The University of Scouting Playbook
A Resource for Scouting America

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Abstract

The University of Scouting is a signature training event hosted annually by the Allegheny Highlands Council of Scouting America (formerly the Boy Scouts of America), offering Scouts and adult leaders a wide range of educational opportunities. As the event has grown, maintaining consistency, knowledge transfer, and quality year over year has become increasingly difficult, especially amid volunteer turnover and limited documentation. This capstone addresses those challenges through the design of a modern, role-based digital playbook.

The University of Scouting artifact functions as both a planning tool and onboarding resource for future event planners and participants. It applies design principles from instructional design, user-centered design, and information architecture to ensure clarity, usability, and scalability. While Scouting America has developed playbooks for other activities, many follow outdated formats, and lack modern visual and interactive design. This artifact offers a more forward thinking alternative to traditional design that is aimed at not only improving planning for the local event, but also at serving as a model other Councils can adopt.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The University of Scouting serves a key role in Scouting America's educational programming. This event provides a full day of learning and leadership development for both youth and adult participants. Within the Allegheny Highlands Council, this fall event offered over Veterans Day weekend in partnership with Fredonia University, has become a central part of the annual calendar. By offering dozens of classes and bringing together staff, volunteers, and instructors from across the region, the University of Scouting builds fellowship and fosters the values and tradition set forth by Scouting. As the event has matured, however, so too have the organizational challenges associated with planning and executing it successfully.

Unlike corporate training programs or professional conferences, the University of Scouting relies heavily on volunteer support, much of which changes from year to year. As a result, institutional knowledge is often lost, processes must be relearned, and the burden of continuity falls on a small number of returning individuals. There is currently no comprehensive, centralized guide for how to plan, organize, and execute an event of this magnitude across multiple years or different leadership teams. This challenge is further exasperated by the fact that there are hundreds of Scout Councils across the country, many of which offer a similar program with no set guideline or volunteer plan.

While Scouting America has published playbooks and handbooks for a variety of other activities, including summer camp administration, commissioner service, and leadership development, these resources are typically “designed for print.” By this virtue, they follow outdated, text-heavy formats that do not reflect current expectations for visual design, user navigation, or modular accessibility.

This capstone project hopes to close that gap by creating a modern, visually structured digital playbook created specifically for the University of Scouting. Developed in response to local planning challenges but designed for broader applicability, the artifact aims to simplify processes, improve onboarding, and preserve organizational knowledge. It is intended not only to support the Allegheny Highlands Council, but to offer a replicable framework for other Councils seeking to strengthen their training infrastructure.

Playbook Overview & Visual Sample

As part of this project, a redesigned University of Scouting Playbook was developed to address the issues outlined in the Introduction—specifically the need for clarity, scalability, and ease of volunteer onboarding. Before diving into the research and design analysis, the following sample page offers a visual representation of the proposed artifact structure.

The design focuses on modular role-specific pages, clear visual hierarchy, and an accessible layout that reflects best practices from user-centered and instructional design principles. The following sample, representing the **Instructor Role**, serves as a visual anchor that will be referenced throughout subsequent sections as design principles are evaluated.

FIGURE 1: REDESIGNED PLAYBOOK LAYOUT FOR THE INSTRUCTOR ROLE, SHOWCASING MODULAR STRUCTURE, ROLE-BASED COLOR CODING, AND CLEAR TASK SEGMENTATION.

Literature Review

In the field of Information Design and Technology, the ability to communicate complex organizational knowledge clearly and effectively is critical—especially when end users are volunteers with varying levels of experience. Designing materials for usability, clarity, and scalability becomes even more essential in settings like Scouting America, where staff turnover is high and institutional memory is informal or undocumented. This literature review reviews foundational principles from instructional design, user-centered design, visual communication, and knowledge management to support the development of a modern, digital playbook for the University of Scouting.

Information Design and Clarity

“Information Design” organizes and presents content in a way that allows users to understand and act on it with minimal effort. A viewer should not have to “think too hard” to find the information needed. Redish (2000) defines effective information design as” content that is usable, useful, and accessible to the intended audience.” Tufte (1990) and Wurman (1997) advocate for clarity, hierarchy, and the elimination of "chartjunk," which are nonessential elements that distract from meaning. We have all viewed busy infographics that seem important but lack useful content. These principles are especially relevant for planning tools like a University of Scouting playbook, where clarity and navigability directly impact volunteer effectiveness. By definition, a volunteer is an unpaid worker, committing their own time, talent, and resources. It should be made as easy as possible for volunteers to get the info they need to get the job done.

Visual Hierarchy and Gestalt Principles

Lidwell, Holden, and Butler (2010) emphasize the role of **visual hierarchy**, which is the organization of elements to signal importance and flow. Visual hierarchy helps users to quickly locate and process content. Gestalt principles such as proximity, similarity, and alignment especially encourage cognitive processing by presenting clear relationships between related items. These concepts are foundational to the artifact's design, influencing the use of consistent icons, headers, color-coded sections, and predictable formatting.

User-Centered Design (UCD) in Volunteer Contexts

User-centered design (UCD) is a design philosophy that keeps the needs, behaviors, and limitations of the user at the forefront throughout the development process (Norman, 2013). In volunteer driven environments like Scouting, users vary considerably in factors such as digital literacy, time availability, and event familiarity. Because of this, using a "one-size-fits-all" design approach can prove ineffective. By applying UCD, the playbook includes role specific modules and simple, intuitive navigation that should help to minimize time to get up to speed for volunteers.

Knowledge Transfer and Institutional Memory

In organizations that depend on short-term or rotating volunteers, retaining and transferring institutional knowledge is a known challenge (Dalkir, 2011). Nonprofit literature underscores the value of accessible documentation and standardized workflows to preserve consistency across event cycles (McDonald, 2007). By capturing these workflows in a centralized, visually engaging format, the playbook serves as a sustainable knowledge management tool.

Instructional Design and Cognitive Load

The playbook is designed as an instructional tool, helpful particularly for first-time volunteers. The **ADDIE model** (Molenda, 2003) provides a logical structure for the artifact's development through phases of analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation. Additionally, **Mayer's (2009) Principles of Multimedia Learning** and **Sweller's (1998) Cognitive Load Theory** emphasize the need to reduce mental effort for the audience consuming content. By leveraging segmentation of information, providing meaningful visuals, and eliminating unnecessary content, the playbook should be easy to use and find the info needed by all volunteers, regardless of their familiarity and skill level.

Limitations of Existing Scouting Playbooks

Existing Scouting America playbooks, such as the *Adult Recruitment Playbook* (2019), reflect content expertise but frequently suffer from outdated visual structures and dense formatting. Their linear, static design and lack of modular navigation limit accessibility, particularly for digital users. Many of these former playbooks were designed to be printed and distributed. These limitations further prove the need for playbooks that reflect modern standards in layout, visual communication, and interactivity.

Theoretical Framework

The development of a modern playbook for the University of Scouting is grounded in theories from the fields of information design, instructional design, user experience (UX), and cognitive psychology. These theories inform both the design decisions, and the delivery methods used in the artifact. This capstone draws from established frameworks that address how individuals perceive, process, and interact with visual information, especially in instructional environments.

To support clarity and organization, this section is divided into two parts: **Visual Design Principles**, which guide the layout and structure of content, and **Visual Design Methods**, which inform the creation, testing, and refinement of the artifact in real-world contexts.

Visual Design Principles

Following Visual Design Principles assures that a created artifact is not only visually appealing, but also functional and accessible. For this project, the following principles were particularly influential:

- **Visual Hierarchy**

  By leveraging contrasts in size, color, and placement, visual hierarchy ensures that the most important information is seen first. Headers, sub headers, and role specific callouts are leveraged to guide the users eyes logically through the content.

- **Gestalt Principles**

  Gestalt psychology states that users naturally group and interpret visual information. Close attention is paid to proximity, similarity, alignment, and continuity to visually organize the playbook's content in ways that align with natural human perception (Lidwell et al., 2010).

- **Consistency and Predictability**

  Aligning with Norman's (2013) emphasis on user centered design and interface predictability, consistent use of icons, colors, formatting, and navigation cues throughout the artifact supports quick recognition and reduces cognitive load.

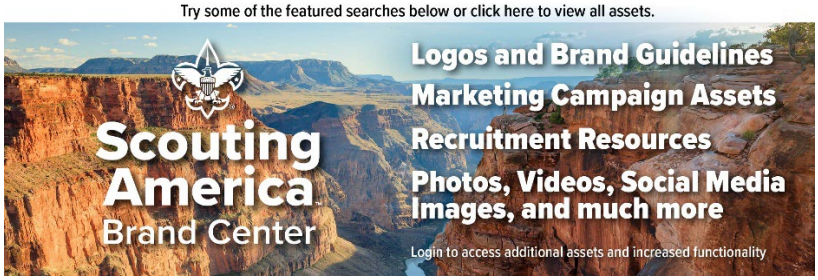
- **Cognitive Load Theory**

  Sweller's (1998) Cognitive Load Theory emphasizes that design should not overwhelm users with extraneous information. By keeping layouts simple, reducing text density, and "chunking" information into useful pieces, the playbook supports faster comprehension and recall. This is especially critical for volunteers operating under time pressure, when getting the right info at the right moment is key.

- **Brand Alignment and Identity**

  Visual design was also guided by the need to align with Scouting America's established visual identity. Color palettes, logos (such as the fleur-de-lis), and tone were carefully integrated to maintain organizational consistency while improving clarity and usability. All Scouting America Councils are allowed to leverage the resources provided by the Scouting America Brand Center, but are also required to follow the guidelines set forth for proper use.

Scouting America Brand Center: ***https://scouting.webdamdb.com/bp/#/folder/4731610/***



Visual Design Methods

In addition to core design principles, the project drew from methods used in instructional design, multimedia development, and iterative user testing. These methods provided a process-oriented approach to creating and refining the artifact:

- **ADDIE Model**

  The ADDIE model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) served as the primary instructional design framework for this artifact. Following ADDIE supported a structured process for identifying the needs of event staff, designing appropriate content, developing visual layouts, implementing the playbook, and collecting feedback for refinement in future iterations. Feedback collection will be completed outside of the scope of this capstone.

- **User-Centered Design (UCD)**

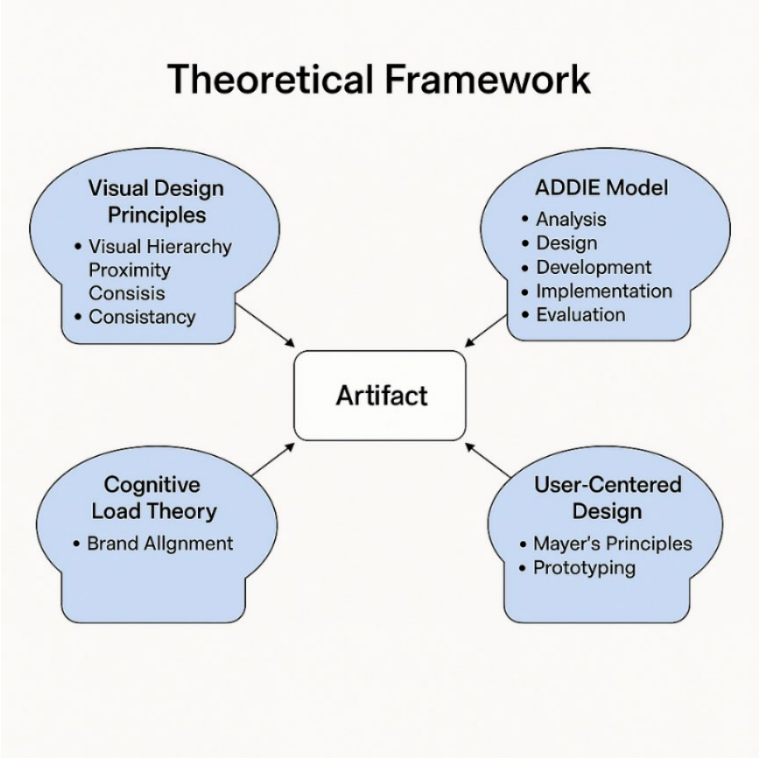
  UCD, which gets its roots from User Interface (UX) Design, emphasizes designing with the end user in mind. This involved identifying primary user roles (instructors, course directors, volunteers), gathering their needs, and tailoring both content and navigation to suit them (Norman, 2013). Role-based modules in the playbook are a direct outcome of this method, and are designed to be easily edited and changed from year to year to continue to adapt to improved UX abilities.

- **Mayer's Principles of Multimedia Learning**

  Mayer (2009) outlines strategies for integrating text and visuals in ways that improve learning. By segmenting content, aligning visuals with corresponding text, and eliminating unnecessary decorative elements, users can naturally consume required and needed information efficiently. These principles directly informed the layout of key pages and sections.

- **Modular Content Design**

  Inspired by web and learning experience design, the playbook was constructed in a modular fashion, allowing councils to adopt, revise, or replace sections as needed. Not all Councils will use all modules or roles, and some will add roles not currently in place. This supports scalability to any size Council, local customization, and long-term adaptability.



Visual Design Analysis

In order for the University of Scouting Playbook to be successful, it must deliver not only the required content but do so in a way that is clear and usable. The visual design of this artifact was based on the foundational principles of information design, user centered design, and cognitive load theory. This section reviews the specific design concepts used and how they contribute to the usability and long-term sustainability for volunteer-based event environments.

INSTRUCTOR

OVERVIEW

Instructors are the front-line educators of the University of Scouting, delivering engaging, informative, and age-appropriate content to Scouts or adult leaders. They are subject-matter experts, skilled facilitators, or experienced Scouters who volunteer to teach one or more sessions throughout the day. Instructors are responsible for preparing their materials, ensuring youth protection standards are followed, and contributing to a positive, high-quality learning experience.

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- Prepare engaging, age-appropriate content for your assigned course(s)
- Communicate with your Dean or Course Director regarding class needs and updates.
- Submit all required materials (class description, supply list, room setup requests) by the requested deadline
- Attend the virtual or in-person instructor training session
- Arrive on event day with enough time to check in and set up your classroom
- Monitor youth behavior and safety, maintaining two-deep leadership at all times
- Complete post-event feedback if requested

TIMELINE HIGHLIGHT

4–6 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- Submit course description, prerequisites, and supply needs
- Communicate any room or AV requests

2–3 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT:

- Attend instructor orientation/training
- Finalize materials and lesson plan
- Confirm room assignment and session schedule

EVENT DAY:

- Arrive by 7:30 AM
- Teach assigned sessions
- Submit any attendance records or sign-offs (if applicable

RESOURCES & LINKS:

- Google Form – Submit class description and materials
- PDF Template – Instructor Lesson Plan
- Video – "How to Run a 50-Minute Scouting Session"
- Email – Contact your Dean with questions: [email@example.com]

REMINDER: Please review Scouting America's Youth Protection Guidelines before the event. Two-deep leadership is required in every classroom—no exceptions.

Instructor | page 17

FIGURE 2 - ROLE BASED LAYOUT

Layout and Structure

The University of Scouting playbook leverages a role based layout, creating individual modules for each role that allows the user to quickly access only the content that is relevant to their role in the planning process. While Event Chairs will need to be familiar with all roles, an Instructor can swiftly find the expectations and requirements of their role. Each section is layed out with consistent use of whitespace and content dividers which allow the reader to scan as needed to get the info they need quickly. Headings, callouts, and navigation cues are consistently placed and styled, reinforcing predictability and reducing the cognitive burden on the user (Sweller, 1998). Sections are organized using visual hierarchy principles, including size, color, boldness, and spacing, This allows the viewer to differentiate between role titles, task lists, timelines, and resources. By creating a template with these features, it supports the "at-a-glance" usability that is typically required by time-constrained volunteers, and reflects principles recommended by Lidwell et al. (2010) and Redish (2000).

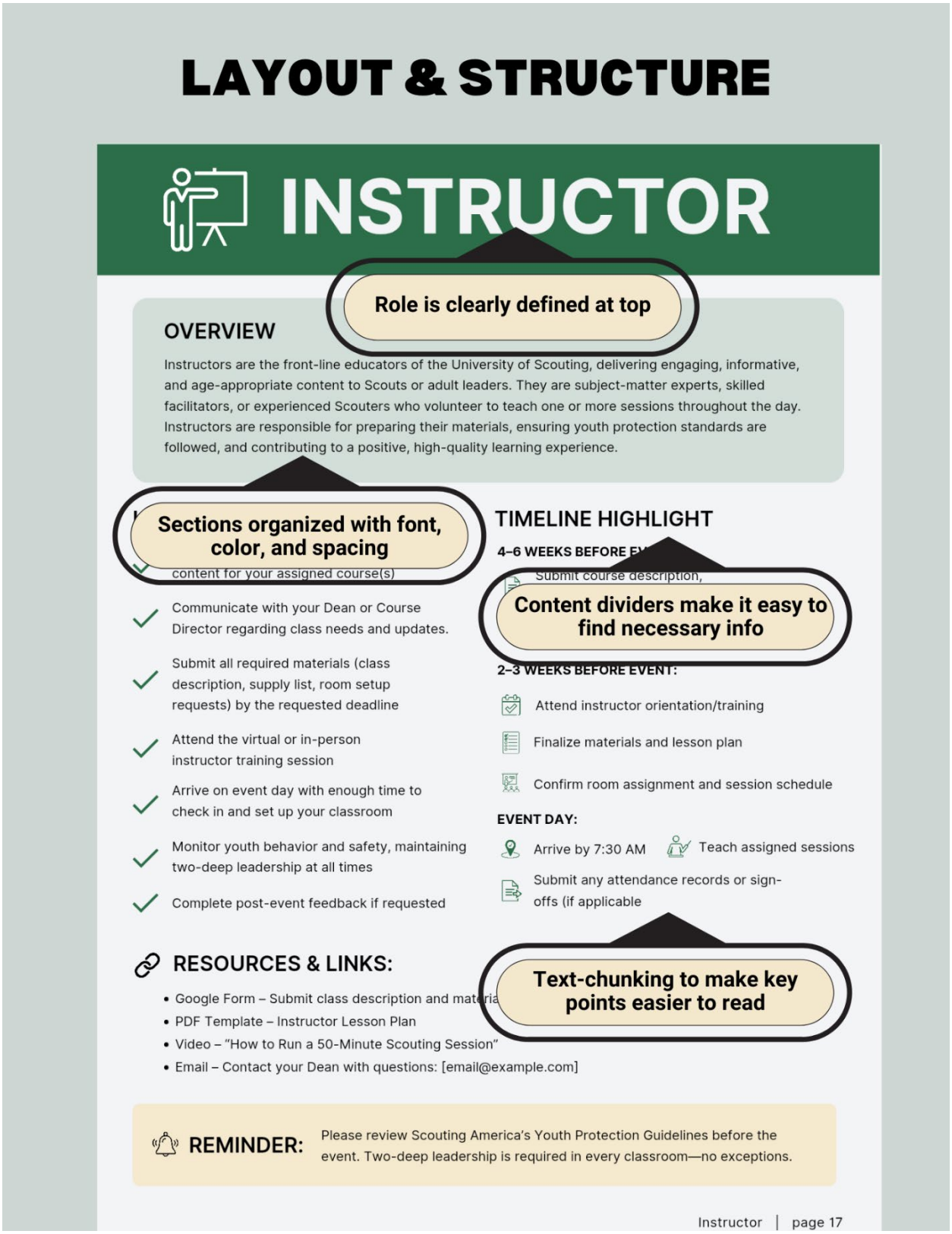


FIGURE 3 LAYOUT AND STRUCTURE

Typography and Font Pairing

Fonts were chosen for readability and hierarchy. Header fonts such as *Montserrat* were used to introduce each role and major section with visual strength. Body fonts such as *Lato* or *Open Sans* offered clean readability at smaller sizes. As opposed to prior Scouting America Playbook releases, these fonts are compatible across both print and digital formats, and support accessibility when viewed on various screen sizes and devices.

Text is chunked into short paragraphs or bullet points, following Mayer's (2009) guidance on segmenting to reduce overload. Color-coded checklists and clearly labeled action items will help volunteers identify and prioritize their responsibilities.

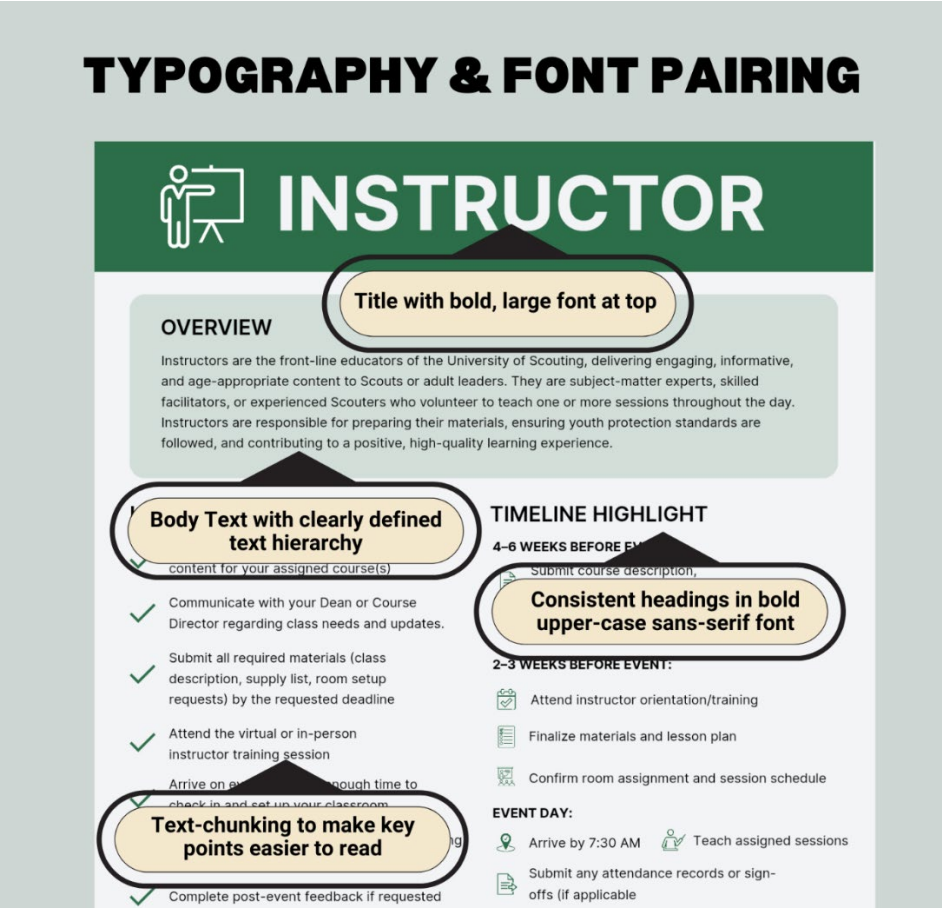


FIGURE 4 - COLOR SCHEME AND BRANDING

Color Scheme and Branding

The artifact applies a color-coded role system, where each is assigned its own distinct but coordinated color palette. This will assist not only in the role based sections, but also in overview sections, such as a timeline which will contain multiple roles, allowing the viewer to easily determine where they fit within the plan. For this sample artifact, the overall design uses the official blue of Fredonia University, the host facility for the Allegheny Highlands UofS, and golds and reds that align with Scouting America's national branding. Accent colors are used where necessary to differentiate sections or highlight critical information such as due dates and required scheduling.

Color choices are made with sufficient contrast to comply with accessibility standards for users with visual impairments or color blindness. Backgrounds remain light or white to maintain legibility, while action boxes or reminders may appear in light gray, blue, or yellow to draw attention.

FIGURE 5 - TIMELINE ILLUSTRATING ICONOGRAPHY

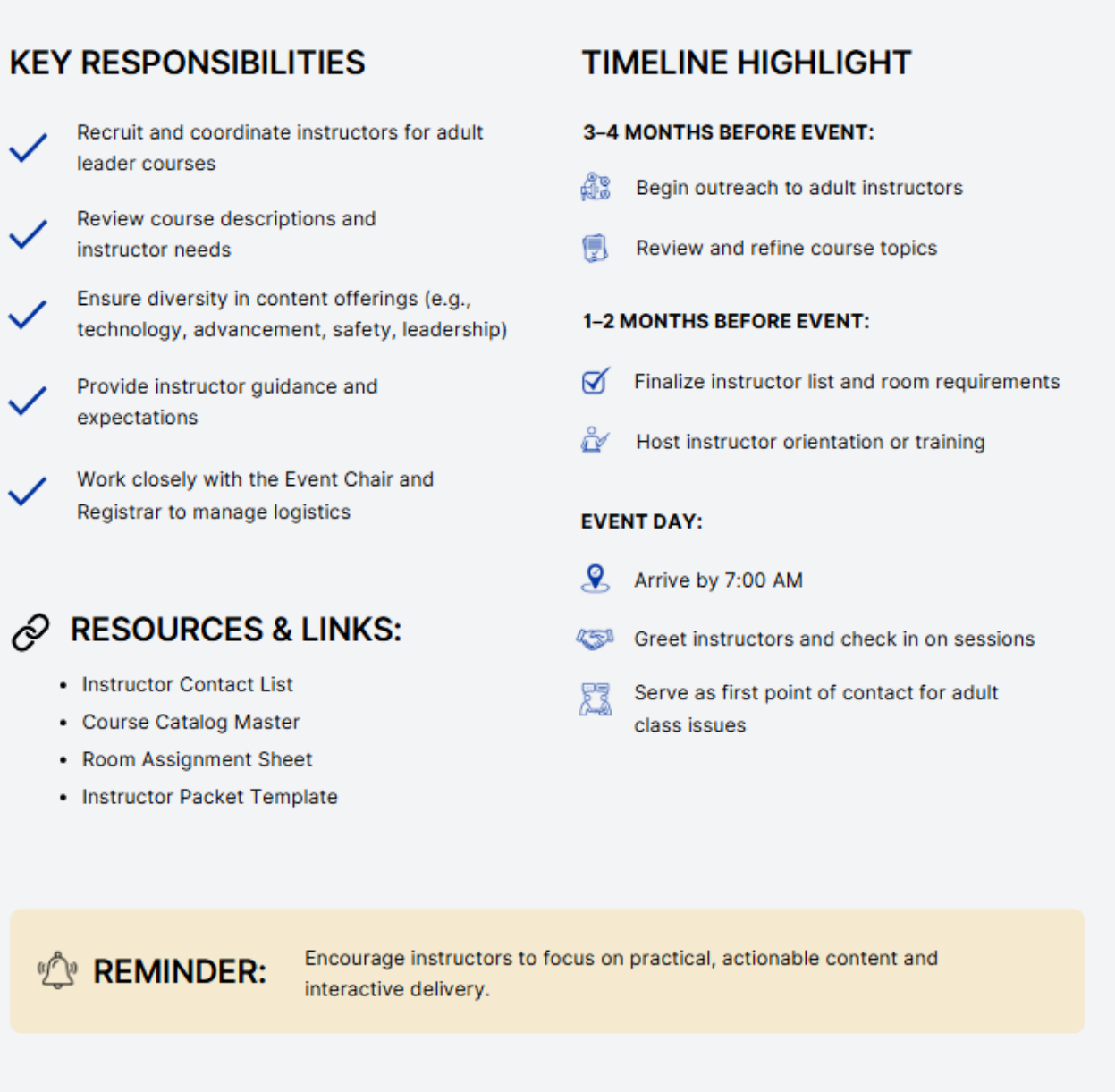


FIGURE 6 - ICONOGRAPHY & IMAGERY

Iconography and Imagery

Icons are used throughout the playbook to enhance navigation and support information recognition. For example, 🗓️ is used for calendar items, 🔗 for links or digital resources, and ✅ for task completion. These icons function as visual shorthand, improving usability for those unfamiliar with the material as well as helping users skim pages more effectively.

Illustrations and photographs are used sparingly and only when they support the content. For example, in the instructor module, a photo may show classroom setup or give an idea of the environment from a prior event. Decorative imagery is minimized in keeping with Mayer's principle of coherence, which recommends eliminating non-essential visuals to reduce distraction.

Interactive Design Considerations

Although the playbook is designed to be printable, it is primarily designed as a digital-first artifact. Hyperlinks are embedded in text and icons, allowing for quick access to templates, instructional videos, or forms. Pages are designed with clear "next steps." In cases where content cross references to other roles breadcrumbs or footer navigation is leveraged to promote user flow.

Integration of Visual Design Principles

The University of Scouting Playbook was designed with the intent to integrate key visual design principles from the fields of information design, instructional design, and cognitive psychology. Great attention was given to assure that these principles were strategically built into every aspect of the artifact's development from layout and typography to color use, modular structure, and role specific navigation.

Visual Hierarchy and Layout

Visual hierarchy plays a key role in guiding the user's attention and improving the overall usability of the artifact. Every section of the playbook has a clear title header, followed by structured subsections. The playbook maintains structured subsections with consistent spacing, alignment, and font style throughout. Key information such as deadlines or required actions and responsibilities are visually elevated by using larger type, bold formats, and consistent color cues. Leveraging visual Hierarchy ensures that users can both locate and absorb key content first, without having to sift through massive blocks of text.

REGISTRATION

ONLINE REGISTRATION

Online registration is open at **https://scoutingevent.com/382-UofS20223**, and will close at 11 PM on October 4th.

There are four registration categories:

- Adults taking Classes: **$25.00**
- Scouts BSA Age Youth (Age 11-17) taking Classes: **$25.00**
- Adults NOT taking Classes (inc. lunch only): **$15.00**
- Cub Scouts & Webelos (Age 5-10): **$15.00**
- Instructors: **No charge**

INCLUDED WITH REGISTRATION

Fee includes up to six University of Scouting courses, a patch, lunch, and certificate if earned.

PRE-REGISTRATION

Advance scheduling is required for best course selection. Some classes sell out. Early registration is highly recommended. Register early at https://scoutingevent.com/382-UofS23.

NO ONSITE REGISTRATION/WALK-INS

No onsite registration or walk-ins allowed due to planning requirements.

STUDENT REGISTRATION

During **registration**, attendees select their daily schedule by choosing a course for each of the seven instructional periods (1–7).

Note: Periods 3, 4, or 5 are lunch periods; choose accordingly for your lunch and Midway break.

EVENT CANCELLATION /REFUND POLICY

In case of **inclement weather**, cancellation decisions will be communicated via email and on **Allegheny Highlands Council's** website and Facebook page.

Partial refunds may be requested by submitting a written **request**, subject to **administrative cost deductions.**

FINANCIAL HARDSHIP

Scholarships are available. Contact Scout Executive Nate Thornton via email: **nate.thornton@scouting.org** for details.

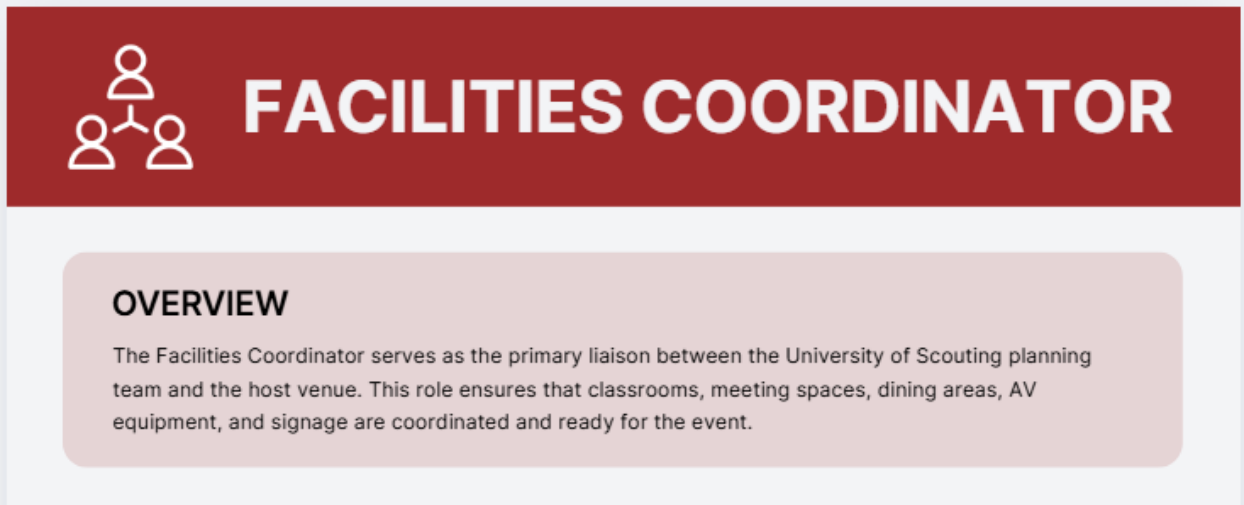
COURSE CHANGE & CANCEL POLICY

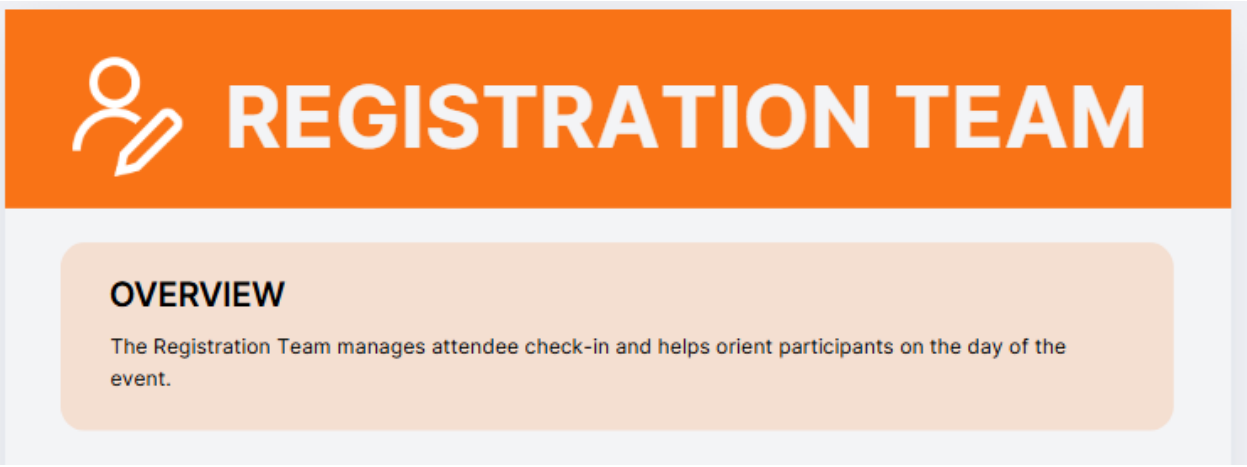
The University of Scouting may reschedule or cancel courses if necessary. Registered participants will be informed about schedule changes.

FIGURE 7 - VISUAL HIERARCHY & LAYOUT

Cognitive Load Reduction

Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory and Mayer's Multimedia Learning Principles were used through techniques such as content chunking, role-based segmentation, bullet lists, and icon-supported navigation instead of presenting the document as a paragraph driven narrative. By breaking out information into manageable and easy to find sections that target specific roles, it reduces unneeded data processing by the reader, allowing them to focus on the tasks most relevant to them.





User-Centered and Role-Based Design

In keeping with Norman's User-Centered Design model, the artifact prioritizes the experience of its end users, which are primarily volunteers operating under tight schedules with varying levels of Scouting or event planning experience. By color coding role modules and timeline summaries, it ensures that users can use the material presented in a way that feels intuitive and efficient.

FIGURE 8 -BRAND DESIGN

Visual Consistency and Brand Integration

By adhering to design standards and using the same fonts, color palettes, icons, and section formatting, the playbook supports user familiarity and reduces the mental effort needed to navigate new sections. It is also critical that artifact remains visually aligned with Scouting America's branding through its use of familiar colors, iconography (e.g., the fleur-de-lis), and maintains a tone that reflects the Scouting values of preparedness, leadership, and service. This blend of modern design and traditional identity ensures that the artifact feels both fresh and trustworthy.

Scalability and Adaptability

This playbook is built for reuse and adaptation. Other Councils can easily modify the templates, timelines, or role definitions while maintaining the underlying structure and clarity and assuring their adherence to the universal Scouting America brand guideline. This scalability reenforces best practices in digital product and information design, allowing the artifact to evolve with feedback while maintaining coherence across implementations.

Conclusion

The University of Scouting Playbook was developed in response to a real and recurring challenge faced by not only the Allegheny Highlands Council but most Councils in Scouting America. The lack of consistent, accessible, and scalable documentation for volunteer led event planning led to inconsistencies in the success and repeatability of this critical Youth training event.

By applying principles from information design, instructional design, cognitive psychology, and user-centered development, this capstone project produced a modular, visually-driven artifact intended to centralize knowledge, support onboarding new volunteers, and enhance planning efficiency.

While the playbook addresses the logistical demands of the University of Scouting event, it goes further to talk to the human factors that influence volunteer success. Volunteers expect clarity of expectations, accessibility of resources, and ease of task execution. Through intentional use of visual hierarchy, color systems, role-based segmentation, and cognitive load reduction strategies, the artifact offers a user friendly tool that empowers volunteers to step confidently into complex roles.

While its initial implementation focuses on the Allegheny Highlands Council, the design is adaptable and scalable. Other Councils can adopt or customize the structure to fit their own events, allowing this artifact to serve as a replicable model for institutional knowledge retention and volunteer training across Scouting America.

Ultimately, this capstone affirms the value of design thinking in community-based organizations and illustrates how thoughtful, theory-driven information design can lead to greater continuity, engagement, and success in mission-driven work.

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