

# Girl Scouts of Orange County

## PR Handbook

Whether you've already been actively promoting Girl Scouts to your local media or are new to the process, we're excited to have you share your Girl Scout story in your community. You, as a local volunteer, parent, or Girl Scout are an important link to 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.

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

- Procedures you should know when 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

### Choosing Your Story

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, volunteering, or providing financial support. There are many types of stories Girl Scouts may choose to share with local media.

*Local Events.* If your Service Unit is hosting 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 girls to gather information for preparing a story for media consideration. [Example](#)

*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 and make sure you have permission from the adults and any minors in the photo before you share it with local media. Please also share any great photos with GSOC at [marcom@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:marcom@girlscoutsoc.org). [Example](#)

*Cookie and Fall Product Programs.* Let your community know when girls will be selling

Fall Product/Girl Scout Cookies in your area! Work with your service unit cookie manager to gather information. Use photos of booth sales to elevate the importance of the Girl Scout Cookie Program and Five Skills girls learn: goal setting, decision-making, money management, people skills, and business ethics. [Example](#)

*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 willing to be quoted and give media outlets their testimonials about what they like about Girl Scouts – from leadership opportunities to fun, friendship, and adventure. [Example](#)

*Highest Awards/Take Action/Service Projects.* Media outlets typically enjoy showing how youth are making a difference in the local community. If you hear of a troop or Girl Scout with a compelling Highest Award, Take Action 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. [Example](#)

*Op-Eds* An Op-Ed is an opinion article written by someone not employed by the newspaper or magazine. Op-Eds are a compelling way to share the first-person perspective from our Girl Scouts, parents, and volunteers about the impact of Girl Scouts on their life. [Example](#)

## **Identifying Your Audience**

Listeners, readers, and viewers of local media span all ages and have a variety of interests. Before you draft your pitch, decide which group of people will be most likely to respond to your story. Based upon the type of audience you want 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. For example, if you have a story about building a community garden, you wouldn't pitch it to the reporter handling business news or politics. Making the right contact is key.

The internet is an excellent source to research for local media's contact information. 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.

You can also reach out to Girl Scouts of Orange County's Communications Director, Elizabeth Fairchild, at [efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org) for advice on what outlets you might want to consider targeting.

## **Selecting Your Format**

This handbook includes a list and samples of different ways you can alert the media of 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 which events to include. Ones that are well written and visual 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 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 news that is timely and has broad public interest. Is your story or event 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 editor in your city. Visit [OCRegister.com](http://OCRegister.com) and click on [“Contact Us”](#) - scroll down to find the editor(s) for your city. You may also want to look up city reporters in your area.

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

- What is happening? Why does it matter? Who is involved? When is it happening?
- 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? Provide contact information for publication: phone number, email, website.

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.

## Op-Eds

Editorial departments have different requirements for submitting Op-Eds to their publication. Before you start writing, do your research on the requirements for the publication you are targeting (The Orange County Register for example) and read other Op-Eds they have published to see how you might tailor yours for the specific outlet.

If you have never written an Op-Ed before, check out [What Is an Op-Ed Article and How to Write One](#). Feel free to reach out to Girl Scouts of Orange County Communications Director, Elizabeth Fairchild, [efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org) for support in developing your Op-Ed.

## Photos

Most important of all: include photos with your submission to bring your event to life for readers!

Specifically:

- Two or three engaging photos. If you are submitting information in advance of 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 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.
- 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.
- Include a credit, indicating who took the photo. Be sure you have permission from the subjects and the photographer to use the photos for publication.

Technical:

- Send photos attached as .jpg files. **(Minimum recommended photo size is 4x6, 300 dpi)**
- Do not send photos from the web. Web photos and photos embedded in email do not have a high enough resolution for print.

## Pitching Your Story or Event to the Media

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

Before reaching out to media, please connect with GSOC's Communications Director, Elizabeth Fairchild, at [efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@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, did you know 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.

In some cases, Girl Scouts of Orange County may be able to help secure council-wide media coverage.

**Please follow the guidelines below when planning your media outreach.**

- Consult with GSOC's Communications Director Elizabeth Fairchild, [efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org) prior to contacting press.
- Clearly represent yourself as an individual Girl Scout, volunteer, or parent, and refrain from speaking on behalf of Girl Scouts of Orange County, aka "the Council."
- Immediately refer media to GSOC's Communications Director for statements from the Council.
- When submitting photos to the Council, describe the activity depicted in the photo and include first and last names of all members in the photo (from left to right) and troop numbers of girls and adults.
- Share any published articles or news pickups with Council communications staff at [marcom@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:marcom@girlscoutsoc.org).

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

- 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 pertaining to our overall council, please refer them to Communications Director Elizabeth Fairchild ([efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org)) and Chief Marketing Officer Julie Weeks ([jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:jweeks@girlscoutsoc.org)).
- If asked a question you don't know the answer to, it's okay to say you need to check on it and call the reporter back after you confirm the answer with council. Or, refer them to Communications Director Elizabeth Fairchild.
- There's no such thing as "off the record." Be friendly with the reporter, but always remember that anything you say may be printed. Stay focused on the positive ways Girl Scouts builds girls of courage, confidence, and character and prepares girls for a lifetime of leadership.
- Be thorough. Anticipate questions the reporter may have for you before you contact them. Make sure you provide your contact accurate information, and follow up and respond quickly since reporters often have tight deadlines.

**What to do if representatives from the press/media show up at a Girl Scout event or program and Council staff is not present:**

- Verify the identity of the reporter/photographer and write down their name, phone number, email, and publication.
- Introduce yourself to the reporter, stating that you are a volunteer/parent/member with Girl Scouts of Orange County and provide your troop number and region.
- Refer any questions you do not know how to answer to the GSOC Communications Director Elizabeth Fairchild, [efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org). Volunteers should not discuss council operations, fundraising, sensitive issues (Planned Parenthood, GMOs, etc.), or other topics pertaining to our overall council. Please refer any questions about these matters to GSOC's Communications Director.

- As soon as possible after the event/program (within 8 hours), notify GSOC's Communications Director about press/media in attendance at your event. Please be detailed - who did they talk to, what was asked, what was said, were photos taken, etc.

## Working with youth and the media

The media enjoys covering stories about youth and featuring youth in photos, which gives Girl Scouts many opportunities for news coverage. First and foremost, Girl Scouts must always protect the safety of our Girl Scouts. Please follow these guidelines when working with media and youth:

- Ensure that any girl featured in media promotion has permission from her parent or guardian to speak with or be photographed by media. Always get parental permission before involving girls in media promotion.
- Take every effort to respect the privacy of our girls. In general, for girls under the age of 18, we do not use their 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 can 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 the parent or guardian (or an approved, background screened 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.

### 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 known locally and enjoyed by local residents.

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 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 that 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 placing a story or photo in your local media, there are several follow-up steps to take:

- Make note of the reporter's name and contact information so 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.
- Share your success! Contact Communications Director Elizabeth Fairchild ([efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org](mailto:efairchild@girlscoutsoc.org)) and Chief Marketing Officer 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.
- Very occasionally, the way a reporter presents information comes across as negative. If you see this happening, please contact Communications Director Elizabeth Fairchild 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 our Girl Scout story out there helps the public see how important Girl Scouts is to local girls and the community, which translates to increased girl membership, adult volunteers, financial donors, and community support!

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

If you have any questions, please contact:

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