Volunteer Essentials

2026–2028 Edition



girl scouts of western new york

Contents

Welcome! 4

What's Inside? 4

All About Girl Scouts 5

Girl Scout Volunteers 5
Girl Scout Grade Levels 5
Inclusion 5
The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE) 6
Reflection 7
Progression 7
The Girl Scout Program: National Program Pillars 8
Important Differences: Patches, Badges, and Awards 8
Other Important Differences: Community Service and Take Action Projects 9
Traditions, Ceremonies, and Special Girl Scout Days 9
Highest Awards 10
Leadership Awards 10
Girl Scout Travel 10
Planning Overnight Adventures 10
Safety First 10
Transporting Girl Scouts 11

Troop Management 12

Your Role as a Girl Scout Volunteer 12
Your Responsibilities as a Girl Scout Volunteer 12
Planning Your First Troop Meeting 12
Can We Meet in a Private Home? 13
Girl Scout Troop Size 13
Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need 14
Safety in Girl Scouting 15
The Buddy System 15
Adding New Girl Scouts to Your Troop 15
Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion 15
Focus on Accessibility for All 16
Language Related to Disability 17
Registering Members with Cognitive Disabilities 17
Getting Support for Your Troop 17
Troop Management Tools and Resources 17

Troop Finances 20

Establishing a Troop Account 20
Money-Earning Basics for Troops 22
Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals 24

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Contents

Financial Assistance 24
Financial Management and Product Program Abilities by Grade Level 26
Working with Sponsors and Other Organizations 27
Fundraising and Working with Sponsors 27
Disbanding Troops and Unused Troop Funds 29

Engaging Girl Scouts by Level **30**
Understanding Healthy Development in Youth 30

Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts **36**
Recognize and Support Each Girl Scout 36
Promote Fairness 36
Build Trust 36
Inspire Open Communication 37
Manage Conflict 37
Communicate Effectively with Girl Scouts of Any Age 37
Address the Needs of Older Girl Scouts 38
Be Prepared for Sensitive Topics 38
Report Concerns 39
Child Abuse 39
Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment 40
Anti-Retaliation Policy 41
Accident/Incident Reporting 41
In Case of Emergencies 41

Engage Families **42**
Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents and Caregivers 42

Girl Scout Product Programs **43**
Five Essential Skills 43
Girl Scout Cookie History 43
Where Cookie Proceeds Go 44
Your Council's Role 44
Your Role 45
Product Program Safety 45
Selling Cookies Online 45
Supervising Girl Scouts While Selling 46
Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth 46
Cookie Donation Programs 48
Handling Product Complaints 48
Recognizing Cookie Sellers in the Media 48

Know How Much You're Appreciated **49**

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Welcome!

As a volunteer, you're not just helping—you're inspiring. You're a builder of community, a mentor, and a joyful guide who leads with kindness. Thanks to you, Girl Scouts of all ages will dream big, explore boldly, and make a real difference in the world. Thank you and welcome. We're glad you're here!

What's Inside?

This guide is designed to support you as a Girl Scout volunteer. From Girl Scout basics to managing your troop, we've got you covered! You can use the links in the Table of Contents to go directly to each section. Are you a new troop leader? We have a resource designed especially for you. Plus, council staff and volunteer coaches are ready to help throughout your first year and beyond!

- Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts
- Engaging Families
- Girl Scout Product Programs
- Additional Resources and Support
- All About Girl Scouts
- Troop Management
- Troop Finances
- Engaging Girl Scouts

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

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All About Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts' dreams are our dreams. A Girl Scout builds a better world—just as Girl Scouts have been doing for over a century. With programs coast-to-coast and around the globe, everyone can find their place in Girl Scouts and start creating the world they want to see.

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Girl Scout Volunteers

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

Young people can join Girl Scouts at any point from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

- **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)

Inclusion

Girl Scouts has a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, and we welcome and embrace individuals of all abilities and backgrounds in 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. This means that each Girl Scout needs to be able to feel seen for who they are and what they bring to the group.

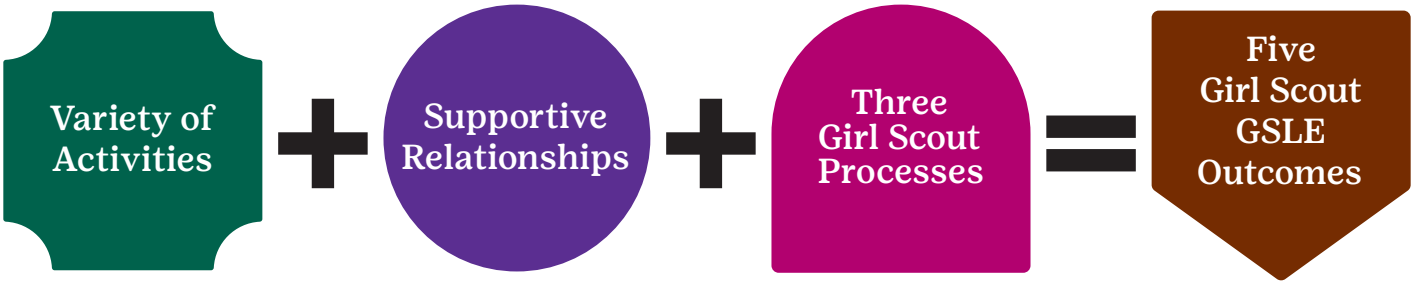
Part of the important work you'll do as a volunteer is modeling friendship and compassion for your Girl Scouts, and showing them what it means to practice empathy. By treating all Girl Scouts with kindness and respect, you can nurture an inclusive troop environment.

A critical component of inclusion is ensuring everyone can participate in Girl Scout activities. When scheduling, planning, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of everyone involved, taking into account school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, dietary requirements, religious holidays, and the accessibility of 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

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The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)



Regular meetings / activities | Emotionally & physically safe space | Girl Scout traditions

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE) is our research-based impact model that describes what members do in Girl Scouts, who they do it with, how they do it, and how they benefit. When planning your year, make sure you're implementing all parts of the GSLE regularly.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience was designed to include a **variety of fun and challenging activities** to help Girl Scouts learn, grow, and thrive. These include activities associated with:

- National Program Portfolio (badges, awards, and patches)
- Outdoor and camping experiences
- Community service and Take Action projects
- Field trips and events
- Girl Scout Cookie Program

The GSLE also emphasizes **supportive relationships**, seen in how volunteers care for the Girl Scouts they lead—encouraging their creative thinking, honoring inclusion, and nurturing a safe space overall. As a result, Girl Scouts develop positive relationships with their peers and feel a sense of belonging. When Girl Scouts feel supported and safe, they're more likely to achieve the five GSLE outcomes described below and, ultimately, reflect the Girl Scout mission.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience draws on **three unique processes** that encourage Girl Scouts to try new things, write their own stories, and develop the skills and confidence to say, "I know I can do this!"

- **Girl Scout-led.** Girl Scouts take the lead, no matter their age. From selecting badges to organizing activities, they gain confidence while following their dreams.
- **Learning by doing.** Participatory activities are fun for members of any age, but they also help Girl Scouts feel empowered to shape their own experience.
- **Cooperative learning.** Girl Scouts experience 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 Girl Scouts!

Naturally, "Girl Scout-led" at the Daisy level will look very different from Girl Scout-led at the Ambassador level. What's most important is that your Girl Scouts make decisions about the activities they'll do *together* and make choices as they're doing the activities *together.* As they learn from their successful and not-so-successful tries, they gain confidence.

All Girl Scouts should have the opportunity to lead within their peer group. By the time they're Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors, they'll 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.

And finally, when a variety of activities, supportive adults, and the three Girl Scout processes are combined, Girl Scouts demonstrate the **five GSLE outcomes**:

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- **Strong sense of self.** Girl Scouts have confidence in themselves and their abilities and form positive identities.
- **Positive values.** Girl Scouts act ethically, honestly, and responsibly, and show concern for others.
- **Challenge seeking.** Girl Scouts learn to take appropriate risks, try things even if they might fail, and learn from mistakes.
- **Healthy relationships.** Girl Scouts develop and maintain healthy relationships by communicating their feelings directly and resolving conflicts constructively.
- **Community problem solving.** Girl Scouts desire to contribute to the world in purposeful and meaningful ways, learn how to identify problems in the community, and create "action plans" to solve them.

One last tip: Tuning in to what interests your Girl Scouts and sparks their imaginations is much more important than completing all the activities on your list. Projects don't have to come out perfectly—in fact, it's a valuable learning experience when they don't—and 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 Girl Scouts take the lead**.

To learn more about the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, view our training on **gsLearn**.

Reflection

Reflection is the necessary post-activity debrief that reinforces what's been learned and gives Girl Scouts the confidence they need to make connections between the activities your troop tries and future challenges they might face.

Keep in mind that reflection doesn't need to be a formal process, though you can kick-start the conversation with three simple questions: 1) What? 2) So what? and 3) Now what?

First, go over the "what" of the activity. For example, ask:

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

Next, move to the "so what?" You might ask:

- So, what did you learn by doing this activity?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about your community (or environment, school, etc.) that you didn't know before?
- Why do you think this activity was important?
- What key learning can we take with us?

For the "now what?" say something like:

- Now that we've done this, what would you like to do next?
- Now that you know [thing learned] about yourselves, what would you like to try next?
- Now that we've completed this Take Action project, what could we do to make sure it continues to have impact?
- Given this experience, what's more of a priority to you now?
- What are you curious to learn more about?
- Where would you like to go?
- Who would you like to meet?

This form of reflection, or however you choose to reflect with your Girl Scouts, is a powerful component of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. It helps Girl Scouts carry with them what they've learned throughout the rest of their lives.

Progression

Girl Scout programming grows with Girl Scouts! While some activities—like outdoor adventures or learning business skills—are part of every Girl Scout grade level, each group experiences them in their own way. Brownies and Juniors won't be doing the same things as Seniors and Ambassadors, but with your support, they'll be ready when the time comes.

At Girl Scouts, progression is key, whether Girl Scouts are camping, on a troop trip, or running their cookie businesses through the cookie program. Our programming is designed to build confidence and skills year after year, helping Girl Scouts feel excited to try new things and take on bigger challenges. As a volunteer, you'll help create a safe, supportive space where Girl Scouts can explore, make mistakes, and grow—every step of the way.

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The Girl Scout Program: National Program Pillars

Girl Scouts' four program pillars—STEM, Life Skills, Outdoors, and Entrepreneurship—form the foundation of the Girl Scout program.

1. **STEM.** Girl Scouts 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 (science, technology, engineering, and math) and gain the confidence to turn their ideas into breakthrough inventions to help others.
2. **Life Skills.** Girl Scouts' life skills programming equips Girl Scouts with practical skills and tools that foster financial literacy, civic engagement, and community service. It's programming that helps 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.
3. **Outdoors.** Girl Scouts have been building outdoor confidence and skills for over 100 years! They do this through a variety of outdoor adventures like camping and nature-focused badge work that have them spending time outdoors and developing a lifelong appreciation of nature. This appreciation sparks Girl Scouts' desire to take action as environmental stewards in their community and beyond.
4. **Entrepreneurship.** Starting with the iconic Girl Scout Cookie Program and including Girl Scouts' fall product program and a series of entrepreneurship badges, this pillar instills and nurtures an entrepreneurial mindset in Girl Scout. It fuels their curiosity and confidence as they learn the essentials of running their own businesses and how to think like entrepreneurs.

Important Differences: Patches, Badges, and Awards

Girl Scouts from each grade level have one official uniform item (a sash, vest, or tunic) to display badges, pins, awards, and other insignia. This item is required when you participate in ceremonies or officially represent Girl Scouts. Girl Scouts can wear their sash, vest, or tunic over official Girl Scout gear or over a white shirt and khaki pants or skirt. Depending on grade level, official uniform items may be blue, brown, green, or khaki.

Uniform components can be **purchased on-line**.

Girl Scouts of Western NY has **three shop locations** through our council. Patch, badges, and awards are designed to give Girl Scouts different leadership-building experiences, all while they have fun!

- **Patches** are about sparking interest. Often called fun patches or participation patches, Girl Scouts receive them for participating in a special event or activity, like troop activities, events or activities that are part of council-sponsored programs... It could even be a trip to the zoo. Patches are worn on the back of a Girl Scouts' uniform.
- **Badges** are about skill building. When a Girl Scout earns a badge, it shows they've learned a new skill, such as how to make a first aid kit, build and test a toy race car, or take great digital photos. Badges may even seed a future career. Badges are worn on the front of a Girl Scout's uniform.
- **Awards** are about deepening understanding. Whether they're focused on leadership, service, or earning the Bronze, Silver, or Gold Award (Girl Scouts' Highest Awards), by earning an award, Girl Scouts show their commitment to growth and making a meaningful impact. Awards are often pins and worn on the front of a Girl Scout's uniform.

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Other 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 address essential needs, but at different levels.**

- When a Girl Scout performs community service, they're responding to an immediate need in a one-off, "doing for" capacity. In other words, they're making an impact *right now.*
- Through Take Action/service learning, Girl Scouts 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 aside time 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 future projects—or in 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—across the country and around the globe—and remind them how far their fellow trailblazers have come and just how far they'll go.

A few of those extra special days, when you're encouraged to turn up the celebrations, include:

- Juliette Gordon Low's birthday, or Founder's Day, on October 31, which marks the birth in 1860 of **Girl Scouts of the USA founder Juliette Gordon Low** in Savannah, Georgia.
- **World Thinking Day,** February 22, celebrating international friendship. This is an opportunity for Girl Scouts and Girl Guides to connect with one another and explore a common theme around the world.
- Girl Scouts' birthday, March 12, commemorating the day in 1912 when Juliette Gordon Low officially registered the organization's first 18 girl members in Savannah, Georgia.

At Girl Scouts, we embrace our rich cultural legacy. Whether they're working on a new badge, making new friends, or closing meetings with a friendship circle, your troop can learn and incorporate **traditions, ceremonies, and special Girl Scout days**—which are a few of the ways we remember and honor our long and cherished history.

Know that we continually review Girl Scout norms and traditions to ensure they're relevant and inclusive. At times this may lead to our modifying or discontinuing traditions to make way for new ones.

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All About Girl Scouts

Highest Awards

The Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards honor Girl Scouts 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 may want to take on an issue that's 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 a group of Juniors (grades 4-5).
- The **Girl Scout Silver Award** can be earned by Cadettes (grades 6-8), either individually or in a small group.
- The **Girl Scout Gold Award** can be earned by Seniors (grades 9-10) and Ambassadors (grades 11-12). Girl Scouts work individually to earn this award.

Every Girl Scout can earn our Highest Awards. Learn **how to get started**!

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.

Girl Scout Travel

Girl Scouts love to explore—and travel is a big part of that adventure! Whether it's a local field trip or a journey across the globe, Girl Scout travel is special because the Girl Scouts take the lead. They decide where to go and what to do, and they take on more responsibility as they grow, building lifelong skills along the way. From short outings to international trips or council-led **Destinations**, these experiences help Girl Scouts gain confidence, learn to plan, and discover the world in exciting new ways. Field trips and overnight adventures bring learning to life—connecting badge work to real-world experiences like exploring new cuisines, budgeting for a trip, and diving into nature.

Want to add a special Girl Scout touch? Consider visiting the Juliette Gordon Low Birthplace in Savannah or one of the WAGGGS World Centers around the globe. Many councils also offer camps that troops can rent—perfect for staying local or going far! Anyone traveling on a Girl Scout trip must be a registered Girl Scout - youth or adult. This is required for our insurance to cover them and to provide a safe environment for Girl Scouts.

As your troop plans its next journey, your role is to guide and cheer Girl Scouts on—not do the work for them. Share ideas, ask thoughtful questions, and support their decisions with enthusiasm. With your encouragement, they'll build confidence and create unforgettable memories!

The **GSWNY Travel Guide** and the **GSWNY Field Trip and Travel Page** can get you set for everything from local field trips to international travel.

Planning Overnight Adventures

Girl Scout travel starts with day trips. Learn more through the **Field Trips & Travel course** on gsLearn or by reviewing our **Day Trips Checklist**.

Contact your council as soon as you start thinking about planning an overnight trip to find out more about their approval process. They also likely have training programs to boost your confidence as a chaperone.

Not sure where to begin? 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.

Once Girl Scouts have mastered planning and embarking on trips in the U.S., they might be ready for a global travel adventure! Global trips usually take a few years to plan, and the **Girl Scout Guide to Global Travel** can guide you through the entire process.

Safety First

If you're planning any kind of trip—from a short field trip to an overseas expedition—the "Trip and Travel" section of Safety Activity Checkpoints is your go-to resource for safety. Your council may also have additional resources and approval processes that can be found in **Safety Activity Checkpoints.**

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Transporting Girl Scouts

How parents and caregivers decide to transport Girl Scouts between their homes and Girl Scout meeting places is each parent's and caregivers 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.
- Girl Scouts never drive other Girl Scouts.
- 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 youth-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 youth-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-youth 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 Girl Scouts.

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

- **Review the "Transporting Girl Scouts"** 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** section below.
- 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.

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Troop Management

Your Role as a Girl Scout Volunteer

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you'll embark on your own leadership journey while you help Girl Scouts develop the leadership skills they'll use to make the world a better place. Below 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're decision-makers who 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 with, and cheers on your troop, not as a teacher with a planned lesson or activity but as a mentor.
- Ensures each member understands and can carry out their responsibilities within the troop—and gives Girl Scouts more responsibilities as they grow and develop.
- Encourages Girl Scouts to build their skills and develop their ethics.
- Helps Girl Scouts feel seen and included—like they belong.

It's important to remember that:

- You can't know everything your Girl Scouts might ever want to learn.
- You'll explore and learn alongside your Girl Scouts and build 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

- Embrace the Girl Scout Promise and Law.
- Guide and coach Girl Scouts through the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- Complete required trainings and follow Girl Scout policies, procedures, and safety guidelines.
- Share your skills and knowledge with positivity and flexibility.
- Partner with your Girl Scouts to ensure activities are Girl Scout-led and hands-on.
- Plan fun, interactive activities that reflect Girl Scouts' interests and needs.
- Partner with troop parents and caregivers to create an environment that encourages family support and participation.
- Recognize the needs of individual Girl Scouts and working with parents and caregivers to provide flexibility and accommodations to ensure a successful experience.
- Communicate regularly with troop families using email, phone, social media, or other tools.
- Handle registration forms, permission slips, and other paperwork.
- Manage troop funds responsibly, with honesty and accurate record keeping.
- Stay connected with your council, including the volunteer support team.
- Nurture a positive, safe and inclusive environment for every Girl Scout.

Planning Your First Troop Meeting

Choosing a Meeting Place

Meeting places should be welcoming to all. This could mean locations that serve diverse populations, are openly inclusive, have diverse staff, and use welcoming language. What makes a great meeting space depends on your troop, but look for spaces that are available and free to use, large enough for your troop activities, and equipped with resources that meet your needs. Also, make sure your space generally accommodates (is accessible to) individuals with physical disabilities who might attend meetings, including troop members and parents/caregivers.

Consider this as a starting point for a conversation with the contact of a potential meeting space:

"I'm a Girl Scout volunteer with a group of [number of members] Girl Scouts. We're doing lots of great things for youth 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 Girl Scouts 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]."

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Troop Management

GIRL SCOUT ADULT-TO-YOUTH RATIOS	GROUP MEETINGS		EVENTS, TRAVEL, AND CAMPING	
	Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of youth:	**Add One** additional volunteer for each additional:	**Two** unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for up to this number of youth:	**Add One** additional volunteer for each additional:
DAISY GIRL SCOUTS (Grades K–1)	12	1-6	6	1-4
BROWNIE GIRL SCOUTS (Grades 2–3)	20	1-8	12	1-6
JUNIOR GIRL SCOUTS (Grades 4–5)	25	1-10	16	1-8
CADETTE GIRL SCOUTS (Grades 6–8)	25	1-12	20	1-10
SENIOR GIRL SCOUTS (Grades 9–10)	30	1-15	24	1-12
AMBASSADOR GIRL SCOUTS (Grades 11–12)	30	1-15	24	1-12

Can We Meet in a Private Home?

- Meetings or activities that involve Girl Scouts are **not allowed in private homes**, including yards or private outdoor spaces.
- 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.

Want more support? Contact your council or service unit support team for help securing a troop meeting place. You can also check out the gsLearn course **Your First Troop Meeting**.

Girl Scout Troop Size

The troop size "sweet spot" is large enough to support an interactive and cooperative learning environment and small enough to encourage individual development. Though the ideal troop size is 12 Girl Scouts, we recommend that group membership falls within the below ranges—no smaller than the low end, and no larger than the high end.

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

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Troop Management

A Girl Scout troop/group must have a minimum of five Girl Scout youth and two approved adult volunteers. Be sure to double-check the volunteer-to-youth ratio table below to make sure you have the right number of adults present for group meetings, events, travel, and camping.

Adults and youth registering in groups of fewer than five Girl Scout youth and two approved adult volunteers who are not related to each other or in a relationship, at least one of whom is female, will be registered as individual Girl Scouts to accurately reflect their status and program experience. Individual members are always welcome to participate in Girl Scout activities and events.

Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need

Girl Scout groups gathering in person or virtually must follow these guidelines:

- At least two unrelated, registered, background-checked volunteers must be present and actively supervising. Youth leaders cannot take their place.
- At least one of the volunteers must be female.
- The two required volunteers must not be related or live in the same household.

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 or 1-888-837-6410 so that a new co-leader can be approved.

Any troops with fewer than 2 approved co-leaders cannot meet until the new co-leader is approved and the troop fulfills this safety requirement.

Adult supervision rules apply to all Girl Scout activities, including meetings, trip/travel, camps, events, and activities. There are no exceptions. Report any deviation from this policy to your council at customercare@gswny.org or 1-888-837-6410.

Note: Invited or additional participating adults can be related, but they cannot replace the two unrelated leaders.

Determine the minimum number of adult chaperones needed:

- Adult-to-youth ratios vary based on participants' ages and the type of activity.
- Group meetings require fewer adults; refer to the "Group Meetings" column in the table below.
- Outings, activities, camping, and travel require more supervision. Refer to the "Events, Travel, and Camping" column in the table.

Count all children (Girl Scouts or not) in supervision ratios unless they're under the constant care of their own parent/guardian who is not acting as a chaperone.

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 Chaperon/Helper.
- Each participant has her own bed, or parent/guardian permission must be obtained if Girl Scouts 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 Scout members. Always support and maintain an all-Girl Scout 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 Girl Scouts' 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 Girl Scouts, this type of accommodation may not be possible. If this is the case, men do not supervise Girl Scouts in the sleeping area of the event and the adult-to-Girl Scout ratio is adjusted accordingly.

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- An exception is made for family members during events such as parent-Girl Scout or family overnights; families are allowed to sleep in the same area, otherwise adults and youth cannot sleep in the same area unless there are at least two unrelated adult females present.

Safety in Girl Scouting

The emotional and physical safety and well-being of Girl Scouts is our top priority. Our resource Safety Activity Checkpoints outlines the safety standards and guidelines used in Girl Scouting, which apply to all Girl Scout activities. Volunteers should refer to **Safety Activity Checkpoints** when planning Girl Scout-sanctioned activities.

Safety Activity Checkpoints contains two primary sections, an introduction, and an appendix. You'll find:

- Safety standards and requirements for adult supervision, transportation, permission slips, preparation for troop activities, and field trips and overnight trips.
- Individual safety checkpoints for specific activities—such as camping, internet use, and water sports—that provide activity-specific information.
- Specifics on activities not permitted by Girl Scouts of the USA and actions that Girl Scouts and volunteers should not take.
- Policies on chartered aircraft trips and aviation.
- First aid and overall health information.
- Standards for well-being and inclusivity, and ways to include Girl Scouts with disabilities and to support everyone's emotional safety.

The Buddy System

Use the buddy system anytime your troop leaves your meeting site or attends a field trip. Divide your troop into teams of at least two members, with each Girl Scout responsible for always staying with their buddy/buddies, warning them of danger, giving them immediate assistance if it's safe to do so, and seeking help if needed. Girl Scouts are encouraged to stay near their buddy/buddies or join with another team, so that if someone is injured, one person cares for the injured party while others seek help.

Registering Youth and Adults in Girl Scouting

Every participant (youth and adult) must register to become a member of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). GSUSA membership dues are valid for the Girl Scout membership year, which runs annually from October 1 through September 30. Membership dues cannot be transferred to another member and are not refundable.

Preregistration for the upcoming membership year occurs in the spring. Early registration allows for uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps troops and councils plan ahead, and gets members excited about all the great things they'll do as Girl Scouts in the year to come. Note that 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 Girl Scouts to Your Troop

Growing your troop is a great way to share the power of the Girl Scout experience! **There are many ways to get the word out**, like hanging posters in local schools, using social media to reach families in your community, and including your troop in your council's opportunity catalog or troop catalog.

For help registering your troop, contact GSWNY's customer care team: customercare@gswny.org or 1-888-837-6410

Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance and Inclusion

Girl Scouts is for every girl, and that's why we embrace Girl Scouts of all abilities and backgrounds with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each Girl Scout—regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, physical or cognitive ability, sexual orientation, primary language, or religion—is an equal and valued member of the group.

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We believe inclusion is an approach and an attitude, rather than a set of guidelines. Inclusion is about cultivating environments that enable every Girl Scout to feel a sense of belonging. It's about treating everyone with respect and dignity, and celebrating their unique strengths. It's about being a sister to every Girl Scout. Some ways to cultivate inclusion and build belonging are to:

- Welcome every Girl Scout as a valued peer, and focus on building community. To start interactions off with care, learn each person's name, caregivers included, with correct pronunciation. Use a warm and friendly tone, and consistently greet each community member when they arrive. Say goodbye to each person by name as well.
- Cultivate cooperation over competition, when appropriate.
- Cultivate a confidential, socially comfortable environment. Occasionally ask those who participate in Girl Scout programming if anything is worrying or bothering them. Be a trusted adult they can come to with their needs and emotions without judgment. Allow, but don't require, participants to say the Pledge of Allegiance or the Girl Scout Promise and Law at meetings.
- Model respect for and understanding of all members and their families. Learn about the cultures and identities represented in your Girl Scout community, and honor cultural differences. Be sure not to put anyone on the spot or ask them to educate you about their culture/identity. Welcome personal sharing about people's cultural traditions, spoken languages, and family structures. Make this kind of sharing a consistent, reliable part of your time together.
- Embrace diverse gender expressions and identities. Invite each community member to share their personal pronouns aloud or on name tags, explaining that no one has to share if they don't want to. Make these conversations matter of fact and use a positive tone.
- Prioritize equitable communications, including feedback requests such as surveys, by ensuring consistent openness and reach to all members/families
- Learn the most valuable ways to support individual children and adults with disabilities, learning differences, and/or neurodivergence. Ask parents, "What can I do to support your child to participate/learn/feel successful in our group?"

To learn more about this topic, check out our **Delivering Inclusive Program** training on gsLearn. If you have questions about accommodating an individual member, please reach out to your council.

Focus on Accessibility for All

A key part of creating an inclusive Girl Scout environment is making sure everyone is able to participate. 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. Seek to learn about the special needs of any members who have disabilities or whose parents/caregivers have disabilities—though don't rely on visual cues to inform you. Disabilities include physical, sensory, and cognitive conditions, and not all of these are visible.

Approximately 20% of the U.S. population has a disability—that's one in five people across every socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and religion. If you want to find out what an individual with a disability needs **to make their Girl Scout experience successful**, simply ask them or their parent/caregiver. If you're open and receptive, they'll likely respond in kind.

Remember, it's important that all Girl Scouts be rewarded for their best efforts, not the completion of a task. Give everyone the opportunity to do their best, and they likely will! Sometimes that means changing a few rules or approaching an activity in a more creative way. Here are some examples of how to modify activities so that everyone can participate:

- Invite a member to complete an activity after they've observed others doing it.
- If an activity calls for using a sense that a Girl Scout doesn't have (like sight for a Girl Scout who's blind), find ways for them to participate using other senses. Can they touch objects and/or participate by hearing?
- If an activity calls for running, an individual who's unable to run might walk if possible and desired by them, or perhaps move in another way.

To learn more, take our **Delivering Inclusive Program** course on gsLearn.

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Language Related to Disability

First and foremost, seek personal preferences. How would the Girl Scout or family member you're interacting with like you to refer to their disability (if at all)? When this information can't be determined or you're speaking more generally, consider taking a person-first approach—acknowledging the person first, then the condition or disability, or what a person has, not what that person is. So not "schizophrenic person," but "person with schizophrenia."

Still, know that there's considerable disagreement here, with many in the disability community preferring an identity-first approach (e.g., "disabled person," not "person with a disability"), which reinforces the importance of establishing and honoring personal preferences whenever possible.

When interacting with a person with a disability that you're aware of, keep the following guidance in mind.

- Speak directly to the person, not through a family member or friend.
- It's okay to offer assistance to an individual 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 person's wheelchair is invading their space and should be avoided.
- When speaking for more than a few minutes to an individual who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at their eye level.
- When speaking to an individual who is deaf and using an interpreter, speak to them, not to the interpreter.
- When greeting an individual 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."

To learn more, take our **Delivering Inclusive Program** course on gsLearn.

Registering Members with Cognitive Disabilities

Girl Scouts with cognitive disabilities can be registered as closely as possible to their chronological ages. They should wear the uniform of the associated grade level. As a volunteer, you're encouraged to make any adaptations to activities for Girl Scouts with cognitive disabilities.

These Girl Scouts may choose to retain their youth membership through their 21st year and then move into an adult membership category.

Getting Support for Your Troop

Remember, you're never alone—your Girl Scout support team has your back! Just like Girl Scouts support each other, you'll have a team of council staff and fellow volunteers ready to help you succeed. Here's how to build your own troop support system:

- **Connect with your local Service Unit** for local training, advice, and answers to your questions.
- **Build your volunteer troop team early**—include parents, caregivers, friends, family, and community members who bring energy and unique skills.
- **Know that troop committee volunteers** are your extra hands and eyes. They can help with meetings, outings, or take on specific roles like troop treasurer.
- **Encourage flexible volunteering**—even small roles make a big impact. Help caregivers find ways to contribute that match their strengths.
- **Empower your volunteers.** Just like the Girl Scouts, once your fellow volunteers see they can succeed, they'll be excited to stay involved!

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. You'll find tools to keep your troop going strong on **MyGS**, which you can always access via the icon on the upper right corner of our website. Click/tap the "login" button, then "my account"—you'll see the gsLearn and VTK buttons on the left menu bar, accessible on any desktop, tablet, or mobile device. The menu bar will be populated with any trainings you should view.

Following are some important resources you'll want to be sure to check out.

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Troop Management

The Volunteer Toolkit

The Volunteer Toolkit is a customizable planning tool where you can find suggested meeting plans for most badges, access activity guides, track your Girl Scouts' achievements, and so much more. Featuring inspiring ideas for engaging 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.

With the Volunteer Toolkit, Girl Scouts, parents/caregivers and leaders can explore meeting topics and program activities together and follow the fun as they plan their Girl Scout year.

Troop leaders can:

- Plan the troop's calendar year and meeting schedule.
- Email parents/caregivers with one click.
- View the troop roster, renew Girl Scout memberships, and update Girl Scout contact information.
- View meeting plans for badges, including suggested tracks for multi-level groups (K–5 and 6–12).
- Customize meeting agendas to fit the 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 meeting attendance and the troop's badge achievements.
- Add council and other events to the troop's calendar.
- 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 the troop is working on.
- Renew their memberships and update 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.

gsLearn

gsLearn is our online training platform that gives you easy access to online and in-person learning opportunities as well as the ability to track all your accomplishments! Learn at your own pace, access additional resources, and repeat trainings as needed!

To access gsLearn, first log in to MyGS. You'll find the platform in the options on the left-hand navigation bar.

More Tools and Resources

- **Volunteer Basic Training Series.** These **three short videos** introduce you to Girl Scouting and set you up to begin leading a troop. All troop co-leaders are required to watch these videos and complete the Knowledge Check before meeting with Girl Scouts.
- **New Leader Welcome Meetings.** All new co-leaders leaders are encouraged to attend a **New Leader Welcome Meeting** during their first year of leading a troop. New co-leaders will have the opportunity to meet with council staff and fellow new co-leaders.
- **Members tab.** The **resources on this page** will help you along the way in your volunteer journey. Whether you're looking for guidance on managing troop finances or need help planning your first year of meetings, you'll find everything you need.
- **Safety Activity Checkpoints.** Safety is paramount in Girl Scouting, and **Safety Activity Checkpoints** contains everything you need to know to help keep everyone safe during various activities done outside of 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/done that, this **volunteer-to-volunteer resource** has what you need for a successful troop year.
- **Troop year plans.** Our grade-level-specific **troop year plans** are the best tool for first-year troop leaders getting started with Girl Scouts, or to help any troop leader in planning out a well-balanced Girl Scout year. The entire year is mapped out—just follow along to help your Girl Scouts complete badge activities, improve their communities, and explore the world around them.
- **Girl Scout handbooks.** These **grade level-specific handbooks** break it down for your Girl Scouts. Adventures include earning badges and awards, running a cookie business, and learning about the traditions that have brought Girl Scouts together for over a century.

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Troop Management

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

Even More Learning Opportunities

We know that when you have the knowledge and skills you need to manage your Girl Scouts, both you and your troop thrive. We offer national onboarding training for new troop leaders, to combine with local training courses provided by your council.

- **What Girl Scouts Do.** This course introduces what Girl Scouts do at each grade level and how they do it, helping you plan your troop's year. **Take the course**.
- **Your First Troop Meeting.** This course provides new troop leaders with the structure and tools to plan a successful first troop meeting—and beyond—with their Girl Scout troop. **Take the course.**
- **The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE).** This course teaches you how to implement the Girl Scout Leadership Experience—the framework that sets Girl Scouts apart—in an age-appropriate way for your troop. **Take the course.**
- **Family Engagement: The Key to Success.** This course highlights the value of family engagement and provides practical strategies for how to enlist family support. **Take the course**.
- **The Girl Scout Cookie Program**. This course reviews the basics of the Girl Scout Cookie Program, including why Girl Scouts sell cookies, who the cookie bakers are, how to use your cookie proceeds safely with your troop and with support from parents/caregivers. **Take the course**.
- **Troop Safety.** This course equips you with the fundamentals to keep your troop safe in meetings and on field trips. You'll also learn about a go-to guide that helps your troop stay safe no matter where your adventures take you! **Take the course**.
- **Funding the Fun.** Explore the basics of managing your troop's funds, including how troops fund meetings and activities, and manage and report their finances to their councils. **Take the course.**

These courses are available online via gsLearn as referenced above.

Other Program Courses

- **Leading Multi-Level Troops.** Multi-level troops provide unique opportunities for Girl Scouts and their families. This course provides tips, tools, and strategies for leading a multi-level troop through an exceptional Girl Scout experience. **Take the course**.
- **Field Trips and Travel.** This course guides you in planning a Girl Scout trip. It also covers the concept of Girl Scout travel progression. **Take the course**.
- **Sexual and Child Abuse Prevention.** Child abuse and neglect are difficult subjects to think about, yet the prevention of abuse is a topic Girl Scouts takes *very seriously*. This training prepares supervising adults o Girl Scout youth to recognize, respond to, and report concerns of child abuse and neglect. **Take the course**.
- **Delivering Inclusive Program.** In this course, you'll practice using inclusive language to support Girl Scouts of all backgrounds and identities and foster a cohesive troop environment. **Take the course.**

Courses are also offered about specific badges, including Math in Nature and Mental Wellness, as well as Daisy petals.

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Troop Finances

With your guidance, your Girl Scouts will learn money management skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Your Girl Scout troop will plan and finance its own activities, and you'll coach your Girl Scouts as they earn and manage troop funds. Troop activities are powered by proceeds earned through council-sponsored product program activities (such as the Girl Scout Cookie Program), group money-earning activities (council approved, of course), and any dues your troop may charge.

Remember that all funds raised, earned, collected, or otherwise received in the name of and for the benefit of Girl Scouting belong to the troop as a whole and must be used for the purposes of Girl Scouting. Funds are administered through the troop and do not belong to individuals.

Establishing a Troop Account

You'll need a safe place to deposit your troop dues, product program proceeds, and other funds. If you're a new leader of an existing troop, you may inherit a checking account, but with a new troop, you'll want to open a new bank account. If your group is earning and spending money, the group needs to set up a bank account.

Here are a few helpful tips you can take to the bank:

- Ask your local service unit if they have preferred banking partners and specific account-opening procedures. Be sure to find a bank that has free checking and low fees.
- Designate a "troop treasurer"—that is, one person responsible for troop funds and for keeping a daily account of expenditures.
- Ensure your account comes with a debit card you can use during activities or trips. These transactions are easier to track than cash payments at the end of the year.
- Be prepared and make sure another troop volunteer has a debit card for the troop account in case the main card is lost.
- Handle a lost troop debit card the same way you would a personal debit card: cancel it immediately.

Keep troop funds in the bank before an activity or trip and pay for as many items as possible in advance of your departure.

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 Girl Scouts.
- 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.

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Troop Finances

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.

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 Scout 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 Scout 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 Girl Scouts and/or leaders

As with all other elements of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, Girl Scouts should provide input regarding troop expenses. All troop expenses must be documented with receipts and reflected on the Finance Report using the online Volunteer 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 bank statement showing the balance on April 30th. 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.

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Troop Finances

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

Money-Earning Basics for Troops

Troops flex their financial muscles in two distinct ways:

1. **The Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product Program,** organized by the council. All youth members are eligible to participate in two council-sponsored product program activities each year with volunteer supervision—the Girl Scout Cookie Program and one other council-authorized product program. Please remember, volunteers and Girl Scout council staff don't sell cookies and other products—Girl Scouts do. Daisy and Brownie Girl Scouts may participate in council-sponsored product sales programs only.
2. **Group money-earning activities** organized by the troop (not by the council) that are planned and carried out by Girl Scouts (in partnership with volunteers) and that earn money for the group.

Participation Guidance

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

- Voluntary participation
- Permission of each member'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 member
- 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 Girl Scouts through 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.
- **Troops are encouraged to participate in council product programs as their primary money-earning activity**; any group money earning shouldn't compete with the Girl Scout Cookie Program or other council product programs.
- **Service units or troops (Junior, Cadette, Senior and Ambassador only) may organize additional money-earning activities** to support Girl Scout 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 requested in October, during Fall Product Program or March, during the cookie program, may be denied.

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Troop Finances

- **Written approval from GSWNY is needed** to participate in an additional Money-earning Activity. To apply:
  1. Troops must 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.
- **GSWNY prohibits games of chance.** Any activity that could be considered a game of chance (raffles, contests, bingo, etc.) is prohibited.
- **Girl Scouts' *Blue Book of Basic Documents* policy forbids Girl Scouts from directly soliciting cash.** Girl Scouts 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 program donation programs. An exception is to allow Seniors and Ambassadors to solicit funds for their Gold Award projects.
- **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 participants** and be consistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- **Money earned is for Girl Scout activities and is not to be retained by individuals.** Girl Scouts 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.
- **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 Girl Scouts (such as paintings, blankets, etc.) or enhanced through the Girl Scouts' 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.
- **Money earning projects** may be used to support Gold, Silver, and Bronze Award projects.

Sample Money-Earning Activities

Collections/drives

- Cell phones for refurbishment
- Used ink cartridges turned in for money
- Christmas tree recycling

Food/meal events

- Lunch box auction (prepared lunch or meal auctioned off)
- Themed meals, like a high tea or a build-your-own-taco bar, related to activities Girl Scouts are planning; for instance, if they're earning money for travel, they could tie the meal to their destination

Services

- Service-a-thon (people sponsor a Girl Scout doing service and funds go to support a trip or other activity)
- Babysitting for a special event
- Raking leaves, weeding, cutting grass, shoveling snow, walking pets
- Cooking class or other specialty class

The Girl Scout Cookie Program and other council-sponsored product programs are designed to unleash Girl Scouts' entrepreneurial potential. From there, your troop may decide to earn additional funds on its own.

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Troop Finances

Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals

As a volunteer, you have the opportunity to facilitate Girl Scout-led financial planning, which may include the following steps for your troop:

1. **Set goals for money-earning activities.** What does the group hope to accomplish through this activity? In addition to earning money, what skills do Girl Scouts hope to build? What leadership opportunities present themselves?
2. **Create a budget.** Use a budget worksheet that includes both expenses (cost of supplies, admission to events, travel, and so on) and available income (the group's account balance, projected cookie proceeds, etc.).
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 money-earning activity be necessary to achieve the group's financial goals? In this planning stage, engage members through the Girl Scout processes (Girl Scout-led, learning by doing, and cooperative learning) and consider the value of any potential activity. Have Girl Scouts 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 your troop created.

Remember: It's great for Girl Scouts to have opportunities like the Girl Scout Cookie Program to earn funds that help them fulfill their goals. As a volunteer, try to help Girl Scouts 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 them to spend any money!

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 Girl Scouts:

- **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 Girl Scouts 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.

Girl Scouts 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 (Girl Scouts may apply once a year)
- Campership for summer resident and day camp
- Program fees for GSWNY-sponsored program events (Girl Scout may apply once a year)
- Girl Scout Destinations (formerly known as Wider Opportunities) up to 50% of program registration fee.
- GSWNY council sponsored trips

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Troop Finances

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 Girl Scouts. The amount of funding available is determined by donations to Girl Scouts of Western New York. Girl Scouts 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.

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Financial Management and Product Program Abilities by Grade Level

Girl Scouts build their financial and sales savvy as they grow in Girl Scouting. Each person learns a little differently, but below are some examples of opportunities for Girl Scouts' progression at each grade level.

Girl Scout Daisies (grades K-1)

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

Girl Scout Brownies (grades 2-3)

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

Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4-5)

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

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Troop Finances

Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors (grades 6-12)

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

Working with Sponsors and Other Organizations

Local sponsors help bring Girl Scout experiences to life! Community partners—like businesses, organizations, and individuals—can support your troop in creative, meaningful, and inclusive ways. Make the most of these connections! Keep in mind that sponsors may be able to offer meeting spaces, volunteer time, activity materials, in-kind donations, and/or equipment.

Don't forget to celebrate your sponsors for their support! Encourage your Girl Scouts to say thank you with cards or invitations to meetings or ceremonies, or by teaming up on a Take Action project.

Just be sure to check with your council before reaching out to sponsors. The council can guide you with regard to policies, existing partnerships, and best practices.

Here are a few tips for partnering with other organizations:

- **Don't fundraise in uniform.** Girl Scouts can't raise money for other organizations while wearing anything that identifies them as Girl Scouts (like uniforms or pins). However, they *can* support causes through Take Action projects or community service.
- **Keep it nonpolitical.** Girl Scouts should not participate in political campaigns or events in any official capacity. That means no rallies, petitions, or political fundraising while representing Girl Scouts.
- **Respect religious practices.** Girl Scout groups should be respectful when working with religious organizations, but no one should be required to participate in religious observances.
- **Avoid endorsing commercial products.** Girl Scouts and volunteers shouldn't promote or sell retail products. This policy has been in place since 1939!

Fundraising and Working with Sponsors

GSWNY's Fund Development department is responsible for raising money to support our Girl Scouts' 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 Girl Scouts 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:

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Troop Finances

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 nonprofit 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 Girl Scouts 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 Girl Scouts 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 require donations to be formally acknowledged directly by the nonprofit organization for tax purposes and to adhere to IRS regulations; 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.

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Disbanding Troops and Unused Troop Funds

Leaders of Disbanding troops must complete the **Troop Disbanding Form** and final Troop Financial Activity Report (TFAR) (available in the Forms and Documents section of www.gswny.org), which provides information on the troop finances, bank account, resources, and placement of Girl Scouts. When a troop disbands, the bank account and any equipment (flags, tents etc.) shall become property of the council or service unit. All funds raised in the name of Girl Scouts are the property of Girl Scouts of Western New York (GSWNY). Troops and Service Units serve as stewards of these funds and are responsible for ensuring that they are managed and distributed in accordance with council policies. Troop funds are not the property of any individual Girl Scout. If the troop does not re-register within one year, the funds will remain to benefit Girl Scouts within the service unit. If a troop disbands, ages out, or otherwise ceases operations and the account is not properly closed, those funds remain the property of GSWNY and may be reassigned by the council to support Girl Scout programming. If one troop merges with another, troop funds go with the remaining Girl Scouts 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 Scout activities. These activities must be in keeping with the Girl Scout mission and outcomes. Girl Scout activities can include purchasing materials to support another organization through take-action projects.

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Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

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

Understanding Healthy Development in Youth

It sounds simple, but just being attentive to what Girl Scouts 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; below are some guidelines for meeting Girl Scouts' needs and abilities at different grade levels. Keep in mind that these guidelines reflect neurotypical experiences.

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

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Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

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

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Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

GIRL SCOUT JUNIORS	
At the Girl Scout Junior level (fourth and fifth grades), many Juniors...	**This means...**
Want to make decisions and express their opinions.	Whenever possible, allowing them to make decisions and express their opinions through guided discussion and active reflection activities. Also, have them set rules for listening to others' opinions and offering assistance in decision making.
Are social and enjoy working in groups.	Allowing them to team up in small or large groups for art projects, performances, and written activities, if they would like to.
Are aware of expectations and sensitive to the judgments of others.	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 they can be comfortable sharing theirs.
Are concerned about equity and fairness.	Not shying away from discussing why rules are in place and having them develop their own rules for their group.
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 other people.	Asking them 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.
Have strong fine and gross motor skills and coordination.	Engaging them in moving their minds and their bodies. Allow them to express themselves through the written word, choreography, and so on.
Love to act in plays, create music, and dance.	They might like to tell a story through playwriting, playing an instrument, or choreographing a dance.
May be starting puberty, which may include beginning breast development, skin changes, and weight changes. Some may be getting their periods.	Being sensitive to their changing bodies, possible discomfort over these changes, and their desire for more information or total avoidance of the topic. Create an environment that acknowledges and celebrates this transition as healthy and normal for them.

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Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

GIRL SCOUT CADETTES

At the Girl Scout Cadette level (sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), many Cadettes...	This means...
Are going through puberty, including changes in their skin, body shape, and weight. Many also will be starting their menstrual cycles and have occasional shifts in mood.	Being sensitive to the many changes Cadettes are undergoing and acknowledging that these changes are as normal as growing taller! They 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.
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.	That many 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. If you're noticing a pattern of isolation for any troop member, check in with them—are they content to work solo, or are they being excluded?
Can be very self-conscious, wanting to be like everyone else but fearing they're unique in their thoughts and feelings.	Encouraging them to share, but only if they're ready. At this age, they may be more comfortable sharing a piece of artwork or a fictional story than their own words. Throughout activities, highlight and discuss differences as positive, interesting, and beautiful.
Are beginning to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults at school and at home.	Trusting them to plan and make key decisions and allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.

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Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

GIRL SCOUT SENIORS

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

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Engaging Girl Scouts by Level

GIRL SCOUT AMBASSADORS

At the Girl Scout Ambassador level (eleventh and twelfth grades), many Ambassadors...	This means...
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.	Inviting them to develop stories as a group and then individually create endings that they later discuss and share.
Have strong problem-solving and critical-thinking skills and can adapt logical thinking to real-life situations. Most will recognize and incorporate practical limitations to solutions.	They are more than able to go beyond community service to develop projects that will create sustainable solutions in their communities. Be sure to have them plan and follow up on these experiences through written and discussion-based reflective activities.
Spend more time with peers than with their families and are very concerned about friends and relationships with others their age.	They'll 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 they interact with those they might not usually pair up with.
Frequently enjoy expressing their individuality.	Encouraging them to express their individuality in their dress, creative expression, and thinking. Remind them frequently that there isn't just one way to look, feel, think, or act. Assist them in coming up with new ways of expressing their individuality.
Feel they have lots of responsibilities and pressures—from home, school, peers, work, and other sources.	Acknowledging their pressures and sharing how stress can limit health, creativity, and productivity. Help them release stress through creative expression, movement, and more traditional stress-reduction techniques.
Are continuing to navigate their increasing independence and expectations from adults—at school and at home—and are looking to their futures.	Trusting them to plan and make key decisions, and allowing them to experience "fun failure," which is learning from trying something new and making mistakes.

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Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts

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

Recognize and Support Each Girl Scout

You're a role model and a mentor to your Girl Scouts. Since you play an important role in their lives, they need to know that you consider each of them an important person, too. It's likely they'll weather an ill-equipped meeting place or an activity that flops—but being ignored or rejected by their troop leader is something they should never have to experience.

Remember to:

- Give shout-outs when you see Girl Scouts trying their best, not just when they've had clear success.
- Emphasize the positive qualities that make each Girl Scout worthy and unique.
- Be generous with praise—but not with criticism.
- Help Girl Scouts find ways to show acceptance of and support for one another.

Promote Fairness

In a Girl Scout troop, fairness is fostered by sharing responsibilities, addressing disagreements constructively, and responding consistently to accomplishments. When you model this commitment, it makes the inevitable mistakes easier to forgive. When possible, ask your group what they think is fair before decisions are made.

Remember to:

- Try to ensure responsibilities as well as chances for feeling important are evenly divided among troop members.
- Help Girl Scouts explore and decide for themselves fair ways of solving problems, carrying out activities, and responding to behaviors and accomplishments.
- Explain your reasoning for making certain decisions.
- Be willing to apologize as needed.

Build Trust

Girl Scouts need your support when they try new things, and you'll need to demonstrate that you won't betray their confidence. Show them you're making an effort to understand them as individuals.

- Inspire them to think for themselves and use their own judgment.
- Encourage them to make important decisions in the group and assure them that all troop members have an equal say.
- Offer them assistance in correcting/addressing their mistakes.
- Support them in trusting one another—let them see firsthand how trust can be built, lost, regained, and strengthened.

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Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts

Inspire Open Communication

Promote open communication by listening and responding positively to what your Girl Scouts think, feel, and want to do. They'll appreciate having someone they can talk to about the important things happening in their lives.

- Speak your mind when you're happy or concerned about something, and encourage Girl Scouts to do the same.
- Leave the door open for Girl Scouts to seek advice, share ideas, and propose plans or improvements.
- Help them see how open communication can promote helpful action, discovery, a better understanding of self and others, and an atmosphere that fuels fun and accomplishment.

Manage Conflict

Conflicts and disagreements are an inevitable part of life, and if handled constructively they show Girl Scouts they can manage differences of opinion, 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 in your troop, try to get those involved to sit down together and talk calmly in a nonjudgmental manner, keeping in mind that each party may need some time—perhaps a few days or a week—to settle first. Explain to Girl Scouts that communicating in this way might feel uncomfortable and difficult in the moment, but it lays the groundwork for working well together in the future.

Whatever you do, don't spread word of the conflict, as this won't help the situation and may cause Girl Scouts embarrassment or anger.

If a conflict persists, be sure you explain the matter to your volunteer support team. If the supervisor can't resolve the issue satisfactorily (or if the problem involves the supervisor), it can be taken to the next supervisory level and, ultimately, to your council if you need additional help.

Communicate Effectively with Girl Scouts of Any Age

Make sure your words and actions nurture connection among members. Keep in mind how important the following approaches are.

Listen. Listening to Girl Scouts, 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 okay 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. Also, owning up to mistakes—and apologizing for them—goes a long way.

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

Show respect. Girl Scouts often say that their best experiences were the ones where adults treated them as equal partners. Speak to them respectfully to reinforce that their opinions matter and that they deserve respect.

Offer options. Members' needs and interests change; being flexible shows them you respect them and their busy lives. Be ready with age-appropriate guidance and parameters no matter what Girl Scouts choose to do.

Stay current. Show members 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.

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Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts

Address the Needs of Older Girl Scouts

Let these simple tips guide you when working with teenage Girl Scouts:

- Think of yourself as a "guide on the side"—a partner, a coach, or a mentor, not a "leader."
- Ask them what rules they need for safety and about the group agreements they need to be a good team. When they take the lead in establishing group rules, they're more likely to stick to them.
- Understand that they need time to talk, unwind, and have fun together.
- Ask what they think and what they want to do.
- Encourage them 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 person. For some, it might mean sharing their ideas in front of the entire group; for others it could mean providing a written response or contributing as part of a group.
- Treat them like partners.
- Don't repeat what's said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for Girl Scout's safety). See "Report Concerns" below to understand the guard rails.

Be Prepared for Sensitive Topics

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

Girl Scouts welcomes and serves youth and families from a wide spectrum of faiths and cultures. When members make clear that they want to participate in discussions or activities that could be considered sensitive—even just for some—put the topic on hold until you've spoken with a parent/caregiver of the members or received guidance from your council.

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

Know that 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 Girl Scouts 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 child's participation in Girl Scout programming 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 Girl Scouts will take when the activity is complete. Be sure to have a form for each troop member 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 follow your council's guidelines for obtaining written permission.

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Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts

Report Concerns

There may be times when you worry about the health and well-being of individuals in your group. Alcohol, drugs, sex, bullying, abuse, depression, and eating disorders are some of the issues they may encounter. You're on the frontlines of their lives, which places you in a unique position to identify a situation in which Girl Scouts may need help. If you believe someone is at risk of hurting themself or others, your role is to promptly bring that information to the parent/caregiver or the council so the Girl Scout can get the expert assistance they need. Your concern about their 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 someone 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/efforts to hide their body
- Tendency toward perfectionism (e.g., mistakes are considered unacceptable, there's an unwillingness to start or try something for fear of failure, or a belief that there's only one way to do something)
- 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, or animals

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 youth 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 youth members
- Physical neglect of youth members, including failure to provide adequate safety measures, care, and supervision in relation to Girl Scout activities
- Emotional maltreatment of youth 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 youth 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 youth 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 their 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

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is found guilty of child abuse and neglect, has been convicted of child abuse and neglect, or lives at the same address as a registered sex offender.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, or any individual with whom the volunteer shares a household, 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 youth 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.

Our volunteers are essential to the protection and well-being of our Girl Scouts. Any volunteer who becomes aware of information concerning another volunteer, or that volunteer's household member, that may present a risk to children must immediately report the concern to the council CEO (or designee).

Child abuse and neglect are forms of behavior that negate the integrity of the adult/youth 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, youth 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, youth or caregiver believes another volunteer, Board Member, employee, vendor, contractor, consultant, customer, youth 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.

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Creating a Safe Space for Girl Scouts

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.

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Engage Families

You want your Girl Scouts to have fun, be inspired, take healthy risks, and learn about themselves and the world—that's why you're a Girl Scout volunteer! Parents and caregivers want the same thing for their children, but getting families to pitch in and play an active role in the troop while enhancing the experience for their Girl Scout 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 Caregivers

Parents and caregivers will feel most connected to the troop when you're proactive in engaging them early on. Express your desire for them to play an active role in troop life, and how this can contribute to the connection, joy, and sense of pride that Girl Scouts feel. At the same time, recognize that not all families have the capacity to be involved, for various reasons (don't take it personally!). Be open with parents about your hopes for their involvement and listen to what can work for them.

What Is a Parent/Caregiver Meeting?

It's the first meeting that starts each troop year—and whether you're leading a new or returning troop, it's a valuable meeting.

Why hold this type of meeting? **Kicking off each year with a parent/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 troop members benefit! The meeting helps:

- Families understand what Girl Scouting can do for their child.
- Families and leaders identify ways they'll 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 more tips on working with troop families, check out Girl Scouts' **Tips for Troop Leaders** hub.

Tips for Engaging Families in Your Troop

- **Just ask!** Many parents want to help—they just haven't been asked. Be clear about what you need, and don't worry if someone says no. Follow up later—they might be available next time!
- **Explain the "why."** Helping out benefits the whole troop and strengthens the bond between Girl Scouts and their caregivers. It's a meaningful way to show support.
- **Discover talents.** Ask what people enjoy and what they're good at—event planning, social media, budgeting, etc. Matching tasks to interests makes volunteering fun and sustainable.
- **Keep it simple.** Find out how much time someone can give. Even 15 minutes a week can make a difference—like organizing snack schedules or carpools.
- **Include families in the fun.** Host a few family-friendly events during the year—like a holiday open house or a "reverse meeting" where Girl Scouts lead the adults in an activity.
- **Stay connected.** Keep communication open year-round through emails, chats, or social media. Ask families how they prefer to receive updates at your first meeting.
- **Let Girl Scouts teach at home.** Encourage caregivers to let their Girl Scouts share what they've learned. This builds confidence and reinforces new skills.
- **Don't forget.** Remind caregivers that any adult that is interacting with Girl Scouts outside of pick up/drop off must be a registered adult member—this includes a caregiver who is providing a program or chaperoning a field trip.

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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 package of Thin Mints®.

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

Five Essential Skills

By participating in Girl Scout Cookie Programs, Girl Scouts as young as five develop five essential skills that help them be successful today and throughout their lives:

- **Goal setting.** Girl Scouts learn to create a plan to reach their goals.
- **Decision making.** Girl Scouts learn to make decisions on their own and as a team.
- **Money management.** Girl Scouts learn to create a budget and handle money.
- **People skills.** Girl Scouts find their voice and up their confidence through customer interactions that build relationships.
- **Business ethics.** Girl Scouts learn to act responsibly and honestly, both in business and in life.

But building their business know-how isn't just tied to the products themselves! Girl Scouts at any level can continue honing their entrepreneurial skills by earning our **Cookie Business badges, Cookie Entrepreneur Family Pin**, and **Financial Literacy badges** year after year.

Before your entrepreneurs open shop, be sure to check out the **cookie section** of your council's website and our helpful **troop leader resources** that will empower you to:

- Manage your troop's funds.
- Learn how Girl Scouts participate in money-earning activities.
- Discover how your troop can reach its financial goals.
- Plan activities to help Girl Scouts earn cookie pins and badges.
- Understand just how much your Girl Scouts are capable of 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.

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Girl Scout Product Programs

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 in multiple other ways. A portion of the proceeds is directly managed by Girl Scouts, 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 Girl Scouts and their families so everyone understands how product programs support your local council.

Troop members share in the proceeds from successful product programs; proceeds are not distributed to individual members. Girl Scouts, however, may be eligible for rewards and credits that they put toward council-sponsored camps, programs, and store related credits, or travel experiences. The council plan for rewards applies equally to all participants in the product program activity. Visit the cookie section of your council's website for more information about individual rewards and troop proceeds locally.

Girl Scouts' *Blue Book of Basic Documents* ("Owners of Assets") specifies: "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."

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 as "purposes of Girl Scouting"—for instance, using troop proceeds to purchase memberships or uniforms for another organization. We encourage all councils to remind their volunteers of this policy in order to avoid diversion of Girl Scout funds.

Your Council's Role

When *you* are set up for success, you're better able to set your Girl Scouts up for success! That's why every year, your council provides trainings and guidelines for conducting the Girl Scout Cookie Program and fall product program, as well as determines how the proceeds and product rewards system will be managed. Check the cookie section of your council's website to find the answers you need, in addition to local trainings and resources.

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**. **Meet the Cookies** for additional information 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**. M2 Media Group provides online tools and activities for Girl Scouts. Check with your council for more details.

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Girl Scout Product Programs

Your Role

You help Girl Scouts develop the **five essential skills and think like entrepreneurs.** Your key actions are to:

Motivate participation

- Get Girl Scouts excited about supporting the troop, while keeping participation voluntary.
- Help them choose from the menu of **ways to participate in the Product Program**.

Support goal setting

- Encourage both confident and hesitant sellers to set meaningful **personal goals**.
- **Foster family partnerships** for success; introduce the **Cookie Entrepreneur Family Pin** as a resource.

Guide sales opportunities

- Inform Girl Scouts about options: individual sales (in-person and online) and cookie booths.
- Ensure cookie booth locations follow council safety guidelines.

Shift your role as opportunities grow

- Move from hands-on involvement to oversight and support.
- Remember, volunteers and caregivers don't sell; Girl Scouts lead the effort.

Manage finances and records

- Establish a clear accounting system for proceeds and products.
- Keep excellent records and copies of receipts; track all inventory.
- For older Girl Scouts, supervise as they learn record-keeping skills.
- Attend product program trainings to learn systems and tools.

Build a support network.

- Reach out to your service unit product program manager if you need help.
- Consider forming a cookie team to share responsibilities.

Product Program Safety

Safety is the top priority while participating in the Girl Scout Cookie Program and other product programs. Volunteers, families, and Girl Scouts 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 girlscouts.org and in Safety Activity Checkpoints.

Selling Cookies Online

Before Girl Scouts open their online storefront, they should partner with their troop leader and their family to learn how to safely run an online business.

We know Girl Scouts and their troops are creative, and the Girl Scout Cookie Program provides the perfect opportunity to highlight this creativity. Participants can use vanity URLs to add a creative component to their marketing and learning (e.g., Shana's Cookie Sale or Buy Cookies from Shana). However, troops and individual Girl Scouts cannot use GSUSA's intellectual property (Buy Thin Mints Now or Buy Girl Scout Cookies) as part of a vanity URL.

A few more online safety practices to keep in mind:

- The Girl Scout Cookie Program is a Girl Scout-led program; Girl Scouts should always lead online marketing and sales efforts, with the supervision of their caregiver.
- Girl Scouts engaging in online sales and marketing must review and apply the **Digital Marketing Tips for Cookie Entrepreneurs and Their Families**.
- Girl Scouts, volunteers, and caregivers must review and adhere to the **Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge**, the **Digital Cookie Pledge**, and the product program section of Girl Scouts' Safety Activity Checkpoints resource.
- Posting individual or troop sales links to resale sites (Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace, etc.) is prohibited.
- Girl Scouts must adhere to all terms and conditions on the Digital Cookie platform.
- Girl Scouts of the USA reserves the right to remove or disable Girl Scouts' Digital Cookie links 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.

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Additionally, families, Girl Scouts, and volunteers should contact and collaborate with GSWNY and GSUSA in advance of any national news media opportunities tied to their online marketing and sales efforts.

Supervising Girl Scouts While Selling

Remember to always incorporate the buddy system when Girl Scouts engage in product programs. Girl Scouts should not sell or deliver products alone.

Adults should provide supervision and guidance for all program levels, and must accompany Daisies, Brownies, and Juniors when they're selling, taking orders, and delivering products. Adults oversee Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors and must be aware of how, when, and where they're selling products. In addition, an adult must be readily available to Girl Scouts when they're participating in product programs. This can be accomplished by having an adult present with them or by having an adult and Girl Scouts exchange telephone numbers.

Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth

Cookie booths—which can be thought of as cookie pop-up shops 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 and facilitated within council jurisdictions, and participants must follow all council guidelines regarding setting up, running, and taking down a booth.

Cookie Booth locations are scheduled by the Troop. There are two types of booths: Troop Secured and Council Secured.

Troop Secured: Booth locations which are secured by the troop with permission granted by the business/organization. All booths must be submitted in the Smart Cookies software for approval/denial. Booths should not be requested at any locations where children are not permitted to patronize

Council Secured: Council secured booth locations have been contract-secured by GSUSA or GSWNY. These locations cannot be contacted by a troop to solicit a booth slot.

Girl Scouts must be present at all cookie booths. Booths may not be run by adults only.

Present at every cookie booth must be 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.

Common types of cookie booths include:

Cookie stand

- A small lemonade-stand-style booth run by a Girl Scout (or Girl Scouts from one household), supervised by their parent/caregiver(s). For safety reasons, two adults are recommended.

Drive-thru

- Set up in a parking lot or open area; customers stay in their vehicles.
- Troops should create a safe lane and keep Girl Scouts away from traffic.
- Typically run by a larger group of Girl Scouts, with appropriate adult supervision.

Standard booth

- Set up at the entrance or exit of a business or retailer.
- Usually run by 2-4 Girl Scouts, with the appropriate adult supervision.

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Girl Scout Product Programs

You can use the below rubric to help you determine whether a given site would make for a successful cookie booth location. (These are best practices, but councils reserve the right to deny a location for any reason.) Remember to follow council guidelines for requesting and approving cookie booth sites.

Must-haves	Nice-to-haves
✓ Safety focused (visible, well-lit, etc.) ✓ ADA accessible ✓ Space for set up ✓ Schedule alignment ✓ Accessible to underage patrons	✓ Cell service ✓ Options for indoor or outdoor booths ✓ Restrooms ✓ Ease of physical access (parking lot entrance)
Booth should have at least one of the following	**Exact booth setup location must be one of these options**
✓ Heavy foot traffic ✓ High street visibility ✓ Strong social media presence ✓ Proximity to other high traffic stores or events	✓ Sidewalk space ✓ Entryway/exit space ✓ Drive-thru space

Encourage your Girl Scouts to unleash their creativity—and work on their advertising skills—in making colorful signs and booth decorations that potential customers can't resist! Remind them to be polite and to have their sales pitch ready for interested customers.

And keep in mind:

- Booths where any Girl Scout is not accompanied by their own parent/caregiver require two registered, background-checked Girl Scout volunteers.
- Certain locations may be inappropriate for younger Girl Scouts based on the standards of your community and could negatively impact the cookie program experience for Girl Scouts and/or negatively impact the Girl Scout brand in the community. For example, Girl Scouts should not sell cookies in or in front of establishments that they themselves cannot legally patronize.
- Additionally, with respect to marijuana dispensaries, we have been steadfastly combating 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 continue 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 booths at such locations.
- Retail sales without Girl Scouts present are not approved by GSUSA. Councils, troops, and Girl Scouts may not sell cookies in a retail space where Girl Scouts cannot be present to market and manage inventory and collect and process payment for cookies. Store employees and/or adults cannot sell cookies on behalf of a Girl Scout or troop.

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- Daisies are still learning how to make correct change. Help them handle money as needed, but remember that Girl Scouts make all sales at the booth!
- Keep your customers in the loop and update your baker's software system if you need to cancel or are unable to attend a cookie booth. If not, customers could be routed to cancelled booths as all scheduled booths are available on GSUSA's **Cookie Finder**!

For more tips to make your booth a success, check out our **Cookie Booth Essentials** (**Spanish version**). For additional information about setting up a booth and safety and security suggestions, consult your council's guidelines.

Contact GSWNY for information on reporting any cookie sale-related incidents.

Cookie Donation Programs

Cookies help Girl Scouts make a big impact in their community! GSWNY may have an established cookie donation program that allows customers to purchase cookies for donation. Encourage your troop members to let customers know about these programs—it's a great way for customers to give back to their community, too!

With cookie donations, remember that:

- Donated cookies must stay within the council jurisdiction unless your council has approval from other council jurisdictions.
- Donated products cannot be resold and must be used in a responsible and ethical way.
- Donated products must be used in a way that doesn't 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. If a customer isn't satisfied with the quality of their cookies for some reason, they can contact the baker at the phone number printed on the side of the cookie package. Troops should notify their council if they're aware of any such customer dissatisfaction.

Recognizing Cookie Sellers in the Media

The Girl Scout Cookie Program has always emphasized entrepreneurial outcomes. It has never been about and does not focus on individual sales results. With this in mind, know that:

- There are many impressive cookie entrepreneurs throughout the U.S., and the Girl Scout Movement will continue to recognize dynamic cookie entrepreneurs for various achievements tied to the Girl Scout Cookie Program and 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 individuals as "top sellers" in the media. Doing so detracts from the essence of the Girl Scout Cookie Program, which is based on offering members important experiences in entrepreneurship, business, and finance from an early age as well as providing Girl Scouts and local Girl Scout councils with the funds necessary to power amazing experiences and opportunities for Girl Scouts year-round.
- A Girl Scout's or troop's sales link should not be highlighted when speaking to the media. All calls to action should be directed to the Girl Scout Cookie Finder.
- Volunteers, parents/caregivers, and Girl Scouts may not secure paid media to enhance a troop's or individual's positioning in the media.

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Know How Much You're 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'll have your support to thank for it. Your volunteer role makes a powerful difference: Girl Scouts wouldn't exist without volunteers like you. And your first step as a troop leader may lead you to other volunteer opportunities once this year is over.

We'll say it again: without our passionate and dedicated volunteers, there would be no Girl Scouting. That's why we celebrate National Volunteer Month every April (including National Volunteer Week the third week of that month) and turn up the party as we ring in National Girl Scout Leader's Day on April 22.

What can we say? We love our volunteers!

We know volunteering isn't always easy, especially when you're new to an organization, so we can't thank you enough for giving your time and energy to be the mentor and role model your troop needs. Guiding your Girl Scouts—even if you're still figuring things out—is nothing short of amazing.

The important thing to remember is you're not alone. We're in this with you, ready to help and support you every step of the way Thanks again! It's going to be a great Girl Scout year!

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