

Use this handbook to find ideas, information, and resources you need for working with your local media to tell the Girl Scout story, including:

- Policies and procedures you should know about representing Girl Scouts in the media and working with youth
- What kinds of stories you can pitch to local media
- How to make a media pitch
- What formats and methods you should use

## Pitching Your Story or Event to the Media

Whether you've already been actively promoting Girl Scouts in your local media or are new to the process, we're excited to have you tell the Girl Scout story in your community.

You, as a local contact, are an important link to local media reporters and editors. We need your help to promote more Girl Scout events and opportunities in your community. To support you, we created this handbook to give you the tools to secure local media coverage.

We hope that it enhances the work many of you are already doing and provides others with the information you need to get the word out about the great things Girl Scouts are doing locally.

Most community newspapers, blogs, and websites are hungry for stories. Don't be shy about talking up a girl's accomplishments, community service or Take Action projects, or other achievements that show the power of Girl Scouts in your community.

## Getting the Word Out

Before reaching out to media, you can touch base with Communications Director, Elizabeth Fairchild, at [efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org) and VP of Marketing & Communications, Julie Weeks, at [jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org) to see if there is any additional information that can be included in your media pitch. For example, if you are promoting a STEM event, we can provide you with intriguing Girl Scout research that illustrates the importance of science, technology, engineering, and math for girls, for instance that as early as second grade girls think "math is for boys, not for girls." We may also have materials, like Gold Award press release templates, that you can customize for local media, as well as connections to relevant media contacts.

### What audience do you want to reach?

Listeners, readers, and viewers of your local media span all ages and have a variety of

interests. Decide which group of people will be most likely to respond to your project. Based upon the type of audience you would like to reach, make a list of local newspapers, blogs and websites to contact. Typically, most websites for a media outlet will have contact information available, as well as each reporter's area of focus. This information is key when determining who to pitch your story to. Do not send your story to just anyone. For example, if you have a story about building a community garden, you wouldn't pitch it to the person who handles business or politics. Making the right contact is key.

The internet is an excellent source to research contact information for local media. You can use sites like Google to look up specific media outlets. If you find a reporter or staff person who provides good Girl Scout coverage, be sure to make a note on your list with her or his name and contact information for next time.

### ***What you should know before you contact media***

In some cases, Girl Scouts of Orange County may be able to help secure council-wide media coverage. Please contact Elizabeth Fairchild ([efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org)) and Julie Weeks ([jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org)) before you contact the media if:

- You expect more than 100 people at your event AND you will be focusing on a major Girl Scout initiative such as Highest Awards, STEM, the Outdoors, Media Advocacy or Anti-Bullying, OR
- Your event will feature someone notable in the community or in the country.

If neither of these are the case (for instance if you are having a day camp or a service unit event that will not involve a Girl Scout initiative or someone notable in the community), there is no need to reach out about council-wide coverage before contacting the media.

Please keep in mind that, even though you are working with your local media, you are representing the entire Girl Scouts of Orange County council.

Remember, if a reporter asks you questions that move away from the local angle you are presenting and into areas that involve council operations, fundraising, sensitive issues (Planned Parenthood, GMOs, etc.), or other topics that pertain to our overall council, please refer them to Elizabeth Fairchild ([efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org)) and Julie Weeks ([jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org)).

- If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, it's okay to say you need to check on that and call the reporter back after you confirm the answer, or refer them to Elizabeth Fairchild.
- There's no such thing as "off the record." Be friendly with the reporter but always remember that anything you say can be printed. Stay focused on the positive ways Girl Scouts prepares girls to empower themselves.
- Be thorough. Anticipate what questions the reporter might have for you before you contact them. Make sure you provide your contact information, and follow up and respond to them quickly since they often have tight deadlines.

### ***What stories do you pitch?***

So, what kinds of things should you pitch to your local media? Reporters are busy, so make sure that your story has merit and is worth their time before contacting them. While we all like to see Girl Scout stories in the media, the best ones show the public why Girl Scouts is important in the local community and why it's important to support Girl Scouts by becoming a member or providing financial support.

*Local Events.* If your service unit is sponsoring an event, check in with your service unit manager to see if anyone is handling media promotion. If a local troop has an event scheduled, work with the leader and the girls to gather information for the media.

*Awards and Honors.* When local girls, troops, and volunteers are recognized for their achievements, let the media know! Get a quality photo from an awards ceremony, make sure you have photo releases for the [Minors](#) and [Adults](#) pictured, and send a photo with the information you share with media.

*Cookie and Fall Product Programs.* Let your community know that girls will be selling Girl Scout Cookies in your area! Work with your service unit cookie manager to gather information. Use photos of booth sales (make sure the girls have photo releases) to help tell the story of the Cookie Sale and the Five Skills girls learn: goal setting, decision-making, money management, people skills, and business ethics.

*Membership Recruitment.* When your service unit is working to recruit new members, the media is an important way to let the public know what Girl Scouts does for girls and the local community. Find girls who are willing to be quoted and give their testimonials about what they like about Girl Scouts – from leadership to fun, friendship, and opportunity.

*Take Action/Service Projects.* Media typically loves to show how youth make a difference in the local community. If you hear of a troop with a compelling Take Action project or service project, give them the attention they deserve! If there are ways the public can help, be sure to include that info in your pitch.

### ***Working with youth and the media***

The media loves to cover stories about youth and to feature youth in photos, which gives Girl Scouts many opportunities for news coverage. First and foremost, Girl Scouts must always protect our girls. Please follow these guidelines when working with media and youth:

- Ensure that any girl featured in media promotion has a [Minor Photo Release](#) signed by a parent or that her parent/guardian signed the photo release on her registration form. Adults photographed should also have an [Adult Photo Release](#) on file.
- Even if you know that a girl or girls have submitted photo releases, always get parental permission before involving girls in media promotion.
- Once photo releases have been obtained, you must also be careful to respect the privacy of our girls. In general, for girls under the age of 18, we do not use last names in any media story. First names and last initials are our standard practice. However, media like using full names, so if they request this, a full name may be used after parental permission has been granted.

- Be sure that girls are comfortable talking to and working with the media. Girls should never be pressured or made to feel uncomfortable. Talk with the girls before to make sure they understand what types of questions the reporter might ask and how an interview would be set up so they know what to expect.
- Make sure an adult is present at all times when a girl is being interviewed. If she becomes uncomfortable, anxious, or confused, the adult can step in.
- If you have many girls who would like to be involved in a media opportunity, conduct practice interviews to see who best presents herself for that particular story. Assuming that the most outgoing girl present would be best for media without checking could result in an interview where the girl has stage fright or doesn't provide the information the media is looking for.

## What format should you use?

This handbook includes a list and samples of the different ways to alert the media to your event and describes which methods might meet your needs.

### Community Calendar Listings

These are the most easily accessible formats available to nonprofits. Newspapers, blogs, and websites – and sometimes local radio and TV stations – have calendars promoting community events of general interest and the activities and services of nonprofit and government agencies.

- In addition to online calendars, you can send your calendar listing to local newspapers and other media that publish calendars.
- The community calendar listing should utilize the most important elements of your event, pared down to the essentials, including the what, where and how.
- Sometimes community calendars have editors who choose what events to include. The ones that are well written and easy-on-the-eyes are used most often – and also do the best job of getting your message across.

**Tip:** Research the calendar format of the desired outlet so that your content is already ready to publish when you submit it!

### Press Releases vs. Direct Email Contact

Feature articles offer more in-depth information than a calendar listing or public service announcement, but this type of coverage can be difficult to get. Media outlets will only use items that are timely and of broad public interest. Is your story or event really significant to the general public? Can you make your story compelling during a jam-packed news day?

You may have heard that anyone contacting the media must have a press release. This was true at one point in time, but due to the changing media landscape and focus on technology (not to mention busy editors and reporters), this is no longer common practice. Time is precious to

media folks, so the quickest way to get your message across is best. We have provided some guidelines for an email you might send to your local community blog or newspaper (i.e., The OC Register or a local weekly paper).

Email your submission to the community engagement editor in your city. Visit [OCRegister.com](http://OCRegister.com) and click on “Contact Us” - scroll down to Newsroom to find the editor(s) for your city. If your story is city specific, you should also look up the city reporters for your area.

Send a note three weeks ahead of time if possible, with the following details:

- What is happening? Who is involved? When is it happening? What is the expected outcome? What else should their readers know?
- Share more about Girl Scouts – you can include this [fact sheet](#).
- Tell them a little bit about the person submitting the information: name, title, city of residence, other details.
- How can people volunteer or get involved? Contact information for publication: phone number, email, website.
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Most important of all: include photos with your submission!

Specifically:

- A head shot of the person writing the submission
- Two or three other engaging photos. If you are advancing an event, send photos of last year’s event. If you haven’t previously had a similar event, send a photo of the organizers, or of the people who will benefit.
- Consider the subjects in your photo. Is what you are submitting eye-catching and publishable? Avoid photos with dim lighting and blurry subjects. Try to show your subjects smiling and having fun.
- Please always include captions saying who is in the photo (from left to right, first and last names only if you have received permission from all guardians) and what is happening in the photo.
- Please include a credit, saying who took the photo. Be sure you have permission from the subjects and the photographer to give you permission to use the photos for publication.

Don’t forget to have signed [Minor Photo Releases](#) and [Adult Photo Releases](#) in place for any photo you submit.

If you are publicizing an event that has already happened:

- Send an email with the same kind of information mentioned above.
- Share the outcome. For example, if you completed a community service project, share how many people were positively impacted.
- If you are donating to a cause, share how that will happen and when.
- Send a half dozen or more photos of the event.

Technical:

- Please send photos attached as .jpg files.
- Please do not send photos from the web. Web photos and photos embedded in email do not have a high enough resolution for print.
- You can send photos from your phone. Please use the large file size. **(Minimum recommended photo size is 4x6, 300 dpi)**

## **Other Sources of Media Contacts**

Newspapers, blogs and websites – and occasionally local radio and TV stations – are the usual medium for local Orange County publicity. However, there are many other ways to get the Girl Scout message out, many of which are only known locally, and are devoured by locals because they contain specific types of information they are interested in.

For example, organizations of all sorts have newsletters for their membership. Occasionally, they may not mind printing a brief article announcing a special event or opportunity as a community service. Service clubs that fall into this category include Rotary, Jaycees, Kiwanis, Masonic temples, chambers of commerce, political clubs, Soroptimists and homeowner's associations, to name a few.

Private sector companies and local politicians frequently have newsletters published for their employees or to solicit new business through public mailing lists. These are also good places, but **be careful the brand name of Girl Scouts is not used to endorse a product or to endorse a political candidate.** If you have any doubts, do not contact them.

## **Once Your Story Runs**

If you are successful in getting a story or photo placed in your local media, there are several follow-up steps to take:

- Make note of the reporter's name and contact information so that you can contact them again for future stories.
- Look for an online version of the story, and copy its link location. If you place a multimedia story (radio or television, for instance) it's okay ask the media outlet how to get a copy of the story.
- Show off your success! **Please** contact Elizabeth Fairchild ([efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org)) and Julie Weeks ([jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org)) with your media successes. We love to brag about your good work! If you have advance notice that a story is running, give us a heads-up so we can tell others to watch for it. If you do end up with a video or audio recording, let us know and we can share that as well.

Very occasionally, the way a reporter presents information comes across as negative. If you see this happening, please contact GSOC so we can discuss next steps.

- Finally, give yourself a big pat on the back! Securing placement for stories takes creativity and effort on your part, plus a bit of luck amidst a busy news cycle. Getting the Girl Scout story out there helps the public see how important Girl Scouts is to local girls and the local community, which can translate into increased girl membership, adult volunteers, financial donors, and other community supporters.

**Thank you for your work on Girl Scout PR!**

If you have any questions, please contact:

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