

COVID-19 Highest Awards Guidelines

Gold, Silver, and Bronze Award Girl Scouts are the youth leaders their communities need to create solutions to the new and ever changing challenges that arise from this global pandemic—whether it’s helping ensure kids are still getting the nourishment and enrichment they need out of school, responding to the possible ramifications of isolation during social distancing, or something else entirely!

Gold, Silver, and Bronze Award Girl Scouts have the tools to partner with community organizations to identify challenges, research the root cause(s) and take action to address them. Let’s encourage them to harness their creativity and innovation to brainstorm digital solutions to continue to meet community needs as we navigate this period of uncertainty and rapid change.

That said, let’s be flexible and accommodating so girls have the time and space they need to adjust to the changes and, when they’re ready, safely harness their enthusiasm so they can facilitate meaningful solutions for their communities!

Read on for some guidelines:

We’re offering a special deadline extension to December 31, 2020 and will continue to re-assess over the next few months:

Recognizing that many schools, youth activities and community gatherings have been suspended, and that we are navigating a period of rapid change, Girl Scouts is offering a three-month extension from Sept. 30 to December 31, 2020, to provide flexibility for Girl Scout Juniors, Cadettes, Seniors and Ambassadors earning Girl Scouts’ Highest Awards. This is particularly relevant for 5th grade Juniors, 8th grade Cadettes, and 12th grade Ambassadors who will bridge to the next program age level officially on September 30, 2020 and typically would be no longer eligible to earn the Bronze, Silver or Gold Award, respectively.

Support girls to adjust their highest award projects.

The safety and health of our Girl Scouts is our top priority. We urge Girl Scout families to take the time they need to acclimate without the added stress of impending deadlines. Then, when girls are ready, let’s encourage them to flex their problem-solving muscles and adjust how they plan and implement their projects, rather than put their projects on hold. This will show girls that we’re confident in their ability to be the change our community needs through this crisis.

Facilitate reflection that positions girls as the *leaders and change makers we know they are.*

Guide them through the “*What? So What? Now What?*” framework by asking: What? (What is happening/changing?), So What? (So, what does that matter?) and Now What? (Now what do we do better/differently in these new circumstances?) It may also be pertinent to add: “Who is this impacting and how?”. Through this framework girls will analyze the situation and harness their leadership to develop new solutions that creatively meet their community’s needs.

Obstacles provide productive problem-solving; barriers don’t and should be addressed.

Problem solving obstacles is a critical part of the Bronze, Silver and Gold Award process. However, there is a difference between an obstacle and a barrier:

Obstacles can be overcome—they may include a girl losing in-person access to a site and/or their target audience. Girls may no longer be able to enter elderly centers to give classes, meet with their clubs in-person during lunchtime, or provide in-person afterschool enrichment. But: all those people are still seeking engagement!

Use the “What? So What? Now What?” reflection framework to help girls brainstorm other ways of meeting their community needs. Can they harness digital solutions — like Zoom, Google Hangouts, Facebook Live, Skype, phone calls or another format — to engage their target audience and facilitate their change? Or, can they schedule online “train the trainer” sessions that equip volunteers to host sessions with small groups rather than plan/implement large events? Talk about leadership!

Barriers are showstoppers—what if a girl lacks access to computers or internet? What if their community partner lacks the interest/resources to continue working with them right now and puts them on hold? What about funding or resource shortages?

Handle these situations on a case by case basis. Depending on how far along a Girl Scout was in her process—and how close she is to a council or national deadline— you might determine they have facilitated appropriate change worthy of a highest award and direct them to plan out their sustainability and submit their final report. If they are closer to the beginning of their project or have ample time, you might coach them hold tight and adapt their project.

Community partners may need time to adjust. Give it to them!

Like all of us, community partners are also in a significant period of adjustment. They may lack the capacity or interest to continue supporting girls’ projects right now. And, project advisors may be too overwhelmed to give proper attention, guidance and support. Coach girls to be patient and mindful that “right now” might not be the right timing and waiting a month or two may give community partners, project advisors and other teammates time to adjust to their new normal and become receptive again. This is one reason we put the national extension in place.

When community partners are available, girls can lead with forward thinking. Encourage girls to flex their leadership muscles by proactively asking: What’s your current situation? What do you need now/today that has shifted from the original plan? And, how can my work/plan support your new goals?

Help girls feel confident in making impact through virtual solutions.

It might take a bit of coaching to help girls grasp how to transform their hands-on, interactive, resource-driven project into a new structure that accommodates today’s challenges. Be patient and understanding as you help them identify useful knowledge and resources. Digital solutions can strengthen already strong projects!

Just like in pre-pandemic times, digital solutions must address the root cause of a community issue with sustainable and measurable impact. Girls should be able to say “here’s the change I wanted to make, and here’s how I know I made it”—and they should be able to provide proof that their solution made that meaningful change. Be sure girls are following the safety activity checkpoints for virtual events, just like they would for in-person settings.

Uplift particularly innovative Bronze, Silver and Gold Award Girl Scouts by sharing their projects with gogoldonline@girlscouts.org. We’ll be sure to share them with our Movement to inspire more girls!

Should my Gold Award committee meet virtually?

Follow the guidelines shared from the CDC for your community or state government. We encourage virtual meetings! GSUSA is currently exploring online platforms, like Zoom, that will promote meaningful virtual engagement for girls and volunteers...stay tuned! Regardless, always be sure there is a call-in option for those with limited internet access!

What about council Highest Award Celebrations?

Rather than cancelling, try to postpone your celebrations! These are life-changing, landmark moments for girls, and prioritizing the recognition of these achievements will be important to girls, their volunteers and families for years to come.

How can my committee safely meet with girls in an online space?

Please maintain the Safety Activity Checkpoints for all meetings whether in-person or virtual. There should always be two unrelated, background check adult members meeting with Girl Scouts. To make this more comfortable for girls, you may opt for small group meetings.

What if I have volunteers who are not digitally literate?

It's not only important to meet girls where they are at, but the volunteers who support them. Ensure you're providing not only call-in options but resources in a way that are easily accessible for all skill levels. Then, if you're able, you might consider engaging Silver or Gold Award Girl Scouts who are promoting digital literacy in the wider community. They are primed with the skills and experience to teach your volunteer the skills they need to move into this digital space. And, if there isn't a Girl Scout able to provide this coaching, perhaps you or a member of your team can help create a training or guide they can use!

Gold, Silver and Bronze Award Girl Scouts are the leaders their communities need to create solutions to the new and ever-changing obstacles that arise from this global pandemic. Thank you for investing time, energy and enthusiasm in encouraging them—and the volunteers who support them—to harness their creativity and rise to the challenge!