

Christmas Post



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1. Introduction

Fed up of Postal Strikes!!!! Want to set up a great fundraising scheme in your area? Want something that is really and truly a real community event?

Well how about setting up a Christmas Post Scheme. Lots of Scout Groups/Districts do this and over the years have raised thousands of pounds. Some split the funds raised with other local charities, others to help to fund camps in the coming year or for new equipment.

However you decide to spend the money, delivering the Christmas Post is not only a great money maker, but also highlights to the local community that Scouting is out there, doing things that help others.

2. The Legal Stuff

In 1981 the Government announced that charities could deliver Christmas cards during the period 25 November to 1 January and make a small charge for this service. The 'British Telecommunications Bill' has seen many changes since then, but Section 68 the area relating to Christmas Post remains unchanged. The Bill states that mail can only be carried 'for the purposes of raising funds for charitable purposes'. A 'Christmas card' is defined as 'a document which conveys a greeting appropriate to the seasons of Christmas and the New Year (or either of them) and no other communication', and a 'Charity' is defined as 'any body of persons or trust established for charitable purposes only'.

3. What will we get out of it?

Money is raised by the sale of stamps. The more stamps you sell, the more money you make. Every Group/District involved should get some percentage of the money raised less all costs.

As part of your planning you could make use of the budget form in Factsheet FS190018. This will

help you to work out all of the expected costs and know what you need to raise to recoup those costs. After that all of the monies raised should be split between those taking part.

In some areas the lead Group/District is allocated a fixed percentage as they do all the planning, purchasing etc. The other Groups/Districts receive a percentage share of the remaining with the split depending on the number of Groups/Districts involved.

Whatever you decide to do, make sure everyone is signed up to and in total agreement before you go ahead.

4. Planning

As with any Scout event planning pays dividends. Outline planning should begin in the late summer to ensure that an efficient and successful scheme is run. To help you plan your scheme you will need to make decisions about the following areas.

5. Delivery and Collection

5.1 Where are we going to deliver?

It is very important to clearly specify the area over which your postal service will deliver. To say it covers a certain Scout District would not be understood by the public. A village or small town clearly defined by roads or similar boundaries is relatively easy to administer. At the other end of the scale, complete geographical areas could be covered by schemes involving many Groups and Districts working together.

5.2 How often should we deliver?

Legally the scheme is able to operate between 25 November and 1 January. Many Groups/Districts decide to operate just the one delivery after all of the cards have been collected. Others choose to deliver once a week in the period allowed. Whatever you decide you must ensure it is manageable. In a large catchment

area you could be dealing with thousands of cards and you need to ensure you will have enough volunteers and deliveries to cope with your commitments.

Once you have agreed your scheme the details can be used in your advertising of the scheme. It is imperative that your customers know when and where collections and deliveries are to be made.

Remember - sorting the post will always take longer than you think. If you have not run a scheme before it might be best to start small with one delivery date. This will take some of the pressure off and help you to gauge whether or not you could do more.

5.3 Who is going to collect and deliver?

If your scheme is going to cover a large geographical area, with many Groups or Districts involved it is imperative that those involved know well in advance the area they are responsible for. Each of these Groups/Districts can also be involved in advertising the scheme prior to its launch. Remember that delivering in rural areas may be more time consuming than a town area. Numbers of collectors need to be allocated accordingly.

Delivering mail is a responsible act. Mistakes and disappointment must be avoided at all costs.

Beaver Scouts, Cub Scouts and Scouts must only deliver Christmas Post under adult supervision and only during daylight hours.

5.4 How do we collect cards?

Posting Boxes

You do not need to rival the postal authorities so large red structures are unnecessary! As a general rule the size of a posting box should be governed by the size of the catchment area. Please bear in mind that the bigger the posting box the more difficult it will be to find a shop willing to accept it.

Sites for Posting Boxes

Posting boxes need to be situated in places where people will readily see them. Many schemes have found newsagents and businesses where people routinely call for daily or weekly shopping, libraries, old people's homes, community centres and church porches to be ideal. Some schemes may involve manning boxes in shopping areas on Saturday mornings.

Whatever system is used the posting boxes must be secure, clearly labelled and emptied on a regular basis. You can not expect the shopkeeper to empty the posting box for you.

5.5 How do we sort the cards?

Delivery rounds must be agreed upon and clear maps and lists of street names and numbers should be produced to make the sorting simple. You will need plenty of space and a number of cardboard boxes, a "raid" on a local supermarket or shoe shop should provide you with the latter. Depending upon the size of the scheme the sort will be in three or four stages:

Stage 1 sort the post into Group areas

Stage 2 frank the cards

Stage 3 sort the Group areas into delivery rounds

Stage 4 sort each round by street name and numbers

Small schemes operated by a single Group need only need to complete stages 2-4.

During a sort you may come across cards that do not fall within your delivery area. These must either be passed to the Scout post team for the relevant area or consigned to the official postal authorities by affixing a second class stamp. Incomplete and incorrect addresses will inevitably occur. Telephone directories and local information may help to redirect these cards. It is much quicker for Explorer Scouts and adults to do the sorting. Beaver Scouts, Cub Scouts and Scouts may be perfectly able, but time constraints normally make it impractical until the final delivery sort (stage 4).

6. Finance

6.1 Do we have to use stamps?

No, but there must be an indicator on the envelope that shows the postee has paid for the service. This can be a stamp, or a postmark with a suitable distinguishing mark.

You may decide to operate a 'trust' scheme'. This is where the cards and the charge are placed in the 'post box' together. If you choose to operate this type of scheme than it is only necessary to have a rubber stamp manufactured.

If you do decide to use stamps there are a few considerations.

- designs should be clear, show stamp value and have some obvious indication of scouting
- a local printer would be able to advise on the best and most economical methods of producing your designs
- many Groups find it more economical to produce two years stock of stamps in one go

Stamps can be produced in several ways:

- Printed perforated stamps - A local printer who can fully perforate may not be easy to find, but it is worth ringing round. This can be quite an expensive route depending on print and paper qualities, but it is definitely worth getting a quote. These types of stamps do look really professional and customers can buy more than they need, and possibly save some, or give them to collectors.
- Use a photocopier and gummed paper or self-adhesive labels. This is only really good for black and white designs. Colour photocopiers can be used, but this is relatively expensive.
- Self-adhesive labels, printed on a home colour printer. If you choose this method please ensure the ink is not water soluble. Sometimes it rains during this period, and half the fun of this scheme is that the recipient receives a hand delivered card, with a unique stamp on it, not so unique if the design has washed away!

Stamps must be produced in sufficient quantities to allow easy availability.

6.2 Can we use sponsorship?

You may be able to get a local firm to help you cover all of your expenses, such as printing. This may mean you will only be able to fund enough stamps for one year, but on the other hand, you will be able to put together a new design every year, with more First Day covers on offer.

6.3 How much should we charge?

In general the charge levied for each card sent via the scheme is between half and three quarters the price of a second class stamp.

Most Groups/Districts currently charge around 10p for each card (Christmas 2008)

If you choose to operate a 'trust' system, the charge for the post should be posted in your post box at the same time as the cards are posted.

If you choose to operate a stamp system you can sell your stamps through:

- your members and family
- local shops and pubs that you have placed letter boxes in. Most local businesses that are happy to accept the post box are also willing to help with selling stamps. Many are also interested in finding out how successful the scheme was.

6.4 How do we record monies raised?

Whatever method is used to run the scheme, accurate records must be kept of all finances and should be incorporated in audited with the annual accounts.

If stamps are issued to people for sale an accurate return must be made.

If money is put on trust into the posting box this must be carefully counted and recorded.

Groups that use the trust method find they are always in pocket.

Schemes that may bring the Group or District annual income above the VAT threshold (around £68,000 09/10. These rates are subject to change) should discuss their financial arrangements with their County Treasurer who will be able to give them advice.

6.5 Are there any additional money making opportunities?

Stamp collectors may be interested in purchasing First Day covers, or cancelled covers. There are many collectors all over the world who are interested in these stamps and postal service. Advertise widely. You could be pleasantly surprised.

7. How do we advertise the scheme?

Once sites have been agreed for the posting boxes, stamps ordered, and people have agreed to supervise and empty the posting boxes, all that is now required is publicity for the scheme.

Publicity is essential and should be the specific responsibility of a person or team. Posters can be used in shops, windows and on public notice boards. Press releases may be required for local newspapers, radio and television. Letters can be written to parish magazines and even personal visits to old peoples' homes and community clubs are an option.

Further publicity can be obtained by way of a leaflet posted with all cards delivered in the first week of the scheme.

Tip: If you have not run a Christmas Post before, you could contact your nearest Scout Group/District who have and talk it through with them. They will probably have some great hints and tips that will help you to introduce your service.