New Leader Launch

November Q & A

Guest 1 – Dana Antis Girl Experience Manager- Girl Scout Leadership Experience & GSWCF Program Events

1. **What is the Girl Scout Leadership Experience?**
   The Girl Scout Leadership Experience or GSLE, is the foundation of everything we do in Girl Scouts. Simply put, it is what Girl Scouts do, who they do it with, and how they do it. It's built on three keys to leadership:

   Discover: *Girls explore their interests and learn about themselves.*
   Connect: *Girls build relationships and work together.*
   Take Action: *Girls use what they've learned to make the world a better place.*
   And at the heart of this are the three Girl Scout processes, or how Girl Scouts participate in our program:
   Girl-Led, *Girls make age-appropriate decisions.*
   Learning by Doing: *Hands-on activities where girls try, learn, and reflect.*
   Cooperative Learning: *Working together and supporting one another.*
   If your troop is engaging in hands on learning, exploring their interests, working together, and your girls are at the center of their own experiences — you're delivering the GSLE.

2. **So, the first part of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience is that girls will participate in a variety of activities. Can you tell me more about that?**
   Girl Scouts of the USA recommends specific activities for leaders to do with their troop. This includes earning badges, participating in Girl Scout traditions, doing community service, engaging in outdoor experiences, participating in the Girl Scout Cookie Program and going on field trips or to council events

3. **What if a troop doesn't want to do all these things? For example, maybe the troop isn't excited about camping or they're not really into big events. Do troop leaders need to push those activities to make sure girls get a 'variety' of experiences?**
   No, not at all, while these activities are recommended, Girl Scouts is not a checklist. Variety doesn't mean asking girls to do things they don't enjoy.
   If your troop isn't into camping or big events, that's perfectly fine—there are plenty of other ways to explore the outdoors or try new activities.
   Your role is to introduce options, and the girls decide what excites them.
   If they're engaged and having fun, you're doing it right.

4. **What are some ways leaders can create a supportive and inclusive space for the troop while they are having fun?**

The key is supporting EVERY girl, so they feel valued, heard, and included. Leaders can do this by implementing inclusion practices at all troop meetings

For example, you might ensure all girls get a warm friendly greeting when they arrive at the meeting or start each meeting with a quick check-in where every girl shares a “rose and thorn” of her week. It gives each girl a moment to be heard and helps leaders get to know how everyone is feeling before starting the meeting. Small routines like this build trust and create a comfortable, welcoming troop environment.

The “New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Leadership Experience” course in gsLearn is a great resource for this as well—it even includes a simple “recipe” for building a positive troop culture and goes into each “ingredient” in detail. I highly recommend taking this course if you haven’t already.

5. **Even in a supportive welcoming troop environment, girls may naturally develop closer friendships with other girls in the troop. Are there strategies leaders can use to help promote positive peer relationships and avoid cliques within the troop?**
   Troop Leaders will want to pay close attention to peer dynamics. Who do girls naturally cling to? Are there girls who may feel left out? Small-group activities can help girls connect and give each girl a chance to lead in her own way, which builds confidence.

   This connects to one of the ways we want girls to participate in the Girl Scout program, which is cooperative learning. Mix it up early on and give girls equal opportunities to work with everyone in the troop, rather than pairing with the same people together all the time. When girls plan, create, and problem-solve together, friendships will form naturally.

6. **Girls should be at the center of their own experiences and get to choose how they participate in the program. Is that what Girl-Led means?**
   Yes exactly. Girl-led means that girls’ decisions guide the troop in what the troop does and doesn’t do. The leader is there to guide them on how to reach their goals.

7. **Now Daisies and Brownies are only 6 to 8 years old, so I am sure leaders are wondering: “How do I make the troop girl-led when the girls are so young?**
   Girl-led looks different at every age level.
   For younger girls, it can be as simple as giving them a choice between two badges—like, “Do we want to do the Animal Observer badge or the Fun with Movement Badge next?” Start small and meet them where they are. As they feel more comfortable taking the lead, you will start letting them come up with their own ideas. It is important to involve them in decision making in small ways, so they are prepared to take on more responsibility and leadership as they get older.

With older girls, girl-led becomes much more independent. For example, Cadettes or Seniors might look at the full list of badge steps, decide which ones to complete, plan the supply list, and even lead parts of the meeting themselves. These small, structured decisions for younger girls—and more open-ended planning for older girls—help build leadership skills and confidence at every level.

8. **What should leaders do if the girls suggest something too expensive or unrealistic?**
   Instead of saying no immediately, explore the idea with them. Ask what they like about it. Once you understand the "why," you may be able to help them find a more realistic version that still excites them.

   That's called fostering possibility thinking, and it helps girls feel like you care about their ideas while also creating a troop environment where girls feel respected and heard.

9. **What does the Girl Scout process - learning by doing mean?**
   That is part of it. For example, we want girls to learn how to pitch a tent themselves, rather than having someone do it for them. However, it also means allowing them to make mistakes. Naturally as adults we want our kids to feel successful, but mistakes are an important part of the learning process.

   Reflection is also a key piece of learning by doing. In Girl Scouts, we don't use tests or quizzes—we focus on reflection. After an activity, troop meeting, or field trip ask questions like, "What went well?" "What did you not like?" "What did you notice?" or "What would you try differently next time?" This will also help you guide your troop through their decision-making next time around.

   With younger girls, even a simple "How did that make you feel?" works. The goal is to help girls understand what they learned, even when the activity wasn't perfect.

10. **If leaders want to learn more about the GSLE, where should they go?**
    Two great resources are:
    "New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Leadership Experience", which breaks down the GSLE in detail. And GSUSA's "Delivering Inclusive Program", which goes into how you can use language foster an inclusive troop environment
    Both courses together would take you less than an hour to complete

11. **What's the difference between a badge and a patch?**
    Badges are part of the official Girl Scout program. They build specific skills and are tied to GSLE outcomes. Earning a badge means completing a series of required steps. (These go on the front of the vest/sash).

    Fun patches are optional and extra. They celebrate participation in events, holidays, or special activities. They're flexible and just for fun. (These go on the back of the vest/sash) Both encourage learning, trying new things, and enjoying new experiences.

12. **What should they do when girls want to learn something the leader isn't an expert or they don't have the supplies?**
    This is where council program events come in. We partner with museums, STEM groups, outdoor educators, artists—people who can provide the expertise and supplies. Leaders don't need to know everything. Reaching out to your community is also a great resource, and if you find a good partner, you can send them to council too.

13. **Are there any events where non-Girl Scouts can attend?**
    We also host signature events that give girls unique, hands-on opportunities where non-Girl Scouts are also welcome to attend.
    Girl Scout Fest (late September): A large, all-ages event featuring badge and patch activities, museum tours, partner experiences, and interactive learning stations.

    STEMapalooza (Early April): Focused on STEM, girls can experiment with robots, AI, and other hands-on STEM badge activities. These events allow girls to explore new interests, try activities they might not do at regular troop meetings, and engage with the wider Girl Scout community.

14. **Where can leaders find upcoming program events?**
    The Events Page on the GSWCF website is the best place to check. https://www.gswcf.org/en/Events.html
    We also post updates on social media during our "What's Up Wednesday" posts. And the Two-Month Look-Ahead Event Flyer is included in both the Leader and Member newsletters**.**

15. **How much do events cost and are they only held in Tampa?**
    Event pricing varies, but every program page clearly lists the cost. Programs are offered throughout our entire eight-county area—and even out of council.

16. **When it comes to paying with troop funds, should leaders register the whole troop, or should parents register individually?**
    Either works. Troop leaders can register the whole troop, or parents can register individually. You can also use Council Dough and program credits earned through Fall Product or Cookies. Those credits apply only to the girl who earned them—adults can't use girl credits.

    If the troop leader chooses to use troop funds to pay for all members of the troop, they can assign girls from their troop to the tickets when they add them to their cart. Just select the "My Troop Member" when assigning attendees instead of your household. It will then allow you to select your troop and the troop member you want to assign the ticket to.

17. **What if a troop wants a break from badges, are there fun patches offered by GSWCF?**
    Yes! Council Patch Programs are a great choice. They offer flexible ways to explore new topics without following a badge structure. Each one includes a guide with activities that girls can pick based on what interests them.

Plus, we have tons of unique programs to pair a fun patch with—museum sleepovers, art workshops, snorkeling with manatees—you name it.

18. **Where can leaders stay up to date on new events, patch programs, and opportunities?**
    The Leader Newsletter which comes out on the first of each month is the best place to stay informed. It includes event announcements, program updates, and reminders. And while not every parent is on social media, if you are, our council pages are a great way to see what's going on briefly. But check the newsletter and website when planning the year with your troop.

Guest 2 – Jennifer Libby, Vice President of Product Program, Girl Scout Cookie program

1. **What do leaders need to do to make sure their troop can participate in the Girl Scout Cookie Program?'**
    - Complete troop level cookie manager training – available in gsLearn – search Content Library "Cookie" '320 troop/Juliette Girl Scout cookie program volunteer learning path.'
    - Fill out the troop cookie manager agreement for eBudde access – found in final module of cookie training.
    - Ensure troop has roles assigned to leader and troop cookie manager, MY27 active membership, background screened.
    - Establish a troop bank account.

2. **What advice would you give to a new leader who is experiencing cookies for the first time?**
    Create your team of champions and consider sharing the role of troop cookie manager. It is not recommended that one person carry out the full responsibility of the position. Share the role with troop volunteers (troop helpers) who cannot be a leader.

    Identify tasks with which volunteer members of your troop can help. Share the need for everyone to be involved. Make your ask and be specific.

    Instead of this: "Jennifer, can you help with cookies this year?"
    Try this: "Gloria, can you be responsible for picking up the additional cookie orders from the cookie cupboard?"

3. **If someone needs help during the season, what support is available to leaders?**

- Contact your Service Unit Cookie Manager or Community Manager
- Attend the GSWCF Live Chats – in the moment learning, Wednesday evenings, 7 p.m. Registration link sent through newsletter updates
- Weekly updates sent to troop cookie managers through eBudde
- YouTube step-by-step videos created by the baker
- Review Volunteer Guide
- Contact info@gswcf.org

4. **What important dates should leaders keep in mind as they prepare for Cookie Season?**
   November 11 : The newly revamped 2027 Cookie Manager training is available in gsLearn
   November 18:eBudde opens
   Jan. 1: Cookie program begins. Digital Cookie opens for girls/caregivers
   Jan. 29 - 31: Cookie delivery to troops
   Feb. 5: Community booths begins
   March 7: Cookie program (both paper and online sales) and Booths end
   March 10: Troop deadline to enter awards into eBudde
   April – **May**: Rewards distributed
   For a complete list of dates, visit the cookie section here.

5. **Some new leaders may have taken New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Cookie Program as an optional course part of their required training. Is this the same as the Cookie Program Training you mentioned?**
   No – New Leader Onboarding course is published by GSUSA and our training is published by council staff. The New Leader Onboarding course gives a great overview program, and our council training goes into much more detail that is specific to our area.

6. **Are there any new patches for girls participating this year?**
   Yes, we have a new patch to recognize girls for setting and reaching their cookie goal. The GSWCF exclusive Queen of My Goal will spotlight these girls. The GSWCF V.I.P Cookie Spirit patch is a surprise patch given to girls by council staff, CEO, board members and special community members during their cookie sale participation at a booth event. Both are very cute and give girls something else to look forward to during the cookie program experience.

Additional Questions from Our Volunteers

1. **What are the rules around non-GS members under 5 years old attending council events?**
   Each event will provide the age level and indicate if it is open to members or non-members. Our two large signature events; Girl Scout Fest and STEMapalooza

for example are both open to Girl Scout members and non-Girl Scout members as well as littles.

2. **How do we sign up for newsletter?**
   You do not have to sign up for the newsletter. Once you are placed in the role of a leader, you will automatically receive the newsletter directly to your selected email address. The newsletter comes out on the 1st of each month. If you are not receiving the Leader newsletter, please reach out to our customer care team at info@gswcf.org.

3. **What about multi-level groups?**
   GSUSA has a training on programming for multi-level troops in gsLearn. There is also a multi-level plan in the Volunteer Toolkit and leaders can access plans for the entire year. If you want to plan your meetings ala-carte, you can visit the Girl Scouts of the USA site, https://www.girlscouts.org/en/activity-zone/grade-levels/all-ages-levels-badge-activities.html. Here you can look up activities by program level and interest.

   One of our attending volunteers gave this advice; *I have 2nd and 5th graders. What I found helpful: (1) pair up the 5th and 2nd graders for collaboration activities and (2) use ChatGPT to create a badge framework for those badges that overlap - this was hugely helpful for me! I think there's also a document another council put together that shows the overlap too (I think I found on Pinterest).*

4. **What advice is there for leading girls with autism, can they be girl scouts? And what about allergies?**
   Our Volunteer Essentials, the GS volunteer guide located on our website provides information on being inclusive and working with girls with disabilities; https://www.gswcf.org/content/dam/gswcf-redesign/pdf-forms/be-involved/volunteers/volunteer-essentials/Volunteer%20Essentials%202026.pdf
   We also have online training in gsLearn on working with girls and being inclusive.

   The Safety Activity Checkpoints, SAC; https://www.gswcf.org/content/dam/gswcf-redesign/pdf-forms/be-involved/volunteers/ve-and-sac/Safety-Activity-Checkpoints.pdf gives information on addressing allergies. Each girl member should have a completed Health History form completed by parents that always stay with the leader and gives information about any health concerns and how parents wish to handle.

5. **Is there a directory/index for all possible activities for badges?**
   You can view the badges at https://www.girlscouts.org/en/activity-zone/grade-levels/all-ages-levels-badge-activities.html or on the VTK- Volunteer Toolkit.

6. **Do both leaders need to do all the training?**

It is highly recommended that all leaders do the new leader training. The training courses are very short 10 - 15 minute long and have a lot of information.

320 New Leader Learning Path (New as of October 1, 2024):

GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Leadership Experience
GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: What Girl Scouts Do
GSUSA Girl Scouts Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Course
GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Your First Troop Meeting
GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Family Engagement – The Key to Success
GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Troop Safety
GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: Funding the Fun – Managing Girl Scout Troop Finances
GSUSA New Leader Onboarding: The Girl Scout Cookie Program

7. **Is the Cookie Program training to be completed by leaders and troop cookie managers?**
   The troop cookie manager is required to take the training. The leader can also take the training.

8. **Where can I learn more about cookie proceeds, guidance of recommended initial order size per girl and how many boxes per cookie flavor?**
   Besides the cookie training, you can learn more about the Girl Scout Cookie Program details on our website; https://www.gswcf.org/en/cookies/about-cookies.html.

9. **How do you fund meetings outside of cookies and fall profit. We have already asked for dues and parents to pay part of the experience cost. I feel like it's just not enough meetings and experiences and badges. We have 16 multilevel groups, and everything is expensive.**
   While we want our troops to be self-sustaining and a place where girls can learn and participate in fun and unique experiences, we caution troops not to spend the year solely on money earning projects. Girls should learn about setting goals and budgeting so that they understand making decisions and planning. Trips and activities should also be a process of progression. Your troop will not be able to do everything at once.

   Visit our Volunteer Essentials, https://www.gswcf.org/content/dam/gswcf-redesign/pdf-forms/be-involved/volunteers/volunteer-essentials/Volunteer%20Essentials%202026.pdf, pages 40 – 43 to learn more about money earning.

10. **Can lemonade style cookie stands begin before cookie booths begin?**
    Lemon up stands, which is kind of you kind of selling them, you know, in your neighborhood or that type of thing. Yes, once this you can pick up cookies, you can start those. So, the actual cookie booths don't start till February 5th, but you can do lemonade stands and mobile stands January 29th on when you pick up the cookies.

11. **Do the girls purchase their own vest or is that sponsored by the troop itself?**
    it really is up to the parents.
    Usually the first meeting that the troops have, they decide on what they'll wear that is the same. So it may be the vest, it may be the sash. And then at that time, troops don't necessarily have funds. So it may be the responsibility of the parents. But if you have participated in the sweets and treats or fall product, you may have some funds and now you might be able to purchase the vest for the sash for the girls.

12. **Do we have financial aid for uniforms?**
    Yes, we do.

13. **if there's a free shipping period promotion for cookies, particularly with the new cookie, only available for shipping?**
    We probably will do some sort of shipping promo, but probably be at least by mid-season, just so that we can encourage people to get them before that.

14. **Can we purchase the online only cookies to sell in person?**
    No, we really are strongly encouraging troops not to do that. That's not what they're made for. They really are made as digital exclusives.

15. **We are trying to get a new troop started. It isn't really clear as to exactly what needs to happen in order for us to start having meetings, can you advise?**
    if you have girls, you can start meeting and doing activities. If you are a brand new leader. you have a community manager that can help you, guide you through the first parts, maybe getting a meeting location, definitely connecting you to your service unit, which is a group of other troops that are in the same area as you are. There are very experienced people in the service unit, and they can also guide you with resources. If you are a brand-new Daisy, Brownie, or Junior Troop, you could be eligible once you have 4 girls in one of those program levels to receive a monthly meeting subscription box for free. Your community manager can talk to you about that, and it will come to you or the co-leader in your troop who wants to receive the box. It has all the meeting supplies and the meeting information for you to lead meetings throughout each month. And again, it's free. So if you are starting new Daisy Brownie Junior, you're eligible for that.

16. **How can we get testers for new cookies?**
    The service unit did get two boxes of the Sparkables to either give to leaders, to taste test, or to use at the rally. You can check with them on the tasting for leaders perhaps at a leader meeting.

    We unfortunately do not have a large amount of the Sparkable samples and have a limited supply.

17. **Do you need CPR first aid training before having meetings?**

No, you do not need CPR/First aid to meet with the girls at the designated troop meeting location. You do need CPR first aid to go away from your meeting place. As long as you are having your meetings at the designated meeting location for your troop, you do not need to have CPR first aid. **Would it be good to have that?** Yes, but that does not stop you from meeting with your troop. You will need to have that if you're going away from your troop meeting. So if you're going to any of these wonderful programs with your troop, you will need that. And it does not have to be the troop leader. It can be a parent who wants to get that training.

We have very affordable CPR first aid training for $20 per person. That is phenomenal. And we are introducing a blended learning CPR first aid training. So, you don't have to spend 6 hours doing that training in person. It's part online and then a few hours in person.

18. **Can we buy a box of Sparkables for our troops to try?**
    They're not for sale until January 1 officially. Our council received about 2 cases for the whole council to use for service units sampling. Unfortunately, we have a very limited amount.

19. **Can you provide any advice to get girls to share their opinions on choices or activities, badges, et cetera, trying to lead our troop to a more girl-led way, but it has been a challenge?**
    What you can do is have them brainstorms You can put up a giant piece of paper and you can have a major brainstorm party. The other thing you can do is pull out the badge book and flip through it. and see, what interests them.

    Do they like to do outdoor activities? Also ask them what they do in their free time. So when I was leading a bunch of Girl Scout troops, what I did with my girls is I gave them an example, like, would you guys want to do something involved with jewelry making, for example? Sometimes they get all excited and other times they start popping out other ideas. So even giving examples is also helpful for the girls if they don't know where to start.

20. **Who can I contact for technical support? I cannot access the VTK.**
    Info@gswcf.org

We invite you to send any questions to our customer care team at info@gswcf.org. They are the council's team that can answer many questions but will know the appropriate department or staff to forward your question. Please note that sometimes this may take an extended amount of business days, especially during high volume time; September – November. The goal is to make sure all correspondences going through a channel to track and get our members the attention they need to have a great experience. We appreciate your patience but will get back to you.

Thank you again for all you do to support Girl Scouts and the mission. You are priceless!