

UNLEASH YOUR GIRL SCOUT VOICE

Legislative Workbook



girl scouts 
of the colonial coast

Why a Legislative Workbook?

This guide is designed to help Girl Scouts (Cadettes, Seniors, Ambassadors) learn about government, the legislative process, and to become stronger advocates for themselves and others. It is also a resource to help prepare for visit during Girl Scout Legislative Days or visits to public policy officials. This encompasses a wide array of issues including the basics of how a bill becomes a law, how to educate yourself on the issues that are important to you, and how to use that information in talking with your legislator/official.

Consider also learning about Girl Scout Civic badges and earning the one for your Girl Scout grade level! They can be found at www.girlscouts.org

What is Legislative Advocacy?

Legislative advocacy is being able to communicate about the importance of a policy issue or law to people who are in a position to change it. This can be talking to a city council member, a school board representative, your state representative or senator, your Governor, or the member of the U.S. Senate or the U.S. House of Representatives who represents you in Washington, DC.

What does it mean to be a legislative advocate?

Being an effective legislative advocate does not mean you have to live in your state capital or go to Washington DC. Legislators and representatives often have local or district offices that may be closer to where you live. Once you identify a nearby office, you can visit, schedule meetings, and talk to your representative about the issues you find important. Often, it's even more helpful to build relationships with the staff people at local offices. They have more time to work on local issues and are often very interested in what's going on in their own backyards. These relationships will be a great resource in getting through to the representative.

How do you find out who represents you?

Taking the time to find out who represents you can be time-consuming. The information you collect, however, will become a valuable resource. Use your research skills at the library or on the Internet to compile your own legislative advocacy directory or collaborate with local peers and share each other's results. Look up as many names as you can find and record their contact information in the directory page of this workbook.

Local Representatives

All contact information for local representatives is available online. Look for information on your city's website.

Mayor and City Council Members

If your issue affects people on a local level, you need to identify the mayor of your town as well as the city council members.

School Board

As a young person, it's quite possible that the issue you're dealing with has to do with your school board. If so, fill in the name and contact information for your school board members in the directory worksheet.

State Representatives

Sometimes the issues you're advocating for affect more people than just those in your local area. Sometimes they affect people throughout your whole state. In this case, you need to find out who your State Senators and State Representatives are. They represent the issues of people in your state, in the state capitol.

Finding out who you need to advocate to in state government is the next step in completing your legislative directory included in this workbook.

National Representatives

Three individuals advocate on behalf of people in your state on a national level—two Senators and one Congressional Representative. If the issue you're working on affects people all over the country, Congressional Representatives and Senators are the people you want to talk to. They can take your concerns on a local level and address them on a national level.

To find this contact information, you have multiple options. First, you can look in the front section of your local phone book, often called the "Government Pages." Here you can find information for both your state and federal representatives as well as local government officials.

Contact information for your representatives in both on the House and Senate can be found on two very informative websites. Since Members of Congress, both on the House and Senate side, often have multiple offices, it may be useful to write down the contact information for both their local (or district) office as well as their national office. Both listings can be found at the websites below:

U.S. House of Representatives: <http://www.house.gov>

U.S. Senate: <http://www.senate.gov>.

Senators

Senators represent the views and issues important to your entire state in the U.S. Senate in Washington, DC.

Representatives

Congressional Representatives represent the views and issues important to your district in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington, DC. Districts are defined as an area established by law for the election of representatives to the U.S. Congress. In the United States every person has a Congressional Representative, or someone who advocates to the United States Congress for the issues important to your community. Representatives have offices in both the districts that they represent and in Washington, DC.

Congressional Committees

Sometimes the person you're going to meet is not the Representative or Senator from your area or state, but someone who holds a position on a congressional committee that deals with a particular issue that you're interested in. Committees are groups of Representatives and Senators who are selected to serve on issue-related groups—such as Budget, Education, or Labor—in the House or the Senate.

How does a bill become a law?

A bill starts by a legislative advocate talking to their Member of the House or the Senate. As this bill gets shared with other people, and it starts to gain more and support, it eventually gets to a Congressional Representative or Senator, which is where the formal process starts. If that Representative or Senator thinks the bill has a good chance of becoming a law, then he or she can carry it to Congress.

Step by Step

A bill is introduced by a member of the House or Senate.

It is referred to a committee by the House Speaker or the Senate Leader.

The committee considers the bill.

It is read a third time. Members then debate and vote on the bill.

It is read a first time, amended, and read a second time.

The committee reports the bill to the members of the House and Senate.

If passed, the bill is sent to the second chamber, where the process is repeated.

With support from the House Speaker or the Senate Leader.

The bill is then sent back to the committee.

Legislature may vote to override the veto; the bill becomes law without the President.

If passed, the bill is signed into law or vetoed by the President.

Action is taken by the House or Senate.

Visit Virginia's General Assembly website to find information on how a bill is passed and other helpful information. <https://capclass.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>

Planning for Visits with Legislators or Other Officials

You want to go into a meeting prepared with the information that you need, when you need it. It's important to do your research!! Be sure to do your homework on your representative too! Learn what your representative's history on an issue is. It's also important that you know the context for your issue. Researching the people, places, and things that are directly and indirectly affected by your issue can help you become stronger in what you want to talk about.

List the top three issues you want to address in your meeting.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What three things about your Girl Scout experience can you share that has relevance to the meeting?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What kind of experience (e.g., personal, professional, or other) and/or voting background does your representative have for each issue you've described?

Educate yourself ahead of time about how your representative's background, voting record, or pet projects might relate to your particular issue. This information may be valuable as you start to develop a plan of action for your meeting. Your representative will also know that you did your homework before setting up your meeting!

Issue 1: _____

Issue 2: _____

If your representative has little/no experience on your issues, how will you educate him or her?

What do you think the biggest challenges will be in talking about these issues to your representative?
What can you/your group do to make it easier?

What materials should I prepare to bring with me?

When preparing materials to bring to a visit with a legislator or a staff person, it is important to supply them with necessary information, details, and research regarding your particular issues. Documents that are one page or less are ideal! Stick to the KISSrule: Keep It Super Simple. If attending a GSCCC Legislative Day, the council will provide these for you.

A brochure/pamphlet about your group/organization

A sample of a product or document

Articles that may have been written about you/your work

How do I set up the visit?

Once you are all prepared, you're to make the connection with your representative to set up an appointment. If you are attending a GSCCC Legislative Day event, these appointments will be scheduled for you.

Here's a sample script you can use to practice making your call if you are scheduling a visit.

Sample Phone Script for Calling Your Legislator to Make an Appointment

Hello, Congressperson/Senator _____'s office.

You: May I please speak to the Senator's scheduler?

Scheduler: Yes?

You: Hello, my name is (state your name) and I am calling today to make an appointment with Congressperson/Senator _____. I am calling today because we would like to schedule a meeting with him/her or a key staff person to discuss (name the bill or describe the issue you would like to discuss).

Once a meeting is scheduled, remember to follow up with a phone call within one to two weeks of the date to confirm your appointment.

When setting up a meeting with a legislator, or with anyone for that matter, it's important to have a clear idea what you're going to say, and if you're going with a group, who is going to say it.

Introductions (e.g., who you are, what groups you represent)

Why you scheduled a visit

How you can be a resource for your legislator

What you want your legislator to do

Follow-up

Role play to rehearse for your meeting

Doing a role play activity before your actual meeting is a great way to get to rehearse your ideas. Take advantage of getting some outside input, such as having a mentor or an advisor serve in the role of the legislator/legislative staff person and also having someone serve as an outside observer. These individuals can help you think about what potential questions could come up and observe things such as body language, the tone of voice you use, and other verbal and non-verbal behaviors that can have an impact on your presentation.

Body language tips

Avoid standing/sitting with your arms crossed. It tends to look defensive. Instead, grab a paperclip to bend or play with underneath the table.

Identify assignments for presenters

Create assignments for all involved, both for the role play and the actual visit. When assigning roles for people in your group, or just yourself, it's good to think about it in terms of tasks. This does not mean that only one person is going to do the talking, but it does mean that individual group members each have a responsibility to make sure that the group gets the job done well. Some tasks are things that everyone should do, such as taking notes and telling your stories, but it helpful to have one person specifically assigned to these tasks, so that they do not fall to the wayside.

Here are a few roles and tasks you can use as an example when identifying assignments for each of your group members:

Facilitator: Keeps the group on task

Recorder: Takes notes throughout the presentation

Supplier: Keeps track of the handouts or documents you may decide to leave with the legislator/staff.

Testifier: Has a prepared personal story to tell that relates to the issue at hand.

Ten Tips for your visit

Be on time, if not a few minutes early

Dress in Girl Scout uniform.

Be very courteous to the office staff/receptionist

Always introduce yourself and those that you're with

Thank him or her for their previous support•

Get down to business quickly

Build on what each other says (think of it like building a house, it needs a strong foundation

Continually suggest how you can help him or her in this particular field

Always tie it back to the subject at hand (keep on task)

Thank them for the meeting.

Top Tip for after your visit:

Send a thank you note!!!!

Be sure to check out Girl Scout Civic Badges!



Girl Scout Uniform Tips

For over a century, Girl Scouts have proudly worn distinctive uniforms that symbolize the high ideals for which Girl Scouting stands. Uniforms provide unity among Girl Scouts and a feeling of belonging to a worldwide sisterhood. Girl Scouts wear uniforms for ceremonies, when officially representing Girl Scouts, and when they just want to share their Girl Scout pride. Please plan to be in full uniform when representing Girl Scouts on your legislative visits. A vest or sash is required, along with any white shirt and khaki pants or skirt. No heels, please.

Example: Uniform Basics



My Legislative Directory

LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

Mayor

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

City Council Members

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

School Board Members

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

State Senator:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

State Representative:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

National

U.S. Senator 1:

Name: _____

Local Office

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Washington D.C. Office

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

U.S. Senator 2:

Name: _____

Local office

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Washington D.C. office

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

U.S. Representative:

Name: _____

Local Office

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Washington D.C. Office

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Congressional Committees

Senate Committee

Committee Name: _____

U.S. Senator Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

House Committee

Committee Name: _____

U.S. Representative Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____