

## Background

In 2016 Girl Scouts will celebrate 100 years of girls earning the organization's highest honor—since 1980 known as the Girl Scout Gold Award—by making meaningful, sustainable change in their communities and around the world. Each year the Gold Award is presented to girls in grades 9–12 who have executed “Take Action” projects in response to pressing community and global needs. Girl Scouts will use the centennial of the Gold Award as an opportunity to call on all of our public officials to stand with us to recognize these courageous young leaders from across the country.

Girl Scouts is the preeminent organization for girls in the world, with nearly 3 million members in the United States and its territories and more than 90 countries across the globe. Nearly one in two adult women in the United States was a member of Girl Scouts as a girl, and today, Girl Scouts has an alumnae base of more than 59 million American women. For over a century, Girl Scouts has provided the premier leadership development experience for girls ages 5 to 17.

Public policies are needed to support programs that allow young people to grow up healthy and strong, develop skills for today's and tomorrow's jobs, and connect to their communities and their world. In partnership with our 112 local councils, GSUSA works with policymakers at all levels to advance the cause of girls and their limitless potential. Girl Scouts supports policies that let girls know they matter and gain the necessary social and emotional skills to succeed in life.

To advance the cause of girls, Girl Scouts is prioritizing the following public policy goals in 2016:

- **Promote Economic Opportunities for Girls**
  - Increase girls' involvement in STEM
  - Strengthen girls' financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills
- **Encourage Healthy Living Opportunities for Girls**
  - Increase access to outdoor activities
  - Prevent bullying/relational aggression and promote healthy relationships
- **Foster Global Citizenship and a Global Voice for Girls**
- **Support a Strong Nonprofit Community and Girl Scout Experience**

# Promote Economic Opportunities for Girls

## Increase girls' involvement in STEM

Girl Scouts is committed to ensuring that every girl has the opportunity to explore and build an interest and possible career path in STEM-related fields. As cited in the GSRI's *Generation STEM: What Girls Say About Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math* (2012), 74 percent of teen girls show interest in STEM; however, they have low exposure to STEM fields.

Since 1913, girls have learned STEM skills while earning Girl Scouts' national proficiency badges. Today's Girl Scouts can learn to code, become videogame designers, and get involved in robotics. Girls who participate in STEM programming through Girl Scouts express increased confidence in their STEM skills, and increased capability in critical thinking and problem solving.

*Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:*

- *Expose girls to diverse role models and mentors.*
- *Promote proven techniques for engaging girls in STEM, including single-gender learning environments and hands-on, inquiry-based learning.*
- *Expand out-of-school STEM programming to girls and underrepresented minorities.*
- *Cultivate and support collaboration among schools and out-of-school providers, including nonprofits, science centers and museums, universities, and businesses.*

## Strengthen financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills

For over a century, Girl Scouts has made financial literacy an integral part of its programming, with 23 percent of the 132 Girl Scout badges related to financial empowerment skills. For example, high school girls can earn a "Good Credit" badge that teaches them how to maintain good credit, borrow money smartly, and pay back on time.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program is often girls' first introduction to business planning, teaching them five key skills: goal setting, decision making, money management, people skills, and business ethics. As we approach the second century of the cookie program, Girl Scouts is embracing technology, offering an online cookie-selling platform as a part of its traditional cookie program. Last year, nearly 160,000 Girl Scouts experienced a revolutionary update to the iconic Girl Scout Cookie Program with Girl Scouts' first-ever national digital platform, Digital Cookie 1.0 gave girls the opportunity to sell cookies via website or mobile app. This initiative was a first step in preparing girls to be leaders in the high-tech, fast-paced, e-commerce world of today. In 2016, Girl Scouts builds on the initial success of Digital Cookie 1.0 by launching Digital Cookie 2.0, with dynamic, engaging, and interactive new tools and fun new upgrades that make learning and selling cookies more exciting and educational for girls.

*Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:*

- *Ensure that all girls have financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills.*
- *Bolster the role of youth-serving organizations in providing real-world financial literacy and entrepreneurial experiences for girls.*
- *Leverage educational technology to strengthen financial literacy capabilities for youth.*

# Encourage Healthy Living Opportunities for Girls

## Increase access to outdoor activities

Since its beginning in 1912, Girl Scouts has been committed to ensuring every girl has a unique outdoor experience. Girl Scouts participate in an array of innovative and memorable adventures, including daily environmental service projects, exploration, and camping.

It is more important than ever to increase access to outdoor activities. In the United States, 25 percent of children play outside daily, compared to nearly 75 percent a generation ago. Each day, the average child spends four to seven minutes in unstructured play as compared to the seven hours she/he spends in front of an electronic screen. This is very concerning, as spending time outdoors in nature is beneficial to our children's physical, mental, and emotional health and has been proven to decrease symptoms of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, stimulate brain development, improve motor skills, result in better sleep, reduce stress, increase creativity, and improve mood.

Girls further benefit from being outdoors in a *girl-only* environment. According to a survey of nearly 3,000 current Girl Scouts by the GSRI, *More Than S'mores* (2013), 50 percent of girls would not have opportunities for outdoor experiences without their participation in Girl Scouts. More than 70 percent said Girl Scouts had allowed them to try an outdoor activity for the first time, and 79 percent of Latina girls say they first tried an outdoor activity through Girl Scouts. Finally, the effects of monthly outdoor exposure on environmental stewardship and leadership traits were even more pronounced for underserved girls.

*Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:*

- *Ensure that all girls get outdoors regularly and in varied ways, particularly underserved girls who may have limited opportunities to experience nature.*
- *Provide opportunities for girls to explore solutions to environmental issues and develop an increased understanding of the natural sciences, natural resource management, and STEM careers.*

## Prevent bullying/relational aggression and build healthy relationships

According to the GSRI's *State of Girls* report, about 30 percent of girls have experienced some form of bullying or relational aggression from their peers. In addressing this issue, Girl Scouts gives girls the skills to develop healthy relationships and prevent bullying behavior outright. Our BFF (Be a Friend First) bullying prevention program, designed for middle school girls, focuses directly on reducing bullying, including cyberbullying and relational aggression. From an evaluation of BFF conducted in partnership with 24 Girl Scout councils, Latina girls were more likely to see bullying as a "huge" problem, and they reaped greater benefits from the BFF program.

*Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:*

- *Partner with youth-serving organizations to engage local education agencies in providing education and training programs for middle school (and younger) youth in the interest of reducing relational aggression, bullying, and adolescent violence, and creating safe schools and communities.*

## Foster Global Citizenship and a Global Voice for Girls

Girl Scouts is dedicated to ensuring that girls have opportunities to understand their relationship to the larger world—even if they don't travel beyond their own community—so they can develop into responsible global citizens. Girl Scouts strives to promote cross-cultural learning opportunities and educate girls on relevant global issues that inspire them to take action. In 2015, more than a quarter of nominations for our organization's highest recognition, the Girl Scout Gold Award, entailed girls taking action on issues to improve conditions for girls globally in a variety of areas including: human trafficking, sanitation and violence against women and girls.

Through the Let Girls Learn initiative, Girl Scouts is partnering with the Peace Corps to promote Girls Global Access to education and launched the Global Action Award badge that will provide girls the opportunity to understand and address the challenges associated with and the specific root causes of barriers to girls' access to education globally.

*Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:*

- *Promote a sense of global citizenship.*
- *Support youth-serving organizations that promote global access to education for girls.*
- *Support awareness of the impact in investing in girls globally.*
- *Provide cross-cultural opportunities for international travel.*

## Support a Strong Nonprofit Community and Girl Scout Experience

Girl Scouts is proud to partner with organizations and coalitions in the nonprofit sector such as Leadership 18, Independent Sector, National Council of Nonprofits, National Human Services Assembly, and the Charitable Giving Coalition. The goal of these groups is to ensure that nonprofits not only survive but flourish as employers providing essential services. We support policies that help nonprofits screen, recruit, and retain staff and volunteers, and incentivize charitable giving.

Girl Scouts is also committed to supporting policies that help us deliver on our mission and increase our capacity to serve girls. As a result, in addition to supporting broader issues important to nonprofits at large, we educate policymakers on the impact of tax and regulatory proposals on our cookie program and pension plan, and on overall organizational support issues.

*Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:*

- *Ensure a healthy, effective, and vibrant nonprofit community.*
- *Maintain the financial stability of the Girl Scout Movement to ensure that the Girl Scout Leadership Experience can be offered to an increasing number of girls.*

GSUSA's **Public Policy and Advocacy Office**, located in Washington, D.C., works in partnership with all 112 Girl Scout councils across the country to educate representatives of the legislative and executive branches of government and advocate for public policy issues important to girls and Girl Scouting. For more information, contact us at 202-659-3780 or [advocacy@girlscouts.org](mailto:advocacy@girlscouts.org). To volunteer, reconnect, donate, or join, visit [www.girlscouts.org](http://www.girlscouts.org).