

Advocacy Projects

Girls may decide to engage in advocacy activities as part of their Take Action Projects. The laws governing nonprofit organizations draw a distinction between lobbying activities and electioneering activities. While GSUSA encourages members to actively work with and lobby their public officials on policy issues, it is important to remember that any type of electioneering in your official Girl Scout capacity is prohibited. Electioneering is defined as participating in the electoral process by promoting particular candidates for office. Such activity is a direct violation of the tax law that governs non-profit organizations. You may, however, campaign on behalf of a political candidate as an individual without reference to your role as a Girl Scout leader.

Nonprofit organizations are allowed to educate elected officials or other government officials about issues that are important to them. In your capacity as a Girl Scout representative, you may communicate with elected officials and their staff members in order to influence action on specific legislation, encouraging them either to enact it or defeat it. As a Girl Scout representative, you can write letters to members of Congress and/or their staff, visit them, send e-mails, or make phone calls about their legislative interests or pending legislation. However, if you are in communication with an elected official during his or her re-election campaign, you must be very careful that your actions aren't misconstrued as an endorsement.

The official GSUSA policy on electioneering is as follows:

Political and Legislative Activity: Girl Scouts of the United States of America and any Girl Scout council or other organization holding a Girl Scouts of the United States of America credential may not, nor may they authorize anyone on their behalf to, participate or intervene directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office; or participates in any legislative activity or function which contravenes the laws governing tax-exempt organizations. (Blue Book of Basic Documents 2019)

The Girl Scouts Advocacy Network provides a tool for you to become the voice for girls and to make a difference in your community and across the nation.

www.GirlScouts.org/en/about-girl-scouts/advocacy.html/advocacy.html

Advocacy

n. (noun) Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy

Advocacy/Lobbying Activities (Allowed)

It IS acceptable for Girl Scout staff and volunteers to engage in the following activities:

- Write, visit, or call your Members of Congress, Governor, state legislator, and all other local policy makers in support or opposition to legislation, especially when Girl Scout or girl issues arise.

- Keep your members of Congress, Governor, state legislators, and all other local policy makers informed about of GSNorCal’s work. For example, you may continue to submit to your elected officials’ newsletters, key press releases, fact sheets, annual reports, and other relevant council publications with your position on legislative proposals (including ballot measures) and other public issues.
- Invite your elected officials to major council events, such as Gold Award ceremonies or other community events, hosted by GSNorCal as long as the elected official is clear that they are invited in his or her capacity as an elected official, not as a candidate, and cannot use their speaking time as an election-related platform. It is a good practice to send a letter to the elected official prior to the event reminding them that GSNorCal is a nonpartisan 501(c)(3) organization that cannot support or oppose candidates and that he or she cannot mention their candidacy, hand out campaign literature, or use speaking time to discuss their election platform.
- Participate in and host “get out the vote” registration drives. Registration may not be limited to a particular political party or on behalf of a specific political party or candidate.

It IS acceptable for Girl Scout staff and volunteers to teach girls about the election process by encouraging them to participate in the following activities:

- Going to the polls with an adult on election day.
- Collecting signatures of members in their community who promise that they will vote on election day, such as participating in the “I Promise a Girl Scout I Will Vote” campaign and publicizing the efforts.
- Stage a public candidate debate on a wide range of issues concerning girls that the candidates would address if elected to the office and that are of interest to the public.
- Equally attend political party candidate events in Girl Scout uniform and ask candidates questions about issues that are important to girls and publicize the responses.

Electioneering

n. To work for the success of a particular candidate, party, ticket, etc. in an election

Electioneering Activities (Not Allowed)

GSUSA respects that Girl Scout staff and volunteers may hold strong political convictions concerning upcoming elections; however, it is crucial that you adhere to the GSUSA policy. Participation in electioneering as Girl Scouts could result in the loss of our 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt status. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this topic, please contact the GSUSA Public Policy and Advocacy Office at (212) 659-3780 or Advocacy@GirlScouts.org

Below is a list of electioneering examples. This list is not exhaustive and, if at any point, you are uncertain as to what constitutes electioneering, contact GSNorCal. When acting as a Girl Scout representative, a Girl Scout council staff person, volunteer or young Girl Scout may NOT engage in the following prohibited electoral activity:

- Endorse any candidate for public office. This includes social media functions that may be viewed as endorsement, such as “liking,” “friending,” or “following” a candidate.

- Influence in any way the nomination or election of someone to a federal, state or local public office or to an office in a political organization, including by publishing or communicating anything that explicitly or implicitly favors or opposes a candidate.
- Mobilize constituents to support or defeat a candidate.
- Use official Girl Scout letterhead, office email, or computers to write in support or opposition of a candidate or any statements that favor or oppose candidates, or let a political candidate use any council office space or property for a campaign event.
- Distribute campaign materials, including flyers, postcards, newsletters and signage.
- Post, tweet, retweet, or otherwise share on social media any posts, tweets, or other materials from a candidate, campaign or political organization, or any statements that favor or oppose candidates.
- Share the link to a website that discusses specific candidates and their views on specific issues.
- Post political statements on personal social media accounts that identify your employment organization without clarifying that the post is not work-related.
- Provide an email list to candidates, political parties or politically active 501 (c)(4) organizations.
- Coordinate or host council site visits, activities, or other functions with a candidate running for office.
- Participate in any election events or activities, including a campaign parade or rally.
- Host a flag ceremony to open a political campaign event.
- Provide public opinions about a candidate.
- Wear official Girl Scout uniforms or other insignia to a political campaign event or fundraiser, even during non-work hours.
- Wear campaign buttons on the Girl Scout uniform at any time, as well as on non-Girl Scout apparel, while conducting official Girl Scout business.
- Make financial contributions to candidates or political parties on behalf of Girl Scouts, meaning any payment, loan, deposit, gift, or other transfer of anything of value.
- Ask candidates to endorse the Girl Scouts platform and publicize the responses (but feel free to urge all candidates and the public to invest in girls and make girls a priority).
- In addition, be careful if you are considering posting, retweeting or otherwise sharing news video of a candidate talking about the Girl Scouts, to lessen the risk of an implicit endorsement. A candidate may speak favorably about the Girl Scouts. You cannot control what candidates say, but circulating their statements creates a risk that the Girl Scouts will be viewed as promoting that candidate.

NOTE: It is acceptable for individuals to participate in the above activities as long as they do not do so in their capacity as a Girl Scout.