

GIRL SCOUTS OF WESTERN WASHINGTON STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY SUMMARY

SUMMARY

A strategic plan is similar to a road map. It identifies key initiatives and guides an organization to achieve specific goals. It outlines the organization's vision as well as the more tactical steps to achieve the organization's goals.

To better understand the needs, hopes and aspirations that girls, volunteers and parents/guardians have, Girl Scouts of Western Washington conducted an online strategic planning survey in April 2008. More than 1,300 girls and adults participated in the survey.

Here are a few key highlights of what these girls, parents/guardians and volunteers shared:

- ◆ Today's girl is busy and often participates in 2-3 activities outside of Girl Scouts.
- ◆ Older girls tend to be bored with Girl Scouting, while younger girls enjoy it - especially camp.
- ◆ Volunteers are committed to and passionate about Girl Scouts.
- ◆ Volunteers' time is scarce as they serve multiple volunteer organizations and work.
- ◆ Overall, volunteers feel valued; however, with realignment, some regions feel undervalued.
- ◆ Across the board, customer service needs improvement.
- ◆ There is limited understanding of what Girl Scouts is truly about, as well as the impact Girl Scouting has on the lives of girls.
- ◆ Girls are interested in serving their communities locally and globally, especially when it comes to environmental issues.

WHAT GIRLS ARE DOING...

Today's girl is busy. Most likely you'll find older girls participating in three activities outside of Girl Scouting and younger girls two activities. Girls can be found participating in sports, music, performance arts, summer camps, school clubs and religious activities as well as helping out in the community. All of these activities are in addition to Girl Scouting.

WHY GIRLS LEAVE...

When we asked why girls leave Girl Scouts, 70% of younger girls thought it was because girls wanted to try something else. 72% of older girls thought it was because "their friends don't think it is cool anymore." More than 50% of older girls thought it was for "younger girls" or "they had other after school activities."

We asked parents/guardians why their daughters or other girls leave and 64% said that there are too many competing activities and something has to give. 41% said it was because "her friends don't think it is cool anymore."

WHAT GIRLS WANT TO DO...

Girls can participate in Girl Scouting in a variety of ways. They can participate in troops, as an individual member and at camp. Girls can also experience Girl Scouting through travel, events and special interest areas. Girl Scouts of the USA is formalizing several of these "pathways" so that councils can offer even more ways for girls to participate. When we asked older girls if they would be interested in leadership experiences such as a virtual, online experience, special interest sessions, events and travel, 74% were most interested in travel.

Girls also shared how much they have enjoyed camp, meeting friends, community service, travel, outdoor experiences and activities such as earning patches, selling cookies and arts and crafts.

While girls talked about how much they loved camp we found that many parents/guardians reported that their daughter did not attend our Girl Scout camps but rather other camps.

When we asked what we need to do to keep girls interested in Girl Scouting, older girls suggested we provide activities that are more interesting, fun, exciting and geared towards older girls. Parents/guardians seconded this, stating that activities need to be hip, relevant, flexible and age appropriate.

Girls in grades 6-12 wished we would expand or offer more camp, travel overseas and outdoor adventure programs such as archery, rope courses, rock climbing, river rafting, scuba diving and more. Older girls also requested programs on technology "stuff" and programs geared towards increasing awareness of global problems.

Girls in grades K-5 wished more programs were offered for camping, helping people and the environment, animals, field trips and outings, science and outdoor activities.

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE...

When it comes to issues in the local and global community, girls are most interested in helping with the environment. For girls in grades K-5, 72% of

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girls shared that “helping wildlife and nature by protecting the planet” is an area that they are most interested in helping out with in their local community. Similarly, when it comes to topics that girls are most interested in globally, younger girls said “learning about people and the environment” most interested them. Girl in grades 6-12 also were interested in helping with environmental issues both locally (47%) and globally (49%).

Overall, older girls expressed interest in a wide range of issues, including local issues such as hunger and homelessness, as well as global issues such as education access for children (girls), HIV/AIDS and peace and conflict. In terms of helping the local community, younger girls were also interested in helping people who didn’t have food. Globally, younger girls wanted to discover more about girls around the world.

WHAT GIRLS TALK OR WORRY ABOUT...

Media reports highlight the many challenges girls are facing in today’s world. We wanted to make certain we understand what girls in Girl Scouting worry or talk about so that we can help provide them with the skills they need to make positive choices. Given the nature of the issues facing girls today we asked younger girls in grades K-5 different questions than girls in grades 6-12.

Younger girls worry or talk most about making friends (75%), doing well in school (67%), being bullied by others (56%) and how they look (52%). We’re happy to report that 78% said they never worry or talk about their weight.

Older girls ranked academic school pressure the highest in terms of what they worry or talk about the most. Whereas 97% of parents and 94% of volunteers thought peer pressure was the greatest worry, girls ranked it at 49%. Girls ranked mental and emotional health second, with 53% of older girls worrying about this.

Survey Statistics:

Four surveys were available, participants included:

- ◆ 556 volunteers
- ◆ 254 parents & guardians
- ◆ 357 younger girls in grades K-5
- ◆ 196 older girls in grades 6-12

Geographic representation: The majority of counties participated in at least one of the surveys except for San Juan County.

The table below compares how each of these groups rated these issues.

Issues Girls Worry or Talk About	Girls Grades 6-12	Parents/ Guardians	Volunteers
Academic/ School pressure	84%	87%	90%
Mental and emotional health & depression	53%	64%	61%
Eating disorders/ body image	50%	76%	65%
Peer pressure	49%	97%	94%
Physical safety	49%	59%	59%
Sexual activity/ teen pregnancy/ STDs	48%	72%	60%
Violence: bullying and harassment	48%	80%	76%
Drugs (including pills, prescriptions, cold medicines and illegal drugs)	46%	61%	54%
Obesity; lack of physical activity	44%	75%	66%
Alcohol (including binge drinking)	44%	63%	51%
Media influence	42%	77%	77%
Self-inflicted violence	42%	29%	30%
Internet safety	37%	83%	81%
Sexual assault	36%	47%	40%
Tobacco	33%	49%	40%

WHAT GIRLS HAVE LEARNED...

Girls learn amazing skills in Girl Scouts. In Girl Scouts, older girls reported that they have learned the following:

- ◆ 84.4% know how to listen and talk to others
- ◆ 83.8% stand up for themselves and their friends
- ◆ 80.6% listen to and consider others’ opinions or view points
- ◆ 80.0% respect others and value their opinions even if they disagree
- ◆ 79.4% know how to make positive choices
- ◆ 77.5% know how to solve a problem
- ◆ 75.0% feel confident in what they believe

Younger girls reported similar benefits from Girl Scouting, especially in the areas of communication, standing up for themselves and their friends and how to make good choices.

When we asked parents/guardians what they

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believe to be the most important skills for their daughter to gain, 65.4% said a strong sense of self and 42.2% said an ability to advocate for themselves and others. We then asked parents/guardians what skills they think their daughter has gained from Girl Scouting and 56% responded "an ability to develop healthy relationships" and 50% said "she respects and values diverse backgrounds and viewpoints."

Volunteers responded differently. 90.8% thought girls gained leadership skills and 81.9% a strong sense of self. It is difficult to pinpoint why this difference may exist as it may be linked to several factors. However, it does highlight the need for telling the story about how Girl Scouts impacts girls' lives.

SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS...

Volunteers are fundamental to all we do here at Girl Scouts. Each week 76% volunteer between 1-5 hours. 79% feel that they volunteer just the right amount of time and 13% feel they spend too many hours volunteering.

At the same time our volunteers are making a difference with other organizations, 58% volunteering 1-5 hours per week. Volunteers serve organizations focused on education (51%), children/youth (48%), religious activities (41%) and sports/outdoor recreation (22%).

When asked about the various support resources we currently offer or could offer volunteers, volunteers prioritized online trainings, peer to peer support, secure online space and additional council staff support that provides program resources and answers program-related questions.

FEELING VALUED...

Overall 83.7% of volunteers said that they felt GSWW values them as a volunteer. Within specific geographic areas a larger percentage of volunteers did not feel valued. Specifically, 27% of volunteers in Pierce and 23% in Thurston Counties shared that they did not feel valued. Many volunteers shared that they feel removed and that GSWW is too large, they perceive a North/South divide or felt abandoned once signed on to lead.

Volunteers said that what makes them feel most valued was being listened to, recognition both public and small, girl feedback, hearing from parents, responses from staff and friendliness/acceptance by staff.

When asked if they felt GSWW values their region, 76.7% felt their region was valued. Regional differences were exhibited in Kitsap, Pierce and Thurston, where a larger percentage felt their region was not valued. Volunteers commented that there is a focus on "Totem", "North", and/or Seattle. There is a feeling that there is a difference between rural versus urban areas, big versus small and that the council is too big to serve everyone. Some shared that their community is small so they feel left out, or they felt more programs are offered in other areas versus their own. Others noted that King County has an advantage simply because of its location. Volunteers shared that there is a feeling of lost resources through the "merger". Still others noted a difference of economic resources by region.

When asked what the most important thing GSWW can do to make all regions feel valued, volunteers provided insightful feedback. Volunteers suggested GSWW listen, provide equal opportunities and resources, offer parallel events and trainings in "North" and "South", improve communication, involve volunteers in publications, offer more events, reduce bureaucracy, provide more support for new leaders and remove the north/south divide by referencing county. Many recognized that it is a work in progress and it needs to be more equitable.

SERVING OUR CUSTOMERS...

In the area of customer service, GSWW demonstrated a need to improve. We asked both volunteers and parents/guardians to rate customer service in terms of staff knowledge, response time, convenience and quality of experience. Volunteers expressed whether they received outstanding or fair customer service, or whether service needed improvement. Volunteers who used these services rated only four areas with more than a 50% rating: Girl Scout store, cookie/product sales support, dealing with front desk staff and Neighborhood Troop Services staff. Similarly, parents/guardians rated only two areas with more than a 50% rating: financial assistance and cookie/product sale support.

All areas where we serve our customers require improvement. Specifically, volunteers helped us identify the following critical areas: becoming a volunteer, training for volunteers and troop banking support. Parents/guardians emphasized the need for better service in registration for program/events, camp and becoming a girl/adult member.

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GSWW AND THE COMMUNITY...

Community is critical to Girl Scouts of Western Washington's success. We asked volunteers and parents to rate GSWW on reputation in the community, visibility in the local community, expertise on issues facing girls and effectiveness in advocating for girls. In terms of reputation in the community, 59% of volunteers and 56% of parents rated our reputation as outstanding. In all of the other areas, volunteers and parents said we were fair or needed improvement.

We also asked what parents and volunteers thought the non-Girl Scout community believes about us in terms of what we offer as an organization. 93% of parents and 84% of volunteers thought the non-Girl Scout community believes we build leadership skills. The vast majority also believe that Girl Scouts makes a positive impact on the world. However, to a lesser degree, volunteers and parents did not think that the non-Girl Scout community believed that Girl Scouts:

- ◆ Is open, inclusive and welcoming to all
- ◆ Encourages individuality
- ◆ Is fun, cool, exciting and stimulating
- ◆ Is a place where girls determine/define their scouting
- ◆ Is grounded, yet contemporary

GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE...

Volunteers were asked what they viewed as the greatest challenge GSWW will face in the future. 36% said retaining older girls. Recruiting volunteers (14%) was second. Meeting the diverse needs of a large geographic region and addressing competing programs from other organizations were tied for third at 10%.

FUTURE VISION FOR GSWW...

As we plan for the future, we asked volunteers and parents/guardians to share their vision for GSWW. We asked volunteers "In the next five years, what would you like GSWW to be widely known and respected for?" Volunteers suggested:

- ◆ Leadership, community service, an elevated Gold Award
- ◆ Inclusion, respect
- ◆ Issues such as conserving the environment, addressing obesity
- ◆ Empowering strong, young women
- ◆ A united GSWW
- ◆ Better customer service

- ◆ Strong volunteer support
- ◆ More than cookies

We asked parents/guardians and volunteers: "What is the single most important thing GSWW should do to rise to the next level in terms of reputation and stature?" Suggestions included:

- ◆ More publicity/visibility in the community through marketing, PR, advertising and outreach
- ◆ Improve customer service
- ◆ Offer high interest programs
- ◆ Community advocacy
- ◆ Community outreach
- ◆ Focus on improving volunteer management and support
- ◆ Make sure every girl can join

KEY COMMITTEE INSIGHTS...

GSWW's Strategic Planning Committee reviewed and discussed the surveys and shared the following key strategic insights:

- ◆ Continue the process of unifying the council.
- ◆ Become a strong advocate for girls in the community by helping others understand the value of girls participating in Girl Scouting and sharing our story.
- ◆ Continue to engage and energize the volunteer community so that they feel connected and have clarity of purpose.
- ◆ Strengthen the lifelong connections of girls to community.
- ◆ Appreciate volunteers and understand where and why volunteers feel undervalued.

For more information visit the Strategic Planning web page at:

www.girlscoutsww.org/aboutus/strategicplan

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