



# My First Year Guide

A complete guide for  
your first year leading  
a Girl Scout troop

**girl scouts**   
of western new york

# Welcome to Girl Scouts!

## Troop Co-Leaders

On average, troop co-leaders spend 6-11 hours per month (+ 8 during cookie season) volunteering. We want to help you enjoy as much of that time as possible! This guide takes the guesswork out of leading a troop.

### What do troop leaders do?

- **Help** girls reach their potential as creative, courageous leaders
- **Create** a space where girls try new things without worrying about failing
- **Teach** lessons girls will use for decades to come
- **Try** new things along with their girls
- **Develop** your own organizational and leadership skills
- **Join** a global community of sisterhood

## Girl Scout Mission

Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

## Girl Scout Promise

On my honor, I will try:  
To serve God\* and my country,  
To help people at all times,  
And to live by the Girl Scout Law.

## Girl Scout Law

I will do my best to be  
honest and fair,  
friendly and helpful,  
considerate and caring,  
courageous and strong, and  
responsible for what I say and do,  
and to  
respect myself and others,  
respect authority,  
use resources wisely,  
make the world a better place,  
and  
be a sister to every Girl Scout.



## What is the Girl Scout Difference?

Girl Scouting is the preeminent leadership development organization for girls. When you see the trefoil throughout the book, it is used to highlight what makes our organization different and why it is so valuable to your girl.

## Thank you!

Welcome to the great adventure that is Girl Scouting! Thanks to volunteers like you, generations of girls have learned to be leaders in their own lives and in the world. Have no doubt: you, and nearly one million other volunteers like you, are helping girls make a lasting impact on the world.

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# Getting Started

New leaders often spend the first few weeks getting started and setting up their troop.

## New Co-Leader Start-up Checklist

### Have you...

- Registered as a Girl Scout?
- Completed a criminal background check?
- Completed Volunteer Basic Training series?
- Reviewed Grade-Level resources?
- Received a Congratulations email?
- Met with your co-leader(s)?
- Signed up for a New Leader Welcome Event near you?
- Checked gswny.org for up-to-date council guidelines and support?

**Need help with anything? GSWNY is here for you!**

Give us a call at 1-888-837-6410 or email [customercare@gswny.org](mailto:customercare@gswny.org)

**... Great! You're ready to get started!**

## Setting Up Your Troop


### 1 Grow your Troop

We recommend having 8-12 girls in your troop—small enough to encourage individual development and large enough to provide an interactive and cooperative learning environment. **Need help growing your troop? GSWNY is here for you!**

### 2 Troop Meeting Times and Location

Set meeting times that work within your schedule! We recommend meeting 2 times per month in a public, accessible space like a school, library, or community center, or meet virtually! Troops are not allowed to meet at private residences. **Need help finding a troop meeting location? We can help with that, too!**

### 3 Get Connected

Girl Scouting is all about sisterhood  In addition to your troop co-leader(s), your troop team of parents/caregivers, Service Unit, and Council are all here for you. Learn more on page 4.

### 4 Open a Troop Bank Account

Open a troop bank account as soon as possible. Learn more about funding your fun starting on page 9.

# Your Troop's Support System

Girl Scouts is all about sisterhood. As the leader of a Girl Scout troop, you are not alone!

## Your Troop Team

A strong leader-family partnership is a key component to a successful Girl Scout troop experience.

1. Get to know your co-leader and determine the best division of troop tasks.
2. Host a troop parent/caregiver meeting to build your volunteer team.

**Check out page Working with Parents/Caregivers on page 6 for more!**



## Your Service Unit (Neighborhood)

The Service Unit (SU) is the bridge between your troop and the GSWNY Council Support Staff and often your first stop for information!

**Where:** Our GSWNY Council is divided into Service Units based on neighborhood, school district, geographic area, or county. Each Service Unit is supported by a Service Unit team.

**Who:** Service Unit teams are made up of skilled volunteers with years of Girl Scout experience. Service Unit Managers (SUMs) coordinate the Service Unit. Other important Service Unit roles include: Finance Consultant, Product Program Managers, Troop Manager, and Welcome Specialist.

**What:** Service Unit teams support you by holding regular leader meetings and planning fun activities throughout the year like Cookie Kickoff, camping, or a STEM event.

**Learn more about your Service Unit in your co-leader welcome and approval email**

### Service Unit Meetings

Attending regular Service Unit meetings is required for at least one troop leader or troop representative. There you'll:

- Meet and network with fellow volunteers
- Learn about upcoming events and trainings
- Receive important resources and materials, like your Cookie Program materials

**Learn more from your Service Unit Manager or Welcome Specialist**

## Your GSWNY Council Staff

We are here for you! If you have a private matter, a conflict to discuss, issues with registration, or any other needs, GSWNY can help! Contact Customer Care for assistance at [customer care@gswny.org](mailto:customer care@gswny.org) or 1-888-837-6410.

# Your Service Unit Information

Remember, the Service Unit should be your first stop when you need help! The Service Unit team is made up of local, super skilled Girl Scout volunteers.

**Service Unit Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Service Unit #:** \_\_\_\_\_

Key Service Unit Team Members	Name	Phone	Email
Service Unit Manager(s) (SUMs)			
Finance Consultant (SUFC)			
Troop Manager			
Product Program Manager(s) (SUPPMs)			
Welcome Specialist			

## Service Unit Leader Meetings

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day of the Week:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Special Instructions (parking, entrance, room number, etc.)**

**Virtual Meeting Information:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Meeting Dates

<b>Sept:</b>	<b>Oct:</b>	<b>Nov:</b>	<b>Dec:</b>	<b>Jan:</b>
<b>Feb:</b>	<b>March:</b>	<b>April:</b>	<b>May:</b>	<b>June:</b>

# Working with Parents/Caregivers



Unlike many other extracurriculars, a Girl Scout troop needs parent and caregiver support to thrive!

Kick Off the year with a Parent/Caregiver Meeting!

## Parent/Caregiver Meeting Agenda

- Welcome and introduce one another and the Girl Scouts
- Share how family is an important part of the Girl Scouts
- Encourage caregivers to take roles in the troop (use the guide below and on the next page)
- Discuss troop dues, and how the troop will raise money (See pages 9-10 Troop Finances)
- Close by sharing contact information, collect health forms and permission slips, and answer any questions

Check out the detailed, step-by-step guide for the Parent/Caregiver Meeting online on the VTK (see page 13, Girl Scout Resources)

### ASK: How much spare time can you dedicate to your child's Girl Scout Experience?

30 minutes/month	Organize and manage the troop calendar for snacks or carpooling.
1 hour/month	Manage troop communication by texting or emailing families with meeting reminders, manage social media, or organize a phone tree in case of emergencies.
1-2 hours/month	Take photos or videos at troop meetings or Girl Scout events! Make sure all girls have signed photo releases.
2-4 hours/month	Share your interests or expertise by leading part of a troop meeting or guide girls through a specific badge. Or, register as a Troop Driver/Chaperone/Helper within the troop so you can participate along with the girls and assist the leaders when needed.
5+ hours/month during cookie season (January to March)	Help the troop during Cookie Season as the Troop Product Program Manager Or, sign up to be another co-leader! There is no limit to the number of co-leaders a troop can have. Plus, the more co-leaders the troop has, the more girls can join the troop!

### Helpful Tips!

- Make your ask for help clear and direct: "Will you be our First Aider?"
- Explain that you need parent/caregiver buy-in if the troop will be successful
- Invite a member of the Service Unit team to help during your Parent/Caregiver meeting
- If girls will be present during the parents' meeting, have a small craft or activity ready to keep them busy and engaged
- Did you know male caregivers can be Girl Scout volunteers too? *(Note: All male co-leaders must be paired with a non-related female at all times)*

# Your Troop Team

Volunteer Role	Description	Contact Information
Product Program Manager	Manages Fall Product Program and Cookie Program for the troop: helps build a troop product team to support girl/caregiver Product Program training, direct sale coordination and activities, product inventory and reward distribution, and payments. The Troop Product Program Manager will work closely with the Service Unit Product Program Manager.	Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____ Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
Troop Treasurer	Eases the task of maintaining your troop's financial records. Troop Treasurers must be a registered member and pass our background check because they are dealing with money.	Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
First Aider	At least one registered volunteer in all troops must be first aid certified before leaving the troop meeting place for field trips or outings. GSWNY offers first aid trainings throughout the year, or you can get certified with an outside vendor, like the Red Cross, or you can get trained through your Service Unit if it is offered.	Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
Subject-Matter Experts	Ask the parents/caregivers in your troop to share their talents! For example, if a caregiver is a veterinarian, she might lead a field trip to her office to teach the girls about anatomy on the family dog.	Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____ Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____
Troop Drivers/Chaperones/Helpers	We encourage troop parents/caregivers to register as volunteers in the role if they intend to participate in Girl Scout meetings, events, carpooling, field trips, overnights, or camping trips. This way they will be background checked and covered by our Girl Scout insurance should an accident occur. This helps keep everyone safe!	Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____ Name: _____ Phone: _____ Email: _____



# Troop Finances

You're probably wondering how you will fund your first year full of Girl Scout experiences. We are here to help you get started!

## Opening a Bank Account

Open a troop bank account as soon as you are able.

### 1. Connect with your SUFC

All troops must open bank accounts with the help of their Service Unit Finance Consultant, SUFC. Your SUFC contact information is provided to you in your co-leader welcome and approval email.

### 2. Visit the bank with your SUFC

Set a time to meet with the SUFC and go to the recommended bank for your Service Unit; bring any required paperwork or ID with you. All Girl Scout bank accounts must have three signers: the two co-leaders and the SUFC.

## Keep Financial Records

Save all of your receipts and bank statements. You can use the Finance tab of the Volunteer Tool Kit to keep an ongoing ledger of your troop's income and expenses, or download an Excel file from the online Forms Library which does the math for you! You'll submit the annual Troop Finance Activity Report (TFAR), which is due via the Volunteer Tool Kit (VTK) in May-June. Information on accessing the VTK is on page 13 of this guide.

## The Council Opportunity Fund

This is a resource available to all registered members of GSWNY to cover the cost of uniforms, registration, GSWNY programs, and adult trainings. Access financial assistance documents by visiting the Troop Basics page of our website ([gswny.org](http://gswny.org)) or searching "council opportunity fund" in the Forms Library of our website. Share this information with all families; it's better not to make assumptions about which families may need it. All girls are welcome and no girl is ever turned away for financial reasons.

## Volunteer Essentials

For full information about financial guidelines, you may consult Volunteer Essentials, our comprehensive policies document. Volunteer Essentials is updated annually and is the primary GSUSA & GSWNY reference document to be consulted for general safety and planning guidelines. Volunteer Essentials can be accessed by visiting the Troop Basics page of [gswny.org](http://gswny.org).

**Visit [gswny.org/volunteerbasics](http://gswny.org/volunteerbasics) for more Troop Finance information!**

# Troop Finances

How to fund your fun!

## 1. Troop Dues

Start-up funds to cover the cost of supplies and activities come from **troop dues**. Troop co-leaders can decide how much dues will be and how to collect them at the beginning of the year. Ask families what they feel most comfortable with during your first parent/caregiver meeting. Each girl or family can pay \$1-\$2 per meeting, or you can ask for one-time dues of \$20-\$50 at the beginning of the year. At your parent meeting, you can also ask for families to donate supplies to the troop like markers or scissors.

**Note:** For field trips, we recommend asking families provide a small contribution—this helps ensure buy-in and good attendance. We also have financial aid and the Council Opportunity Fund (page 9) because at GSWNY, we never want cost to be a barrier.

## 2. Product Program Sales (Financial Literacy Program)

The Girl Scouts of Western New York holds two Product Program opportunities for girls to participate in throughout the year. While selling delightful nuts, candy, and magazine subscriptions to delicious Girl Scout Cookies, troops earn funds to do amazing things.

Troop Funds can be used for a variety of activities such as Council sponsored programs, field trips, camping adventures, travel and so much more! Troop Funds enable girls to try new experiences, get outdoors, and unleash their potential to do amazing things and keep their communities at the center of everything they do.

Fall Product Program	Girl Scout Cookie Program
Mid-October - Mid-November	February-April
Girls sell nuts, candy and magazine subscriptions to friends and family both Online and through in-person order taking.	Girls sell cookies to her customers through Online, in-person, door to door and booth sales.
Vendor: Ashdon Farms and M2	Vendor: ABC Smart Cookies
Troops will earn \$1 for nuts and candy and \$3 for magazines sold	Troops will earn a minimum of \$.90 per box of Girl Scout Cookies

**Are there other ways my troop can earn money?**



**The Girl Scout Cookie Program is the largest girl-led entrepreneurial program in the world!**

Troop dues and Product Program money-earning opportunities are the best way to fund your Girl Scout Fun. Older girls may participate in other council approved money earning activities such as a car wash, or bake sale.

Through the generosity of a troop donation (physical or monetary) and or troop sponsorship, troops can utilize these funds/goods to power their Girl Scout activities, adventures, service projects and more! Visit [gswny.org](http://gswny.org) or contact Customer Care for more information.

# Fall and Cookie Program Entrepreneurial Experiences

Girl Scouts Product Program is the largest girl-led entrepreneurial program in the world, aiming to empower girls through the development of five essential skills: Goal Setting, Decision Making, Money Management, People Skills and Business Ethics. Girls will explore entrepreneurship as they participate in money earning activities that spark curiosity, confidence and innovation. Troop Proceeds can help fund your troop's entire year, including programs, experiences, trips, and more amazing opportunities.

## Fall and Cookie Program Participation Information

Your Service Unit Product Program Manager will share troop training dates and important participation information. Being with you every step of the way, you'll be provided program and troop support to ensure the program is fun, easy, and engaging! Head to [gswny.org](http://gswny.org) to visit our Cookies and Fall Products tab to find council resources, Smart Cookie training, and marketing resources.

### Fall Product Program

#### Mid-October - Mid-November

One month, quick and easy program, starting mid-October. This is a great program to earn troop start-up funds to kick off your Girl Scout year!

Girl Scouts sell a variety of delicious nuts, candy, and magazine subscriptions to friends and family online and through in-person order taking.

Troops will earn \$1.15 per nut/candy/share donation item sold and \$3.25 per non-candy item sold.

### Cookie Program

#### February - April

Girl Scouts use their in-person order card and online store front to sell cookies and reach her goals. The Cookie Program runs February – April, focusing on goal setting, skill building, and entrepreneurship. The Cookie Program funds amazing troop experiences!

With the support of your Service Unit Manager and Product Program Manager, each troop is encouraged to build a Cookie Team to ensure the program is fun, engaging, and successful. After attending a Troop Leader Cookie Training, as well as working with your Service Unit Product Program Manager throughout the cookie program, you'll feel confident, eager and ready for your girls to crush their cookie goals.

Troops will earn a minimum of \$.90 per box of Girl Scout Cookies, and up to \$.95 for reaching a per girl average set by council.

## How is the Cookie Program Managed?

Using the Smart Cookie Digital Cookie platform, girls and volunteers are able to seamlessly manage every phase of the cookie program, from online, to in-person, Keep Goaling, and Direct Sales! Girls are able to set goals, manage her cookie orders, and even communicate with her customers. For the volunteer, the platform allows you to set and monitor the troop's cookie goals, track girl/troop finances, view your troop recognitions and achievements and more!

# Field Trips and Outdoor Experiences

Getting outside of your normal meeting location can provide opportunities for learning, exercise, community service, and, most importantly, fun! Getting girls outdoors can be challenging and wonderful.

## Safety First

### 1. Permission Slips

Keep parent/caregiver permission slips and health forms with you for any activity outside your troop's normal meeting location. Find our Annual Permission Slip and health forms at [gswny.org/safety](http://gswny.org/safety).

### 2. First Aid

A first-aid kit and at least one registered volunteer who is first aid certified must be present any time you leave the regular troop meeting location.

### 3. Safety Ratios

To ensure everyone's safety, each troop is required to have two approved non-related co-leaders, at least one of whom is female, present at all times when meeting.



Girl Scouts Volunteer-to-Girl Ratios	Group Meetings		Events, Travel, and Camping	
	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of girls:	One additional volunteer to each additional:	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of girls:	One additional volunteer to each additional:
Girl Scout Daises (Grades K-1)	12	1-6	6	1-4
Girl Scout Brownies (Grades 2-3)	20	1-8	12	1-6
Girl Scout Juniors (Grades 4-5)	25	1-10	16	1-8
Girl Scout Cadettes (Grades 6-8)	25	1-12	20	1-10
Girl Scout Seniors (Grades 9-10)	30	1-15	24	1-12
Girl Scout Ambassadors (Grades 11-12)	30	1-15	24	1-12

### 4. Safety Activity Checkpoints

The Safety Activity Checkpoints (SAC) are detailed rules and policies for higher-risk activities. Prior to an activity, you may reference the SAC on the Safety page at [gswny.org](http://gswny.org)

### 5. Emergencies

First, call 911 if an emergency occurs during a Girl Scout meeting or activity, then inform GSWNY as soon as you are able. Please call our emergency answering service if the emergency occurs after business hours at 1-800-882-9268.

# Girl Scout Ceremonies

## Investiture



An investiture ceremony is a ceremony which honors Girl Scouts of all ages officially into the Girl Scout and Girl Guide family. The investiture part is where girls say the Girl Scout Promise and are invested into Girl Scouts receiving their membership and world trefoil pins. There is no “right way” for girls to be invested, as long as each girl has a chance to make her Promise and receive both of her pins. Typical Girl Scout investiture ceremonies are made up of three parts:

**Opening:** begins the ceremony

**Main:** the reason for holding the ceremony

**Closing:** ends the ceremony

## Bridging



Bridging from one level of Girl Scouting to another are important transitions in the life of a Girl Scout. This is the opportunity for girls to look back at their accomplishments and to look forward toward the new adventures and challenges that lie ahead. Girl Scouts who bridge to the next grade level wear special insignia on their uniform.

More information on holding a troop bridging ceremony is available on the GSWNY website. One important component of bridging is talking to an older troop to learn and get excited about the next level of Girl Scouts. Contact sister troops within your Service Unit to get started!

## Girl Scout Traditions

**Girl Scout Motto:** Be prepared

**Quip:** “Girl Scouts leave a place better than they found it.”

**Girl Scout Slogan:** Do a good turn daily

**Quip:** “Once a Girl Scout, always a Girl Scout!”

**Girl Scout Sign:** Hold the right hand up at shoulder height with the middle three fingers pointed to the sky and the thumb pressed down over the pinky finger. Make the Girl Scout sign while saying the Girl Scout Promise and the Girl Scout Law, and using the Girl Scout handshake.



**Girl Scout Handshake:** Shake left hands and make the Girl Scout sign with the right hand.

**Quiet sign:** The signal to be silent in a group. The person in charge raises their right hand high into the sky. All girls and adults raise their right hands, stop talking, and stay quiet.

**The Buddy System:** A safety practice to keep girls in pairs when they are outside of the troop meeting space. Trios are sometimes nicknamed a truddy, as in, “Girls, stay with your buddy, or stay with your truddy!”

Visit [gswny.org/volunteerbasics](https://www.gswny.org/volunteerbasics) for more ceremony resources!

# Girl Scout Resources



## Girl Scout Shops

Our council has four shops for your shopping needs of official uniforms, apparel, badges, program materials, and so much more. Visit our website for current locations and hours.



## Girl Scout Ceremonies & Traditions

Learn all about Girl Scout traditions like friendship circles, flag ceremonies, bridging, the Girl Scout uniform and more!



## Badges & Journey Awards

On the Award and Badge Explorer, find a list of the badges and Journey awards Girl Scouts can earn.



## Safety, Guidelines, & Procedures

You'll find Volunteer Essentials, Safety Activity Checkpoints, info on First Aid training, and more on the Members Page on our website.



## Service Projects & Activities

Explore ideas for your troop's next adventure in the Girl Scout Activity Zone full of Girl Scout tested and approved activities and service projects.



## Volunteer Toolkit (VTK)

The VTK is a digital planning tool that includes troop contact info as well as detailed troop meeting plans as you work on petals, badges, and more. Access the VTK through your myGS account on our website.



## Fieldtrips & the Outdoors

Check out our GSWNY website for more information on getting outdoors or attending Council Programs and Events.



## GS Learn

Take short, fun, and informative online courses through gsLearn. Access gsLearn through your myGS account on our website.



## Cookies & Money Earning

On the Cookies+ tab, you'll find helpful information for both Product Programs -- Fall Nuts and Candy and Cookie Program -- as well as forms, resources, training videos, and more! This is your one-stop shop for volunteers, girls and families, giving you all the tools needed for a great product program year.



## Stay Connected!

Join our GSWNY Members Facebook Group to read our monthly Volunteer Resources email, full of timely information for Troop Leaders. Be sure you've opted in to email via your myGS account on our website.

# We're here to help!

If you have a private matter, a conflict to discuss, issues with registration, or any other needs, your GSWNY council can help!

The best way to connect with us is through our Council Customer Care team:

Call: 1.888.837.6410  
Email: [customercare@gswny.org](mailto:customercare@gswny.org)  
Website: [gswny.org](http://gswny.org)

## Our Council Map

Visit [gswny.org](http://gswny.org) for hours by location or call for more information.

### Buffalo Service Center

4433 Genesee St., Suite 101  
Buffalo, NY 14225  
716.935.6035

### Jamestown Service Center

2661 Horton Rd.  
Jamestown, NY 14701  
716.935.6040

### Lockport Service Center

5000 Cambria Rd.  
Lockport, NY 14094  
716.935.6080

### Niagara Falls Service Center (Satellite Office)

1522 Main St., Suite 307  
Niagara Falls, NY 14305  
716.935.6082

### Rochester Service Center

1000 Elmwood Ave., Door 9  
Rochester, NY 14620  
585.292.5160

☆ Girl Scout Office

### Girl Scout Camps

- 🏕️ Timbercrest  
Randolph, NY
- 🏕️ Piperwood  
Fairport, NY
- 🏕️ Seven Hills  
Holland, NY
- 🏕️ Windy Meadows  
Lockport, NY

