

Volunteer Essentials

Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest
Membership Year 2026



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Welcome!

Adventures Await

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

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

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

Before you know it, you'll be trying to keep up with your unstoppable troop. Imagine the excitement, the impact, and the memories that will be made—those are the moments you'll enjoy as a Girl Scout volunteer.

Thank you and welcome. We're glad you're here!

What's Inside?

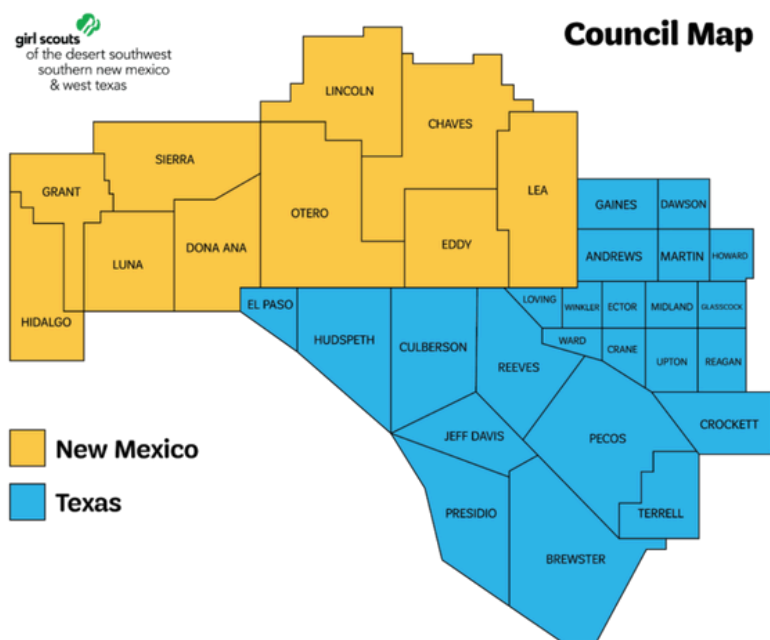
This guide is designed to support busy, on-the-go troop volunteers. Inside you will find details and information to help you get started on your newest adventure—being an awesome leader for girls. We recommend that you begin by browsing the sections below and come back throughout the year to find answers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

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

Are you a new troop leader? We have a resource designed especially for you. Plus, council staff and volunteer coaches are ready to help you throughout your first year and beyond!



Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest (Council 582) – Your Home Council



GSDSW El Paso Program Center

9700 Girl Scout Way
El Paso, YX 79924

Friday-Sunday: Closed

Monday–Thursday: 8:00 AM-6:00 PM

The Leadership Center also houses a full-service Girl Scout Store!

Please see page 5 for all GSDSW locations and hours.

Families can also shop online at gsdsw.org/shop.

Have a question about Girl Scouts?

Our Customer Care team is available to answer questions and meet your needs:

Monday–Thursday
8:00 AM-6:00 PM

915-566-9433

info@gsdsw.org

Connect with GSDSW

At gsdsw.org, you can find information about programs, upcoming events, product program resources, and forms and documents, as well as log into the Volunteer Toolkit!

GSDSW is also active through its social media outlets. Follow the council on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn to learn about council activities, updates, and programs, as well as learn about all the amazing things that members are doing throughout GSDSW's jurisdiction.



Facebook – Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest



Instagram – gsdswofficial



YouTube – GSDSW



Twitter – GSDSWGIRLSOUTS



LinkedIn – Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest

GSDSW Locations & Hours

Shop online at gsdsw.org/shop!

El Paso Program Center

9700 Girl Scout Way
El Paso, TX 79924

Monday – Thursday,
9:00 AM - 6:00 PM MT
(Closed for lunch 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM)
1st Saturday of each month,
9:00 AM - 1:00 PM MT

Visit our shop carrying
uniforms, badges and more!

Midland Program Center

901 W. Dengar Ave.
Midland, TX 79705

Office and Shop Hours:
Tuesday and Thursday,
2:00 PM - 7:00 PM CT

1st & 3rd Saturday,
10:00 AM - 2:00 PM CT

Visit our shop carrying
uniforms, badges and more!

Las Cruces Program Center

225 E. Idaho, Ste. #9
Las Cruces, NM 88005
By appointment only

Odessa Program Center

5217 N. Dixie Blvd.
Odessa, TX 79762
By appointment only

Roswell Program Center

1307B E. College St.
Roswell, NM 88201
By appointment only

Hobbs Program Center

522 E. Broadway
Hobbs, NM 88240
By appointment only

Ready to get started? Let's go!

Girl Scout councils are chartered by the national office (Girl Scouts of the United States of America or GSUSA) to attract and retain members in a geographic area, provide ways for girls to participate in Girl Scouting, create an environment that reflects Girl Scout values and ideals, manage volunteers' experience with Girl Scouting, and keep girls and volunteers as safe as possible. GSUSA provides support materials to all councils to ensure that the Girl Scout experience is nationally consistent.



Your Support Team

A team of volunteers provides you with local support, learning opportunities, and advice. As a volunteer, you will have the most contact with your local Girl Scout support team, which is called a service unit. Never hesitate to contact these fellow volunteers because your service unit is your expert in all things Girl Scouting. If you have questions about the Girl Scout program, working with girls, resources in the national program portfolio (leadership Journeys, Girl Scout handbooks, etc.), or selling Girl Scout Cookies and other products, go to your service unit team for answers and ongoing support.

Council staff members are dedicated to providing assistance to volunteers in several different capacities. Each service unit is assigned an engagement specialist who is responsible for providing ongoing support and guidance to the service unit team and volunteers. Troop leaders receive ongoing support throughout the year from various council staff members. In addition, staff members in various functional areas are also available for support and guidance.

Policy & Council Structure

WHAT IS POLICY?

A policy is an established, binding course of action that must be followed. In Girl Scouting, we follow the policies established by GSUSA as stated in the [Blue Book of Basic Documents](#). Additionally, we are governed by the policies established by the Board of Directors of Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest, Inc.

A policy defines:

1. What shall be done
2. What purposes shall be followed
3. What financial procedures shall operate
4. What personnel practices shall be adopted
5. What courses of action shall be taken

The structure of a Girl Scout council may be divided into three major areas as it relates to policy:

1. Policy Influencing
2. Policy Making
3. Policy Implementing

The policy influencing responsibility may be shared by the following:

Board Development Committee

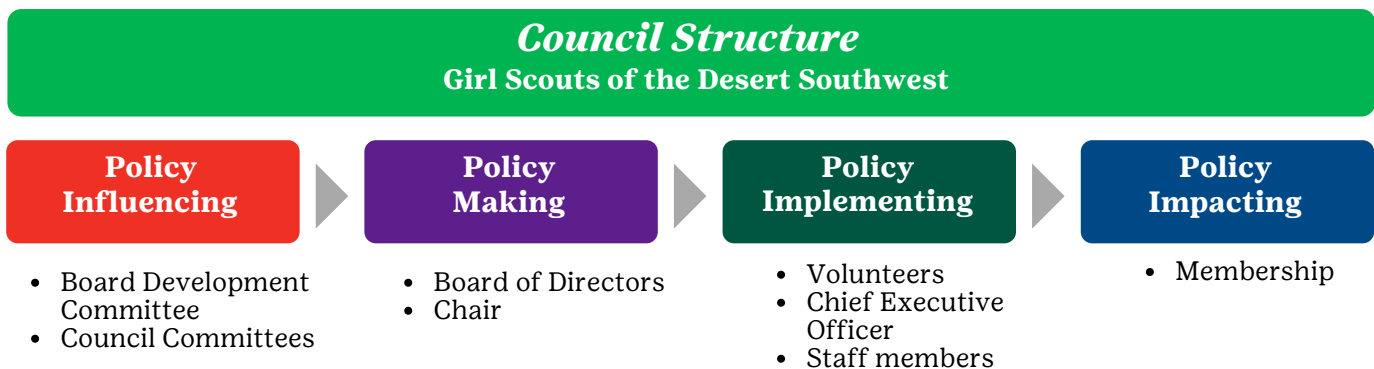
- Presents the slate of officers and board members to the Board of Directors

Committees

- Makes policy recommendations to the Board of Directors

The policy-making responsibility rests solely with the Board of Directors, under the direction of the chair. **ONLY THE BOARD CAN CHANGE POLICY OR VOTE ON EXCEPTIONS.**

The policy implementation responsibility is shared by both volunteers and employed staff members who perform the day-to-day work of the council, under the direction of the chief executive officer, toward achieving the council's goals and objectives. The chief executive officer is accountable to the Board of Directors for administering the total operations of the council, as stated in the council's bylaws.



All About Girl Scouts

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

Girl Scout Volunteers

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

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

Girl Scout Levels

Girls can join the fun at any point from kindergarten through grade 12.

Girl Scouts' six levels are:

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

Inclusion

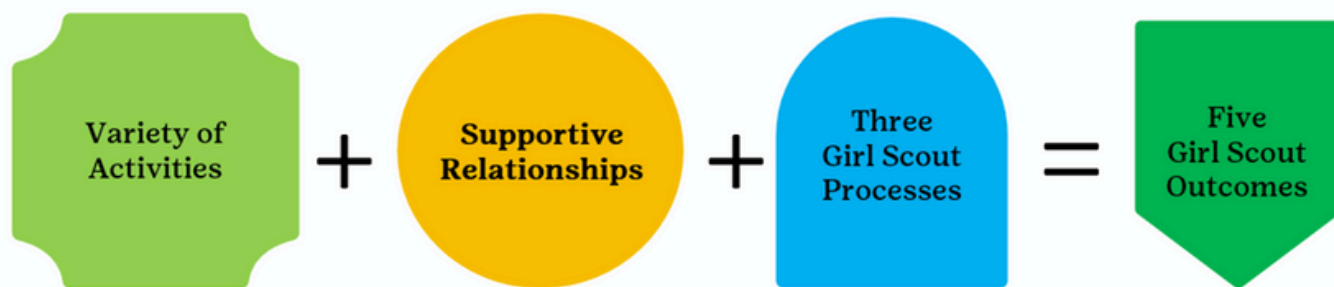
Girl Scouts has a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, and we welcome and embrace individuals of all abilities and backgrounds into our wonderful sisterhood.

Inclusion is at the core of who we are; it's about being a sister to every Girl Scout and celebrating our unique strengths. To create an inclusive environment, the most important thing is that each Girl Scout feels seen for who they are and what they bring to the group. Through treating all Girl Scouts with kindness and respect, you can nurture an inclusive troop environment. Part of the important work you will do includes modeling friendship and kindness for your Girl Scouts and showing them what it means to practice empathy.

A critical component of inclusion is that everyone is able to participate. When scheduling, planning, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of everyone involved, including [school](#) schedules, family needs, financial constraints, dietary requirements, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)

The Girl Scout Leadership Experience



Regular meetings | Activities | Emotionally & Physically Safe Space | Girl Scout Traditions

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

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

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

What girls do in Girl Scouting fits within three key functions: discover, connect, and take action.

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

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

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

As a volunteer, you’ll draw on these three processes as you lead girls of any age. Naturally, girl-Led at the Daisy level will look very different from girl-led at the Ambassador level. What is most important is that your Girl Scouts make decisions about the activities they will do together and make choices as they’re doing the activities together. As girls learn from their successful and not-so-successful tries, they gain confidence. All girls should have the opportunity to lead within their peer group. By the time girls are Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors, they will be using the leadership skills they’ve developed to take on more ownership of their activities, mentor younger Girl Scouts, and take action to make the world a better place.

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

Reflection

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Last, review the “now what.” Say something like:

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

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

Progression

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

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

Keep in mind that progression drives success for your troop.

The Girl Scout Program: National Program Pillars & More

Girl Scouts' four Program Pillars—STEM, life skills, outdoors, and entrepreneurship—form the foundation of the Girl Scout program and work together to build girls' curiosity, kindness, and can-do spirit. In fact, every aspect of our program, and every Girl Scout adventure, can be traced back to one of our four program pillars.

- **STEM** (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Girls are naturally curious and have a strong desire to help others. Whether they're building a robot, developing a video game, or studying the stars, Girl Scouts become better problem-solvers and critical thinkers through STEM and gain the confidence to turn their ideas into breakthrough inventions to help others.
- **Life Skills**. Girl Scouts' life skills programming includes a mix of practical skills, tools, and activities that foster positive values in girls, like financial literacy, civic engagement, and community service. Skills that help them discover that they have what it takes to raise their voices as community advocates, make smart decisions about their finances, and form strong, healthy relationship skills that inspire them to accept challenges and overcome obstacles, now and always.
- **Outdoors**. Girl Scouts has been building girls' outdoor confidence and skills for more than 100 years through a variety of outdoor adventures like camping and nature-focused badges that inspire them to spend time outdoors and develop a lifelong appreciation of the outdoors. It is appreciation that sparks girls' desire to take action as environmental stewards in their community and across the globe.
- **Entrepreneurship**. Starting with Girl Scouts' iconic Girl Scout Cookie Program and growing to include the fall product program and a series of entrepreneurship badges, this pillar instills and nurtures an entrepreneurial mindset and fuels girls' curiosity and confidence as they learn the essentials of running their own businesses and how to think like entrepreneurs.

Important Differences: Journeys & Badges

Journeys and badges are designed to give girls different leadership-building experiences, all while having fun!

- Journeys. These include multi-session leadership experiences through which girls explore topics such as bullying, media literacy, or environmental stewardship. They'll do hands-on activities, connect with experts, and take the reins on age-appropriate Take Action projects. Because of their leadership focus, Journeys are also a prerequisite for Girl Scouts' highest awards, the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards.
- Badges. It's all about skill building. When a Girl Scout earns a badge, it shows that she's learned a new skill, such as how to make a healthy snack, build and test a toy race car, or take great digital photos. Badges may even spark an interest at school or plant the seed for a future career.

If they choose, your Girl Scouts can pursue badges and Journey awards in the same year. If they do choose to take this approach, encourage them to find the connections between the two to magnify their Girl Scout experience. While you're having fun, keep in mind that the quality of a girl's experience and the skills and pride she gains from earning Journey awards and skill building badges far outweigh the quantity of badges she earns.

As a volunteer, you don't have to be an expert in any badge or Journey topic. In fact, when you show that you're not afraid to fail and willing to try something new, you are modeling what it is to be a Girl Scout. Our badge and Journey requirements are structured so your girls can learn new skills without you having to be an expert in all the assorted topics, including STEM.

Important Differences: Community Service & Take Action Projects

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

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

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

Traditions, Ceremonies, & Special Girl Scout Days

Time-honored traditions and ceremonies unite Girl Scout sisters, and the millions of Girl Scout alumni who came before them, from around the country and around the globe. It reminds girls how far their fellow trailblazers have come and just how far they'll go.

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

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

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

High Awards

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

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

- The Girl Scout Bronze Award can be earned by Juniors. The prerequisite is completion of one Junior Journey and the associated Take Action project. The Bronze Award is earned by a group.
- The Girl Scout Silver Award can be earned by Cadettes. The prerequisite is completion of one Cadette Journey and the associated Take Action project. The Silver Award can be earned by an individual girl or by a small group.
- The Girl Scout Gold Award can be earned by Seniors and Ambassadors who have completed either two Girl Scout Senior/Ambassador level Journeys and the associated Take Action project or earned the Silver Award and completed one Senior/Ambassador level Journey. The Gold Award is earned by an individual girl.

Did you know that a Gold Award Girl Scout is entitled to enlist at a higher paygrade when she joins the U.S. military? A Gold Award Girl Scout's achievements also prime her for the fast track when it comes to college admissions and make her an outstanding candidate for academic scholarships and other financial awards.

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

Ask your council about Gold Award Girl Scouts in your community and how they're doing their part to make the world a better place. For inspiration, consider inviting a local Gold Award Girl Scout to speak to your troop about how she took the lead and made a difference.

You'll be inspired when you see and hear what girls can accomplish when they take the lead, and by the confidence, grit, problem-solving, time and project management, and team-building expertise they gain while doing so!

Girl Scout Travel & Destinations

Girl Scouts encourages girls to try new things and see the world with fresh eyes, both inside and outside of their usual troop meetings.

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

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

Destinations.

Planning Troop Adventures

Contact GSDSW as soon as you start thinking about planning a trip to find out more about our approval process for overnight and extended travel. Our training programs will raise your confidence as a chaperone. You can access GSDSW resources here: [Forms & Documents](#)

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 are longer than a weekend. It also features tips and tools for budding explorers who are just getting started with field trips and overnights.

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

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 to follow through the [Trip and High-Risk Activity Application](#). Be sure to follow all the basic safety guidelines, like the buddy system and first aid requirements, in addition to the specific guidelines for travel. You will learn more about how to use and follow Girl Scouts' Safety Activity Checkpoints.

Note that extended travel (more than three nights) and international or cruise travel are not covered under the basic Girl Scout insurance plan and will require additional coverage.

Travel & Girl Scout Program Connections

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

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

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

If your troop is looking to stay closer to home this year, ask your council about council -owned camps and other facilities that can be rented out.

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



Troop Management

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

Your Role as a Girl Scout Volunteer

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

Leadership is teaching your Girl Scouts:

- They can do and be anything
- They are decision makers and should own their decisions
- Live by the Girl Scout Law and model it for them

As a leader, see yourself as a coach who:

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

It is important to remember that:

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



Your Responsibilities as a Girl Scout Volunteer

Your responsibilities as a Girl Scout volunteer include:

- Accepting the [Girl Scout Promise and Law](#).
- Understanding and coaching Girl Scouts' Three Keys to Leadership—discover, connect, and take action—that are the basis of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- Sharing your knowledge, experience, and skills with a positive and flexible approach.
- Working in a partnership with your Girl Scouts so that their activities are girl-led and that they learn by doing, individually and as a group. You'll also partner with other volunteers and council staff members for support and guidance.
- Organizing fun, interactive, girl-led activities that address relevant issues and match girls' interests and needs.
- Providing guidance and information regarding Girl Scout group meetings with troop families on a regular and ongoing basis through a variety of tools, including email, phone calls, newsletters, blogs, other forms of social media, and any other method you choose.
- Processing and completing registration forms and other paperwork, such as permission slips and health history forms that need to be updated annually.
- Communicating effectively and delivering clear, organized, and vibrant presentations or information to an individual or group.
- Overseeing with honesty, integrity, and careful record-keeping the funds that girls raise.
- Maintaining a close connection to your volunteer support team as well as your council.
- Facilitating a safe experience for every Girl Scout.

Background Screening

All adults who wish to serve as volunteers are required to complete and pass a background screening. Parents who wish to volunteer as chaperones on field trips or work cookie booths must register, complete, and pass a background screening.

After the background screening is completed, all adults receive notification of their eligibility to volunteer. Background screenings are valid for three years and volunteers must be rescreened before it expires to remain eligible.

The decision to disqualify or limit an individual's participation as a volunteer is solely at the discretion of Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest. Background screening factors that may influence this decision includes, but are not limited to, criminal record history, nature and severity of a charge or conviction, number of convictions, or length of time since the criminal conduct occurred. Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest will maintain the confidentiality of all background information obtained, including reasons why a volunteer applicant may have been disqualified.

Standard of Conduct for Volunteers

By accepting a volunteer position, you have a responsibility to Girl Scouts and to your fellow volunteers and girls to adhere to certain rules of behavior and conduct. The purpose of these standards is not to restrict your rights, but rather to be certain that you understand what conduct is expected and necessary. When each person is aware that he or she can fully depend upon fellow volunteers to follow the rules of conduct, then our organization will be a better place to volunteer for everyone.

Code of Conduct:

- Respect the mission of Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest.
- Manage conflicts or difficulties in an appropriate manner. Contact your service unit manager to voice your concern and receive support.
- Respect your meeting site and the properties of the council.
- Honor confidentiality of volunteers and girls.
- Be willing to take part in orientation and training sessions to enhance your leadership skills.
- Demonstrate respect for the guidance, direction, and decisions staff members and/or their designated appointee provide to support your role as a volunteer.
- Treat staff members, volunteers, girls, and members fairly and without discrimination.
- Dress appropriately for your volunteer position and/or the activity in which the girls will be taking part.
- Hats and T-shirts with political views or harmful logos are not permitted during Girl Scout meetings and functions.

Grounds for Dismissal

Immediate Dismissal:

- Willful violation of security or safety rules; negligence or any careless action, which endangers the life or safety of a girl or another adult
- Being intoxicated or under the influence of a controlled substance while volunteering; use, possession, or sale of controlled substance drugs in any quantity while on Girl Scout premises and/or while conducting volunteer activities except medications prescribed by a physician, which do not impair the volunteer's performance
- Unauthorized possession of firearms, weapons, or explosives on Girl Scout property or while conducting volunteer activities
- Engaging in criminal conduct or acts of violence, or making threats of violence toward anyone, fighting or provoking a fight or negligent damage of property when representing Girl Scouts
- Insubordination or failing to obey instructions properly issued by GSDSW staff
- Theft of agency property or the property of fellow volunteers and/or girls; unauthorized possession or removal of any agency property, including money and documents from the premises, without prior permission from management; unauthorized use of agency equipment or property for personal reasons; using agency equipment for personal gain
- Dishonesty; willful falsification or misrepresentation on your application for volunteering or other volunteer records; alteration of agency records or other agency documents
- Breach of confidentiality of personal or health information
- Inappropriate conduct in a Girl Scout setting Inappropriate behavior toward girls as defined by abuse or harassment policies or other organizational guidelines

Dismissal at the End of the Appointment Period:

- Refusal to participate in conflict resolution procedures with council staff members and another volunteer or parent
- Refusal to abide by any restrictions placed on you by council staff members (i.e., cannot drive girls; cannot be a signer on a bank account; cannot act in a volunteer capacity, etc.)
- Providing an unsatisfactory experience for the girl members of your troop
- Continual refusal to communicate with council membership staff assigned to your area or with service team members
- Failure to ask permission for additional money-earning events
- Allowing an environment of bullying and exclusion at your troop meetings

- Poor representation of the council at Girl Scout and community events
- Not demonstrating the core values of the Girl Scout mission—This may include but is not limited to: speaking poorly of girls, parents, volunteers or council staff; posting negative comments on Facebook or other social media websites about girls, parents, volunteers or council staff; embarrassing girls, parents, or other volunteers at events, activities, and camp; aggressive/antagonistic behavior toward council program partners; frequent complaining of Girl Scout rules and regulations; ignoring policies and procedures contained in the Volunteer Essentials
- Every volunteer is entitled to the ongoing support of a supervisor and regular or periodic evaluations of her or his performance based on the requirements of the written position description, including goals and objectives, expectations, and time commitments. Annual reappointment meetings will be conducted as needed to address concerns and may be required for a volunteer to continue in a position.
- Volunteer positions with the council are 12-month appointed positions. The council reserves the right to dismiss or refuse the appointment of any volunteer.

We want every volunteer to have a self-fulfilling, impactful, and authentic experience. When you volunteer with Girl Scouts, you'll be creating friendships with a supporting community of other volunteers much like you. You'll be showing the next generation that what makes them unique also makes them powerful, and that everyone has a lot more fun when no one has to worry about being judged and everyone is participating in a safe space.

Planning for Your First Troop Meeting

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

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

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

Choosing a Meeting Place

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

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

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

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

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

Virtual Meetings

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

Before setting up a virtual meeting, you'll want to:

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



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

Can We Meet in a Private Home?

Girl Scouts does not recommend holding troop meetings in private homes. If you are considering meeting in a private home, check with your council to make sure it is permitted based on their council policy. In addition to the above, remember to ensure these standards:

- Always obtain prior approval from your council.
- The private home must be the home of a registered, council-approved volunteer.
- Girl Scout members may not meet in a home where a registered sex offender resides.
- Some councils require membership and background checks for all adults living in the home. Contact your council for specific guidelines.
- Troop members need to be able to focus without disruptions from other household members.
- Animals should be kept in a place that is separate from the meeting space.
- Homeowners should consider any personal insurance implications. The homeowner should ask their personal homeowner's insurance carrier if there are any insurance concerns with troop meetings in the home. Also, volunteers should confirm with the council that troop meetings in the home are covered by the council's liability insurance carrier.
- Weapons must be out of view and in a locked space. Medication, cleaning products, or any poisonous substances must be stored in a secure space, out of sight, and preferably locked.

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

Girl Scout Troop Size

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

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

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

Knowing How Many Volunteers You Need

From troop meetings to camping weekends and cookie booths, adult volunteers must always be present to ensure Girl Scouts have fun and stay safe, no matter their level. If you are not sure about the number of adults you will need for your activity, the chart below breaks down the minimum number of volunteers needed to supervise a specific number of Girl Scouts. The council may also establish maximums due to size or cost restrictions, so be sure to check with them as you plan your activity.

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

NOTE: For multi-level troops use the ratio for the lowest level in the troop. For example, if the troop consists of Daisies and Brownies, the Daisy ratio should be followed.

In addition to the volunteer-to-girl ratios, please remember that adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old. Volunteers must also be registered members and have an approved background screening on file with the council.

Adult supervision for all girls also extends to any online activity. For additional information regarding online safety, please consult:

- [“Computer/Online Use” in Safety Activity Checkpoints](#)
- [Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge](#)
- [Digital Cookie Terms & Conditions for Girls, Digital Cookie Terms & Conditions for Parents/Guardians, and Digital Cookie Terms & Conditions for Volunteers](#)

NOTE: Volunteers who are driving girls other than their own children must be 21 years of age and possess a valid driver’s license to transport girls for Girl Scout activities.

Safety in Girl Scouting

The emotional and physical safety and well-being of Girl Scouts is our top priority. Safety Activity Checkpoints outlines the safety standards and guidelines used in Girl Scouting, which apply to all Girl Scout activities. All volunteers should review Safety Activity Checkpoints when planning activities with girls in order to manage safety and risk in Girl Scout-sanctioned activities.

In [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#), you will find:

- Girl Scouts safety standards and guidelines, which apply to all Girl Scout activities, including requirements for adult supervision, permission slips, preparation, field trips, and overnight trips, and other vital information.

Activities that are not permitted by Girl Scouts of the USA and actions that girls and volunteers should not take.

- Policies surrounding chartered aircraft trips and aviation.
- First aid and overall health information.
- Standards for well-being and inclusivity, along with ways to include Girl Scouts with disabilities and ways to ensure girls' emotional safety.
- Individual safety activity checkpoints for specific activities—such as camping, internet use, and water sports that provide activity-specific safety information.

Safety Activity Checkpoints is laid out in three primary sections, Introduction: Safety Standards and Guidelines, Activities at a Glance, and Individual Safety Activity Checkpoint pages.

- Introduction: Safety Standards and Guidelines provide the standard safety guidelines for Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA) and Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest (GSDSW) approved activities.
- Girl Scouts' Activities at a Glance table provides a quick review of the safety standards for that activity with a focus on two critical points to keep in mind when considering and planning activities for you troop:
 - Age-appropriate activities and participation by grade level, and
 - Whether prior approval from your council is required before anyone participates in a specific activity.
 - The Activities at a Glance section is a great quick reference but ensure you refer to the individual checkpoint as you plan your activity.
- Individual Safety Activity Checkpoint pages provide activity-specific safety measures and guidance on individual activities.

The Buddy System

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

Registering Girls & Adults in Girl Scouting

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

Preregistration for the upcoming membership year occurs in the spring. Girls are encouraged to register early to avoid the fall rush. Early registration allows for uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps girls and the council plan ahead, and gets girls excited about all the great things they want to do as Girl Scouts next year. A Girl Scout's 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 10 or more years of service can become lifetime members at the discounted young alum rate.

Financial Assistance

Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest is committed to providing all girls with the opportunity to participate in Girl Scouting, regardless of their financial background. Financial assistance is available to cover membership dues and summer camp fees.

- Financial assistance funds are supplementary, and the council encourages each family, troop, and service unit to contribute as much as they can toward the cost of Girl Scouting. Individuals should seek assistance from the troop and service unit prior to applying for financial assistance.
- The council-sponsored product programs are structured to provide funding for the Girl Scout experience and troops should budget for troop operating expenses above all else. Participation in these programs shows a commitment to Girl Scouting and the benefits that a girl receives from being a part of the organization.
- Awards are based on financial need and/or special circumstances at the girl level, not the troop level. Applications should be completed by the individual and any applications submitted on behalf of the troop itself will be returned.
- At times, a family may not qualify for financial assistance under the income guidelines but may have extenuating circumstances that the council will consider when determining eligibility and award amounts. In that case, the circumstances must be clearly explained for consideration.
- Financial assistance for membership is only awarded to a girl or adult one time when new.
- Summer camp financial assistance can be requested each year.

Adding New Girls to Your Troop

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

To help troops achieve their ideal size, leaders should contact info@gsdsw.org to be added to the Opportunity Catalog. This should also be done whenever the troop's meeting information or availability changes.

Creating an Atmosphere of Acceptance & Inclusion

Girl Scouts is for every girl, and that's why we embrace girls of all abilities and backgrounds with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl—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, and groups reflect the diversity of the community.

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

- Welcome every girl and focus on building community. Show care by learning each person's name with correct pronunciation, caregivers included! Use a warm and friendly tone, and consistently greet each community member when they arrive. Say goodbye to each person by name as well.
- Emphasize cooperation instead of competition.
- Provide a confidential, socially comfortable environment. Occasionally, ask those who participate in Girl Scout programs 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.
- Teach respect for, understanding of, and dignity toward all members and their families. Learn about the cultures and identities in your Girl Scout community and understand and respect cultural differences. Be sure not to put anyone on the spot or ask them to educate you. Welcome personal sharing about people's cultural traditions, languages they speak and diverse family structures. Make this kind of sharing a consistent, reliable part of your time together.

Embrace diverse gender expression by inviting each community member to share their gender pronouns aloud or on name tags. Explain that no one must share if they don't want to. Make this conversation matter-of-fact and use a positive tone.

- Actively reach out to members and families who are traditionally excluded or underrepresented.
- Learn the most valuable ways to support individual children and adults with disabilities, learning differences and/or or neurodiversity. Ask parents, “What can I do to support your child to learn/participate/feel successful in our group?”
- Foster a sense of belonging to this community as a respected and valued peer.
- Honor the intrinsic value of each person’s life.

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

If you want to find out what a girl with a disability needs to make her Girl Scout experience successful, simply ask her or her caregiver.

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

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

Language Related to Disability

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

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

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

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

Registering Girls with Cognitive Disabilities

Girls with cognitive disabilities can be registered as closely as possible to their chronological ages. They wear the uniform of that level. Make any adaptations for the girl to ongoing activities of the Girl Scout level to which the group belongs. Young women with cognitive disorders may choose to retain their girl membership through age 21 and then move into an adult membership category.

Getting Support for Your Troop

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

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

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

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

Troop Management Tools & Resources

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

Girl Scouts Volunteer Toolkit (VTK)

The Volunteer Toolkit is a customizable planning tool where you can find suggested meeting plans for most badges, access activity guides and badge requirements, track your Girl Scouts' achievements, and so much more. With inspiring ideas so you can engage your troop in a mix of activities all year long, it's the digital planning assistant that will help you power a fun filled—and organized—Girl Scout year. Be sure to look for helpful icons to identify activity focus areas. For example, the 'Evergreen' icon tells you the activity can be taken outside and the 'Global' icon lets you know you can bring a global perspective to the activity.

You'll find the Volunteer Toolkit in the left menu bar under MyGS/My Account. VTK is accessible on any desktop, tablet, or mobile device.

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

Troop leaders can:

- Plan the troop's calendar year and meeting schedule.
- Email caregivers with one click.
- View the troop roster and update girls' contact information.
- View meeting plans for Journeys and badges, including suggested tracks for multi-level groups (K-5 and 6-12).
- Customize meeting agendas to fit 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 attendance at meetings and the troop's badge and Journey achievements.
- Add council or custom 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 troop's badge and Journey progress.
- Renew their memberships and update their contact information.
- View their Girl Scout's attendance and achievements.
- See upcoming events the troop is planning or attending.
- Easily locate both national and local council resources.
- View the troop's finance report (depending on the council's process).

Get started by visiting: www.gsds.org.

gsLearn

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 info when you need it!

Accessing gsLearn. To take advantage of the learning opportunities and other programmatic training offered to Troop Leaders, you'll need to access our online learning management tool, gsLearn. To access gsLearn, log in to MyGS. You will find gsLearn in the options on the left-hand navigation once you've logged into MyGS.

Tools and Resources

Girl Scout Handbooks. These grade level-specific handbooks will break it down for your Girl Scouts. Adventures include earning badges and awards, running your own cookie business and learning about the traditions that have brought Girl Scouts together for over a century. girlscoutshop.org

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

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

Troop Year Plans. Our age-appropriate troop year plans are the best tool for first year troop leaders to get started with Girl Scouts without getting overwhelmed, or to help any troop leader with 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. [Access Troop Year Plans online here!](#)

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

Customer Care Contacts. Questions? Need help resolving an issue?

We've got you! Reach out anytime by email to info@gsdsw.org. During business hours (Monday–Friday: 8:00 AM - 6:00 PM) you can reach a customer service specialist by calling 1-915-566-9433.

Newsletters. Please contact info@gsdsw.org if a member is not receiving the monthly council newsletter.

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

We know that when you have the knowledge and skills you need to manage your girls, both you and your troop will thrive. Contact the council to ask about ongoing learning opportunities that will help you grow your skills and confidence. Volunteer learning opportunities are offered both in person and [through](#) free on-demand webinars. To see all classes offered and to sign up in gsLearn, visit [MyGS](#).



Volunteer Training

The council offers a variety of learning opportunities for registered volunteers to develop their skills and increase their knowledge of the Girl Scout program. To see all we have to offer, visit the volunteer training page on our website. Training is offered either in-person or through on-demand webinars.

Take Advantage of Learning Opportunities

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

New Leader Onboarding Courses:

- **GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: What Girl Scouts Do**
 - In this course, you will learn about what girl scouts do and how they do it at each grade level so you can plan your troop's year. This course is presented through the lens of an experienced troop leader whose troop completed all grade levels of the Girl Scout program. You will have the opportunity to explore the troop's interactive journal and learn about the things they did on their Girl Scout journey. Please note, you are only required to explore the grade levels you will be leading, although you are welcome to explore more if you'd like.
- **GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: 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.
- **GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)**
 - The framework we use to grow future leaders, also known as the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, is what sets Girl Scouts apart from other organizations. In this course, you will learn how to facilitate the Girl Scout Leadership Experience with your troop in an age-appropriate way. Throughout the course, you will learn about lots of real-world examples so you can apply the framework as your troop ages through the Girl Scout program.
- **GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Family Engagement: The Key To Success**
 - Engaging families in their Girl Scout's experience benefits troop leaders, Girl Scouts, and families too. This course illuminates the value of family engagement and provides practical strategies for how to enlist family support. It also equips you with an agenda to plan a parent/caregiver meeting to set the tone for family engagement for the year.
- **GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Cookie Program**
 - In this course, you will learn the basics of the Girl Scout Cookie program. You'll discover how and why Girl Scouts sell cookies, who the bakers are that make the cookies, and how to utilize your cookie proceeds with your troop. A review of all the exciting program options you can explore with your troop as you build their entrepreneurial skills is also included. Cookie selling safety and important ways to bring families and caregivers along in your troop's cookie business adventure are also part of the course.

These courses are available online via gsLearn as referenced above. Your council may offer additional local onboarding training for new Troop Leaders, as well as other ongoing training opportunities. Contact your council to ask about additional training opportunities that will help you grow your skills and confidence.

Other Program Courses Available

- **Delivering Inclusive Program**
 - In this course, you will practice using inclusive and equitable language to support the identities of all Girl Scouts and foster a cohesive troop environment.

Courses are also offered on specific badges including Daisy petals, Math In Nature, and Mental Wellness.

Girl Scout Participation in Activities with Other Scouting Organizations

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

Marketplace Confusion

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

Protecting Use of Girl Scout Materials

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

Troop Finances

With your guidance, your Girl Scouts will learn money skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Your Girl Scout troop will plan and finance its own activities, and you'll coach your girls 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 collected, raised, earned, or otherwise received in the name of and for the benefit of Girl Scouting, belong to the troop 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

No matter how much your troop plans to save or spend, you'll need a safe place to deposit your troop dues, product program proceeds, and other funds. If you've stepped up to lead an existing troop, you may inherit a checking account, but with a new troop, you'll want to open a new bank account.

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

- Be sure to find a bank that has free checking and low fees.
- Designate a "troop treasurer," that is, one person who is responsible for troop funds and for keeping a daily account of expenditures.
- Ensure your account comes with a debit card that you can use during activities or trips. These transactions are easier to track at the end of the year than cash payments.
- 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.

Follow the council's Troop and Service Unit Banking Guidelines for setting up an account. Most council-sponsored product program activities have specific banking and tracking procedures. Council reserves the right to close Girl Scout bank accounts when necessary, without notice or consent of the account signers.

Use of Cash, Reimbursements, Troop Account, & Debit Card Tips

Cash withdrawals are not to be used unless necessary and must be completed with a bank teller to allow an audit trail. A detailed accounting of how cash was used must be reported with the troop financial records. Do not reimburse someone for expenses with cash; reimburse someone who used their own funds to purchase troop items using a check. If a troop leader is being reimbursed, she/he cannot be one of the signers on the check. Relatives, spouses, minors, and members of the same household as the primary signer may not be the secondary signer on troop checks.

Do not store debit card information online for any website in order to protect the Girl Scout funds.

Troop Finance Reports

Troops are required to submit a financial report by June 30th each year. The financial report should account for all troop income and expenses throughout the year. Amounts in the troop account of \$300 or less at the end of the program year may be carried over to the next program year. If the troop has more than \$300, the girls should plan and carry out activities, so they benefit from the money they earned. Troops of Girl Scout Juniors or older levels planning an extended trip in the near future may retain amounts greater than \$500 for that trip.

Failure to turn in the finance report by the deadline will prevent the troop from participating in fall product sales in the next membership year until the finance report is received.

Account Management and Support

Individuals listed on an account are responsible for all account activity. Responsibilities include, but are not limited to, account maintenance, keeping accurate records, retaining receipts, and any overdraft fees. The troop adult leadership team should:

- Adhere to all local, state, and federal laws and ordinances.
- Help girls prepare a group budget.
- Ensure funds are being used in support of the Girl Scout experience and that the troop benefits from the money that is earned. No troop funds are to be used for personal benefit.

For example:

- A troop may pay for girls to attend an event, but not for adults who are not needed for safety ratios, siblings not in the troop, or a girl attending without the troop.
- A troop may pay for a leader to attend a training to be certified for an upcoming troop activity, but not for a training unrelated to the troop activities.
- Keep troop/group money secure at all times by establishing a group bank account.
- Maintain financial records, keep receipts and make them open and available to parents.
- Help girls establish the amount of weekly or monthly dues to be collected.
- Using the girl and adult partnership, set goals for income from council-sponsored product programs and other money-earning activities.
- Recruit and supervise a troop/group product program coordinator.
- Prepare and submit to the service unit an annual financial report.

Troop financials/bank statements should be reviewed by girls regularly and parents should receive periodic updates. All financial documents must be available for review upon request. Actions related to Girl Scout banking and money management that are not in line with council policies, result in loss of funds or could be considered negligent. This will result in consequences up to and including removal from all council roles and possible legal action.

At any time, the council reserves the right to audit troop and service unit accounts and financial information without consent of the account signers.

The council reserves the right to process ACH (Automated Clearing House) direct electronic debits and credits to or from troop or service unit accounts at any time.

Troops and service units are responsible for ensuring they have sufficient funds in their account on the dates of scheduled ACH debits related to council's cookie and fall product programs. The council publishes these dates and requirements annually.

Service Unit Accounts

Girl Scout service unit teams must maintain checking accounts to meet the expenses of supporting Girl Scouting in their area. All guidelines that apply to troop checking accounts apply to service unit team checking accounts as well. Individuals listed on an account are responsible for all account activity.

Responsibilities include but are not limited to account maintenance, keeping accurate records, retaining receipts, and any overdraft fees. The service unit adult leadership team should:

- Adhere to all local, state, and federal laws and ordinances.
- Provide budgeting guidance as needed.
- Help troop leaders/advisors establish a troop bank account.
- Establish a service unit team bank account.
- Provide regular service unit team treasury reports to the service unit.
- Ensure funds are being used in support of the Girl Scout experience and that the service unit benefits from the money that is earned. No service unit funds are to be used for personal benefit.
- Assist troop leaders/advisors with preparation of budget/finance reports as needed.
- Collect and review service unit team and troop financial reports, review and approve the troop financial reports, then have the troops submit them to council.
- Submit the service unit financial report to council by June 30th.

Bad Debt/Mismanagement of Funds

Although it should rarely occur, troops/groups and service unit teams can be the recipients of bad debts, such as a caregiver/volunteer bouncing a check or not paying for cookies. Troops/Service units are discouraged from taking checks from parents and other members of the community.

Troops that receive non-sufficient funds (NSF) checks or any other type of bad debt should attempt to resolve the situation first, themselves. For instance, a parent may pay for dues with a check that subsequently bounces. Work with the parent to recover the value of the check plus the fee charged by the bank.

All communications and information regarding a case of suspected misappropriation of funds is to remain in strict confidence with ONLY those parties involved. The concerned party should report suspected misappropriation immediately to info@gsdsw.org. The council will review and investigate the situation. A determination of misappropriation of funds is cause for immediate release of a volunteer from all appointed positions.

Helping and coaching girls to earn and manage money to pursue their goals, is an integral part of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Volunteers/adults that owe money to the council or the troop for product programs, bad checks, non-payment of summer camp fees, or misappropriation of troop funds, cannot serve as a volunteer at the troop, service unit, or council level, or earn volunteer awards.

Volunteering includes, but is not limited to:

- **Troop Level**
 - Troop leader; fall or cookie product program coordinator; troop treasurer; troop helper; record keeper; volunteer to maintain required adult/girl ratio on trips, camping, or activities; designated trained adult for Girl Scout trips, camping, or activities
- **Service Unit Level**
 - Any position the council considers administrative including volunteers needed for adult/girl ratios for service unit events, programs, day camps
- **Council Level**
 - Any position the council posts as a volunteer opportunity; participation in special committees and/or advisory groups at any level

How adult caregivers CAN participate if they owe money to the council or troop:

- Provide permission for the girl to participate in Girl Scout activities.
- Provide additional consent for activities that take place outside the scheduled meeting place.
- Drive the girl to and from the meeting location or to locations outside the scheduled meeting place to attend events and activities.
- Serve as a helper if the girl has special needs or abilities.

How their Girl Scout CAN participate if her adult caregiver owes money to the council or troop:

Girls can attend all meetings and activities of the troop including product programs but are limited to selling in the online programs and at cookie booths only. The adult guardian should be the person to explain to the girl how she can participate in the product sales. This should not be up to the troop leader or the troop fall/cookie chair.

Closing the Troop Account

When closing a troop or service unit bank account, please start by contacting the council at info@gsdsw.org to notify us of your plan to close the troop bank account. This action should only occur after your troop is aware of bank account closure and has had input into this decision. If the reason for closing the bank account is disbandment, please follow GSDSW Disbandment Procedures.

Do not proceed with bank closure until you have received approval in writing from council.

Troop supplies, troop records and all financial records will be turned over the service unit manager or the closest program center within one week of troop bank closure.

Disbanding/Splitting Troops & Unused Troop Funds

When a troop disbands, any unused Girl Scout money left in the account becomes the property of the council. Troop funds are not the property of any individual member. Before disbanding, ask your girls how they want to pay it forward. They may decide to donate any unused funds to their service unit, to another troop, or to pay for Girl Scout activities. Activities can also include purchasing materials to support another organization through Take Action projects.

Remaining funds may not be distributed to members of the troop and may not be used for personal items (such as gift cards, non-Girl Scout related merchandise, etc.).

- If all of the girls continuing in Girl Scouts join the same active GSDSW troop, ALL FUNDS will be transferred to that troop.
- If any of the girl(s) join another GSDSW troop, then a portion of money will follow her (them) to the new troop. The portion of money is determined by the number of registered girls when the troop disbanded, and the amount of money left in the troop's account.
- If the girls continuing in Girl Scouts choose to transition to two or more other active GSDSW Girl Scout troops, funds will be apportioned among those troops based on how many girls join each troop.
- If none of the girls join another GSDSW troop, funds do not become the property of any individual, girl or adult. Money will go to assist GSDSW for financial assistance and to support girl programs after a period of one year.

Example

There were 10 Girls in Troop 12345 with \$100 remaining after they took a trip to the zoo as their final event. Five (5) girls are continuing in a new troop, and one will be an Individually Registered Member. A check for \$50 should be issued to the five (5) new troop for the five girls. The balance of \$50 should be sent to GSDSW to be deposited and be held for one year. If after one year none of the girls join a new troop the funds will be used for financial assistance and support girl programs.

Troop Money-Earning Basics

Troops flex their financial muscles in two distinct ways:

1. The Girl Scout Cookie Program and other product sales of Girl Scouts (authorized product sales such as calendars, magazines, or nuts and candy organized by the council.) All girl 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 members don't sell cookies and other products, girls do.
2. Troop/Group money-earning activities organized by the troop (not by the council). These are planned and carried out by girls (in partnership with volunteers) and earn money for the group.

Participation Guidance

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

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

Additional Guidelines

Girl Scout troops should be self-supporting; they should not rely on funding from the girls' families. Girls, caregivers, and sponsors should know where troop funds come from and how they are spent. Troop funds do not belong to individual girls, only to the troop as a whole. Girls earn money only for the troop, never for themselves. Girls may not receive individual credit for the amount of funds or the portion of the troop account that resulted from their contributed troop dues or their money earned from product sales program troop proceeds. The IRS requires that 501(c) 3 organizations must not be organized or operated for the benefit of private interests, meaning the funds cannot be collected or used for any individual's benefit. Keep these specific guidelines—some of which are required by the Internal Revenue Service—in mind to ensure that sales are conducted with legal and financial integrity.

- All rewards earned by girls through the product program activities must support Girl Scout program experiences (such as camp, travel, and program events, but not scholarships or financial credits toward outside organizations).
- Rewards are based on sales ranges set by the council 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.
- Obtain written approval from the council before a group money-earning event.
- Girl Scouts discourages the use of games of chance. Any activity that could be considered a game of chance (raffles, contests, bingo) must be approved by the council and be conducted in compliance with all local and state laws.
- Girl Scouts' [Blue Book of Basic Documents](#) policy forbids girls from the direct solicitation of cash. Girls can collect partial payment toward the purchase of a package of Girl Scout Cookies and other Girl Scout-authorized products through participation in council-approved product donation programs.

- Girl Scouts forbids product demonstration parties where the use of the Girl Scout trademark increases revenue for another business, such as in-home product parties. Any business using the Girl Scout trademark or other Girl Scout intellectual property must seek authorization from GSUSA .
- Group money-earning activities need to be suited to the ages and abilities of the girls and consistent with the principles of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
- Money earned is for Girl Scout activities and is not to be retained by individuals. Girls can, however, be awarded incentives and/or may earn credits from their Girl Scout product programs. Funds acquired through group money-earning projects must be reported and accounted for by the group according to council procedures.

Sample Money-Earning Activities

- **Collections/Drives**
 - Cell phones for refurbishment
 - Used ink cartridges turned in for money
 - Christmas tree recycling
- **Food/M 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 girls are planning; for instance, if girls are earning money for travel, they could tie the meal to their destination
- **Service(s)**
 - Service-a-thon (people sponsor a girl doing service and funds go to support a trip or other activity)
 - Babysitting for holidays (e.g., New Year's Eve) or council events
 - Raking leaves, weeding, cutting grass, or walking pets
 - Offering a cooking class or other specialty class

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

Help Your Troop Reach Its Financial Goals

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

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

- Write it out. Once the troop 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 the council and submit it along with the budget worksheet that the girls created.

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

Steps for Money-Earning Activities

1. Girls set a goal to achieve with the money that will be earned. All activities should be consistent with [Safety Activity Checkpoints](#).

2. Complete a Money-Earning Activity Application four weeks prior to the money-earning event. Information required includes:

- Troop and leader/advisor contact information
- Date of proposed activity
- Detailed description of the activity
- Projected troop income
- Projected troop expenses

3. The Girl Scout Cookie Program and fall product program are the primary money-earning activities in which girls can participate. Troops or groups requesting a supplemental money - earning project should participate in both council-sponsored product programs. The troop or group may plan or hold money-earning events at any time of the year; however, it may not compete with the Girl Scout Cookie Program or other council product programs.

4. It is recommended that a troop/group has no more than one money-earning project a year (in addition to the council-sponsored product programs) unless it is raising money for a Take Action project or to go to Juliette Law's birthplace in Savannah, a World Center, or another major trip with a defined purpose and budget.

Financial Management & Product Program Abilities by Level

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

Girl Scout Daisies

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

Girl Scout Brownies

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

Girl Scout Juniors

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

Girl Scout Cadettes, Seniors, & Ambassadors

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

Working with Sponsors & Other Organizations

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

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

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

- **Avoid fundraising for other organizations.**
 - Girl Scouts are not allowed to solicit money on behalf of another organization when identifying themselves as Girl Scouts by wearing a uniform, a sash or vest, official pins, and so on. This includes participating in a walkathon or telethon while in uniform. However, you and your group can support another organization through Take Action projects. Girl Scouts as individuals are able to participate in whatever events they choose as long as they are not wearing anything that officially identifies them as Girl Scouts.
- **Steer clear of political fundraisers.**
 - When in an official Girl Scout capacity or in any way identifying yourselves as Girl Scouts, your group may not participate, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign or work on behalf of or in opposition to a candidate for public office. Letter-writing campaigns are not allowed, nor is participating in a political rally, circulating a petition, or carrying a political banner.
- **Be respectful when collaborating with religious organizations.**
 - Girl Scout groups must respect the opinions and practices of religious partners, but no one should be required to take part in any religious observance or practice of the sponsoring group.
- **Avoid selling or endorsing commercial products.**
 - A commercial product is any product sold at a retail location. Since 1939, Girl Scouts and volunteers have not been allowed to endorse, provide a testimonial for, or sell such products.

Employer Benefits/Matching Gifts

Some employers offer matching gifts and volunteer service hours to their employees. Employers may match the employee's monetary donations or make a donation based on the hours the employee has volunteered with a nonprofit. Find out if your employer participates in a matching gift or volunteer program. Matching gift forms can typically be obtained from the company's employee benefits department. Forms should be completed by the employee and submitted to the council fund development department through email: info@gsdsw.org. Please complete the matching gift form provided by your employer in its entirety. Remember to update that form if any of the information you previously entered is no longer valid or has changed. That may include, troop number, service unit name, name of beneficiaries, etc.

Volunteer service hours will be considered a commemorative gift in honor of the Girl Scout volunteer who performed the hours of service. Any amount exceeding \$1,000 per membership year will go towards the annual giving campaign under the name of that volunteer or individual. Contact info@gsdsw.org for more information.

Gifts-In-Kind

In-kind donations are non-cash gifts of materials or services that individuals and businesses can use to support girls, troops, and the council.

The council will only acknowledge gifts-in-kind from donors who benefit the council, not individual troops. Troops can accept gifts-in-kind but may not provide a tax receipt to the donor. The council is the only entity permitted to provide a Tax ID to companies. Troops and service units are not equipped with a 501(c)3 status to provide the council's Tax ID.

Gift cards are not in-kind donations and are treated as cash donations. All in-kind donations to benefit the council must be approved by the department that will be the recipient of the gift in-kind. Please connect with the appropriate staff member to start the process. Email info@gsdsw.org to get started.

Engaging Girls

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

Understanding Healthy Development in Girls

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

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

Girl Scout Brownies

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

Girl Scout Juniors

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

Girl Scout Cadettes

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

Girl Scout Seniors

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

Girl Scout Ambassadors

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

Creating a Safe Space for Girls

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

Recognize & Support Each Girl

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

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

Promote Fairness

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

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

Build Trust

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

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

Inspire Open Communication

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

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

Responsibilities of Girls

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

- Assist you and other volunteers in safety planning.
- Listen to and follow your instructions and suggestions.
- Learn and practice safety skills.
- Learn to “think safety” at all times and to be prepared.
- Identify and evaluate an unsafe situation.
- Know how, when, and where to get help when needed.

Responsibilities of Caregivers

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

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

Managing Conflict

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

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

You’ll also find conflict resolution activities in some of the Journeys, such as the Amaze Journey for Cadettes or the Mission Sisterhood Journey for Seniors.

If a conflict persists, be sure you explain the matter to your volunteer support team. If the supervisor cannot resolve the issues satisfactorily (or if the problem involves the supervisor), the issue can be taken to the next level of supervision and ultimately to your council if you need extra help.

Communicating Effectively with Girls of Any Age

Make sure your words and intentions create connection with the girls. Keep in mind the importance of the following attitudes:

- **Listen.**
 - Listening to girls, as opposed to telling them what to think, feel, or do (no “you should”), is the first step in building a trusting relationship and helping them take ownership of their Girl Scout experience.
- **Be honest.**
 - If you’re not comfortable with a topic or activity, it’s OK to say so. No one expects you to be an expert on every topic. Ask for alternatives or seek out volunteers with the required expertise. Owning up to mistakes—and apologizing for them—goes a long way with girls.
- **Be open to real issues.**
 - Outside of Girl Scouts, girls may be dealing with issues like relationships, peer pressure, school, money, drugs, and other serious topics. When you don’t know, listen. Also, seek help from your council if you need assistance or more information.
- **Show respect.**
 - Girls often say that their best experiences were the ones where adults treated them as equal partners. Being spoken to as young adults reinforces that their opinions matter and that they deserve respect.
- **Offer options.**
 - Girls’ needs and interests change, and being flexible shows them that you respect them and their busy lives. Be ready with age-appropriate guidance and parameters no matter what the girls choose to do.
- **Stay current.**
 - Show your girls that you’re interested in their world by asking them about the TV shows and movies they like; the books, magazines, or blogs they read; the social media influencers they follow; and the music they like.

Remember LUTE: Listen, Understand, Tolerate, & Empathize.

Try using the LUTE method to thoughtfully respond when a girl is upset, angry, or confused.

- **Listen.**
 - Hear her out, ask for details, and reflect back what you hear; try “What happened next?” or “What did she say?”
- **Understand.**
 - Show that you understand where she’s coming from with comments such as, “So what I hear you saying is...,” or “I understand why you’re unhappy,” or “Your feelings are hurt; mine would be, too.”
- **Tolerate.**
 - You can tolerate the feelings that she just can’t handle right now on her own. Let her know that you’re there to listen and accept how she is feeling about the situation. Say something like: “Try talking to me about it. I’ll listen,” or “I know you’re mad—talking it out helps,” or “I can handle it—say whatever you want to.”
- **Empathize.**
 - Let her know you can imagine feeling what she’s feeling with comments such as, “I’m sure that really hurts,” or “I can imagine how painful this is for you.”

Remember you don’t have to solve their problems for them or have all the answers. Ask them what they would like to do about the situation and how you can support them.

Addressing the Needs of Older Girls

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

- Think of yourself as a “guide on the side”—a partner, a coach, or a mentor, not a “leader.”
- Ask girls what rules they need for safety and what group agreements they need to be a good team. When girls take the lead in establishing group rules, they’re more likely to stick to them.
- Understand that girls need time to talk, unwind, and have fun together.
- Ask what they think and what they want to do.
- Encourage girls to speak their minds.
- Provide structure, but don’t micromanage.
- Give everyone a voice in the group—understanding that “speaking up” may look different for each girl. For some girls, it might mean sharing their ideas in front of the entire group; for others it could mean submitting a written response or contributing as part of a group.
- Treat girls like partners.
- Don’t repeat what’s said in the group to anyone outside of it (unless necessary for a girl’s safety). See “Report Concerns” below to understand the guard rails.

When Sensitive Topics Come Up

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

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

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

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

Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest takes issues of sensitive nature very seriously and are available to offer support if questions should arise. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to council at info@gsdsw.org.

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

Report Concerns

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

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

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

Leaders or volunteers should immediately report suspected child abuse to the Chief Executive Officer or the Board Chair and the local law enforcement agency in which the child resides within 24 hours of receipt of information.

New Mexico Abuse Hotline (855)333-7233
Texas Abuse Hotline (800) 252-5400

Contact a staff member at your Girl Scout council to find out how to refer the girl and her parent/guardian to experts at school or in the community. Share your concern with the girl's family if this is feasible.

Media Inquiries: If there is ever a situation in which you're contacted by the media about anything considered controversial or sensitive in nature, please immediately refer all inquiries to GSDSW at info@gsdsw.org or after-hours call 559-284-3795.

Again, please don't comment on sensitive, council-wide issues. Only official council spokespersons should speak to the media on these issues.

Engaging Families

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

Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents & Other Caregivers

Parents and caregivers will feel most connected to the troop when you are proactive in engaging them early on. Express your desire for them to play an active role in troop life, and how that can contribute to the connection, joy, and sense of pride the Girl Scouts feel. At the same time, recognize that not all families have the same 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?

This first meeting is valuable as you start each troop year—whether you are a new or returning troop.

Why hold a meeting?

Kicking off each year with a caregiver meeting sets the troop up for success. Outlining clear expectations, building a team, and engaging caregivers in the Girl Scout experience is a great way to start off on the right foot. When caregivers are involved, leaders have support, the troop has a plan, and girls benefit! The meeting helps:

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

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

How to Keep Caregivers Engaged

- **Make the Ask(s).**

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

- **Make sense of "why."**

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

- **Make it quick and easy.**

- Everybody has a full plate these days, so instead of starting conversations with a list of tasks or responsibilities that caregivers could take on (which can be intimidating), ask how much time each week they might be able to dedicate to the troop, then go from there. For instance, if a troop caregiver has 15 minutes each week to spare, they could organize and manage the calendar for troop snacks and carpools. If a grandparent has one to two hours, she/he could assist by leading the troop through a specific badge of interest.

- **Make family part of the formula.**

- While Girl Scout programming is always focused on the girls themselves, it's important and helpful to open up a few events to their families throughout the year. Inviting the whole crew to celebrate her accomplishments in Girl Scouting—whether at a holiday open house, a bridging ceremony, or a fun "reverse meeting" where girls take the role of leaders and guide the adults, including caregivers, through an activity—will help caregivers better understand the value of Girl Scouts and they'll be more likely to invest their time and talents to the troop.
- That said, there's no need to wait for a special event to engage families in their girls' Girl Scout life. Keep communication lines open throughout the year—whether it's through your troop's social media page, personal emails, or in-person chats—to keep caregivers in the loop on what the girls are doing and learning during each meeting and encourage them to let their girls "be the experts" at home, explaining or teaching the new skills they've learned.
- You can get everyone in on the fun and keep Girl Scouts strong at home by sharing the family badge guides on the Volunteer Toolkit with caregivers.

Guidelines for Participation by Unregistered Adults/Children

- Safety ratio adults cannot be responsible for tagalongs during any Girl Scout activity, including troop or service unit led family camping events. It does not permit the adult to be able to act in a leadership position with the girls. When family camping, tagalongs cannot be under the supervision of a safety ratio adult, they must be under the supervision of an additional adult guardian.
- The inherent responsibility of overseeing a Girl Scout troop in a camp environment that is not designed for the safety of toddlers has led us to limit participation to girls over the age of five for non-council facilitated family camp. No child under the age of five years old may attend as a tagalong on a troop or service unit led camping trip. Children under the age of five may attend and participate in council-sponsored family camping events.
- No boys are allowed as tagalongs for overnight troop camping at Girl Scout properties but are permitted during service unit overnight camping and council-sponsored family camping where accommodations for males are in place.
- Non-member adult males or females may attend events during the day at Girl Scout properties, but may not stay overnight, even with tag insurance, unless it is a council family camp event.

Girl Scout Product Programs

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

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

Five Essential Skills

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

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

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

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

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

Girl Scout Cookie History

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

Where Cookie Proceeds Go

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

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

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

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

“Ownership of Assets,” Blue Book of Basic Documents

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

The Council’s Role

When you are set up for success, you are better able to set up your girls for success! That’s why every year, your council provides trainings, guidelines, and procedures for conducting the Girl Scout Cookie Program and product program and determines how the proceeds and product rewards system will be managed. Check [GSDSW’s cookie information webpage](#) to find the answers you need as well as local trainings and resources.

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

Councils also work with vendors to offer magazine subscriptions, nut and candy products and more, for the Sweets & Treats 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.

Your Role

You play an exciting role in giving your Girl Scouts opportunities to practice the five skills as they learn how to think like entrepreneurs.

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

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

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

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

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

Product Program Safety

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

Selling Cookies Online

Will your troop use the Digital Cookie platform to manage its cookie business? Check the specific guidelines provided by the cookie vendor before participating. Before girls begin selling online, they should partner with their troop leader and families to learn how to safely run their business online. We know Girl Scouts and their troops are creative, and the Girl Scout Cookie Program provides the perfect opportunity to highlight that creativity. Participants can use vanity URLs to add a creative component to their marketing strategy (e.g. Shana's Cookie Sale or Buy Cookies from Shana). Troops and 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-led program; a Girl Scout should always lead online marketing and sales efforts, with the supervision of her caregiver.
- Girl Scouts engaging in online sales and marketing must review and apply the Digital Marketing Tips for Cookie Entrepreneurs and Their Families.
- Girls, volunteers, and caregivers must review and adhere to the Girl Scout Internet Safety Pledge, the [Digital Cookie Pledge](#), and Girl Scouts' Safety Activity Checkpoints Product Programs.
- Posting individual or troop sales links to resale sites (Craigslist, eBay, Facebook Marketplace, etc.) is prohibited.
- Girls must adhere to all terms and conditions on Digital Cookie and M2 platforms.
- Girl Scouts of the USA reserves the right to remove or disable the link for any reason including violation of guidance, inventory fulfillment issues, safety issues, or if sales and marketing activity goes viral and otherwise creates unanticipated disruption.

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

The Buddy System

Remember to always incorporate the buddy system when Girl Scouts engage in Product Sales. Girl Scouts should not sell or deliver cookies alone.

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

Preparing for Your Girl Scout Cookie Booth

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

Create a great cookie booth experience for your Girl Scouts by adhering to the following guidelines.

- Use your best judgment in setting up cookie booths in locations that will be open, accessible, and safe for all Girl Scouts and potential customers.
- Choose a high traffic area—this could be your local supermarket, mall, or park—where you'll maximize the number of visitors to your booth.
- Check out your booth site ahead of the sale. Talk to business owners in the area so they'll know what to expect. Find out what security measures are in place—these may include lights for evening sales and whether a security camera watches the booth area and where the nearest bathrooms are located.
- Respect the surrounding businesses by making sure your booth isn't blocking a store entrance or exit.

Encourage your Girl Scouts to unleash their creativity by working on their advertising skills to make colorful signs and booth decorations that potential customers can't resist! Remind girls to be polite and to have their sales pitch ready for interested customers.

Keep the following in mind:

- Adults must always be present for cookie booths in public areas.
- A minimum of two volunteers (all must be registered Girl Scout members/volunteers, and background checked), and one Girl Scout should be present at the booth at all times. With two or more volunteers, you'll have adequate booth coverage if the girls need to be accompanied to the restroom. The product program team will share additional information during training for Girl Scout Cookie season, as needed.
- If your Daisies are still learning how to make correct change, help them handle money as needed. Remember that girls make all sales at the booth!
- Changing your cookie booth hours or location? Keep your customers in the loop and update the Digital Cookie system with the new details. All scheduled booths are available on Cookie Finder.
- Certain locations may be inappropriate for younger Girl Scouts based on the standards of your local community, may negatively impact the cookie program experience for girls, and/or may negatively impact our brand in your community. For additional clarity, girls should not sell in or in front of establishments that they themselves cannot legally patronize.

- Additionally, with respect to marijuana dispensaries, we have been steadfastly combating the unauthorized uses of the Girl Scout trademark by the cannabis community, which has been marketing—without our authorization—certain cannabis products under our youth appealing brand. We are continuing to aggressively fight these unauthorized uses of the Girl Scout brand and hope that our council 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, manage inventory, collect and process payments for cookies. Store employees and/or adults cannot sell cookies on behalf of a Girl Scout or troop.

For more tips to make your booth a success, check out our [Cookie Booth Essentials](#). Additional information about setting up a booth and safety and security suggestions, is provided during the service unit and troop cookie training.

Report any suspicious people in the area to security. If someone takes money or cookies from your booth, do not attempt to physically recover the stolen items and do not allow the girls to do so. Instead, get a good description of the offender(s), call 911, and alert local security (if applicable). Make sure girls know what to do in case of theft. Report any incidents to GSDSW.

Consequences

The booth etiquette guidelines were developed to create a positive experience for our Girl Scouts, volunteers, customer, and businesses. If girls and/or troops (including troop caregivers) are not participating within the established guidelines, they may be penalized in one or more of the following ways:

- Verbal counseling regarding any booth-etiquette offense.
- Removal from troop’s next scheduled council-level booth location.
- Girl Scout/troop will not be allowed to hold any further cookie booths at council-level booth locations for the season.
- Girl Scout/troop will not be allowed to hold any further cookie booths for the season.

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

Cookie Donation Programs

Cookies also help girls make a big impact in their community! GSDSW offers several donation programs within the cookie and fall product programs. Service units and troop volunteers learn additional details during training. The established cookie donation program allows customers to purchase cookies that will be donated to an organization by GSDSW. Cookie donations are not only a great talking point for girls to share with their customers; they’re also a thoughtful way to show girls how cookies can help them give back to their community.

With cookie donations, remember that:

- All cookie donation programs must be approved by the council.
- Donated cookies must stay within GSDSW’s jurisdiction unless there is 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 does not undermine the work of the council or jeopardize the integrity of the Girl Scout brand.

Handling Product Complaints

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

Recognizing Cookie Sellers in the Media

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

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

Know How

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

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

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

Appreciation is an ongoing, everyday process for anyone, anywhere, anytime. Showing appreciation for one another is a good way to show respect, to relate to each other's strengths and to build mutual commitment. Giving and receiving recognition is an important component of the Volunteer Development System in Girl Scouting. We recognize any adult whose efforts are sincerely focused on making the Girl Scout experience positive, fun, and available to every girl and every adult, everywhere. Girls should assist in deciding how to recognize their leaders/assistant leaders/troop volunteers/advisors.

Volunteer Appreciation



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

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

Check out the council web page [Ways to Recognize Volunteers](#) for more ideas and information on recognizing and celebrating volunteers.



Volunteer Awards

Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest recognizes adult volunteers with both national (GSUSA) and council awards, and a monthly spotlight for troop leaders making a difference every day. For more information on Girl Scout awards for volunteers, contact info@gdsdw.org or visit our website at gdsdw.org.