

2023 Fall Town Hall Q&A

Question about CIT (Counselor in Training) at Camp Hawthorn Ridge. Would there be a consideration for girls who want to continue there? Yes, CIT programming at Camp Hawthorne Ridge will be listed in *Camp S'more*.

Many volunteers are disappointed that overnight camp will no longer be held at Camp Hawthorne Ridge. Many asked if this decision could be reconsidered. This upcoming summer, Camp Hawthorne Ridge will offer day camp, CIT programming, and overnight camping opportunities for service units and troops. Council will re-evaluate Camp Hawthorne Ridge after the summer of 2024.

We need to provide more ways to represent Girl Scouts during local events. Our membership engagement specialists do actively participate in community events at specific times year-round, however, we know that nothing makes a stronger statement than our Girl Scouts! Our marketing and communications department has tabling resources available to volunteers that can be used at community fairs and other local events. For more information on accessing those resources, please call customer care at 1-800-248-3355.

Are shipping discounts being offered for cookies? Shipping costs are not set by councils, but limited-time promotions may be offered. Any promotions related to the cookie program will be shared with volunteers and caregivers through *Cookie Bytes* during the season. Shipping costs are staying the same for the 2024 season.

How will the payments be processed for the digital orders at the booth? Will troops be reimbursed for fees if they are using another method like Square? Troops can elect to take payment through the methods that work best for them, but the council will only cover credit card fees in March for troops who use Digital Cookie to process credit cards at their booth sales. Fees from other processing platforms will not be paid or reimbursed by the council. Digital Cookie is very easy to use to process credit card payments at booth sales. More information will be available at troop leader cookie training in December. **Could troops be able to shut down those orders so that they don't oversell?** Troops manage their own inventory at booth sales, only taking payment for the cookies they have on hand.

Additional information about how to get Certificates of Insurance (COIs) and which places have blanket policies so you don't have to get individual certificates. This could discourage other troops from traveling. Council's insurance policy has changed effective October 1, 2023. Council staff are working on disseminating this updated information to volunteers. Information will be available soon and will be communicated to volunteers. You can find more information on insured sites and facilities and program partners on our [Planning Activities](#) page.

Easier way to navigate the trainings offered and find specific training with dates planned. There are many places to find volunteer training on our website! Click on the calendar icon (Event List) in the navigation or go to gswpa.org/events. Select the *upcoming training opportunities* or use the *Advanced Search*, under *By Category*, select *Volunteer Training*, and then select *View Results*. You will have all of the volunteer

trainings available by date. You can also find volunteer trainings by selecting *Members* in the navigation, then *For Volunteers*, then *Volunteer Training*. If you are looking for upcoming trainings offered, you can find them listed in *Monthly Council Updates*, emailed monthly to volunteers and available to view at gswpa.org/volcomms.

More communication for volunteers who could have been attending the National Convention. Could have had the possibility of meeting with some Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania delegates/staff. For the next National Convention, we will have a meet and greet for all Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania participants and will be looking to get a group photo together! We have the next Convention on the travel calendar to take a bus of girls, with details to come over the next few years.

What is the process for the gold award scholarship?

Eligible Gold Award Girl Scouts (had to be seniors in high school) had to apply through the third-party link, ISTS. The scholarship organization ISTS chose three top finalists for our council from those girls who applied. Council had a committee of staff and Gold Award volunteers to choose the finalist. **Who nominates girls for the scholarship?** Girls have to apply, so no one is nominated.

Question about requesting the Gold Award to be signed by the president.

We at council send out citations to our legislators, senators, and president, sometime in April after that March deadline.

Are there resources to include and help girls coming into troops who have intellectual disabilities or other challenges? Council has two staff trained in youth mental health programming. Council offers this training for volunteers. As far as resources, there are also a few gsLearn courses. If a case comes through, we can work with membership staff and the troop leader on strategies and best practices.

What is Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania doing to retain staff/volunteer support? Volunteers are frustrated with staff turnover and having to get to know new staff every few months. We understand staff turnover is very frustrating and we are doing some retention acts that we are hoping will improve our retention. The membership leadership reviews all exit interviews for gaps in their employee experience. We have found that expectations for the position are not adequately described during the interview process and we have modified that on our interview form. We also learned that more direct orientation was needed and we have revamped that process. There was also an indication that they needed more support and ongoing training and we have developed right-time training with our new orientation process. In regard to camp directors, it is hard to retain them for multiple reasons. The position is very demanding and we don't currently have adequate housing for a camp director (especially at Camp Conshatawba).

If someone leaves the organization, what is the process for letting volunteers know so that they aren't trying to contact someone who is no longer there? Emails are forwarded to other staff but the process can be tedious to work through all those emails. They may go to junk mail. Customer care is the front line. They can always be contacted at any time.

Zip lining and rock climbing are not available for troop camp at Camp Conshatawba. The camp director mentioned it was because of the staff. The goal is to hire year-round activity staff to support those activities year-round. Another option is to have volunteers who are certified to help out as well. We are looking at developing AutoBelay training for troops so that they can utilize the AutoBelay climbing system while at camp. This should roll out in spring 2024.

Discussions about the state of equipment at camp. How can they get repaired in a timely manner so that girls aren't forced to work with damaged/inadequate equipment?

We try to have our team check equipment regularly and have developed sheets for volunteers to fill out if they find broken equipment. Camp directors regularly check equipment and purchase new equipment as needed.

Question about the new Girl Scouts of the USA CEO. Here is the press release from GSUSA on our new CEO Bonnie Barczykowski: [Girl Scouts of the USA Announces New CEO Bonnie Barczykowski, a Decade-Long Veteran of the Organization](#)

Certified trainers - What trainings are transferrable (NRA Rifle certification, BB Gun certification, etc)? The outdoor team is looking into this to see if this is feasible and our insurance will cover transfers.

What is the plan to maintain and replace equipment at the camps? Council is working on an equipment maintenance plan at each of the camps. Please make sure camp directors are aware of broken or unsafe equipment immediately.

Are neighboring councils increasing the price of cookies? Many councils throughout the country are also increasing to \$6 a package for the 2024 program.

Troops are looking for free space to host troop meetings. Is the Johnstown office available? Council is exploring the opportunity for troops to utilize the Johnstown office for meeting space. Our current building layout will need to be updated to accommodate this.

Volunteers have asked council to identify programming partnerships and opportunities in Blair County. It was suggested to add Daisytown, NRA, Lemon House, Build You Rocks, and Backpacking to current program offerings. Girl program can send out program partner applications to these locations as well as if anyone has other suggestions of who we can partner with, these links can be shared.

<https://gswpa.wufoo.com/forms/program-partner-website-listing/>

<https://gswpa.wufoo.com/forms/program-partner-council-sponsored-events/>

Volunteers would like to see a map of the hiking trails at Camp Conshatawba. We are working with a troop to map the hiking trails at camp and hope to have a map in the coming months.

Volunteers expressed concerns about the late check-in time and the early check-out times. Staff will work with the property team to re-evaluate check-in and check-out times.

Older girl programming is key to retaining girls in Girl Scouts. What is the plan to offer more attractive older girl programming opportunities? The girl program team had 200 program offerings last year and

almost half of them were either for Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors or had a session for them. There is a minimum requirement for attendees often set by a budget or the program partner.

Volunteers expressed concerns about how financial assistance is distributed and asked if council would consider looking into a tiered pricing model for siblings to participate in programs and events. We understand it may be difficult for families with multiple siblings to participate and are most interested in finding ways to make programs and events affordable. We are in the process of researching options including reaching out to other Girl Scout councils to learn of any practices they may have. We have a cross-departmental team working together to discover options to consider.

When do we elect national delegates and how do we (volunteers and girls) find out about it? National Delegates are elected by recommendations of the Board Development Committee to the Board of Directors and then voted on during our Annual Meetings. Our next election for the 2026 NCS will be at the 2025 Annual Meeting. We will begin accepting applications in late 2024. We usually advertise that we are accepting applications on the website and by other means (Fall Town Hall meetings, Monthly Council Updates, etc.).

What was the thought process of removing resident camp at Camp Hawthorne Ridge? The other camps are too far away for us (girls) to continue camp counselor training. Council heard from some families that their girls aren't ready to stay away from home overnight but want outdoor experiences in Girl Scouts. Council decided to make Camp Hawthorne Ridge available for service unit and troop camping next summer. In addition, CIT programming and day camp opportunities will be available at Camp Hawthorne Ridge.

Why is the council charging \$35 for Mental Health and First Aid Training when NAMI offers the same training for free? Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania was covering the cost of the certifications and the staffing. Most organizations that offer the free course have a grant to cover those charges and at the time, we did not have grant funds to cover the course cost for attendees. We did receive a new grant to train volunteers in certain counties in Youth Mental Health First Aid Training.

Why did the council charge \$5/girl and \$12/adult for Women in Sports Day at Mercyhurst University when it was a free event? Our registration did include a snack, however, Mercyhurst also provided pizza. The event was set up to be an event for Girl Scouts Western Pennsylvania members. Mercyhurst said that they would like to open it to athletics department staff children as well and we said that would be okay if they don't participate in the Girl Scout events. The \$5 was to support the Girl Scout-specific activities that included SWAPS, a fun patch, snacks, and two additional activities. About two weeks before the event, Mercyhurst opened the event to the public for free without Girl Scout knowledge. Girls were charged \$5 to offset the cost of the supplies and food. Adults were charged \$12 to offset the cost of food and the ticket to the basketball game. Mercyhurst provided the tickets to the girls for free. The only group outside of registered Girl Scout members that attended was a group of American Heritage girls that are run by a Girl Scout leader. Multiple troop leaders shared how amazing this event was and how they would love to see it repeated and hosted around the council. We also were invoiced for the pizza.

Besides the little bit of money we get for selling cookies, what else can we do to raise money for our trips? Only one additional fundraiser per year and no fundraisers during product program seasons make it too difficult for our troop to raise enough money to travel. Can we host a badge day event during MagNut/cookie season or is that against our Additional Fundraising Policy? Council is re-evaluating money-earning activities for better clarity on permissible activities.

For older girls with busy schedules, it's sometimes difficult to have more than one girl at a cookie booth sale. Is there allowed to be one adult and one kid at a booth sale? Yes, if the girl is selling cookies that were ordered for her or have been signed out from her troop. These are called "lemonade stand" booths. More information will be available about booths as the season gets closer.

What is the goal of Election Week Cookie Sales? The Election Week Cookie Sale (EWCS) is a limited fall cookie sale that is part of our council's Girl Scout Cookie Program. EWCS offers customers a chance to stock up on their favorite Girl Scout Cookies and is an opportunity for Girl Scouts to help their troop earn proceeds as they get started with the new Girl Scout year. This is also an opportunity for Girl Scouts to gain experience in the five skills of the Girl Scout Cookie Program — goal setting, decision making, money management, people skills, and business ethics. **Do other councils participate in this?** Yes, other councils have had success with EWCS.

Is there a listing of partners for whom we currently hold a certificate of insurance paperwork that can be published for volunteer use? This would be helpful for planning trips, other camping, etc. Are there any trainings that would demonstrate how to get the certificate of insurance or is there anyone at council that could help with obtaining certificates of insurance? Council's insurance policy has changed effective October 1, 2023. Council staff are working on disseminating this updated information to volunteers. Information will be available soon and will be communicated to volunteers. Council can provide training to demonstrate how to get the certificate of insurance. You can find more information on insured sites and facilities and program partners on our [Planning Activities](#) page.

Is there anything that we could do to bring in more troop leaders? There are girls waiting to be Girl Scouts and troops are full and unable to accommodate them. The membership leadership is currently working on this initiative. We know that our troop leaders are central to our organization and delivering our mission. We took big strides this last year on one of their pain points — training. We redeveloped our new leader training making it easier and less time-consuming and are producing and pushing out quarterly relevant trainings. We modified the virtual training for new leaders to give them the tools to be successful right away by planning their year. Additionally, we added support pieces like the new mentor network where they will have opportunities to speak peer-to-peer on troop leader subjects. We are also working with marketing and communications on how to better advertise the opportunity to be a troop leader.

Issues with getting girls in because of the lack of leaders in the (Cranberry) area. We are working on the retention of staff (member engagement specialists) to have consistency.