



# The Questions Your Service Unit Manager Wishes You'd Ask

Think your service unit meeting is just one more obligation on your jam-packed calendar this month? Think again!

Your service unit team—on-the-ground Girl Scout volunteers who work directly with your council—is your go-to for advice and extra support. Monthly service unit meetings, whether virtual or in-person, are a collaborative space where you can meet fellow troop leaders, exchange ideas, and get answers to your most pressing questions. Definitely something you don't want to miss!

“In a short period of time, you can get answers to all those questions that are not quite listed on any guides or webpages you might have been referred to,” says Silvia LaFalce of Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana. “No matter what the question, there is always another leader or service unit team member who knows!”

“As a leader of a troop whose members are all on financial aid, I find service unit meetings to be the best place to find folks who can loan me materials, donate supplies, or even sponsor my girls' participation in events,” says Lindsay Hayden, who is also from Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana. “Because I regularly attend meetings, my girls got to go to a service unit camp, free of cost, because a sister troop stepped up to sponsor us.”

As most service unit volunteers have seen, some common questions inevitably pop up at certain points during the year: how to tackle troop budgeting or registration issues at the start of the membership year, how to best communicate with families in the fall, or how to manage all things cookie in the winter.

Though these troubleshooting questions are essential, don't be afraid to bring up other topics with the team. You know the ones—the questions you're almost afraid to ask because you don't want to look silly or that you don't have it all together. The truth is, you're never alone in your struggles and joys as a troop leader, and the sisterhood you'll build with your fellow volunteers will be, as Karen Freundlich of Girl Scouts of Central and Southern New Jersey says, “the support and inspiration you need to embrace your role as leader, role model, and volunteer.”

Here are four questions/comments your service unit team wishes you'd bring up.

1. **“How do I actually pull off a girl-led troop year?”**

“So often I talk with leaders who have planned an entire year of high-quality activities without allowing for girl input or leadership development,” says Lindsay. “My response is, ‘Do you look forward to working this hard when your girls are 17? No? Then you need to lay the groundwork today for them to lead tomorrow.’ I also discuss how letting the girls plan things means you have one less activity to plan at a meeting. Thinking about making that extra popsicle stick craft? Put your glue gun away and use that time to let girls practice making decisions. The craft is unlikely to survive into girls’ adulthoods, but the experience of making plans, compromising, budgeting, and following through will.”

“I know Girl Scouts is girl-led, but sometimes leaders don’t know what’s out there,” says Melanie Boudreault of Girl Scouts Spirit of Nebraska. “For that, the leaders need to find ideas. Some of our leaders do amazing things, and we can all learn from them!”

2. **“I would like to do a specific activity with my girls, but I’m not feeling confident about it. What do I do?”**

One way to inspire confidence in yourself as you lead your troop in activities that may feel unfamiliar is to connect with fellow troop leaders who’ve been there and can share what you might expect, as well as potential questions your girls may ask.

“Whether it is about field trips, service, camping, travel, cookie booths, or STEM badges, chances are that at least one leader in the room has experience they can share,” says Silvia. “The meeting then would turn into a positive discussion that would benefit not only the leader asking but all in the room.”

3. **“I’m feeling overwhelmed, and I’m not sure what to do.”**

“I wish that more [people] asked advice about their difficulties, whether it is dealing with troop parents or the girls or feeling too overwhelmed to continue the troop,” says Karen. “Finding out that you are not alone in those experiences and that others would love to share their struggles as well strengthens the group.”

You’re probably not the only leader in your service unit grappling with a particular issue. If you need some help but can’t make it to the next meeting, ask your service unit volunteer for their tips or if they can connect you with another local leader who could help with the issue.

4. “How can I get more involved?”

"I want the whole service unit to participate in leading an event or just be involved in the planning process so that we have more than just a few of the same people with the same perspectives planning for an always-changing group of girls," explains Trina Floyd of Girl Scouts of Western Ohio. "For example, we had new people at our first service meeting of the year, and when the idea of camping came up, they shared valuable input on why a certain time of year would not work and gave a suggestion that we all liked."

Adds Silvia, "The service unit depends on the feedback from the troops, especially the newer ones! Service unit teams tend to be formed from more experienced leaders whose girls are now older, and hearing back from those Daisy and Brownie leaders can shape the decisions the team makes, the events that get planned, and even the training that is offered."