

# Volunteer Essentials 2011-2012

## 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 their 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 as a Girl Scout volunteer. We encourage you to read through these tips as soon as you can and then feel free to put down this handbook for now.

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.

You will find more information on the Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys (River Valleys) website at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org).

If you are volunteering in the Troop Pathway, one volunteer from each troop will attend a Fast Start Meeting and be assigned a coach within their service unit. More information specific to starting a troop will be covered in this meeting.

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

**Thank you for volunteering!**

# 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. Girl Scouts is in virtually every ZIP code in the United States and in 90 countries around the world.

- **2.3 million girls five 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 [GSRV100.org](http://GSRV100.org) (for River Valleys' Centennial information) and [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org) (for national Centennial information.)

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[GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org) . 800-845-0787

# 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 twelfth 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/guardian volunteer ready for an outdoor adventure with your daughter’s group, or any responsible adult (female or male, who has 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 of \$12 (or purchase a lifetime membership for \$300). Financial assistance is available for the annual membership dues.

## 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.

Depending on her program grade level, a girl will be able to choose to participate in different pathways—camp, events, series, troop, travel, and virtual—within a single membership year. 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 know which options will interest girls, based on their grade levels. River Valleys is



piloting and will be developing support and member options for the various Girl Scout Pathways in the coming year.

# 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 abroad. 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 programs, and to develop, manage and maintain Girl Scouting in a specific area. Our council is called Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys. Through River Valleys, the national office provides support materials to ensure that what is delivered is consistent for all volunteers across the country. Each year, River Valleys serves approximately 45,000 girls with the support of almost 18,000 volunteers across 49 counties in southern Minnesota and western Wisconsin. River Valleys' toll-free phone number is 800-845-0787 and our website address is [GirlScoutsRV.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 is called a service unit. 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 (Girl Scout Leadership Journey books 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.

# Program Essentials: Our Core Girl Scout Plan

Program Essentials is the core plan that girls and leaders use to implement the Girl Scout Leadership Experience in River Valleys. The national Girl Scout Leadership Journey books are the foundation of Program Essentials, which is complemented by additional skill-building activities.

Program Essentials Charts for first-time troops are included in the New Troop Welcome Kit. Program Essentials Charts for second-time (and third-time in the case of Girl Scout Cadettes) troops are available to download at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org).

River Valleys has developed a number of resources supporting Program Essentials, including easy to use Program Essentials Meeting Plans for Girl Scout Daisy, Brownie and Junior troops and resource packets and program kits for all program grade levels.

Each girl who completes the Program Essentials requirements is eligible to receive a pin. For more information on these pins, refer to “Chapter 2: Program—What Girl Scouts Do.”

# Getting Started with the National Girl Scout Leadership Program through Journeys

The Girl Scout program is based on the Girl Scout Leadership Experience 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 Girl Scout Leadership Experience are national Girl Scout 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 Girl Scout Leadership Experience 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 new *Girl's Guide to Girl Scouting*, a resource for each grade level of Girl Scouting.
2. **Find your journey.** In Program Essentials, River Valleys recommends doing the journeys in this order: do *It's Your World—Change It!* with girls in their first year of a program grade level, and do either *It's Your Planet—Love It!* or *It's Your Story—Tell It!* with girls in their second year of a program grade level. Talk to the girls about each journey and which one they'll take each year.
3. **Get to know the journey.** Pick up a girls' book and adult guide. Read the girls' book just for the pleasure of it to get an overview of the journey's theme and content. If you are leading a first-time troop, you will receive a free set of books in your New Troop Welcome Kit.
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. If you are leading a Girl Scout Daisy, Brownie or Junior troop, **read through the River Valleys Program Essentials Meeting Plans** for your troop's program grade level and year to see how everything can come together. These plans have been specially designed for River Valleys volunteers to give you a "one-stop shop" resource with detailed troop meeting plans for your entire year. By following these meeting plans, you can reduce your preparation time and ensure you are covering the core activities as outlined in your Program Essentials Chart. The meeting plans for first-time troops are in the New Troop Welcome Kit, and the meeting plans for second-time troops are on the River Valleys website at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org).

7. **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 together, first draw up a calendar:

January	February	March
April	May	June
July	August	September
October	November	December

If your group will be meeting for less than a year, adjust the calendar to suit your needs. Or, 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 meetings will you have each month? When do you plan to break for holidays?
- How many weeks do you need for the Girl Scout Cookie Program Activity and Fall Product Program?
- Which Program Essentials Chart activities will you try first?
- Will you have time in your schedule for guest speakers and visitors?
- If you've worked with this group before, what are their preferences? Badge work? Field trips? Other activities? These can also be tied to a Girl Scout journey theme! For more ideas, see the online [journey maps](#) and then choose the grade level of the girls you're working 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. Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors may not even want 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. (Journey books for older girls include planning pages specifically designed to help them customize their journey.) Girl Scout Daisies and Brownies, on the other hand, may enjoy your calendar and just fill in a few ideas here and there that 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.** Journey books 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 search the Internet for "ice-breakers for kids" to find more ideas.
- **Introduce your troop's Program Essentials Chart.** The Program Essentials Chart outlines the activities your girls will do throughout the year.
- **Introduce the Girl Scout Leadership Journey books and the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.** You can start with something as simple as asking the girls to raise hands or shout out what "leadership" means to them, and then compiling a list that you can tie to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience, including the three keys of discover, connect and take action. Or, you can do something more complex, such as having the girls create masks from their journey book and choosing a character to play for the evening. Attend a Leadership Essentials or Extra! Extra! training session for ideas on how to kick off and use the journey books.
- **Talk about the three processes—girl-led, learning by doing and cooperative learning—in a grade-level appropriate way.** Consider dividing the girls into small groups or two-person teams to recall the activities they've led in the past, the times when they've learned by doing and the ways in which they've learned cooperatively in groups. What was beneficial about those experiences? What was difficult about them?
- **Find out what interests the group.** Do they want to dig deeper into the Girl Scout Leadership Journey or a related theme? 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 also ask direct questions of the girls who seem shy or unsure about answering so that no one is left out.
- **Get the girls talking about how they want to schedule their time together.** Use the planning pages from their journey book (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 Girl Scout 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 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 at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org) and/or River Valleys will provide you 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 by doing that research themselves rather than if you do the legwork and report back to them. Even Girl Scout Daisies can do basic research and give reports or do show-and-tell for each other. And Girl Scout 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, be sure to check with River Valleys *before* making any definite plans with your group. A few activities are allowed only with written pre-approval from River Valleys and only for girls 12 and older, while some are off limits completely.

**Caution:** You must get written pre-approval from River Valleys 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/guardian permission on forms available from River Valleys. 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 River Valleys 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	
	<i>Two</i> unrelated adults (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <i>one</i> additional adult for each additional number of this many girls:	<i>Two</i> unrelated adults (at least one of whom is female) for this number of girls:	Plus <i>one</i> additional adult for each additional number of this many girls:
<b>Girl Scout Daisies (K–grade 1)</b>	12	6	6	4
<b>Girl Scout Brownies (grades 2–3)</b>	20	8	12	6
<b>Girl Scout Juniors (grades 4–5)</b>	25	10	16	8
<b>Girl Scout Cadettes (grades 6–8)</b>	25	12	20	10
<b>Girl Scout Seniors (grades 9–10)</b>	30	15	24	12
<b>Girl Scout Ambassadors (grades 11–12)</b>	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 River Valleys. Read the checkpoints, follow them and share them with other volunteers, parents/guardians 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 River Valleys 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. Forms for this purpose are located on the River Valleys website.
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 the River Valleys guidelines for reporting concerns about abuse or neglect that may be occurring inside or outside of Girl Scouting. These guidelines are located in *Volunteer Essentials*.
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. Health history forms are located at [GirlScoutsRV.org](http://GirlScoutsRV.org).
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/guardian-daughter overnights, one family unit may sleep in the same sleeping quarters in program areas. When parents/guardians 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 River Valleys 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 age, race, ethnicity, culture, background, sexual orientation, gender, ability, family structure, religious beliefs, education 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 websites, 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.** The Girl Scout Cookie Program Activity 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.