FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE GUIDELINES

Girl Scouts of West Central Florida is committed to ensuring every girl has the opportunity to participate in Girl Scouting. Although funds are limited, the council makes every effort to provide enough support so no girl is denied access to the Girl Scout experience due to lack of funds.

In order to be considered for financial assistance, please read the following guidelines and complete the attached Financial Assistance Application. Incomplete applications will be returned and failure to follow the process may significantly delay an application or result in denial.

Overview:

- Financial assistance funds are supplementary, and the council encourages each family, troops and service unit to contribute as much as they can toward the cost of Girl Scouting. Individuals should seek assistance from the troop and service unit prior to applying for financial assistance.

- The council-sponsored product sales program are partly structured to provide funding for the Girl Scout experience and troops should budget for troop operating expenses above all else. Participation will be verified to ensure applicants are actively taking part in the program.

- Awards are based on financial need and/or special circumstances at the girl level, not the troop level. Applications must be completed by the individual and any applications submitted on behalf of the troop itself will be returned.

- At times, a family may not qualify for financial assistance under the income guidelines, but may have extenuating circumstances that the council will consider when determining eligibility and award amounts. In that case, the circumstances must be clearly explained for consideration.

- Financial assistance can only be awarded to a girl one time per membership year (October 1 – September 30). However, a summer camp financial assistance is treated differently and can be requested in addition to regular financial assistance received during the membership year.

- Families who have received financial assistance in previous membership years will not be guaranteed financial assistance for future membership years.
**Procedure:**
Before applying for financial assistance from the council, consult the local community or troop/group leader about financial assistance availability. Some troops and/or communities will budget for some level of financial assistance for individual girls.

- After reading the Financial Assistance Guidelines, complete the entire Financial Assistance Application. A new form must be completed for each program year.
- Indicate the correct troop/group number on the form. The troop leader will be able to provide the correct troop/group number.
- Indicate all of the requested items on the application.
- Award and/or denial letters will be emailed within 5-7 business days. Award letters will include a uniform voucher (if applicable) that can be redeemed at a West Central Florida Girl Scout store.
- Submit the Financial Assistance application online, or email to customerconnections@gswcf.org

**Income Verification Documentation:**
When submitting an application, income verification documentation must be provided to demonstrate the applicant’s financial need. In order to streamline the process and minimize the undue burden on the applicant, the council can rely on documentation that has already been provided by other agencies.

Examples of acceptable income verification documentation:
1. Unemployment notification letters/receipts
2. Disability/social security statements
3. Food stamp/public assistance award letters/receipts
4. Public housing acknowledgments
5. Free/reduced lunch award letters

The most recent copies of any income verification documentation should be included. Applicants are required to submit at least one type of income verification documentation listed above. All information is kept confidential and in a secure location. The council does not require income levels to be demonstrated, only proof of financial need as evidenced by other forms of public assistance. Do not send copies of bank statements, investment statements or W-2 forms.

Submit income verification documentation to customerconnections@gswcf.org or fax to (813) 282-8285
**Summer Camp Financial Assistance (Campership):**
Registrants will be responsible for paying the initial deposit to secure camp reservations as well as the difference between the voucher amount and cost of the camp.

If registering online:
1. Proceed to the online registration system through [www.gswcf.org](http://www.gswcf.org).
2. Register for the camp product of your choice.
3. Pay the applicable deposit associated with the camp.
4. Complete the Financial Assistance Application and return to the address indicated.

Campership applications must pay the applicable deposit when applying for financial assistance. The deposits differ by camp type, so be sure to check the event details. The deposit is refundable if the request for financial assistance is denied or does not meet the need.

**Review Process:**
Received applications will be reviewed and processed, which may take up to 5-7 business days. The council receives a large amount of applications each year and each one must be individually reviewed; please await the allotted time before contacting the office for a status update.

Depending on the outcome of the review process, a letter will be emailed to the applicant communicating one of the following:

- **Approval** – full amount of the requested award has been approved, and any associated vouchers will be included.

- **Amended Approval** – Financial assistance was awarded, but at an amended amount. Details will be provided and any associated vouchers will be included. Applicants may appeal the decision as explained below.

- **Denial** – Financial assistance was denied for a specific reason(s), and an explanation will be given. Applicants may appeal the decision as explained below.

- **Incomplete** – part of the application was determined to be incomplete or insufficient, and the applicant will need to provide further clarification. Applicants may resubmit the application with the requested information.

**Appeals Process:**
If an application is denied, an applicant may have an opportunity to appeal the decision under certain circumstances, which will be outlined in the denial letter. An applicant may appeal a denied application by
returning the original, completed application, an amended application with supporting documentation, and a letter explaining the reason for the appeal.

If an award is made for an amended amount, an applicant may appeal the decision by submitting a letter of appeal to the contact information provided in the denial letter.

In both cases, once the Council has ruled a second time, no further appeals may be made on an application.

**Use of Financial Assistance:**
Applicants approved for financial assistance (other than membership and campership) will receive a voucher for the item(s) for which they applied. These vouchers should be used according to processes outlined below:

**Store Voucher:**
1. Store vouchers will indicate the items that have qualified for financial aid.
2. Take the store voucher to any council shop location (locations available at www.gswcf.org) and present to a store staff member to redeem indicated items. Additional items may also be purchased from the store, but the voucher will only provide credit towards the noted items.
3. Vouchers may not be used for online purchases.
4. Vouchers have no cash value and change will not be given nor will store credit be issued for any unused portion.
5. To provide flexibility, vouchers may be transferred to the troop/group leader to make purchases on behalf of the girl.

For questions about the Financial Assistance Guidelines, please contact Customer Connections at (813) 281-4475 or 1-800-881-4475.

Revised April 2015