

Girl Scouts of the USA Federal Policy Agenda

The pandemic rewrote the childhoods of young people, upending their education, friendships, and lifestyles. In the face of profound uncertainty, Girl Scouts remains a constant force.

Girl Scouts provides girls with the resources, community, and support they need to thrive in our rapidly changing world. Girl Scouts' after-school and out-of-school programs enrich student learning with our diverse lineup of badges and other hands-on activities; foster community and connection; expose girls to new experiences; and give girls the skills and confidence to say, "I know I can do this!" By exploring activities and experiences within the four pillars of Girl Scouting (STEM, Outdoors, Life Skills, and Entrepreneurship), girls set big goals and achieve even bigger successes.

With over 1 million Girl Scouts, 111 councils, and 50 million alums nationwide, Girl Scouts has the power to enhance learning and leadership on a broad scale. Particularly during a time of interrupted learning and steep learning loss, Girl Scouts is needed to supplement time in the classroom.* No other youth-serving organization combines time-tested, research-backed program delivery methods with fun, innovative experiences that speak to the interests of today's girls, and is tailored to their learning styles and leadership development.

The pandemic proved that the next generation of leaders will face complex and interconnected challenges. Solving them will demand collaborative leadership, innovative perspectives, and resilience. Instilled with courage, confidence, and character, Girl Scouts are poised to address them head on.

In the 118th Congress, Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA) looks forward to working with policymakers to advance solutions that support the whole girl and offer her a chance to practice a lifetime of leadership, adventure, and success.



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* *The State of After-School Programs: Results of a National Survey on Programming During a Pandemic*, EdWeek Research Center

The Girl Scout Difference

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 the community.

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, professionally, and financially.



Did you know Girl Scouts is a global community?

As a member of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, we are a part of an international sisterhood of 10 million girls and young women in 152 countries. We even serve daughters of military, foreign service, and American expat families around the world through USA Girl Scouts Overseas (USAGSO). Over 90 countries have troops, ensuring that no matter where American families move, they will have access to the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.



Policy Priorities



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Inspire greater civic engagement and civic education.

Current school curriculum is not supporting children's civic education, and national statistics illustrate why our civic education programming is critically needed.

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

- Only **24 percent** of eighth graders performed at or above proficiency in civics.
- Only **15 percent** of eighth graders performed at or above proficiency in U.S. history.

Out-of-school programs are critical to supporting this glaring gap in educational achievement in civics.

Through Girl Scouts, girls experience our democracy firsthand. From virtual conversations with Members of Congress to our first-ever nationwide civic engagement project, "Promote the Vote," we aim to provide a close-up view of our democracy to inspire service, leadership, and advocacy for the issues girls care about. Our civic education programs invite girls to dive into democracy and learn skills that empower them to make the world a better place. Our civics education badges consistently trend as the most sought-after badges across our entire K-12 programming, with more than 21,000 girls taking action between July and November 2020.

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



"For more than a century, Girl Scouts has been at the forefront of civics education. Community engagement, education, and action are core parts of the Girl Scout experience, and though many may not be able to vote yet, it is imperative that girls understand the levers of our political system and how change is made so they can effectively make their voices heard."

— Sofia Chang, chief executive officer,
Girl Scouts of the USA

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

- Expanding girls' access to civic 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, such as voting.

Fuel girls' passion for STEM.

For decades, Girl Scouts has been innovating in extracurricular STEM education through programs aimed at increasing girls' interest, confidence, and competence in STEM—which we assess through standardized outcomes.

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.

Research shows that girls are keenly interested in STEM and excel at it. Yet, for a variety of reasons, girls often do not pursue STEM as they move from middle school to high school and beyond. As early as elementary school, girls' interests and activities can influence their future pursuits, which is why Girl Scouts is committed to ensuring every girl has chances to explore and build interest—and a possible career path—in STEM fields.

Girl Scouts plays a pivotal role in reaching girls early, ensuring they're exposed to STEM at a critical time in their development and sustaining their interest through high school. Our STEM badges reach girls as early as age five. By age eight, 67% of Girl Scouts show an interest in STEM fields. Our research suggests that Girl Scout programming 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.* By high school, 74% of Girl Scouts show interest in STEM fields.



From
2017 to 2021,
GSUSA launched
**over 100 new
STEM programs**
and Girl Scouts
earned over
**3.5 million
STEM badges.**

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 out-of-school STEM programming to girls and traditionally underrepresented groups, including English-language learners, racial minorities, and other students served by Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
- Encourage federal agencies to invest in developing STEM career paths for girls and other traditionally underrepresented groups.

**Decoding the Digital Girl*, Girl Scout Research Institute

Strengthen girls' financial literacy and business skills.

The Girl Scout Cookie Program is the largest girl-run entrepreneurial program in the world, with 665,000 girls participating in 2022.

Through the cookie program, Girl Scouts get a taste of 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® and Smart Cookie® platforms, which put 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.

As our workforce and economy continue to evolve in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, these skills, along with entrepreneurial energy, are more important than ever. 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 is the perfect place to support young 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.

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 and the environment. When girls spend quality time outdoors and increase their exposure to nature, they thrive physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Despite the known benefits of spending quality time outside, young people are becoming increasingly sedentary and disconnected from nature. Long school hours, reduced school recess periods, and tech-based leisure activities are all factors—but Girl Scouts' outdoor programming, which spans a girl's childhood and adolescence, offers girls another way. Through camp and programs in every zip code, Girl Scouts offers all girls opportunities to get outside and explore nature.

Our wide-ranging portfolio of outdoor badges and Leadership Journeys 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. Our unique girl-led approach gives girls the confidence to support one another, take on challenges, and spend dedicated time in nature. Their confidence soars as they join with other girls in trying new things, taking healthy risks, and learning through adversity.



- **The Girl Scout Climate Challenge** inspires girls to learn about climate science in the outdoors and includes patch activities that connect the science of climate with other areas of life.
- **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 Outdoors Challenge in 2021.
- **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. **To date, Girl Scouts have cleaned up an estimated 23 metric tons of garbage.**

Girl Scouts supports policy efforts to:

- Ensure all girls can participate in transformative outdoor experiences regularly and in varied ways.
- Engage girls from underserved communities in outdoor experiences by identifying barriers to access and inclusion.
- 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.

Uphold a strong nonprofit community.

As one of the nation's largest nonprofit organizations, Girl Scouts of the USA is committed to advancing policies and programs that promote a strong and sustainable charitable sector.

Our effort includes partnering with other charitable organizations and coalitions, including Leadership 18, National Council of Nonprofits, and the Charitable Giving Coalition.

From churches and cultural centers to food banks and more, the nonprofit sector—which includes Girl Scouts—is a bedrock in American communities. Nonprofits bring Americans together to pursue common goals, solve problems, demonstrate leadership, and promote civic engagement.* Together, the nonprofit sector:

- Employs over 12.3 million people—just over 10% of the U.S. workforce.
- Has a payroll that exceeds many U.S. industries, including construction, transportation, and finance.
- Consumes more than \$1 trillion annually in goods and services, spurring further economic activity.

Nonprofits were hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most organizations experienced increased demand for services while managing declines in revenue, limited access to brick-and-mortar facilities, clients without digital access, and fewer volunteers. As the nation continues to experience uncertainties brought on by the pandemic, nonprofits play a critical role in our nation's recovery and rebuilding. But we can only do so with the necessary supports in place.



Girl Scouts of the USA therefore seeks:

- Reform and simplification of the federal grant application process.
- Greater incentives for charitable giving. Charitable giving policies fuel the health of our nation and communities around the world. Congress can bolster the country's vibrant and independent civil society by creating a permanent above-the-line charitable deduction.
- Reduced premiums for charitable and small employer cooperative (CSEC) pension holders.
- An increased volunteer mileage rate equal to the standard business rate.

* *The 2019 Nonprofit Employment Report*, The Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Economic Data Project