New Leader’s Guide to Success
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**The Girl Scout Promise**

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

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

**The Girl Scout Law**

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

**Our Mission**

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

Thank you for becoming a Girl Scout leader! We're excited to have you on board!

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you're building girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. You get to shape some pretty awesome G.I.R.L.s (Go-getters, Innovators, Risk-takers, Leaders)™.

Pretty big feat, right? No fear—we're here to support you! We created this guide just for new troop leaders, with helpful advice on getting your troop going, learning Girl Scout lingo, and leading with gusto! Plus, we have some tips from troop leaders who have been in your shoes before.

You're now a part of our team. We can't wait to see the impact you'll make this year!

Marina H. Park
GSNorCal Council CEO

Our Council By The Numbers

38,114 Girls
Building courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place.

$271,246 Total Financial Aid
Distributed to girls thanks to our generous donors.

3,839 Volunteer-led Troops
Our council has more adult members than any other Girl Scout council nationwide.

111,449 Badges Earned
Earning badges teaches girls confidence, self-reliance, and the courage to try new things.
You—A Girl Scout Leader!

Being a Girl Scout leader is an incredible journey along which you’ll shape the future by working with girls today. With your guidance, encouragement, and go-getting spirit, your Girl Scouts will be ready to embark on a lifetime of leadership, success, and adventure. And along the way, you’ll hone your own leadership style and discover that you’ll achieve more than you thought possible!

Leadership is teaching girls:
• That they can do and be anything!
• That they are decision-makers and should own their decisions
• How to live the Girl Scout Law by modeling it for them

As a leader, see yourself as a coach who:
• Ensures each girl can carry out her responsibilities within the troop
• Encourages girls to build their skills and their ethics
• Assigns more responsibilities to the girls as they grow and develop

It’s important to remember that:
• You’re not expected to know everything about Girl Scouting, but you should know where to go for information—and to ask for help when you need it

Support From Your Service Unit

Think of service units as Girl Scout communities specific to a geographic region. Service units are made up of dedicated volunteers working to build the Girl Scout experience in their immediate area, for both girls and troop leaders. Together, they meet throughout the year to share ideas, receive training, organize special events for girls and volunteers, and lead local recruitment efforts.

Service units are a key part of the Girl Scout community, and we encourage you to lean on yours for support, especially in your first year. Your service unit’s leader support manager is a great resource who you can call upon whenever you have questions. Your service unit’s treasurer will help with all aspects of managing your Girl Scout finances. Your local service unit team is there to help with... well anything!

Get connected with your local service unit volunteers at www.gsnorcal.org/su-list.
Troop Leader Training Path

In order to build our girls into great leaders, we have to start with ourselves! We offer free online training to empower you with the knowledge, skills and confidence to deliver fun, safe, and meaningful Girl Scout experiences to the girls in your troop. New troop leaders are required to complete the New Troop Leader course and the steps in the training path.
The Girl Scout Playbook www.gsnorcal.org/playbook

With so many badges, adventures, and possibilities to explore through Girl Scouts, where do you begin? We’ve made it easy for you to get started with the Girl Scout Playbook!

The Girl Scout Playbook is a roadmap designed to help you and your girls have the best possible Girl Scout experiences. This easy-to-use tool sets you up for success with the key recommendations you need to manage your troop at every program grade level, such as:

• How to get started as a new leader
• Age-appropriate activities for your troop level
• Ideas for planning your troop year
• Tips for bridging to the next level, end-of-year celebrations, and more!

You can follow our Playbook suggestions, or you and your girls can come up with your own girl-led plan. Whatever you choose to do, don’t forget to have fun!

Managing Your Member Experience Online my.girlscouts.org

After your background check is complete and you’re approved to serve as a volunteer, you’ll receive an email prompting you to log into MyGS, your Girl Scout Member Community. MyGS allows you to manage your member experience online.

MyGS is also home to the Volunteer Toolkit, your one-stop-shop for managing your troop roster, planning and tracking your troop’s activities, communicating with troop families, and accessing badge and award program content. Learn more about the VTK at www.gsnorcal.org/vtk.

Resource Quick Reference Guide

Forms & Documents www.gsnorcal.org/forms
Find GSNorCal forms and documents, like permission slips, health history, financial aid, and more.

Volunteer Essentials ve.gsnorcal.org
GSNorCal’s official guidebook for volunteers, covering money management, Safety-Wise, group management, and key policies that support the safe and consistent delivery of Girl Scout programming to girls across the council.

The Trailhead trailhead.gsnorcal.org
When you’re looking for real-world advice from fellow troop leaders who’ve been there, our volunteer support blog’s got you covered!

GSNorCal Newsletters & Publications www.gsnorcal.org/publications
Missed an email? Can’t find your camp brochure? Check out our archive of recent emails and publications.
NEW LEADER’S GUIDE TO SUCCESS

**Essential Girl Scout Experience**

From the youngest Daisy to the most accomplished Ambassador, all Girl Scouting is united around the same experiences. Rooted in best practices for positive youth development and focused on the benefits girls of all ages receive through Girl Scouts, the Essential Girl Scout Experience is your roadmap to Girl Scout success.

**Through the Essential Girl Scout Experience, all girls follow a path of sisterhood, receive mentoring from supportive adults, and explore who they are through special experiences.**

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**SISTERHOOD**

Flourish in an all-girl, girl-led space where she can gain confidence and build healthy relationships with her Girl Scout sisters.

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**SUPPORTIVE ADULTS**

Adult volunteers provide a consistent supportive presence in a girl’s life over time, making her feel valued and providing guidance and mentorship.

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**SPECIAL EXPERIENCES**

The special experiences she’ll have will expand her horizons, connect her to unique Girl Scout traditions, and help her discover who she is, and who she wants to be.
Six Troop Fundamentals

Sisterhood, supportive adults, and special experiences happen through the six troop fundamentals. Engaging your troop in these areas will introduce them to a variety of activities, experiences, and opportunities that will fuel their development, build new skills, and challenge them to grow.

BADGES, JOURNEYS & AWARDS
Level up the skills you love, try exciting activities for the first time, or team up with your troop to solve a problem in your community! From robotics to first aid, outdoor survival training to a Take Action project, your girls will explore their world, build skills, and improve their community.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE
Get outside with your troop as often as possible, whether it's exploring your local park, taking your first hike, camping, or zip-lining! They'll learn useful skills, self-reliance, and teamwork as they enjoy the sunshine and learn to treasure the planet we call home.

PRODUCT PROGRAM
The Girl Scout Product Programs are the largest entrepreneurial leadership programs for girls in the world! Whether she's building her online business from the ground up in the Cookie Program or fundraising through the Fall Product Program, girls use the funds they earn for service products, camping, travel, and more.

SPECIAL EVENTS
Whether your troop attends a local service unit scavenger hunt or learns to build robots through a GSNorCal program, they’ll make lifelong memories. Special experiences expand girls' horizons and introduce them to ideas, goals, careers, and adventures they might have never otherwise experienced!

COMMUNITY SERVICE
From Take Action projects and Bronze, Silver, and Gold Awards to food drives and beach clean-ups, making community service a core part of your troop experience will teach girls to see with open eyes, fight for what they believe in, and commit to changing the world for the better.

GIRL SCOUT TRADITIONS
Flag ceremonies, camp songs, bridging, and s’mores—Girl Scout traditions connect girls around the country and the world! As she learns about the history and tradition of Girl Scouts, she'll lean on her community of sisters for support as she grows, becoming a better person because of her enthusiastic and diverse community of Girl Scouts.
Where Girl Scouts Can Take Your Girls

As your girls progress through Girl Scouts, they’ll learn to take the reins and make their Girl Scout experiences their own—it’s what being girl-led is all about! And as a leader, you’ll encourage them to dream big and challenge themselves as they take their newfound passions to the next level.

While program elements—like outdoor expeditions and entrepreneurial ventures—align across all grade levels, Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies won’t be doing the same activities as seasoned Seniors and Ambassadors. But by building on the knowledge and skills they gain year after year, your girls’ confidence will grow exponentially and they’ll be eager to take those next steps.

So what can you expect as they grow through each level of Girl Scouting?

**GIRL SCOUT DAISIES** can...
- Learn about nature, science, and through skill-building Petals and badges
- Make a difference through a Leadership Journey
- Explore the world around them through age-appropriate outdoor activities

**GIRL SCOUT BROWNIES** can...
- Try out high-adventure activities like archery or kayaking for the first time
- Bond with their friends as they start their own cookie business
- Explore the great beyond as Space Science adventurer

**GIRL SCOUT JUNIORS** can...
- Earn their Bronze Award, the first of Girl Scouts’ Highest Awards
- Become a CEO when they market and sell cookies
- Build a robot or blaze new trails on an overnight camping trip

**GIRL SCOUT CADETTES** can...
- Gain confidence by mentoring younger girls as a Program Aide
- Backpack through the wilderness or write and direct their own movies
- Demonstrate leadership by earning the Silver Award

**GIRL SCOUT SENIORS** can...
- Be a Counselor-In-Training at Girl Scout Camp
- Travel to amazing places like Costa Rica, Japan, or India
- Earn the Girl Scout Gold Award and change the world in a tangible, lasting way

**GIRL SCOUT AMBASSADORS** can...
- Complete a Take Action project and become eligible for college scholarships
- Explore career paths, connect with women leaders, and build their networks
- Earn the Girl Scout Gold Award—which (by the way) adds that “little something extra” to your college applications

The longer your girls are in Girl Scouts, the brighter their futures will be—and they’ll have you to thank for it!
Guiding Your Troop Experience

In leading a new troop, you’ll want to guide the structure and experiences of your troop—from how and when meetings are held to how the troop communicates, and from steering girl-led activities to setting financial expectations. You’ll make these decisions collaboratively with your volunteer team as well as with input from the girls and their families.

Use these questions to guide your conversation with troop volunteers before discussing the topics with parents and caregivers.

Your troop

- Will our troop consist of girls in a single grade level or facilitated as a multi-level troop with girls of many grade levels?
- What kind of family involvement do we want?

Meeting logistics

- When will we meet and for how long? How frequently should we meet?
- Where will we meet? (Pro tip: schools, libraries, places of worship, or community centers make great meeting spaces.)

Troop funds

- Will our troop charge dues?
- How much money will we need to cover supplies and activities?
- Which components of the uniform—the tunic, sash, or vest—will troop families need to purchase? See more at www.gsnorcal.org/families

Troop communication

- How often will we communicate with troop families?
- How will we keep families in the loop on what their girls are learning and doing?

Volunteer Toolkit www.gsnorcal.org/vtk

The Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) is your official source for delivering easy, fun troop meetings year-round! It’s a fully customizable digital planning tool filled with Girl Scout program content, award requirements, and troop communication tools. Print step-by-step activity guides, manage your troop roster, track and share financial information, message troop families, and so much more!

Your Troop Volunteer Team

It takes a village to lift up the next generation of leaders; you don’t have to embark on your troop leader journey alone! Set the stage for a successful troop year by tapping into the people resources already at your fingertips: caregivers and other family members, friends, and members of the community have their own unique strengths and can provide troops with time, experience, and ideas—so get them involved from the very beginning as part of your troop volunteer team! Many troops have one or more Assistant Troop Leaders. Ideally, your troop will have a Troop Product Manager, Troop Treasurer, and a few Troop Helpers.

Troop Product Managers support the girls as they become young entrepreneurs! They’ll coordinate the annual Cookie Program or Fall Product Program at the troop level.

Troop Treasurers help make all the troop’s activities possible by managing the troop funds and bank account. They also complete the year end troop financial report.

Troop Helpers support the girls throughout their Girl Scout experience by working with the troop leader as a team to coordinate troop activities.

All troop volunteers must complete a background check.

Get volunteers signed up at www.gsnorcal.org/volunteer before they jump in.
The Family Connection

Girl Scouting provides the best opportunities for girls when families step up and play an active part in the troop. Without meaningful support from parents, it’s difficult for a troop to be all it can be. Plus, girls feel a special sense of pride when their families take part and show interest in the things they are doing!

Why? Because it helps:

• Families understand what Girl Scouting can do for their girl
• Families and leaders identify ways they will work as a team to support the troop
• Families and leaders agree about what the troop pays for and what families pay for individually
• You fill key troop positions—you never know which parent will make an awesome assistant leader or troop product manager
• Families know how the troop will communicate things like upcoming events or schedule changes

Make Family Part of the Formula

• Host a parent meeting: A parent and caregiver meeting should be the first meeting you hold to start each troop year and before you kick-off the Cookie Program—it sets up both new and returning troops for success! Find our step-by-step guide for parent meetings at www.gsnorcal.org/family-meetings.

• Invite caregivers to participate: Encourage your troop parents to lend their unique strengths, time, experience, or ideas to the troop, whether as a driver or chaperone for troop events, leading a badge activity related to their skills, or helping to plan your outdoor adventures. We recommend you ask that at least one adult from each family register as a volunteer, even if it’s just as a Troop Helper!

• Keep communication lines open: Whether it’s through emails, troop newsletters, or in-person chats, keep parents in the loop on what the girls are doing and learning during each meeting, and encourage them to let their daughters “be the expert” at home by, for example, explaining or teaching a new skill she’s learned to the rest of the family.

• Invite families to important events: Inviting a whole crew to celebrate her accomplishments in Girl Scouting—whether at a holiday party, a bridging ceremony, awards ceremony—will help parents better understand the value of Girl Scouts and be more likely to invest their time and talents with the troop.
**Funding the Fun**

Your girls probably have some big ideas about what they want to do in Girl Scouts—and that’s awesome! As a troop leader, you’ll coach them as they learn to earn and manage troop funds. But where do you start?

**Troop activities are powered in two main ways:**

**Troop dues:** Many troops decide to collect troop dues to help provide startup funds for troop activities and supplies. These could range from a few dollars per meeting to a lump sum for the entire school year. It’s completely up to each troop to decide what works best for their families to support the activities they want to do.

**Money-earning activities:** The Fall Product Program and the Cookie Program are the primary money-earning activities for a troop—and they’re a hands-on way for girls to learn money management and business skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. You’ll learn the ins-and-outs of these programs in a separate training.

We know you have more questions about troop finances, and we’ve got answers! Check out the *Opening Your Bank Account* and *Managing Troop Finances* modules in the New Troop Leader course [www.gsnorcal.org/new-leader-training](http://www.gsnorcal.org/new-leader-training) and in *Volunteer Essentials* for the details you’ll need to keep troop business running smooth!

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**Money FAQs**

Our three most frequently asked about troop finance topics:

**Opening a bank account:** New troops will need to set up a bank account to collect dues, pay for troop supplies and activities, and collect product program revenue. *Volunteer Essentials* breaks down the process for you.

**Financial aid:** Finances shouldn’t stand in the way of a Girl Scout’s participation. Any girl needing financial assistance for membership, uniforms, events, program books, and camps, can request it online at [www.gsnorcal.org/financial-aid](http://www.gsnorcal.org/financial-aid).

**Tax exemption:** Councils are 501(c)(3) nonprofits, so take advantage of your council’s tax-exempt form when purchasing supplies and materials for troop use.
Keeping Girls Safe

From camping weekends to cookie booths, registered, background checked adult volunteers must always be present to ensure their girls have fun and stay safe, no matter their grade level. The helpful chart below breaks down the minimum number of volunteers needed to supervise a specific number of girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volunteer-to-Girl Ratio Chart</th>
<th>Group Meetings</th>
<th>Events, Travel, and Camping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two unrelated volunteers (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:</td>
<td>Plus one additional volunteer for each additional number of this many girls:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scout Daisies (grades K–1)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scout Brownies (grades 2–3)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4–5)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scout Cadettes (grades 6–8)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scout Seniors (grades 9–10)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Scout Ambassadors (grades 11–12)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1-15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Planning Safe Activities

When preparing for any activity with girls, check Girl Scouts’ Safety Activity Checkpoints at [www.gsnorcal.org/forms](http://www.gsnorcal.org/forms) for required guidelines on where to do the activity, how to include girls with disabilities, where to find both basic and specialized gear for the activity, and the specific steps to follow on the day of the activity.

What to Do in an Emergency

Although we all hope the worst never happens, you should know and follow our council’s procedures for handling emergency incidents. Remember, at the scene of an incident, safety is your first priority. Provide care for the injured person and/or obtain medical assistance, then immediately report the emergency to GSNorCal staff. Call our office Monday–Friday, 8AM–5PM at 800-447-4475, ext. 2093 or after business hours on our emergency line at 877-636-1912.
Your First Troop Meeting

Six Elements of a Great Troop Meeting
The only requirement for your meeting? That your girls are laughing, smiling, and having a fun time! That being said, many troop leaders use this basic structure for their meetings:

1. **Pre-Meeting Activity:** Plan activities for the girls on arrival at the meeting so they have something to do until the meeting begins. This could be as simple as coloring pages, journaling, or talking with one another. (5 minutes)

2. **Opening:** Each troop decides how to open its meetings—most begin with the Girl Scout Promise and Law, a simple flag ceremony, song, game, story, or other activity designed by the girls. (5–10 minutes)

3. **Troop Business:** Collect dues and make announcements, or plan an upcoming event or trip while families are present. (5 minutes)

4. **Main Activity:** Use the meeting plans found in the Volunteer Toolkit! Activities are already designed to fit easily into this part of your meeting as you help your troop earn badges and complete Journeys. (30–45 minutes)

5. **Clean Up:** Because Girl Scouts should always leave a place cleaner than they found it! (5 minutes)

6. **Closing:** Just like the opening, each troop can decide how to close—with a song, a game, a story, or pretty much anything else! (5–10 minutes)

Your first troop meeting is a great chance to get to know the girls and brainstorm all the exciting things they want to do in the year to come. If you’re feeling a little nervous about leading troop meetings and experiences with your girls, that’s OK! Just remember that:

**It doesn’t need to be perfect.** Did an activity run over time? Or maybe a field trip didn’t go according to plan? Take a deep breath, roll with the changes, and have fun! The girls aren’t expecting perfection from you: your time, attention, and guidance are the best part of your leadership.

**Learn with your girls.** Keeping activities girl-led also means that at some point, the girls will want to earn a badge or complete a project in a subject unfamiliar to you. But don’t let that hold you back! Be open with the girls when you don’t know something and become their partner in learning more. You’ll show them that learning is a lifelong process and that with an open mind, they can overcome any challenges that come their way.

First meeting checklist:

- **Cover the basics.** Review the details about when and where the meeting will take place and make sure parents/caregivers are aware.

- **Get ready.** Use the Volunteer Toolkit to verify your troop roster and email parents. This might be a great time to ask parents to provide you with any needed items, such as permission slips, health history forms, uniform order forms, and troop dues.

- **Know the agenda.** Refer to our “Six Elements of a Great Troop Meeting” list and the Volunteer Toolkit sample meeting agenda.

- **Review and practice your agenda.** You’ll feel calmer during the actual meeting and ready to make adjustments as needed.

- **Prepare for fun!** When the girls and parents see that you’re prepared for the meeting and ready to have a great time, they’ll follow your lead!
Council Contact Information

Offices & Retail Shops
Alameda (Council Headquarters)
1650 Harbor Bay Parkway Ste 100
Alameda, CA 94502

Chico Office
50 Landing Circle
Chico, CA 95973

Eureka Office
3203 T Street
Eureka, CA 95503

Redding Office
1670 Market St. Ste 248
Redding, CA 96001

San Jose Office
1310 S. Bascom Ave.
San Jose, CA 95128

Santa Rosa Office
4825 Old Redwood Hwy
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Support & Retail Shop Hours
Member Services:
800-447-4475
Monday-Friday 9 AM–5 PM

Retail Shops:
Visit www.gsnorcal.org/shop for your local store hours.

Or Shop Online 24/7 at www.gsnorcal.org/shop

Contact us at 800-447-4475 or info@gsnorcal.org

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