Troop or group web page guidelines

NOTE: This guide was developed by GSUSA with some modifications by GSGLA staff.

These guidelines are written for adult volunteers, older girls, and others considering developing a Web page or "home page" for a troop or group in Girl Scouts. Although there is some "how to do it" information, the guidelines are not meant to lead you through the construction process. We leave that to the experts. We suggest that you find someone who knows the technical and legal aspects of web construction. **Please consult with your service unit's communication coordinator, website facilitator, or service unit manager before creating a group web page. Or, email marketing and communications staff at communications@girlscoutsla.org if you have any questions.**

Information posted to the Internet on a web page can be read by people all over the world. Therefore, safety and how you represent yourselves as Girl Scouts should be the guiding principal of any web-based endeavor, even if your information is password-protected. This includes issues of privacy, language use, sponsorship, links, and use of any kind of copyrighted material (writing, music, brand images, and pictures).

Is a web page right for your troop or group?

Unless you have expertise within your group, such as parents, or are using a web development template supplied by your service provider, consider recruiting technical expertise. Your council might have a list of volunteers, or you might approach a community college computer lab, a professional in web development, or someone who develops websites for a hobby. Girls can be involved in the process at all levels—decision-making, research, writing, graphics, and the web page creation.

Consider the following when deciding whether or not to develop a troop or group web page:

Poll your service unit/troop members regarding Internet access. Family Internet access will determine whether a web page will be limited to advertising your group, or used as a communication vehicle. If most families don't have web access, you will have to communicate information in a different manner.

As a group, determine why you want a web page. Is it because your service unit or council is giving you an opportunity to post information about your group? Is it to post important dates and notices? Is it a scrapbook record for girls and their families to share? Is it a place to keep track of girls' work?

How much will it cost? Are you part of someone else's site, or are you purchasing your rights to your own web address? Will there be additional costs for a password protected site? Does that site provide a way to keep individual files and downloads? Does it have a calendar function? Does it have email and bulletin board features?

Consider the time needed for site upkeep. Who will be responsible for posting changes? How often do you want to change the site—weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly?

Discuss whether your site will remain an information-only site, or whether you want additional functions, such as an interactive component, which will require password protection. Below is a chart comparing the features of public pages to password-protected pages on the Internet.

Comparison between public and password-protected web page Features

Possible features for your web pages obtained through	Public Internet pages...OR..	Password-protected pages and community collaboration space
Space for description of group	YES	YES - this can be your entry page for group members to sign in
Downloads for permission slips	NO - unless they are generic, not listing specific information	YES
Group email address for public and other Girl Scouts	YES	YES - if you place on the sign-in page
Individual pictures and pages for each troop/girl	Not recommended for security purposes	YES - each troop/girl can have her own page and/or file
Links to council and GSUSA websites	YES	YES
Links to other websites	YES - with qualifications.	YES - with qualifications.
Listing on search engines	YES. Meta-tags can be placed on the page.	YES, meta-tags can be placed on sign-in page.
List-serve of individual emails or phone list	NO. This is against all safety guidelines.	YES - with permission.
Meeting notes	Possibly - with edits. No descriptions of where girls will be meeting or going.	YES - protected with password.
Picture of group for public;	Yes - if have parental permission.	Yes - if have parental permission.

pictures of group activities	Use of first names only.	Recommended first names only.
Records of girls' work	NO - not recommended.	YES- if folders are an option.
Troop/service unit calendar	NO - unless very general as to dates, not including place and time.	YES- if calendar function is an option.
Use of GSUSA/GSGLA trademarks (e.g. badges)	NO	NO
Use of GSUSA/GSGLA Logo (e.g. GS "three faces" logo)	With permission only. Email communications@girlscoutsla.org to discuss	With permission only. Email communications@girlscoutsla.org to discuss
Use of copyrighted music	NO - unless you have permission to use from music company and/or owner.	NO - unless you have permission to use from music company and/or owner.
Use of artwork from books or web	NO - unless you have permission to use from owner.	NO - unless you have permission to use from owner.

Getting Started

If your troop or group decides to post a web page, begin with the following:

Spend time looking at other websites. Note what you like about them. Search for other "Girl Scout troop" or group sites, as well as "Girl Scout council" sites. Note any safety or copyright issues you encounter when looking at other Girl Scout sites after you have reviewed the sections on safety and copyrights. (See http://www.girlscouts.org/councilfinder/ for a listing of council sites.)

Research hosts for your site on the Internet. This is where your council and your technical person can be of great help.

Here are a few website platforms many service units/troops currently use for their websites:

- Google Sites - sites.google.com
- Shutterfly Share Groups - http://www.shutterfly.com/classroom-share/?esch=1
- Scoutlander - http://www.scoutlander.com/
- Rallyhood - http://hello.rallyhood.com/

Consider learning simple html or other web language, or utilizing a more sophisticated program, such as DreamWeaver or FrontPage, which writes the code. Girls can also learn how to prepare photos and graphics for the web, as well as video and music posting. Be prepared to scale back

your graphics or to break your content into separate pages (files) so that your audience will not have to wait a long time to see your web page. Learn how to create versions of graphics that require less time to download.

Create an outline of the information of your site. It can be very simple on one page, or it can take the form of more than one page, with links between. The kind of hosting you decide upon will either limit or broaden your options.

Developing your web page

Write the text for your page(s). Check for spelling and grammar carefully. Ask other people to help you proofread as well.

Create or find graphics on the web for your page. Be sure not to use graphics that are copyrighted by someone else without their permission.

Consider any links you want to create between your site and other sites carefully. Each linked site should contain only material that is safe and suitable for Girl Scouts (and children) using the web. Avoid sites that contain inappropriate advertising or lack of educational value. Ads change frequently, sometimes every few seconds, so it may be impossible to keep track of these links from your site!

Rather than saving and re-uploading council forms, simply link to the GSGLA web address for each form. That way, when forms are updated, they will be updated on your site too. Remember: Always link to the source of the document/form when possible rather than duplicating (and possibly distorting) information.

Publishing your web page

There are many ways to post the pages you create on the Internet. You may have to pay a monthly fee, especially if you go over allotted space for free services, or if you want extras, like chat, file sharing, etc. Most Internet service providers or search engine sites, such as AOL, Yahoo, or Google have publishing options. They also provide a list of suggested hosting options, as well as many helpful hints about website development and establishing "user communities." Look for security features, privacy features, amount of space available, and cost from a provider. (The free sites are listed on page 3 of this document under "Getting Started.")

If you are offered space on a website that is a private business or owned by an individual, be very cautious. You become associated with that person's domain name (Internet address). You should

NOT be associated with a commercial business unless it is clear that they are sponsoring space only, and you should check out the site content and its links, as well as the business to see whether you are in appropriate company for a Girl Scout group. For example, it might not be appropriate to be sponsored by a winery or a gun shop, but it would be OK to be on the site of your local library or your public newspaper with other nonprofit youth groups. A site that has links to sex shops would not be appropriate. If your group's sponsor offers you space, you should check with your Girl Scout council before accepting; and they can help you word a statement that needs to be placed on your page or the page of your sponsor to indicate that the sponsorship of the page does not indicate Girl Scout endorsement of the host site.

Create an email account specifically for your website. It should be monitored by an adult. Never use a personal email account for your troop/group website.

Never post full names of girls, girl email addresses, family email addresses, or troop or group meeting places on a public web page. Have only one or two adults as the administrators or a girl/adult in partnership. Rotate the responsibilities if girls are interested in learning how to administer a site. Determine a schedule for updating your site before it is posted. Some sites will only need to be updated quarterly, or when something is meant to be shared, such as pictures from a camping trip or service activity. Ideally, sites that are password-protected should be updated after each meeting or event in preparation for the next meeting or event. Be sure to remove old sites from free hosting services. If you choose a service that has password-protected space, you must set up ways to protect the password for the users. Limit it to girls and parents or guardians and use a tier of different user rights.

Determine a schedule for changing the passwords and discuss the importance of keeping the password within the member group.

Corresponding with the public

Never post live messages from other people on your website, in a guest book, or on a bulletin board. Every message should be read by someone (the service unit communication coordinator or service unit manager is recommended), edited where necessary, and then posted. Do not post full names and addresses or emails of individuals posting to guest books or bulletin boards. You may post first name, troop/group, and city or state. You do not have to post every message sent to you. Rules or "netiquette" should be discussed and posted on the site. (e.g., no full names; no put-downs, bad language, etc.) Do not offer to act as a broker for girls or groups wanting pen pals. Pen-pal requests must go through a council pen pal coordinator.

Never correspond on any topic not related to your website or Girl Scouts on your Girl Scout email. For example, you should never respond to ads, requests for money, or questions about where your group meets.

FAQs about Girl Scout symbols and clip art

Q: What are Girl Scout symbols?
A: GSUSA and GSGLA symbols are trademarked graphics, such as the Girl Scout logo, Girl Scout badges, and official pins and awards.

Q: Are there guidelines for use of these symbols?
A: Yes. GSUSA and GSGLA symbols cannot be used without authorization from Girl Scouts. Permission may be granted to Girl Scout groups wishing to use the Girl Scout logo on their web page, but they must consult with GSGLA's marketing and communications department first. Please email communications@girlscoutsla.org to get permission. There are rules for use of the GSUSA logo. For example, the logo must appear on a solid background, it may not be put into another graphic or used as background "wallpaper" or watermark, or be made into buttons.

For more about obtaining permission, go to Terms and Conditions, on girlscouts.org. Or, email communications@girlscoutsla.org to talk to a council staff person in the marketing and communications department.

Q: If I have used Girl Scout trademarked symbols and haven't followed the guidelines, what should I do?
A: Change your design.

Q: Why get excited about the misuse of Girl Scout symbols?
A: Girl Scouts must protect the integrity of its trademarked symbols and their use. If the symbols are misused, they no longer send a clear message about who we are. If Girl Scout symbols are used with a product, people may assume that GSUSA endorses that product. If they are used without permission, they may be used inappropriately.

Q: What about using art work from Girl Scout books?
A: Artwork is also protected by copyright laws. More important, it may be owned by the artist. Even Girl Scouts of the USA doesn't always have permission to reproduce it, once it has been used for a specific purpose.

Q: Where can we get graphics for use on our site?
A: Many sites on the web, maintained by companies and individuals, offer free graphics for use by

individuals and nonprofit organizations. It is important to read the legal statements and special instructions for downloading from each site you visit. Make sure that the artwork is owned by the site giving permission for use.

Glossary

Browser - software and a "user-friendly" interface that allows access to pages and sites on the web, as well as a search function for finding pages related to specific topics. A browser has features that allow the user to do things once there, such as downloading files or saving pictures. Popular browsers include FireFox, MSN Explorer, and Yahoo. Yahooligans is just for kids.

Bulletin board - an electronic message center, where visitors can leave messages, which are either live or screened, then posted. Usually focused on specific topics.

home page - a name for the first page of any collection of web pages or a website, often referred to as the "front door" of a website.

html - abbreviation for hyper text mark-up language, which is the basic code-based language used with text to create web pages.

list serve - a collection or list of email addresses that are kept together. When you send out an announcement, you place the name of the list serve in the address window and the email goes to everyone on the list serve.

Password protection - ensures that unauthorized users do not access the computer or web pages. A password is a secret combination of characters (letters and numbers) that allow the user to access a page or files online.

Search engine - this is a program, often included in or linked to by a browser or found at its own address, such as google.com, which allows you to search a database of web pages.

web server - a dedicated computer or system of computers that allows content to be served to a web browser and sent to a user's web browser. The browser and server communicate using HTTP language. There are different types of servers that provide different functions using different computer languages, such as Audio/Video servers that allow for streaming video; Chat Servers, which allow groups of people to talk with each other; Groupware Servers, which allow for people to work together online; and FTP or File Transfer Protocol Servers, which allow files to move through cyberspace.

URL - stands for Uniform Resource Locator, or the address used to locate a Web page. Girl Scouts of the USA's URL is http://www.girlscouts.org. The first section (http) says it is written in hypertext markup language, then that it is on the World Wide Web (www), under the name of "girlscouts" and that we live in the domain name of organization (org). You have to register to have your own unique URL; however, you can be hosted by a website, sharing their URL, with an extension that gives you a specific address.

web host - provides server space, Web services, and file maintenance for websites created by individuals or other companies who do not have their own server. Subscribers to Internet Service Providers (ISPs) often are given limited Web space for their own website, or there is a fee charged, depending on the complexity.

web page(s) - printable pages on the Internet. Often used in place of "home page" when describing a personal site. Each page has its own URL or Universal Resource Locator.

website - a name for a collection of Web pages hosted on a website. Most individuals refer to their page or pages as "home page" or "web page" rather a website, which is usually much more extensive, expensive, and professional. GSUSA calls its collection of web pages a website because of its size and complexity. Its "home page" is at www.girlscouts.org.