

# Quick-Start Guide

Welcome to the great adventure of Girl Scouting! Thanks to volunteers like you, generations of girls have learned to be leaders in their own lives and in the world.

We know you're busy and need to be efficient with your time. For that reason, this Quick-Start Guide to *Volunteer Essentials* gives you the nitty-gritty . . . what you need to know now, as you plan for your first meeting with girls. We encourage you to read through these tips as soon as you can, and then feel free to put down this handbook for the time-being.

That's because the rest of *Volunteer Essentials* is a reference for you to use only as needed. When you have a question, simply look up the topic in the Table of Contents, and you'll find your answer. Think of *Volunteer Essentials* as your encyclopedia to Girl Scout volunteering. It's there when you need it but, rest assured, there's no need for you to read the entire book today.

Ready to get started? Then read the following handy tips, and you'll be well on your way!

## More at [www.gsnnj.org](http://www.gsnnj.org)!

Visit the About Us section at [www.gsnnj.org](http://www.gsnnj.org) for additional information, including hours and locations, a staff contact directory, a directory of the membership staff for all communities, and general information about GSNNJ. You can also sign up for the GSNNJ e-newsletter by clicking on the link at the bottom of any page of [www.gsnnj.org](http://www.gsnnj.org).

Adult volunteers must complete a GSNNJ volunteer application and background check, located under Things to Do on the GSNNJ website.

Adult volunteers must register as an adult member and pay the membership fee through their service unit designee, Membership Development Manager, or, if applicable, utilize online membership registration. Refer to the Get Involved section at [www.gsnnj.org](http://www.gsnnj.org) for additional information.

Thank you for volunteering and for all that you do for Girl Scouts!

# We Are Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts was founded in 1912 by trailblazer Juliette Gordon Low. We are the largest girl-serving organization in the United States and the largest member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a sisterhood of close to 10 million girls and adults in 145 countries.

## Our Mission

Girl Scouts builds girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

## Our Vision

Girl Scouts strives to be the premier leadership organization for girls and experts on their growth and development.

## More than 3 Million Strong

We are urban, rural, and suburban. We are in schools, churches, temples, mosques, public housing, foster homes, and detention centers. We are in virtually every zip code and in 90 countries around the world.

- **2.3 million** girls 5 to 18 years of age
- **16,000** Girl Scouts overseas
- **880,000** adult volunteers
- **50 million** alumnae
- **112 councils** throughout the United States

At any given point in time, approximately 10 percent of girls are Girl Scouts, and

- 80 percent of women business owners were Girl Scouts.
- 69 percent of female U.S Senators were Girl Scouts.
- 67 percent of female members of the House of Representatives were Girl Scouts.
- Virtually every female astronaut who has flown in space was a Girl Scout.

## The Girl Scout Leadership Experience

We have identified three keys to leadership: girls discover themselves and their values; connect with others; and take action to make the world a better place. At Girl Scouts, everything centers around the girl: activities are girl-led, which gives girls the opportunity to learn by doing in a cooperative learning environment.

## 100 Years Young

We are about to celebrate a century of trailblazing, of leadership, of fun and friendship—and we're just getting started. Find out more at [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org).

# Who Can Join Girl Scouts—and How?

Girl Scouts is about sharing the fun, friendship, and power of girls and women together. Any girl—from kindergarten through 12th grade—can join Girl Scouts. Girl Scout volunteers are also a diverse group—you may be a college volunteer working on a community-action project, a parent volunteer ready for an outdoor adventure with your daughter’s group, or any responsible adult (female or male, who have passed the necessary screening process) looking to make a difference in a girl’s life.

What all members share, whether girls or adults, are the Girl Scout Promise and Law. Each member also agrees to follow safety guidelines and pay the annual membership dues (or purchase a lifetime membership).

## Girls at Every Grade Level

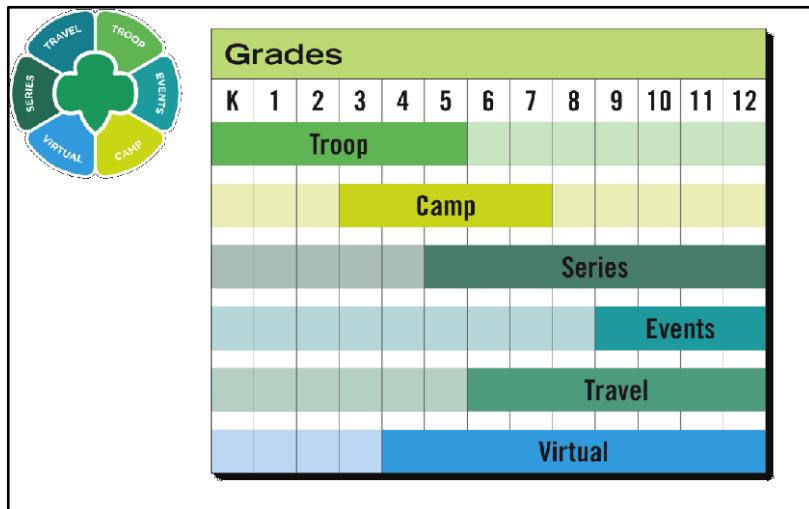
After girls join, they team up in the following grade levels:

- Girl Scout Daisy, grades K–1
- Girl Scout Brownie, grades 2–3
- Girl Scout Junior, grades 4–5
- Girl Scout Cadette, grades 6–8
- Girl Scout Senior, grades 9–10
- Girl Scout Ambassador, grades 11–12

## Flexible Ways to Participate

Across the country, the Girl Scout community is hard at work on a whole new approach to make sure that everyone can participate in Girl Scouting in the ways they want to. As a volunteer, you can choose from flexible ways to participate that offer the freedom to tailor your level of involvement to fit your schedule and lifestyle. You can also volunteer behind the scenes, in your council office, instead of volunteering directly with girls.

Girls can choose any one, all, or some of the options—camp, events, series, troop, travel, and virtual\*—within a single membership year. (\*Note that virtual is still in development.) And, as a volunteer, you, too, have the option of partnering with girls throughout a membership year or committing to an opportunity for only a few weeks or months. Based on independent research and extensive surveys with thousands of council staff members from around the country, we have a good sense of which options will interest girls, based on their grade levels (see the chart at right).



# Girl Scouts' Organizational Structure

Girl Scouts is the world's largest organization of and for girls, currently encompassing 2.3 million girl members and nearly one million volunteers! Three core structures support all these members: the national headquarters, your council, and your support team.

## National Organization and Worldwide Sisterhood

The national office of Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA), located in New York City, employs roughly 400 employees. (Visit [GSUSA online](#), where you'll find a wealth of resources for both girls and volunteers.) GSUSA is a member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS).

Global Girl Scouting ensures that girls have increased awareness about the world, cross-cultural learning opportunities, and education on relevant global issues that may inspire them to take action to make the world a better place. Visit [Global Girl Scouting online](#) for additional information.

Since 1925, USA Girl Scouts Overseas (USAGSO), a division of Global Girl Scouting, has helped ease the transition for American families relocating overseas by offering the familiar traditions and exciting opportunities of Girl Scouting to girls abroad. USAGSO now serves thousands of American girls living overseas, as well as girls attending American or international schools. Through Global Girl Scouting, members participate in World Thinking Day on February 22, visit the four WAGGGS world centers (see the "For Travel Volunteers" appendix), participate in international travel, promote global friendship and understanding by supporting the Juliette Low World Friendship Fund, and take action on global issues.

## Your Council

Girl Scout councils are chartered by the national office to establish local responsibility for leadership, administration, and supervision of Girl Scout program, and to develop, manage, and maintain Girl Scouting in a geographic area. The national office provides support materials to all councils to ensure that the Girl Scout experience is nationally consistent.

Visit the About Us section at [www.gsnnj.org](http://www.gsnnj.org) for additional information, including hours and locations, a staff contact directory, a directory of the membership staff for all communities, and general information about GSNNJ. You can also sign up for the GSNNJ e-newsletter by clicking on the link at the bottom of any page of [www.gsnnj.org](http://www.gsnnj.org).

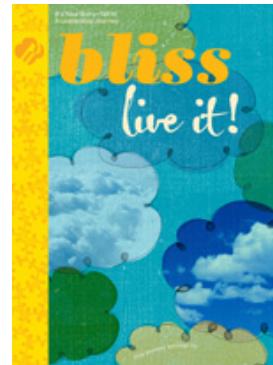
## Your Support Team

A team of volunteers and staff provides you with local support, learning opportunities, and advice. As a volunteer, you will have the most contact with your Girl Scout support team, which may be called a service unit or another name. Never hesitate to contact them, because your support team is your expert in all things Girl Scouting. If you have questions about the Girl Scout program, working with girls, resources in the national program portfolio (leadership journeys and *The Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting*), or selling Girl Scout Cookies and other products, go to your team for answers and ongoing support.

# Getting Started with the National Leadership Program through Journeys

The Girl Scout program is based on the Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE), in which girls discover themselves, connect with others, and take action to make the world a better place—all within the safety of an all-girl environment where girls take the lead, learn by doing, and learn cooperatively.

At the core of the GSLE are national leadership journeys, fun and challenging experiences grouped around a theme and spread over a series of sessions. Each journey has all the important components of the GSLE sewn right in. So, to guide girls on a great journey, all you need is enthusiasm and a sense of adventure. Before you dive in, try these six simple tips:



1. **Check out the journey maps** at [www.girlscouts.org/program/journeys/maps](http://www.girlscouts.org/program/journeys/maps). These maps show you how all the fun and meaningful traditions of Girl Scouting fit right into any national leadership journey. There, you can also find information about the topics that each journey covers, which you can share with girls. And you'll find even more fun traditions to complement your journey in the forthcoming *Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting*, a resource for each grade level of Girl Scouting.
2. **Choose a journey.** Because Girl Scouting is girl-led, it's important to give girls the chance to pick the journey they want to do. Talk to them about what each journey for their grade level is about and let them choose one.
3. **Get to know the journey.** Pick up a girls' book and adult guide. Read the girls' book for the pleasure of it, just to get an overview of the journey's theme and content.
4. **Review the sample session plans in the adult guide.** These sample session plans give you ideas about how to bring the journey to life with girls, but leave plenty of room for creativity and customization.
5. **Invite girls (and their parents/guardians) to use their imaginations** to make the journey come to life in ways that excite them. Remember that you and the girls don't have to do everything exactly as laid out in the sample sessions.
6. **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 national leadership journey awards—and perhaps some Girl Scout badges, too!

# Planning in a Girl-Led Environment

To start planning your time with girls, first draw up a simple calendar for yourself, like the following:

SEPTEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

OCTOBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
	30	31				

NOVEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

DECEMBER						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

JANUARY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

MARCH						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

APRIL						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
	30					

MAY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

JUNE						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

JULY						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
	30					

AUGUST						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

If your group will be meeting for less than a year (such as at a resident camp or during a series), adjust the calendar to suit your needs. In the same way, if you're planning a multi-year event (such as a travel excursion), add one or two more years to the framework. Then consider the following questions:

- How many times will you gather each month? When do you plan to break for holidays?
- How many weeks do you need to allocate for the Girl Scout Cookie Program?
- Will you have time in your schedule for guest speakers and other visitors?
- If you've worked with this group before, what are their preferences: badge work? field trips? other activities? For specific ideas on how to incorporate badges, trips, and other traditions of Girl Scouting into a journey, check out the online [journey maps](#) for the grade level of the girls you're partnering with.

Include all of these considerations in your calendar as a starting point. Girls will fill in the details as they customize their journey. After you've drafted a loose framework, ask the girls what they think. Remember that you want girls to lead, but younger girls will need more guidance, while older girls will require far less. Seniors and Ambassadors may not even want to you to draft a calendar in advance, so if they balk at what you've done, simply put your calendar away and let them take the reins. (Journeys for older girls include planning pages specifically designed to help them customize their journey.) Daisies and Brownies, on the other hand, may enjoy your calendar and just fill in a few ideas here and there, which will clue you in to their interests.

As your group starts its journey, get a discussion (or debate!) going on the journey's theme and what it means to the girls. Probe to find out what they're most interested in accomplishing during their time together, and then help them connect those interests to their journey. This will help them chart the course of their journey and their time together.

# Meeting with Girls for the First Time

When you first get together with girls (and this meeting may also include parents/guardians, or you may decide to hold a separate meeting for the adults), you'll want to get to know the girls, and give them a chance to get to know one another.

Ice-breaker games that let girls share simple details about themselves are a great way to start off your first gathering. Journeys often start with such an icebreaker, so if you're digging in to a journey right away, you'll be all set. You can also check your council's resources or search the Internet for "ice-breakers for kids" to find more ideas.

If you already know which journey the girls want to do, you'll find it useful to accomplish some of the following during this meeting. (Note that all these points are detailed in the adult guide for each journey, too). If your girls haven't chosen a journey yet, you can spend time during the first meeting talking about the themes of the three journeys that are available for their grade level and find out which one the group would like to do. You can then discuss these points in the next meeting, if you run out of time.

1. **Introduce the journey, its theme, and its ties to leadership.** Each journey's adult guide gives you ideas for talking with girls and their parents/guardians about the journey's theme and the three keys to leadership.
2. **Find out what interests the group (and be sure to include the other adult volunteers), so that you and the girls can begin to customize the journey.** Do the girls want to dig deeper into a particular aspect of the journey? Without promising anything (yet!), ask the girls to talk about what they're passionate about, what they've always wanted to do, and how they would spend their time if money or other barriers were no object. Build off the ideas shared, but be sure to include opinions from all the girls. Ask direct questions of those who seem be holding back or are unsure about answering, so that no one is left out.
3. **Get the girls talking about how they want to schedule their time together.** Use the planning pages from their journey (referring to the draft calendar you started only as needed, so that girls are allowed to lead). Consider questions like these:
  - Can girls organize and plan a field trip or longer travel opportunity that will allow them to learn more about a particular journey topic or theme?
  - Is there an event that meshes with this topic or area of interest?
  - Can the girls locate and communicate with an expert in the field via e-mail or social media?
  - Can they invite a guest speaker to answer questions or demonstrate particular skills?
  - Which badges can the group choose to work on that will deepen their skills in this particular area?
  - If they are Juniors or older, are they interested in pursuing their Girl Scout Bronze, Silver, or Gold Awards?
  - Do they have ideas for activities that will involve younger or older girls?

# Using the Safety Activity Checkpoints



When preparing for any activity with girls, start by reading the Girl Scout Safety Activity Checkpoints for that particular activity. You can find these on your council's web site, and/or your council will provide in some other electronic or printed form.

Each Safety Activity Checkpoint offers you information on where to do this activity, how to include girls with disabilities, where to find both basic and specialized gear required for the activity, how to prepare yourselves in advance of the activity, what specific steps to follow on the day of the activity, and so on.

In addition to reading these checkpoints yourself, you can e-mail or print them for co-volunteers, parents/guardians, and the girls themselves. The checkpoints are formatted as checklists, so that you, your co-volunteers, and the girls can check off each step that has been accomplished.

In keeping with the three processes of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, be sure that

- **All activities are girl-led**, taking into account the age and abilities of the girls. Older girls can take the bulk of the responsibility for carefully planning and executing activities, while younger girls will require more of your guidance but should still be deeply involved in making decisions about their activities.
- **Girls have the chance to learn cooperatively**, by having girls teach each other new skills they may need for activities, rather than hearing all that from you.
- **Girls learn by doing**. If research or special equipment is needed, they'll learn better doing that research themselves than by having you do the legwork and report back to them. Even Daisies can do basic research and give reports or do show-and-tell for each other. And Ambassadors may need you only for moral support as they research, teach each other, and plan every detail of their excursions.

If Safety Activity Checkpoints do not exist for an activity you and the girls are interested in, check with your council *before* making any definite plans with the girls. A few activities are allowed only with written council pre-approval and only for girls 12 and over, while some are off-limits completely:

- **Caution:** You must get written pre-approval from your council for girls ages 12 and older who will operate motorized vehicles, such as go-carts and personal watercraft; use firearms; take trips on waterways that are highly changeable or uncontrollable; or fly in noncommercial aircraft, such as small private planes, helicopters, sailplanes, untethered hot-air balloons, and blimps.
- **Warning:** The following activities are never allowed for any girl: potentially uncontrolled free-falling (bungee jumping, hang gliding, parachuting, parasailing, and trampolining); creating extreme variations of approved activities (such as high-altitude climbing and aerial tricks on bicycles, skis, snowboards, skateboards, water-skis, and wakeboards); hunting or shooting a projectile at another person; riding all-terrain vehicles and motor bikes; taking watercraft trips in Class V or higher; and simulated skydiving and zero-gravity rooms.

**One additional note:** What may seem benign to one person could be a sensitive issue for another, so when you or the girls wish to participate in anything that could be considered controversial (health or education in human sexuality, advocacy projects, work with religious groups, or anything that could yield a political/social debate), put the topic on hold until you've obtained written parental permission, on forms available from your council. Included on the permission form should be the topic of the activity, any specific content that might create controversy, and any action steps the girls are to do when the activity is complete. Be sure to have a form for each girl, and keep them on hand in case a problem arises. For non-Girl Scout activities, find out in advance (from organizers or other volunteers who may be familiar with the content) what will be presented, and follow your council's guidelines for obtaining written permission.

# Understanding How Many Volunteers You Need

Girl Scouts adult-to-girl ratios show the *minimum* number of adults needed to supervise a specific number of girls. (Councils may also establish *maximums* due to size or cost restrictions.) These supervision ratios were devised to ensure the safety and health of girls—for example, if one adult has to respond to an emergency, a second adult is always on hand for the rest of the girls. It may take you a minute to get used to the layout of this chart, but once you start to use it, you'll find the chart extremely helpful.

	Group Meetings		Events, Travel, and Camping	
	<b>Two</b> unrelated adults (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <b>one</b> additional adult for each additional number of this many girls:	<b>Two</b> unrelated adults (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <b>one</b> additional adult for each additional number of this many girls:
Girl Scout Daisies (K–grade 1)	12	6	6	4
Girl Scout Brownies (grades 2–3)	20	8	12	6
Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4–5)	25	10	16	8
Girl Scout Cadettes (grades 6–8)	25	12	20	10
Girl Scout Seniors (grades 9–10)	30	15	24	12
Girl Scout Ambassadors (grades 11–12)	30	15	24	12

Here are some examples: If you're meeting with 17 Daisies, you'll need three unrelated adults (in other words, not your sister, spouse, parent, or child), at least one of whom is female. (If this isn't making sense to you, follow the chart: you need two adults for 12 Daisies and one more adult for up to six more girls. You have 17, so you need three adults.) If, however, you have 17 Cadettes attending a group meeting, you need only two unrelated adults, at least one of which is female (because, on the chart, two adults can manage up to 25 Cadettes).

In addition to the adult-to-girl ratios, please remember that adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old or at the age of majority defined by the state, if it is older than 18.

# Following the Girl Scouts Safety Guidelines

Every adult in Girl Scouting is responsible for the physical and emotional safety of girls, and we all demonstrate that by agreeing to follow these guidelines at all times.

1. **Follow the Safety Activity Checkpoints.** Instructions for staying safe while participating in activities are detailed in the Safety Activity Checkpoints, available from your council. Read the checkpoints, follow them, and share them with other volunteers, parents, and girls before engaging in activities with girls.
2. **Arrange for proper adult supervision of girls.** Your group must have at least two unrelated, approved adult volunteers present at all times, plus additional adult volunteers as necessary, depending on the size of the group and the ages and abilities of girls. Adult volunteers must be at least 18 years old (or the age of majority defined by the state, if it is older than 18) and must be screened by your council before volunteering. One lead volunteer in every group must be female.
3. **Get parent/guardian permission.** When an activity takes place that is outside the normal time and place, advise each parent/guardian of the details of the activity and obtain permission for girls to participate.
4. **Report abuse.** Sexual advances, improper touching, and sexual activity of any kind with girl members are forbidden. Physical, verbal, and emotional abuse of girls is also forbidden. Follow your council's guidelines for reporting concerns about abuse or neglect that may be occurring inside or outside of Girl Scouting.
5. **Be prepared for emergencies.** Work with girls and other adults to establish and practice procedures for emergencies related to weather, fire, lost girls/adults, and site security. Always keep handy a well-stocked first-aid kit, girl health histories, and contact information for girls' families.
6. **Travel safely.** When transporting girls to planned Girl Scout field trips and other activities that are outside the normal time and place, every driver must be an approved adult volunteer and have a good driving record, a valid license, and a registered/insured vehicle. Insist that everyone is in a legal seat and wears her seat belt at all times, and adhere to state laws regarding booster seats and requirements for children in rear seats.
7. **Ensure safe overnight outings.** Prepare girls to be away from home by involving them in planning, so they know what to expect. Avoid having men sleep in the same space as girls and women. During family or parent-daughter overnights, one family unit may sleep in the same sleeping quarters in program areas. When parents are staffing events, daughters should remain in quarters with other girls rather than in staff areas.
8. **Role-model the right behavior.** Never use illegal drugs. Don't consume alcohol, smoke, or use foul language in the presence of girls. Do not carry ammunition or firearms in the presence of girls unless given special permission by your council for group marksmanship activities.
9. **Create an emotionally safe space.** Adults are responsible for making Girl Scouting a place where girls are as safe emotionally as they are physically. Protect the emotional safety of girls by creating a team agreement and coaching girls to honor it. Agreements typically encourage behaviors like respecting a diversity of feelings and opinions; resolving conflicts constructively; and avoiding physical and verbal bullying, clique behavior, and discrimination.
10. **Ensure that no girl is treated differently.** Girl Scouts welcomes all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, background, disability, family structure, religious beliefs, and socioeconomic status. When scheduling, helping plan, and carrying out activities, carefully consider the needs of all girls involved, including school schedules, family needs, financial constraints, religious holidays, and the accessibility of appropriate transportation and meeting places.
11. **Promote online safety.** Instruct girls never to put their full names or contact information online, engage in virtual conversation with strangers, or arrange in-person meetings with online contacts. On group web sites, publish girls' first names only and never divulge their contact information. Teach girls the [Girl Scout Online Safety Pledge](#) and have them commit to it.
12. **Keep girls safe during money-earning.** Girl Scout cookies and other council-sponsored product sales are an integral part of the program. During Girl Scout product sales, you are responsible for the safety of girls, money, and products. In addition, a wide variety of organizations, causes, and fundraisers may appeal to Girl Scouts to be their labor force. When representing Girl Scouts, girls cannot participate in money-earning activities that represent partisan politics or that are not Girl Scout-approved product sales and efforts.