

# Financial Assistance

Financial assistance is available to assist individual Girl Scout members when there is a troop option available for them. Due to budget constraints, financial assistance is not available for adult members or for girl member renewals. The Girl Opportunity Fund is part of the annual operating budget approved by Girl Scouts of West Central Florida's board of directors. Funds to support the Girl Scout program in Girl Scouts of West Central Florida come from several sources:

- Girl Scout product programs provide money to support camps and girl programs;
- Annual and monthly giving contributions, campaigns, the Family Partnership Campaign, bequests and special events such as the annual Women of Distinction Luncheon provide a means for individuals in the community to contribute to Girl Scouts;
- Grants from foundations, United Way and other groups fund special projects and programs;
- And, program service fees, paid by girls to participate in specific programs, provide supplies and consultants for these programs.

Girls who need financial assistance can request financial aid in these areas:

- Girl Scouts of the USA membership – new member annual membership fee \$25.
- Grade-level appropriate Journey books.
- Uniform components, such as the council ID strip, troop numbers, a Girl Scout Daisy tunic, or Girl Scout Brownie, Junior, or Cadette/Senior/Ambassador sash. These items are approved on a case-by-case basis due to limited funding.
- Camperships may be available for resident and day camps.
- Event scholarships for council-sponsored events may be available to a maximum of \$25 per girl, per membership year.

Event scholarships of up to \$25 for council-sponsored events may be available to new girls during their first membership year.

Click [here](#) to access the online Financial Assistance Request form. Funding approval is based on federal poverty guidelines. All applications remain confidential and are only shared as necessary with appropriate staff members to determine eligibility of assistance.

## Financial Assistance Policies and Procedures

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 for uniforms and books please read the following guidelines and complete the [Financial Assistance Application](#). Incomplete

applications will be returned and failure to follow the process may significantly delay an application or result in denial.

- 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 programs are structured to provide funding for the Girl Scout experience and troops should budget for troop operating expenses above all else. Participation in these programs shows a commitment to Girl Scouting and the benefits that a girl receives from being a part of the organization.
- Awards are based on financial need and/or special circumstances at the girl level, not the troop level. Applications should 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 for uniforms, books and events 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. We strongly encourage troops to set goals and participate in product sales to fund future troop experiences and continued Girl Scout girl membership.

### **Financial Assistance for Membership**

*The Financial Assistance Request for new girl membership is completed by checking the appropriate box during the registration process. If a caregiver is able to contribute a portion of the \$25 annual membership fee, they will be able to share that with council staff when they follow up to complete the registration.*

Financial aid is not available for membership renewals and troops should consider this when working with the girls on budgeting for their proceeds in the product programs. Troop Leaders should also exercise decorum in discussing the budgeting for renewals in order to not cause embarrassment to any of the other members (girls or adults). Some service units may also budget for some membership renewals and as such the Service Unit Managers should be consulted for support.

Council credits earned during the product sales program can be used towards girl membership renewals (not adult membership since the girl is who has earned them) and should be considered by families who may need assistance. Caregivers who plan to renew their girl scouts memberships with their product sales incentives (nut bucks,

cookie dough, etc.) should reach out to [customerconnections@gswcf.org](mailto:customerconnections@gswcf.org) for help. It is important to be mindful of the value of the incentive and stipulations that are outlined.

### **Financial Aid for Uniforms and Books**

For making financial aid request for uniforms and books, please visit the “Forms and Documents” section of our website and search for the “Uniform and Books Financial Aid Form” or use this link “[Uniform and Books Financial Aid](#)”. Funding approval is based on federal poverty guidelines. All applications remain confidential and are only shared as necessary with appropriate staff members to determine eligibility of assistance.

Procedure:

- Before applying for financial assistance from the council, consult the local service unit or troop leader about financial assistance availability. Some troops and/or service units 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 number on the form. The Troop Leader will be able to provide the correct troop 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](mailto: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:

- Unemployment notification letters/receipts
- Disability/social security statements
- Food stamp/public assistance award letters/receipts
- Public housing acknowledgments
- 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](mailto:customerconnections@gswcf.org) or fax to (813) 282-8285.

### **Summer Camp Financial Assistance (Campership)**

Registrants are required to pay 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 session 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. Print the store voucher and take to any council shop location (locations available at [www.gswcf.org](http://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. The store will allow exchanges with a store receipt. Items awarded through financial aid cannot be returned to the store.
5. To provide flexibility, vouchers may be transferred to the troop leader to make purchases on behalf of the girl.

For questions about the Financial Assistance Guidelines, please contact Customer Connections at [customerconnections@gswcf.org](mailto:customerconnections@gswcf.org) (813) 281-GIRL (4475)