



Adventure Awaits

Findings from the
Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan
Impact and Growth Evaluation

April 27, 2024

girl scouts 
of southeastern
michigan

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Executive Summary

Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan (GSSEM) creates a community for southeastern Michigan youth in grades K-12 that supports them as they gain confidence, overcome barriers, try new things, develop vital social skills, learn to embrace risks, take on challenges, and embark on adventures. The program seeks to provide children with formative experiences to prepare them to serve as leaders in their community.

GSSEM's Deputy Chief of Research and Evaluation (DCRE) conducted an evaluation to learn about current Girl Scout member's experiences and learn about the interests and needs of youth in their service area who are not currently members. The evaluation used a mixed-method design that incorporated interviews and focus groups with Girl Scouts, their parents and guardians, youth eligible for Girl Scouts who are not currently members, and parents of non-member Girl Scout-eligible youth. GSSEM youth members, parents, guardians, and volunteers were also surveyed about their experience.

Key Findings

Girl Scout and Girl Scout Parent and Guardian Experience

Becoming a Girl Scout

- Girl Scouts and their parents or guardians most often learned about the program through the child's school (staff, an announcement, or an advertisement), a friend or family member, or the parent of the Girl Scout's classmate or friend
- The most frequent reason families gave for joining Girl Scouts was to continue the legacy of a parent, grand parent, or other family member who was a Girl Scout, to assist children in building community and gaining social skills, to join friends and family who are already Girl Scouts, and to have new experiences and learn new skills

The GSSEM Experience

- GSSEM provides value through encouraging youth to learn and try new things and skills, building social skills (including confidence and independence), providing community, and helping youth develop strong values
- Girl Scouts and their family's favorite experiences included camp and outdoor activities, social and community events and activities, field trips, skill development programs and events, overnight trips and travel, and community and civic service opportunities

Girl Scout Challenges and Recommendations

- Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians most frequently discussed challenges and recommendations relating to a specific troop-related activity or program, social challenges (within troops), timing and scheduling, Girl Scout processes and systems, certain aspects of the GSSEM Cookie Program, and certain aspects of Council Events

¹ Throughout this evaluation we use the term "youth" instead of "girl" to be inclusive of all Girl Scouts. For more information please see the GSSEM Gender-Expansive Youth policy at [Get the Facts | Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan \(gssem.org\)](https://www.gssem.org/get-the-facts)

Insights from Non-Girl Scouts and Families

- Non-Girl Scouts and their families associated Girl Scouts with cookies, social involvement, camping and the outdoors, community service, and skill and values building
- The most frequent barriers to involvement included scheduling and timing, accessibility for children with physical and developmental disabilities, child's disinterest in Girl Scouts, family's lack of knowledge about how to join or what Girl Scouts involves, and children's friends not participating nor wanting to participate in Girl Scouts
- Families reported that the most important considerations for after-school activity choice included location and transportation, cost, scheduling and time, whether a program promotes and teaches positive values and skills, and whether the program features novel and exciting opportunities
- Non-Girl Scout respondents suggested several marketing and communication approaches for Girl Scouts: involving older Girl Scouts in recruitment, leveraging social media (showcasing Girl Scouts participating in various activities, having posts be girl-run), and emphasizing opportunities for older Girl Scouts

Insight and Growth Evaluation Framework

Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan

In 2009 several smaller Girl Scout councils in Michigan merged to form Girl Scouts of Southeastern Michigan (GSSEM). GSSEM works with volunteers and community partners to provide girls with a vast array of programming, adventure opportunities, and hands-on experiences. GSSEM serves girls in Genesee, Oakland, Lapeer, Macomb, Monroe*, Sanilac, St. Clair, and Wayne* counties. GSSEM creates a community for Southeastern Michigan youth in grades K-12 that supports them as they gain confidence, overcome barriers, try new things, develop vital social skills, learn to embrace risks, take on challenges, and embark on adventures- all of which prepare them for success as the leaders of tomorrow.

GSSEM recruits and trains volunteers to serve as troop leaders in their community, empowering these leaders to champion the mission and vision of the Council. GSSEM provides volunteers and troops with support, coordination, and oversight to ensure they provide Girl Scout experiences aligned with Girl Scout policies and values. Trainings and support are provided by the Membership & Recruitment Team, while the Program Team works to plan and implement events and activities to support girls in their growth and development with a focus on GSSEM's Four Pillars: STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math), Life Skills, Camp & Outdoors, and Financial Literacy & Entrepreneurship.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic schools went virtual and safety concerns prevented Girl Scouts from meeting in person. Around the same time a new Executive Director came to GSSEM with a vision to expand and evolve Girl Scout programming in the area. As schools began to reopen and Girl Scout activities started again, GSSEM leadership recognized the opportunity that change brings. This evaluation serves to measure GSSEM's current impact and examine how best it can grow and change to serve the interests and needs of youth and families in Southeastern Michigan.

² For any counties marked with an asterisk, only certain areas are covered under GSSEM.

Evaluation Design

This evaluation took a mixed-methods approach. This included:

1. Surveys of Girl Scouts, their parents and guardians, and GSSEM volunteers
2. In-depth interviews with Girl Scouts, their parents and guardians, GSSEM volunteers, external girls in grades K-12 in GSSEM service areas, and external parents and guardians of girls in grades K-12 in GSSEM service areas
3. Focus Groups with Girl Scouts, their parents and guardians, GSSEM volunteers, external girls in grades K-12 in GSSEM service areas, and external parents and guardians of girls in grades K-12 in GSSEM service areas

This evaluation took place over a six-month period, beginning in October 2023 with the last interviews and focus groups conducted, as well as the survey closing, in February 2024.

Girl Scouts measures membership in the Salesforce system under various categories: “Girl Membership,” “Adult Membership” and “Lifetime Membership.” The category of “Girl Membership” captures all Girl Scout youth membership. GSSEM and GSUSA allows for membership of cisgender girls (gender identity and sex assigned at birth is female), as well as gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender-neutral, and transgender youth (gender identity girl and sex assigned at birth is male or gender identity boy and sex assigned at birth is female). Therefore, the category of “Girl Membership” is used as a technical term and not as a descriptive term for purposes of this evaluation.

Evaluation Questions

GSSEM designed and organized this evaluation based on the following questions:

1. How well do the programs offered through GSSEM cater to the diverse needs, interests, and preferences of the girls in Southeastern Michigan?
2. Why do some eligible youth not participate in Girl Scouts?
3. What changes or offerings could attract non-Girl Scouts and encourage them to engage with GSSEM?
4. How do GSSEM's communication and marketing strategies impact the decisions of a child or family on whether to join the organization and participate in programs and camps?
5. What new communication and marketing strategies could be used to attract potential Girl Scouts and volunteers?

Evaluation Activities

Surveys

Girl Scouts

From November 2023 to February 2024, we surveyed Girl Scouts who participate through GSSEM. Youth grades K-12 were invited to take the survey, but all respondents were in grades 1-12. Girl Scout youth members were recruited via email, posts to various social media and internal communication platforms, and tabling at GSSEM events. As an incentive, youth were either offered a \$5 Amazon gift card, a Fun Patch, and/or were entered for the chance to win one \$100 Visa gift card (depending on where and when they completed the survey). Qualtrics software was used to complete surveys. This site provides methods of ensuring respondent diversity across multiple categories (race, geographic location, and grade).

Girl Scout Parents, and Volunteers Guardians

During the same time, we surveyed parents and guardians of Girl Scout youth members and GSSEM volunteers. Adults were recruited using the same methods as Girl Scout members (email, posts to various social media and internal communication platforms, and tabling at Girl Scout specific events). As an incentive Girl Scout parents and guardians were either offered a \$5 Amazon gift card or were entered for the chance to win one \$100 Visa gift card (depending on where and when they completed the survey). Qualtrics software was used to complete surveys.

Focus Groups & In-Depth Interviews

Girl Scouts, Parents, and Guardians

We also spoke to current Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians via virtual focus groups and in-depth interviews. Participants were recruited via email, posts to social media, and internal communication platforms. Each participant was offered a \$75 Visa Gift Card upon completion of the focus group or interview and received the gift card upon completion of the conversation.

Three types of interviews were offered:

1. Youth participating in Girl Scouts as Daisies (K-1st graders) or Brownies (2nd-3rd graders) along with their parents
2. Youth participating as Juniors (4th-5th grade) and above on their own (no parents)
3. Parents or guardians of Girl Scouts participating in the interview without their child(ren)

Three types of focus groups were offered:

1. Daisies (K-1st graders) and/or Brownies (2nd-3rd graders) along with their parents
2. Girl Scouts 4th grade and up participating with similar grade peers from their geographic region (no parents)
3. Parents participating with other parents from their geographic region (no children)

Parents were invited to sit in to observe during youth focus groups and interviews.

Community Member Girls 6th-12th Grade and Parents/Guardians

Community members were recruited from several different regions in the GSSEM service area. GSSEM partnered with Cypher Research, a local firm, to recruit a diverse group of individuals for in-person and virtual focus groups and interviews.

Recruitment criteria for youth interviews and focus groups:

1. The child identified as a girl
2. The child lived within the designated area of focus for each group or interview
3. The child was in the grade range of focus for that particular focus group

Recruitment criteria for parent interviews and focus groups:

1. The adult is a parent or guardian of a child in grades K-12
2. The adult lives within the designated area of focus for each group or interview

After GSSEM’s DCRE collected the qualitative data, Dedoose (a web application used for mixed-methods research) was used to code responses for common themes. The DCRE then de-identified and analyzed the data using Excel and Tableau (a visual data analytics platform).

Evaluation Participants

Girl Scouts

388 Girl Scouts in 1st through 12th grades participated responded to our survey between October 2023 to February 2024. 44 Girl Scouts participated in focus groups and in-depth interviews during the same period. Although kindergarteners were invited to participate in the survey with a parent, none responded, so the survey only covered grades 1-12. Youth participating in the qualitative focus groups and interviews were in grades K-12. Respondents for each part of this study were racially and ethnically diverse and represented every county within the GSSEM service area.

Both Juliettes and Girl Scouts who participate as part of a Troop completed surveys. To get an idea of the length of experience of Girl Scouts respondents, the evaluation asked Girl Scouts how long they have participated in the program. 53.8% of respondents participated for 3 or more years.

Figure 1: Girl Scout Survey Respondents

While Kindergarteners make up 8.3% of Girl Members in MY24, none responded to the survey. 4th and 5th grade Girl Scouts responded at higher than representative rates.

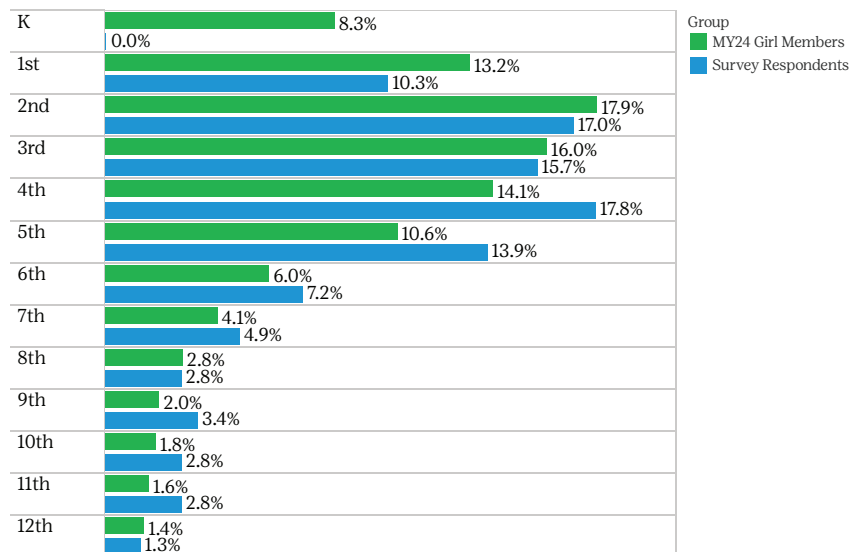
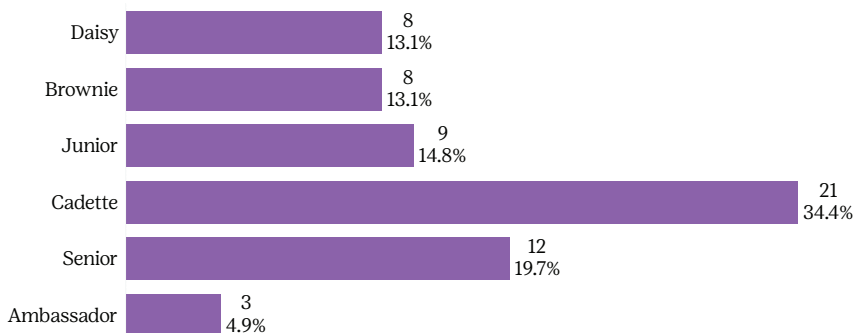


Figure 2: Girl Scout Youth Focus Group and In-Depth Interview Respondents
 Just over a third of Girl Scout In-Depth Interview and Focus Group respondents are Cadettes



Daisies
Grades K-1



Brownies
Grades 2-3



Juniors
Grades 4-5



Cadettes
Grades 6-8



Seniors
Grades 9-10



Ambassadors
Grades 11-12

Girl Scout Parents, Guardians, and Volunteers

744 Girl Scout parents and guardians responded to the evaluation survey, with 41 parents and guardians also participating in qualitative focus groups and interviews. 199 GSSEM volunteers who are not current Girl Scout parents responded to the evaluation survey. Respondents in all groups are racially and geographically diverse, representing every county in GSSEM’s service area. Some respondents and their children had just started participating or volunteering with GSSEM, while some volunteer respondents had been working with GSSEM for decades.

Almost half of Girl Scout parent or guardian respondents are also volunteers with GSSEM. Due to this, some of the answers can be used in both categories, gathering information from a parent that also represents a volunteer or GSSEM troop leader point of view.

Figure 3: Parent or Guardian Roles
 46.2% of Girl Scout parent/guardian survey respondents also hold a volunteer role with a Girl Scouts



Community Member Girls

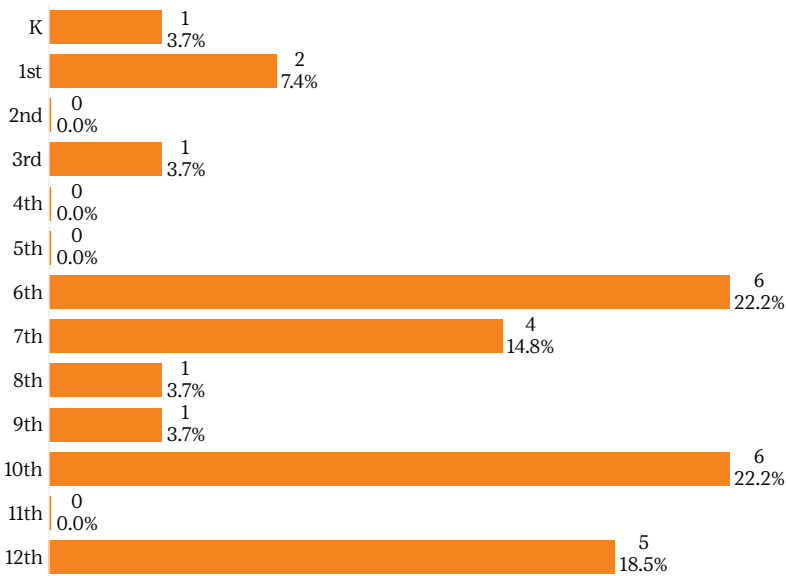
To gauge non-Girl Scout community members’ impressions of Girl Scouts we held two focus groups and one in-depth interview with girls grades 6-12 in the GSSEM service area. One focus group was held with non-Girl Scout youth from Genesee County grades 6-8, another was held with non-Girl Scouts from grades 9-12. There was representation from all grades except 12th grade. A high schooler in Monroe County was interviewed, while another interview was held with a middle schooler from Dearborn, MI.

The youth focus groups consisted of about half Black and African American girls (53.3% and half White or European American girls (46.7%).

Community Member Parents

To gather information about parents and guardians of girls in the GSSEM service area three focus groups were held: one in Wayne County, one in Genesee County, and in Monroe County. One in-depth interview was conducted with a parent of a girl in the southern Wayne County to ensure we had representation of a parent who lived further from the GSSEM Detroit Service Center. Exactly one-third of external parent and guardian respondents came from each of the above counties. Similar to the external girl focus groups and interviews, about half of respondents identify as Black or African American, while another half identify as white or European American. There was one person who identified as “Hispanic” in the Genesee focus group.

Figure 70 External Parent Focus Group and In-Depth Interview- Child’s Grade
Over half of respondents (55.5%) have children in grades K-8



Evaluation Findings

Scope of Report

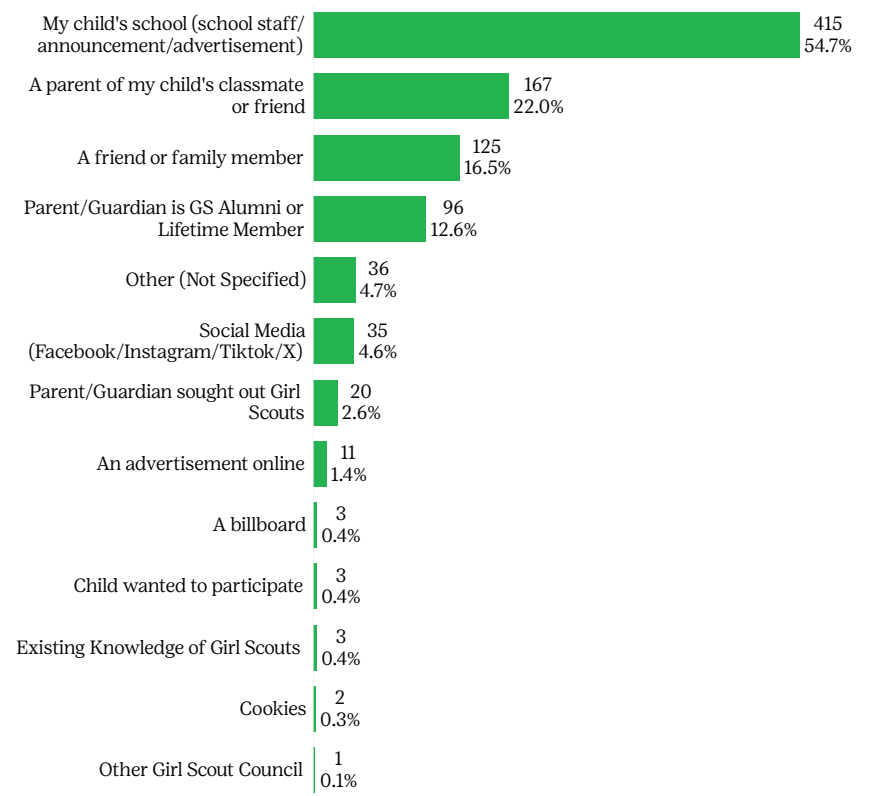
Due to the amount of data collected as part of this evaluation, we were not able to include all findings in this report. This report is a broad overview of results and, therefore, would not be able to give the space and focus necessary to complete a thorough analysis of these areas. GSSEM will continue to analyze and synthesize the findings, with internal reports specifically focusing on Council Programs, Camps, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, Highest Awards, and GSSEM Volunteer Experience.

The Origin of a Girl Scout’s Journey: family, friends, and school

When surveyed, over one-third of Girl Scouts in both grades K-6 and grades 6-12 reported that they first found out about Girl Scouts from their parents. Only a small percentage of Girl Scouts attributed their knowledge to a GSSEM advertisement (billboard, online, etc.), and about 2.5% discovered Girl Scouts from social media.

When asking parents how they first learned of Girl Scouts, over half of the parents surveyed stated it was from their child’s school, with the next most common source being a parent of their child’s classmate or friend.

Figure 8.2 Over half Girl Scout parent and guardian respondents stated that they found out about Girl Scouts from their child(ren)'s school



A smaller but still sizable portion of adults stated that they knew about Girl Scouts because they participated as a child, with some continuing to hold a lifetime membership. Previous experience with Girl Scouts proved to be an important reason that children and parents decided to join the organization and is discussed in the next section.

Motivations to Join Girl Scouts

During qualitative focus groups and interviews Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians were asked about why they chose to become involved with Girl Scouts after learning of the program. Participants had lots of different answers, but the most common one was that a parent or guardian had been a Girl Scout, and they wanted to continue the family legacy of Girl Scouting with their own children. One Girl Scout interviewee said:

I'm actually a third generation Girl Scout. My grandma was a troop leader for 30 years, and then my mom was a Girl Scout and then proceeded to be my troop leader. So yeah, so I'm third generation. My family's been doing Girl Scouting for a really long time.

When a Girl Scout reported that their parent had also been a Girl Scout, there was generally a family legacy of parents serving as a troop leader. A Girl Scout parent and guardian focus group participant spoke of her own reasoning for signing her child up for the program:

I was a Girl Scout growing up. My mom was a troop leader, she was a cookie mom. I really enjoyed those experiences as a child with her. And so when I had a daughter, I wanted to have those kind of experiences and make those kind of memories with her as well. So that's why we started doing scouting and I started my first troop then with her.

Others joined because of family and friends' current involvement in Girl Scouts. One youth respondents said:

...[H]ow I got into Girl Scouts was because my older friend, she was a Girl Scout, and I really wanted to do it so then my mom signed me up. And the reason I still stay in Girl Scouts is because I like to be with my friends after school and on the weekends and do fun stuff with them.

Another significant reason that Girl Scouts and parents signed up was the ability to create community and meet new people. One parent elaborated on the importance of joining Girl Scouts to broaden her child's social group and to have new experiences with different people:

I wanted mine to experience different opportunities and also learn about different cultures and also be around other people as well, because my two kids when they first started, they was kind of shy, so that opened them up.

The last most common theme was Girl Scouts and parent or guardian's desire to have their children experience, be exposed to, and learn new things. This focus group parent's reasoning was based on her research of the program:

I know that there's a lot of different life skills that Girl Scouts have had in the past, and I wanted my daughter to experience those things as well. And the more I dug into the Girl Scout national website and the GSSEM website I saw that there was a lot of other different things than just sewing and making smaller things. There's a lot, again, going back to the world of opportunities, a lot of opportunities that my daughter and even our family can do.

While Girl Scouts, parents, and guardians had many reasons for signing up for Girl Scouts, the majority had to do with the social opportunities the program offers and the promise of learning new skills and unique experiences. These hopes aligned with the value Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians found through the program, discussed in the next section.



Value Gained from Girl Scouts

When discussing value gained from participating in Girl Scouts, parents and youth agree on the two most key areas: Girl Scouts allows a space for trying new things and developing new skills, while also fostering the development of social skills through friendship and community. Parents and guardians of Girl Scouts also discuss their experience of Girl Scouts instilling strong positive values in their children.

Girl Scouts of all survey levels were most likely to agree with statements about trying new things and learning new things in Girl Scouts (See Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6: Grades K-5 “In Girl Scouts I try new things”

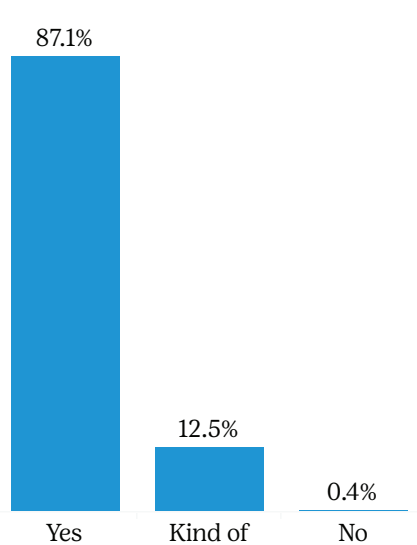
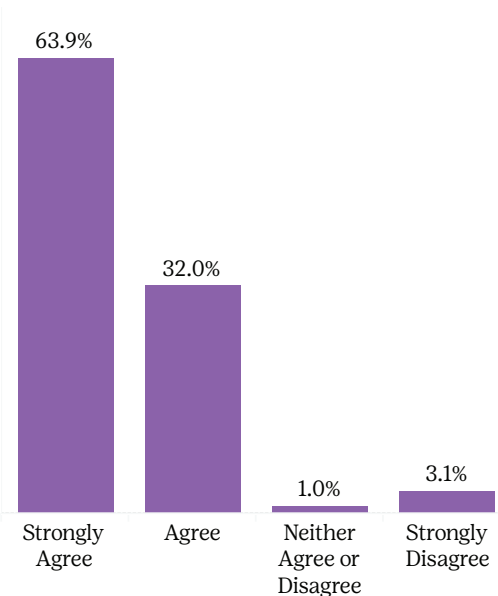


Figure 7: Grades 6-12 “In Girl Scouts I try new things”



When surveyed, most Girl Scouts of all Program Grade Levels (PGL) answered “Yes” (grades 1-5), “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” (grades 6-12) when asked if they learn new things in Girl Scouts. During focus groups and interviews, youth respondents highlighted their learning in entrepreneurship, sales, and business, responsibility and civic duty, and life skills they gained as part of their experience in Girl Scouts.

One Girl Scout parent talked about the skills her child gained helping her with her schoolwork:

[S]tarting [in] middle school was a challenge because sometimes she's got these great big projects that seem so overwhelming, and [she's] able to chunk it out into smaller groups. And I set micro goals, like chunk it out into smaller bits that are easier to swallow versus the entire project at school.

Social skill growth was also highlighted in every Girl Scout and parent or guardian focus group. Girl Scouts reported that they have learned to treat people with kindness, work more effectively in a team, and take more risks. One Girl Scout discussed the impact of her involvement on her communication and confidence:

I definitely have the better ability to speak up and talk because before I was very shy and would not talk to anyone. But now I see myself, if I have to call the business, I feel more comfortable and have the ability to do that.

Parent and guardian respondents also saw growth in social skills. One parent of a Senior or Ambassador emphasized the importance of Girl Scouts in her daughter's social development:

[M]y daughter is not very social. So that's been a little bit of a struggle in her experience, which is part of why I'm so thankful for the Girl Scout crew, because the leaders are amazing... I think if she hadn't gotten into that so young, her struggles in middle school and high school would've been even much more significant.

The final common theme of gained value from Girl Scouts that parents reported was a strong value system. One parent noticed her eleven-year-old Girl Scout referencing the things she learned in the outside world:

[I]f we are out and she'll see something [that she thinks is not right] and she'll be like, 'Oh, that's not in the Girl Scout Law. You shouldn't do that.' Or she'll say things like, 'No, she's not abiding by the Girl Scout Law.' So she takes the Girl Scout law very serious. So it's like she holds that to a high standard of what she's representing.

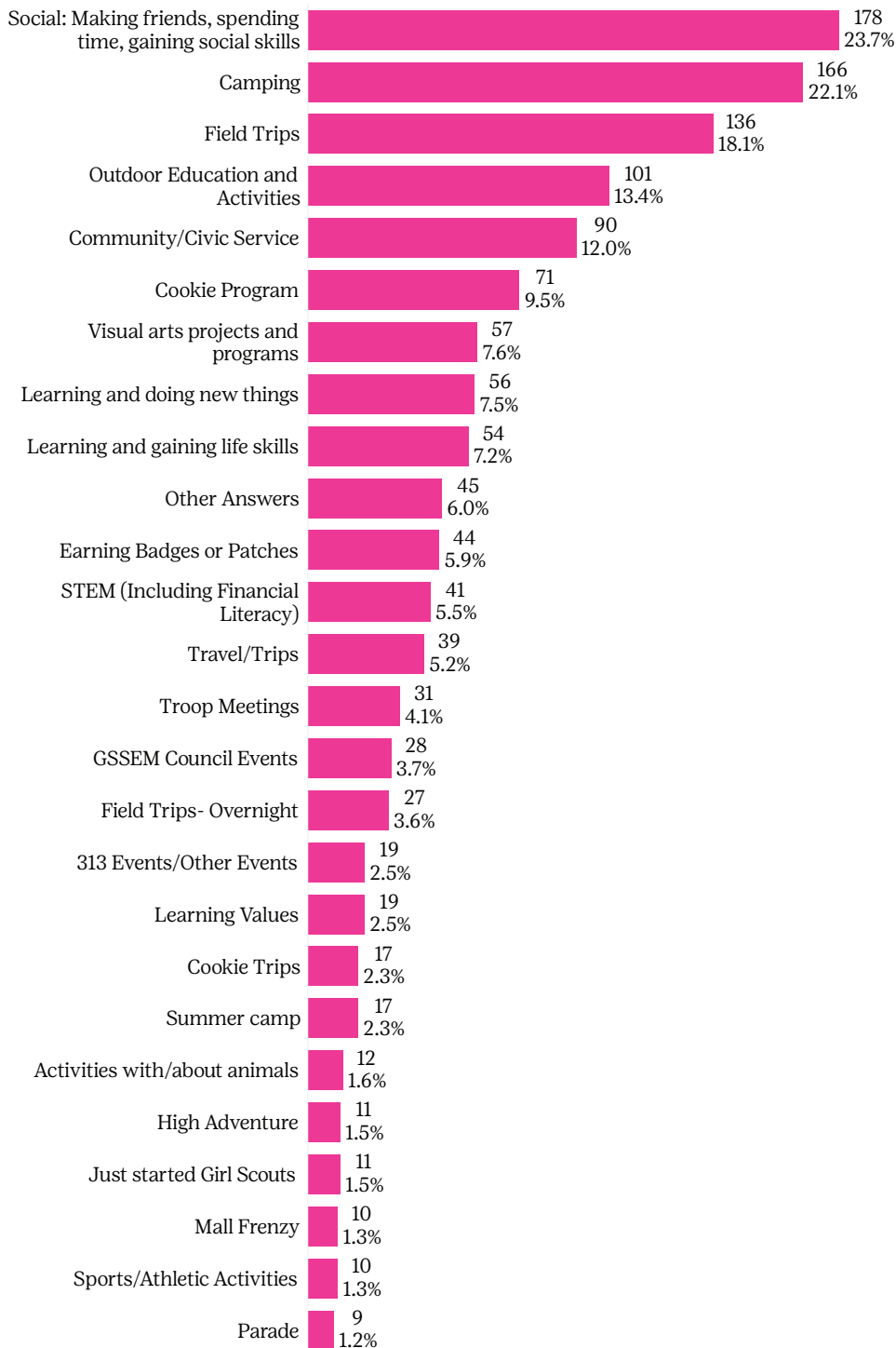
The outcomes of new experiences and skills, social skills, and values were consistent across grade levels, showing that Girl Scouts met the expectations of many members after they joined.



Girl Scout and Family Favorites

When surveyed about their favorite thing as part of Girl Scouts, youth of all PGLs reported that camping was their favorite activity (see Appendices). This was followed by social and community events, field trips, skill development, and overnight trips and travel. Parents and guardians responded similarly, with social and community events being their favorite followed by camping and then field trips (Figure 8).

Figure 8: GSSEM parent and guardian favorite activities since joining Girl Scouts



One youth participant of a Cadette, Senior, Ambassador focus group emphasized that camping is essential to her Girl Scouts experience, saying:

Our troop tries to go camping as often as we can, and whenever we go, I look forward to it a lot. And we normally go to Playfair or Hawthorne (Hollow)... and it's just really fun to be around this group of girls that you are so comfortable with.

The emphasis of being outdoors was often mixed with the fun of being with other Girl Scouts and friends. Connected to the outcomes of building social skills and community, social and community events were the second most discussed type of activity when talking about favorites. A Senior and Ambassador parent and guardian focus group participant talked about how, regardless of the activity, the social aspect is important to her and her child:

We've seen different Broadway shows and things, and we've done so many skill building lessons at many different places all over Metro Detroit, and it's been really cool and to have a group of girls they can share that experience with for us, particularly being that we visited another school, my daughter had the opportunity to make connections with people she wouldn't have otherwise met.

Another aspect of Girl Scouts mentioned as a favorite in the surveys as well as most focus groups and interviews were the field trips. Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians alike spoke about the importance of these events to give children new experiences and add novelty and variety to the Girl Scouts experience. A respondent from a Senior and Ambassador parent focus group talked about a specific event she remembers:

[A]ll the opportunities are phenomenal, but I think the one that pops in my head was a glass blowing class the girls went to. Number one, when [else] would they ever have that opportunity? I don't know. And number two, it was so affordable.

A favorite discussion in focus groups and interviews with older girls and their parents (Cadettes through Ambassadors) were the out-of-town trips they have done with GSSEM or their troop. The parent of an Ambassador recalled her favorite Girl Scout experience with her child, a trip that allowed the troop to practice their planning and organization skills:

[W]e went as a troop to Chicago, and we had all the girls bring their moms so that we didn't have to be as responsible. So we had, I don't remember how many, maybe 10 girls and 10 moms. And we took the train to Chicago and then we stayed in a hostel. So that was kind of cool too. And yeah, it was really fun... We saw a lot of things in Chicago, and we went to a play there. We saw Matilda there... We kind of had them research what they wanted to do and research the cost and everything like that. And they all had goals, how much cookie sales they wanted to do. So if you want to do all these things, this is how many cookies... And so yeah, it was a good trip and they learned a lot, I think.

Finally, Girl Scouts, parents, and guardians reported that community service work and giving back were some of their favorite experiences as a Girl Scout. One Senior Girl Scout remembered a specific project they enjoyed:

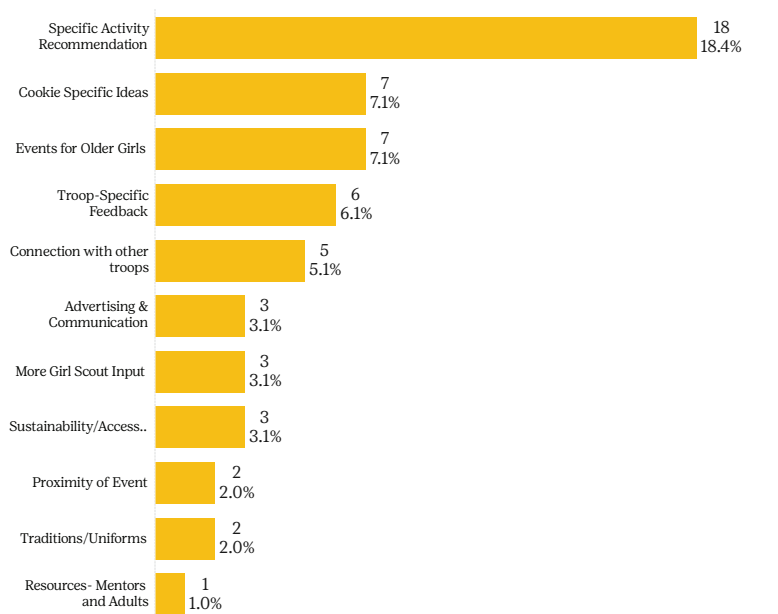
[W]e re-did the whole entrance to the senior center and made it a lot more accessible for the senior citizens that have their events there. We put in benches and we re-did all the landscaping and we put the edging in so that their walkers wouldn't go off and all that kind of thing. We put a lot of effort into that. We even talked to some physical therapists that were local to us, and we talked about how tall the benches should be, how far they should be from the parking lot to the building. We put a lot into that, and it was really cool to see it come through.

While there were some challenges and recommendations that Girl Scouts and their families faced, as discussed in the next session, respondents involved with Girl Scouts were enthusiastic in discussing their favorite parts of the program, and generally spoke about several things that they loved during their focus groups and interviews.

Challenges and Recommendations

During the evaluation, we asked Girl Scouts, parents, and guardians a number of questions to identify areas of improvement for GSSEM. While, generally, youth and parents were positive about their experience with Girl Scouts, there were some common themes that arose in challenges they've experienced, or about things they would like to see changed.

Figure 9: The most frequent recommendation of how to improve Girl Scouts from GSSEM respondents in grades 6-12 were activity-specific



Younger Girl Scouts and Parents/Guardians

Girl Scouts at the Daisy, Brownie, and Junior level were less likely to report challenges or activities that they disliked since becoming a Girl Scout. If there was a challenge or dislike, it was generally a specific activity or a social challenge within the troop. The most frequent complaint from younger Girl Scouts was regarding activities or programs that were too learning-focused or “school-like” and less hands-on. A Daisy and Brownie parent focus group participant talked about the challenges they face trying to engage their troop in STEM activities:

[T]he girls in our troop tend to want to do more arts and crafts type things or a lot of those. And to be honest, a lot of the badge work is more STEM related stuff and so they get frustrated that it's not as fun as they some of the stuff that they would like to do.

[My daughter] doesn't like a lot of the stuff is like research on, you know this woman or something like that and she's like, 'Mom, we have homework at school.'

One parent recommended taking unique approaches to some of the already existing badges, specifically ones that could potentially be less interesting to younger girls.

I love coding, but I also know that coding is boring to anyone who doesn't get coding, but I plan on doing like color by number type things where it's more fun and geared towards my younger [Girl Scouts] too. And how can you talk about cybersecurity without making people roll their eyes? I love this stuff. Yeah, but we for the robotics thing, I had them build a robot that drew pictures and they loved it. So it was hands on... They were all about it, so it's putting A twist on all that stuff so that it's fun cause they go to school all day. They want fun stuff.

Older Girl Scouts and Parents/Guardians

Cadettes, Seniors, and Ambassadors, as well as their parents and guardians, expressed significant frustrations with badges, programs, and activities offered to their PGL. One participant from a Senior and Ambassador youth focus group said:

I will say I have thought about quitting like a few times, but it's like for different reasons... [All of] the badges that we would do during the meetings were all like information just learning stuff and learning stuff and learning stuff. I liked the fun activities that we would do sometimes. They were like really the only reason I stayed in.

In a Cadette, Senior, and Ambassador focus group one respondent suggested updating badges for older youth so they feel less repetitive:

[I would recommend] more unique badges and patches you can earn because I find that at least with Cadettes there's five on technology and three on CPR and there's just a lot of the same badges but for different things, like different sections of it. You want to get all of them but then you're sort of just repeating the same thing.

One parent of an Ambassador discussed their frustration with how quickly workshops and programming for older youth sell out:

[O]ur CSA sessions for both of our, we did a books workshop and we're doing an astronomy one in January, those are the sessions of CSAs that sold out the fastest because they were just so freaking happy to find a field trip for them, especially the Ambassadors. We don't ever get field trips... So leaders are really excited and they're like, are you putting on more? Are you putting on more? We really like your events.

The same parent went on to express her appreciation for events put on by council, as it is difficult to plan her own events, trips, and activities for eight high schoolers.

Several older Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians mentioned wanting additional college and career readiness. A Senior or Ambassador focus group parent stated:

[A]s they're getting older too, I think there are some I've seen... but college stuff to talk about college, maybe college prep applications, anything to again kind of ease their fear with that too, about the apprehension that comes with, oh gosh, I got to start thinking about these things. I think that would be a good, helpful as well as they get older."

Overall youth and families who remain in Girl Scouts through the Senior and Ambassador level are very passionate about the organization. They are proud of their commitment and longevity as Girl Scouts, and want opportunities that grow with them and their interests.

Community Service

When asked about improving Girl Scouts several GSSEM members recommended increasing the amount and type of community service activities. A participant in a youth Cadette, Senior, and Ambassador focus group:

I think we should do more volunteer work because the basic idea of Girl Scouts is to help your community build a sisterhood and I think doing more volunteer work can help you get more involved with the community.

An older Girl Scout who is part of a multi-level troop recommended a more formal recognition for Daisie community service work:

I think at least in the case of my troop, it would be nice if there was an actual badge other than just a community helper badge for kids too young to get their Bronze Award to still be able to get something. While the rest of their troop is working on their Gold and Silvers and Bronzes and they just get a community helper badge. It would be nice if there's something a little more meaningful that they could get for that.

Girl Scouts and parents alike find the community service aspect of Girl Scouts integral and would be excited for more Council Events that focus on service throughout the Membership Year.

Cookie Program

A common discussion by Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians revolved around cookie rewards. Several parents mentioned that they were disappointed that Camp Hawthorn Hollow sessions were not included on the cookie reward options list for Membership Year 2024. Others expressed frustration that more of the cookie selling money did not come back to the troop or girl. One Girl Scout parent recommended changing the distribution:

So I'm hearing that we know that the money goes to the local council, but how can we have the girls see the benefit of all the work that they're doing and all the time that they're putting in and how could maybe that money be used to also teach them lessons along the way about entrepreneurship and saving and financial literacy? Mine would sell more if she got something out of it, but right now when she hits a certain level or it's like, oh, we can't go on the cruise and we can't go to Chicago, she's got no incentive to do it because she gets no benefit from it.

Several Girl Scouts and parents had recommendations for types of cookie reward prizes, citing other councils and past years' prizes. An Ambassador parent made recommendations about cookie reward prizes for older youth, suggesting electronics if trips are not within the budget.

Girl Scout Processes and Materials

A common theme among parent and guardian focus groups was confusion regarding communication with council staff or support services. A focus group respondent discussed her challenges with navigating the GSSEM calendar:

[S]ome of the events that are on the GSSEM website does not necessarily match with the calendar that you log into to actually sign up for some of these events that I've seen, some events that don't necessarily show up, it's like one or another.

To address concerns about the calendar system above, a parent from a Junior and Cadette focus group recommended that there be level-specific filters for the calendar. Another parent from a Daisy and Brownie focus group wanted the ability to filter for events that allow tag-alongs. Parents also requested that the price be on the first event page once you click from the calendar for transparency and planning purposes.

Gender Inclusivity

While GSSEM's policy allows trans, non-binary, and gender expansive youth to participate in the program, several parents and youth reported that they do not feel supported in their identity as part of the program. One parent states:

I've found that although Girl Scouts is gender inclusive as far as membership, I've found that's not [the case] when you talk to people.

Currently GSSEM does not collect gender identity information from youth members and did not collect that information as part of this study, which is a limitation to evaluating the responses. At this time, we are unable to disaggregate and analyze responses based on a member's gender identity. It will be important to further investigate how GSSEM can support trans and gender non-conforming members along with other historically disempowered communities in the future.

Cost

Some parents mentioned the barriers that cost can bring for their troops. One Girl Scout parent discussed the limitation that cost has created in the past for her children:

Sometimes my daughters, they do want to do other stuff as well, but the cost [is too high]. If we're selling all these Girl Scout cookies, why should we have to still pay for [them]. I understand if we have to pay for certain stuff, but not majority of every program that they are doing. It's like every time they have an event or something, we have to pay for something. We have to get new uniforms, we have to get new vests, they get patches done. We have to find somebody to sew them on, sew them on a different way.

Cost was most frequently discussed in relation to Council Programs, discussed later in this report.

Uniforms

Girl Scout traditions were discussed as both positive aspects of the program as well as challenges for some participants. A few Girl Scouts and parents talked about wanting more appealing uniforms for Seniors and Ambassadors. One respondent in a Senior and Ambassador youth interview said:

I think the vest color like for Seniors is that like kind of beige... I really loved the blue for when you were like a Daisy. It was so cute and everything, and I remember, like going to school and everyone thought it was so cool. When you wear your vest, if you had like a meeting after or something, and like I just feel like that like khaki color, just like isn't as great as it could be, I feel like a lot of the other ones have more fun colors like blue or green or whatever.... You know something a bit more peppy instead.

A Girl Scout parent also expressed the uniform limitations for older girls:

[M]y troop, I bought them all the official CSA scarf for when we said, you're all older now, so if there's events that you're asked to work or we're having a formal thing, I want you to have a full uniform. I gave them a bit more leniency than just khaki pants with your khaki vest and your white shirt. It's like they want them to blend into the wall. It really sums up everything perfectly. I gave them some color choices based on past uniforms, so khaki or olive pants, white or light blue or dark blue shirts just in whatever style suits you.

Other girls mentioned frustrations with their sashes falling off when they are at events or selling cookies.

Resources

Some parents and older youth suggested creative ideas for resources that would support Girl Scout members and families. One Senior interviewed suggested a mentorship or resource program for badges and patches.

In Boy Scouts they have this thing where you can just call somebody and somebody in your area specializes in that subject for say a badge or something like that. I think they're called badge officers... My brother's an Eagle Scout and for Boy Scouts, there's different levels of swimming badges and everything, and he had to go to, I don't know, Rochester High School or something pretty far from us. We live over Richmond, and he called up this random middle-aged guy. He was like, 'Hey, you're the swim coach over there. Can I come over there and can you help me with this?' And [the coach] was like, 'Yeah, of course, no problem.' It was a really good experience for him, and I wish that we could do that in Girl Scouts.

A parent suggested there be a directory of businesses and partners that are willing to work with Girl Scout troops:

Anyone else? I think having a resource of previous events that Girl Scouts [had]... Maybe it's with a local florist, or maybe it's a group, I'm trying to think of some, like a restaurant or something like that, to have a resource that [if] daughter or our troop couldn't be involved in that activity when it was already planned with Southeastern Michigan, but maybe we could coordinate with that company to do our own internal troop event with them.

A Daisy parent suggested some way for a troop to let prospective members know what types of activities a specific troop may like to participate in:

Be nice if we knew even just looking for a troop to join if you knew what their emphasis was. Are they really into collecting patches? Are they really into hiking and getting outdoors? Are they really into crafting or something? Not that anything is wrong with crafting, but that's not what I'm in Girl Scouts for and we're doing a lot right now in our current troop and I'm like, I'm a little bit bored.

Girl Scouts and parents, when faced with a challenge, often produced practical solutions that could support them in the future. This suggests that there may be opportunities for ongoing feedback with Girl Scouts and parents when creating materials and updating trainings throughout the membership year.

Marketing and Communications

As part of the evaluation, we asked Girl Scouts and their parents and guardians what ways we could encourage more youth their age to join Girl Scouts. Girl Scout respondents most frequently provided ideas about what specifically to market in the advertisements.

Marketing

Both younger and older Girl Scouts in focus groups recommended advertising activities that children may not do in their day-to-day life, such as horseback riding and archery. A respondent from a Cadette, Senior, Ambassador focus group suggested emphasizing specific events or activities that actual Girl Scouts did with their troop throughout the Membership Year:

One of the reasons I would tell people to join Girl Scouts is probably because of the different opportunities. There's one time my troop and I stayed overnight at the Toledo Zoo, and that was really cool because we got to walk around and see different exhibits after most people probably wouldn't see.

Several Seniors and Ambassadors recommended highlighting how Girl Scouts can provide college and career readiness opportunities. Many respondents talked about their classmates and friends' current focus on their future and suggested that showing how Girl Scouts could support them in their post-high school goals could encourage older youth to join.

So yeah, just presenting the ideas of that to other girls so they can understand how helpful Girl Scouts can really be. And it's not just meetings and just fun. No, [there's] actually real fundamental value in it. So yeah, that's what I think will pull some more girls in.

While the specifics of how to market varied with the age of respondents, the consistent recommendation was to market the parts of Girl Scouts that the general public may not already know about.

Communication

Girl Scouts and parents alike discussed the importance of having a more direct-to-Girl Scout and parent method of communication. A Macomb Senior and Ambassador Girl Scout focus group respondent said:

I wish that there was... an easier way to... get notified about events and stuff which would be really nice and everything. I know there's like online, but sometimes there it's kind of hard to tell.

Another parent suggested a notification system with the calendar and events:

For seeing the [GSSEM] events, it would be really nice to get a notification of when activities are being added to the event screen. It seems like something's automatically filled up by the time I find out, and it could be a week later only. But in fact, somebody knew about it and they... took all the tickets and lo and behold, the events already booked up. I'm like, I swear to God, I checked that website nearly every week. But yeah, I think there needs to be some sort of a flag or notification that an event is being added or maybe not only added or maybe close to capacity even.

Some parents discussed the challenges of finding out about events and programming when communication may be filtered through their child's troop leader, also reporting that many events fill up before they have the chance to register.

Council Events

Many of the suggestions from Girl Scouts and their parents were regarding Council Programs. Consistent with the recommendations above (Figure 9), several older youth expressed a hope for older youth only events.

Aside from grade-level feedback, many respondents recommended specific Council Event content. Youth survey, focus groups, and interview respondents also expressed wanting more events where they can connect with other Girl Scouts outside of their troop.

Many parents from counties across GSSEM's service area requested Council Programs closer to their house, programs that have a reduced cost, no cost, or with a more apparent option for financial aid, and programs with more advance notice so they can adjust their schedule to attend more events.

Insights from Non-Girl Scouts

This evaluation also included youth and parents eligible to join Girl Scouts but have not. We included these participants to understand how non-members perceive Girl Scouts and GSSEM, their reasons for not joining the organization, and ways that GSSEM could appeal to a wider audience. Community members who identified as girls grades 6-12 and, separately, parents of girls grades K-12 participated in focus groups and interviews.

What External Youth and Parents think of Girl Scouts

A quick web search for Girl Scouts will bring back dozens of links related to the Girl Scout Cookie Program, a Financial Literacy and Entrepreneurship Program that has been part of Girl Scouts since 1917. Consistent with this, almost every external youth and external parents and guardians answered "cookies" when asked the first word they thought of when they hear the term "Girl Scout."

The second most frequent answer people associated with Girl Scouts was the social and community aspect of the program. An external youth from Genesee County answered:

They do good things for their community too. They volunteer to go visit old people at nursing homes and stuff like that. Yeah, they don't just sell cookies and candy.

Another Genesee youth participant talked about the social aspect and community within

It's like they teach the girls how to be team players, how to just have a sense of community with their little Girl Scout troops.

external youth, parents, and guardians also associated Girl Scouts with camping and the outdoors. One external parent said:

I would assume that when you're a Girl Scout you would also go to these camping and do fun activities other than going door to door for cookies, like doing activities with your friends and stuff and learning more about customers and stuff and how to take care of things.

Finally, several parents spoke about “Girl Scouts Values” that youth may gain through the Girl Scout Program. A Wayne County parent, when asked about what they associate with Girl Scouts, answered:

Cookies, fellowship for the girls. Guidance, camping, strength

A common theme among external youth and parent or guardian responses were abstract answers. While participants had ideas about what a Girl Scout might do in or gain through the program, when asked specifically they could not give specifics. For example, participants may bring up that Girl Scouts earn badges, but most did not know what badges a Girl Scout might earn or how they might earn them.

Barriers and Reasons for Non-Involvement

When asked about their reasons for not joining Girl Scouts, the most frequent answers from external youth, parents, and guardians were timing and scheduling limitations, their disinterest or their child’s disinterest in Girl Scouts as an activity, and a lack of knowledge about whether Girl Scouts was active in their community and, if it is, what Girl Scouting actually entails.

External parents and guardians also expressed accessibility concerns regarding their child’s potential involvement with Girl Scouts. Some of the respondents have children on the autism spectrum, diagnosed with ADHD, or with physical disabilities. These parents did not know if their children could fully participate in Girl Scouts.

Finally, external youth talked about the importance of other friends being part of the organizations and after-school activities that they join. Several participants in focus groups and interviews said that they had never considered Girl Scouts because their friends were not interested in joining.

After-School Activity Preferences

To gauge what external families do want from an after-school activity, we spoke to youth and parents about their current after-school and extracurricular activities. Almost all the external youth we spoke to were involved with something outside of school. The most frequent activity our respondents participated in was dance or competitive dance, followed by school-associated and club sports. Some youth were involved in academic clubs or church activities, and a few of the children of Genesee parent focus group participants developed a skill (e.g., styling hair and nails, creating items to sell) and were exploring entrepreneurship through it.

When asked about the most important considerations when deciding on an after-school activity, parents and guardians were most likely to answer about the logistics, including time commitment, scheduling, transportation, and cost. Some parents also talked about the importance of character development in an after-school activity and the quality of adult mentors and coaches involved in it.

External youth were much more likely to talk about the social and community aspect of the potential extra-curricular. Many of the youth respondents said that they were much more likely to participate if their friends were already involved in an activity, and some said that they would join an activity to meet new friends.

Lastly, another objective of this evaluation was to determine what aspects of a program are most appealing and exciting to youth in Southeastern Michigan. When asked about the most memorable part of their current activities, external youth often talked about trips, competitions, and instances when they were able to experience new things.

Overall external youth, parents, and guardians were clear about their hopes and expectations of extra-curricular activities for their children. While some of the aspects that parents mentioned as important, such as the strong value-building nature of a program, aligned with their perceptions of Girl Scouts, barriers such as timing and the lack of youth's social circle involvement prevented respondent youth from becoming Girl Scouts.

Conclusion and Considerations

A considerable amount of data was gathered about Girl Scouts and their parents' current experiences, as well as the impressions and interests of non-Girl Scout youth and parents in the area. Youth and families had a positive experience with their time in Girl Scouts, while non-Girl Scout youth and families, especially parents, had a positive impression of the program.

Families consistently found their way to Girl Scouts through similar channels: schools, friends, and family. A strength of Girl Scouts, apparent from this study, is the school-based recruitment and membership. The ways that youth and parents found out about Girl Scouts, most commonly through their schools, influenced them to join, with a strong emphasis of the social aspect of the program.

Parents and children involved in Girl Scouts found that the program delivered what they hoped to gain. Girl Scouts and their parents reported growth in social skills, confidence, and independence. Girl Scout respondents overwhelmingly reported that they tried new things, learned new skills, and worked as part of a team in Girl Scouts. In addition, Girl Scouts and their parents emphasized the importance of, and their pride in, community service work.

Girl Scouts and their parents reported that they love camping, outdoor activities, social and community events and field trips. The stories that Girl Scouts told about their favorite experiences often included things they had never tried before and opportunities they would not have outside of Girl Scouts. Girl Scouts and families expressed a desire for more of these opportunities, with an emphasis on overnight trips and travel.

When discussing challenges and recommendations, Girl Scouts and their parents often gave feedback on specific badges, activities, or events. Cookie rewards were a common discussion, especially among older Girl Scouts. Parents expressed some challenges with scheduling, suggesting more advanced notice and weekends and summer scheduling for events. Some frustrations arose about GSSEM practices and systems, with a request for more direct to parent and Girl Scout communication, and hope that the calendar might be streamlined with some additional features for ease of use.

Speaking to youth and parents not associated with Girl Scouts, most respondents predictably answered that they associated Girl Scouts with cookies, but a considerable number also mentioned the social aspects, camping and outdoors, skills and value building, and the community service focus of the organization. Many of respondents' associations with Girl Scouts were the same things that they deemed important when enrolling their child in an after-school activity. In addition to positive values and skills-building and fun and exciting opportunities, external parents also wanted extra-curriculars with a convenient location, something close to home, and an activity with a flexible schedule. Barriers to their families joining Girl Scouts were scheduling and timing, accessibility concerns, and children's disinterest in Girl Scouts.

As a result of the evaluation, some options GSSEM could explore are:

1. Continuing the successful word-of-mouth and social recruitment through which members joined
2. Continuing to advertise lesser-known aspects of Girl Scouts that align with the interests of both internal and external youth and families (skills-building, college and career readiness, travel opportunities, Highest Awards)
3. Involving Girl Scouts, especially older youth, in the creation and distribution of social media-based advertising
4. Developing resources for troops and Juliettes, as well as prospective members, based on ideas presented in this report and additional user feedback
5. Engaging external youth in programming to expose them to the possible opportunities in and benefits of Girl Scout membership
6. Inviting participant feedback regularly to create new resources for troops and families
7. Exploring options and opportunities around more accessible troops
8. Leveraging the Juliette program which provides families with flexibility of timing, location, and interest

This is not an exhaustive list, and this evaluation is designed to be used by GSSEM leadership as a tool in their efforts to improve and grow the organization.

It is important to note that GSSEM has used some of the above strategies in the past and is implementing some of these ideas currently. This evaluation may help to inform those efforts to support Girl Scouts and families and to engage external youth and families. Revisiting previous initiatives and efforts with the guidance of both internal and external feedback could provide opportunities to enhance ideas that already exist within the GSSEM Council.

Overall, GSSEM members show high satisfaction and positive outcomes during their time with Girl Scouts. Although there are some challenges and barriers, most Girl Scout respondents were committed to and enthusiastic about being Girl Scouts and are excited to improve and grow the organization along with volunteers and staff.

Appendix

Figure 10: 19% of respondents grades 1-5 reported that camp was their favorite activity since joining Girl Scouts (includes both summer camp and troop camp)

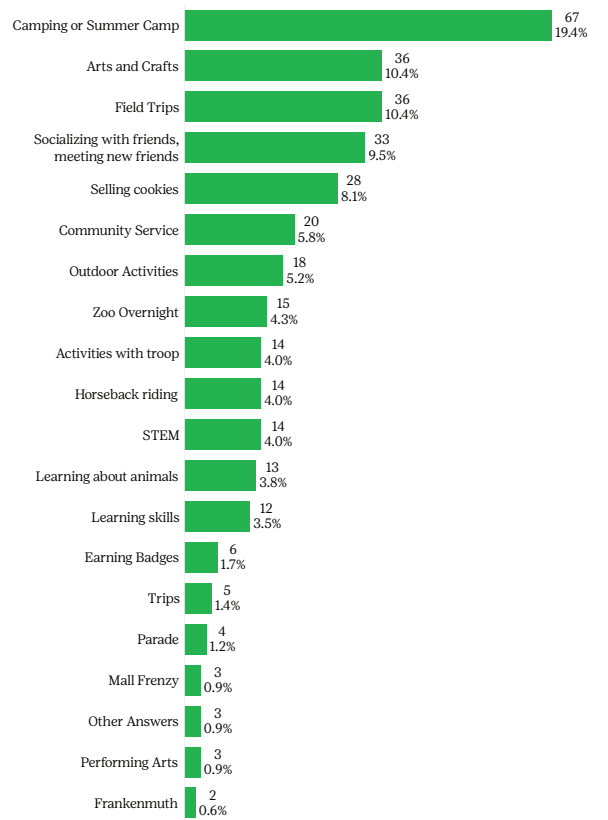


Figure 11: When respondents grades 6-12 were asked about their most enjoyed activity as a Girl Scout, the most common answer was Camping/Camp activities at 20%

