



  
**girl scouts**  
of greater chicago  
and northwest  
indiana

# Leader's Guide to Success



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### The Girl Scout Promise

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

### The Girl Scout Law

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

### Our Mission

Building girls of courage, confidence, and  
character, who make the world a better place.

*\*Members may substitute for the word God  
in accordance with their own spiritual beliefs.*



@GirlScoutsGCNWI



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social media!*



# WELCOME TO GIRL SCOUTS!

Congratulations! You're about to embark on the adventure of a lifetime! On behalf of our girl members, we want to thank you for dedicating your time and talent as a volunteer.

We ask only one thing: create a safe space where girls can learn to be the leaders of their own lives, a space where they build courage, confidence and character.

Let go of any expectations you may have about what this should look like for this generation of girls. This isn't a race to earn the most badges. This isn't about repeating everything you may have done as a Girl Scout. As our most seasoned and satisfied volunteers will tell you, the most rewarding experiences happen when we listen to and support girls as they grow and develop through a variety of phases and ages.

Girls tell us that having a variety of activities, including community service and field trips, is one of the best ways to have a successful year, even if things do not always go according to plan! Sometimes the greatest learnings in life happen when you have not planned them.

As a former Girl Scout and troop leader myself, I can tell you firsthand that there's nothing more rewarding than making a difference in a young girl's life. You're more than a volunteer. You're a positive role model, coach, and mentor. Listen to the girls. Do not plan everything for them; include them in the decision-making process. That's the power of our girl-led program. Girls will see the benefits for years to come, and they will remember that you believed in them.

Thank you again for your commitment to fostering the next generation of women leaders. We could not achieve our mission of building girls of courage, confidence, and character without you.

Yours in Girl Scouting,  
Nancy L. Wright,  
Chief Executive Officer  
Girl Scouts GCNWI





# LET'S GET STARTED

## Your Girl Scout Membership

Every participant (girl or adult) in Girl Scouting must register to become a member of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). Membership dues are valid for one year, from Oct. 1 - Sept. 30. Girl Scout membership dues are \$25. Financial assistance is available to girls and adults by request through the registration process and online.

## Inclusion

Girl Scouts embraces girls of all abilities, backgrounds and heritage, with a specific and positive philosophy of inclusion that benefits everyone. Each girl, without regard to socioeconomic status, race, physical or cognitive ability, ethnicity, primary language or religion, is an equal and valued member of the group, and groups reflect the diversity of our communities. Understanding and valuing each member's unique characteristics and abilities is the first step to establishing a welcoming environment where all girls thrive and contribute to the value of the overall experiences of the troop.

## What is the Opp Cat? (Opportunity Catalog)

The Opportunity Catalog (Opp Cat) is an online, efficient tool that matches interested girls and adult members to troops that would welcome new girl members and adult volunteers. Interested members provide us with their contact information and are able to see what troops are currently available in their preferred area. All new troops are automatically included in the Opp Cat and renewing troops have the option to display their openings. This has been a great resource for troops just starting up to engage new girls, current troops who are looking to expand their membership, and leaders who are seeking more adult leadership to help with various roles. Service units also have the ability to post open service team positions.



## What is the “Detail Survey”?

Troop details may change from year to year. To ensure that each member receives superior customer service and support from our staff, we have created a brief questionnaire to be completed by the troop leader each year. In the survey, you may update your meeting day and time, location, contact numbers, and you also have the option to have the troop details displayed in the Opp Cat so that more members may join your troop.

## Volunteer Toolkit (VTK)

You will see this digital, fully customizable planning tool referenced throughout this guide, and detailed on the Girl Scout Volunteer Resources page. As a new leader, you can rest assured that we “have your back” with this resource. Until you find your groove and feel more comfortable, this is a great way to plan and execute your troop meetings with a little help from your friends in Girl Scouting!

## Family Partnership

Family Partnership recognizes our community of members and families that support our council through a tax-deductible donation. Unlike membership dues, 100% of the funds raised through Family Partnership stay with our local council. Donations made through Family Partnership help girls become Girl Scouts who need financial assistance, supports adult volunteers with training, and maintains camp properties. Last year, we awarded more than \$160,000 in financial assistance to girls and troops, thanks to the generosity of Family Partnership donors. These funds allowed girls to become Girl Scouts, attend camp, and participate in our unique programs, regardless of their financial circumstances. Support Family Partnership by making a donation of any amount online. Visit [girlscoutsgcnwi.org/familypartnership](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org/familypartnership). You can also make a donation online when you register for membership.

## Who to Call with Questions

As a new leader, you will be paired with a troop support specialist who will welcome you and coach you throughout the year. Your troop specialist will reach out to you, or you can contact us through our customer care support team at 855-456-8347 or [customercare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:customercare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org) at any time.



# GIRL SCOUT LEVELS



**DAISIES**  
K & 1ST

**Girl Scout Daisies** sparkle with that “first time ever” newness in everything they do. They go on trips, learn about nature and science and explore the arts and their communities—and so much more. Girl Scout Daisies can also earn Learning Petals and receive participation patches.



**BROWNIES**  
2ND & 3RD

**Girl Scout Brownies** work together, earn badges, and explore their community. Friendship, fun, and age-appropriate activities begin at the Girl Scout Brownie meeting and move out to the community and wider world. While earning badges, they build skills, learn hobbies, and have fun!



**JUNIORS**  
4TH & 5TH

**Girl Scout Juniors** are big-idea thinkers. They’re explorers at camp and product designers when they earn their Innovation and Storytelling badges, or even their Bronze Award. Every day, they wake up ready to play a new role.



**CADETTES**  
6TH - 8TH

**Girl Scout Cadettes** chart their own course and let their curiosity and imagination lead the way. They learn about the power of being a good friend, gain confidence mentoring younger girls, and can earn the Silver Award.



**SENIORS**  
9TH & 10TH

**Girl Scout Seniors** are ready to take the world by storm, and Girl Scouts gives them millions of ways to do it. Their experiences help to shape their world, while giving them a safe space to be themselves and explore their interests. Girl Scout Seniors can earn their Gold Award (which, by the way, adds something “extra” to college applications).



**AMBASSADORS**  
11TH & 12TH

**Girl Scout Ambassadors** know that small acts create big change. While they get ready for life beyond high school, Girl Scouts helps them take flight. They also earn the Gold Award (which, by the way, adds something “extra” to college applications).

## THE GIRL SCOUT UNIFORM

Uniforms are an important part of the Girl Scout experience, connecting girls to Girl Scout traditions, displaying their accomplishments, and creating memories to last a lifetime. Fortunately, today’s uniform options are more in step with today’s trends and what girls want. Girl Scouts at each level now wear one required element (tunic, sash, or vest) to display their official pins and awards. Girls can mix and match pieces to complete the uniform. Troop leaders may opt to collect money from parents and purchase sashes, vests, and insignia from a nearby council shop, or ask parents to purchase items on their own. Financial assistance for uniforms components is available.

Visit one of our shop locations to purchase uniforms, starter kits, and more. Our shop staff are here to help! Or shop online at [shopgirlscouts.com](https://shopgirlscouts.com).

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA)

A national organization supporting the work of more than 100 councils across the U.S. for more than 100 years. Headquartered in New York, New York.

### Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana (GCNWI)

Independent 501(c)3 nonprofit chartered by GSUSA, operating under the direction of a local board of directors and overseeing all service units and troops within a given geographic area.

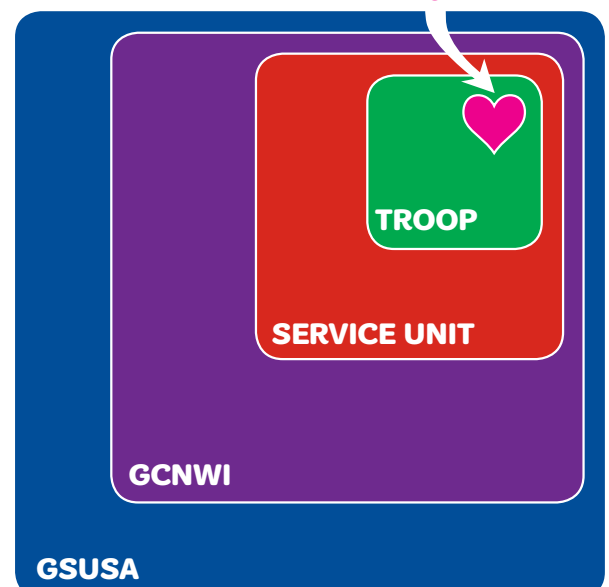
### Service Unit

Comprised of volunteers who support the work of troop volunteers within a given geographic area.

### Troops

Volunteer-supervised groups of girls who participate in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience. Some troops are also led by staff.

Girls are the heart of our organization!



# WHAT'S THE GIRL SCOUT PROGRAM?

As Girl Scouts, girls have tons of fun, make new friends, and go on fantastic new adventures. Our program centers on something called the Girl Scout Leadership Experience—a collection of activities and experiences girls have as they complete Journeys, earn badges, sell cookies, go on exciting trips, explore the outdoors and do Take Action projects that make a difference. The key is that girls need to have a say in what they do and how they do it. That's our girl-led difference.

**In Girl Scouts, girls will:**



## Discover

Find out who they are, what they care about, and what their talents are.



## Connect

Collaborate with other people, locally and globally, to make a difference in the world.



## Take Action

Do something to make the world a better place.



## Journeys



Identify a problem, come up with a creative solution, create a team plan to make the solution a reality, put a plan into action, and talk about what they have learned. As girls go on Journeys, they'll earn awards to put on their uniforms. The Volunteer Toolkit and Journey books are your resources for the requirements to earning awards.



## Badges

What have your girls always wanted to do?

Make their own movie, go geocaching, plant a garden? Great news! They can do all these things and more while earning badges which are worn on the front of the vest or sash.

The Volunteer Toolkit and *Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting* are your resources for the requirements to earning badges.



## Patches

Think of patches like collecting memories in Girl Scouts. They're often a part of the fun activities you can do in Girl Scouts without the requirements of badges. Patches are always worn on the back of the vest or sash.

## Highest Awards



### Bronze. Silver. Gold.

These represent the highest honors a Girl Scout can earn.

All three awards give girls the chance to do big things while working on an issue they care about. Whether they want to plant a community garden and inspire others to eat healthy for their Bronze, advocate for animal rights for their Silver, or build a career network that encourages girls to become scientists and engineers for their Gold, they'll inspire others (and you!).



# KEEPING GIRLS SAFE

While working with girls and learning new skills is fun and rewarding, assuming responsibility for other people's children means that some level of risk management and due diligence is involved. There are several resources we use to help you minimize risk and keep girls safe. Updated COVID - 19 Guidelines are available on our website. [girlscoutsgcnwi.org/en/our-council/news/2020/covid19.html](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org/en/our-council/news/2020/covid19.html)

## Understanding How Many Volunteers You Need

Girl Scout groups are large enough to provide a cooperative learning environment and small enough to allow development of individual girls. Our volunteer-to-girl ratios show the minimum number of volunteers needed to supervise a specific number of girls. These supervision ratios were devised to ensure the safety and well-being of girls.

Your group must have at least two unrelated, approved, registered volunteers present at all times, plus additional volunteers as necessary, depending on the size of the group and the ages and abilities of girls. Any adult that is supervising girls must be approved with an official letter appointing them to the role. Adults must be at least 18 years old, registered at \$25 per person annually (lifetime membership also available) and screened with a background check before volunteering. One troop leader in every group must be female. (See the chart below.)

Volunteer-to-Girl Ratio Chart	Group Meetings		Events, Travel and Camping	
	Two unrelated Volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <i>one</i> additional volunteer for each additional number of this many girls:	Two unrelated Volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <i>one</i> additional volunteer for each additional number of this many girls:
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

## Planning Safe Activities

When preparing for any activity with girls, start by reading the *Girl Scout Safety Activity Checkpoints* for that particular activity. You can find these on the resources tab of the Volunteer Toolkit. Each *Safety Activity Checkpoint* offers you required guidelines on where to do this activity, how to include girls with disabilities, where to find both basic and specialized gear required for the activity, how to prepare yourselves for the activity, and what specific steps to follow on the day of the activity. An adult who has completed first aid training is required for all activities.

If *Safety Activity Checkpoints* do not exist for an activity that you and the girls are interested in, contact us at [customercare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:customercare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org) or 312-912-6313 before making any definite plans with the girls.



## What to do in an Emergency

It's important to know and follow our council's procedures for handling emergency incidents. At the scene of an incident, safety is your first priority. Provide care for the injured person or obtain medical assistance and then immediately report the emergency to GCNWI staff. Call our office at 855-456-8347 or after business hours on our emergency line at 877-870-5823.

Make sure a general first aid kit is available at your meeting place and accompanies girls on any activity, along with their health history forms which may be needed by emergency personnel. You may need to provide the kit if one is not already available at your meeting location. Always have on hand the names and telephone numbers of our council office, parents/guardians and emergency services such as the police, fire department, or hospital.



# YOU—A GIRL SCOUT LEADER!

## Your Role

What does it mean to be a Girl Scout leader? It's the amazing journey of helping girls build courage, confidence, and character through Girl Scouts. As a troop leader, it's important to remember that leadership can bring many joys, including developing a personal relationship with each girl in the troop, building adult friendships through the sisterhood of Girl Scouts, receiving sincere appreciation and thanks from parents, and most importantly, knowing you are shaping the future by working with a girl today.

What does it mean to you to be a Girl Scout leader? That's something you'll discover throughout your time with the girls and adults in your troop, as well as through relationships you make with other volunteers and families. It's an exciting adventure!

### As you build relationships, leadership ...

- will develop as you get to know each girl and adult troop member.
- means communicating with parents and co-leaders.
- includes understanding the needs and interests of the girls, helping them plan activities and excursions beyond the troop meeting, and guiding them as they discover new interests.

### As a leader, it's important to remember that ...

- you cannot know everything the girls might ever want to learn.
- you'll also explore and learn many things along with the girls.
- you're expected to know where to go for information and resources, and get it when needed.
- it's okay not to know; you're not expected to know everything about Girl Scouting.

### Leadership is teaching ...

- girls that they can do and be anything.
- girls that they are decision makers.
- girls not only for the sake of knowing things, but also for the sake of development and growth.
- through being a good role model.

### See yourself as a coach ...

- not as a teacher with a canned lesson or activity or as someone who has to perform for the girls each week.
- who guides and instructs.
- who advises and discusses.
- and work so each girl can carry out responsibilities within the troop.
- as the girls build their skills and ethics.
- and give more responsibilities to the girls as they grow and develop.

### “Belonging” in leadership means ...

- understanding you are part of a troop and a team.
- listening, providing suggestions, and contributing ideas.
- sticking with the girls through good times and bad.
- recognizing you belong to a larger organization beyond the troop that will provide support and resources.



# YOUR VOLUNTEER TROOP COMMITTEE

## On my honor, I will ... *not do this alone!*

Before you hold your first troop meeting with girls, consider the support and resources you'll need throughout the year. Parents, friends, family, and other members of the community 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.

All of these adults must be screened and approved. They commit to these roles based on the amount of time the volunteer has to give and interest in specific areas on the team. Interested individuals should be guided to the *Join* or *Volunteer* buttons at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org](http://girlscoutsgcnwi.org).



Troop committee volunteers lighten the load and make being a troop leader more fun. These adults are an extra set of eyes, ears and hands whose skill sets are leveraged to help the troop safely explore the world around them. Ideally, your troop committee will have a troop cookie manager, troop fall product program manager and a troop treasurer. Trust us. Filling these roles with other helpful adults/parents will make your experience more rewarding.

Other adults/parents/family members may:

- agree to take on other tasks, depending on your troop needs
- chaperone events that to meet the volunteer-to-girl ratios
- agree to drive for trips that requires more supervision
- be an extra set of hands to manage an activity station
- provide a snack
- lead songs
- keep fun activities on track and full of fun!

Don't be afraid to ask! Often parents start in this role if they aren't sure they can commit to a committee or leader role. Once they see how rewarding it is, they may sign up for more!

Troop leaders guide the structure and experiences of the troop – from how/when meetings are held to how the troop communicates, from steering girl-led activities to setting financial expectations. Making these decisions collaboratively with your volunteer team, as well as with input from the girls and their parents/guardians, is part of that recipe for success.

## Troop Leader Responsibilities

- Liaison with service unit volunteers and council staff
- Troop financial management
- Communication with parents
- Girl safety
- Guiding the troop's Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)

## Troop Committee Responsibilities

- Assist troop leader
- Girl safety
- May drive girls, coordinate finances, and/or chaperone troop activities
- Provide extra help at troop meetings

## Parent/Guardian Responsibilities

- Communicate with troop leadership
- Provide permission and information needed for participation in activities
- Ensure current membership for their girl
- Provide transportation to and from meetings
- Complete and submit the Health History form

## Girl Responsibilities

- Be ready to learn and have fun
- Use your imagination and creativity
- Always stay with the group and be safe
- Clean up after yourself
- Listen when others are speaking
- Have fun!

**All Girl Scouts live by the Girl Scout Law!**





# The Secret Ingredient of Successful Girl Scout Troops:

## FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Obviously, you want the girls in your troop to have fun, be inspired, take risks, and learn about themselves and the world this year—that’s why you’re a Girl Scout troop leader! The thing is, parents and caregivers want the same thing for their girls, but getting families to pitch in and play an active role in the troop, while also enhancing the experience for their own daughter, can be tricky for many volunteers. *It doesn’t have to be this way!* After your troop’s initial parent meeting, here’s how you can best keep parents and caregivers on board.

### **Make the ask(s)**

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

### **Make sense of “why”**

Explain that not only does the whole troop benefit with extra help from parents and caregivers, but it also provides an opportunity for family members and girls to create special memories and have shared experiences together.

### **Make it quick and easy**

Start small. Everybody’s got a full plate these days, so instead of starting parent conversations with a list of tasks or responsibilities they could take on (which can be intimidating!), ask caregivers how much time each week they might be able to dedicate to the troop and then go from there. For instance, if a troop mom or dad has 15 minutes each week to spare, they could organize and manage the calendar for troop snacks and carpools. If a grandparent has one to two hours, they could assist with leading the troop through a specific badge on a topic they’re already comfortable with delivering. For more ways parents and other caregivers can help out when faced with a tricky schedule, check out the *Family Resources* tab in the Volunteer Toolkit.

### **Make family part of the formula**

While Girl Scouts 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 a whole crew to celebrate her accomplishments in Girl Scouting—whether at a holiday open house, a bridging ceremony, or a fun “reverse meeting” where girls take the role of leaders and guide the adults, including caregivers, through an activity—will help parents better understand the value of Girl Scouts. They will be more likely to invest their time and talents with the troop.

That said, there’s no need to wait for one of these special events to engage parents in their girls’ Girl Scout lives. Keep communication lines open throughout the year—whether it’s through your troop’s social media page, personal emails, or in-person chats—to keep parents in the loop on what the girls are doing and learning during each meeting, and encourage them to let their daughters “be the expert” at home, such as explaining or teaching a new skill she’s learned to the rest of the family.

# Kick the Year Off Right by Engaging Parents/Caregivers

## THE “PARENT MEETING”

Girl Scouting provides the best opportunities for girls when families step up and play an active part in the troop. Without meaningful support from parents, it's difficult for a troop to be all it can be. Plus, girls feel a special sense of pride when their families take part and show interest in the things they are doing! Resources for virtual meetings are available in the Learning Portal, [gsgcnwitraining.org](https://gsgcnwitraining.org)

So, what is a parent meeting? It's the first meeting you hold to start each troop year—whether you are a new or returning troop. It's valuable for *all* troops.

**100% of troops with the most satisfied parents and troop leaders report they hold a parent meeting.**

Why? Because it helps:

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

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

The best news? We've made it easy for you. Check out our step-by-step guide and parent meeting outline on the VTK. This hour-long meeting will make all the difference in the year ahead. Head to the Learning Portal, [gsgcnwitraining.org](https://gsgcnwitraining.org), for Virtual Meeting ideas and resources





# GUIDING YOUR TROOP EXPERIENCE

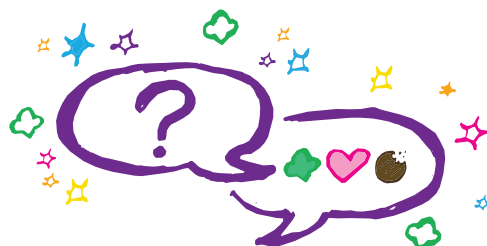
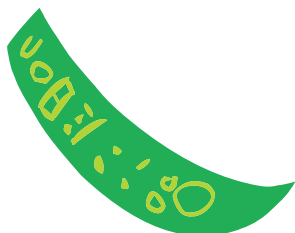
Use these questions to talk with your troop committee volunteers and together outline your troop's structure before discussing these topics with parents/guardians.

- ✓ **How often/when will we meet, and for how long (length of each meeting and until what part of year)?**
- ✓ **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
  - community centers
- ✓ **Which components of the uniform will families need to purchase?** (Our GCNWI retail staff are always happy to help make that experience easy, either in store or online.)
- ✓ **Will our troop be a single level or facilitated as a multi-level troop with girls of many grade levels combined into one troop?** If multi-level, how will we make sure they each get an age-appropriate experience?
- ✓ **How are we going to work with girls to decide on activities that are what they want to do, are age appropriate, and help them discover, connect, and take action?** You can utilize the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) to help you through this process by exploring options for activities and reviewing the meeting plans and resources lists. Again, listen to the girls and help them make age-appropriate decisions.
- ✓ **How and how often are we going to communicate to parents/guardians?** Keep everyone in the loop to make sure they know when, where, and what the activities will be and that girls are prepared for the activity. Effective communication will help set expectations and clarify parent/guardian responsibilities.
- ✓ **How will we fund the fun?** 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? Outline a financial plan, and then fill in the details once girls determine what they want to do this year.

Remember, Girl Scouts is designed to be girl-led. Talk to the girls about what they'd like to get out of Girl Scouts this year and make sure you're having fun along the way!



Virtual Troop Meeting Resources are on the VTK, Learning Portal and GS from Home on our website.



# LET'S GO — YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH GIRLS!

The first troop meeting is always exciting! It is really where you will see the adventure of being a Girl Scout troop leader start to unfold. Remember to have fun! As you help the girls on their journey to discover, connect and take action in the world around them, those experiences will be a part of your Girl Scout journey too. Enjoy it!

Your first troop meeting is a great chance to:

- get to know the girls!
- brainstorm all of the exciting things the girls want to do this year.
- introduce girls to Girl Scout traditions.
- Introduce the whole troop volunteer team to the girls and their parents/guardians.

**Virtual Troop Meeting Resources are on the VTK, Learning Portal and GS from Home on our website.**

If you are feeling a little nervous about leading troop meetings and experiences with your girls – that's okay! Working directly with girls can be challenging at times, but it is always rewarding and can be a lot of fun. As a Girl Scout troop leader, you are encouraged to listen to the girls with an open-mind and lead them with your heart.

Many adults feel that, when working with kids, they have to be the experts and have everything turn out perfectly. But this is not the case in Girl Scouts. When preparing for your first (or any) troop meeting, keep these things in mind:

- **It doesn't need to be perfect.** There are lots of resources with information and guidance to help you facilitate great meetings and experiences, but you are encouraged to be creative. And, if you forget a part of the meeting or the field trip doesn't go the way you planned or you run out of time – that's okay! The girls aren't expecting perfection from you; your time, attention and guidance are the best part of your leadership.
- **Learn with your girls!** As you use the girl-led process in the development of your troop's meetings and experiences, the girls will, at some point, want to earn a badge or complete a project in a subject unfamiliar to you. Be open with the girls when you don't know something, but don't use that as a reason to keep them from exploring the topic or doing the project. Instead, become their partner in figuring out how to learn more. When they see you learning alongside them, their confidence in their current knowledge and skills, as well as their ability to learn, will rise. It will also help them to understand that learning is a lifelong process.

## First Meeting Preparation Checklist

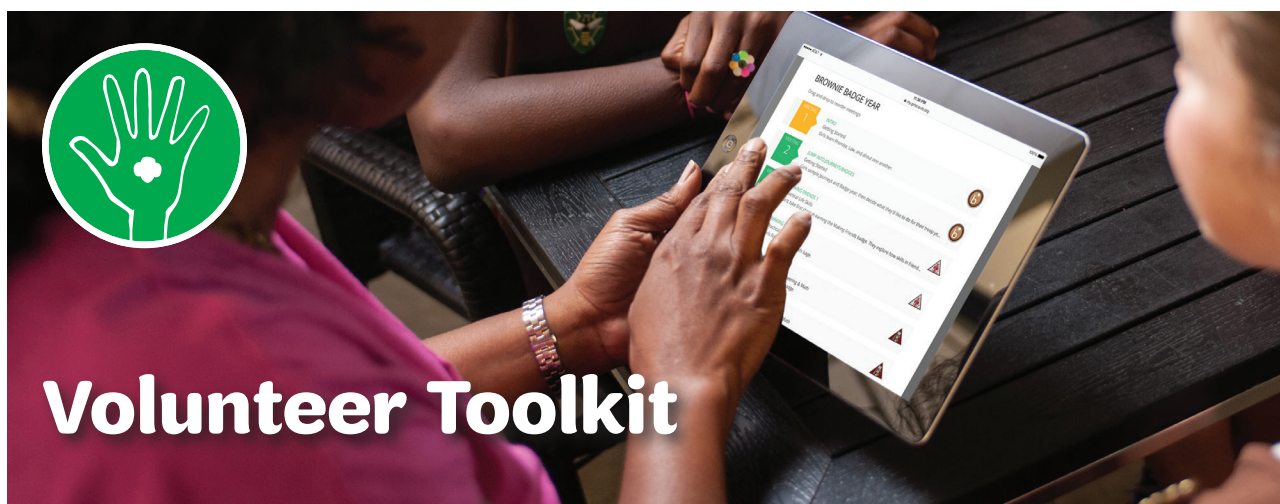
- **Cover the basics.** Review the details about when and where the meeting will take place and that all the parents know that information. You might find it helpful to visit the location beforehand.
- **Get ready.** Use the Volunteer Toolkit to verify your troop roster and email your parents. This might be a great time to ask parents to provide you with any needed items, such as health history forms, uniform order forms, or troop dues.
- **Know the agenda.** Use the "Six Elements of a Troop Meeting" on the next page and the Volunteer Toolkit meeting agenda to customize your meeting plan.
- **Review and practice your agenda.** This will help you feel calmer and be more flexible during the actual meeting.
- **Expect to have fun!** When the girls and parents see that you are prepared for the meeting and ready to have a great time, they'll follow your lead!



# 6 ELEMENTS OF A GREAT TROOP MEETING

**Our most important tip – your meetings should be fun!** Girls come to Girl Scouts to learn how to be leaders, make decisions, and have fun in the activities they choose.

- 1 Start Up**—Plan activities for girls to do as they arrive at the meeting so they have something to keep them busy until the meeting begins. It could be as simple as coloring pages, journaling, or talking with each other. (5 minutes)
- 2 Opening**—Each troop decides how to open their meeting—most begin with the Girl Scout Promise and Law, a simple flag ceremony, song, game, story, or other activity designed by the girls. (5-10 minutes)
- 3 Activities**—Use the meeting plans found in the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK). Activities are already designed to fit easily into this part of your meeting as you help your troop earn badges and complete Journeys. (30-45 minutes)
- 4 Clean Up**—Girl Scouts should always leave a place cleaner than they found it! (5 minutes)
- 5 Closing**—Just like the opening, each troop can decide how to close—with a song, a game, or a story. (5-10 minutes)
- 6 Business**—Collect dues and make announcements, or plan an upcoming event or trip while parents/guardians are present. This gives you a chance to keep families informed. Discuss your troop's process for purchasing awards, patches and uniform pieces. (5 minutes)



# WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT TROOP FINANCES

**Important: Open a Bank Account** — As a troop leader, you and one additional, unrelated, registered and approved volunteer must establish a bank account for the collection of troop dues, payment of troop supplies and activities, and product sales revenue (fall product and cookie programs) within 30 days of your first parent meeting. Once the account is established, bank account information must be submitted using our Bank Account Submission form. This form can be accessed on our website under “forms.”

We highly encourage troop leaders to follow this recommendation to ensure greater troop financial transparency. Families want to know that the money that the girls earn is accumulating in an account so that the girls can spend it on their activities. Use this bank account to help girls understand banking, checks and balances, goal setting and more.

GCNWI has established a partnership with BMO Harris Bank (our recommendation for a preferred bank) which provides benefits to troops, such as waived account fees. No matter which bank you choose, troop leaders need an official letter that provides important information to ensure the troop account is set up correctly. To obtain a copy of that letter, please contact your troop support specialist or email [CustomerCare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:CustomerCare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org).

**Financial Assistance** — Finances shouldn't stand in the way of a Girl Scout's participation. Any girl needing financial assistance for membership can request it as part of the online membership registration process. Other financial assistance is available for uniform components, events, and camps, and can be requested online at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org).

**Tax Exemption** — As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, volunteers can use the GCNWI tax exempt form when purchasing supplies and materials for Girl Scout troop use. The tax-exempt form is found on the VTK Resources Tab.

## Funding the Fun!

Girls have some big ideas about what they want to do in Girl Scouts – and as a troop leader, you will guide them on how to plan and budget for those ideas. How do you do this?

**Troop Dues** — Many troops decide to collect troop dues as a way to help provide start-up funds for their activities and supplies. These could range from \$1-\$2 per meeting to \$30-\$40 for the entire school year paid all at one time. It's completely up to each troop to decide what works best for them to support the activities they want to do.

**Money-earning Activities** — The fall product and cookie programs are the primary money-earning activities for a Girl Scout troop. These programs are a great way for new troops to begin building their finances, and we provide support to new troops throughout the program. You will learn all about these fantastic programs in a separate training when the time is right.

If your troop participates in these programs, they may also plan an additional fundraising activity. Before hosting an additional fundraising activity, written approval from the council must be received. A money-earning activity form is available online at [www.girlscoutsgcnwi.org](https://www.girlscoutsgcnwi.org) under forms. For detailed information on our council policies and procedures, please refer to *Volunteer Essentials*.

## Managing Your Troop's Funds

Remember, Girl Scout funds are girl-earned and girl-spent.

- How the funds are used is a decision made by the entire troop, not just the leaders, parents, or a few select girls
- Troop funds belong to the entire troop and cannot be earmarked for individual girl use.
- Funds can be used to purchase badges and patches, Journey and guide books, uniform components, pay for celebrations and ceremonies, community service projects, field trips, and more.
- Let the girls come up with some ideas and then have the troop vote.
- Be transparent with families about how the troop earns and spends its dollars.

The adult responsible for the troop finances has a responsibility to keep track of receipts and expenses. All income and expenses must be reported by June 15 each year using the finance tab in the Volunteer Toolkit. Copies or originals of bank statements and receipts will be submitted, so be sure to save them throughout the year.



# THE BENEFITS OF PRODUCT PROGRAM!

By listening to, and supporting the girls in your troop, you will discover that being a Girl Scout volunteer is more unique and rewarding that you may have even realized.

- *You will see the pride in girls' eyes as they earn their first badge.*
- *You will see their excitement as they discover something new.*
- *You will have fun teaching new skills and watching them grow!*

To accomplish these things, we want to teach girls some basic money-earning skills through two unique and rewarding product program experiences: fall product and Girl Scout Cookies!

By participating in both programs, girls are an active part of the learning process. They make plans about how to spend the money they earn, just like children learn to save their allowance, plan for things they want to purchase and celebrate the joys of being philanthropic to help others. Your troop receives proceeds to help fund their activities, and individual girls receive rewards/patches for reaching their goals. The entire program is an important way to help support the camp properties you visit, the trainings and development opportunities that support you and other volunteers in their roles, provide financial assistance for those who need it, and more. ***Together, we are a community of people who believe in investing in girls and their potential.***



## October - November: Fall Product Program

Girls sell candy/nuts and magazines to earn money for the troop at the start of the year. It's also great for a new troop just building their bank account. Remember to ask another parent or family member to help coordinate this program so you can continue to focus on the overall troop experience. Even if the schools in your neighborhood host a fundraiser at the same time of year, please let girls and parents make their own decisions about participating.

## January - April: Girl Scout Cookie Program

Girls have been selling Girl Scout Cookies for more than 100 years! Lots of enthusiastic helpers to support this iconic program experience for girls will help bring the tradition to life so that everyone has fun!

The **3** parts to our cookie program:

1. **Initial orders:** Girls go door-to-door to sell cookies, call family and friends, and/or reach out via our Cookie Club. (We do not sell cookies online, but Cookie Club allows our girls to get "cookie promises" of sales from folks they know.)
2. **Cookie cupboards:** From mid-February until the end of March/beginning of April, designated adults from the troop may secure cookies by the case so that troops can do cookie booths AND they can fill "Goal Getter" orders. Girls use Goal Getter order cards to keep selling to reach a specific goal. If they can't get to your troop cookie manager's house for more cookies, they can go directly to one of our six Girl Scout Gathering Places/Cookie Cupboards and pick up cookies by the box and pay for them. That ensures that they can keep reaching for their goals!
3. **Booth and Loop sites:** When you see Girl Scouts selling cookies at a booth in a mall or at your local grocery store, those are booth sites. Loops sites are basically the same, except they are specific days that are organized by our council in buildings in the Chicago Loop.

## How Is This a "Program"?

Girls who are involved in setting goals and deciding how to use the money they earn are more likely to be engaged members of the troop and full of confidence. We hear, over and over, how girls who are shy about speaking in public become vocal and knowledgeable about cookies after even just one hour at a cookie booth! Many professional women credit their experiences in our Girl Scout Cookie program with their success in business!

## Where Do I Go for Help?

**YOU are not alone** when your troop is participating in our two product programs ... Girl Scout's Honor. We are here to help support and guide you. Our experienced and helpful team will be more than happy to answer your questions and give you tips for supporting the girls at any age! Contact us at 1-855-ILOVEGS ext. 6722 (that's 1-855-456-8347 ext. 6722).

# GIRL SCOUT VOLUNTEER RESOURCES

## The Volunteer Toolkit (VTK)

The Volunteer Toolkit is a digital planning tool that gives you resources and program content to get your year started—and keep it going smoothly with organization and communication tools! With this fully customizable resource, troop leaders can:

- Explore meeting topics and program activities with their girls
- Add local events their girls choose
- Print step-by-step activity guides and shopping lists
- View and edit troop roster
- Update contact information
- Renew members
- Manage girl attendance and track achievements
- Share troop meeting activities with parents/guardians
- Email parents/guardians with a single click
- Track and share financial information

Learn more and access the VTK at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org/vtk](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org/vtk) and [gsgcnwittraining.org](https://gsgcnwittraining.org)



## Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting and More

This easy-to-use binder (one for each grade level) is full of great info on being a Girl Scout, activities and awards. It's part handbook, part badge book, and all fun! For information about purchasing the guides, uniform components, pins, fun patches, and all other resources, visit [shopgirlscouts.com](https://shopgirlscouts.com). We are here to help you!

## Safety Activity Checkpoints

These are online lists containing everything you need to know to be prepared and keep your girls safe during a number of different kinds of activities outside of the normal Girl Scout troop meeting. These can be found in the Volunteer Resources section of [girlscoutsgcnwi.org](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org).

## Volunteer Essentials

This resource contains information, policies and procedures to guide our volunteers and staff and to ensure that the Girl Scout program is delivered in a safe, consistent manner for girls across our council. By agreeing to be a Girl Scout volunteer, you're agreeing to follow the items laid out in this resource. The policies and procedures document is updated on a regular basis and the newest version can always be found on our website. Find it at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org) under volunteer resources.

## GCNWI Social Media

Want to know what other troops are doing? Interested in new activities for your girls? Like sharing photos and videos? Stay connected and help us share the Girl Scout love on social media! Be sure to like us on Facebook, and follow us on Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram. Find all the links at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org). Share your story and photos with [gsmarketing@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:gsmarketing@girlscoutsgcnwi.org).

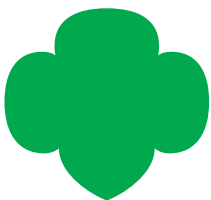
## Customer Care (Who to Contact with Questions!)

Serving our volunteers is a top priority. Reach out any time you have questions or do not know who to contact by either clicking on the “**Contact Us**” form at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org) or send an email to [customercare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:customercare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org). During business hours (Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m.- 5 p.m.), you can reach a customer service specialist **by calling 312-912-6313**. The team looks forward to resolving your needs and inquiries quickly.

**Girl Scouts at Home** Meeting virtually? Girl Scouts at Home is where you'll find family friendly activities, virtual meeting resources, and a virtual events calendar with engaging sessions everyone can do from home! Find it at [girlscoutsgcnwi.org/en/events/program-department/girls-scouts-from-home.html](https://girlscoutsgcnwi.org/en/events/program-department/girls-scouts-from-home.html).

# TROOP LEADER TRAINING

In order to build our girls into great leaders, we have to start with ourselves. We offer online training courses to meet your needs as a new or experienced troop leader. Head to the Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana Learning Portal <http://gsgcnwittraining.org>. Create an account and access your leader training modules. Basics of Inclusion, Safety in Girl Scouting, Meeting with Parents and Hosting Virtual Meetings are just a few of the courses you will find. Choose the Troop Leader role to complete all of the required and recommended trainings while having a great time starting your troop!





# WHERE WE'RE LOCATED AND HOW TO CONNECT



  
**girl scouts**  
of greater chicago  
and northwest  
indiana

[girlscoutsgcnwi.org](http://girlscoutsgcnwi.org)

Contact us at 855-456-8347  
or [CustomerCare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org](mailto:CustomerCare@girlscoutsgcnwi.org)

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## Offices/ Gathering Places

855-456-8347

### CHICAGO

20 S. Clark St., Suite 200  
Chicago, IL 60603  
Shop Extension: 6366

### MERRILLVILLE

8699 Broadway  
Merrillville, IN 46410  
Shop Extension: 1943

### HOMewood

1005 175th Street  
Homewood, IL 60430  
Shop Extension: 2323

### JOLIET

1551 Spencer Road  
Joliet, IL 60433  
Shop Extension: 2726

### VERNON HILLS

650 N Lakeview Parkway  
Vernon Hills, IL 60061  
Shop Extension: 9246

### GREENE WOOD

3155 71st Street  
Naperville, IL 60540  
Shop Extension: 5901

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## Office & Shop Hours:

### Offices:

Monday-Friday 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

### Shops:

Monday-Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.\*

Or shop online 24/7 at

[shopgirlscouts.com](http://shopgirlscouts.com)

*\* Please check shop site for location  
specific hours*