

Get Girls Outdoors: Four Tips for Council Success

It's no secret that Girl Scout founder Juliette Gordon Low loved nature and the great outdoors. At Girl Scouts' beginning, a girl who joined was sure to experience campouts and outdoor adventures. Yet today, only an alarming 40 percent of Girl Scouts report getting outdoors on a monthly basis. Our challenge is clear: we need to find ways to get Girl Scouts outdoors and active.

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) forged a strategic partnership to address these challenges. Through an investment from the [Richard King Mellon Foundation](#), we partnered with the [Student Conservation Association](#) (SCA) to pilot our Outdoor Internship Program and provide sub grants to five councils: Girl Scouts of Alaska (GSAK), Girl Scouts–Arizona Cactus–Pine (GSACP), Girl Scouts of Greater New York (GSGNY), Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan (GSSEM), and Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania (GSWPA). The councils were then linked with outdoor-savvy interns who helped implement events and programs.

To help improve your council's outdoor programs and volunteer training, we've collected these tips, experiences, and best practices from the outdoor interns and five councils.



“We have been thrilled with how this project has strengthened and increased the effectiveness of our council....It has also inspired a new group of volunteers to pursue more training and more opportunities to be involved with the council.”

—Matt Thesing, project manager, GSACP



Girl Scouts of Alaska prepares girls and adults for canoeing.

Tip #1: Get Girls Excited About the Outdoors

Offer interactive programs, create fun events, and ease girls into the outdoors to alleviate any apprehension.

Outdoor Service Events

Design service events to get girls outdoors. GSWPA organized girls and volunteers to weed and mulch 100 trees surrounding Fort Necessity National Battlefield and the Pennsylvania Veterans' Memorial. The council also organized a day to clean up Friendship Hill National Historical Site, where a National Park Service ranger led an environmental education program for the girls.

Environmental Take Action Projects

Partner with local or national parks and other environmentally minded organizations so girls can complete a Take Action project that addresses an environmental need. GSGNY created an Environmental Action Squad of 30 Senior and Ambassador Girl Scouts (9–12th grade) to work with younger girls on Take Action projects. The squad took part in the council's Take Action Fridays, during which girls camped at one of five locations across New York City to learn and participate in environmental work in their community. Take Action Fridays also give girls the opportunity to get involved with various activities—from creating a birdhouse to place in their local park to building a green space that stops water runoff at a nearby river. These events focus on showing girls how they can improve the environment in different ways while also getting them outside for a hands-on experience.



Nature Acclimation

The city-living girls of GSGNY are mostly unaccustomed to natural environments, so the council created a way slowly acclimate girls to having a lifelong love of the outdoors using a five-stage nature acclimation process:

- 1) Learn about the outdoors in a city environment.
- 2) Go on an outdoor day trip.
- 3) Take an overnight trip.
- 4) Participate in a girls-only overnight.
- 5) Become a camp counselor-in-training.



Left: Girl Scouts from the GSGNY Day Camp getting hands on experience building bird houses for a Take Action project.

Right: Girl Scouts of Greater New York SCA Intern, Deanna, helps girls take action by building and installing bird houses in Harlem River Park.

Get Outdoors and Badge Kits

Create kits with activities and supplies to support outdoor initiatives or to help girls earn outdoor-related badges. GSAK worked with the Student Conservation Association, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and National Park Service to create Get Outside kits containing supplies and engaging hands-on activities with instructions for all levels. For example, a birding kit included binoculars, a *Birds of Alaska* mini book, colorful bird trading cards, and several hands-on activities with instructions for girls to learn about and explore birds.

GSWPA designed kits to help girls earn outdoor-related badges.



Badge Kits

Following GSWPA's example, you can create kits that include materials, instructions, and tools for girls to meet Outdoor badge requirements.

Brownies' Bugs Badge Kit

Girls draw a poster, make a bug-related craft, see bugs in action, make a model spider web, and take a bug field trip.

Cadettes' Trees Badge Kit

Girls design a treehouse, make a tree map, research and debate logging and deforestation, and plan a community project related to trees.

Juniors' Animal Habitats Badge Kit

Girls compare animal traits, design a meerkat burrow or beaver lodge, and throw a wildlife awareness party.

Seniors' Sky Badge Kit

Girls learn about stargazing, draw a map of the atmosphere, make paper airplanes, research air pollution, and write a story about the Northern or Southern Lights.



Get Out Challenge

Hold a Get Out Challenge for your council, like GSACP did. The council teamed up with Arizona State Parks and Trails to create a six-week competition to name the council's most adventurous troop, girl, or Girl Scout family. Participants earned points by logging outdoor activities, which were then displayed on the council's website alongside the others' progress. In addition to getting girls outside more, the event helped girls earn their Outdoor badges, complete their Journeys, and finish their Take Action projects.



Tip #2: Promote Your Council's Outdoor Efforts

Spread the news and keep volunteers and partners informed by collecting and sharing relevant data and by using your website and social media.

Council Website

Create an "Outdoor" section on your council's website to promote the outdoor programs and volunteer trainings your council offers. If you already have a page on your website dedicated to the outdoors, update it to spotlight the latest offerings, including girl and volunteer success stories. For example, GSAK boosted the outdoor resources on its website by adding downloadable tutorial videos and outdoor activities for volunteers. GSWPA updated its map for all approved campsites and facilities and made it interactive. Now volunteers can search for sites that offer services based on their desired activity, such as horseback riding or kayaking. The council also uploaded an interactive map of state parks in the area to highlight relevant nearby activities.

Social Media

Start a Facebook and Pinterest page to share events, experiences, and resources for your outdoor programs. GSGNY set up Pinterest boards for Naturalist, Outdoor Explorer, First Aid, and Art in the Outdoors badges with resources to help leaders develop troop programming.

Data Gathering

Gather data on girls and volunteers who participate in outdoor programs or trainings. Use this information to shape your future programs and to share with media outlets and your partners.

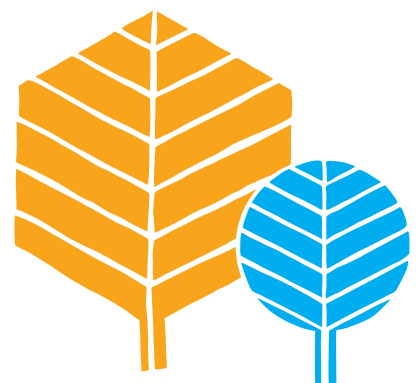


"We are eager to get outdoors to start getting girls ready for their first overnight campout. Please keep us posted about any cool activities at the state parks, we'd love to attend!"

*—Sabrina Bault,
troop leader, GSACP*



GSACP Girl Scouts and their families participating in Get Out Challenges.



Tip #3: Provide Outdoor Support for Volunteers

Getting girls outside and organizing a troop camping trip can be daunting tasks for volunteers. Lead them to all the resources your council and Girl Scouts offer to simplify the process and give volunteers the confidence they need.

Safety Activity Checkpoints

Make sure you are using the current version of GSUSA Safety Activity Checkpoints. Volunteers need to know how they can safely navigate every outdoor adventure, from hiking to camp cookouts. GSACP created a council hiking guide to build capacity and increase adult volunteers' confidence.

Volunteer Essentials

Provide volunteers with everything they will need, such as basic facts and forms and tips for planning outdoor education training courses, and arranging camping trips.

Outdoor Specialists

Recruit outdoor specialists (archery experts, kayak instructors, skilled horseback riders, etc.) who aren't troop leaders to support volunteers as they teach girls new skills.

Outdoor Workshops and Skills Training

Hold a workshop for volunteers to learn basic outdoor skills, like campfire building and first aid. GSWPA offered an Adult Outdoor Skills Summit at Camp Redwing, which included workshops for volunteers like campfire building, creating girl-led outdoor activities, and first aid. The workshops focused on empowering volunteers with the skills they would need to prepare their girls for camping overnight.



Adventure Squad

GSWPA used parks and partner relationships to create Adventure Squad, a series of outdoor summer events that girls could attend by joining the squad. Girls went on an overnight at the Pittsburgh Zoo, canoe camping with Allegheny Outfitters, geocaching with Allegheny Land Trust at Wingfield Pines, on a trip on the Brig Niagara followed by biomimicry programming with the Tom Ridge Environmental Center, and on a stand-up paddle boarding eco tour of Lake Arthur at Moraine State Park.



Tip #4: Partner with Local and National Groups for Outdoor Initiatives

Look within your community or get leads from other councils about potential local and national groups that can create, sponsor, host, or lend experts for your outdoor initiatives.

Local Conservation and Environmental Groups

Design outdoor programs and events for girls with the support of local conservation and environmental groups. GSWPA partnered with Tamarack Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center to provide an owl education program for girls that featured four live owls. GSSEM facilitated outdoor games for the public for five days at the National Park Service's Every Kid in a Park event, held at the Historic Fort Wayne in Detroit.

Contests and Awards

Ask a partner to sponsor outdoor contests or awards for girls, or invite troops to join an existing competition. GSAK partnered with REI for its 101 Things Girls Can Do Outdoors initiative. Across the country, GSGNY paired up with an archery club in Brooklyn so Cadettes could learn archery skills and safety.

Outdoor STEM

Journeys and badges offer many science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) opportunities to get girls outdoors (e.g., visiting watersheds and exploring wildlife) that STEM-related partners can support. GSSEM partnered with the Organization for Bat Conservation so girls could learn about bat species and build and donate bat houses. The council also collaborated with local experts in the field of pollination so girls could restore or create a butterfly garden in their community. At GSGNY, 60 Brownies earned their Bugs badge while visiting the Staten Island Children's Museum.

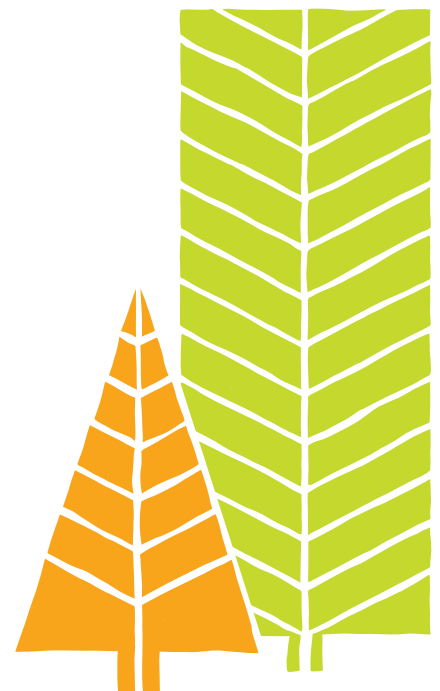
Badge Partners

Find partners to help girls both meet their badge requirements and get outdoors. For example, GSGNY partnered with "Wildman" Steve Brill to host an event in Central Park where Juniors learned about plants while earning their Gardener badges. GSGNY also teamed up with the Red Cross to hold emergency preparedness training for girls earning their First Aid badges. For an Art in the Outdoors badge requirement, the council partnered with Stress Solutions of New York to hold a drum circle event in Battery Park.



"I loved it, and I'm mounting a bat house in my backyard because we have woods behind our house."

*—Girl Scout participant
in GSSEM's bat habitat
restoration project*



Outdoor Resources

Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) is continually expanding its resources so girls and volunteers have access to information that enables the best-possible outdoor experiences. Keep these helpful tools in mind when planning your outdoor initiatives:

Journeys and Badges

Encourage girls to go on [Journeys](#) (e.g., It's Your Planet—Love It!) and to earn [badges](#) with an outdoor focus: Troop Camping, Art in the Outdoors, Athlete, First Aid, Naturalist, etc. Also, Check out the [Outdoor Journey Year Plan](#).

Volunteer Toolkit: “Get Girls Outside”

While logged in to the Volunteer Toolkit, click on the “Get Girls Outside!” evergreen icon, found in many of the Daisy–Junior badge meeting activities, to find an optional activity designed specifically for the outdoors.

Girl Scout Travel

Learn about [travel opportunities](#) rooted in outdoor adventure—both national and international—for Girl Scouts. There are so many different trips and Destinations through which girls can take action to protect wildlife.

Outdoor Resources Web Page

Find guidance for volunteers with [Venture Out](#), which offers suggestions for implementing the Girl Scout Leadership Experience outdoors, teaches how to practice decision making with outside activities, instructs how to deal with outdoor challenges, and lists practical tips and real-life stories from other volunteers. Also, gain access to these [skill-building videos](#), along with this [video](#) on the do's and don'ts of backpacking.

Girl Scout Outdoor Progression Chart

This valuable [chart](#) shows how volunteers can acknowledge a girl's mastery of an outdoor skill and help her get to the next level.

GSUSA research shows that girls' outdoor experiences are positively linked to challenge seeking, problem solving, and environmental stewardship. Through our collective training and resources, we're working to ensure that girls are confident in the outdoors, learn about wildlife and conservation, and enjoy the beauty and wonder that nature has to offer.

GSUSA thanks the Richard King Mellon Foundation for its continued support and efforts to inspire girls to get outdoors and become lifelong stewards of the environment.

