

# Community Cultivation Guide to Success



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In Partnership With:





Our success in achieving our mission of building girls of courage, confidence, and character is directly related to our ability to connect, understand and be part of our communities. It is important to diversify our recruitment methods to reach more girls and adult volunteers.

The dictionary defines cultivation as “promoting or improving the growth of (a plant, crop, etc.) by labor and attention; promoting the growth or development of (an art, science, etc.); to foster.” For Girl Scouts, community cultivation is defined as “exploring communities and building relationships with people and organizations to provide the Girl Scout program in a way that mutually benefits the community and Girl Scouting”. (*Girl Scout Online Council Network*, accessed 3/2010)

Community cultivation means working with community members. This is much more than identifying where girls are in a community and delivering Girl Scout Leadership Experience but learning the needs, wants, strengths, and interests of a community. By assessing and engaging in a community, we can ensure that:

- The needs and strength of the community, Girl Scouting, and most importantly the girls will be met.
- The community itself will work to keep Girl Scouting vital and strong.
- Girl Scouting will become an important and lasting presence in the community.

In order to grow our Girl Scout’s presence in a community we must be present in the communities, understanding their needs and strengths, and customizing our approach based on assessment. Community cultivation is constant work--connecting our opportunities with the needs and strengths of individual communities/service units. We need to be active, meaningful relationships to help girls and volunteers meet their full individual potential.

### **Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)**

Rather than focusing on the weaknesses and needs of a community, Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) “builds on the assets that are found in a community and mobilize individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to rely on and develop their strength.” Communities have never been built by focusing on their deficiencies, needs, and problems. Communities respond creatively when focusing on resources, capacities, strengths, aspirations, and opportunities. Asset Based Community Development aligns very well with the Girl Scout mission to build people of courage, confidence, and character to make the world a better place. ABCD is about local people working together to better their community. Girl Scouts of Western Ohio is positioned in a way that we can implement an ABCD approach to building a stronger presence.

### **Shift in Mindset**

The first step to asset-based community development is to refocus our mindset. Asset Based Community Development begins with the idea that every community has something that works. Instead of asking “what’s wrong, and how to fix it,” the question we should be asking is “what’s worked and how do we get more of it?” The change in mindset ABCD creates meaningful and lasting community change that originates from within. Building and nourishing relationships is the fundamental action in community building. Instead of focusing on what Girl Scouts need to be successful.

We need to focus on building valuable connections to learn more about the values and interests of the community. Often, we are focused on growing our membership and forget to understand the value of Girl

Scouts in our communities. A mindset shift would go from this: “How am I going to meet my benchmark? I must be able to serve 50 girls. Lincoln Elementary is a big school but will not return my calls. I will never make my goal.” To this: “I want to make sure that every girl has an opportunity to benefit from Girl Scouts. Looking at my membership reports and reviewing what happened this year already, the girls at Lincoln Elementary have not had an opportunity to join. I know that Lincoln Elementary has been reluctant to promote Girl Scouts. What connections do I need to make so that Girl Scouts becomes a valuable part of the community?” As you can see the plans have not changed, both are data-driven plans. With a shift in mindset, the approach will be different. Instead of sending yet another email to the school to prove what you already know that you cannot get into the school, you utilize your connections to ensure that girls have an awesome opportunity.

## **The Guiding Principles in ABCD**

- **Everyone has gifts** - People can contribute and want to contribute. Everyone in a community has something to offer. There is no one that we don't need. We just need to discover how they can contribute. In Girl Scouts, this means that people can contribute to our mission. Although every person may not choose to be part of Girl Scouts, we must approach every person with the possibility that they have something to offer.
- **Relationships build a community** - See them, make them, and utilize them. An intentional effort to build and nourish relationships is the core of ABCD and all community building. As Girl Scout staff members, we must build a relationship in the community. First, it is important to foster the relationship between you and your volunteers and caregivers that are involved in Girl Scouts. Then we need to build new relationships with others in the community.
- **Citizens at the center** - It is important to see community members as it is citizens not just as recipients of services. Our Girl Scout members and their families are not just the people we serve, they are part of Girl Scouts and can be the solution to growing our membership.
- **Leaders involve others as active members of the community** - Leaders from the wider community can engage others. This is based on trust, influence, and relationships. The best way to build relationships with others is through introduction. Ask those that you formally have a connection with to introduce you to others in the community.
- **People care about something** - There is a misconception that people are apathetic; they assume that people just don't care enough to give back. People in communities are motivated to act. The challenge is to discover what their motivation is. We see and hear this in Girl Scouts all the time, caregivers are not interested in volunteering or Girl Scouts are not important to school administrators. We must acknowledge that this is simply not true. People do care, we need to discover what they care about and how Girl Scouts fit into that mission.
- **Motivation to act must be uncovered** - People act on things they feel strongly about. Every community is filled with invisible motivation for action. Listen for their passion. We must ask ourselves what will motivate these caregivers to get involved or how Girl Scouts can serve the school's needs.

- **Listening conversation** - One-on-one small group conversations are ways of discovering motivation and inviting participation. Forms, surveys, and asset maps can be useful to guide intentional listening and relationship building. Service Unit meetings and troop formations can be used as a starting point for listening conversations.
- **Ask, Ask, Ask** - Asking and inviting are key community-building actions. “Join us. We need you.” This is the song of the community. Hearing no is hard but don’t stop asking people to get involved.
- **Asking Questions rather than giving answers invites stronger participation** - People in communities are usually asked to follow outside experts’ answers to their community problems. A more powerful way to engage people is to invite communities to address ‘questions’ and find their own answers-- with agencies following up to help. Rather than giving people answers about Girl Scouts, ask questions to see what makes them and what motivates them.
- **A citizen-centered “inside-out” organization is the key to community engagement** - A “citizen-centered” organization is one where local people control the organization and set the organization’s agenda. Girl Scouts is a volunteer lead organization; they should be invited to the table to discuss growth within their community.
- **Institutions have limits in problem-solving** - Institutions such as government, non-profits, and businesses are stretched thin in their ability to solve community problems. They cannot be successful without engaging the rest of the community in solutions. As Girl Scout staff, we can limit ourselves if we do not engage in the community.
- **Institutions as servants** - People are better than programs in engaging the wider community. Leaders in institutions have an essential role in community-building as they lead by “stepping back,” creating opportunities for citizens to take the lead and to create a real democracy. The gifts of institutions are important, but they must in support of what the citizens want and need, not what the institution wants and needs.

## Five Key Assets in ABCD

Communities can no longer be thought of as complex masses of needs and problems, but rather diverse and potent webs of gifts and assets. Each community has a unique set of skills and capacities to channel for community development. ABCD categorizes asset inventories into five groups:

- **Individuals:** At the center are the people of the community that have gifts and skills. Everyone has assets and gifts. Individual gifts and assets need to be recognized and identified.
- **Associations:** Small informal groups of people, such as clubs, working with a common interest as volunteers. They don’t control anything; they are just coming together around a common interest by their individual choice. In Girl Scouts, this would be a Service Unit or Troop
- **Institutions:** Paid groups of people who generally are professionals who are structurally organized. assets of these institutions help the community capture valuable resources and establish a sense of civic responsibility.
- **Physical assets:** Physical assets such as land, buildings, space, and funds are other assets that can be used.

- **Connections:** There must be an exchange between people sharing their assets. These connections are made by people who are connectors. It takes time to find out about individuals; this is normally done through building relationships with one-on-one connections.

In Asset Based Community Development, it is critical to highlight, map, connect and celebrate the diverse range of community assets. Here are the steps in utilizing an Asset Based Community Development approach to Girl Scouts:

### Step one: Map assets in a community.

- Start mapping the assets of your community by using resources available to you. The following resources will be valuable in helping you gain useful knowledge. What individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, and connections are within the community? What are the trends, problems, strengths, and values of the community?
- Service Unit Annual Plan- Review your current and past years' Service Unit Annual Plan. Knowledge of the goals, strengths, and needs of a service unit through the eyes of the volunteers will help you make connections with individuals and organizations to bring resources directly to girls and volunteers in the community.
- Connect with key volunteers with Key Girl Scout volunteers in the community. You do not need to do this alone. Volunteers are an important resource. They have connections in the community that they can introduce you and help navigate where to start.
- Community & Membership Plans-Girl Scouts have always focused on documenting the community assets through plans. Review past years' community and membership plans to learn about resources and assets that have been utilized in the past.
- Staff Knowledge-Talk to staff who have worked or lived in that community. Do not limit this to your regional office; find out if there has been anyone in the council that may have connections. Someone that currently lives in Dayton may have grown up in Toledo. Talk to the program staff regarding program partners within the community.
- Online Resources-The internet has simplified the process of researching a community without ever having to step foot outside the office. Information such as demographics, schools, religious institutions, government leaders, local businesses, professional groups, social services, and community trends can be found online.
  - [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)
  - <https://www.statsamerica.org/>
  - <https://www.thearda.com/>
  - <https://education.ohio.gov/>
  - <https://www.in.gov/doi/>

### Spotting Trends

Spotting trends is an important part of assessing your data. Think of trends as what is happening inside and outside the community that will affect the people who live there. It is important to be aware of what is influencing girls and adults in the community i.e. new businesses, availability of community funding, the status of school levies, foreclosures, etc. Paying attention to the news, following social media listening to local radio shows, and talking with people will help you spot those trends.

- **Social Media: (community groups, media outlets, schools, parent organizations, and youth organizations)**
- **School's Website**
- **United Way's Website**
- **Church's Website**
- **Chamber's Website**

Some questions to ask during your internal research:

- ✓ What type of community is this (suburban, urban, or rural)?
- ✓ How do members of the community define it?
- ✓ Where are the schools, religious institutions, stores and businesses?
- ✓ How do community members get to these locations... cars, walk, or public transportation?
- ✓ What colleges or universities are in the community? Do the students live in the community who attend these institutes or are they from out of town?
- ✓ What are the cultural backgrounds of the people who live in the community?
- ✓ What are the socioeconomic levels?
- ✓ What are the racial/ethnic demographics?
- ✓ What religious organizations are there?
- ✓ What other youth-serving organizations?

**Step two: Building relationships and connections with community members.**

Internet searches and reviews of community plans will only provide so much information. It is important that we get out and meet community members to understand how the community works.

If you have not already, start with our volunteers; they live and work in the community. Not only can they tell you about their communities, but often know the history of Girl Scouts there. Their point of view will be honest and unique. Ask them to introduce you to key individuals or take you on a tour.

If working with volunteers is not feasible, you may need to explore on your own by taking a community tour. This should be a **driving, walking, and talking tour**. Ride public transportation, taking a bus route from beginning to end. Study where people live and where people work. Eat in local restaurants and talk to the people living and working in the community.

**APPROPRIATE ATTIRE FOR COMMUNITY CULTIVATION**  
 What message do you wish people in the community whom you meet to see Girl Scouts as? Think about the community and who you are visiting. What first impression do you wish them to have? What you wear may vary based on the organization. Always make sure you are following the GSWO dress code.

- Business suit or professional attire with Girl Scout pin
- Girl Scout logo shirt and jeans

As you tour, consider visiting some of the following locations:

- |  |                             |                       |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Schools, Colleges,<br/>Universities</b> | <b>Government offices</b>   | <b>Park system</b>    |
| <b>Religious Institutions</b>              | <b>Chambers of Commerce</b> | <b>Grocery stores</b> |
| <b>Entertainment</b>                       | <b>Public libraries</b>     | <b>Retail centers</b> |
|  | <b>Youth services</b>       | <b>Banks</b>          |

## **Local Restaurants**

Community Cultivation does not happen with one visit. It happens with ongoing presence in the community. Look for ways to get involved in the community. Spend some “office time” in a local establishment, such as a coffee shop, restaurant, park, or mall. You may get interrupted by running into someone you know; however, this allows you the opportunity to engage with those in your community. Take time to watch people and see what individuals are interested in. Additional ways to get involved include volunteering in the community or school, attending festivals, participating in meetings, visiting organizations, supporting businesses, or being active on social media.

### **Step 3: Cultivating relationships to encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources and to identify common interests.**

As you visit various locations in the community, engaging and talking with community members is a must. Your goal is to take those relationships to the next level. Just knowing the name of a person will not leverage growth. Building real connections takes time. Of course, some relationships are easier to build than others but most of the time your first visit with community members will usually be a quick visit and will give you minimal information. The relationships built in the community may take time to develop and cultivate into full collaborations. As you develop the relationship, schedule time to meet with community members to dig deeper into the community. Community cultivation is a continuous process that builds upon itself.

Here are some ways to build relationships:

**Be direct-** Remember that people may be busy and have limited time to talk to you. This is a great time to use an elevator speech. Then let them know what you are doing or want to do. Let them know that you are not familiar with the community and look to them for more information and connections.

**Build rapport-**The first way to build rapport is to be mindful of their time. Ask, do you have a moment to talk, or would you prefer to schedule a better time? This will show respect and establish trust. After your elevator speech, stop talking and start listening. Ask simple, open-ended questions then sit back and allow the prospect to talk. People like to talk about themselves more than anything else. The more they talk, the more enjoyable the conversation is for them. People will be more open if they find the conversation to be enjoyable. Make sure you thank them. Girl Scout cookies or a handwritten follow-up is a great way to show appreciation and build rapport.

**Ask questions-** Get them talking about themselves or their organization. Start with simple questions like how long you have worked/lived in the area. Where is a great place to eat while I am visiting? Then dive deeper into questions such as what your organization’s mission is, what services you provide, what kids do for fun, and what are the school’s extracurricular activities. Then look for ways to align. Do you have any experience with Girl Scouts? What challenges are you currently facing?

**Make the connection-**Often, people are familiar with Girl Scouts. However, they may only know a fraction of our organization. When meeting with community members, they may not have a good understanding of how they can partner with Girl Scouts. Be clear on what you are looking for in the relationship. More importantly, find ways that the relationship between their organization and Girl Scouts can be mutually beneficial. Are there opportunities to share their business with our members? Are there any take-action project opportunities? Are they looking to grow their customer base? Do they need programming that we can provide?



Asking good questions is the key to evaluating your community cultivation efforts.

What are the community's values, assets, and needs?

What are the community's goals for its children? What are children/families involved in?

What do members of this community think about Girl Scouting? Are their perceptions accurate? What are their perceptions based upon?

What parts of the community are not involved with Girl Scouts?

What barriers exist that prevent girls and adults from participating in Girl Scouts?

Who in the community can help you increase Girl Scout membership? Who else should I be talking to?

How will girls in this community benefit from Girl Scouting?

What organizations/youth-serving groups could provide support, resources, or collaboration?

What percentage of the community commutes a long distance to work?

**Keep records of your contacts** - Keeping these records up to date will provide a history for both you and your field team and will help build a network for further cultivation.

**Follow up** – All relationships take work. The same is true with the relationships you build and form in your community cultivation efforts. Make sure that your community contacts are communicated with regularly, included in any activities happening in the community, and feel they have a connection back to Girl Scouting. Ensure you develop trust with your contact by following through with promises. Do what you say you will do.

**Step Four: Bring together a core group of community members to identify the key theme or issue that will inspire people to get organized and create a vision and a plan.**

Bring together a core group that is invested in Girl Scouts. Who in the community is invested in Girl Scouts? Do you have volunteers that live or work in the community? Are there schools in the school district that have successfully partnered with Girl Scouts? Are any co-workers connected with Girl Scouts? Any Girl Scout alumni? Have you made any additional contacts while on your community visits? Sometimes it takes leg work to find those Girl Scout promoters. You may find that the mayor is a former Gold Award Recipient. In this work, you are building a network of people who believe in the work of Girl Scouts rather than trying to sell Girl Scouts.

Invite those groups of people to come together to discuss how to best impact the community through Girl Scouts. You may utilize the service unit meeting for this work, or you may hold separate meetings. Engage connectors who can build relationships. Keep asking this group of people who else should be informed. Ask them to help connect you with others that can implement change. Are they connected to

### **ELEVATOR SPEECH**

An elevator speech explains who you are, what you do, and why you do it. It is short, usually 60 seconds or less. It should be enticing and creates a relationship.

For example, “my name is Lynn, I am a Membership Growth Project manager at Girl Scouts of Western Ohio. My job is to ensure that every girl has an opportunity to be a Girl Scout. This is important to me as I want every girl to know their value, a place to belong, and to have the opportunity to be a leader. As a young girl, I was not athletic or top of the class, it was Girl Scouts that built my self-confidence and empowered me.”

anyone in the school that they can introduce you to? Are they part of the PTO? Are they connected to any other youth organizations in the community?

Create a vision and plan. Now it's time to start creating a vision for girls in that community. How can you best serve the girls? Asset Building Community Development is not a linear process. Community Development is an ongoing and circular process that takes time and energy. As more connections are made, more assets are uncovered, and growth occurs. One who truly uses Asset Based Community Development must see the big picture and long-term goals. What is the ultimate goal for the community? Break this down into small measurable goals, prioritize your work, and take actionable steps to achieve them.

### **An example of asset-based Community Development**

A Community Engagement Manager works in a rural community within Girl Scouts of Western Ohio. She has a particular Service Unit that has not seen growth in multiple years. The Service Unit is made up of several small communities in one county. They have three school districts represented. She has several long-term volunteers that lead the six troops within the service unit. The volunteers are rarely in communication with council staff. The service unit is non-existent, and growth does not seem to be top of anyone's priority.

Washington School has one troop that has about 15 girls ranging from k-12 grade and two leaders. The CDM rarely hears from the troop leaders unless it is during cookie season. The school will distribute flyers, but only 1-2 girls show up every year. The school will not allow girl talks. The CDM must have the recruitment off-site as the school does not allow "outsiders" use of the building. The CDM has not had much else going on, nor does it feel that there is a solution to the current situation.

Freedom School is the largest school. The school has 3 troops serving a total of 60 girls. One D/B troop, one D/B/J troop, and a CSA troop. The troop leaders cross over between the troops so there are only about 5 troop leaders between the three troops. The CDM has some contact with two of the leaders. Freedom schools will allow her to flyer and do girl talks. The secretary is usually very responsive to her needs as her granddaughter is a Girl Scout.

Lincoln School has two troops. One troop is a multiple-level troop, serving 27 girls and the other is a new Daisy troop. The multi-level troop has 4 troop leaders, the two primary leaders that are looking to step down at the end of the year. They are passing the hat over to the other two who seem to be less engaged. There is also a new daisy troop with four girls. Although there are two troop leaders, one of the troop leaders is very enthusiastic about Girl Scouts. The troop has had a meet-the-leader and an invite-a-friend with little results. The school does not respond to communication so must recruitment efforts are through word of mouth.

Based on the CDM gap analysis, every school has significant potential. Also, the CDM is only about 75% to the end of the year goal. The CDM has been very frustrated because most communication goes untouched by both volunteers and schools. The CDM feels stuck!

### **The shift in mindset**

The CDM speaks to her team lead who shares the Asset Based Community Development. The CDM must first make a shift in mindset. Instead of thinking that there is little hope, and people are just not interested in Girl Scouts, she must realign her thinking that the solutions are living within the community, and it is her job to uncover the assets to see change.

### **Step one: Map assets in a community**

The CDM reviews Community Plans, Service Unit Annual Plans, and Membership Plans. She connects with program staff in her office to learn about any program partners. She makes a list of assets that she is aware of in the community. She uncovers individuals, associations, institutions, physical assets, and connections. She also looks at the trends, problems, strengths, and values of the community. She talks to staff members who are familiar with the community. She begins to form some ideas of how she can impact change. Although she has several ideas, she decides to start with three assets within the community. She is hoping that she can start building relationships with both Freedom and Lincoln Schools through those assets. She hopes that starting in these two communities will give her connections for Washington Schools.

### **Step two: Building relationships and connections with community members**

GSWO Staff Member: While talking with other GSWO staff, she learns from the D&C Specialist that there is a youth community center near Freedom Schools, and she is friends with a board member. The CDM ask the D&C to make an introduction.

Freedom School Secretary: The CDM talks to the secretary at Freedom Schools since she is already engaged in Girl Scouts and is always helpful. She says she is not sure how she can help.

Volunteer: The CDM meets with the new daisy volunteer at Lincoln Schools. She learns that the Girl Scout volunteer has a sister that works at the school. She asks if there is a good time to pick their brain about Girl Scouts at Lincoln Schools.

### **Step 3: Cultivating relationships to encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources and to identify common interests.**

GSWO Staff Member: The CDM has worked with her co-worker to arrange a meeting with the board member to explore ways that Girl Scouts can have a larger impact on the community. While the CDM is hoping to offer an after-school series, she is not sure that is the best, so she is not going to lead with this. She will let the board member be the expert and would like to find out what her thoughts are on the community's needs and assets. After speaking to the board member, she learned that the community has several after-school programs but has difficulty meeting the needs of the kids over the summer. The community center would like to begin providing a summer lunch program; they are excited about the idea of some programming also. They have invited her to be part of the planning committee.

Freedom School Secretary: While dropping off flyers at Freedom Schools, the CDM shares about the idea of a summer lunch program. The secretary gets excited saying, "OMG, we were just talking about this the other day." The secretary explains that there may be several school staff that may be interested in getting involved.

Volunteer: The volunteer schedules a meeting between the CDM, herself, and her sister. In that meeting, the CDM learns that the Lincoln School principal is the gatekeeper and limits interruptions to the school year. He believes that to increase test schools, the school must hyper-focus on academics and eliminate distractions. She also learns that the PTO is resolving how to get information about extracurriculars to

families. They are planning two community network days in the upcoming year. Based on this information, she starts to attend the PTO meetings.

**Step Four: Bring together a core group of community members to identify the key theme or issue that will inspire people to get organized and create a vision and a plan.**

Based on the work that the CDM is doing, she is joining two core groups of people to address issues. At Freedom School, she has partnered with the community center and school staff to resolve the issues regarding programming and nutrition for the youth over the summer. At Lincoln School, she joins a core group of people who want to make sure that their children get involved with extracurricular activities.

05-19074-01/2023



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