

Volunteer Support Team Guide

For Service Unit Volunteer
Support Team Volunteers



Volunteer Support Team Guide

*“The ultimate responsibility for the Girl Scout movement rests with its members.”
Blue Book of Basic Documents*

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Volunteer Support Team Overview

What is the purpose of a service unit?

Since its founding in 1912, Girl Scouts has always been a volunteer-run organization. Here in GSCCC, more than 12,000 girls are served every year by over thousands of volunteers – and there's no way Girl Scouts would be possible otherwise. The service unit is the structure that was created to support those volunteers in delivering Girl Scouting to girls. The service unit is a dynamic support system that, through diverse methods and the support of local communities, provides the Girl Scout Leadership Experience to girls and adults. It is the embodiment of the Girl Scout movement within the local community and has the responsibility to:

- Extend membership
- Provide direct support to girls and adults
- Educate the community about the benefits of Girl Scouts
- Act as a communication center for Girl Scouts

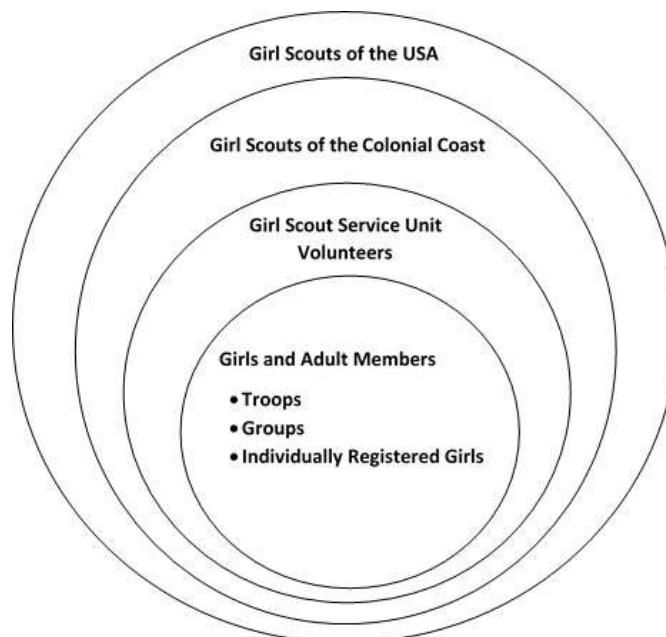
What is the purpose of a service unit volunteer support team?

The purpose of the support team is to recruit, develop and support volunteers to effectively implement the Girl Scout Leadership Experience with girls. The support team works together to assess the needs of volunteers and girls in the communities, develops a plan to address those needs, implements the plan and ensures there is ongoing communication between volunteers, the support team, and staff.

Your Network of Support

You are part of the world's largest organization of and for girls, currently encompassing two million girl members and nearly one million volunteers! As a member of the service unit volunteer support team, you play a vital role in supporting the girls and adult members within your service unit and you are directly supported by council staff. Don't ever hesitate to reach out to council staff for help.

The Girl Scout Organization



Volunteer Support Team Volunteers

- Provide consistent support to volunteers within key functional areas in the service units.
- Facilitate the sharing of information and resources among service units.
- Provide consistent processes and messaging from council to service unit volunteers.
- Serve as a communication center for volunteers within the service unit.
- Be champions for the service unit.

Your Staff Partner

Each service unit support works closely with their staff counterpart – a volunteer support specialist – to design the most effective structure for their service unit, and to train and support the service unit volunteers. Each volunteer support specialist is assigned to several service units, so it is important to keep in mind that they want to do everything they can to empower you so that they can maintain a high level of quality among all of their service units.

Volunteer Essentials

Girl Scout councils, like other organizations, have policies and procedures to help the organization run smoothly and stay safe. Policies are not optional and must be followed to help ensure safeguarding of girls in our care. All policies, standards and guidelines are outlined in the manual, *Volunteer Essentials*, which is available in electronic format on the GSCCC website. In your position on the volunteer support team, you will be supporting and guiding volunteers within the service unit. It is important that you be familiar with the contents of *Volunteer Essentials* and to understand the difference between a policy, a standard and a guideline.

- **Policy** – an official course of action which must be followed – “MUST do”.
- **Standard** – an established model or example which should be done. It permits people to use a certain degree of judgment, but there must be good reason not to follow a standard as written – “SHOULD do”.
- **Guideline** – established criteria or steps for doing something well or safely. They provide direction - “HOW to do”.

The Essential Functions of a Service Unit

There are six essential responsibilities that must happen in a service unit to ensure we are working towards the mission and goals of the organization. These functions are carried out through appointed and trained administrative volunteers who work together as the support team.

Administration

This function will provide the structure and the backbone of the service unit -- setting goals and making them a reality, managing finances, keeping things running smoothly and making sure everyone has what they need to perform the other functions.

Core Positions: Service Unit Coordinator, Finance Coordinator

Community Development

This is where it all begins for any girl or adult in Girl Scouting. It's how we let people know we're here, how to join and what we're all about. This function covers activities such as girl and adult recruitment, public relations, outreach and anything else a service unit does to give every girl in grades K-12 the information and opportunity they need to participate in Girl Scouts.

Core Position: Recruitment Champion

Support Positions: Placement Coordinator, School Liaison,
Community Relations Coordinator

Volunteer Support

Once an adult volunteer agrees to give girls the opportunity to participate in Girl Scouts, she/he requires a lot of support to provide the best possible experience. This function covers things like training, networking opportunities, mentorship, recognition and other avenues for assisting volunteers to do their jobs well.

Core Position: Volunteer Coordinator

Support Position: Adult Recognitions Coordinator, Adult Learning Facilitators

Program

This covers all the activities that girls do, within the troop, at the service unit level, regionally and Council level. Some service units directly organize activities for the girls in their area, plus they give leaders support and training in providing program at the other levels.

Core Position: Program Consultant

Support Positions: Outdoor Coordinator, Event Coordinator, Individual Girl
Coordinator

Product Sales Support

This is actually a mixture of volunteer support and program, but since fall products and cookies play such a significant role in the activities of a service unit, it merits its own function.

Core Position: Product Sales Coordinator

Getting Your Team in Place

What is the best structure for your service unit?

The key to a successful Girl Scout year is having the right people in place to provide support to girls and adults. There are several people who will work with you to fulfill the functions of the service unit. Their titles and roles will vary depending on how you structure your support team and the needs of your service unit.

How your team is structured will depend on a variety of factors. The size of your service unit is probably the primary factor that determines your structure. A small service unit may have only a few volunteers in support team roles who perform multiple functions. Larger service units may have large support teams with several volunteers who share the responsibilities for a function. One size does not fit all.

Another influence for the structure of your team may be the level of involvement of the volunteers. The more involved your volunteers are in the service unit, the more support they'll all receive from it in return. What matters most is that you build an effective team, promote healthy communication, and be a role model to your troop leaders and girls.

It is expected that all members of the volunteer support team will:

- Be at least 18 and have completed the volunteer appointment process (registration, background check, and appointed).
- Maintain strict confidentiality when handling membership data and confidential conversations.
- Apply the Girl Scout Promise and Law in everything you do as a Girl Scout volunteer.
- Value individual diversity.
- When there is a problem, be a part of the solution.
- Remember that we are all here for the girls.

Volunteer Support Team Core Positions

There are a few core positions necessary to implement the five essential functions of a service unit. Regardless of the structure of your volunteer support team, these core positions are a priority. For larger service units, additional support positions can be filled to help carry out the essential service unit functions.

Program Consultant

Advises troop leaders on how to effectively use Girl Scout program resources to plan fun and safe activities, ensures that service unit events and activities are aligned with the Girl Scout Leadership Experience and reviews troop trip and activity requests to ensure that all safety standards are in place prior to travel. The events coordinator is under the program consultant.

Finance Coordinator

Maintains the service unit bank account and financial forms, disperses funds to individually registered girls and for service unit expenditures, advises troop volunteers about managing troop finances and assists in collecting annual troop finance reports.

Volunteer Coordinator

Welcomes new troop volunteers and provides service unit information session. Assists leaders with acquiring required training and with finding all the resources they need to lead their troops

successfully. The adult recognitions coordinator and adult learning facilitators are under the volunteer coordinator.

Product Sales Coordinator

Provides support, guidance and training to troop product sales volunteers, organizes the distribution of products and collects, organizes and submits required product sales paperwork to the Council office at the close of the selling period.

Recruitment Champion

Helps plan for recruitment events/parent information nights in their service unit along with the recruitment specialist, keeps track of troop sizes, works with troop leaders to identify where space is available for troops to meet. They work directly with the recruitment and placement team in the Council.

Service Unit Coordinator

Coordinates communication between the volunteer support team to support troop leaders in the service unit. Facilitates volunteer support team and leader meetings throughout the year.

Volunteer Support Team Support Positions

Events Coordinator

Oversees the planning and implementation of events offerings that provide high-quality activities for girls using the national program portfolio and are aligned to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE).

Placement Coordinator

Tracks troop openings and shares that information with the council placement team to help with placement of girls.

School Liaison

Serves as liaison between school administration and volunteers, notifies recruitment specialist about visibility events within assigned school, and represents Girl Scouts at school functions when available.

Outdoor Coordinator

Establishes, plans and implements volunteer-led, outdoor experiences for girls that are aligned to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE), such as day camps, camporees, encampments or other outdoor opportunities.

Adult Recognitions Coordinator

Makes sure that volunteers within the service unit are properly recognized for their contributions, coordinates the nomination process for national awards and plans and executes annual adult recognition events.

Adult Learning Facilitator

Delivers courses, workshops and resources to individuals and/or groups of volunteers in order to orient, prepare and support them throughout their appointment. Works in conjunction with the council learning manager and service unit volunteer coordinator to provide the needed learning in the assigned area.

Individual Girl Coordinator

Provides a communication link for individually registered girls who are not assigned to a troop and their families about service unit and Council program opportunities. She or he ensures that the individually registered girls receive ongoing support while participating in activities/events (such as earning grade level recognitions/awards, product sales, etc.) during the membership year.

Community Relations Coordinator

Identifies newsworthy Girl Scouting activities within his or her service unit and coordinates media coverage with the GSCCC public relations manager. He or she attends Girl Scout events to take photographs and write articles.

Council Committees

Travel

Ensures that volunteers and girls participating in GSUSA Destinations and council, service unit and troop travel opportunities receive the proper preparation and support for their travel experience. She or he does not need to attend the trips, but she or he provides expertise and logistical support to ensure successful travel. She or he also reviews overnight and extended travel/activity requests for all groups within the area.

Adult Awards

Reviews all of the nominations for national adult awards (Appreciation, Honor, Thanks, Thanks II, Buck Harris, President's Award) and Volunteer of Excellence nominations.

Gold Award

Advises girls in planning, implementation, and documentation of take-action projects and Girl Scout Gold Award projects. Participates in the process for approving Gold Awards and guides Girl Scout Gold Award candidates through the council approval process

Team Dynamics

An effective team:

- Shares a clear sense of purpose
- Develops clear goals
- Understands the value of a team
- Shares a sense of interdependence
- Holds each other accountable
- Gives recognition
- Evaluates periodically

Four dynamics are fundamental to team success:

1. **The team member:** Successful teams are made up of a collection of effective individuals. These are people who understand their role, are engaged in the team purpose, have problem solving ability, are open to addressing problems, and are action oriented.
2. **Team relationships:** For a team to be successful the members of the team must be able to give and receive feedback.
3. **Team problem solving:** An effective team depends on how focused and clear the goal of the team is. A relaxed, comfortable and accepting environment and finally, open and honest communication are required.
4. **Team leadership:** Effective team leadership depends on leadership competencies. A competent leader is: focused on the goal, ensures a collaborative climate, builds confidence of team members, sets priorities, demonstrates sufficient “know-how” and manages performance through feedback.

Coordinating the Work of the Team

As a support team, your role is to ensure the essential responsibilities are implemented in the service unit. Each appointed support team position has a staff counterpart that appoints, trains and provides ongoing support to the volunteer position to ensure that the function of the position can be implemented effectively. It is through the coordinated work of the support team in which everyone must come together to ensure the right support is being provided for the volunteers in the service unit. You can do this by:

- Developing and implementing Service Unit Engagement Plan.
- Ensuring ongoing communication with volunteers, support team and staff.

Developing the Service Unit Engagement Plan

The Service Unit Engagement Plan is a guide for what the service unit team has accomplished in the past year and plans to accomplish in the upcoming membership year. Your team planning will take place in May or June, so your plan is ready for the beginning of the new school year. The engagement plan will be tailored to your service unit needs and is a working tool to achieve goals and needs to be reviewed ongoing throughout the year. The engagement plan will include what you will be doing to meet the goal, when it will happen and who is responsible. Your support team will work with your volunteer support specialist to complete the Service Unit Engagement Plan. Items of priority include:

- Volunteer support and retention
- Communication
- Product Sales
- Finances
- Program
- Membership

As the team sets dates for service unit leader meetings or events, be sure to consider GSCCC program training and dates, as well as special Girl Scout dates/celebrations.

Leader meetings are key to implement and achieve the service unit goals and should be scheduled to meet the needs of your volunteers and service unit needs. If monthly meetings are not possible, some type of communication piece should go out to the volunteers in your service unit on a regular basis.

Developing a Service Unit Engagement Plan helps focus and organize the work of the team. If done correctly it will engage all stakeholders in the service unit, help define the most important work to do to accomplish goals, determine responsibility amongst volunteers and provide a guide to help volunteers stay on track in achieving success.

The timeline on the following page gives you an overview of the cycle for the membership year at a glance. As a support team it is important to remember that there is some flexibility in how, when and by whom support is being provided. The support is determined by the needs of volunteers and girls in the service unit. The expectations for volunteers should still be identified and explained as well as documented and implemented.

A more detailed planning guide for each essential function is included at the end of this booklet.

Annual Cycle for the Membership Year

August – October

- Recruit in all schools with kindergarten through fifth grade and start new troops.
- Ensure volunteers and girls renew their memberships.
- Develop support team—identify gaps, participate in volunteer support team meetings, review the Service Unit Engagement Plan.
- Support new volunteers—identify, prepare and match mentors, facilitate Service Unit Information Session for new volunteers; arrange for a facilitated Girl Scout Program Basics, Part II class; share First Aid/CPR/AED training dates.
- Connect all volunteers to the service unit—activities, support team members, social media.
- Connect all volunteers to the council – activities, staff members, social media, Volunteer Connection.
- Promote council and service unit program opportunities.
- Begin fall product sale.
- Write and submit nominations for National adult awards (due November 1).

November – February

- Prepare volunteers to communicate with parents and caregivers about girls' progress and service unit activities.
- Continue school recruitments and continue to place girls and volunteers.
- Prepare for girl-planned service unit events.
- Check on progress of new volunteers and their mentors and provide support based on those needs.
- Provide enrichment opportunities for new and returning volunteers (i.e. troop money earning, service learning) during a service unit/leaders' meeting.
- Promote summer camp opportunities.
- Finalize fall product sale and begin cookie program.

March – June

- Continue support activities for volunteers.
- Facilitate a girl-planned Court of Awards, bridging and adult recognition event for the service unit.
- Participate in assessment and planning for the next membership year.
- Facilitate early renewal and identify who will be returning the next year.
- Recruit support team members.
- Implement service unit day camp or encourage participation in council-sponsored camping opportunities.
- Finalize cookie program.

Creating a Welcoming Environment

It is important for the volunteer support teams to create a positive atmosphere for volunteers at service unit meetings or community meetings. It boosts confidence and fosters a sense of belonging, acceptance and unity.

Service Unit Meetings

Running a service unit meeting is an important responsibility for a support team. These meetings can happen monthly, bi-monthly, or once per quarter and will focus primarily on the most important priorities for your service unit. Ideally, 20 percent of the meeting is spent on announcements and service unit business; the other 80 percent is spent on collaborating with each other, mentoring each other, planning events, and learning new skills.

Keeping to a time schedule is very important; these meetings need to start and end on time, unless the participants were warned that the meeting will run longer than usual (i.e. product sales trainings). Remember: your time is valuable and the time of all the participants is valuable. Make sure you do not spend too much time presenting information that could have been learned via notes or a post-meeting email; instead, spend the majority of your time on learning opportunities or activities.

Using Meeting Time Wisely

- Each month the service unit coordinator may send out a newsletter or agenda with announcements, upcoming events, and information. This information can be forwarded out via email and does not have to be covered in its entirety during the meeting.
- Start on time. End on time or early. Always.
- If your volunteers want to stick around and talk afterwards, give them a window of time to do so; sometimes being given the opportunity to share ideas is the best use of your time together. Be prepared to keep the building open longer than the scheduled time but know when/if the building manager needs to lock up the facility.
- Be consistent with your meetings. “Face time” with other leaders and the opportunity to share information can make a huge difference in a volunteer’s Girl Scout experience. The service unit volunteer coordinator can provide suggestions of trainings or activities for your volunteers.

Keep them coming back!

Another great use of time for a service unit meeting is to schedule a training or activity. With the help of the council learning manager, volunteer facilitators and staff, the service unit volunteer coordinator can arrange for short trainings - at your service unit meetings or booked on a separate date - on a variety of subjects that would benefit all volunteers. A small selection of ideas is below, but if you have other ideas, you can always ask! A variety of “Short and Snappy” session designs are available from the volunteer support department. Email CustomerCare@gsgccc.org if you have specific questions or ideas.

Some ideas include:

- Journeys
- Event Planning (for troops or the service unit)
- Trips
- Songs and Games
- Teambuilding activities
- S.W.A.P.S.
- Flag ceremony and retirement
- Traveling with your girls
- How to pack for camp
- Troop etiquette
- Risk Management
- Volunteer Toolkit

Leading Service Unit Meetings – A Sample Agenda

It is the responsibility of the support team to make sure that the service unit meeting runs smoothly and that you request the resources the volunteers in your area might need. Below is a suggested meeting agenda and schedule to use as a sample with your volunteers.

Notice that this meeting does not last longer than one hour. It is important that your volunteers know that the meeting will start on time, end on time, and not last longer than one hour, unless it is truly necessary. Make sure that you wisely use the time you are given with your volunteers every month. This is a simple agenda example and you are welcome to add items in as needed.

Lovely Valley Service Unit Meeting
December 10, 2018
6:30 – 7:30 p.m.

- 6:30 – Welcome and Introductions
- 6:35 – Icebreaker or teambuilding game
- 6:45 – Announcements and upcoming events (include treasurer's report, minutes from previous meetings, and Council business)
- 7:00 – Training or activity
- 7:25 – Closing activity or game

Parts of the Meeting

- **Welcome** - This is the beginning of your meeting. You can introduce the support team, especially if you have new troop volunteers attending; use name tags or re-useable name plates on the tables so you can call individuals by their name. You might explain how the members of your team serve in the area; this is also a great time to do a flag ceremony and say the Girl Scout Promise and Law together.
- **Icebreakers and Teambuilding Games** - Icebreakers and teambuilding games are a great addition to service unit meetings. These games traditionally give people an opportunity to get to know each other or learn new skills. Always try to include information on how volunteers can use these games with their girls, possibly explaining how to alter for younger or older girls. These games can get more challenging as the year moves on and people get to know each other; if you need suggestions for games and activities, ask your troop volunteer coordinator or community volunteer support coordinator.

- **Announcements and Upcoming Events** - This is the third part of your service unit meeting. It can include service unit information, and council information. This is where the agenda can be used. Remember; don't spend more than 10 or 15 minutes making announcements. This information and event reminders can be sent out via email either right before the meeting or soon after and this valuable meeting time can be spent learning together instead.
- **Training or Activity** - This is the place where the majority of your time together will be spent. This is your opportunity to bring in speakers, activities, trainings, and resources. Be creative. Ask the volunteers in your area what they would like to see at the meetings. Many times, the service unit team is made up of experienced troop volunteers who need different training than newer troop volunteers. Look at the list of activities and trainings. See which of those trainings and activities can be provided by a volunteer in your service unit. Ask the volunteers what they would like to know and then find someone who can provide that training. If you cannot find a volunteer in your area to teach a particular topic, contact customer care@gsgccc.org.
- **Closing Activity** - This is the final part of your service unit meeting. There are a lot of options for this portion as well. It is the perfect opportunity for a friendship circle or short game. You could ask the volunteers to share something that they learned during the meeting. It is also the best time to remind your volunteers of the next meeting time and day, especially if you only meet every other month.

See! Planning and running an informative, helpful, and timely meeting can be that easy! If you need suggestions for games or activities, ask a member of the volunteer support team or do a quick online search. There are many free resources available for these activities. Each member of the team can be responsible for providing a game or activity.

What to Avoid:

- **Avoid Negativity!** - Don't allow negativity to thrive in the meeting. There needs to be time for participants to voice opinions but encourage the conversation to move towards what does work instead of what does NOT work. A great rule to use and establish with your service unit team is this: if you bring up a problem or concern during the service unit meeting, you must also give one possible solution. This helps to ensure that your meetings stay productive!
- **Avoid not planning or being unprepared** - Use the small amount of time you have as wisely as you can. Come early and be prepared when it is time for the meeting to start.
- **Avoid losing control of the discussion/agenda** - Again, opinions are valuable but set aside a specific amount of time for discussion then move forward. At times, you might need to table a discussion until a later time when everyone is thinking more clearly. Use the Parking Lot. If there is a question a member of the team cannot answer, get the answer from council and email the volunteers in your service unit the answer to the question. Be sure to follow-up! You can also Create a Group Agreement during your first meeting and post each meeting. Refer to it each time and ask the volunteers if anything needs to be added. Make additions as necessary.

Communication

Communication is key to the success of the service unit. As lives become busier, technology advances and individuals have various preferred methods to communicate it becomes even more important that as a support team we are communicating the most important things in a variety of ways. Each support team member holds equally important responsibility in communicating with others and creating an open environment that welcomes all volunteers' voices.

What does good communication look like?

- There is a forum for open discussion at the service unit meetings.
- Volunteers share successes and challenges at the service unit meeting and opportunities are provided to problem solve.
- Diverse viewpoints are expressed and valued.
- The service unit talks about the council goals and how they are achieved within troop, group and service unit activities.
- The service unit involves all volunteers in developing the Service Unit Engagement Plan.
- The service unit talks about how to involve girls in the planning, implementing and evaluating of service unit activities.
- A variety of communications methods are used to ensure all volunteers (even though not at service unit meetings) are engaged in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Consider the following when communicating with:

Volunteer Support Team

- What is the best way for us to communicate?
- How often should we come together as a team?
- What is the purpose of holding a meeting?
- If there is no defined purpose, is there another way to effectively share information?

Service unit volunteers

- What are the ways we ensure volunteers are connected to the service unit and one another?
 - Mentors
 - Service unit meetings
 - Buzz sessions
 - Council and service unit websites
 - Social media
- How do we engage volunteers in problem solving?
 - Ensure the appropriate support team member is involved in solving issues with volunteers.
 - Encourage networking at service unit meetings and service unit events.

Staff

- Have we shared the service unit goals with the staff representative?
- Have we discussed our goals and mutually identified areas of growth and support?
- Am I being contacted regularly by my staff representative, not only through e-mail but by phone and in person?
- Am I reaching out to staff to share success stories of troops and the service unit, problem solve and identify support resources?

Electronic Communication

Email, texting and social media are powerful tools for communicating information, but if it is used incorrectly can often be the cause of conflict for many reasons, including misinterpretation of a message, perceived underlying tones and ineffective writing styles. Also, these tools make it very easy to communicate with an entire group of people even when the message is intended for individuals only. To avoid these problems, support teams should adhere to an established set of guidelines when using electronic communication. Here are some basic etiquette guidelines:

1. **Take Another Look Before You Send a Message.** Allow every message at least some minutes of rest after you have finished it but before you press the "Send" button. Reread and reconsider the whole message when you return to it, possibly from the recipient's perspective.
2. **Use sentence case.** USING ALL CAPITAL LETTERS LOOKS AS IF YOU'RE SHOUTING. Using all lowercase letters looks lazy. For emphasis, use asterisks or bold formatting to emphasize important words. Do not use a lot of colors or graphics embedded in your message, because not everyone uses an e-mail program that can display them.
3. **Use the blind copy and courtesy copy appropriately.** Don't use "bcc" to keep others from seeing who you copied; it shows confidence when you directly "cc" anyone receiving a copy. Do use "bcc", however, when sending to a large distribution list, so recipients won't have to see a huge list of names. Be cautious with your use of "cc"; overuse can clutter inboxes. Copy only people who are directly involved.
4. **Be sparing with group e-mail and Do Not Default to "Reply All."** Use the *Reply to All* feature **only** when your reply will be necessary to know for the original sender and all people in the original email's *to:* and *cc:* field. Do **not** use *Reply to All* when only the original sender needs to know your reply. If your comments will be crucial to know for the original sender and a few other recipients, use *Reply* in this case and add the select other recipients manually. Don't use *Reply to All* if you are a "bcc" recipient or if your message simply says, "Thanks," or "Me too!"
5. **Don't use e-mail as an excuse to avoid personal contact.** Don't forget the value of face-to-face or even voice-to-voice communication. E-mail communication isn't appropriate when sending confusing or emotional messages. Think of the times you've heard someone indignantly say, "Well, I *sent* you an e-mail." If you have a problem with someone, speak with that person directly. Don't use e-mail to avoid an uncomfortable situation or to cover up a mistake.
6. **Remember that e-mail isn't private.** Assume that e-mail over the Internet is not secure. Never put in an e-mail message anything that you wouldn't put on a postcard. Remember that e-mail can be forwarded, so unintended audiences may see what you've written. You might also inadvertently send something to the wrong party, so always keep the content professional.
7. **Use the subject field to indicate content and purpose.** Don't just say, "Hi!" or "From Laura." It's also a good practice to include the word "Long" in the subject field, if necessary, so that the recipient knows that the message will take time to read.
8. **Don't send chain letters, virus warnings, or junk mail.** Personal information of volunteers, including email addresses, should only be used for Girl Scout business. Don't clog inboxes with information that does not pertain to Girl Scouts.
9. **Remember that your tone can't be heard in e-mail.** E-mail communication can't convey the nuances of verbal communication. In an attempt to infer tone of voice, some people use emoticons, but use them sparingly so that you don't appear unprofessional. Also, don't assume that using a smiley will diffuse a difficult message.
10. **Use a signature that includes contact information.** To ensure that people know who you are, include a signature that has your contact information, including phone numbers.

11. **Do Let People Know Their Mail Has Been Received.** Sometimes, emails get lost or fall prey to overeager spam filtering. If it is not obvious to the sender that you have gotten their message, do send a quick note back to acknowledge receipt even if no reply is necessary otherwise.
12. **Keep messages brief and to the point.** Nothing is more frustrating than wading through an e-mail message that is twice as long as necessary.
13. **Talk About One Subject per Email Message Only.** Packing too many different subjects into one message can make things confusing. Start a new message when you start writing about a new subject. The new subject is also reflected in the *Subject:* header field of the new message and it makes organizing mail a lot easier. If you have trouble coming up with a single and simple subject summarizing your message, take this as a hint to split the email's body.
14. **Summarize long discussions.** Scrolling through pages of replies to understand a discussion is annoying. Instead of continuing to forward a message string, take a minute to summarize it for your reader. You could even highlight or quote the relevant passage, then include your response.

Conflict

Even with the best of intentions and an open flow of communication, conflicts are bound to arise in any group situation. As service unit leaders, support team volunteers may have to address conflict among team members, troop volunteers and sometimes parents and guardians.

In itself, conflict isn't a problem; how it's handled, however, can bring people together or tear them apart. Poor communication skills, disagreements and misunderstandings can be a source of anger and distance, or a springboard to a stronger relationship and happier future.

Know what to do

If a situation among volunteers arises, follow these basic guidelines to keep the situation at a manageable level:

- **Keep a record of what happens.** Don't trust your memory. A written record will help keep things in order and establish some perspective.
- **Notify your staff representative.** Not all situations will require staff involvement, but keeping your staff representative apprised of a situation early on can save time if the issue grows.
- **Involve as few people as possible.** Solve the problem as closely to the situation as possible. The entire team does not need to know the details of every situation. Containment of information to only those people involved can keep a situation from growing.
- **Communicate effectively:**
 - **Help keep all parties focused:** Sometimes it's tempting to bring up past seemingly related conflicts when dealing with current ones. Unfortunately, this often clouds the issue and makes finding mutual understanding and a solution to the current issue less likely, and makes the whole discussion more taxing and even confusing. Try not to let the involved parties bring up past hurts or other topics. Stay focused on the present, their feelings, understanding one another and finding a solution.
 - **Listen carefully:** People often think they're listening, but they are really thinking about what they're going to say next when the other person stops talking. Truly effective communication goes both ways. While it might be difficult, try really listening to what others are saying. Don't interrupt. Don't get defensive. Just hear them and reflect back what they're saying so they know you've heard. Then you'll understand them better and they'll be more willing to listen to you.
 - **Try to see all points of view:** In a conflict, most of us primarily want to feel heard and understood. We talk a lot about our point of view to get the other person to see things our way. Ironically, if we all do this all the time, there's little focus on the other person's point of view, and nobody feels understood. Try to really see the other side, and then you can better explain yours. (If you don't 'get it,' ask more questions until you do.) Others will more likely be willing to listen if they feel heard.
 - **Respond to criticism with empathy:** When someone comes at you with criticism, it's easy to feel that they're wrong, and get defensive. While criticism is hard to hear, and often exaggerated or colored by the other person's emotions, it's important to listen for the other person's pain and respond with empathy for their feelings. Also, look for what's true in what they're saying; that can be valuable information.
 - **Own what's yours:** Realize that personal responsibility is a strength, not a weakness. Effective communication involves admitting when you're wrong. If all parties share some responsibility in a conflict (which is usually the case), look for and admit to what's yours. It diffuses the situation, sets a good example, and shows maturity. It also often inspires others to respond in kind, leading closer to mutual understanding and a solution.

- **Encourage the use of “I” Messages:** Rather than saying things like, “You really messed up here,” begin statements with “I,” and make them about yourself and your feelings, like, “I feel frustrated when this happens.” It’s less accusatory, sparks less defensiveness, and helps the other person to understand your point of view rather than feeling attacked.
- **Look for compromise:** Instead of trying to ‘win’ the argument, look for solutions that meet everybody’s needs. Either through compromise, or a new solution that gives all parties what they want most, the focus is much more effective than one person getting what they want at the other’s expense.
- **Take a time-out:** Sometimes tempers get heated and it’s just too difficult to continue a discussion. It’s okay to take a break from a discussion.
- **Don’t give up:** While taking a break from the discussion is sometimes a good idea, always come back to it.
- **Ask for help if you need it:** If the parties involved have trouble staying respectful or if the situation just doesn’t seem to be improving, ask for assistance from other team members, community volunteers and staff.

Remember, the goal of effective communication skills should be mutual understanding and finding a solution that pleases all parties, not ‘winning’ the argument or ‘being right.’ It’s important to remain respectful of other people, even if you don’t like their actions.

The Four Agreements

In **The Four Agreements**, don Miguel reveals the source of self-limiting agreements that rob us of joy and create needless suffering. When we are ready to change these agreements, there are four deceptively simple, yet powerful agreements that we can adopt as guiding principles. Based on ancient Toltec wisdom, the Four Agreements offer a powerful code of conduct that can rapidly transform our lives to a new experience of freedom, true happiness, and love.

The Four Agreements are:

BE IMPECCABLE WITH YOUR WORD

Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

DON'T TAKE ANYTHING PERSONALLY

Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

DON'T MAKE ASSUMPTIONS

Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness, and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST

Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are tired as opposed to well-rested. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret.

The Four Agreements sound simple, even simplistic.
But try keeping just one for an entire day!

Service Unit Annual Planning Guide

Important Dates

September/October – Fall Product Sales begin

October 1 – New Membership Year Begins

October 31 – Founder's Day (Juliette Gordon Lowe's Birthday)

November 1 – Nominations due for National awards: Thanks Pin, Honor Pin, Appreciation Pin, Volunteer Years of Service (20 years and over), President's Award, Buck Harris Award

January – Cookie Program Begins

January 31 - Financial reports with transactions through December 31 due for troops with interest bearing accounts with interest income reported on 1099 form.

February 22 – World Thinking Day

February 28 – Nominations due for Volunteer of Excellence Awards

March 12 – Girl Scout Birthday

April 22 – Girl Scout Leader Appreciation Day

June 30 – Service unit and troop finance reports due to council

August 31 – Last day to turn in All-Star Troop Patch Reports to Council shops for patches

September 30 – End of Membership Year

Essential Functions by Month

Administration

Monthly

- Recruit volunteers for any volunteer support team position vacancies.
- Hold a volunteer support team meeting to:
 - Review Service Unit Engagement Plan and plan next steps.
 - Review finances and budget.
 - Prepare service unit meeting agendas.
- Ensure all support team volunteers receive appropriate training for their positions.
- Ask troop volunteers to double-check troop management and ensure their troop rosters are complete and correct. Verify correct adult membership information.

August

- Work on completing President's Award application.
- Encourage re-registration for returning members (available until September 30).

September

- Hold Annual Meeting delegate chair, delegate and alternate delegate elections. Submit paperwork to the Council by the deadline.
- Encourage re-registration for returning members (available until September 30).
- Work on completing President's Award application (November 1 deadline).

October

- Consider support team volunteers to nominate for national recognition awards (November 1 deadline).
- Work on completing President's Award application (November 1 deadline).
- Work on completing Buck Harris Award nomination (November 1 deadline).

November

- Submit President's Award completed paperwork to Council office by November 1.
- Turn in delegate paperwork to Council office.
- Remind delegate chair, delegates and alternate delegates to complete position training and register for Annual Meeting and Annual Awards Celebration.
- Remind troop volunteers that troops with interest bearing accounts must turn in a financial report as of December 31. (Interest income must be reported and 1099 forms turned in with reports by January 29.)

December

- Host holiday fun service unit meeting.
- Remind delegate chair, delegates and alternate delegates to complete position training and register for Annual Meeting and Annual Awards Celebration.
- Conduct a mid-year audit of troop bank accounts.
- Turn in fall product sales final paperwork.

January

- Support troops through cookie program.

February

- Support troops through cookie program.

March

- Support troops through cookie program, reminding leaders of deposit and final paperwork submission deadlines.
- Provide instruction on troop financial reporting (finance reports must be turned in for each troop by June 30).

April

- Remind all troop leaders to update the opportunity catalog.

May

- Provide instruction and support with troop financial reporting (finance reports must be submitted through the Volunteer Toolkit by June 30).
- Remind volunteers that completed All-Star Troop Patch Reports can be turned in to shops for patches between June 1 and August 31.
- Remind all troop leaders to update the opportunity catalog.
- Identify disbanding troops and follow up with bank account procedures.
- Begin Service Unit Engagement Plan and budgeting for next membership year.
- Submit Volunteer of Excellence Award nominations by May 31.

June

- Submit service unit finance report to volunteer support specialist.
- Remind all troop leaders to update the opportunity catalog.
- Identify disbanding troops and follow up with bank account procedures.
- Create Service Unit Engagement Plan and budget for next membership year.

July

- Remind all troop leaders to update the opportunity catalog.
- Identify disbanding troops and follow up with bank account procedures.

Community Development

Monthly

- Contact school administrators and PTA representatives to find out important open house and/or event dates.
- Schedule recruitment events wherever available.
- Implement and monitor recruitment plans.
- Make arrangements for Girl Scout representation at events/functions.
- Work with recruitment specialist to determine needs for fliers and promotional materials.
- Distribute fliers and other printed information to advertise visibility and recruitment events.
- Place newly recruited girls into troops.
- Provide names and contact information of potential troop volunteers to the troop volunteer coordinator.
- Send any paper registrations into Council as they are processed (deposits made). Girls and adults are considered registered when their registration paperwork is received in the Council office.
- Promote Girl Scouts through civic and community websites, newsletters and bulletin boards.

August

- Ensure back-to-school nights/open houses and recruitment events have volunteer coverage.

September

- Ensure back-to-school nights/open houses and recruitment events have volunteer coverage.

October

- Assess outcomes from first round of recruitments.
- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in November, December, and January.

November

- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in December and January.

December

- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in January and February.

January

- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in February and March.
- Contact schools regarding kindergarten registration events, dates and times and plan for Girl Scout representation.

February

- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in March and April.

March

- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in April and May.
- Promote early renewal registration campaign and communicate the advantages of early renewal for upcoming membership year.
- Arrange for representation at elementary schools during kindergarten open house events.

April

- Secure dates and sites for recruitment events to be held in May and June.
- Deliver fliers to be put in kindergarten registration packets.
- Notify troop volunteers of spring early renewal incentive, deadline and service unit goal.

May

- Arrange for representation at elementary schools during kindergarten open house events.
- Deliver fliers to be put in kindergarten registration packets.
- Begin planning for fall recruitment and include details in the service unit plan of work.

June

- Continue developing upcoming year recruitment plan and include details in the Service Unit Engagement Plan.

July

- Finalize recruitment plan for upcoming year and include details in Service Unit Engagement Plan.

Volunteer Support

Monthly

- Personally, welcome all new troop leaders and assist them through their onboarding process
- Assist new troop leaders in securing safe meeting places.
- Review training records of continuing troop volunteers to ensure all training requirements are met.
- Work with the community volunteer support organizer to arrange for local training, if needed.
- Track new volunteers going through the application process. Keep them engaged while they are awaiting appointment.
- Promote the New Volunteer Open House in November to all new volunteers.

August

- Work with support team to create a plan and timeline for recognizing volunteers throughout the year.
- Promote national volunteer awards, nomination process and deadline that nominations for the Appreciation Pin, Honor Pin, and Thanks Badge and II and Years of Volunteer Service (20 years and over in increments of 5) (November 1 deadline).
- Request years of service information from all volunteers so that volunteers with 5+ years (in increments of 5) can be properly recognized.
- Support troop volunteers in using the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK).
- Provide guidance to nominators for writing effective nominations.
- Promote the Volunteer Kick Off.
- Promote the New Volunteer Open House in November to all new volunteers.

September

- Publicize the nomination process and deadlines for national and Council awards. Nominations for the Appreciation Pin, Honor Pin, and Thanks Badge I and II are due to Council office no later than November 1 (you may want to provide your own due date of when the award nominations are due to you).
- Provide guidance to nominators for writing effective nominations.
- Promote the Volunteer Kick Off.
- Promote the New Volunteer Open House in November to all new volunteers.

October

- Request years of service information from all volunteers to recognize those with 5+ years (in increments of 5).
- Remind volunteers that nominations for the Appreciation Pin, Honor Pin, and Thanks Badge I and II and Years of Volunteer Service (20 years and over in increments of 5) are due to Council office no later than November 1.
- Promote the New Volunteer Open House in November to all new volunteers.

November

- Provide guidance to nominators for writing effective nominations.
- Request years of service information from all volunteers to recognize those with 5+ years (in increments of 5).
- Turn in all nominations for Appreciation Pin, Honor Pin, Thanks Badge and Years of Service by November 1.
- Promote the New Volunteer Open House in November to all new volunteers.

December

- Remind volunteers that nominations for the Volunteer of Excellence are due to Council office no later than May 31.
- Provide guidance for writing effective nominations.

January

- Remind volunteers that nominations for Volunteer of Excellence are due to Council office no later than May 31.
- Purchase Volunteer Years in Service pins for volunteers who have volunteered 5 years, 10 years and 15 years.
- If holding a service unit volunteer recognition event, begin working with the VST to plan a spring event.

February

- Remind volunteers that nominations for the Volunteer of Excellence award are due by May 31.
- If not already done, purchase Volunteer Years of Service pins for volunteers who have volunteered 5 years, 10 years and 15 years.
- If holding a service unit volunteer recognition event, continue with event planning.

March

- Remind volunteers that nominations for the Volunteer of Excellence award are due by May 31.
- If holding a service unit volunteer recognition event, continue with event planning.

April

- Remind volunteers that nominations for the Volunteer of Excellence award are due by May 31.
- Present Volunteer Years in Service pins for volunteers who have volunteered 5 years, 10 years and 15 years.
- Present awards to anyone who could not attend Annual Awards Luncheon.
- Plan year-end thank you to all volunteers.

May

- Begin planning for volunteer support and recognition for the upcoming membership year and include details in the service unit plan of work.
- Turn in Volunteer of Excellence award nominations by May 31.
- End of year recognition to say thank you to all volunteers in service unit

June

- Continue planning for volunteer support and recognition for the upcoming membership year and include details in the Service Unit Engagement Plan.

July

- Recruit experienced Girl Scout troop volunteers to be mentors for new troop volunteers in the fall.
- Finalize plans for volunteer support and recognition for the upcoming membership year and include details in the service unit plan of work.

Program Support

Monthly

- Provide assistance to troop leaders with planning program activities aligned to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE).
- Provide GSLE education at the service unit meetings.
- Assist in the planning of service unit events and encampments. If holding a service unit encampment, be sure to pay in full at least one month prior to the scheduled dates.

August

- Girl planning is an important part of fall product sales. Guide troop leaders through helping girls set financial and product sales goals.

September

- Provide information to troop leaders about Juliette Gordon Lowe's Birthday – October 31.

October

- Review status of all planned service unit events and/or encampments.

November

- If holding a service unit cookie rally, secure location and begin planning activities.

December

- If holding a service unit Thinking Day event (February 22), secure location and begin planning activities.
- Work with troop volunteers to help girls set financial goals for their cookie sale proceeds.

January

- Inform volunteers about Girl Scout Birthday (March 12) and assist in planning troop and/or service unit Girl Scout Birthday activities.

February

- Promote summer camp.

March

- If holding service unit summer activities, begin planning.
- Promote summer camp opportunities.

April

- Promote summer camp opportunities.
- Expect letter with your service unit encampment date.
- If holding a service unit bridging ceremony, begin planning.

May

- Provide assistance to troop leaders with bridging requirements and ceremonies.
- Begin creating a program support and event plan for the upcoming membership year. Include details in the Service Unit Engagement Plan.

June

- Provide assistance to troop leaders with bridging requirements and ceremonies.
- Continue creating a program support and event plan for the upcoming membership year. Include details in the service unit plan of work.

July

- Finalize the program support and event plan for the upcoming membership year. Include details in the service unit plan of work.

Product Sales Support

Monthly

- Check reports to ensure that all girls participating in the fall product or cookie sale are registered.
- Check reports to ensure that all troop product sales representatives are registered members and appointed volunteers (background check on file).

August

- Attend Council fall product sale training.
- Plan and promote fall product sale training for troop volunteers and individual girl coordinators.
- Work with membership coordinator to find out the number of girls currently registered in each troop and prepare fall product packets.

September

- Provide fall product sale training for troop volunteers and individual girl advisors and parents/caregivers.
- Distribute fall product sale materials to all registered girls participating.
- Online ordering and nut/candy/magazine subscription order taking begins.
- Provide support to troop volunteers for submitting orders into Unify program.
- Plan delivery site and input into Unify program.
- Arrange for fall product sale booth locations.

October

- Provide fall product sale training to newly recruited troop volunteers and any volunteers who still need it.
- Support troops as needed for fall sale.
- Remind troop cookie chairs to enter initial orders by deadline.
- Submit initial orders through Unify so that GSCCC can submit initial order to supplier.
- Confirm delivery location.
- Confirm booth locations.

November

- Coordinate delivery of fall products to the service unit and dissemination to troops.
- Support troops as needed for fall sale.
- Monitor fall product booth sales and address any concerns.
- Submit final paperwork and payments for fall products
- Attend council's training for cookie program.
- Begin setting up cookie booth locations.

December

- Help troops wrap-up fall sales, including depositing money and rounding up information on outstanding balances.
- Turn in completed fall product sale paperwork to council office before the deadline.
- Determine the numbers of girls registered in each troop in order to prepare troop cookie packets.
- Determine the number of individually registered girls that will be involved in the cookie sale.
- Provide cookie program training for troop volunteers, individual girl advisors and parents/caregivers.
- If holding a service unit cookie rally, promote event to troop leaders and order sample cookies from product sales department.
- Seek out cookie booth locations.
- If holding a service unit cookie rally, pick up Girl Scout cookies that were ordered for the cookie rally.

January

- Service unit cookie rallies.
- Coordinate distribution of cookie order forms to girls who have a signed parent permission slip.
- Cookie Program begins!
- Provide cookie program training for troop volunteers, individual girl advisors and parents/guardians.
- If a service unit cookie rally was held, order and pay for cookie rally patches from the product sales department.
- Ensure all girls selling cookies are registered.
- Remind troop cookie chairs of their deadline to submit their troop's initial cookie and incentive initial orders in eBUDDE and turn in paperwork.
- Verify and submit troops' cookie and incentive orders in eBUDDE and turn in paperwork to Council office.
- Finalize cookie delivery arrangements. Get help from the service unit, girls aged 11-17 years and other outside groups.
- Submit pre-order to council office.
- Confirm cookie booth locations and schedule troops/groups for booths.
- Submit booth locations to product sales manager to be included in cookie booth locator app.

February

- Finalize cookie delivery arrangements. Get help from the service unit, girls aged 11-17 years and other outside groups, if necessary.
- Schedule troops for cookie pick-up.
- Remind troop cookie representatives about cookie cupboard pick up procedures.
- Monitor eBUDDE to ensure troop chairs are entering (and making) deposits.
- Connect troop volunteers with each other to exchange cookies.
- Begin cookie booth selections
- Submit booth locations to product sales manager to be included in cookie booth locator app.

March

- Help troops with excess cookies by connecting troop volunteers with each other to exchange cookies.
- Remind troop cookie chairs to have a plan for Gift of Caring cookies.
- Remind troop cookie chairs to enter all transactions in the eBUDDE including transfers, deposits, girl incentives, etc.
- Assist troop cookie chairs as necessary (i.e., collecting money, completing paperwork).
- Remind troop cookie chairs of the deadline to turn in final report paperwork and all money deposited.
- Verify that all troop entries are in eBUDDE, including transfers, deposits, girls' incentives, etc.
- Submit the final troop cookie and incentive orders in eBUDDE.
- Turn in final reports to council office by deadline.
- Cookie program wraps up!

April

- Thank volunteers for their participation in the cookie program. Share total number of boxes sold, all paid in full, highest seller, etc.
- Super Seller selection and CEO Events.

May

- Count and distribute cookie incentives.
- Remind troop volunteers to distribute incentives to girls quickly – some incentives are time sensitive.
- Contact staff liaison for extras or to return overages.
- Provide incentive pick-up information to volunteers who missed initial distribution.
- Promote fall sales dates once announced.

June

- Continue to distribute cookie incentives.
- Remind troop volunteers to distribute incentives to girls quickly -- some incentives are time sensitive.
- Deadline for troops to report discrepancies in recognitions – June 30.
- Provide incentive pick-up information to volunteers who missed initial distribution.
- Promote fall sales dates once announced.
- Create product sales plan for upcoming membership year and include details in the service unit plan of work.

July

- Turn in any unclaimed cookie incentives to your volunteer support specialist.
- Register for fall product sale training.
- Announce fall product sale training for troop fall product chairs.
- Finalize product sales plan for upcoming membership year and include details in the Service Unit Engagement Plan.