

Volunteer Essentials

2025-2026 Edition

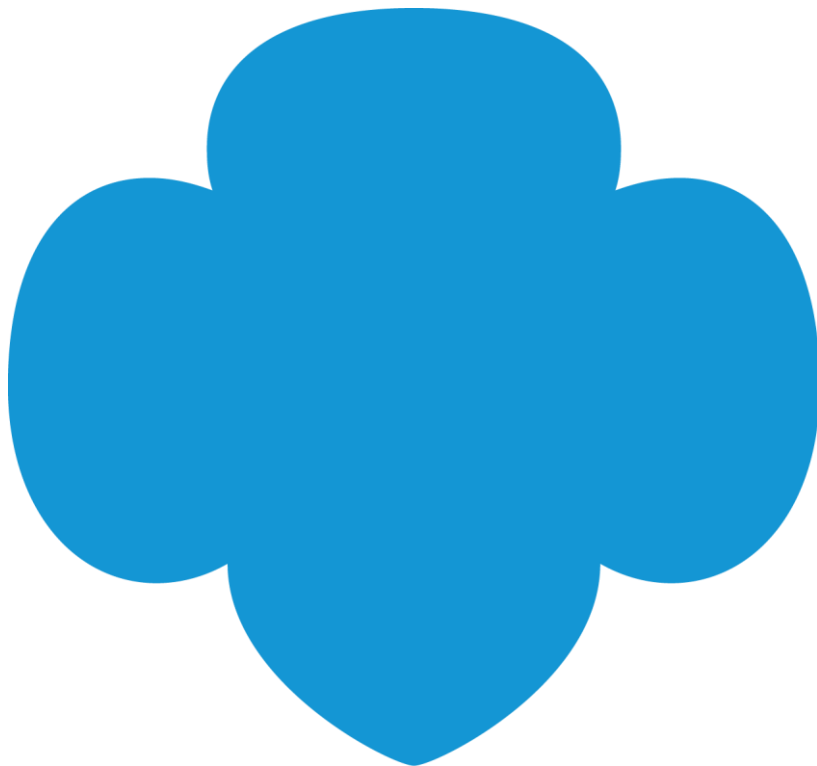


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Welcome! Adventures Ahead!

You're her hero—and ours too! Thanks to you, girls will learn to listen to their hearts, think on their feet, and raise their voices for what they believe in. From all of us at Girl Scouts, thank you for sharing your time and talents as a Girl Scout volunteer!

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you are a community-builder, mentor, champion of fun, and a role model for what it means to lead with your heart. And because of you, Girl Scouts of all ages will have the opportunity to discover that a little imagination can go a long way as they chase their dreams, explore the world around them, take action to improve their communities, and make the world a better place.

Whether you're supporting them through their Girl Scout experience, guiding them as they choose the way they will run their Girl Scout Cookie business, or encouraging them as they raise their voices on issues, they care about most, you'll be their cheerleader, guide, and mentor as they develop essential life skills and gain the confidence they will rely on throughout their lives. The best part of this experience is while you're teaching them important life lessons and setting them up for happy, successful lives, you'll grow too! Because when you embrace leadership in all forms and show girls what it means to be resilient and strong, they learn, grow, and thrive. Before you know it, you'll be trying to keep up with your unstoppable troop. Imagine the excitement, the impact, and the memories that will be made—those are the moments you'll enjoy as a Girl Scout volunteer.

Thank you and welcome, we're glad you're here!

What's Inside?

This guide is designed to support busy, on-the-go troop volunteers. Inside you will find details and information to help you get started on your newest adventure—being an awesome leader for girls. We recommend that you begin by browsing the sections below and come back throughout the year to find answers to your questions as they arise. Ready to get started? Let's go!

- [All About Girl Scouts](#)
- [Troop Management](#)
- [Troop Finances](#)
- [Engaging Girls](#)
- [Creating a Safe Space for Girls](#)
- [Engaging Families](#)
- [Girl Scout Product Programs](#)
- [Additional Resources and Support](#)

New troop leader? We've got you covered. Check out our [New Troop Leaders webpage](#), a resource designed especially for you. Plus, council staff and volunteer coaches are ready to help throughout your first year and beyond!

Questions? Call 1-888-837-6410 or email customercare@gswny.org

www.gswny.org

All About Girl Scouts

At Girl Scouts, girls' dreams are our dreams and Girl Scouts is where girls see the limitless possibilities ahead, because they are encouraged to aim for the stars and reach them! Whether she's making a new friend on the playground, raising her hand in class, starting her own nonprofit, or advocating for climate change or social justice, a Girl Scout builds a better world—just as Girl Scouts have been doing for over a century. With programs in every zip code, coast-to-coast and around the globe, every girl can find her place in Girl Scouts and start creating the world she wants to see.

Girl Scout Volunteers

Girl Scout volunteers are a dynamic and diverse group. Whether you're a recent college graduate, parent, retiree, or really, anyone with a sense of curiosity and adventure (of any gender, who is 18 years or older and has passed their council's screening process), your unique skills and experiences have the power to change girls' lives. With you as their mentor, girls will grow and thrive.

Girl Scout members and volunteers are united by the values in the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#) and their shared commitment to embrace leadership in all forms. Each member agrees to follow Girl Scouts safety guidelines and pay annual membership dues. Volunteers and adults also have the option to purchase a [Lifetime membership](#).

Girl Scout Grade Levels

Girls can join the fun at any point from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Girl Scouts six grade levels are:

- [Girl Scout Daisy](#) (grades K–1)
- [Girl Scout Brownie](#) (grades 2–3)
- [Girl Scout Junior](#) (grades 4–5)
- [Girl Scout Cadette](#) (grades 6–8)
- [Girl Scout Senior](#) (grades 9–10)
- [Girl Scout Ambassador](#) (grades 11–12)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience provides the foundation for all we do. It is the core of our program and encompasses everything from our Promise and Law to our badges, activities, and Journeys. And at the center of it all are the girls. At Girl Scouts, everything centers around the girl, [it's what makes Girl Scouts truly unique](#). Our program is designed by, with, and for girls. With a focus on girl-led programming and activities, girls have the opportunity to take on leadership roles and learn-by-doing in a safe, fun, and cooperative environment.

Although girls may start building their leadership skills in school and on sports teams, [research shows](#) that the courage, confidence, and character girls develop as Girl Scouts stay with them throughout their lives. Our program and outcomes are based in research and our studies show that Girl Scouting has a measurable positive impact on girls. In fact, we can proudly say Girl Scouts are almost 10% more likely, than non-Girl Scouts, to have positive expectations about their future based on our studies. We encourage you to learn more about our program and outcomes as you [check out our studies and in-depth research](#) for insights and information.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience has been purposefully designed to include a variety of fun and challenging activities to help girls learn, grow, and thrive. And at the base of it all are three keys and three processes.

What girls *do* in Girl Scouting all fit within our three keys: **Discover, Connect, and Take Action.**

- **Discover.** When Girl Scouts take part in fun and exciting badge activities, earn a Girl Scout Journey award, go camping, or attend an amazing Girl Scout program or event, you are helping them *discover* who they are, what they care about, and where their talents lie.
- **Connect.** When Girl Scouts collaborate with others—including the members and leaders of their troop, Girl Scouts from their local community, or community partners and experts—they *connect* and expand their horizons. This helps them care about, support, inspire, and team up with others both locally and globally.
- **Take Action.** When girls deepen their relationship with the world around them, they're eager to *take action* to improve the local community and the greater global community and make the world a better place.

So how do we *do* it? The Girl Scout Leadership Experience draws on three unique processes—**Girl-led, Learning by Doing, and Cooperative Learning**—that encourage girls to try new things, write their own stories, and develop the skills and confidence to say, “I know I can do this!”

- **Girl-led.** Girl Scouts take the lead, no matter their age. From selecting the badges they'll pursue to how they'll organize an activity; Girl Scouts have the chance to follow their dreams and grow their skills—and gain the confidence that comes with that.
- **Learning-by-Doing.** Hands-on activities are fun for Girl Scouts of any age, but they also help them feel empowered to shape their own experience. Girl Scouts unlock their “I got this” attitude as they discover they can always dust themselves off and try again when things don't go according to plan.
- **Cooperative Learning.** There's power in having a tight-knit group of friends who will learn with you, grow with you, and always cheer you on. Girl Scouts see firsthand that teamwork, respect, and collaboration can fuel them through any challenge that comes their way.

As a volunteer, you'll draw on these **three processes** as you lead girls of any age. And naturally, girl-led at the Daisy level will look very different from girl-led at the Ambassador level. What is most important is that your Girl Scouts make decisions about the activities they will do *together* and make choices as they are doing the activities *together*. As girls learn from their successful, and not so successful tries, they gain confidence. All girls should have the opportunity to lead within their peer group. By the time girls are Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors, they will be

using the leadership skills they've developed to take on more ownership of their activities, mentor younger Girl Scouts, and take action to make the world a better place.

One last tip about following these processes. Girl Scouting **isn't** a to-do list, so please don't feel that checking activities off a list is more important than tuning in to what interests girls and sparks their imaginations. Projects don't have to come out perfectly—in fact, it's a valuable learning experience when they don't—Girl Scouts don't have to fill their vests and sashes with badges. What matters most is the fun and learning that takes place as they make experiences their own, so don't be afraid to [step back and let your girls take the lead](#).

Reflection

Was a badge-earning activity a resounding success? Or was it derailed by something your troop hadn't factored in? No matter the activity's outcome, you can amplify its impact by encouraging your girls to reflect on their latest endeavor.

Reflection is the necessary debrief that reinforces what girls learned. As your Girl Scouts explore the whats and whys, they'll make meaningful connections between the activity at hand and future challenges that come their way. In other words, reflection gives girls the confidence boost they need to pick themselves up, try again, and succeed.

Keep in mind that reflection does not need to be a formal process, but you can kick-start the conversation with three simple questions: What? So what? and Now what?

What? Go over the “what” of the activity. For example, ask:

- What did we do today?
- What part was your favorite?
- If we did it again, what would you want to do differently and what would you want to repeat?

So what? Next, move to the “so what.” You might ask:

- So, what did you learn by doing this activity?
- So, what did you learn about yourself?
- So, what did you learn about your community (or environment, school, or others) that you didn't know before?

Last, review the now what. Say something like:

- Now that we've done this, what would you like to do next?
- Now that you know this about yourselves, what would you like to try next?
- Now that we've completed this Take Action™ project, what do you think we should do next to make sure it continues?

This form of reflection, or whatever style of reflection you choose to use with your girls, is a powerful component of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience that helps girls to carry these lessons with them for the rest of their lives.

Progression

Although program elements—like outdoor expeditions or entrepreneurial ventures—align across all grade levels, Girl Scout Brownies and Juniors won't be doing the same activities as Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors. But with your support, they will get there!

Girl Scout programming is designed to be progressive and it's what makes Girl Scouting fun and effective! By building on the knowledge and skills they gain year after year, your girls' confidence will grow exponentially, and they'll be eager to try new things and take on new challenges. As a volunteer, you will cultivate a [supportive, nonjudgmental space](#) where your Girl Scouts can test their skills and be unafraid to fail.

Keep in mind that progression drives success for your troop. In the following links, we've outlined some suggestions that will help you determine when your girls are ready for their next [outdoor challenge](#), their [next troop trip](#), or their next cookie-selling challenge.

Inclusion

Girl Scouts has a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, and we welcome and embrace girls of all abilities and backgrounds into our wonderful sisterhood.

Inclusion is at the core of who we are; it's about being a sister to every Girl Scout and celebrating our unique strengths. Part of the important work you will do includes modeling friendship and kindness for your girls and showing them what it means to practice empathy. Through equal treatment, you can nurture an inclusive troop environment.

When scheduling, planning, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of all girls involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, religious holidays, dietary restrictions, abilities, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.

At GSWNY, we strive to welcome and include all Girl Scout youth and adult members and seek to reduce barriers to participation. Girl Scout members can request reasonable accommodations by contacting customercare@gswny.org.

The Girl Scout Program: National Program Pillars & More

[Girl Scouts four Program Pillars](#)—STEM, Life Skills, Outdoors, and Entrepreneurship—form the foundation of the Girl Scout program and work together to build girls' curiosity, kindness, and can-do spirit. In fact, every aspect of our program, and every Girl Scout adventure, can be traced back to one of our four program pillars.

[STEM](#) (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Girls are naturally curious and have a strong desire to help others. Whether they're building a robot, developing a video game, or studying the stars, Girl Scouts become better problem-solvers and critical thinkers through STEM and gain the confidence to turn their ideas into breakthrough inventions to help others.

Life Skills. Girl Scouts life skills programming includes a mix of practical skills, tools, and activities that foster positive values in girls like financial literacy, civic engagement, and community service. Skills that help them discover that they have what it takes to raise their voices as community advocates, make smart decisions about their finances, and form strong, healthy relationships—skills that inspire them to accept challenges and overcome obstacles, now and always.

Outdoors. Girl Scouts has been building girls’ outdoor confidence and skills for over one hundred years through a variety of outdoor adventures like camping and nature focused badges that inspire them to spend time outdoors and develop a lifelong appreciation of nature. An appreciation that sparks girls’ desire to take action as environmental stewards in their community and across the globe.

Entrepreneurship. Starting with Girl Scouts iconic Girl Scout Cookie Program and growing to include the Fall Product Program and a series of entrepreneurship badges, this pillar instills and nurtures an entrepreneurial mindset and fuels girls’ curiosity and confidence as they learn the essentials of running their own businesses and how to think like entrepreneurs.

Important Differences: Community Service and Take Action Projects

As your Girl Scouts look for meaningful ways to give back to their community, you can help sharpen their problem-solving skills and expand their definition of doing good by discussing community service and Take Action projects. [Both projects serve essential needs, but at different levels.](#)

- When a Girl Scout performs **community service**, she is responding to an immediate need in a one-off, “doing for” capacity. In other words, she is making an impact right now.
- Through **Take Action/service learning**, girls explore the root causes of a community need and address it in a lasting way; they truly make the world—or their part of it—a better place.

If your troop members want to pursue their Bronze, Silver, or Gold Award, they’ll develop a Take Action project on an issue that’s close to their hearts. To make Take Action projects even more impactful for your Girl Scouts, set time aside for them to reflect on their projects. When they take time to internalize the lessons they’ve learned, they’re more likely to find success in their future projects—or anything else they put their minds to.

Traditions, Ceremonies, and Special Girl Scout Days

Time-honored traditions and ceremonies unite Girl Scout sisters, and the millions of Girl Scout alums who came before them—around the country and around the globe—and remind girls how far their fellow trailblazers have come and just how far they’ll go.

A few of those extra special days, when you will want to turn up the celebrations, include:

- Juliette Gordon Low's birthday or Founder's Day, October 31, marks the birth in 1860 of [Girl Scouts of the USA founder Juliette Gordon Low](#) in Savannah, Georgia.

- [World Thinking Day](#), February 22, celebrates international friendship. It is an opportunity for Girl Scouts and Girl Guides to connect with each other and explore a common theme around the world.
- Girl Scouts' birthday, March 12, commemorates the day in 1912 when Juliette Gordon Low officially registered the organization's first eighteen girl members in Savannah, Georgia.

So, whether they're working on a new badge, making new friends, or closing meetings with a friendship circle, your troop won't want to miss out on Girl Scouts' treasured [traditions, ceremonies, and special Girl Scout days](#).

Leadership Awards

Practice all the ways you can lead yourself, your team, and your community.

The new Leadership Awards are about building real skills for real impact and having the confidence to turn your ideas into action. Whether you're figuring out what leadership means to you, working with a team, leading a group, or stepping up to a challenge, these awards are designed to help you explore what leadership means to you—no pressure, just room to grow.

Highest Awards

The Girl Scout Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards honor girls who become forces for good and create a lasting impact in their communities, nationally and around the world.

As your Girl Scouts discover the power of their voices, they'll want to take on an issue that is close to their hearts and meaningful to them. Encourage them to turn their ideas into reality by pursuing Girl Scouts' highest awards.

- [The Girl Scout Bronze Award](#) can be earned by Juniors. The prerequisite is completion of a Junior Leadership award or a Junior Journey and the associated Take Action project. The Bronze Award is earned by the group.
- [The Girl Scout Silver Award](#) can be earned by Cadettes. The prerequisite is completion of a Cadette Leadership Award or a Cadette Journey and the associated Take Action project. The Silver Award can be earned by an individual girl or by a small group.
- [The Girl Scout Gold Award](#) can be earned by Seniors and Ambassadors who have earned their Silver Award, a Senior/Ambassador Leadership Award or Senior/Ambassador Journey.
- Did you know that a Gold Award Girl Scout is entitled to enlist at a higher paygrade when she joins the U.S. military? A Gold Award Girl Scout's achievements also prime her for the fast track when it comes to college admissions and make her an outstanding candidate for academic scholarships and other financial awards.

Girl Scouts are eligible to earn any recognition at the grade level in which they are registered. Any Girl Scout is eligible to earn the Girl Scout Gold Award even if she joined Girl Scouts for the first time in high school.

Ask your council about Girl Scout Gold Award Girl Scouts in your community and how they're doing their part to make the world a better place. For inspiration, consider inviting a local Gold Award Girl Scout to speak to your troop about how she took the lead and made a difference. You'll be inspired when you see and hear what girls can accomplish when they take the lead—and by the confidence, grit, problem-solving, time and project management, and team-building expertise they gain while doing so!

Girl Scout Travel and Destinations

Girl Scouts encourage girls to try new things and see the world with fresh eyes, both inside and outside of their usual troop meetings. As COVID-19-related travel restrictions are lifted across the globe and you and your troop feel safe doing so, you may be excited to travel and explore the world as a troop.

Traveling as a Girl Scout is a more engaging experience than traveling with family, school, or other groups because [girls take the lead](#). They'll make important decisions about where to go, what to do, and take increasing responsibility for the planning of their trips. During this process, they will also build their organizational and management skills—skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

Girl Scout travel is built on a [progression of activities](#), so girls are set up for success. Daisies and Brownies start with field trips and progress to day trips, overnights, and weekend trips. Juniors can take their adventures farther with longer regional trips. And Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors can travel the United States and then the world. There are even opportunities for older girls to travel independently by joining trips their council organizes or participating in GSUSA's travel program, [Destinations](#).

Planning Troop Adventures

Consult the most current [Safety Guidelines](#). These guidelines will provide information on the types of travel allowed, and how to safely proceed.

The [GSWNY Travel Guide](#) can get you set for everything from local field trips to international travel. COVID-19 guidelines always supersede any guidelines provided within the Travel Guide.

Not sure where to begin? Review the GSWNY Travel Right Requirements on the next page – you'll find requirements for everything from a simple day trip to extended trips.

GSWNY Travel Right Requirements

All events that occur outside the normal meeting time and place require **GSWNY Travel Right** requirements:

1. [Appropriate girl to adult ratio](#) for events and trips. Review the specific guidelines for [overnight trips and overnight trips including male volunteers](#) as applicable.
 2. Permission slips are required.
 3. If you are arranging transportation, troop drivers are approved, registered volunteers.
 4. Health forms, permission slips and a first aid kit must be brought along on the trip.
 5. Leaders must review the [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#) for additional requirements.
- Some trips require additional paperwork and/or permission. All travel paperwork can be found at www.gswny.org. Refer to the grid below for details.

Where am I going?	What do I need?
A day trip in my community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GSWNY Travel Right requirements ● Any additional requirements per Safety Activity Checkpoints
An overnight at an aquarium, museum, zoo or other building where programming will be provided (<250 miles); within US	
An overnight at a hotel for two nights or less, <250 miles; within US	
An overnight in a lodge structure at a GSWNY camp property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GSWNY Travel Right requirements ● Camping Safety Activity Checkpoints ● Depending on trip activities (such as archery or boating), any additional requirements per Safety Activity Checkpoints
An overnight in an A-frame or tent at a GSWNY camp property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GSWNY Travel Right requirements ● Camping Safety Activity Checkpoints ● Depending on trip activities (such as archery or boating), any additional requirements per Safety Activity Checkpoints
An overnight at a camp property not owned by GSWNY, <250 miles	Same as above based on outdoor structure, but must submit Permission for Use of Non-Council Camp Site form 60 days before trip
A trip 250+ miles and/or longer than 2 nights; within US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GSWNY Travel Right requirements ● Submit Intent to Travel 90 days before trip ● Troop Travel Agreement/add'l documents 60 days before trip ● Any additional requirements per Safety Activity Checkpoints
A trip outside of the US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● GSWNY Travel Right requirements ● Submit Intent to Travel 24 months before trip ● International Troop Travel packet/additional documents 18 months before trip ● Any additional requirements per Safety Activity Checkpoints

To learn more about domestic extended travel, check out the [Girl Scout Guide to U.S. Travel](#). This resource is designed for Juniors and older Girl Scouts who want to take extended trips—that is, longer than a weekend—but also features tips and tools for budding explorers who are just getting started with field trips and overnights.

Once girls have mastered planning and embarking upon trips in the United States, they might be ready for a global travel adventure! Global trips usually take a few years to plan, and the [Girl Scout Global Travel Toolkit](#) can walk you through the entire process.

Travel and Girl Scout Program Connections

It's easy to connect eye-opening travel opportunities to the leadership training and skill building your girls are doing in Girl Scouts! When it's safe to travel together, girls can use their creativity to connect any leadership Journey theme into an idea for travel. For example, girls learn where their food comes from in the *Sow What?* Journey. That would connect well with a trip focusing on sustainable agriculture and sampling tasty foods!

There are abundant opportunities to build real skills through earning badges too. The most obvious example is the Senior Traveler badge, but there are plenty more, such as Eco Camper, New Cuisines, Coding for Good, and, of course, all the financial badges that help girls budget and earn money for their trips.

Want to include Girl Scout traditions in your trip? Look no farther than the [Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace](#) in Savannah, Georgia! Your girls also have the chance to deepen their connections to Girl Scouts around the world by visiting one of the WAGGGS (World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts) [World Centers](#), which offer low-cost accommodations and special programs in five locations around the world.

And if your troop is looking to stay closer to home this year? Ask your council about council-owned camps and other facilities that can be rented out.

As your Girl Scouts excitedly plan their next trip, remember to limit your role to facilitating the girls' brainstorming and planning, never doing the work for them. Share your ideas and insights, ask tough questions when you have to, and support all their decisions with enthusiasm and encouragement!

Transporting Girls

How parents decide to transport girls between their homes and Girl Scout meeting places is each parent's individual decision and responsibility.

For planned Girl Scout field trips and other activities (outside the normal meeting time and place) in which a group will be transported in private vehicles keep in mind the following:

- Every driver must be an approved volunteer (completed background check and registered member) at least 21 years old, and have a clean driving record, a valid license and a registered/insured vehicle.
- Girls never drive other girls.

- If a group is traveling in one vehicle, there must be at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers in the vehicle, one of whom is female. In addition, the girl-volunteer ratios in the “Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need” section must be followed.
- If a group is traveling in more than one vehicle, the entire group must consist of at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers, one of whom is female, and the girl-volunteer ratios in the “Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need” section must be followed. Care must be taken so that a single car is not separated from the group to keep to the necessary volunteer-girl safety ratios.

Private transportation includes private passenger vehicles, rental cars, privately owned or rented recreational vehicles and campers, chartered buses, chartered boats and chartered flights. Each driver of motorized private transportation must be at least **21** years old and hold a valid operator’s license appropriate to the vehicle. In addition, state laws must be followed, even if they are more stringent than the guidelines here.

Anyone who is driving a vehicle with 12 or more passengers must follow all state laws regarding driving these vehicles. Note, you must check with your council to determine specific rules about renting large vehicles. Fifteen passenger vans are not permitted for use to transport girls.

Please keep in mind the following non-negotiable points regarding private transportation:

- **Review the “Transporting Girls” Safety Activity Checkpoint**
- Even though written agreements are always required when renting or chartering, you are *not* authorized to sign an agreement or contract, except for rental car agreements, even if there is no cost associated with the rental. **Such an agreement must instead be signed by the GSWNY CEO. See Contracts on p. 14.**
- Check with your council to make sure you are following accepted practices when using private transportation. This ensures that both you and your council are protected by liability insurance in the event of an accident.
- If your council has given permission to use a rented car, read all rental agreements to be sure you comply with their terms and avoid surprises. For example, in many cases the minimum age of drivers is 25, and the maximum age is often under 70. In addition, make sure the car is adequately insured and you know who is responsible for damage to, or loss of, the vehicle. Finally, ensure you have a good paper trail that shows the vehicle rental is Girl Scout-related.
- Obtain parent/guardian permission for any use of transportation outside of the meeting place.

Contracts

According to the Girl Scouts of Western New York by-laws, all contracts, leases, hold harmless agreements and other documents requiring a signature must be signed by the GSWNY Chief Executive Officer. Documents which must be reviewed include, but are not limited to:

- bus contracts or car lease agreements
- non-GSWNY campsite contracts
- hold harmless agreements (commonly used by vendors)
- contracts for site rentals, such as for troop or service unit events

Contracts and other documents requiring review should be submitted as follows:

- bus contracts/leases/vendor agreements, etc. related to a trip >250 miles outside the council boundaries should be submitted as part of the required Troop Travel documentation (see GSWNY Travel Right requirements)
- non-GSWNY campsite contracts/hold harmless agreements, etc. related to the use of a non-GSWNY campsite should be submitted as part of the Non-Council Campsite Approval process (see GSWNY Travel Right requirements)
- directly via email to customercare@gswny.org or if by mail to GSWNY CEO, 4433 Genesee St., Suite 101, Buffalo, NY 14225 no less than one month prior to the proposed usage.

Troop Management

Leadership is more than “being in charge” or having a title; it’s recognizing that you are part of a team and understanding that team’s needs and interests. Here’s how you’ll do that with your troop!

Your Role as a Girl Scout Volunteer

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience is based on three keys—discover, connect, and take action—but it’s not just for your troop. As a Girl Scout leader, you will embark on your own leadership journey as you help girls develop the leadership skills they’ll use to make the world a better place. Here are a few basic concepts that outline what leadership means in Girl Scouting.

Leadership is teaching your Girl Scouts:

- That they can do and be anything!
- That they are decision makers and should own their decisions.
- How to live the Girl Scout Law by modeling it for them.

As a leader, see yourself as a coach who:

- Advises, discusses, and cheers on your troop, not as a teacher with a planned lesson or activity but as a mentor and coach.
- Ensures each member understands and can carry out their responsibilities within the troop.
- Encourages Girl Scouts to build their skills and their ethics.
- Gives more responsibilities to the girls as they grow and develop.

It is important to remember that:

- You cannot know everything that your Girl Scouts might ever want to learn.
- You’ll explore and learn alongside your girls and grow your confidence in the process.
- You’re not expected to know everything about Girl Scouting, but you should know where to go for information—and to ask for help when you need it.

Your Responsibilities as a Girl Scout Volunteer

Your responsibilities as a Girl Scout volunteer include:

- Accepting the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#).
- Understanding and coaching Girl Scouts Three Keys to Leadership—discover, connect, and take action—that are the basis of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- Sharing your knowledge, experience, and skills with a positive and flexible approach.
- Working in partnership with your Girl Scouts so that their activities are girl-led and that they learn by doing, individually and as a group. You’ll also partner with other volunteers and council staff for support and guidance.
- Organizing fun, interactive, girl-led activities that address relevant issues and match girls’ interests and needs.
- Providing guidance and information regarding Girl Scout group meetings with troop families on a regular and ongoing basis through a variety of tools, including email, phone calls, newsletters, blogs, other forms of social media, and any other method you choose.

- Partnering with troop parents and caregivers to create an environment that encourages family support and participation.
- Recognizing the needs of individual girls and working with parents and caregivers to provide flexibility and accommodations to ensure a successful experience.
- Processing and completing registration forms and other paperwork.
- Communicating effectively and delivering clear, organized, and vibrant presentations or information to an individual or the group.
- Overseeing with honesty, integrity, and careful record-keeping the funds that girls raise.
- Maintaining a close connection to your volunteer support team as well as your council.
- Facilitating a safe experience for every Girl Scout.

Safety in Girl Scouting

The emotional and physical safety and well-being of Girl Scouts is our top priority. [*Safety Activity Checkpoints*](#) outlines the Safety Standards and Guidelines used in Girl Scouting, which apply to all Girl Scout activities. All volunteers should review the [*Safety Activity Checkpoints*](#) manual when planning activities with girls in order to manage safety and risk in Girl Scout-sanctioned activities.

In *Safety Activity Checkpoints*, you will find:

- Girl Scouts Safety Standards and Guidelines, which apply to all Girl Scout activities, including requirements for adult supervision, permission slips, preparation, field trips and overnight trips, and other vital information.
- Activities that are not permitted by Girl Scouts of the USA and actions that girls and volunteers should not take.
- Policies surrounding chartered aircraft trips and aviation.
- First aid and overall health information.
- Standards for well-being and inclusivity along with ways to include Girl Scouts with disabilities and ways to ensure girls' emotional safety.
- Individual safety activity checkpoints for specific activities—such as camping, internet use, and water sports that provide activity-specific safety information.

The document is laid out in three primary sections, Safety Standards and Guidelines, Activities at a Glance, and individual safety activity checkpoint pages.

- **Girl Scouts' Activities at a Glance** table provides a quick look at the safety standards for that activity with a focus on two critical points to keep in mind when considering and planning activities for your troop:
 - age-appropriate activities and participation by grade level, and
 - whether prior approval from your council is required before girls participate in a specific activity.

- **Individual Safety Activity Checkpoint** pages provide activity-specific safety measures and guidance on the individual activities that troops and girls may choose to participate in.

Planning for Your First Troop Meeting

Depending on the ages of your girls, you might take the lead in guiding the structure and experiences of your troop—from how and when meetings are held to how the troop communicates, from steering girl-led activities to setting financial expectations. You'll make these decisions collaboratively with your volunteer team or co-leader, as well as with input from the girls and their parents and caregivers.

Use the questions below to guide your conversations with your troop committee volunteers or co-leader before discussing these topics with parents and caregivers.

- When will we meet and for how long? How frequently should we schedule troop meetings?
- Where will we meet? Your meeting space should be somewhere safe, clean, and secure that allows all girls to participate. Some great meeting space ideas include schools, places of worship, libraries, and community centers. If working with teens, consider meeting at coffee shops, bookstores, or another place they enjoy.
- Which components of the uniform will families need to purchase? Which uniform components will the troop provide for each girl?
- Will our troop be a single-grade level or [facilitated as a multi-level troop](#) with girls of many grade levels combined into one troop? If multi-level, how will we make sure they each get an age-appropriate experience?
- How will we keep troop activities and decisions girl-led? Use the Volunteer Toolkit to help you through this process by exploring options for activities and reviewing the meeting plans and resource lists.
- How often are we going to communicate with troop families? Which channels will we use to keep families in the loop? Effective communication [will help set expectations](#) and clarify parent/caregiver responsibilities.
- Will our troop charge dues, use product program proceeds, and/or charge per activity? How much money will we need to cover supplies and activities? What should our financial plan look like?

Choosing a Meeting Place

Meetings or activities that involve girls are not allowed in private homes, including yards or private outdoor spaces.

What makes a great meeting space? It depends on your troop, but here are a few considerations as you visit potential locations:

- **Cost.** The space should be free to use.
- **Size.** Make sure the space is large enough for the whole group and all planned activities.
- **Availability.** Be sure the space is available for the day and the entire length of time you want to meet.
- **Resources.** Ask if tables and chairs come with the room and ensure that the lighting is adequate. A bonus would be a cubby of some sort where you could store supplies or a safe outdoor space for activities.
- **Safety.** Potential spaces must be safe, secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards, and have at least two exits that are well-marked and fully functional. Also be sure first-aid equipment is on hand.
- **Facilities.** It goes without saying, but make sure that toilets are sanitary and accessible.
- **Communication-Friendly.** Check for cell reception in the potential space and whether Wi-Fi is available.
- **Allergen-Free.** Ensure that pet dander and other common allergens won't bother susceptible girls during meetings.
- **Accessibility.** Your space should accommodate girls with disabilities as well as parents with disabilities who may come to meetings.

Need a few talking points to get the conversation started? Try...

"I'm a Girl Scout volunteer with a group of [number of girls] girls. We're doing lots of great things for girls and for the community, like [something your group is doing] and [something else your troop is doing]. We're all about leadership—the kind that girls use in their daily lives and the kind that makes our community better. We'd love to hold our meetings here because [reason why you'd like to meet there]."

Stuck and need additional support? Contact your council or your service unit support team for help with a troop meeting place.

Overnights/Weekend programs

GSWNY prohibits troops from hosting sleepovers in private homes/backyards. GSWNY encourages troops to consider one of GSWNY's four camp properties for overnight and weekend programs, or to take advantage of vendor-run overnight programming at a zoo, aquarium or museum, or to participate in GSWNY-run overnight programming such as Core Camp.

Virtual Meetings

If your group or troop can't meet in person or hold a traditional meeting, there are many ways to bring the power of Girl Scouting home! Meeting virtually can be a fun and engaging option for your troop.

[Before setting up a virtual meeting](#), you'll want to:

- Partner with troop families to make sure the girls are safe online.
- Select a meeting platform that allows families who may not have internet access to call in.
- [Think about logistics](#). Work with the girls to set up ground rules; consider how you will incorporate in-person meeting traditions in your virtual space and how you'll keep meetings on track.
- Talk with families on [how to keep activities girl-led](#) if your girls will be completing them from home.

And don't worry if your girls want to use a web or social platform you're not as familiar with, because you'll learn alongside them! For more tips on successful virtual meetings, check out [Tips, Tools, and Ideas for Planning a Great Virtual Meeting](#).

Girl Scout Troop Size

The troop size “sweet spot” is large enough to provide an interactive and cooperative learning environment and small enough to encourage individual development. Though the ideal troop size is 12 girls, we recommend that groups be no fewer and no larger than:

- Girl Scout Daisies: 5–12 girls
- Girl Scout Brownies: 10–20 girls
- Girl Scout Juniors 10–25 girls
- Girl Scout Cadettes: 5–25 girls
- Girl Scout Seniors: 5–30 girls
- Girl Scout Ambassadors: 5–30 girls

A Girl Scout troop/group must have a minimum of five girls and two approved adult volunteers. Be sure to double-check the [volunteer-to-girl ratio table](#) below to make sure you have the right number of adults present for group meetings, events, travel, and camping. Adults and girls registering in groups of fewer than five girls and two approved, unrelated adult volunteers, at least one of whom is female, will be registered as individual Girl Scouts to accurately reflect their status and program experience. Individual Girl Scouts are always welcome to participate in Girl Scout activities and events.

Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need

From camping weekends to cookie booths, adult volunteers must always be present to ensure their girls have fun and stay safe, no matter their grade level.

Not sure just how many adults you'll need for your activity? The following chart breaks down the minimum number of volunteers needed to supervise a specific number of girls; councils may also establish maximums due to size or cost restrictions, so be sure to check with them as you plan your activity.

In the chart on the following page, "Volunteer" refers to a registered, approved adult with a current background check who has completed council-required leader training. **Troops must have a minimum of 2 approved volunteers who are unrelated/not at the same address/not in a significant relationship, at least one of whom is female, and who have completed council-required leader training.**

Troops cannot start meeting until there are at least 2 approved co-leaders per the requirements listed above. If a co-leader resigns from their position, it is the responsibility of both co-leaders to inform GSWNY Council Staff at customercare@gswny.org so that a new co-leader can be approved. Any troops with less than 2 approved co-leaders cannot meet until the new co-leader is approved and the troop fulfills this safety requirement.

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

For all overnight/camping trips:

- All accompanying adults must be registered as a Girl Scout member and background checked. Those who are not co-leaders should register as a Troop Chaperone/Helper.
- Each participant has her own bed, or parent/guardian permission must be obtained if girls are to share a bed.
- Youth members and adults do not share a bed, with an exception for family members.
- It is not mandatory that an adult sleep in the sleeping area with youth members.
- If an adult female does share the sleeping area, there must always be at least two unrelated adult females present.

For overnight/camping trips, where male volunteers are part of the group:

- It is not appropriate for men to sleep in the same space as girl members. Always support and maintain an all-girl atmosphere for sleeping quarters.
- Men may participate only when separate sleeping quarters and bathrooms are available for their use.
- Men should not be in a situation where they must walk through girls' sleeping quarters to enter or exit their sleeping quarters or access restrooms. In some circumstances, such as a museum or mall overnight, with hundreds of girls, this type of accommodation may not be possible. If this is the case, men do not supervise girls in the sleeping area of the event and the adult-to-girl ratio is adjusted accordingly.
- An exception is made for family members during events such as parent-girl or family overnights; families are allowed to sleep in the same area, otherwise adults and youth cannot sleep in the same area unless there is at least two unrelated adult females present.

Registering Girls and Adults in Girl Scouting

Every participant (girl or adult) in Girl Scouting must register and become a member of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). GSUSA membership dues are valid for one year. Membership dues cannot be transferred to another member and are not refundable.

Preregistration for the upcoming membership year occurs in the spring. Girls are encouraged to register early to avoid the fall rush. Early registration allows for uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps girls and councils plan ahead, and gets girls excited about all the great things they want to do as Girl Scouts next year. A Girl Scout's grade level is determined by the current membership year beginning October 1.

Lifetime membership is available to anyone who accepts the principles and beliefs of the Girl Scout Promise and Law, pays the one-time lifetime membership fee, and is at least 18 years old (or a high school graduate or equivalent). Volunteers with ten or more years of service can become lifetime members at the discounted young alum rate.

Adding New Girls to Your Troop

Growing your troop is a great way to share the power of the Girl Scout experience and [there are many ways to get the word out](#), like hanging posters at your girl's school, using social media to reach families in your community, or including your troop in your council's Opportunity Catalog or Troop Catalog.

Don't forget to ensure your troop is listed on the opportunity catalog. This is the listing of all the available troops within a certain zip code. Interested new girls will only be able to find your troop and register for it if it's listed. Contact GSWNY at 1-888-837-6410 or customercare@gswny.org for more information.

Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion

Girl Scouts has a strong commitment to inclusion and diversity. We welcome all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, background, cognitive or physical abilities, family structure, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (except cis-gender boys), and socioeconomic status.

If you have questions about accommodating an individual Girl Scout, please reach out to our Customer Care Team. Youth and adult Girl Scout members can also request reasonable accommodations by contacting customercare@gswny.org

We believe inclusion is an approach and an attitude, rather than a set of guidelines. Inclusion is about belonging, all girls being offered the same opportunities with respect, dignity, and celebration of their unique strengths. It's about being a sister to every Girl Scout. You're accepting and inclusive when you:

- Welcome every girl and focus on building community.
- Emphasize cooperation instead of competition.
- Provide a safe and socially comfortable environment for girls.
- Teach respect for, understanding of, and dignity toward all girls and their families.
- Actively reach out to girls and families who are traditionally excluded or marginalized.
- Foster a sense of belonging to community as a respected and valued peer.
- Honor the intrinsic value of each person's life.

As you think about where, when, and how often to meet with your group, consider the needs, resources, safety, and beliefs of all members and potential members. Include the special needs of any members who have disabilities or whose parents or caregivers have disabilities. But please, do not rely on visual cues to inform you of a disability; approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population has a disability—that's one in five people of every socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and religion.

If you want to find out what a girl with a disability needs to make her Girl Scout experience successful, simply ask her or her parent or caregiver. If you are open and honest, they'll likely respond in kind, [creating an atmosphere that enriches everyone](#).

It's important for all girls to be rewarded based on their best efforts—not on the completion of a task. Give any girl the opportunity to do her best and she will! Sometimes that means changing a few rules or approaching an activity in a more creative way. Here are some examples of ways to modify activities:

- Invite a girl to complete an activity after she has observed others doing it.
- If you are visiting a museum to view a sculpture, find out if a girl who is blind might be given permission to touch the pieces.
- If an activity requires running, a girl who is unable to run could be asked to walk or do another physical movement.

Focus on a person's abilities—on what she can do rather than on what she cannot. In that spirit, use people-first language that puts the person before the disability.

Say:	Instead of:
She has a learning disability.	She is learning disabled.
She has a developmental delay.	She is mentally retarded; she is slow.
She uses a wheelchair.	She is wheelchair bound.

When interacting with a girl (or parent/caregiver) with a disability, consider these tips:

- When talking to a girl with a disability, speak directly to her, not through a family member or friend.
- It's okay to offer assistance to a girl with a disability but wait until your offer is accepted before you begin to help. Listen closely to any instructions the person may have.
- Leaning on a girl's wheelchair is invading her space and is considered annoying and rude.
- When speaking to a girl who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to the girl, not to the interpreter.
- When speaking for more than a few minutes to a girl who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level.
- When greeting a girl with a visual disability, always identify yourself and others. You might say, "Hi, it's Sheryl. Tara is on my right, and Chris is on my left."

Registering Girls with Cognitive Disabilities

Girls with cognitive disabilities can be registered as closely as possible to their chronological ages. They wear the uniform of that grade level. Make any adaptations for the girl to ongoing activities of the grade level to which the group belongs. Young women with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their girl membership through their twenty-first year and then move into an adult membership category.

Getting Support for Your Troop

Just as your Girl Scouts rally around each other for support, you will also have a dedicated Girl Scout support team, consisting of council staff and passionate volunteers like you. Your support team, which may be called a service unit at your council, is ready to offer local learning opportunities and advice as well as [answer your questions](#) about the Girl Scout program, working with girls, product sales, and much more.

Before you hold your first troop meeting with girls, consider the support and people resources you'll need to cultivate an energizing troop experience. Parents, friends, family, and other members of the community have their own unique strengths and can provide time, experience, and ideas to a troop, so get them involved from the very beginning as part of your volunteer troop team. This team is made up of troop leaders (like you) and troop committee volunteers.

Your [troop committee volunteers](#) are the extra set of eyes, ears, and hands that help the troop safely explore the world around them. Depending on your troop's needs, they can play a more active role; for instance, someone can step up as a dedicated troop treasurer—or simply provide an occasional helping hand when you need to keep a meeting activity on track.

If a parent or caregiver isn't sure if they can commit to a committee or co-leader role, encourage them to try [volunteering in a smaller capacity](#) that matches their skill set. Just like your young Girl Scouts, once troop parents and caregivers discover they can succeed in their volunteer role, they'll feel empowered to volunteer again.

Troop Management Tools and Resources

From toolkits and guides to regular contact with experienced individuals, you'll have all the support you need to be a Girl Scout volunteer. Here's a list of some important resources you'll want to check out.

The Volunteer Toolkit



Girl Scouts Volunteer Toolkit (VTK)

The Volunteer Toolkit is a customizable planning tool where you can find suggested meeting plans for most badges, access activity guides and badge requirements, track your Girl Scouts' achievements, and so much more. With inspiring ideas so you can engage your troop in a mix of activities all year long, it's the digital planning assistant that will help you power a fun-filled—and organized—Girl Scout year. Be sure to look for helpful icons to identify activity focus areas like the evergreen icon which tells you the activity can be taken outside or the globe icon which lets you know you can bring a global perspective to the activity. You'll find the Volunteer Toolkit in the left menu bar under My GS / My Account. VTK is accessible on any desktop, tablet, or mobile device.

With the Volunteer Toolkit, girls and leaders can explore meeting topics and program activities together and follow the fun as they plan their Girl Scout year. Using the Volunteer Toolkit:

Troop Leaders can:

- Plan the troop's calendar year and meeting schedule.
- Email parents/caregivers with one click.
- View the troop roster, renew girls' memberships, and update girls' contact information.
- View meeting plans for Journeys and badges, including suggested tracks for multi-level groups (K–5 and 6–12).
- Customize meeting agendas to fit your troop.
- Explore individual meeting plans that show a breakdown of every step, including a list of materials needed, editable time allotments for each activity within a meeting, and printable meeting aids.
- Record attendance at meetings and their troop's badge and Journey achievements.
- Add council or custom events to the troop's calendar.
- Submit troop finance reports (depending on the council's process).
- Easily locate both national and local council resources, such as *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

Parents and Caregivers can:

- View the troop's meeting schedule and individual meeting plans to stay up to date on the badges and Journeys the troop is working on.
- Renew their memberships and update their contact information.
- View their Girl Scout's attendance and achievements.
- See upcoming events the troop is planning or attending.
- Easily locate both national and local council resources.
- View the troop's finance report (depending on the council's process).

Get started by visiting www.gswny.org and clicking on the MYGS tab.

Additional Tools and Resources

Girl Scout Shop

Check out our retail shops for GSUSA program materials such as handbooks and badge booklets, as well as uniform components and apparel. GSWNY has retail shops in all of our service centers; locations and hours can be found on our website. Our retail staff can provide expert advice to new and seasoned leaders. You can even email your order and have it shipped or do curbside pickup! We also offer an online store to shop from the comfort of home.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Safety is paramount in Girl Scouting, and this resource—[Safety Activity Checkpoints](#)—contains everything you need to know to help keep your girls safe during a variety of exciting activities outside of their regular Girl Scout troop meetings.

Tips for Troop Leaders

When you're looking for real-world advice from fellow troop leaders who've been there, this volunteer-to-volunteer resource, called Tips for Troop Leaders, on the Girl Scouts of the USA website has what you need for a successful troop year.

Girl Scout Volunteers in Your Community

Remember that Girl Scout support team we mentioned? You'll find them in your service unit! Troops are organized geographically into service units or communities. **You'll find a local network of fellow leaders and administrative volunteers ready to offer tips and advice to help you succeed in your volunteer role.**

Customer Care Contacts

Questions? Need help resolving an issue? We've got you! Reach out anytime by either clicking on the "Contact Us" form at (council website) or email customercare@gswny.org. During [business hours](#) you can reach a customer service specialist by calling **888-837-6410**.

Newsletters/Communication

Watch for our GSWNY emails – Member Essentials, Volunteer Resources, and Council Updates – to learn about any updates and upcoming events. You can see past issues on our [GSWNY blog](#). You can also follow us on social media – just check out the links at www.gswny.org.

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

We know that when you have the knowledge and skills you need to manage your girls, both you and your troop will thrive. Contact us to ask about ongoing learning opportunities that will help you grow your skills and confidence.

All new leaders are required to complete a series of Volunteer Basics online courses. In addition, specialized training is available for specific positions such as Troop Cookie Manager .

You'll also find regularly scheduled offerings for required courses such as First Aid & CPR training, but also enrichment classes and webinars to enhance your knowledge, all on our [Volunteer Resources](#) page.

Know How Much You are Appreciated

What begins with Girl Scouts speaking up at a troop meeting can go all the way to speaking in front of their city council for a cause they champion—and they will have your support to thank for that. Your volunteer role makes a powerful difference. Thank you for all you do.

Just as you'll receive support throughout your volunteer experience, when you reach the end of the term you signed up for, you'll talk with your support team about the positive parts of your experience as well as the challenges you faced, and you'll discuss whether you want to return to this position or try something new. The end of your troop year, camp season, overseas trip, or series/event session is just the beginning of your next adventure with Girl Scouts!

If you're ready for more opportunities, be sure to let your council support team know how you'd like to be a part of girls' lives in the future—whether in the same position or in other, flexible ways. Are you ready to organize a series or event? Take a trip? Work with girls at camp? Work with a troop of girls as a yearlong volunteer? Share your skills at a council office, working behind the scenes? The possibilities are endless and can be tailored to fit your skills and interests.

The Adult Recognition system includes awards for significant service by individuals and groups, as well as recognitions that can be earned by completing specific criteria. GSUSA recognitions require approval by the Board of Directors and are awarded yearly at the Adult Recognition event. GSUSA recognition nominations must be submitted by February 1 of each year.

Recognitions requiring approval by a Service Unit Adult Recognition Committee (SARC) may be awarded at any time of the year, depending on each service unit's calendar. Learn more on our [Recognitions page](#)!

Volunteer Appreciation



Without our passionate and dedicated volunteers, there would be no Girl Scouting. That's why we celebrate National Volunteer Month every April and turn up the party as we ring in National Girl Scout Leader's Day on April 22.

Girl Scouts also celebrates National Volunteer Week, which falls during the third week of April. What can we say, we love our volunteers!

Girl Scout Participation in Activities with Other Scouting Organizations

The decision by Scouting America (SA) to open the Boy Scout program to girls has fundamentally altered the nature of the relationship between SA and Girl Scouts nationally and locally. Local relationships between SA and Girl Scout councils that have led to partnerships and joint activities in the past may now create certain risks or challenges for Girl Scouts. For this reason, councils are encouraged to avoid joint recruiting and/or joint participation in community events or activities.

Marketplace Confusion

To protect the integrity of the Girl Scout brand and reinforce our programming as unique, girl-only, and best in class, we must ensure that we take care that the activities in which girls participate are exclusive to the Girl Scout program, are safe and girl-led, and are conducted under the appropriate supervision of Girl Scouts.

Protecting Use of Girl Scout Materials

Girl Scout materials are intended for the exclusive use of Girl Scouts and are protected as the intellectual property of Girl Scouts of the USA. Materials include but are not limited to: Girl Scout logo, tag lines, and/or program and badge requirements.

Engaging Girls

Creating the kind of environment in which girls are unafraid to try new things and to be who they want to be starts with you! By meeting your girls where they are, you'll help them develop the leadership skills they'll use today and in the future.

Understanding Healthy Development in Girls

It sounds simple, but just being attentive to what girls are experiencing as they mature is a big help to them—and to you, as you guide and mentor them! You'll experience different joys and challenges with each Girl Scout level, but here are some guidelines for meeting girls' needs and abilities at different grade levels, you'll also find these listed in the adult guide of each leadership Journey.

Girl Scout Daisies	
At the Girl Scout Daisy level (kindergarten and first grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Have loads of energy and need to run, walk, and play outside.	<i>They'll enjoy going on nature walks and outdoor scavenger hunts.</i>
Are great builders and budding artists, though they are still developing their fine motor skills.	<i>Encouraging them to express themselves and their creativity by making things with their hands. Girls may need assistance holding scissors, cutting in a straight line, and so on.</i>
Love to move and dance.	<i>They might especially enjoy marching like a penguin, dancing like a dolphin, or acting out how they might care for animals in the jungle.</i>
Are concrete thinkers and focused on the here and now.	<i>Showing instead of telling, for example, about how animals are cared for. Plan visits to animal shelters, farms, or zoos; meet care providers, or make a creative bird feeder.</i>
Are only beginning to learn about basic number concepts, time, and money.	<i>You'll want to take opportunities to count out supplies together—and, perhaps, the legs on a caterpillar!</i>
Are just beginning to write and spell, and they don't always have the words for what they're thinking or feeling.	<i>That having girls draw a picture of something they are trying to communicate is easier and more meaningful for them.</i>
Know how to follow simple directions and respond well to recognition for doing so.	<i>Being specific and offering only one direction at a time. Acknowledge when girls have followed directions well to increase their motivation to listen and follow again.</i>

Girl Scout Brownies

At the Girl Scout Brownie level (second and third grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Have loads of energy and need to run, walk, and play outside.	<i>Taking your session activities outside whenever possible.</i>
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	<i>Allowing girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects and performances.</i>
Want to help others and appreciate being given individual responsibilities for a task.	<i>Letting girls lead, direct, and help out in activities whenever possible. Allow girls as a group to make decisions about individual roles and responsibilities.</i>
Are concrete thinkers and focused on the here and now.	<i>Doing more than just reading to girls about the Brownie Elf's adventures. Ask girls questions to gauge their understanding and allow them to role play their own pretend visit to a new country.</i>
Need clear directions and structure and like knowing what to expect.	<i>Offering only one direction at a time. Also, have girls create the schedule and flow of your get-togethers and share those at the start.</i>
Are becoming comfortable with basic number concepts, time, money, and distance.	<i>Offering support only when needed. Allow girls to set schedules for meetings or performances, count out money for a trip, and so on.</i>
Are continuing to develop their fine motor skills and can tie shoes, use basic tools, begin to sew, and the like.	<i>Encouraging girls to express themselves and their creativity by making things with their hands. Girls may need some assistance, however, holding scissors, threading needs, and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	<i>Girls might like to create a play about welcoming a new girl to their school or to tell a story through dance or creative movement.</i>
Know how to follow rules, listen well, and appreciate recognition of a job well done.	<i>Acknowledging when the girls have listened or followed the directions well, which will increase their motivation to listen and follow again.</i>

Girl Scout Juniors

At the Girl Scout Junior level (fourth and fifth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Want to make decisions and express their opinions.	<i>Whenever possible, allowing girls to make decisions and express their opinions through guided discussion and active reflection activities. Also, have girls set rules for listening to others' opinions and offering assistance in decision making.</i>
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	<i>Allowing girls to team up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities.</i>
Are aware of expectations and sensitive to the judgments of others.	<i>Although it's okay to have expectations, the expectation is not perfection! Share your own mistakes and what you learned from them and be sure to create an environment where girls can be comfortable sharing theirs.</i>
Are concerned about equity and fairness.	<i>Not shying away from discussing why rules are in place and having girls develop their own rules for their group.</i>
Are beginning to think abstractly and critically and are capable of flexible thought. Juniors can consider more than one perspective as well as the feelings and attitudes of another.	<i>Asking girls to explain why they made a decision, to share their visions of their roles in the future, and to challenge their own and others' perspectives.</i>
Have strong fine and gross motor skills and coordination.	<i>Engaging girls in moving their minds and their bodies. Allow girls to express themselves through the written word, choreography, and so on.</i>
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	<i>Girls might like to tell a story through playwriting, playing an instrument, or choreographing a dance.</i>
May be starting puberty, which means beginning breast development, skin changes, and weight changes. Some may be getting their periods.	<i>Being sensitive to girls' changing bodies, possible discomfort over these changes, and their desire for more information. Create an environment that acknowledges and celebrates this transition as healthy and normal for girls.</i>

Girl Scout Cadettes

At the Girl Scout Cadette level (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Are going through puberty, including changes in their skin, body shape, and weight. They're also starting their menstrual cycles and have occasional shifts in mood.	<i>Being sensitive to the many changes Cadettes are undergoing and acknowledging that these changes are as normal as growing taller! Girls need time to adapt to their changing bodies, and their feelings about their bodies may not keep up. Reinforce that, as with everything else, people go through puberty in different ways and at different times.</i>
Are starting to spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	<i>That girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities as well as tackling relationship issues through both artistic endeavors and Take Action projects.</i>
Can be very self-conscious, wanting to be like everyone else but fearing they are unique in their thoughts and feelings.	<i>Encouraging girls to share, but only when they are ready. At this age, they may be more comfortable sharing a piece of artwork or a fictional story than their own words. Throughout the activities, highlight and discuss differences as positive, interesting, and beautiful.</i>
Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	<i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions and allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

Girl Scout Seniors

At the Girl Scout Senior level (ninth and tenth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Are beginning to clarify their own values, consider alternative points of view on controversial issues, and see multiple aspects of a situation.	<i>Asking girls to explain the reasoning behind their decisions. Engage girls in role-play and performances, where others can watch and offer alternative solutions.</i>
Have strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills and are able to plan and reflect on their own learning experiences.	<i>Girls are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have girls plan and follow up on these experiences through written and discussion-based reflective activities.</i>
Spend more time in peer groups than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	<i>That girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities. They'll also want to tackle relationship issues through both artistic endeavors and Take Action projects. Alter the makeup of groups with each activity so that girls interact with those they might not usually pair up with.</i>
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	<i>Encouraging girls to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind girls frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist girls in coming up with new ways of expressing their individuality.</i>
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	<i>Acknowledging girls' pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help girls release stress through creative expression, movement, and more traditional stress-reduction techniques.</i>
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	<i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions, allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

Girl Scout Ambassadors

At the Girl Scout Ambassador level (eleventh and twelfth grades), girls...	<i>This means...</i>
Can see the complexity of situations and controversial issues—they understand that problems often have no clear solution and that varying points of view may each have merit.	<i>Inviting girls to develop stories as a group and then individually create endings that they later discuss and share.</i>
Have strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills and can adapt logical thinking to real-life situations. Ambassadors recognize and incorporate practical limitations to solutions.	<i>Girls are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have girls plan and follow up on these experiences through written and discussion-based reflective activities.</i>
Spend more time with peers than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	<i>Girls will enjoy teaming up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities. They'll also want to tackle relationship issues through artistic endeavors and Take Action projects. Alter the makeup of groups with each activity so that girls interact with those they might not usually pair up with.</i>
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	<i>Encouraging girls to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind girls frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist girls in coming up with new ways of expressing their individuality.</i>
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	<i>Acknowledging girls' pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help girls release stress through creative expression, movement, and more traditional stress-reduction techniques.</i>
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults—at school and at home—and are looking to their futures.	<i>Trusting girls to plan and make key decisions, allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.</i>

Creating a Safe Space for Girls

A safe space is where girls feel that they can be themselves, without explanation or judgment. As a volunteer, the environment you create is just as important as the activities girls do—it's the key to developing the sort of group that girls want to be part of! Cultivate a space where confidentiality is respected, and girls can express their true selves.

Recognize and Support Each Girl

You're a role model and a mentor to your girls. Since you play an important role in their lives, they need to know that you consider each of them an important person too. They can weather a poor meeting place or an activity that flops, but they cannot endure being ignored or rejected.

- Give a shout-out when you see girls trying their best, not just when they've had a clear success.
- Emphasize the positive qualities that make each girl worthy and unique.
- Be generous with praise and stingy with rebuke.
- Help your girls find ways to show acceptance of and support for one another.

Promote Fairness

Girls are sensitive to injustice. They forgive mistakes if they are sure you are trying to be fair. They look for fairness in how responsibilities are shared, in handling of disagreements, and in your responses to performance and accomplishment.

- When possible, ask the girls what they think is fair before decisions are made.
- Explain your reasoning and show why you did something.
- Be willing to apologize if needed.
- Try to see that responsibilities as well as the chances for feeling important are equally divided.
- Help girls explore and decide for themselves the fair ways of solving problems, carrying out activities, and responding to behavior and accomplishments.

Build Trust

Girls need your belief in them and your support when they try new things. You'll also need to show them that you won't betray their confidence.

- Show girls you trust them to think for themselves and use their own judgment.
- Encourage them to make the important decisions in the group.
- Give them assistance in correcting their own mistakes.
- Support girls in trusting one another, let them see firsthand how trust can be built, lost, regained, and strengthened.

Inspire Open Communication

Girls want someone who will listen to what they think, feel, and want to do. They like having someone they can talk to about the important things happening in their lives.

- Listen to the girls. Respond with words and actions.
- Speak your mind openly when you are happy or concerned about something and encourage girls to do the same.
- Leave the door open for girls to seek advice, share ideas and feelings, and propose plans or improvements.
- Help girls see how open communication can result in action, discovery, better understanding of self and others, and a more comfortable climate for fun and accomplishment.

Managing Conflict

Conflicts and disagreements are an inevitable part of life, but if handled constructively, they show girls that they can overcome their differences, exercise diplomacy, and improve their communication and relationships. Respecting others and being a sister to every Girl Scout means that shouting, verbal abuse, or physical confrontations are never warranted and cannot be tolerated in the Girl Scout environment.

When a conflict arises between girls or a girl and a volunteer, get those involved to sit down together and [talk calmly in a nonjudgmental manner](#), keeping in mind that each party may need some time—a few days or a week—to calm down before being able to do this. Talking in this way might feel uncomfortable and difficult now, but it lays the groundwork for working well together in the future. Whatever you do, do not spread your complaint around to others—that won't help the situation and causes only embarrassment and anger.

If a conflict persists, be sure you explain the matter to your service unit manager. If the supervisor cannot resolve the issues satisfactorily (or if the problem involves the supervisor), the issue can be taken to the next level of supervision and, ultimately, to your council if you need extra help. If you need assistance, please reach out to Customer Care at customercare@gswny.org or 888-837-6410, who can connect you with your council volunteer support staff.

Communicating Effectively with Girls of Any Age

Make sure your words and intentions create connection with the girls. Keep in mind how important the following attitudes are.

Listen. Listening to girls, as opposed to telling them what to think, feel, or do (no “you should”) is the first step in building a trusting relationship and helping them take ownership of their Girl Scout experience.

Be Honest. If you're not comfortable with a topic or activity, it's OK to say so. No one expects you to be an expert on every topic. Ask for alternatives or seek out volunteers with the required expertise. Owning up to mistakes—and apologizing for them—goes a long way with girls.

Be Open to Real Issues. Outside of Girl Scouts, girls may be dealing with issues like relationships, peer pressure, school, money, drugs, and other serious topics. When you don't know, listen. Also seek help from your council if you need assistance or more information than you currently have.

Show Respect. Girls often say that their best experiences were the ones where adults treated them as equal partners. Being spoken to as young adults reinforces that their opinions matter and that they deserve respect.

Offer Options. Girls' needs and interests change and being flexible shows them that you respect them and their busy lives. Be ready with age-appropriate guidance and parameters no matter what the girls choose to do.

Stay Current. Show your girls that you're interested in their world by asking them about the TV shows and movies they like; the books, magazines, or blogs they read; the social media influencers they follow; and the music they listen to.

Remember LUTE: Listen, Understand, Tolerate, and Empathize. Try using the LUTE method to thoughtfully respond when a girl is upset, angry, or confused.

Listen. Hear her out, ask for details, and reflect back what you hear; try "What happened next?" or "What did she say?"

Understand. Show that you understand where she's coming from with comments such as, "So what I hear you saying is..." or "I understand why you're unhappy," or "Your feelings are hurt; mine would be, too."

Tolerate. You can tolerate the feelings that she just can't handle right now on her own. Let her know that you're there to listen and accept how she is feeling about the situation. Say something like: "Try talking to me about it. I'll listen," or "I know you're mad—talking it out helps," or "I can handle it—say whatever you want to."

Empathize. Let her know you can imagine feeling what she's feeling with comments such as, "I'm sure that really hurts" or "I can imagine how painful this is for you."

Addressing the Needs of Older Girls

Let these simple tips guide you when working with teenage girls:

- Think of yourself as a "guide on the side"—a partner, a coach, or a mentor, not a "leader."
- Ask girls what rules they need for safety and what group agreements they need to be a good team. When girls take the lead in establishing group rules, they're more likely to stick to them.
- Understand that girls need time to talk, unwind, and have fun together.
- Ask what they think and what they want to do.
- Encourage girls to speak their minds.
- Provide structure, but don't micromanage.

- Give everyone a voice in the group—understanding that “speaking up” may look different for each girl. For some girls, it might mean sharing their ideas in front of the entire group; for others it could mean submitting a written response or contributing as part of a group.
- Treat girls like partners.
- Don’t repeat what’s said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for a girl’s safety). See “Report Concerns” below to understand the guard rails.

When Sensitive Topics Come Up

It’s an amazing feeling when your Girl Scouts put their trust in you—and when they do, they may come to you with some of the issues they are facing such as bullying, peer pressure, dating, athletic and academic performance, and more. Some of these issues may be considered sensitive by families who may have opinions or input about how, and whether, Girl Scouts should cover these topics with their girls.

Girl Scouts welcomes and serves girls and families from a wide spectrum of faiths and cultures. When girls wish to participate in discussions or activities that could be considered sensitive—even for some—put the topic on hold until you have spoken with the parents and received guidance from your council.

When Girl Scout activities involve sensitive issues, your role is that of a caring adult volunteer who can help girls acquire skills and knowledge in a supportive atmosphere, not someone who advocates a particular position.

Girl Scouts of the USA does not take a position or develop materials on issues relating to human sexuality, birth control, or abortion. We feel our role is to help girls develop self-confidence and good decision-making skills that will help them make wise choices in all areas of their lives. We believe parents and caregivers, along with schools and faith communities, are the primary sources of information on these topics.

Parents/caregivers make all decisions regarding their girl’s participation in Girl Scout program that may be of a sensitive nature. As a volunteer leader, you must get written parental permission for any locally planned program offering that could be considered sensitive. Included on the permission form should be the topic of the activity, any specific content that might create controversy, and any action steps the girls will take when the activity is complete. Be sure to have a form for each girl and keep the forms on hand in case a problem arises. For activities not sponsored by Girl Scouts, find out in advance (from organizers or other volunteers who may be familiar with the content) what will be presented, and reach out to us at customercare@gswny.org regarding obtaining written permission.

Report Concerns

There may be times when you worry about the health and well-being of girls in your group. Alcohol, drugs, sex, bullying, abuse, depression, and eating disorders are some of the issues girls may encounter. You are on the frontlines of girls' lives which places you in a unique position to identify a situation in which a girl may need help. If you believe a girl is at risk of hurting herself or others, your role is to promptly bring that information to her parent/caregiver or the council so she can get the expert assistance she needs. Your concern about a girl's well-being and safety is taken seriously and your council will guide you in addressing these concerns.

Here are a few signs that could indicate a girl needs expert help:

- Marked changes in behavior or personality (for example, unusual moodiness, aggressiveness, or sensitivity).
- Declining academic performance and/or inability to concentrate.
- Withdrawal from school, family activities, or friendships.
- Fatigue, apathy, or loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Increased secretiveness.
- Deterioration in appearance and personal hygiene.
- Eating extremes, unexplained weight loss, distorted body image.
- Tendency toward perfectionism.
- Giving away prized possessions; preoccupation with the subject of death.
- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, burns, or fractures.
- Avoidance of eye contact or physical contact.
- Excessive fearfulness or distrust of adults.
- Abusive behavior toward other children, especially younger ones.

Child Abuse

Child abuse and neglect are unlawful acts and against GSUSA's policy for any volunteer or employed staff, male or female, to physically, sexually or mentally abuse or neglect any girl member.

In accordance with this policy, the Girl Scouts of Western New York, Inc. will not condone nor tolerate the following:

- Infliction of physically abusive behavior, bodily injury, upon girl members
- Physical neglect of girl members, including failure to provide adequate safety measures, care, and supervision in relation to Girl Scout activities
- Emotional maltreatment of girl members, including verbal abuse and/or verbal attacks

Some examples of child abuse are:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual molestation

- Emotional starvation
- Constant verbal attack or torment
- Deprivation of proper food, clothing, and/or shelter
- Being left alone for long periods of time

The council supports and maintains an environment that encourages any girl member who believes that she has been a victim of child abuse or neglect as defined in the organization's policy to report the incident(s) immediately to either her leader, another trusted adult, or to the CEO of the council at GS.CEO@gswny.org or by phone at: 1-888-837-6041

Similarly, a volunteer who believes that a girl member is the victim of abuse or neglect must immediately report the fact to the CEO of the council at GS.CEO@gswny.org or by phone at: 1-888-837-6041

Employees are required by New York State law to report any known incidence of child abuse to the CEO of the council or his/her designated person and proper authority.

The council reserves the right to refuse membership, to dismiss or exclude from affiliation with the council any volunteer who is found guilty of child abuse and neglect or has been convicted of child abuse and neglect.

The council will consider any of the above-mentioned stipulations as the basis for progressive disciplinary action, which can include dismissal or termination from the organization.

Any report of child abuse will be forwarded to an appropriate governmental agency. Reports are held in strict confidence and you will be informed that the report has been made. The council will protect the rights of the accused, who is considered innocent until proven guilty, by not discussing the situation or releasing specific information. The council will cooperate fully with appropriate law enforcement and social service agencies.

In the event that a Girl Scout volunteer is formally accused of, charged with, or under investigation by authorities for the crime of child abuse, the council has a responsibility to both the girls and adult involved. The following procedure will be followed:

A volunteer so accused must:

- suspend all Girl Scout activities and duties until the matter has been resolved; and
- turn over all monies, materials and records to a designated representative of the council.

If the individual involved is a troop leader, the council will focus its attention on assisting the service unit in helping the troop and parents to continue to function as a Girl Scout unit. A council representative will meet with parents to discuss the change in leadership, and their concerns for the future direction of the troop.

Child abuse and neglect are forms of behavior that negate the integrity of the adult/girl leadership relationship. The Girl Scouts of Western New York, Inc. will consider any of the above

mentioned stipulations as the basis to refuse appointment/reappointment to any position, and to dismiss or suspend from any position or affiliation with our council, any volunteer who violates the aforementioned council policies, GSUSA policies, federal, New York State, and local laws, or who is found guilty of child abuse or neglect, or has been convicted of child abuse or neglect.

Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment

Girl Scouts is committed to creating a respectful, courteous environment free of discrimination and unlawful harassment of any kind.

GSWNY does not tolerate sexual or other unlawful harassment by any employee, Board Member, volunteer, vendor, contractor, consultant, customer, girl or adult member, or visitor.

Harassment is a breach of GSWNY policy and may be a violation of state and/or federal law. Harassment can include unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, or visual, including intimidation, ridicule, insult, comments or physical conduct that is based on an individual's protected status including sex, race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ability, etc.

GSWNY is committed to taking all reasonable steps to prevent such harassment and discrimination. GSWNY is determined to resolve possible discrimination and harassment situations as quickly and discreetly as possible. Volunteers can contact our Customer Care team at 888-837-6410 or customercare@gswny.org for any questions or concerns, and our formal process for reporting issues of harassment and discrimination are below:

If a volunteer, girl or caregiver believes another volunteer, Board Member, employee, vendor, contractor, consultant, customer, girl or adult member, visitor, or agent of the organization is harassing or discriminating against them, the volunteer is encouraged to tell the offender clearly that the behaviors and actions are unwelcome. The volunteer should immediately inform the Chief Executive Officer at gs.ceo@gswny.org or by calling Customer Care at 888-837-6410 or customercare@gswny.org. If the complaint involves the Chief Executive Officer, then the complaint should be reported to the Board Chair by calling Customer Care at 888-837-6410.

The GSWNY CEO (or designee) will work with the individual to determine if they are seeking guidance and assistance from GSWNY staff, and/or if they wish to make a formal complaint.

The individual should report the facts of the incident, including what happened, how often, and where the incident(s) took place, as well as the names of the individuals and witnesses involved. Any employee who is informed of, witnesses, or receives a complaint must report it directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

All harassment and discrimination claims will be investigated in a timely, fair, and thorough manner, and GSWNY expects all volunteers and staff members to cooperate fully in any investigation. All complaints will be investigated as discreetly and confidentially as possible. If the organization finds that discrimination or harassment has occurred, it will take appropriate corrective action up to and including dismissal of the offending volunteer (or other appropriate action if the offender is not a volunteer for the organization). The Chief Executive Officer has the overall responsibility of maintaining effective enforcement of nondiscrimination and harassment policies.

Each volunteer is responsible for following the procedures outlined in this policy to ensure that their complaint is handled promptly and appropriately.

Anti-Retaliation Policy

GSWNY feels very strongly that it is important to provide volunteers, members and caregivers with confidential, nonthreatening alternatives for registering their concerns without fear of retaliation. GSWNY will not tolerate retaliation against anyone for stepping forward with a concern, complaint, or grievance. An employee or volunteer may not retaliate against employees, members or volunteers in any way for registering a concern or complaint in good faith.

Accident/Incident Reporting

Although you hope the worst never happens, you must observe council procedures for handling accidents and fatalities. At the scene of an accident, first provide all possible care for the injured person. Follow established council procedures for obtaining medical assistance and immediately reporting the emergency. To do this, you must always have on hand the names and telephone numbers of council staff, parents/guardians and emergency services such as the police, fire department or hospital. Check with your council for emergency contact information.

GSWNY EMERGENCY CONTACT PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency First Aid And Rescue	911
Fire	911
GSWNY Emergency Response	1-800-882-9268

In case of emergencies:

- Provide all possible care to injured person(s).
- Secure doctor, ambulance and police, as appropriate. Call 911 if needed.
- See that no disturbance of victim or surroundings is permitted until police have assumed authority.
- Retain a responsible adult at the scene of the accident or emergency.
- Give requested information only to the officials responding to your call.
- As soon as possible, contact the Girl Scout emergency line at 1-800-882-9268.
- Refer all media inquiries to the GSWNY Emergency Response Team at 1-888-837-6410. When traveling, remember to contact your emergency designated parent.
- **Within 24 hours, you must submit an Accident/Incident Report to the council.**

After receiving a report of an accident, council staff will immediately arrange for additional assistance at the scene, if needed, and will notify parents/guardians, as appropriate. If a Girl Scout needs emergency medical care as the result of an accident or injury, first contact emergency medical services, and then follow council procedures for accidents and incidents. Your adherence to these procedures is critical, especially with regard to notifying parents or guardians. **If the media is involved, let council-designated staff discuss the incident with media representatives.**

In the event of a fatality or other serious accident, the police **must** be notified and a responsible volunteer must remain at the scene at all times. In the case of a fatality, do not disturb the victim or surroundings and follow police instructions. Do not share information about the accident with anyone but the police, your council and, if applicable, insurance representatives or legal counsel.

Engaging Families

You want your Girl Scouts to have fun, be inspired, take risks, and learn about themselves and the world—that's why you're a Girl Scout troop leader or troop volunteer! Parents and caregivers want the same thing for their girls but getting families to pitch in and play an active role in the troop while also enhancing the experience for their girl and themselves can be tricky for many volunteers. It doesn't have to be this way.

Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents and Other Caregivers

When families step up and play an active part in troop life, your troop can shine its brightest! Plus, girls feel a special sense of pride when their families take part and show interest in the things they are doing.

What Is a Parent and Caregiver Meeting?

It's the first meeting you have to start each troop year—whether you are a new or returning troop, it's valuable for all troops.

Why Hold a Meeting? [Kicking off each year with a parent and caregiver meeting](#) sets the troop up for success. Outlining clear expectations, building a team, and engaging parents in the Girl Scout experience is a great way to start off on the right foot. When parents are involved, leaders have support, the troop has a plan, and girls' benefit! The meeting helps:

- Families understand what Girl Scouting can do for their girl.
- Families and leaders identify ways they will work as a team to support the troop.
- Families and leaders agree about what the troop pays for and what families pay for individually.
- You fill key troop positions—you never know which parent will make an awesome assistant leader or troop cookie manager.
- Families know how the troop will communicate things like upcoming events or schedule changes.
- Families learn about uniforms, books, and other important basics.

For even more tips on working with troop families, check out [Girl Scouts' Tips for Troop Leaders](#) hub.

How to Keep Parents and Caregivers Engaged

Make the Ask(s). The main reason people don't take action is because they were never asked to in the first place. That's why hearing one out of three Girl Scout parents say no one had communicated expectations around involvement with their girl's troop is so troubling. Parents may have many talents, but they're certainly not mind readers. If you're nervous about getting turned down, don't be. Sure, a few parents might be unable to lend a hand, but the helpers you do get will be worth their weight in gold. And just because someone wasn't available a month or two ago doesn't mean they won't be free to help now. Loop back, follow up, and ask again!

Make Sense of “Why.” Explain that not only does the whole troop benefit with extra help from parents and other caregivers, but also that girls feel a special sense of pride in seeing their own family member step up and take a leadership role. Getting involved can strengthen the caregiver/girl bond and is a meaningful way to show girls that they are a priority in their parents’ lives.

Make It Quick and Easy. Everybody’s got a full plate these days, so instead of starting conversations with a list of tasks or responsibilities that parents and other caregivers could take on (which can be intimidating), ask how much time each week they might be able to dedicate to the troop, then go from there. For instance, if a troop mom or dad has 15 minutes each week to spare, they could organize and manage the calendar for troop snacks and carpools. If a grandparent has one to two hours, they could assist with leading the troop through a specific badge on a topic they’re already comfortable with.

Make Family Part of the Formula. While Girl Scout programming is always focused on the girls themselves, it’s important and helpful to open up a few events to their families throughout the year. Inviting the whole crew to celebrate her accomplishments in Girl Scouting—whether at a holiday open house, a bridging ceremony, or a fun “reverse meeting” where girls take the role of leaders and guide the adults, including caregivers, through an activity—will help parents better understand the value of Girl Scouts and they’ll be more likely to invest their time and talents to the troop.

Some parents and caregivers, particularly those of Daisy or Brownie Girl Scouts (or new girls at any level), may be interested in participating in troop meetings. They may have never experienced Girl Scouts themselves so may wish to learn more, or they may enjoy participating in programs with their child. Finding support positions for parents and caregivers, as well as planning some family-friendly activities, will help the troop as well as provide enriching experiences for both girls and adults.

That said, there’s no need to wait for a special event to engage families in their girls’ Girl Scout life. Keep communication lines open throughout the year—whether it’s through your troop’s social media page, personal emails, or in-person chats—to keep parents in the loop on what the girls are doing and learning during each meeting and encourage them to let their girls “be the experts” at home, explaining or teaching the new skills they’ve learned. You can get everyone in on the fun and keep Girl Scouts strong at home by sharing the family badge guides on the Volunteer Toolkit with parents and caregivers.

Responsibilities of Parents and Guardians

You want to engage each parent or guardian to help you work toward ensuring the health, safety and well-being of girls. Clearly communicate to parents and guardians that they are expected to:

- Support the troop leadership. Identify ways that they can help support the troop leaders and troop activities.
- Communicate and respond with the troop leadership in a timely and appropriate manner. If concerns arise, contact the troop leaders or the council office. **Do not use social media to air concerns with the troop or Girl Scouts.**

- Provide permission for their girls to participate in Girl Scouting as well as provide additional consent for activities that take place outside the scheduled meeting place. This can include such activities as: product program, including Digital Cookie; overnight travel; the use of special equipment; or sensitive issues.
- Make provisions for their girls to get to and from meeting places or other designated sites in a safe and timely manner and inform you if someone other than a parent or guardian will drop off or pick up their child.
- Provide their girls with appropriate clothing and equipment for activities or contact you before the activity to find sources for the necessary clothing and equipment.
- Follow Girl Scout safety guidelines and encourage their children to do the same.
- Assist you in planning and carrying out program activities as safely as possible.
- Participate in parent/guardian meetings.
- Understand what appropriate behavior is for their girls, as determined by the council and you.
- Partner with troop leadership to assist with accommodations for special needs.

Responsibilities of Girls

Girls who learn about and practice safe and healthy behaviors are likely to establish lifelong habits of safety consciousness. For that reason, each Girl Scout is expected to:

- Follow the Girl Scout Promise and Law, as well as any other troop rules, as a guideline for their behavior
- Help create a safe space for all girls where bullying, clique behavior and discrimination are not tolerated
- Treat the leaders and girls with respect
- Share concerns in a timely and appropriate manner. If concerns arise, contact the troop leaders or the council office. **Do not use social media to air concerns with the troop or Girl Scouts.**
- Assist you and other volunteers in safety planning.
- Listen to and follow your instructions and suggestions.
- Learn and practice safety skills.
- Learn to “think safety” at all times and to be prepared.
- Identify and evaluate an unsafe situation.
- Know how, when and where to get help when needed.

Troop Finances

If your group is earning and spending money, the group needs to set up a bank account. If you're taking over an existing group, you may inherit a checking account. Please keep in mind that whenever troop leaders change, updated signers on the troop account would need to be established with the appropriate bank. If a new group is created, establishing a new troop bank account is required. This usually happens when there is money to deposit, such as group dues or money from product program or group money-earning activities. The following procedures apply to all troop/group accounts:

- All money collected or earned in the name of Girl Scouts must be deposited in the established bank account and thereafter used for the purpose of providing the Girl Scout Leadership Experience to the girls.
- All signers are responsible for safeguarding and maintaining sufficient funds to cover payments drawn on the account. As with any banking account, signers are legally responsible for all account transactions.
- Security of troop funds is necessary to safeguard troop assets. The bank account should be reconciled monthly.
- Volunteers who misuse funds may be released from all Girl Scout positions. The Council may file criminal and/or civil charges if deemed appropriate.

Consider these tips when working with a group account:

- ✓ Keep group funds in the bank before an activity or trip, paying for as many items as possible in advance of your departure.
- ✓ Use debit cards during the activity or trip.
- ✓ Make one person responsible for group funds and for keeping a daily account of expenditures.
- ✓ Have one or more back-up people who also have debit cards, in case the main card is lost.
- ✓ Handle a lost group debit card the same way you would a personal debit card: cancel it immediately.

All troops and service units are required to establish a bank account when the balance of funds exceeds \$100. Accounts shall bear the name of the Girl Scouts of Western New York, and must include the troop/group number or service unit name. You will receive an authorization letter to open a bank account when you are approved as a volunteer. The letter will give you the council's Federal Tax ID number to supply to the bank and will authenticate your identity as a GSWNY volunteer. After. Troops with existing bank accounts who need to change signers or accounts should contact their Service Unit Finance Consultant. **Please note that in addition to the Service Unit Finance Consultant's signature or other approved SU Team Volunteer, each troop bank account must have two additional non-related council approved volunteer members assigned to the troop.**

Ensure that bank accounts do not allow overdrafts of any kind, including debit card transactions. The service unit representative must receive an electronic or hard copy of the monthly statements.

A minimum of two signers (unrelated) is required for CASH withdrawals and troops are prohibited from using internet banking (except viewing the account online). Prohibited online transactions include: transfers between bank accounts and bill pay. Debit Cards are allowed, but credit cards are not permitted to be issued or used with the bank account. If a debit card is used for purchases, the second signer should sign the receipt or next to the transaction on the bank statement, evidencing approval. See "Finance Reporting" section for more information. The

designated signers are not authorized to conduct any other business on behalf of the council or to access any accounts the council may maintain at the bank except for those specific to their subordinate unit.

Please keep the following with troop records for seven years:

Bank statements

Cancelled checks

Deposit slips

Sales receipts

Cookie and Fall product program records

Most council-sponsored product program activities have specific banking and tracking procedures.

Troop Expenses

Troop funds are for the benefit of all youth in the troop and should be spent in the year the funds are earned, unless the troop has a long-range plan for spending the funds. It is important to note that the funds belong to the troop as a whole. Per IRS guidelines for charitable organizations, troops are prohibited from keeping separate individual girl accounts or tracking troop funds by individual Girl Scouts. Examples of proper uses of troop funds include:

- Program supplies, such as paper, crayons, and craft supplies, as well as copies of GSUSA books for leader and girl use
- Uniform components and badges/patches/pins
- Fees for field trips
- Refreshments and paper products
- Photocopies, paper and printer ink for printing troop paperwork
- Troop organizational needs such as totes, binders, folders
- Leader trainings which enhance troop programming, such as First Aid/CPR, outdoor and GSWNY-sponsored enrichment training
- Registration fees for girls and/or leaders

As with all other elements of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, girls should provide input regarding troop expenses. All troop expenses must be documented with receipts and reflected on the Finance Report using the online Voluer Toolkit. Use of the toolkit during the year to track income and expenses is encouraged so parents can follow troop activities. The toolkit automatically saves and displays updates. Reimbursements or payments to any of the signers on the troop account (including cash withdrawals) must be approved and authorized by a signer other than the payee.

Finance Reporting

Troops will submit a yearly Finance Report using the online Volunteer Toolkit. The Finance Report will be due by July 3 . The Finance Report will require submission of the April bank statement. Troops which do not submit a timely Finance Report will be subject to a troop audit or other consequences. Troop leaders or service unit managers who do not turn in activity reports will be subject to removal.

Troop Audits

The Volunteer Experience Manager, or designee, can audit a troop account at any time. Misappropriation of troop funds may result in prosecution of the adult in question and will result in dismissal from a volunteer position.

NYS Tax Exempt Certificate

A tax-exempt certificate will allow you to make purchases for the troop without paying New York State or local sales tax. To obtain a tax-exempt certificate or to replace a certificate, contact your service unit finance consultant or Volunteer Experience Manager.

- On the tax-exempt form, the leader will write her name and signature in the space provided as an officer of the organization. In the space for title, write troop leader and troop number.
- Make copies of your tax-exempt certificate. You will need to give the seller a copy with each purchase. This is his/her proof of the exempt sale.
- Exemption **does not** apply to personal purchases.

GSWNY troops who travel may also utilize the council's tax-exempt status in Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Virginia, Texas and Pennsylvania. Contact the gsfinance@gswny.org for additional information.

Disbanding or Aging out Troops

Leaders of Disbanding troops must complete the Troop Disbanding Form (available at www.gswny.org), which provides information on the troop finances, bank account, resources, and placement of girls. When a troop closes, the bank account and any equipment (flags, tents etc.) shall become property of the council or service unit. Troop funds are not the property of any individual girl. If the troop does not re-register within one year, the funds will remain to benefit girls within the service unit. If one troop merges with another, troop funds go with the remaining girls and become the property of the new troop. As when closing a personal account, be sure all checks and other debits have cleared the account before you close it and realize that you may have to close the account in person. Turn remaining funds over to the Service Unit Finance Consultant.

Prior to closing, the group may decide to donate any unused funds to their Service Unit, another troop or for girl activities. These activities must be in keeping with the Girl Scout mission and outcomes. Girl activities can include purchasing materials to support another organization through take-action projects.

Money-Earning Basics for Troops

Troops flex their financial muscles in two distinct ways:

- The Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product Program - sales of Girl Scout-authorized products (such as cookies, magazines, nuts and candy), organized by your council. All girl members are eligible to participate in two council-sponsored product sale activities each year with volunteer and caregiver supervision: The Girl Scout Cookie Program and the Fall Product Program. Please remember, volunteers and caregivers do not sell cookies and other products— Girl Scouts do.
- Group Money-Earning Activity- **organized** by the troop (not by the council), are planned and carried out by Girl Scouts (in partnership with volunteers) to earn money for the

group. Group Money Earning activities require prior approval from council. Group Money- Earning activities may not take place during the Fall Product Program or Girl Scout Cookie Program set by council. These months are October (Fall Product) and January – March (Cookie Program). Please visit www.gswny.org for specific Fall Product and Cookie Program timelines.

Participation Guidance

Girl Scouts' participation in both council-sponsored product program activities and group money-earning projects is based upon the following:

- Voluntary participation
- Written permission of each girl's parent or guardian
- An understanding of (and ability to explain clearly to others) why the money is needed
- An understanding that money earning should not exceed what the group needs to support its program activities
- Observance of local ordinances related to involvement of children in money-earning activities as well as health and safety laws
- Vigilance in protecting the [personal safety](#) of each girl
- Arrangements for [safeguarding the money](#)

Additional Guidelines

Keep these specific guidelines, some of which are required by the Internal Revenue Service—in mind to ensure that sales are conducted with legal and financial integrity.

- All rewards earned by girls through the product program activities must support Girl Scout program experiences (such as camp, travel, and program events, but not scholarships or financial credits toward outside organizations).
- Rewards are based on sales ranges set by councils and may not be based on a dollar-per-dollar calculation.
- **Money earned is for Girl Scout activities and is not to be retained by individuals.** Girls can, however, be awarded incentives and/or may earn credits from their Girl Scout product programs. Funds acquired through group money-earning projects must be reported and accounted for by the group according to council procedures.

Council-Sponsored Money-Earning Activities

The council only sponsors money-earning projects that are approved by the board of directors (currently The Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product Program). All registered girls shall be offered the opportunity to participate in the council-sponsored programs. Daisy and Brownie Girl Scouts may participate in council-sponsored product programs only.

More information on the Fall Product and Girl Scout Cookie Programs can be found later in this document.

Additional Money-Earning Activities

Service units or troops (Junior, Cadette, Senior and Ambassador only) may organize additional money-earning activities to support girl activities, programs or trips.

Troops are required to participate in council product programs as their primary money-earning activity before requesting other additional money earning opportunities. Any group money

earning activity other than the Fall Program and Cookie Program must take place AFTER the Fall Product/ Cookie programs have closed for Girl Scout membership year.

Guidelines for Additional Money-Earning

- **Daisy and Brownie Girl Scouts may participate in council-sponsored product programs only.**
- **GSWNY prohibits games of chance. Any activity that could be considered a game of chance (raffles, contests, bingo, etc.) is PROHIBITED.**
- **Girl Scouts are prohibited from reselling any commercial product, such as candy, sodas, entertainment books, etc.** Any items sold must either be made/created by the girls (such as paintings, blankets, etc.) or enhanced through the girls' effort (such as decorating purchased plain wreaths or planting flowers in decorated pots).
- **Girl Scouts are prohibited from crowd-sourced fundraising, such as GoFundMe**
- Activities where a business will provide a portion of their profits to the troop/service unit (such as a "Girl Scout night" at a restaurant) is not money-earning, but rather a fundraising in the form of a sponsorship. See page 52 for details on guidelines for sponsorships. This info is on page 56
- Girl Scouts' [Blue Book](#) policy forbids girls from the direct solicitation of cash. Girls can collect partial payment toward the purchase of a package of Girl Scout Cookies and other Girl Scout-authorized products through participation in council-approved product sale donation programs.
- Girl Scouts forbids product demonstration parties where the use of the Girl Scout trademark increases revenue for another business, such as in-home product parties. Any business using the Girl Scout trademark or other Girl Scout intellectual property must seek authorization from GSUSA.
- Group money-earning activities need to be suited to the ages and abilities of the girls and consistent with the principles of the GSLE.
- If the troop participate in a multiple vendor event (such as a craft or community fair), research to ensure that other vendors are appropriate for Girl Scout participation.
- Adult members in their Girl Scout capacities may not solicit financial contributions for purposes other than Girl Scouting. Adults may engage in combined fundraising efforts authorized by the council and in which the local council is a beneficiary.

Service Unit Money-Earning Projects

Service units are required to have approval for all money-earning activities outside council-approved sales. Money-earning applications must be submitted for approval AT LEAST THIRTY (30) DAYS prior to project. Service unit money-earning activities may be denied during the months of the respective United Way appeals and council-sponsored product programs. See page 51 for application guidelines.

Troop Money-Earning Projects

Troops are required to have council approval for all money-earning activities outside of council-approved programs. Money-earning applications must be submitted for approval AT LEAST THIRTY (30) DAYS prior to project. Troop money-earning activities may be denied during the months of the respective United Way appeal and council-sponsored product programs. See page 51 for application guidelines.

Sample Money-Earning Activities

Collections/Drives

- Used ink cartridges turned in for money
- Can/bottle drive
- Scrap metal drive

Food/Meal Events

- Spaghetti dinner/pancake breakfast
- Themed meals, like a high tea or a build-your-own-taco bar, related to activities girls are planning (For instance, if girls are earning money for travel, they could tie the meal to their destination.)
- Bake sales at school open houses, election day polling sites, community events
- Hot chocolate stand during winter months/lemonade stand in summer months

Service(s)

- Babysitting for service unit events/meetings, holidays (such as New Year's or winter holiday shopping days for caregivers), school breaks
- Raking leaves, weeding, cutting grass, shoveling snow, walking pets
- Holiday gift wrapping

Money earning projects may be used to support Gold, Silver & Bronze Award projects.

The best way to earn money for your group is to start with Girl Scout cookie activities and other council-sponsored product programs. From there, your group may decide to earn additional funds on its own.

How to apply for an Additional Money-Earning Activity

1. To participate in an additional Money-earning Activity, complete Additional Money Earning Activity Application and submit the form to your Customer Care Team at customercare@gswny.org at least one month prior to the activity.
2. Forms will be reviewed at the council office, and leaders and service unit managers will be notified of approval or denial.
3. Within one month after the activity, the troop will write a brief evaluation. This, along with the bank statement showing the deposit of money, will be submitted to Customer Care at customercare@gswny.org

Fundraising and Working with Sponsors

GSWNY's Fund Development department is responsible for raising money to support our girls' council-wide, including monies for programming, camp properties, financial aid and more. The Fund Development Team works to ensure the benefits derived from this fundraising help the greatest number of girls and support our Girl Scout organization as a whole.

The team is also happy to assist troops and service units with special fundraising initiatives as needed. Most often these are larger projects/initiatives that require funding over and above typical money-earning activities.

Below are the two most common fundraising opportunities used by Troops and Service Units:

Volunteer Incentive Program (VIP)

You can turn your volunteer hours into money! If you work for a company that offers a Volunteer Incentive Program (also called a Community Involvement Program), it is easy to earn dollars for your troop/SU. Parents, aunts, uncles, and even grandparents can sign up to support a troop too.

How does this work? Typically, an employee provides a specific number of volunteer service hours as a Girl Scout leader or other volunteer and submits the necessary information to their company. GSWNY verifies the volunteer hours and receives the money on behalf of the troop/SU – we do this because companies require donations to be formally acknowledged by the non-profit organization for tax purposes. 100% of the donation received from the company is forwarded to the designated troops/SU.

Volunteer Incentive Program paperwork and payments can be mailed/emailed to:

Attn: Bev Rhodes
 Girl Scouts of Western New York
 4433 Genesee Street, Suite 101
 Buffalo, NY 14225
Bev.Rhodes@gswny.org

Troop/Service Unit Sponsorships:

Sponsors help Girl Scout councils, service units and troops ensure that all girls in the community have an opportunity to participate in Girl Scouting. Community organizations, businesses, religious organizations, and individuals may be sponsors and may provide meeting space, volunteer their time, offer in-kind donations, provide activity materials, loan equipment and, in some cases, provide monetary support. Troops/SUs are encouraged to recognize sponsor contributions by arranging for the girls to send thank-you cards, inviting the sponsor to a meeting or ceremony, or working together on a Take Action project.

For Non-monetary Sponsorships (e.g. meeting space, in-kind donations, volunteers, activity materials or equipment), please consult your Volunteer Experience Manager. They can give you guidance on the availability of sponsors, recruiting responsibility, and any council policies or practices that should be followed. Council may already have relationships with certain organizations, or may know of some reasons **not** to collaborate with others. Troop Sponsorships of this kind can be formalized via the Troop/Group Sponsorship Agreement available in the Forms section at www.gswny.org or from your Volunteer Experience Manager.

For Monetary Sponsorships (i.e. cash donations), please contact the Fund Development Team Bev.Rhodes@gswny.org to discuss the company or organization you plan to solicit and any information you have about what should be included in a request. We are happy to assist you in crafting an appropriate solicitation, as well as provide such requests on GSWNY letterhead! A few things to keep in mind as you consider an ask:

- **Girl Scouts are prohibited from crowd-sourced fundraising, such as GoFundMe**
- Cash solicitations should be specific to a project or initiative, they cannot be for general troop/SU support. When the gift is received, it is important the funding be used in the manner it was originally intended.
- The Fund Development Department should be made aware of all cash sponsorships/donations being pursued. The team may already have relationships with certain organizations and are eager to guide your proposal to success; we also want to avoid submitting multiple asks to the same organization, which decreases the likelihood anyone will receive funding. We strive to help any troops/SU that requests it, and it is rare that a request is turned down.
- Once received, monetary donations over \$250 must be processed through GSWNY via the Troop/Group Sponsorship Agreement. We ask this for two reasons: (1) companies and organizations typically require donations to be formally acknowledged directly by the non-profit organization for tax purposes; and (2) it provides us with the opportunity to help you steward your donor throughout the year to increase the likelihood they will say yes when you ask again! GSWNY will receive the donation on behalf of the troop/SU and the full amount is then quickly forwarded back to the designated troop/SU. The Troop/Group Sponsorship Agreement is available in the Forms Section at www.gswny.org or from the Fund Development Team Bev.Rhodes@gswny.org
- Monetary donations from \$1-249 can be accepted and acknowledged directly by the troop/SU. If a donor requests formal acknowledgment from council, we are happy to do that for you via the Troop Sponsorship Form following the guidelines above.

Working with Sponsors and Other Organizations

Local sponsors can help councils power innovative programs for Girl Scouts. Community organizations, businesses, religious organizations, and individuals may be sponsors and may provide group meeting places, volunteer their time, offer in-kind donations, provide activity materials, or loan equipment. Encourage your girls to celebrate a sponsor's contribution to the troop by sending thank-you cards, inviting the sponsor to a meeting or ceremony, or working together on a Take Action project.

For information on working with a sponsor, consult your council, which can give you guidance on the availability of sponsors, recruiting guidelines, and any council policies or practices that must be followed. Your council may already have relationships with certain organizations or may know of some reasons not to collaborate with certain organizations.

When collaborating with any other organization, keep these additional guidelines in mind:

Avoid fundraising for other organizations. Girl Scouts are not allowed to solicit money on behalf of another organization when identifying themselves as Girl Scouts by wearing a

uniform, a sash or vest, official pins, and so on. This includes participating in a walkathon or telethon while in uniform. However, you and your group can support another organization through Take Action projects. Girl Scouts as individuals are able to participate in whatever events they choose as long as they are not wearing anything that officially identifies them as Girl Scouts.

Steer clear of political fundraisers. When in an official Girl Scout capacity or in any way identifying yourselves as Girl Scouts, your group may not participate, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign or work on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate for public office. Letter-writing campaigns are not allowed, nor is participating in a political rally, circulating a petition, or carrying a political banner.

Be respectful when collaborating with religious organizations. Girl Scout groups must respect the opinions and practices of religious partners, but no girl should be required to take part in any religious observance or practice of the sponsoring group.

Avoid selling or endorsing commercial products. A commercial product is any product sold at a retail location. Since 1939, girls and volunteers have not been allowed to endorse, provide a testimonial for, or sell such products.

Financial Assistance

All girls are welcome to join Girl Scouting, regardless of ability to pay, and there are multiple options for financial assistance. If any member is concerned about a financial barrier, we encourage and welcome you to apply for financial assistance.

There are two levels of financial assistance available to girls:

- Level 1: *Troop funds*. Troops/groups participating in product sales should be budgeting for expenses as well as for potential financial assistance needs for members of their troop.
- Level 2: *Council Opportunity Funds*. Council assistance can be utilized if funds are not available at the troop level.

Council Opportunity Fund

The Council Opportunity Fund is maintained by the council office to help finance Girl Scout program opportunities for girls and educational opportunities for adults. It is highly encouraged that troops participate in council sponsored product programs as a first means for budgeting for troop expenses.

Girls may receive financial assistance for:

- GSUSA registration fees
- Troop dues
- Sashes, vests or uniform insignia
- Handbooks Badge in a box
- Camping fees for GSWNY-sponsored camp programs (girls may apply once a year)
- Campership for summer resident and day camp
- Program fees for GSWNY-sponsored program events (girls may apply once a year)
- Girl Scout Destinations (formerly known as Wider Opportunities) up to 50% of program registration fee.
- GSWNY council sponsored trips

Troops may receive financial assistance for:

- Transportation
- Additional items may be requested; please contact us with questions

Registered volunteers may apply for financial assistance to attend one Girl Scout training opportunity a year that will benefit the troop, group or service unit but only if the training is not available through GSWNY. This includes training, conferences and educational workshops. Council Opportunity Funds may not be used to defray the cost of an adult accompanying a troop trip.

Financial assistance is granted according to need. Each application is considered until the funds are exhausted. Council Opportunity Fund applications are available on the GSWNY web site in the Forms Library or at the council's service centers.

Financial assistance is made possible by the generosity of individuals, organizations and businesses who understand the importance of making Girl Scouting available to girls. The amount of funding available is determined by donations to Girl Scouts of Western New York. Girl and adult members are not eligible for Financial Assistance if money is owed to the council.

For financial assistance questions and forms, contact the council office at 1-888-837-6410 or customercare@gswny.org.

Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals

We get it—there's something exciting about opening that first case of Girl Scout Cookies. However, before your girls take part in all the cookie program fun, it's important they have a clear plan and purpose for their product program activities. As a volunteer, you have the opportunity to facilitate girl-led financial planning, which may include the following steps for the girls:

1. **Set goals for money-earning activities.** What do girls hope to accomplish through this activity? In addition to earning money, what skills do they hope to build? What leadership opportunities present themselves?
2. **Create a budget.** Use a budget worksheet that includes both expenses (the cost of supplies, admission to events, travel, and so on) and available income (the group's account balance, projected cookie proceeds, and so on).
3. **Determine how much the group needs to earn.** Subtract expenses from available income to determine how much money your group needs to earn.
4. **Make a plan.** The group can brainstorm and make decisions about its financial plans. Will cookie and other product programs—if approached proactively and energetically—earn enough money to meet the group's goals? If not, which group money-earning activities might offset the difference? Will more than one group money-earning activity be necessary to achieve the group's financial goals? In this planning stage, engage the girls through the Girl Scout processes (girl-led, learning by doing, and cooperative learning) and consider the value of any potential activity. Have them weigh feasibility, implementation, and safety factors.

5. **Write it out.** Once the group has decided on its financial plan, describe it in writing. If the plan involves a group money-earning activity, fill out an application for approval from your council and submit it along with the budget worksheet the girls created.

Remember: It's great for girls to have opportunities like the Girl Scout Cookie Program to earn funds that help them fulfill their goals. As a volunteer, try to help girls balance the money earning they do with opportunities to enjoy other activities that have less emphasis on earning and spending money. Take Action projects, for example, may not always require girls to spend a lot of money

Financial Management and Product Program Abilities by Grade Level

As with other Girl Scout activities, girls build their financial and sales savvy as they get older. Every girl will be different, but here you'll find some examples of the abilities and opportunities for progression of girls at each grade level.

Girl Scout Daisies

- The group volunteer handles money, keeps financial records, and does all group budgeting.
- Parents/caregivers may decide they will contribute to the cost of activities.
- Girls can participate in Girl Scout Cookie Program activities and other council-sponsored product programs.
- Daisies are always paired with a volunteer when selling anything. Girls do the asking and deliver the product, but volunteers handle the money and keep the girls safe.
- Girls should be given the opportunity to practice identifying money and counting back change with an adult during each transaction.

Girl Scout Brownies

- The group volunteer handles money, keeps financial records, and shares some of the group budgeting responsibilities.
- Girls discuss the cost of activities (supplies, fees, transportation, rentals, and so on) with guidance from their volunteer(s).
- Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Girls may decide to pay dues to contribute to the cost of activities.

Girl Scout Juniors

- The group volunteer retains overall responsibility for long-term budgeting and record keeping, but shares or delegates all other financial responsibilities.
- Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Girls decide on group dues, if any. Dues are collected by girls and recorded by a group treasurer selected by the girls.
- Girls budget for the short-term needs of the group based on their plans and income from the group dues.
- Girls budget for more long-term activities, such as overnight trips, group camping, and special events.
- Girls budget for Take Action projects including the Girl Scout Bronze Award if they are pursuing it.

Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors

- Girls estimate costs based on plans.
- Girls determine the amount of group dues, if any, and the scope of money-earning projects.
- Girls set goals for and participate in council-sponsored product programs.
- Girls carry out budgeting, planning, and group money-earning programs.
- Girls budget for extended travel, Take Action projects, and leadership projects.
- Girls may be involved in seeking donations for Take Action projects with council approval.
- Girls keep their own financial records and give reports to parents and group volunteers.
- Girls budget for Take Action projects, including the Girl Scout Silver or Girl Scout Gold Awards, if they are pursuing them.

Girl Scout Product Programs

Learning to think like an entrepreneur? Developing business smarts? Getting to know customers and building lasting relationships? There's so much more to that box of Thin Mints®.

Whether girls participate in the Girl Scout Cookie Program or the Girl Scout Fall Product Program (or both!), everything your Girl Scouts learn prepares them to take on the world. Plus, Girl Scout Product Program proceeds stay in your local community to power amazing year-round experiences—experiences that broaden girls' worlds and spark their sense of wonder.

Five Essential Skills

Girl Scouts as young as five develop five essential skills through the Girl Scout Cookie Program—skills that will help them be successful today and throughout their lives:

- **Goal Setting.** Girls learn to create a plan to reach their goals.
- **Decision Making.** Girls learn to make decisions on their own and as a team.
- **Money Management.** Girls learn to create a budget and handle money.
- **People Skills.** Girls find their voice and up their confidence through customer interactions that build relationships.
- **Business Ethics.** Girls learn to act responsibly and honestly, both in business and in life.

But building their business know-how isn't just tied to the cookies themselves! Girl Scouts at any level can continue honing their entrepreneurial skills by earning the [Cookie Business badges](#), [Cookie Entrepreneur Family Pin](#), and the [Financial Literacy badges](#) year over year.

Before your cookie bosses open shop, be sure to check out these [helpful troop leader resources](#) that will empower you to:

- Manage your troop's funds.
- Learn how girls participate in money earning.
- Discover how your troop can reach its financial goals.
- Plan activities to help her earn cookie pins and badges
- Understand just how much your girls are capable of by grade level and [how their entrepreneurial skills progress](#).

Girl Scout Cookie History

What started with Girl Scouts selling home-baked cookies to raise money grew into enlisting professional bakers in 1936 to handle the growing demand—and the rest is history. [Explore Girl Scout Cookie History](#) to find out how cookies have helped build generations of female entrepreneurs and leaders who make the world a better place.

Where Cookie Proceeds Go

After paying for the cost of cookies and materials, [Girl Scout Cookie proceeds stay local](#) and help councils provide Girl Scout programs in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), the outdoors, life skills, entrepreneurship, and more—in camps, through leadership training, and multiple other ways. A portion of the proceeds is directly managed by girls, and it's up to them to decide how to invest their troop's share of the earnings.

Your council will provide a breakdown of how cookie program proceeds support Girl Scout activities locally. Please share this information with girls and their families so everyone understands that product program sales make it possible for your Girl Scout council to serve girls.

Troop members share in the proceeds from a successful product program; proceeds are not distributed to individual girl members. Girls, however, may be eligible for rewards and credits that they put toward council-sponsored camps, programs, and Girl Scout swag. The council plan for rewards applies equally to all girls participating in the product program activity. Visit the cookie section of www.gswny.org for more information about individual rewards and troop proceeds locally.

The [Girl Scout Blue Book of Basic Documents](#) specifies that:

“All money and other assets, including property, that are raised, earned, or otherwise received in the name of and for the benefit of Girl Scouting must be held and authorized by a Girl Scout council or Girl Scouts of the USA. Such money and other assets must be used for the purposes of Girl Scouting.”

“Ownership of Assets,” Blue Book of Basic Documents

Making s'mores under the stars, creating a lasting impact in your community, or ordering supplies for an eye-opening STEM project, there are limitless ways to put troop proceeds toward dynamic Girl Scout experiences! There are a few things, however, that don't qualify for “purposes of Girl Scouting,” for instance, using troop proceeds to purchase memberships in or uniforms for another organization. We encourage all councils to remind their volunteers of this policy in order to protect the all-girl environment and to avoid diversion of Girl Scout funds.

Independent Girl Scouts Participating in the Product Programs:

1. An Independent Girl Scout (IRG) is a registered Girl Scout who is not affiliated with a troop.
2. Finances of an Independent Girl Scout must be managed and maintained by an adult that is not affiliated with the girl. They are managed by a member of the service team such as the service unit finance consultant.

Independent Girl Scout Sellers:

1. **Income from product sales does not become property of individual girl members.**
2. The service unit will manage the proceeds raised from the product program activity.
3. An Independent Girl Scout may request funds from the Service Unit to participate in a **Girl Scout program. Examples include Girl Scout camp, Girl Scout event, Girl Scout trip, Girl Scout Take Action project, or for membership dues, Girl Scout uniforms, badges or books. Funds will not be disbursed for non-Girl Scout programs or activities.** Funds should be requested using the Program Selection Request Form: Independent Girl Scout Sellers (Service Unit)-available at gswny.org/forms.
4. The service team will review each request and allocate the amount accordingly from the Service Unit Fund for Independent Girl Scout. The funds should be pooled; not tracked by individual girl.

Your Council's Role

When you are set up for success, you are better able to set up your girls for success! That's why every year, your council provides trainings, guidelines, and procedures for conducting the Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product Program and determines how the proceeds and product rewards system will be managed.

Each council also selects the vendors of its choice to provide the products for their product programs. Two commercial bakers are licensed by Girl Scouts of the USA to produce Girl Scout Cookies: [Little Brownie Bakers](#) and [ABC Bakers](#). You can also [Meet the Cookies](#) and find additional info on cookie varieties, including nutritional details.

Councils also work with vendors to offer magazine subscriptions, nut and candy products, and more for the fall product program. These companies are [Ashdon Farms](#), [Trophy Nut](#), and [M2 Media Group](#). Each provides online tools and activities for girls to download. Magazine selection and sales may take place online—check with your council for more details.

Your Role

You play an exciting role in giving your Girl Scouts opportunities to practice the five skills as they learn how to think like entrepreneurs. Some of the things you'll do include:

- Get girls excited about the opportunities to support the troop (but allowing their participation to be voluntary).
- Support both [competitive and apprehensive cookie bosses](#), helping all your girls set meaningful goals for themselves.
- [Fostering partnerships with each Girl Scout's family](#) to ensure cookie season success, whatever that may look like for her, will help you build a positive partnership with girls and families, and the [Cookie Entrepreneur Family pin](#) is designed to help families support girls' growth at home.

Not only can girls sell individually, both in-person and using the online tools provided by each vendor, they can also participate in group booth sales during product programs. Your local council has additional guidance and processes to market and ensure every booth is in a safe and appropriate location.

As your Girl Scouts grow, your role will evolve from a hands-on one to providing oversight and support where needed. No matter their ages, remember that volunteers and parents/caregivers do not sell the product. Your role is to encourage your girls and let their entrepreneurial spirit soar. Learning by doing is exactly how your girls develop the business savvy and communication skills that will [empower them to reach any goals they set for themselves](#).

Another critical task for each troop is to establish a clear accounting system for all proceeds and product during the programs. It's up to you to make sure that money is spent wisely, that excellent records are kept (remember to keep copies of all receipts in a binder or folder), and that all product is tracked. For older girls, your job is to oversee their work as they learn to keep impeccable records. Be sure to attend product program orientation or training so you are aware of the systems and helpful tools available.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and the fall product program can be exhilarating and busy times during the troop year, but you're never alone in your efforts! You can reach out to your service unit product program manager when you're feeling stuck, or you can [build a cookie team](#) to provide the support your troop needs.

Product Program Safety

Safety is the top priority while selling Girl Scout Cookies and other products. Volunteers, families, and girls should be familiar with and practice the safety guidelines outlined in local program resources as well as those available in the [troop leader resources](#) section of girlscoutcookies.org and in *Safety Activity Checkpoints*.

Selling Cookies Online

Will your troop use the Digital Cookie® platform to manage its cookie business? Check the specific guidelines provided by each cookie vendor before participating. Before girls begin selling online, they should partner with their troop leader and families to learn how to safely run their business online.

A few more online safety practices to keep in mind:

- The Girl Scout Cookie Program is a girl-led program; a Girl Scout should always lead online marketing and sales efforts, with the supervision of her parent or caregiver.
- Girl Scouts engaging in online sales and marketing must review and apply the [Digital Marketing Tips for Cookie Entrepreneurs and Their Families](#).
- Girls, volunteers and parents must review and adhere to the [Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge](#), the [Digital Cookie Pledge](#), the [Supplemental Safety Tips for Online Marketing](#), and Girl Scouts' *Safety Activity Checkpoints* for Computer and Internet Use and Cookie and Product Sales (with the exception that they may share beyond friends and family).
- Girl sales links should never be posted to resale sites (Craigslist, eBay, Facebook, Marketplace, etc.).
- Girls must adhere to all terms and conditions on Digital Cookie and Smart Cookie platforms. For copies of terms and conditions, please contact GSUSA, ABC, or M2 as needed.

- Girl Scouts of the USA reserves the right to remove or disable the link for any reason including violation of guidance, inventory fulfillment issues, safety issues, or if sales and marketing activity goes viral and otherwise creates unanticipated disruption.

Additionally, families, girls, and volunteers should contact and collaborate with their councils and Girl Scouts of the USA in advance on any national news media opportunities tied to girls' online marketing and sales efforts.

The Buddy System

With the supervision of an adult, and using the buddy system, the troop is divided into teams of two. Each Girl Scout is responsible for staying with her buddy at all times, warning her buddy of danger, giving her buddy immediate assistance if safe to do so, and seeking help if needed. Girls are encouraged to stay near the group or buddy with another team of two so that in the event someone is injured, one person cares for the patient while two others seek help.

Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth

Cookie booths—that is, cookie pop-up sales in areas with lots of foot traffic—are a fun way for Girl Scouts to connect with their community and practice their sales pitch with new customers. Booth locations must be approved by councils, facilitated within council jurisdiction, and participants must follow all council guidelines with regard to setting up, running, and taking down a booth.

Please check your local COVID-19 guidelines for any restrictions on booth locations and other safety considerations, or [consider a virtual cookie booth](#) or [virtual cookie rally](#) if it makes sense for your troop.

Scheduling Cookie Booths: Cookie Booths locations are scheduled by the Troop Cookie Booth Coordinator. There are two types of booths; a troop secure and a council secure booth.

The Troop Secure Booth This booth is scheduled by the Troop Cookie Coordinator with a specific business. Once the booth details are confirmed, the Booth Coordinator will input the booth information into Smart Cookies as a “Troop Secured Booth.” Council will review and approve/decline all Troop Secured Booths. Troops are NOT permitted to set up a booth in an approved location when they notice that no one is there. All booths have to be submitted in Smart Cookie software.

Where You Can Sell: Troops are allowed to set up their scheduled booths at the store entrances/exits, per the store management agreement.

Booth hours: Council recommendations for booth hours are

- Monday-Friday 10am-8:00pm
- Saturday: 8am-8:00pm
- Sunday: 11am-6:00pm

Council Secured booths are available through the Smart Cookie lottery. Council secured booths are locations that have been contract-secured by GSUSA or Council. These locations cannot be secured by a troop.

Booth Staffing: Each booth requires a minimum of:

- ✓ Two non-related/not living in the same household/not in a significant relationship registered volunteers with valid background checks, at least one of whom must be female. This means that co-leaders who are related/live in the same household/have a significant relationship (e.g. married couples, sisters, etc.) must at minimum have a third registered volunteer with a valid background check present. Booth volunteers may be troop leaders, troop drivers, chaperone/helpers, or product program volunteers – these are positions with required background checks.
- ✓ A minimum of two Girl Scouts must be present at the booth at all times. Booths may not be run by adults only.
- ✓ Parents may be asked to help support booth sales and attend as chaperones. If an adult is attending a cookie booth, they must be registered with a valid background check since they will be supervising girls, working with money and managing inventory. When registering, indicate secondary role: **Chaperone/Helper**. We do this to ensure the utmost safety to all of our Girl Scouts and members.

Here are some notes about locations for a cookie booth:

- Using your best judgment in setting up cookie booths in locations that will be open, accessible, and safe for all girls and potential customers.
- Choosing a high traffic area—this could be your local supermarket, mall, or park—where you’ll maximize the number of visitors to your booth.
- Checking out your booth site ahead of the sale. Talk to business owners in the area so they’ll know what to expect. Find out what security measures are in place—these may include lights for evening sales and whether a security camera watches the booth area—and where the nearest bathrooms are located.
- Respecting the surrounding businesses by making sure your booth isn’t blocking a store entrance or exit.
- Encouraging your girls to unleash their creativity—and work on their advertising skills—to make colorful signs and booth decorations that potential customers can’t resist! Remind girls to be polite and to have their sales pitch ready for interested customers.

And keep in mind:

- If your Daisies are still learning how to make correct change, help them handle money as needed. But remember that girls make all sales at the booth!
- Changing your cookie booth hours or location? Keep your customers in the loop and update ABC Smart Cookies with the new booth details. If your scheduled cookie booth has an attached Virtual Booth pickup location, be sure to log into Digital Cookie and edit that pickup location information. All scheduled booths are available through the Cookie Finder App ([IOS](#) or [Android](#)).
- Certain locations may be inappropriate for young girls based on the standards of your local community, may negatively impact the cookie program experience for girls, and/or may negatively impact our brand in your community. For additional clarity, girls should not sell in or in front of establishments that they themselves cannot legally patronize.
- Additionally, with respect to marijuana dispensaries, we have been steadfastly combating the unauthorized uses of the Girl Scout trademark by the cannabis community, which has been marketing—without our authorization—certain cannabis products under our youth-appealing brand. We are continuing to aggressively fight these unauthorized uses of the

Girl Scout brand and hope that our councils and volunteers will join Girl Scouts of the USA's efforts by discouraging cookie booth locations at such locations.

For more tips to make your booth a success, check out our [Cookie Booth Essentials](#).

Cookie Donation Programs

Cookies also help girls make a big impact in their community! Your council may have an established cookie donation program where customers can purchase cookies that will be donated to an organization by your council. Cookie donations are not only a great talking point for girls to share with their customers—they're also a thoughtful way to show girls how cookies can help them give back.

With cookie donations, remember that:

- Donated cookies must stay within the council jurisdiction unless your council has the approval from other council jurisdictions.
- Donated products cannot be resold and must be used in a responsible and ethical way.
- Donated products are used in a way that does not undermine the work of councils or jeopardize the integrity of the Girl Scout brand.

Handling Product Complaints

Girl Scout Cookies are well loved and for good reason—it has always been the practice of Girl Scout councils and the bakers to guarantee customer satisfaction with their delicious cookies. If a customer is not satisfied with the quality of their cookies for some reason, they can contact the baker via the contact information printed on the side of the cookie package. Troops should notify their council if they are aware of any customer dissatisfaction.

Recognizing Cookie Sellers in the Media

Focusing on entrepreneurial outcomes has always been the focus of the Girl Scout Cookie Program. The cookie program has never been about and does not focus on individual girls' sales results.

- There are many impressive cookie bosses throughout the United States, and the Girl Scout organization will continue to recognize dynamic cookie entrepreneurs for various achievements tied to the Girl Scout Cookie Program and through their participation in Girl Scouts.
- Girl Scouts of the USA does not currently track the top seller(s) of Girl Scout Cookies on a national level and does not identify a specific Girl Scout as the number one or "record-breaking" national cookie seller.
- Girl Scout councils should not reference such girls as "top sellers" in the media. Doing so detracts from the essence of the Girl Scout Cookie Program, which is based on offering girls important experiences in entrepreneurship, business, and finance from a young age as well as providing girls and local Girl Scout councils with the funds necessary to power amazing experiences and opportunities for Girl Scouts year-round.

Additional Resources and Support

[GSWNY By-Laws](#)

[GSUSA Blue Book of Documents](#)

[Safety Activity Checkpoints](#)

Appendix:

Girl Scouts of Western New York Policies, Standards and Procedures

Our Mission

The Girl Scouts of Western New York, Inc. prepares girls and young women in Western New York to meet the emerging challenges of society and to provide leadership in resolving issues that may be prevalent in their environment.

With the values of diversity and inclusion, we carry out our commitment through the guidance of adult members who serve as role models of responsibility, character and citizenship, providing our girls and young women with skills to enable them to achieve their full potential as both individuals and contributing members of their community.

Introduction

The Girl Scouts of Western New York, Inc. acknowledges that the direction and success of Girl Scouting rests in the voluntary participation of its adult members. These policies will supersede any previous existing policies. Every volunteer in the council should be apprised of GSUSA and council policies and practices that guide and protect her or his status as a Girl Scout volunteer.

The following policies are required for volunteers: affirmative action, membership registration, recruitment/selection, membership, placement, adult leadership, appointment, training, orientation, advantages, performance assessment, reappointment, uniforms, personal conduct, conflict resolutions/disputes, recognition, termination, harassment, sexual harassment, and child abuse.

Affirmative Action for Volunteers

There shall be no discrimination against an otherwise qualified adult volunteer by reason of disability or on the basis of age. Furthermore, there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, sex, creed, national origin, or socioeconomic status. In addition, to ensure full equality of opportunity in all operations and activities of the organization, affirmative action policies and procedures shall be utilized in the recruitment, selection, training, placement, and recognition of volunteers. Special emphasis shall be placed upon securing underrepresented population groups.

—Blue Book of Basic Documents, page 21

Membership Registration

All girls and adults participating in the Girl Scout Movement shall be registered as members with Girl Scouts of the United States of America and individually pay the annual membership dues, except those adults who are lifetime members or who are working in a temporary advisory or consultative capacity.

Recruitment

The recruitment process consists of a number of methods to attract qualified volunteers who will be matched to appropriate open or newly created positions. Written position descriptions that define specific responsibilities and clarify expectations will be completed prior to recruitment and used in the search. Each volunteer will also be required to complete an application, provide references, sign agreements, and undergo a background check, prior to selection.

Selection

Each volunteer is selected on the basis of ability to perform the volunteer position, volunteer and council need, ability and willingness to attend training, and qualifications for membership in the Girl Scout Movement. There shall be no discrimination against an otherwise qualified adult volunteer by reason of disability or on the basis of age. Furthermore, there shall be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, ethnicity, sex, creed, national origin, religion, citizenship, ancestry, marital status, veteran status, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics protected by federal, state, or local law. Volunteers will receive some type of face-to-face interview prior to selection.

Membership

All volunteers participating in the Girl Scout Movement shall meet GSUSA membership standards, be registered through the council as members of the Girl Scout Movement, and shall agree to abide by the policies and principles of GSUSA and the Girl Scout council.

Placement

Every attempt will be made to place volunteers in positions that meet both their needs and the needs of the council. In instances where this is not possible, the needs of the council will take precedence over the needs of the individual. Individuals not placed in a position for which they applied may be recommended for other positions, and they may request reassignment.

Adult Leadership

Your group must have at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers present at all times, plus additional adult volunteers as necessary, depending on the size of the group and the ages and abilities of girls. Adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old (or the age of majority defined by the state, if it is older than 18) and must be screened by your council before volunteering. One lead volunteer in every group must be female.

Appointment

Operational volunteers shall be appointed for a term not to exceed one year (See Reappointment for additional information).

Training

All volunteers will receive basic training for their position and will also be required to complete additional training that is designated as mandatory for the position within a specified time frame. Training will ensure that each volunteer has the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in her or his work.

Orientation

Each volunteer is provided with an overview of the Girl Scout purpose and organization, local council information, and the support systems available to help them in their work.

Advantages

Advantages to volunteers include support in their position, training, and other learning opportunities. Volunteers are encouraged to enhance and develop their skills while serving with the council. As appropriate, the council will assist volunteers in broadening their skills through assignment to new volunteer positions involving additional and/or greater responsibilities. Other advantages for volunteers include council publications; tools for recording volunteer experience; references upon request; liability insurance; and supplementary accident insurance, as part of national and/or council membership.

Performance Appraisal

Each volunteer shall be provided with the opportunity for a periodic performance appraisal and evaluation. The performance appraisal should include both a review of the volunteer's performance of position responsibilities and a discussion of any suggestions that the volunteer may have concerning the position or project with which the volunteer is connected. The performance appraisal session should also be utilized as an opportunity to ascertain the mutual interest of the council and volunteer in the volunteer's continued service in her or his position. It shall be the responsibility of each staff person in a supporting relationship with a volunteer to schedule and conduct the performance appraisal.

The position description and standards of performance for a volunteer position should form the basis of the performance appraisal. A confidential written record should be kept of each appraisal session.

Reappointment

Prior to the completion of her or his term, each volunteer who is to be reappointed to the same position or rotated to a different position may receive confirmation of such reappointment or rotation. Reappointment is based on past performance, adherence to council and GSUSA policies and standards, support of the Girl Scout purpose, values, and council goals, as well as positive relationships with the community, parents, other volunteers, and employed staff. There will be mutual acceptance of position accountabilities, expectations, and time commitments.

Uniforms

A uniform is not required for participation in Girl Scouting. Purchase of a uniform is at the volunteer's expense and is encouraged. Volunteers are encouraged to wear the Girl Scout Membership Pin when they are not in uniform.

Personal Conduct

Standards outlining conduct of volunteers are important for the orderly operation of any organization and for the benefit and protection of the rights and safety of all members. Inappropriate conduct may result in immediate suspension or termination. Some examples follow:

- Violation of federal, New York State, and local laws
- Harassment/sexual harassment
- Falsifying or making material omissions in council records
- Unsatisfactory performance in volunteer position
- Theft or inappropriate removal of property that belongs to or is in possession of our council, council employees, girl members or visitors, and/or malicious or willful destruction or damage to such
- Insubordination, including refusal to abide by council and GSUSA policies, do assigned work or refusal to perform work in the manner prescribed without proper justification
- Soliciting or accepting gratuities for personal gain or benefit
- Smoking in areas that are designated as non-smoking areas
- Bringing onto council properties or to Girl Scout activities dangerous or unauthorized materials such as explosives, firearms and other similar items, or while transporting girls to and from any activity
- Possession of alcohol or any controlled substance while on council property or participation in Girl Scout activities under the influence of alcohol or controlled substance, unless prescribed by a personal physician. The exception to this standard is that alcohol is allowed at council sanctioned events, when the premises are closed to girls.
- Child abuse (see page 38, 72)

Conflict Resolution/Dispute

The conflict resolution process is based on the fundamental values of respect for the individual and fairness. The policy exists so members of the organization can air their grievances and have avenues to solving them. All volunteers may use the conflict resolution procedure. Every volunteer may expect a fair resolution of her or his dispute without fear of jeopardizing her or his volunteer status. Informal

counseling by volunteer and staff personnel is the first step in resolving a situation involving a conflict or dispute. The initiation of the conflict resolution procedure, however, will not restrict the council from taking immediate and appropriate action with respect to the volunteer. The procedure is as follows:

Step 1. If an informal resolution is not possible and a further hearing is desired, the person filing the complaint must do so in writing, citing the issue. The signed and dated document must be specifically titled "Conflict Resolution/Dispute Request," identify the person with whom the conflict is registered, and cite the policy or procedure that has allegedly been misapplied. A copy should be sent to the identified person's supervisor. Within ten (10) working days, the supervisor will call a conference of all parties involved in the dispute and attempt to resolve the conflict. A written summary of the conference will be distributed to all parties.

Step 2. If the volunteer is not satisfied with the disposition of the conflict resolution, the council staff member or the council staff member's supervisor will meet with the volunteer within ten (10) working days following her or his initial conference.

Step 3. If the volunteer is not satisfied with the disposition of the conflict resolution, the Chief Operating Officer will meet with the volunteer within ten (10) working days following Step 2.

Step 4. In the event that the dispute is not resolved in Step 3, the staff member prepares a written report on the situation, including recommendations, and sends a copy to the Chief Executive Officer.

OR

Step 5. The Chief Executive Officer will appoint a dispute/complaint resolution review team. (The review team will be comprised of a management representative, an employee not involved in the conflict resolution process, and a council volunteer selected by the complainant). The dispute review team will review the documentation on file and meet with the individuals involved. The review team may seek additional information, if necessary, to aid it in making a final decision. The team will provide the Chief Executive Officer with a written report of its findings and recommendations within ten (10) working days of the review hearing. Copies will also be issued to the volunteer and immediate supervisor.

If the recommended resolution is not acceptable to the volunteer or any of the supervisors involved, a request to submit the recommended resolution to the Chief Executive Officer for a final and binding decision will be made. The Chief Executive Officer may exercise the following:

1. Accept the Dispute Resolution Team's recommended solution.
2. Provide an alternative final and binding decision.

This is the council's final decision. It is the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer to implement the decision.

Alcohol and Drug-Free Environment

GSWNY is committed to providing volunteers with an environment that is free of the problems associated with the use and unlawful possession of controlled substances, illegal drugs or alcohol. "Controlled substances" are defined as those drugs listed in Schedules I through V of section 202 of the

federal Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. 812, and include, but are not limited to marijuana, cocaine, (including “crack” and other cocaine derivatives), morphine, codeine, Phenobarbital, heroin, amphetamines, and many barbiturates. Alcohol is not permitted at any event which girls may attend.

Release

Either the council or the volunteer may initiate a release from a position. A volunteer is requested to give as much notice as possible when resigning. A minimum of two weeks is requested.

Situations may arise that make it necessary to release an individual from a position. The council may release an individual because of, among other things, restructuring of positions, elimination of the volunteer position in which the individual serves, the volunteer’s inability or failure to complete the requirements of the position, or the refusal to comply with council or Girl Scouts of the USA policies. Release from the position does not cancel membership with Girl Scouts of the USA unless it is determined that she or he is unable to meet the membership requirement.

Harassment

The council is committed to an environment and climate in which relationships are characterized by dignity, respect, courtesy, and equitable treatment. It is the policy of the organization to provide all volunteers with an environment free from all forms of unlawful or unwelcome harassment, including implied or expressed forms of sexual harassment. The council expressly prohibits any form of harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, marital status, citizenship, ancestry, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

Any volunteer who feels that she or he has been subjected to harassment of any type, whether by another volunteer, council staff member, or any agent of the organization, should promptly report the incident to a supervisor or to the Chief Executive Officer. The supervisor, upon receiving such a complaint, must report the matter to the Chief Executive Officer, who will conduct an investigation and, depending on the findings, take appropriate corrective actions.

Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment

Girl Scouts is committed to creating a respectful, courteous environment free of discrimination and unlawful harassment of any kind.

GSWNY does not tolerate sexual or other unlawful harassment by any employee, Board Member, volunteer, vendor, contractor, consultant, customer, girl or adult member, or visitor. Harassment is a breach of GSWNY policy and may be a violation of state and/or federal law. Harassment can include unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, or visual, including intimidation, ridicule, insult, comments or physical conduct that is based on an individual’s protected status including sex, race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ability, etc.

GSWNY is committed to taking all reasonable steps to prevent such harassment and discrimination. GSWNY is determined to resolve possible discrimination and harassment situations as quickly and discreetly as possible. Volunteers can contact our Customer Care team at 888-837-6410 or customercare@gswny.org for any questions or concerns, and our formal process for reporting issues of harassment and discrimination are below:

If a volunteer, girl or caregiver believes another volunteer, Board Member, employee, vendor, contractor, consultant, customer, girl or adult member, visitor, or agent of the organization is harassing or discriminating against them, the volunteer is encouraged to tell the offender clearly that the behaviors and actions are unwelcome. The volunteer should immediately inform the Chief Executive Officer at gs.ceo@gswny.org or by calling Customer Care at 888-837-6410 or customercare@gswny.org. If the complaint involves the Chief Executive Officer, then the complaint should be reported to the Board Chair by calling Customer Care at 888-837-6410.

The GSWNY CEO (or designee) will work with the individual to determine if they are seeking guidance and assistance from GSWNY staff, and/or if they wish to make a formal complaint.

The individual should report the facts of the incident, including what happened, how often, and where the incident(s) took place, as well as the names of the individuals and witnesses involved. Any employee who is informed of, witnesses, or receives a complaint must report it directly to the Chief Executive Officer.

All harassment and discrimination claims will be investigated in a timely, fair, and thorough manner, and GSWNY expects all volunteers and staff members to cooperate fully in any investigation. All complaints will be investigated as discreetly and confidentially as possible. If the organization finds that discrimination or harassment has occurred, it will take appropriate corrective action up to and including dismissal of the offending volunteer (or other appropriate action if the offender is not a volunteer for the organization). The Chief Executive Officer has the overall responsibility of maintaining effective enforcement of nondiscrimination and harassment policies.

Each volunteer is responsible for following the procedures outlined in this policy to ensure that their complaint is handled promptly and appropriately.

Anti-Retaliation Policy

GSWNY feels very strongly that it is important to provide volunteers, members and caregivers with confidential, nonthreatening alternatives for registering their concerns without fear of retaliation. GSWNY will not tolerate retaliation against anyone for stepping forward with a concern, complaint, or grievance. An employee or volunteer may not retaliate against employees, members or volunteers in any way for registering a concern or complaint in good faith.

Sexual Harassment

It is against the council's policies for any individual, male or female, to sexually harass another volunteer, employee, or Girl Scout member of the same or opposite sex. The council reserves the right to refuse membership endorsement or reappointment, and to dismiss or suspend from affiliation with the council any volunteer who, in conducting Girl Scout program, sexually harasses another volunteer, employee, or Girl Scout member of the same or opposite sex.

Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual acts or favors, abusing the dignity of another through insulting or degrading sexual remarks or conduct and threats or suggestions that a volunteer's status is conditioned upon toleration of or acquiescence to sexual advances. Some examples of sexual harassment that could create a hostile work environment include telling of sexual jokes or stories; the presence of sexually explicit photographs or other materials; touching of another person's clothing, hair or body; making sexual comments about another person's body; making sexual comments or innuendoes; asking personal questions about another person's social or sexual life; staring; leering; and making sexual gestures.

Any volunteer who feels that she or he has been sexually harassed should promptly report such behavior to a supervisor or the Chief Executive Officer. Upon receiving a complaint, a supervisor will report the matter to the Chief Executive Officer. The Chief Executive Officer will conduct an investigation and, depending on the findings, take appropriate corrective action.

Child Abuse

The council abides by Board approved policies, GSUSA policies, federal, New York State, and local laws.

Council Policy

The council supports and maintains environments that are free of child abuse and neglect. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act defines child abuse and neglect as "the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse as exploitation, negligent treatment or maltreatment:

- Of a child under the age of 18, or the age specified by the child protection law of the state in question.
- By a person who is responsible for the child's welfare.
- Under circumstances, which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened.
- The act defines sexual abuse as the use, persuasion, or coercion of any child to engage in any sexually explicit conduct (or any simulation of such conduct) for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of such conduct or rape, molestation, prostitution or incest with children."

Child abuse and neglect are unlawful acts and against GSUSA's policy for any volunteer or employed staff, male or female, to physically, sexually or mentally abuse or neglect any girl member.

In accordance with this policy, the Girl Scouts of Western New York, Inc. will not condone nor tolerate the following:

- Infliction of physically abusive behavior, bodily injury, upon girl members
- Physical neglect of girl members, including failure to provide adequate safety measures, care, and supervision in relation to Girl Scout activities
- Emotional maltreatment of girl members, including verbal abuse and/or verbal attacks

Child abuse and neglect are forms of behavior that negate the integrity of the adult/girl leadership relationship.

The council supports and maintains an environment that encourages any girl member who believes that she has been a victim of child abuse or neglect as defined in the organization's policy to report the incident(s) immediately to either her leader, another adult, or to the CEO of the council or his/her designated person.

Employees are required by New York State law to report any known incidence of child abuse to the CEO of the council or his/her designated person and proper authority.

The council reserves the right to refuse membership, to dismiss or exclude from affiliation with the council any volunteer who is found guilty of child abuse and neglect or has been convicted of child abuse and neglect.

The council will consider any of the above-mentioned stipulations as the basis for progressive disciplinary action, which can include dismissal or termination from the organization. Similarly, a volunteer who believes that a girl member is the victim of abuse or neglect must immediately report the fact to the CEO of the council or his/her designated person.

Any report of child abuse will be forwarded to an appropriate governmental agency. Reports are held in strict confidence and you will be informed that the report has been made. The council will protect the rights of the accused, who is considered innocent until proven guilty, by not discussing the situation or releasing specific information. The council will cooperate fully with appropriate law enforcement and social service agencies.

In the event that a Girl Scout volunteer is formally accused of, charged with, or under investigation by authorities for the crime of child abuse, the council has a responsibility to both the girls and adult involved. The following procedure will be followed:

A volunteer so accused must:

- suspend all Girl Scout activities and duties until the matter has been resolved; and
- turn over all monies, materials and records to a designated representative of the council.

If the individual involved is a troop leader, the council will focus its attention on assisting the service unit in helping the troop and parents to continue to function as a Girl Scout unit. A council representative will meet with parents to discuss the change in leadership, and their concerns for the future direction of the troop.

Some examples of child abuse are:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual molestation
- Emotional starvation
- Constant verbal attack or torment
- Deprivation of proper food, clothing, and/or shelter
- Being left alone for long periods of time

Child abuse and neglect are forms of behavior that negate the integrity of the adult/girl leadership relationship. The Girl Scouts of Western New York, Inc. will consider any of the above mentioned stipulations as the basis to refuse appointment/reappointment to any position, and to dismiss or suspend from any position or affiliation with our council, any volunteer who violates the aforementioned council policies, GSUSA policies, federal, New York State, and local laws, or who is found guilty of child abuse or neglect, or has been convicted of child abuse or neglect.