Troop Start-up Guide

YOUR GO-TO GUIDE FOR GETTING YOUR GIRL SCOUT TROOP STARTED
Thank you so much for volunteering to start a Girl Scout troop!

We're excited to have you on board! As a Girl Scout volunteer, you're building girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.

Awesome opportunity, right? No fear—we created this guide packed with helpful advice on getting your troop going, learning Girl Scout lingo, and leading with gusto! Whether you have been a Girl Scout since kindergarten, or if this is your first introduction to the organization, we hope this guide will provide you with useful information as you start this journey with your troop.

We are here to help—feel free to give us a call at 800-881-GIRL (4475).

Yours in Girl Scouting,

Girl Scouts of West Central Florida (GSWCF)

Please Note: This guide is not a replacement for Volunteer Essentials; think of it as a “quick start” reference for troop leaders. Please read Volunteer Essentials for more detailed and complete information.

What’s the Word? Lingo You’ll Want to Know

Review these acronyms that you most likely will encounter when working with council and other Girl Scout volunteers.

**Customer Connections** or **CCT**: Council staff members who act as a first point of contact for inquiries, reachable by phone or email

**GSWCF**: Girl Scouts of West Central Florida

**GSLE**: Girl Scout Leadership Experience

**GSUSA**: Girl Scouts of the USA

**MY GS**: Located on the GSWCF homepage, this is the portal to Volunteer Systems with member profile info and the VTK

**Opportunity Catalog**: A list of available troop & volunteer possibilities for members to join

**SAC**: Safety Activity Checkpoints

**SU**: Service Unit

**SUAC**: Service Unit Accounting Coordinator

**SUM**: Service Unit Manager

**SUR**: Service Unit Recruitment Coordinator

**SUTC**: Service Unit Troop Consultant

**SU Team**: Service Unit Team

**VE**: Volunteer Essentials

**VTK**: Volunteer Toolkit

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Getting Started with Your Troop

1. **Start your troop leadership training.**

   Learn about your new role, and so much more! Girl Scouts offers many ways to accomplish trainings for new leaders. You can complete webinar trainings at home, or register for in person training where you'll have the chance to interact with new volunteers just like you. Live webinars are available throughout the year as well. Plus, you'll have access to short enrichment videos to learn how to use the volunteer toolkit (VTK), step-by-step.

   New leader training is required to work directly with girls and will prepare you to facilitate the program. You'll learn how to manage a troop, how to let girls lead in planning of activities, how to take trips, and much more.

   Girl Scout troop leadership trainings are a great way to build transferrable skills in the professional world and broaden your knowledge in areas including group management, project management, budgeting, and goal setting. Visit [gswcf.org/training](http://gswcf.org/training) to find all the learning opportunities we offer.
2. Review the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) and Additional Troop Resources.

The Volunteer Toolkit includes everything you need to plan and implement your troop year. Check out page 7 for more info on the VTK.

- **Additional volunteer resources** (found at gswcf.org through the "Forms and Documents" link at the top right hand side of the page.)
  - **Volunteer Essentials**: A guide which includes information about engaging girls, safety requirements, managing finances, and more. There is a quick start-up guide that is a great place to start as a brand-new Girl Scout volunteer.
  - **Safety Activity Checkpoints**: Online lists containing everything you need to know to be prepared and keep your girls safe outside normal Girl Scout troop meetings. When preparing for any activity with girls, start by reading the Girl Scout Safety Activity Checkpoints for that particular activity.
  - Troop leader resources including planning guides, tip sheets, and other helpful tools
  - Available in Spanish (found through the Espanol link in the top right corner on gswcf.org)

- **Additional program resources**
  - The most up-to-date events and program listings, and the Program Events and Family Guide (found at gswcf.org/events)
  - Girl Scout Cookie Program and Fall Product Program information (found at gswcf.org/fpp and GirlScoutCookieTime.com)
  - Camp properties and program information (found at gswcf.org/camps)

- **Additional support**
  - A community membership manager dedicated to you!
  - Your council Troop Support team (Contact Troop Support for assistance regarding badges, patches, and other program questions at troopsupport@gswcf.org)
  - Your volunteer support network known as your service unit team (includes volunteers who serve as service unit manager, accounting coordinator, and recruitment coordinator)

3. Prepare for and schedule your parent and caregiver meeting.

Welcome parent/adult volunteers and introduce them to the Girl Scout experience and their responsibilities. Recruit parents and adult members to participate and take on troop roles.

- Check out page 9 for resource on parent meetings.
- Contact adults who have shown interest in helping you run your troop.

4. Prepare for and schedule your first troop meeting.

Each Girl Scout meeting provides an opportunity to explore new worlds and learn new skills!

- Review the meetings plans in the Volunteer Toolkit and the safety information in Volunteer Essentials and Safety Activity Checkpoints.
- Set your meeting place and time, and communicate this info to parents and GSWCF by completing the Troop Update Form located at gswcf.org through the "Forms and Documents" link at the top right hand side of the page.)
- Set up your troop bank account with your service unit accounting coordinator.
- Ensure that all troop funds are placed in a troop bank account.

5. Attend monthly service unit meetings designed to support and connect you as a volunteer.

Service units provide local support to troop leaders and are a great source of information on Girl Scout programs and events in your community, county, or area. Please contact your area-specific community membership manager for more information.

6. Most importantly, don't forget to have fun!

*We are here for you!* Contact us at (800) 881-GIRL (4475) or CustomerConnections@gswcf.org
Make Your Troop Work for You  

Variations of a Troop

**Traditional**

Two unrelated adults lead a troop of one program level. Other parents volunteer to help with various troop roles.

**Multi-level**

One adult acts as the 'administrator', responding to emails, planning the troop calendar, etc. Other parents volunteer to lead specific grade levels, meetings, or activities based on skill or preference.

**Co-Op Team**

One adult functions as the meeting coordinator managing the administrative side of the troop including emails, forms, and staying in contact with the service unit. A second unrelated adult functions as the activities coordinator and manages the troop calendar and activities through the VTK.

Each girl and parent rotates leading meetings, activities, and events, or another troop role to divide responsibilities by interest and/or skill set.

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Governing Structure  

Organization Breakdown

**Girls and volunteers are the heart of Girl Scouts!**

**Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA)**

The national organization supporting the work of more than 100 councils across the U.S. for more than 100 years.

**Girl Scouts of West Central Florida (GSWCF)**

Independent 501(c)3 nonprofit chartered by GSUSA and overseeing all service units and troops within our eight county footprint.

**Service Units**

Comprised of volunteers who support the work of local troops within each county.

**Troops**

Volunteer-supervised groups of girls who participate in the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.
The Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE) is the core of who we are. In Girl Scouts, girls follow a path to 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.

Journeys include adult and girl books that guide girls through fun and challenging experiences grouped around a theme, and spread over a series of sessions. Each Journey has all the important components of the GSLE sewn right in.

Girl’s Guide to Girl Scouting is full of information about being a Girl Scout and how to earn certain badges. Girls who want to earn more badges can add a skill building badge set tied to the theme of the Journey they’ve chosen.

Badges are earned when a girl masters a skill or shows increased knowledge in a particular subject. Badges are earned at every grade level and should be placed on the front of the sash or vest.

Patches symbolize participation as a troop or individual in a Girl Scout program or activity. Patches are worn on the back of the sash or vest.

Our Council

About Us
Girl Scouts of West Central Florida serves more than 28,000 girl and adult members in eight counties. The Girl Scout Leadership Center in Tampa features an expanded Girl Scout Store and the Girl Zones. The Girl Zones are activity areas themed around key Girl Scout initiatives—healthy living, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), financial literacy, community, and the environment.

Resource Center
The Leadership Center features a Resource Center dedicated to supporting council volunteers. Our lending library has resources such as The Girl’s Guide to Girl Scouting for each grade level, Journeys and other books, CDs, flags, cookie costumes, ceremony kits, program materials, and game equipment. For information and/or assistance with Resource Center items contact Troop Support at TroopSupport@gswcf.org or 813-281-GIRL (4475).

Our Camps
GSWCF owns and operates four camp facilities for day and overnight summer camps, programs, and encampments. Whether girls are looking to spend some time in the water or take a trail ride on horseback, we’ve got a camp for you! Visit gswcf.org/camps for more information on our camps.
Dressed for Success  

Uniforms are an important part of the Girl Scout experience. They connect girls to Girl Scout traditions, display their accomplishments, and create memories that last a lifetime. Girl Scouts at each level wear one required element (tunic, sash, or vest) to display official pins, patches, and badges. Use your friends and family meeting to discuss which uniform elements your troop wants to purchase.

The Girl Scout Store

Visit one of our shop locations (below) to purchase uniforms, starter kits, and more.

**Girl Scout Store at the Leadership Center, Tampa**
4610 Eisenhower Blvd., Tampa, FL 33606

**Girl Scout Store at Camp Wildwood, Wildwood**
9583 County Rd. 223, Wildwood, FL 34785

We have Saturday Shops at Camp Dorothy Thomas and Camp Wai Lani. For your convenience, we can bring ANYTHING from the Tampa store to the Saturday Shops if you order it by Friday. Place an order by emailing GSStore@gswcf.org or by calling 813-262-1793 and your items will be waiting for you at Camp Dorothy Thomas or Camp Wai Lani on Saturday.

Saturday Shops

**Saturday Shop at Camp Dorothy Thomas**
16119 Boyette Rd., Riverview, FL 33569

**Saturday Shop at Camp Wai Lani**
500 Wai Lani Rd., Palm Harbor, FL 34683

For promotions and the most up to date store hours, visit gswcf.org/store.

*Saturday Shops are closed during the summer.

Shop online anytime at gswcf.org/shop!
The Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) is an online tool that allows you to:

- Create a member profile
- Update contact information
- Renew members
- Manage your troop
- Communicate with parents
- Inform parents about finances
- Plan your annual meeting & activities calendar

(See example on right.)

### How to Access the Volunteer Toolkit:

1. **Go to gswcf.org and log into MyGS:**
   
   Your username is your email address and you should receive an email from gsusacustomercare@girlscouts.org to activate your password through the Girl Scout Member Community.

2. **Once you are logged in, select Volunteer Toolkit:**

   ![Volunteer Toolkit Button]

   ![Member Profile Button]

### Your #1 Resource as a Troop Leader:

**MY TROOP**
- View and edit roster (click girl name to open)
- Edit contact info
- See girl achievements and attendance
- Renew memberships
- Email families

**YEAR PLAN**
- Specify meeting dates and locations
- Add a meeting
- Add an activity (custom or council).
  Be sure to complete registration for council events!
- Change meeting order (drag gray box & drop)
- Delete, add, replace, or combine meetings (click meeting date)
- See past years’ plans

**MEETING PLAN**
- Meeting overview, activity plan and materials lists - download or print
- Send customized reminders to families
- Attendance and achievements
- Get/print/add meeting aids
- Change agenda order or time allotted
- Add or remove agenda item

**RESOURCES**
- Meeting Aids for all levels
- Meeting Plans for K-5
- VTK tutorial videos
- Various helpful documents

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![Go to Saturday Shop at Camp Wai Lani*](500 Wai Lani Rd., Palm Harbor, FL 34683)

Go to gswcf.org and log into MyGS:

Your username is your email address and you should receive an email from gsusacustomercare@girlscouts.org to activate your password through the Girl Scout Member Community.
Organizing your meeting is easy with the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK), which will help you fill your meeting with specific activities and timelines. The simple guide below will give you the framework for how a typical meeting runs. Find more meeting guides on the VTK!

**Shaping Your Troop Experience**

You can structure your troop in a way that works best for you — from using parents to help lead meetings, to the number of meetings and activities per month, to what time of day and where you will meet.

**Tips for structuring your troop:**

- **Troops can be structured by grade level,** or leaders may choose to facilitate multi-level troops with girls of different grade levels combined into one troop.

- **Determine the frequency of your meetings and the meeting/activity schedule.** Use the Volunteer Toolkit (VTK) to help you through this process. Most troops meet twice per month, but you can choose a schedule that works best for you.

- **Your meeting space should be somewhere public, safe, clean, and secure that allows all girls to participate.** Some great meeting space ideas include schools, churches, libraries, or community centers.

- **Remember, Girl Scouts is designed to be girl-led.** Talk to the girls and parents about what they’d like to get out of Girl Scouts this year.

- **Think about how you want to guide.** Do you want to run every troop meeting? Consider rotating the responsibility with the different members of your troop. A parent/caregiver and girl could team up to lead one meeting.

- **Consider supply costs.** Does your troop need to charge monthly or annual dues to help offset costs? Will you charge families per activity? It’s important to talk with parents about financial expectations up front. Assign a parent volunteer to help manage troop finances.

- **Keep everyone in the loop.** Make sure parents know when and where your activities will be and how they can help. You can send parent emails directly through VTK to troop adults.

**6 Steps to a Fabulous Troop Meeting!**

1. **Start Up:** Plan an activity for girls to work on before the meeting begins. It can be simple—coloring pages, journaling, or talking with others. This part is so important, because it breaks the ice and helps girls get excited about the meeting! *(5 minutes)*

2. **Opening:** As a girl-led organization, we encourage the girls to decide what they want to open with. Example openers include the Girl Scout Promise and Law, or a song or game. Get creative and don’t be afraid to switch things up occasionally. *(5-10 minutes)*

3. **Business:** This is the time to let girls plan their upcoming meetings, collect dues, make announcements, decide which council or service unit events they’d like to attend, and which badges they’d like to earn. Consider using this as practice for girls in doing research and coming prepared to present! Not only will this help the meeting run more smoothly, but it also builds transferable skills, which the girls can take far past their Girl Scout years. *(5-10 minutes)*

4. **Activities:** Work towards earning badges and completing Journeys. Again, this portion of the meeting should be heavily girl-led, with the troop leader offering support on the side. It may feel like you’re not doing as much as you should, but trust us, you will be amazed at how capable the girls can be. *(30-45 minutes)*

5. **Clean up:** Girl Scouts should always leave a place cleaner than they found it! They might even enjoy the tradition of a kaper chart, so that everyone takes turns at each responsibility. *(5 minutes)*

6. **Closing:** Just like the opening, each troop can decide how to close—with a song, a game, or a story. As caregivers arrive, provide any important updates or reminders about upcoming meetings and activities. *(5-10 minutes)*
Hold a parents & caregiver support meeting as your chance to:

- Get to know your Girl Scouts and their families
- Set clear expectations for the troop including dues, meeting/activity schedule, financial obligations, uniforms, etc.

- Ask for support and help at troop meetings and outings
- Brainstorm all the exciting things your troop wants to do this year

Sample Parent and Caregiver Meeting Agenda

Welcome & Introductions:
- Have each adult share their name and what they hope their girl will get out of Girl Scouting
- Leader(s) share what they hope the troop will gain from the year

Brief Overview of Girl Scouts
- Mission: To build girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place
- Girl Scouts is girl-led (decision-making and planning), hands-on (active not passive), and collaborative (girls feel safer to try new things in collaborative, team-based environments)
- Girl Scouts of West Central Florida (gswcf.org) is our local council.

Girl Scout Troop Specifics
- Meeting time, day, frequency, and locations
- Finances:
  - Dues (how much, how often)
  - Financial assistance available
- Uniforms (will the girls wear a sash or vest, or choose one or the other for themselves?)
- Participating in the cookie and fall product program—helps girls learn budgeting and business skills, plus contributes to council costs for camps, training, and other resources.
- Setting expectations of girls, parents, and leaders (Troop Agreement)

We ♥ Our Troop Parents and Caregivers
- Building a Troop Committee – Share the list of jobs, get volunteers to join in on the fun!
  - Adult membership registration ($25) and criminal background check are required for all participating adults
- Snack coordination (if it applies)
- Troop supply needs (wish list for a troop supply box)
- Drop-off and pick-up etiquette – Please provide transportation to and from meetings in a timely manner (5-10 minutes before the start and end of each meeting)

Forms & Actions to Take
- Girl Health History and Emergency Medical Authorization (located at gswcf.org through the "Forms and Documents" link )
- Girl membership registration online ($25 fee once a year)

Activities with Girls (if they are present)
- Fun activities while adults meet
- Brainstorming activity ideas

Reminder of Next Meeting Date and Goodbyes!
Girl Scout Forms

Troop forms can be found at gswcf.org by clicking on the "Forms and Documents" tab at the top right hand side of the page.

- Girl Permission Form
- Health History
- Safety Activity Checkpoints
- Safe Driver Pledge
- Troop Agreement
- Troop Finance Report
- Volunteer Essentials

Adult Supervision

It is important to adhere to the adult-to-girl ratio, which is two non-related adults, including one female, for every:

- 6 Girl Scout Daisies
- 12 Girl Scout Brownies
- 16 Girl Scout Juniors
- 20 Girl Scout Cadettes
- 24 Girl Scout Seniors
- 24 Girl Scout Ambassadors

There should be one extra adult for every additional:

- 1–4 Girl Scout Daisies
- 1–6 Girl Scout Brownies
- 1–8 Girl Scout Juniors
- 1–10 Girl Scout Cadettes
- 1–12 Girl Scout Seniors
- 1–12 Girl Scout Ambassadors

Tips for Troop Financials

Bank Account
All troops should establish a bank account with two unrelated adult signers for collection of troop dues (optional), payment of troop supplies and activities, and the Girl Scout Cookie Program.

Financial Assistance
Financial difficulties shouldn't stand in the way of a girl's participation. Any member needing financial assistance for membership can request it as part of the online membership registration process. Other financial assistance is available for books, badges, uniforms, and programs. The form is available on the VTK through the resources tab.

Troop Dues
Many troops decide to collect troop dues as a way to help provide start-up funding for troop activities and supplies. These could range from $1-2 per meeting, to $30-40 for the entire school year paid all at one time. It's completely up to each troop to decide what works best for them.

Money-earning Activities
The Girl Scout Cookie and Fall Product Programs are the primary money-earning activities for a troop. If a troop participates in these programs, they may also opt to participate in a limited number of additional money-earning activities.
**GSWCF Year At A Glance**

For a complete listing of council events, programs and activities, please visit [www.gswcf.org/events](http://www.gswcf.org/events)

**October**

*The new Girl Scout year officially begins!*
- Oct. 1: Recruit girls and adults to join your troop this month.
- Oct. 31: Founder’s Day, Juliette Gordon Low’s birthday

★ **TROOP TIP:** Room for one more? Consider adding a spot for a new girl in your troop. Make sure your troop is listed as open for registration on the opportunity catalog.

**November**

*Prep for the Girl Scout Cookie Program.*
- Hold a troop meeting all about cookies this month.
- Check out our event calendar, and get involved with our council-led programs.

★ **TROOP TIP:** At the meeting all about cookies, include both girls AND families.

**December**

*Get ready for the Girl Scout Cookie Program & enjoy the spirit of the holidays!*
- Place your initial cookie order.
- Participate in service projects in your community!

★ **TROOP TIP:** Evaluate your training needs & share finances with parents/caregivers.

**January**

*Happy New Year! Set some goals.*
- Girl Scout Cookie Program begins.

★ **TROOP TIP:** Consider planning a campout with your troop before the summer heat hits!

**February**

- Feb. 22: World Thinking Day. Have your troop connect with international Girl Scout sisters!
- Volunteer recognitions due. Celebrate the accomplishments of our Volunteers through peer nominations.

★ **TROOP TIP:** Talk to your troop about who might be interested in camp this summer.

**March**

- March 12: Girl Scout Birthday.
- Girl Scout Week—look for fun activities for girls to celebrate being Girl Scouts.

★ **TROOP TIP:** Look for community engagement opportunities this month!

**April**

*Volunteer Appreciation Month!*
- Apr. 22: Leader Appreciation Day
- *Early Bird Registration.*
  - Renew your troop’s memberships for next year and get in on some awesome perks!

★ **TROOP TIP:** Consider getting outdoors with your troop this month to do some badge work.

**May**

- May 1: Troop/SU reports of banking activity due to service unit treasurer.

★ **TROOP TIP:** Hold an end-of-year party to celebrate the troop’s accomplishments & plan for summer/fall.

**June/July**

- Early Bird renewal ends
- Summer camp begins! Hooray!
- High Award Ceremonies

★ **TROOP TIP:** Relax and enjoy your summer!

**August**

*Gear up for the new year by forming troops, recruiting volunteers and girls, and planning the upcoming year!*
- Make sure your info is correct—update the Troop Update Form for your troop!

★ **TROOP TIP:** Send a letter to your girls getting them ready to return to troop meetings with the new school year schedule.

**September**

*Prep for the new Girl Scout year!*
- Be sure to renew your memberships before the end of the On-Time renewal period.

★ **TROOP TIP:** Connect with parents who might be interested in volunteering for the troop cookie coordinator or troop treasurer role.

**Fall**

- GS Fest
- Dessert First
- Women of Distinction
- Camp Registration opens
- Thin Mint Sprint

**Winter**

- STEMapalooza

**Spring**

★ **TROOP TIP:** Get together as a troop with a fun activity to kick off the school year like a family picnic.
Troop Start-up Checklist

- Speak with your recruitment manager (council staff) and establish troop number
- Locate a meeting space or request council staff for assistance in finding one
- Complete the required trainings for new leaders (see list at gswcf.org/training)
- Speak to your local support (service unit contact)
- Confirm meeting frequency, day of week, and time
- Welcome any members joining your troop (templates provided in first training)
- Schedule parent/caregiver meeting and invite girls and families via email
- Hold a parent/caregiver meeting and request help from parent/caregiver (troop cookie chair, chaperone, camp coordinator, outing planner, treasurer)
- Attend a local service unit monthly leader meeting
- Create an annual plan using the VTK (volunteer toolkit)
  - Watch enrichment videos
  - Take CPR/first aid training or secure a parent volunteer
  - Open a troop bank account with assistance from your service unit accounting coordinator
- Begin enjoying a year of exciting, new adventures!

Girl Scout Contacts

My troop belongs to service unit name: ________________________________

My service unit manager(s) is: __________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: ____________________________

When I have questions about troop management and program, I can contact the troop consultant in my service unit: ________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: ____________________________

When I have question about troop budgeting, expenses, and troop finances, I can contact the accounting coordinator in my service unit: ________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: ____________________________

When I have questions about the Girl Scout Cookie Sale, I can contact the cookie manager in my service unit: ________________________________

Phone: ___________________________ Email: ____________________________

We are here for you!

Contact us at 800-881-GIRL (4475) or CustomerConnections@gswcf.org

4610 Eisenhower Blvd. Tampa, FL 33634  
gswcf.org

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