



Service Unit Retention Guide

Retention FAQs

What is My Role?

As a Retention Specialist, you will work closely with your service unit committee and council staff to develop strategies which encourage troops and adult volunteers to renew their memberships.

- Use communication channels available to you to share messaging related to renewals, including the Early Bird Renewal campaign in the spring and on-time renewals in the fall.
- Partner with Program Level Mentors and the CSA Specialist to ensure that troops at each level are receiving appropriate support and training to enable them to take full advantage of the program.
- Connect with bridging troops to offer support.
- Facilitate connections with others in the service unit who may be able to offer guidance on level-specific or other issues.
- Where possible, partner with Event Managers to host an Early Bird renewal event, and/or a bridging event.
- Work with your team to ensure that learning opportunities at e.g. volunteer meetings are relevant and help to fill identified needs for troop volunteers.

Retention happens when volunteers and youth feel valued, supported, engaged, and that they are able to develop new interests and skills. You will play a key role in making sure that this is the ethos within your service unit, and that troops receive appropriate and timely support.

Why Does Retention Matter?

Each year, Girl Scouts learn more about themselves and the world around them as they continue their Girl Scout journey. The older they get, the more leadership experience they can gain - from earning a leadership award for guiding younger Girl Scouts through a meeting, to planning a trip to another state or even around the world!

When we retain our older youth, not only can they help to lead the way for younger Girl Scouts and act as ambassadors to show the younger members what the Girl Scout program has to offer, but it also helps to ensure that there are more trusted and experienced adult volunteers to mentor new leaders and support the service unit.

Who Do I Connect With for Support?

Your service unit's Membership Advisor, and/or your council staff member.

How Can I Impact Retention?

As a member of the service unit team, you are in a unique position to be able to help guide Troop Leaders and have an impact on youth experiences. As a first step, recruit more adults to help support newer troop leaders. Do you know a troop that had some amazing experiences last year? Ask that leader to be a Program Level Mentor and pass on their experience and knowledge! Maybe an older troop would like to take the lead on a service unit Bridging event, or you may know a CSA troop leader who would be great in the role of CSA Advisor.

What are Early Bird and On-Time Renewals?

Each year, April 1st to June 30th is dedicated to Early Bird renewals. Renewing early helps both GSNorCal AND service units and troops to plan ahead for a bigger and better year. Knowing how many members to plan for enables both volunteers and council staff alike to create more concrete budgetary and program plans. Early Bird renewals are typically incentivized at the troop and individual level - your help advertising and promoting these rewards is crucial to our efforts!

Girl Scouts who renew before the membership year ends on September 30th are considered to be "on-time". Members and volunteers who have not renewed by this time should not participate in any Girl Scout activities or hold any volunteer positions until they renew their membership. Troops that have not renewed many (or any) members and volunteers by this time should be contacted so that support can be offered. If the troop still does not renew, they may be disbanded and lose access to their bank accounts and troop funds.



Supporting Troops With Retention

The Long-Term Benefits of Girl Scouting

Girl Scout alumni display positive outcomes to a greater degree than their non-Girl Scout peers. These outcomes pertain to sense-of-self, community service, civic engagement, education, and income. These differences are seen regardless of generation, social class, race, and engagement in other extra-curricular activities. The data is clear: remaining in Girl Scouts leads to many lifelong benefits!

What Help Might Troop Leaders Need?

- Troop adult support
- Managing and reporting finances
- Understanding or providing program
- Applying the GSLE
- Youth-led progression
 - Outdoors
 - Leadership
 - Entrepreneurship
- Council regulations/paperwork
- Transitioning to an older youth troop
- Conflict management
- Feelings of isolation
- Finding local community service opportunities
- Getting outdoors
- Stepping out of their comfort zone
- Troop leadership
 - Communication
 - Succession
 - Delegation
 - Balancing time



Providing Support

Once you have identified any problems that troops/leaders are facing, how can you help them to find the support they need?

[Other adults in the troop are not helping](#) - discuss with the leader what their needs are and suggest ways in which they can approach their troop adults and assign tasks.

[Managing and reporting finances](#) - direct them to the gsLearn training and the additional resources for financial reporting in the Help Center. Connect them with the SU Treasurer for additional support.

[Help understanding and/or delivering program](#) - your service unit's Program Level Mentors and/or CSA Specialist should be able to help guide them in navigating the program opportunities available at their level. Encourage them to attend service unit meetings to connect with other leaders at their level to brainstorm ideas and potentially work together to provide program.

[Applying the GSLE/progression](#) - there are a lot of resources in the Help Center to help leaders understand youth-led progression in different program areas and how to plan their Girl Scout year, so this would be a great starting point.

[Council regulations/paperwork](#) - connect the leader with your service unit's Troop Outdoor Mentor for help with paperwork. The Trip & Outdoor Learning Matrix is a handy chart which breaks down the training and paperwork needed for different types of trips, and can be found in the Help Center.

[Transitioning to an older youth troop](#) - connect them with your service unit's CSA Advisor and/or directly with CSA troop leaders who can help answer their questions about how Girl Scouts changes as our youth transition from elementary to middle and high schools.

[Conflict management](#) - connect them with a volunteer in your service unit who will be able to help them navigate the conflict. Escalate to council staff for intervention as needed.

[Finding local community service opportunities](#) - work with your team to ensure that this is put on the agenda for a future service unit meeting, and encourage other troop leaders to share examples of projects their troop has done through your social media channels.

[Feelings of isolation](#) - encourage them to attend service unit meetings and adult socials, as well as service unit events. Program Level Mentors may also be able to arrange for leaders at their level to connect and network.

[Getting outdoors](#) - training and practice will improve confidence! Your service unit's Troop Outdoor Mentor may be able to help ensure that training is available. Encourage the leader to identify an adult in their troop who could lead this piece of the program.

[Stepping out of their comfort zone](#) - Just as Girl Scouts offers a safe space for our youth members to take risks and try new things, so it does for our adult volunteers! Mentoring can be of great benefit in these instances, and service unit meeting time can be dedicated to short training opportunities to give volunteers more confidence.

Retention Strategies

Volunteer-Facing

Identifying Support Needs

There are many ways in which troop volunteers may be in need of support. If they "don't know what they don't know" they may not be able to clearly express their needs.

Look for the warning signs:

- Are the troop leaders and other volunteers in the troop completing training in gsLearn?
 - Training helps to prepare adults for the next steps with their troop and if they aren't taking the training they need, they can be left feeling overwhelmed.
- Did a troop see a sudden drop-off in members at an unexpected time (e.g. after 1st grade)?
 - This can be an indicator that a troop is struggling - maybe because the leader needs training or more adult support.
- Are new troops sending adult volunteers to service unit meetings?
 - Track attendance and try to form connections with troops that rarely, if ever, engage. Encourage them to attend meetings so that the community can support them.
- Do you have troops which are consistently slow to renew, and may not have all of their members renewed even by cookie time?
- Do newer, younger troops have plenty of adult volunteers?
 - Leaders can become burned out easily if they have insufficient support, particularly in the early years.

Youth-Facing

Early Bird Events

A program-based event that serves as an incentive to troops and individuals to renew during the "Early Bird" period from April-June.

What Kind of Event?

If your service unit is able to facilitate an early bird renewal event, consider something that is easy to plan, such as:

- **Movie Matinee:** if there's an upcoming movie that would appeal to the Girl Scouts, contact your local movie theater to see if you can host a private viewing!
- **Pool Party:** reserve the space and provide snacks - the entertainment takes care of itself!
- **Bowling/Skating:** much like a pool party or movie, once the space is reserved there's typically little else to organize other than registrations.
- **Songfest:** get back into the swing of Girl Scouts with some traditional songs, and have an older Girl Scout act as MC.
- **S'mores & More:** make it a Girl Scout traditions evening, with a campfire, songs, skits, and s'mores!

Promotion

Consider offering a service unit subsidy such as reduced cost registrations and/or a special something extra for your early birds!

Registrations

For an event to act as an effective incentive for early bird renewals, be sure to begin promoting it well before the end of the early bird renewal time frame. Be prepared to check your registrations to ensure that everyone registering has, in fact, renewed their membership in time!

Timeline

Year-Round

Does each service unit volunteer support meeting include at least one of the following?

- A learning opportunity that meets an identified need.
- Program level breakouts.
- An opportunity to network and make connections.

Prepare for the 5th-6th grade drop off by:

- Encourage CSA leaders to mentor a 4th or 5th grade troop.
- Celebrate and promote the successes of older Girl Scouts.
- Provide hands-on workshops or training opportunities for 5th grade troop leaders and youth.
- Connect 5th grade troops together to facilitate merging and/or placements for continuing youth.

August-September

Back to school = back to troop! Work with your council staff member to identify troops in need of outreach.

Potential actions include:

- emails and phone calls to troops that have not yet renewed 70% of their youth membership, being sure to include a list of troop members who have not yet renewed.
- Promote the service unit's event calendar and meeting themes.
- Call or text identified troop leaders to find out if the service unit can support them in any way.
- Reach out to parents of Juliette Girl Scouts to make sure they are connected to the service unit.

October-December

Partner with your service unit's Communications Specialist to ensure troop leaders have joined your communication platforms. Arrange support for identified troops. Connect incoming Cadette troops to the CSA Advisor and newly bridged troops and Juliettes to their Program Level Mentors

December-February

Partner with the Cookie Advisor and leaders as needed to help get everyone renewed in time for cookie sales!

March

Begin working with the team to plan an early bird renewal event. Reach out to 5th grade troop leaders to discuss their plans and connect them to existing Cadette troops as needed for mentorship.

April

Promote your early bird renewal event. Partner with your staff member to ensure a comprehensive promotion plan for early renewals to include council and service unit messaging and outreach.

July-August

Partner with your council staff to reach out to troops that indicated an unsure status on their annual finance report to identify what support is needed to ensure as many troops as possible continue into the new membership year.