



TROOP MODULE

(ADD-ON TO VOLUNTEER ESSENTIALS)

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Welcome to the *Troop Module*, an add-on to *Volunteer Essentials*, which is a handbook for volunteers in all pathways. After you've read through *Volunteer Essentials*, come back to this add-on, which tells you specifically about the troop pathway.

Defining the Troop Pathway

Girls and adults participating in the troop pathway usually stay together for an entire school year and meet once a week, once a month, or twice a month—how often is up to you and the girls! Troops can meet just about anywhere, as long as the location is safe, easily accessible to girls and adults, and within a reasonable commute (“reasonable” having different definitions in different areas: In rural areas, a two-hour drive may be acceptable; in an urban area, a 30-minute subway ride may be too long). In each meeting, girls participate in fun activities that engage them in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Troops provide a flexible way for girls to meet for nine to twelve months. Some ideas include:

- Fourteen Girl Scout Brownies who meet twice a month from November through March at a local community center
- Seven girls who are homeschooled and meet weekly as a Girl Scout Cadette troop
- Girls who meet together once a week at their juvenile detention center to participate in Girl Scout activities

Understanding Your Role as a Troop Volunteer

Your most important role as a troop volunteer is to be excited about everything this opportunity affords you: a chance to partner directly with girls; an invitation to play a critical role in their lives; a chance to watch them blossom under your direction!

Sure, you'll have a few other responsibilities, too, and the rest of this section shares those details.

One note, however: As a troop volunteer, you serve as a partner and role model to girls. You'll also work closely with a co-volunteer, because two adults must be present at all times when working with girls, and at least one of those volunteers must be female and *not* related to the other adult. This is an important distinction that bears repeating: Men can serve as troop volunteers, but an adult female who is not related to the other volunteer must be present at all times, and at no time is a girl to be alone with only one volunteer. Remember to also check the adult-to-girl ratios in Chapter 5 of *Volunteer Essentials*.

Your Responsibilities

Your other responsibilities as a troop volunteer include:

- Sharing your knowledge, experience, and skills with a positive and flexible approach

- Working in a partnership with girls so that their activities are girl-led, and also partnering with other volunteers and council staff for support and guidance
- Organizing fun, interactive, girl-led activities that address relevant issues and match girls' interests and needs
- Providing guidance and information regarding Girl Scout events and troop meetings with girls' parents or guardians on a regular and ongoing basis through a variety of tools, including email, phone calls, newsletters, blogs, or whichever other method you choose
- Processing and completing registration forms and other paperwork, such as permission slips
- Communicating effectively and delivering clear, organized, and vibrant presentations or information to an individual or the troop
- Overseeing troop funds with honesty and integrity
- Maintaining a close connection to your volunteer support team

Your Support Team

In your role as a troop volunteer, you'll team up with helpers, including your co-volunteer(s), a volunteer support team, parents and guardians, council staff members, and others who have expressed interest in working alongside you.

The first thing you'll want to do is meet with this group and discuss what brought you to Girl Scouts, review your strengths and skills, and talk about how you would like to work together as a team. Also discuss:

- When and where to meet as a troop
- When, where, and how often to hold parent/guardian meetings
- When you will hold an investiture (pinning and dedication) ceremony
- Your local council calendar, which lists seasonal events, trainings, celebrations, Girl Scout special days, and product sales (including the Girl Scout Cookie program).

Remember to call on your volunteer support team, which can help you observe a meeting, assign you a buddy, help with registration forms, assist you with opening a bank account, plan your first meeting, and so on. Also plan to attend support meetings—usually held several times throughout the year—that provide excellent opportunities to learn from other volunteers.

Taking Your First Steps

Your first steps as a troop volunteer include the following:

- Form a troop committee

- Decide when and where to meet
- Hold a parent/guardian meeting

This section shows you how to complete all three steps. After you've completed those, you're ready to plan and hold your first few troop meetings, which is discussed in the remainder of this module.

Forming a Troop Committee

You need to involve other adults in the troop—please don't try to go it alone or depend on too few adults! Many hands make light work, and the role is more fun when it's shared. Think about the people you know whom you admire, who connect with children (especially girls), who are dependable and responsible, and who realistically have time to spend volunteering. (Remember that these adults will need to register as Girl Scout members, fill out volunteer application forms, take online learning sessions, and review written resources.) Consider business associates, neighbors, former classmates, friends, and so on. If you have trouble finding reliable, quality volunteers to assist, talk to your volunteer support team for advice and support.

Your troop committee members might help by:

- Filling in for you
- Arranging meeting places
- Locating adults with special skills to facilitate a specialized troop meeting
- Assisting with trips and chaperoning
- Managing troop records

A troop committee may be made up of general members or may include specific positions, such as

- **Troop Cookie Manager:** A volunteer who would manage all aspects of Girl Scout Cookie sales
- **Transportation Coordinator:** The volunteer you'd look to whenever you needed to transport girls for any reason; this person would have volunteers available to drive and chaperone
- **Troop Records Keeper:** This volunteer could be like a treasurer/secretary rolled into one person—someone to keep track of the money and keep the books.

Set up positions that work for you, and draw on other volunteers who possess skill sets that you may lack. When you're ready to invite parents, neighbors, friends, colleagues, and other respected adults to work with you, send them a letter and invite them to their first troop committee meeting. The adult guides for the Girl Scout Daisy, Brownie, and Junior *It's Your World—Change It!* leadership journeys include a sample welcome letter and a friends/family checklist to assist you in expanding your troop's adult network. There's a similar version included in the appendix to this module.

Deciding When and Where to Meet

When to meet is at your troop committee's discretion: What day and times work best for the girls, for you, for your co-volunteer(s), and for other adults who will be presenting or mentoring? Once per week throughout the school year is common, but so is once or twice per month. Is after-school best? Can your co-volunteers meet at that time, or will meetings work better in the evenings or on the weekends? If so, which day of the week? At what time?

Where to meet can be a bit trickier: A troop meeting place needs to provide a safe, clean, and secure environment that allows for the participation of all girls. You might consider using meeting rooms at

- Schools
- Libraries
- Houses of worship
- Community buildings
- Childcare facilities
- Local businesses

For teens, you can also rotate meetings at local coffee shops, bookstores, and other places girls enjoy spending time. When choosing a space, consider the following:

- **Cost:** The space should be free.
- **Size:** Make sure the space is large enough to hold all the girls in the troop while engaged in a variety of activities.
- **Availability:** Be sure the space is available at the time and day you want to meet, for the entire length of time you plan to use the space.
- **Resources:** Determine what types of furnishings (table? chairs?) come with the room and ensure that the lighting is adequate. A bonus would be a cubby of some sort, where you can store supplies!
- **Safety:** Ensure that the space is safe, secure, clean, properly ventilated, heated (or cooled, depending on your location), free from hazards, and has at least two exits that are well-marked and fully functional. Also be sure first-aid equipment is on-hand.
- **Facilities:** Sanitary and accessible toilets are critical.
- **Communication-friendly:** Be sure your cell phone works in the meeting space.
- **Allergen-free:** Be sure pet dander and other common allergens won't bother susceptible girls during troop meetings.
- **Accessibility:** Be sure the space can accommodate girls with disabilities, as well as parents with disabilities who may come to any meetings.

If this is your first time asking for a Girl Scout meeting place, here are a few speaking points to get you started: “I’m a Girl Scout volunteer, and I run a troop of _____ girls. We’re doing lots of great things for girls and for the community, like _____ and _____. 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 _____.”

Holding a Parent/Guardian Meeting

A parent/guardian meeting is a chance for you to get to know the families of the girls in your troop. Before the meeting, be sure you’ve done the following:

- Arranged for a parent, another volunteer, or a group of older girls to do activities with the girls in your troop while you talk with their parents/guardians (if girls will attend the meeting, too)
- Practiced your discussion on the following: Girl Scout Mission, Promise, and Law; benefits of Girl Scouting for their daughters, including how the GSLE is a world-class system for developing girl leaders; all the fun the girls are going to have; expectations for girls and their parents/guardians; and ideas of how parents and other guardians can participate in and enrich their daughters’ Girl Scout experiences.
- Determined when products sales (including Girl Scout Cookie sales) will happen in your council; parents/guardians will absolutely want to know!
- Created a sign-in sheet.
- Determined what information parents should bring to the meeting
- Created a one-page information sheet (your contact information, contact information for other troop committee members, the day and time of each meeting, location of and directions to the meeting place, what to bring with them, your troop number, and information on how to get journey books and other merchandise like sashes, vests, T-shirts, and so on).
- Gathered supplies, including the sign-in sheet, the information sheet, Girl Scout registration forms (available from your council), permission forms for parents/guardians to keep on hand (also available from your council), any other appropriate forms (see the appendix of this module), Girl Scout merchandise catalogs (also available from your council), pens, and an envelope for dues.
- Prepared yourself to ask parents and guardians for help with the troop, planning to be as specific as you can about the kind of help you will need!

Registering the Girls in the Troop

Every participant (girl or adult) in Girl Scouting must register and become a member of Girl Scouts of the USA. GSUSA membership dues are valid for one year, from October 1 to September 30. Membership dues (currently \$12) are sent by the council to GSUSA; no

portion of the dues stays with the council. Membership dues may not be transferred to another member and are not refundable.

Pre-registration for the upcoming membership year occurs in the spring. Troop members are encouraged to register early to avoid the “fall rush.” Early registration helps ensure uninterrupted receipt of forms and materials from the council, helps girls and troops plan ahead, and gets girls excited about all the great stuff you want to do as a Girl Scout next year. Girl Scout grade level is determined by the current membership year beginning October 1st.

Lifetime membership is available at a reduced rate. A lifetime member must be at least 18 years old (or a 17-year-old high-school graduate) and agree to the Girl Scout Promise and Law.

You’re free to structure the parent/guardian meeting in whatever way works for you, but the following structure works for many new volunteers:

- **As the girls and adults arrive, ask them to sign in.** Hand out registration forms and any other paperwork, including a one-page information sheet.
- **Open the meeting by welcoming the girls and adults.** Introduce yourself and other members of the troop committee. Have adults and girls introduce themselves, discuss whether anyone in their families has been a Girl Scout, and talk about what Girl Scouting means to them. Welcome everyone, regardless of experience, and let them know they will be learning about Girl Scouts today. (If you’re new to Girl Scouting, don’t worry—just let everyone know you’ll be learning about Girl Scouting together!)
- **Ask the girls to go with the adult or teen in charge of their activity and begin the discussion.**
- **Discuss the information you prepared for this meeting:**
 - All the fun girls are going to have!
 - When and where the troop will meet and some examples of activities the troop might choose to do
 - That a parent/guardian permission form is used for activities outside the troop’s usual meeting place and the importance of completing and returning it as indicated
 - How you plan to keep in touch with parents/guardians (e-mail, text messaging, a phone tree, fliers the girls take home, posting on an invitation-only group you create on Facebook are just some ideas)
 - The Girl Scout Mission, Promise, and Law
 - The Girl Scout program, especially what the Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE) is and what the program does for their daughters.
 - When Girl Scout Cookies (and other products) will go on sale and how participation in product sales teaches life skills and helps fund troop activities.

- The cost of membership, which includes annual GSUSA dues, any troop dues (ask your local council), optional uniforms, and any resources parents/guardians will need to buy (such as a journey book)
 - The availability of financial assistance and how the Girl Scout Cookie Program and other product sales generate funds for the troop treasury
 - That families can also make donations to the council—and why they might want to do that!
 - What the troop committee does, who is on it, in which areas you are looking for additional volunteers (be as specific as possible!)
- **Collect the completed registration forms.**
 - **Remind the group of the next meeting (if necessary) and thank everyone for attending.** Hold the next meeting when it makes sense for you and your troop committee—that may be in one month if face-to-face meetings are best or in six months if you’re diligent about keeping in touch with parents/guardians via e-mail, phone calls, or some other form of communication.
 - **After the meeting,** follow up with any parents or guardians who did not attend to connect them with the group, inform them of decisions, and discuss how they can help the troop.

Planning and Holding Troop Meetings

To plan and hold successful troop meetings, follow the steps in each of the following sections. You’ll feel confident and comfortable in no time!

Using Journeys

Like all pathways, the troop pathway offers an opportunity to deliver the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, in which girls discover themselves, connect with others, and take action to make the world a better place. The most efficient—and fun!—way to deliver the GSLE in a troop setting is to use journey books, which are the core program offering from Girl Scouts. **To get started, all you need is a sense of adventure to guide girls on a great journey. Check out these five simple tips:**

1. **Boot up your computer and take a 10-minute walk through the Girl Scout Leadership Experience interactive resource** at www.girlscouts.org/gsle. This bilingual interactive resource is designed for the busy volunteer. A guide talks you through each component of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience and provides clear definitions, illustrating how each piece is part of a well-researched, powerful, and change-making experience for girls.
2. **Kick off your shoes and sit down to relax.** Yes, this is where the real fun starts. Read the (grade-appropriate for the troop) girl journey as if you were a girl and without thinking what to do with it.

3. **Break out your accompanying adult guide** and flip straight to the “sample sessions at a glance” two-page spread for a “bird’s eye” view of how to bring the journeys to life.
4. **Now that you know what’s possible, invite the girls (and their parents) to use their imaginations** for how to make the journeys real in ways that excite them (girl led). You do not have to do everything as exactly as laid out in the books. The books are a great resource with lots of room for creativity. Remember, the books provide the ice cream: The girls and you add the sprinkles!
5. **Step back and watch** how the girls, with your knowledge, support, and guidance, have enormous fun and a rewarding experience. Celebrate with them as they earn their leadership awards, too!

Throughout your own journey—and even before—volunteer and staff members of your local Girl Scout council are there to offer crucial support with learning opportunities and advice. Never hesitate to contact them.

Utilizing Other Resources

You have other resources at your disposal, as well, including the *Daisy Girl Scout Activity Book*, *Try-Its for Brownie Girl Scouts*, *Junior Girl Scout Badge Book*, and *Interest Projects for Girls 11–17*. These resources provide topic-specific skills-building activities as girls earn the associated badges.

In addition, you’ll find a wealth of Girl Scout resources centered on four core areas: STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), financial literacy; the environment and outdoor education, and healthy living. Contact your local council or your volunteer coach for guidance on where to find these resources and how to infuse them into your troop activities.

Holding Troop Meetings

Troop meetings usually include six components, and journey book sample sessions are also arranged in a similar way, making the process easy for you!

- **Start-up:** Start-up activities are planned so that when girls arrive at the meeting they have something to do until the meeting starts. For younger girls, it could be coloring pages; teen girls might jot down a journal entry or just enjoy a little time to talk.
- **Opening:** The opening focuses the meeting and allows girls to start the meeting. Each troop decides how to open their own meeting—most begin with the Girl Scout Promise and Law, and then add a simple flag ceremony, song, game, story, or other ceremony designed by the girls. Girl Scout Brownies, for example, might create a new tradition by skipping in a circle while singing a song. Ceremonies, even when brief or humorous, make Girl Scout time special.

- **Business:** Troop business may include taking attendance, collecting dues, making announcements, and planning an upcoming event or trip. This is a good time for girls to lead, especially as they grow up! (Note that some troops move the business portion of the meeting to an earlier slot.)
- **Activities:** Activities will depend on what the girls want to do in their troop and how they want to spend their collective time. Outdoor time is important, so, encourage the girls to an activity at a park or forest. If girls are interested in animals, encourage the girls to plan a visit to a zoo or animal shelter. As you engage in one of the two leadership journeys, review the “Sample Sessions at a Glance” in the adult guide for journey activity ideas.
- **Clean-up:** Clean-up is just how it sounds, and it’s a great habit for girls to get their meeting space back to the way it was when they got there—maybe even cleaner than it was! Girls can also take leadership of the cleaning themselves, deciding who does what. They might even enjoy the tradition of a kaper chart (or a chore chart, listing all the chores, and assigning girls names to each), so that everyone takes turns at each responsibility.
- **Closing:** The closing lets the girls know that the troop meeting is ending. Many girls close with the friendship circle, in which each girl stands in a circle, puts her right hand over her left, and holds the hands of the girls standing next to her. The friendship squeeze is started by one girl, and then passed around the circle until it comes back to the girl who started it. When the squeeze is finished, girls twist clockwise out of the circle lifting their arms and turning around out.

Treat Time!

Treats are an option some troops decide to include in their meetings and range from a bottle of soap bubbles, a jump rope, or a food snack. If girls choose to include snacks, guide them to consider the health of a potential snack, as well as possible food allergies. Enlist the help of parents or guardians by asking them to sign up and bring a treat.

You help each troop member do her part to ensure the meeting and activities are enriching and fun. Based on their grade levels and abilities, girls may decide and plan opening and closing activities, bring and prepare treats, teach songs or games, and clean up. As girls grow, they can show and teach younger members about Girl Scouting. They can also assist you in preparing materials for activities. For activities such as trips, campouts, parent meetings, and multi-troop events, girls may be responsible for shopping, packing equipment, handing out programs, cleaning up, gathering wood, and so on. As long as you pay attention to grade level and maturity, the list of girl involvement is endless! (See Chapter 3 in *Volunteer Essentials* for a better understanding of girls’ progression by grade level; also see detailed information about each grade level in the journey adult guides.)

Troop Governance: Letting Girls Lead

Many troops employ a democratic system of governance so that all members have the opportunity to express their interests and feelings and share in the planning and coordination of activities. Girls partner with you and other adults, who facilitate, act as a sounding board, and ask and answer questions. Girls from the youngest Girl Scout Daisies through Ambassadors will gain confidence and leadership skills when given the opportunity to lead their activities, learn cooperatively as a group, and learn by doing instead of by observing.

The following are some traditions troops have used for girl-led governance, but these are just examples—girl-led and cooperative learning can happen in many ways! Journeys offer other examples of team decision-making, too.

- **Daisy/Brownie Circle:** While sitting in a circle (also called a ring), girls create a formal group decision-making body. The circle is an organized time for girls to express their ideas and talk about activities they enjoy, and you play an active role in facilitating discussion and helping them plan. Girls often vote to finalize decisions. If girls are talking at once, consider passing an object like a talking stick that entitles one girl to speak at a time (see Chapter 4 of *Volunteer Essentials* for additional tips).
- **Junior/Cadette/Senior/Ambassador Patrol or Team System:** In this system, large troops divide into small groups, with every member playing a role. Teams of four to six girls are recommended so that each girl gets a chance to participate and express her opinions. Patrols may be organized by interests or activities that feed into a take-action project, with each team taking responsibility for some part of the total project, and girls may even enjoy coming up with names for their teams.
- **Junior/Cadette/Senior/Ambassador Executive Board:** In the executive board system (also called steering committee), one leadership team makes decision for the entire troop. The board's responsibility is to plan activities and assign jobs based on interests and needs, and the rest of the troop decides how to pass their ideas and suggestions to the executive board throughout the year. The executive board usually has a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer and holds its own meetings to discuss troop matters. Limit the length of time each girl serves on the executive board so all troop members can participate during the year.
- **Junior/Cadette/Senior/Ambassador Town Meeting:** Under the town meeting system, business is discussed and decisions are made at meetings attended by all the girls in the troop. As in the patrol and executive board systems, everyone gets the chance to participate in decision-making and leadership. Your role is to act as a moderator, who makes sure everyone gets a chance to talk and that all ideas are considered.

A Sample Troop Year

Here is just one example of how you could set up your troop year. As long as you're basing your activities on the GSLE (using the three keys—discover, connect, and take action—and realizing the

outcomes/benefits that Girl Scouts promises) and using the three processes (girl-led, learn by doing, and cooperative learning), there is no wrong way!

- Hold a parent/guardian meeting.
- Open a checking account, if needed.
- Register all the girls in the troop.
- Meet together for the first time, allowing the girls to decide how they can learn each others' names and find out more about each other.
- Kick off the journey with a trip or special event that fits the theme. Have the girls brainstorm and plan this trip or event.
- Have the girls work through the journey, which will involve eight to ten gatherings (but can be more or less, depending on whether you combine or stretch out the sample sessions, based on your needs.
- Complete the take-action project.
- Encourage girls to plan a culminating ceremony for the journey, including awards presentations.
- Choose badge-exploration activities that girls will enjoy and that will give them a well-rounded year.
- Have the girls plan, budget for, and work on their Girl Scout Cookie sale (see Chapter 7 of *Volunteer Essentials*).
- Help girls plan a field trip or other travel opportunity.
- Pre-register girls for next year.
- Camp out!
- Participate in a council-wide event with girls from around your region.
- Have the girls plan and hold a bridging ceremony for girls continuing on to the next Girl Scout grade level.

Appendix: Forms

Forms can be found on Sybaquay's Web site.

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