

Girl Scouts of the USA Federal Policy Agenda

In a rapidly changing world, girls need Girl Scouts more than ever. Girl Scouting opens the door to life-changing, year-round, girl-centered, fun experiences. Nationwide, Girl Scouts offers a wide variety of programs—including STEM, life skills, entrepreneurship, and the outdoors—to equip girls with the skills and experiences needed today to become the leaders of tomorrow. Girls from all backgrounds and abilities can discover their strengths, rise to meet new challenges, and be unafraid to make mistakes—a space where they can be unapologetically themselves.

Girl Scout programs, which may be after school or in school, enrich learning through a diverse lineup of badges and other hands-on activities. Girl Scouts build community and connection. They explore new experiences. And they build the skills and confidence to say, “I know I can do this!”. Through exploring activities and experiences in the four pillars of Girl Scouting (STEM, Outdoors, Life Skills, and Entrepreneurship), Girl Scouts set big goals and achieve even bigger successes.

With over 1 million Girl Scouts, 111 councils positioned to serve every zip code, and 50 million alums nationwide, Girl Scouts has the power to enhance learning and leadership on a broad scale. Girl Scout programs evolve with girls as they grow, turning each moment into an opportunity to create a lifelong, positive impact. Girl Scouts combines time-tested, research-backed program delivery methods with fun, innovative experiences to speak to the interests of today’s girls, all while tailoring leadership development to fit girls’ learning styles.



“The desire to do good is universal. To the extent that each person contributes to making the world a better place, they become a beacon of hope.”

–Juliette Gordon Low
Founder of Girl Scouts of the USA

The Girl Scout Difference

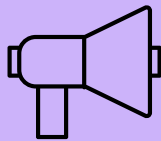
Program Pillars



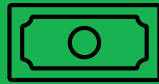
STEM



Outdoors



Life Skills



Entrepreneurship

Girl Scouts' mission is to build girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place.

During a time when girls face innumerable challenges to their mental health and social development, Girl Scouts offers a space where they can make meaningful connections, discover new passions, engage with life-changing mentors and role models, and understand the power they have to achieve their dreams.

Girl Scouts provides a supportive environment and fun experiences for girls, helping them develop the skills necessary to navigate life with purpose and joy. It offers a holistic experience as well as the space girls need to explore their interests, build self-confidence, and strengthen their sense of self. Girl Scouts helps girls become Life Ready—for today and tomorrow. Research shows that many girls struggle with growing their confidence and self-esteem, building the skills necessary to successfully navigate today's complex world, and leading happy and fulfilling lives. Girl Scouts is the answer.

Girl Scout alums are more likely than other women to:

- Exhibit courage, confidence, and character
- Attain higher levels of education and management positions at work
- Volunteer and contribute to causes they support
- Be civically engaged and involved
- Exhibit leadership attributes and hold more leadership roles
- Be satisfied with life—personally, professional, and financially



Girl Scout Leadership Experience

The **Girl Scout Leadership Experience (GSLE)** is our evidence-based learning model, created in 2008 in collaboration with Tufts University. The GSLE includes three essential components that are needed to create the magic of Girl Scouting:

- 1. Variety of Activities:** Girl Scouts participate in a variety of activities that can take them anywhere in their communities. This allows girls to become comfortable trying new things in new places, with new people!
- 2. Supportive Relationships:** Caring adults who can truly connect with and mentor girls are vital to the Girl Scout experience. These wonderful people create safe spaces for exploration and discovery.
- 3. The Three Girl Scout Processes:** The Girl Scout program is developed to intentionally engage girls in three different ways. Girl Scouts experience these three processes differently, depending on their age, but they're built into the foundation of every experience!
 - **Girl Led:** Girl Scouts follow their own lead, no matter their age. From selecting the badges they'll pursue to deciding how they'll organize an activity, Girl Scouts have the chance to follow their dreams and grow their skills—and gain the confidence that comes with that.
 - **Learning by Doing:** Hands-on activities are fun for Girl Scouts of any age, but they also help them feel empowered to shape their own experience. Girl Scouts unlock their “I got this” attitude as they discover they can always dust themselves off and try again when things don't go according to plan.
 - **Cooperative Learning:** There's power in having a tight-knit group of friends who will learn with you, grow with you, and always cheer you on. Girl Scouts see firsthand that teamwork, respect, and collaboration can fuel them through any challenge that comes their way.

Girl Scout programming has long promoted independent decision making, which helps girls develop agency, challenge themselves to move beyond their comfort zones, and build confidence in their abilities.



Girl Scouts is proven to help girls:

- Develop a strong sense of self
- Seek challenges and learn from setbacks
- Display positive values
- Form and maintain healthy relationships
- Identify and solve problems in their communities

Highest Awards

Girl Scouts offers three levels of Highest Awards: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. At each level, Girl Scouts demonstrate leadership, possibility thinking, and civic mindedness to identify problems, create solutions, and make the world and others' lives better.

The Gold Award, the most prestigious award in Girl Scouting, is earned by trailblazing Girl Scouts who are willing to tackle pressing challenges in their communities with measurable and sustainable results. To earn the Gold Award, high school Girl Scouts must identify and investigate an issue they care about, devise a plan, and lead a team of experts and community members to implement a project that produces lasting change. Over the course of one to two years, Gold Award Girl Scouts demonstrate initiative, commitment, and leadership. **Through their resourcefulness and perseverance, they embody the Girl Scout Promise and Law to truly make the world a better place.**



Making the world
a better place

3,000

Girl Scouts earned their Gold Award, with projects that included addressing education needs or gaps, children's issues, health, environment and sustainability, life skills, and more.

287,000

Volunteer hours invested

\$1.6 million

Fundraised were directed to create and deploy community-centric projects.

Global Girl Scouting

Girl Scouts is part of a global sisterhood. As a global organization, it provides opportunities for girls to learn, grow, and take action in their local and global communities—all while connecting with their sisters around the world.

As a member of the **World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)**, Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is part of an international movement consisting of nearly 11 million girls and young women in 153 countries. These girls and young women come together to learn new skills, share their international experiences, and form lifelong friendships.

USA Girl Scouts Overseas (USAGSO) serves U.S. girls living overseas. Families serving in the military and foreign service or working corporate assignments overseas and American expatriates have access to Girl Scouts through USAGSO, ensuring that no matter where American families live, they will have access to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

Girl Scouts offers global program opportunities to all girls, regardless of where they live. Whether Girl Scouts decide to travel the world or participate in local activities with a worldwide impact, Global Girl Scout activities boost awareness of the world through cross-cultural learning opportunities.



USA Girl Scouts Overseas serves over **10,000** members in more than **60 countries**.



Policy Priorities

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Expand Girls' Access to Outdoor Exploration

Girl Scouts has a long and storied history of getting girls outdoors and instilling a lifelong appreciation for nature, conservation, and the environment. When girls spend time outdoors and increase their exposure to nature, they thrive physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Despite the known benefits of spending time outside, young people are increasingly sedentary and disconnected from nature. Technology-based lives, hours spent online for school and leisure, and limited active extracurricular hours contribute to this demise. Girl Scouts' outdoor programs offer girls an alternative, with 67 percent of girls participating in one or more outdoor activities. Through troop activities, earning badges, camps, and other outdoor programs, girls get outside, get active, and explore.

Girl Scouts' outdoor programming is designed for girls to explore nature, connect to the environment, and take on adventures from trail running and rock climbing to snow sports and hiking. **The unique girl-led approach gives girls the confidence to support one another, take on challenges, and spend dedicated time in nature on their own terms.** Girls' confidence soars as they join their friends in trying new things, taking healthy risks, and exploring the world around them.

- **Girl Scouts Love State Parks** allows Girl Scouts to explore the natural wonders of our state parks and collect trash from public lands to **#PickUpAmerica**. More than 780 events were held in 713 state parks in all 50 states across the country, with girls in 107 Girl Scout councils participating. **To date, Girl Scouts have cleaned up an estimated 23 metric tons of garbage.**
- **Girl Scouts Love the Outdoors** is an annual challenge that inspires and encourages girls to connect with the outdoors, regardless of where they live or their age. Some of the interactive activities include practicing yoga outside at sunset, writing a "thank you" note to nature, and connecting with local environmental groups. More than 46,000 Girl Scouts participated in the Love the Outdoors Challenge in 2021.
- **The Girl Scout Tree Promise** continued to be a favorite among Girl Scouts who want to make an environmental difference, with over 250,000 trees planted.



Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:

- Ensure all girls can participate in transformative outdoor experiences regularly and in varied ways.
- Identify and eliminate barriers impacting girls and their ability to seek outdoor experiences and activities.
- Provide girls with opportunities to explore solutions to conservation-related issues, thereby advancing their understanding of the natural sciences, natural resource management, and related STEM careers.
- Engage girls in environmental stewardship and advocacy so they learn the value of protecting our world and, in the process, learn to advocate for themselves.

Inspire Greater Civic Engagement and Civics Education

Civics education is central to preserving and strengthening our country's democracy for the future. Informed citizens are far more likely to be engaged, active participants who stand up for issues they care about at the local, state, and national level. With less than half of US adults able to name all three branches of government, it's vital that we inspire girls to be informed, engaged, and civically minded individuals equipped with the tools needed to take action and make positive change in the world.

The most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows:

- Only 22 percent of eighth graders performed at or above proficiency in civics.
- Only 13 percent of eighth graders performed at or above proficiency in U.S. history.

For most K-12 students, civics is a one-semester course in high school. Only five states require a stand-alone civics course in middle school, and elementary schools spend less than 30 minutes per day on social studies, civics included. Rural students, students of color, and low-income students are more likely to attend schools with fewer civic learning opportunities. Out-of-school programs are critical to supporting this glaring gap in educational achievement in civics.

Girl Scouts aims to support our democracy through service, leadership, and advocacy. Girl Scout civics education programs invite girls to dive into democracy and learn skills that empower them to make the world a better place. **Our civics education programming consistently trends as the most sought-after badges across our entire K-12 programming, with more than 96,000 girls taking action in 2024.**

In 2020, in honor of the 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment, Girl Scouts launched the first national *Promote the Vote* initiative to engage Girl Scout troops in the democratic process during a general election. It revived the program for the 2024 election, in partnership with League of Women Voters. *Promote the Vote* engages girls in civics, providing them with resources and information to encourage adults in their community to vote. Through *Promote the Vote*, Girl Scout troops are given information and tools to support a range of outreach, from letter writing to texts, encouraging potential voters, providing girls with the opportunity to get involved in the democratic process, even if they are not old enough to vote.

Through Girl Scouts' civics education programs, girls are equipped for effective civic engagement and taking the reins of responsibility for our country and its future.



“Civic engagement is a core element of the Girl Scout experience. We prepare our girls to lead and offer them the tools to confidently engage in their communities, collaborate with others on solutions, and create the change they want to see in the country and the world. We are committed to ensuring that Girl Scouts are prepared to live lives of purpose and be informed, engaged, and involved citizens.”

–Bonnie Barczykowski
Chief Executive Officer, Girl Scouts of the USA

Girl Scouts strongly supports actions to increase civics education opportunities, including:

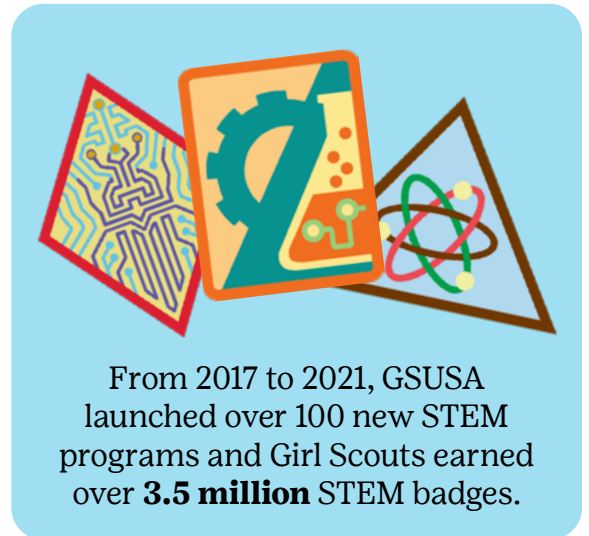
- Expanding girls' access to civics education, including service-learning projects and informal educational programs that take place out of school.
- Improving girls' practical understanding of the systems, laws, and processes that govern society at the local, state, and federal levels.
- Encouraging a sense of personal and community responsibility to engage in civic processes.

Fuel Girls' Passion for STEM

For decades, Girl Scouts has been innovating in extracurricular science, technology and math (STEM) education through programs aimed at increasing girls' interest, confidence, and competence in STEM—which we assess through standardized outcomes. Girl Scout programs give girls the training, mentoring, and hands-on experiences to help them understand the value of STEM to society and the options for their own careers. Whether girls are interested in computer technology and cybersecurity robotics, coding and app development, or everyday tools like online safety and data protection, Girl Scouts connects them with STEM experiences, no matter their age or zip code.

Without question, STEM skills are critical to solving today's problems. Despite the exponential growth in STEM occupations, women remain vastly underrepresented in the STEM workforce, in holding STEM degrees, and in opportunities to develop STEM interest as youths. Addressing the gender gap in STEM requires starting early and investing in STEM opportunities for girls.

Girl Scouts plays a pivotal role in reaching girls early by ensuring they have experience with STEM at a critical time in their development and that their interest is sustained through high school. STEM badges reach girls as young as five, with 59 percent of all Girl Scouts participating in STEM programs or activities. Girl Scouts' research suggests that participating in at least one Girl Scout STEM activity sustains girls' interest in STEM during middle school and into high school, despite traditional declines in interest. **Non-Girl Scouts' interest in tech careers drops by 21 percentage points in middle school, compared to only a two-percentage point drop in Girl Scout tech career interest** (Decoding the Digital Girl, Girl Scout Research Institute). By high school, 74% of Girl Scouts show interest in STEM fields.



As a trusted partner and leader in the STEM field, Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:

- Invest in STEM programs through federal partnerships with community organizations and schools.
- Promote proven techniques for engaging girls in STEM, including single-gender learning environments and hands-on, inquiry-based learning.
- Introduce girls to diverse role models and mentors in STEM.
- Expand opportunities for out-of-school STEM programming for girls.
- Encourage federal agencies to invest in developing STEM career paths for girls and other traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Secure girls' online safety by equipping them with the tools, safeguards, and transparency to protect their health and well-being online.

Strengthen Girls' Financial Literacy and Business Skills

The Girl Scout Cookie Program is the largest girl-run entrepreneurial program in the world, with **nearly 700,000 girls participating in 2024**.

Girl Scouts get an introduction to entrepreneurship while learning important online and offline business skills that set them up for success in life. And while what's inside the box is tasty, it's the amazing experiences that happen outside the cookie box that make the cookie program so special.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program inspires girls to develop business and entrepreneurial acumen, building five skills that serve them for life:



Goal
Setting



Decision
Making



Money
Management



People
Skills



Business
Ethics

In addition to traditional in-person cookie sales, girls can participate in the Digital Cookie® platform, which puts Girl Scouts in the driver's seat of their own digital cookie businesses. It teaches them vital twenty-first century lessons about online marketing, app usage, and ecommerce.

Every girl can benefit from learning to think like an entrepreneur, regardless of whether they see it as their future career path. **By building financial acumen, business skills, and entrepreneurial curiosity, Girl Scouts supports girls on their journey toward future success.**



Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:

- Ensure all girls gain financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills
- Bolster the role of youth-serving organizations in promoting real-world financial literacy and entrepreneurial experiences in all-girl environments
- Expand federal initiatives that support financial literacy and entrepreneurial programs through partnerships with community organizations and schools
- Leverage educational technology to strengthen youths' financial literacy capabilities

Uphold a Strong Nonprofit Community

Charitable nonprofits like Girl Scouts embody the longstanding American tradition of people coming together at the local level to identify challenges, solve problems, serve neighbors, and enrich their communities. **As one of the nation's largest nonprofit organizations, Girl Scouts is committed to advancing policies and programs that promote a strong and sustainable charitable sector.**

As lawmakers address major policy considerations, particularly tax policy, Girl Scouts implores that they understand the profound impact—positive or negative—that policy changes may have on the ability of nonprofits to effectively provide and serve. Nonprofits are bedrocks in communities and an essential part of the U.S. economy and society.

Together, the nonprofit industry:

- Consumes more than \$1 trillion annually in goods and services, spurring further economic activity.
- Earns more than 80% of its revenue through fees for services and government contracts and grants, receiving another 14% of its revenue thanks to donations by individuals (10.2%), foundations (2.9%) and corporations (0.9%)
- Employs over 12.3 million people—just over 9.9% of America's private workforce*
- Pays more than \$65 billion each year in payroll, unrelated business income, and other taxes.**

Charitable nonprofits continue to make extraordinary contributions for the well-being of the people and communities they serve. However, nonprofits like Girl Scouts face an unprecedented workforce shortage, economic uncertainty, and increased demands for goods and services.



Girl Scouts of the USA therefore seeks:

- Reinstatement of a Non-itemizer Charitable Deduction, which would empower taxpayers to give back to their communities, allow for greater giving to the work of nonprofits that individuals care about, and effectively reduce demands on governments.
- Promotion of the ability for nonprofits to recruit and support volunteers who wish to dedicate their time to missions and communities by removing disincentives in tax policy.
- A reformed and simplified the federal grant application process.

*Nonprofits accounted for 12.8 million jobs, 99 percent of private-sector employment, in 2022, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Aug. 16, 2024.

** Calculation provided by the National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute.