



# Girl Scout PR Handbook

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
- Sample materials

## Pitching Your Girl Scout 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 local community newspapers, blogs and websites are hungry for stories. Don't be shy about talking up a girl's accomplishments, a community service project or anything else that shows the strong ties Girl Scouts have to their communities.

## Getting the Word Out

Before reaching out to media, you can touch base with PR Director Stefanie Ellis, at [stefanie@girlscoutsww.org](mailto:stefanie@girlscoutsww.org), to see if there is any additional information that can be included in your media pitch. For example, if you are promoting a science event, she can provide you with information on how needed such an event is, for instance that as early as second grade Washington State girls think "math is for boys, not for girls." She may also have materials that you can customize for local media.

### *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. 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.

**Important: Council-Led Media Outlets.** Girl Scout PR volunteers are encouraged to work with local media, but there are some media outlets that should not be approached. These media outlets are highly visible with large-scale audiences, are included in our strategic marketing and communications plan, and must be approached only by council staff. Council-led-only media include the Seattle Times, SeattlePI.com, Associated Press, KOMO 4 TV, KING 5 TV and Northwest Cable News, KIRO 7 TV, Q13 Fox, any other national TV affiliate, KOMO News Radio, STAR 101.5, KEXP, KMPS and the Puget Sound Business Journal. This includes any shows that run on the above television or radio stations, such as New Day Northwest, plus the websites from these media. If you have an idea for promotion for these council-led media, contact Stefanie Ellis at [stefaniece@girlscoutsww.org](mailto:stefaniece@girlscoutsww.org) to discuss.

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

In some cases, Girl Scouts of Western Washington may be able to help secure council-wide media coverage. Please contact Stefanie Ellis at [stefaniece@girlscoutsww.org](mailto:stefaniece@girlscoutsww.org) before you contact the media if:

- You expect more than 100 people at your event AND you will be focusing on a Girl Scout initiative such as STEM, 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 an encampment 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 Western Washington council. What you say to a

newspaper in Kelso could be read in an online edition throughout western Washington, so it's important to present consistent messages.

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 and other topics that pertain to our overall council, you can always refer them to Stefanie Ellis or contact her for guidance at [stefaniece@girlscoutsww.org](mailto:stefaniece@girlscoutsww.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 Stefanie Ellis.
- 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 Scouting helps girls.
- 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 Scouting is important in the local community and why it's important to support Girl Scouting by becoming a member or with their financial support.

**Important note:** When promoting activities and topics, like the Cookie Program, it is crucial that you do not promote cookie sales or fall product sales by telling the public to contact individual troops or girls, which would be using the media to give an unfair advantage. Instead, promote the overall program and how it benefits your community. Always include the contact information for the closest council office and our website, [www.GirlScoutsWW.org](http://www.GirlScoutsWW.org).

*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, and send a picture with the information you share with media.

*Cookie Sale Program.* 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 Scouting – from leadership to fun, friendship and opportunity.

*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 service project, give them the attention they deserve! If there are ways the public can help, be sure to include that info.

*Topical Issues.* Pay attention to what your local media is already covering and piggyback on those topics if they have a real connection to Girl Scouting. For example, if earthquakes are in the news, find a troop or girl that has worked on emergency preparedness and get quotes from them to use in a news release.

### ***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.
- 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 guide includes a list and samples of the different ways to alert the media to your event and describes which methods might meet your needs. The Girl Scouts of Western Washington Style Guide is another resource that will give you some additional information about style and format of language in written releases.

### 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.

### Radio Public Service Announcements

A benefit of smaller, community-based radio stations is that the DJs aren't always as difficult to reach as those who work for larger, nationally-affiliated radio stations. This means that you can often call or email your community DJ directly, and they might be willing to announce the details of an event you're having. They might even talk about the Girl Scout Cookie Sale, and provide the cookie locator website address so people in the community can find girls selling cookies. Remember, in the case of the cookie sale, on-air promotion is not about promoting a single site sale or a girl – it's important to be more general and inclusive. However, if one girl or a troop is hosting an event or has just earned an award, it would be fine to request on-air promotion.

### 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

***Example Email to an Online Newspaper:***

Subject: A Truly Sweet Contest Using Girl Scout Cookies!

Hello, \_\_\_\_\_!

It's our third year sponsoring the [Girl Scout Cookie Recipe Contest](#), and we've got some interesting contenders! How about a coconut cream-filled Samoa croissant donut pitted against a baklava-inspired dessert made with crushed Trefoils, honey and walnuts? There's also a Samoas no-bake cheesecake, a raspberry streusel bar and a clever Trefoil cookie butter.

Voting can be done [here](#), now through February 27. Our top winner gets \$250, cookies and super-sweet bragging rights. I'd love it if you told your audience about this fun contest! It's a great way to get the community talking about our upcoming Girl Scout Cookie Sale February 28-March 16!

Thank you!  
Stefanie Ellis

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 a sample email you might send to your local community blog or newspaper. If you have a website they can go to with more information, or a flyer with further details, include this in the email, but more than one attachment is not recommended. Do not send photos unless you're talking about something that already happened, and if you are, make sure you reference that in your email.

Most editors are not interested in past news, only upcoming events. But some – including many local papers and blogs – will also welcome reports on past events of significance, especially if there are great photos. If you've got something really special to share, send it in, even if the event already happened.

#### *Example Email to a Local Blog:*


**Blog:** MyWallingford.com

**Subject:** Girl Scouts + Trophy Cupcakes = A Sweet Story!

Hello, \_\_\_\_\_!

I wanted to send you some photos of [girl's name], who is from Girl Scout troop #[number] in Wallingford. She made a sales pitch to Jennifer Shea from Trophy Cupcakes, and now the Thin Mints will go into Trophy's Thin Mint cupcakes!

Shea is a proud Girl Scout alumna. Because of her love of Girl Scouts, she created three Girl Scout Cookie-inspired cupcakes she sells every day during our cookie sale – the Samoa, Thin Mint and Dark Chocolate Peanut Butter (a tribute to Tagalongs!). We love Jennifer's support, and especially the way she gives back to her community by buying cookies from local Girl Scouts.

I'd love it if you wrote this piece during our Girl Scout Cookie Sale, which is going on now through March 16. I have attached some more information about our sale in case you're interested. I have also attached an illustration you may use that famed food blogger, Cakespy, made just for Girl Scouts of Western Washington and Trophy Cupcakes. 

Sincerely,  
Stefanie Ellis

## Photo Opportunities

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. That's especially true in local media. Some local newspapers will accept photographs from events taken by yourself or others who aren't involved in the media, particularly award presentations. If you have a good, print-quality, news-worthy photograph, try sending it to your local newspaper with thorough caption and identification information, as well as your contact number in case they have follow up questions. Be sure that you have signed photo releases on people in the photograph, and remember that newspapers will only print quality photos. They should be clear, well-framed in the shot, not include an electronic date and, again, worthy of being included in print.

## Other Sources of Media Contacts

Newspapers, blogs and websites – and occasionally local radio stations – are the usual medium for local western Washington 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 name of the 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 Stefanie Ellis at [stefanieece@girlscoutsww.org](mailto:stefanieece@girlscoutsww.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 link that from our website as well.
- Very occasionally, the way a reporter presents information comes across as negative. If you see this happening, please contact council 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 Scouting 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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