



Gold Award Coach Handbook



Introduction

Welcome!

Thank you for stepping into the role of Gold Award Coach for Senior and Ambassador (9th-12th grade) Girl Scouts. Coaching a Girl Scout is not about having all the answers or being an expert on every topic. It is about showing up with curiosity, patience, and a willingness to partner with a Girl Scout as they deepen their leadership throughout the Gold Award experience. This handbook is designed to help you navigate that partnership with confidence while centering the Girl Scout's experience. Return to it whenever you need support, practical ideas, or reassurance along the way.



Every Gold Award Experience Is Unique

No two Girl Scouts, projects, or coaching relationships will look exactly alike. This handbook is intended to provide a foundation, while giving you the flexibility to meet each Girl Scout where they are.

Key Resources

Gold Award Coaches should be familiar with the core Gold Award resources and comfortable using them to guide coaching conversations. While you do not need to memorize every detail, these resources will help you understand the Gold Award standards, answer questions, and help Girl Scouts as they develop and carry out their projects.

- **Your Guide to Going Gold:** Gold Award standards, requirements, and project development process
- **National Proposal Rubric:** Proposal and final report readiness criteria
- **GoGold:** Online platform developed and supported by GSUSA that Girl Scouts use to develop their project proposal and final report, and councils use to track each Girl Scout's progress
- **Project Proposal:** A planning tool Girl Scouts use to develop, document, and communicate their project plan prior to implementation
- **Final Report:** A reflection and documentation tool Girl Scouts use to capture their Gold Award project implementation, leadership, impact, learning, and outcomes
- **Council Resources:** Guidance and policies specific to your council on topics such as money-earning, safety, marketing, and more.

When questions arise, coaches should use these resources and consult council staff as needed.



Understanding Your Role in the Gold Award Experience

The Gold Award experience includes a network of support. Each person has a different role.

Person	Primary Role
Girl Scout	Drives the vision, decisions, and impact of their project, demonstrating leadership throughout the process.
Gold Award Coach	Helps the Girl Scout understand the Gold Award process and standards, reflect on ideas, navigate challenges, and determine readiness for project proposal and final report submission.
Troop Leader	Encourages the Girl Scout, celebrates progress, and supports participation in the broader Girl Scout experience.
Parent/Caregiver	Provide encouragement, transportation, logistical support, and other assistance while allowing the Girl Scout to lead the project.
Council Staff	Train and support coaches, answer questions, and provide guidance throughout the Gold Award experience.
Project Advisor	Provides expertise related to the project topic and is chosen by the Girl Scout to advise their work.

As a coach, you are often the person who helps the Girl Scout connect these pieces together. You do not need to be an expert on the Girl Scout's project topic, but you should be comfortable with the Gold Award resources and know how to help the Girl Scout apply them to their project.

Core Principles of Coaching

Achievability: The award is ambitious but fully achievable with guidance and skill-building.

Equity: We ensure each Girl Scout has what they need to access the Gold Award and succeed on their own terms.

Process over product, experience over evaluation: We prioritize leadership development, learning, and grace over a “perfect” project.

Girl Scout ownership: Your role is to be a champion and guide, ensuring the process remains centered on the Girl Scout.

The Girl Scout Leads

The Girl Scout makes decisions, reflects on their experiences, and grows.

The Coach Supports

The coach's role is to help the Girl Scout move forward with confidence.



Foundations of the Gold Award

A foundational understanding of the Gold Award will help you support Girl Scouts with confidence throughout the experience. This section provides a brief overview of key concepts that can help inform coaching conversations and support the Girl Scouts as they work toward the Gold Award.

What Is the Gold Award?

The Gold Award is the highest award that a Senior or Ambassador Girl Scout (grades 9–12) can earn. To achieve this, the Girl Scout completes a project that must include five key elements. The project must (1) address a root cause of an issue that the Girl Scout feels passionate about that has a (2) national and/or global link. Through their actions, they must demonstrate (3) leadership while also creating (4) sustainable and (5) measurable impact.



The Five Gold Award Elements

Root Cause: The underlying reason an issue exists. Gold Award projects address root causes rather than symptoms or immediate needs.

National and/or Global Link: The connection between a local issue and a broader issue that exists nationally and/or globally. Researching how other communities or countries address the issue can help identify this connection.

Leadership: Demonstrating leadership means recruiting and engaging others, sharing a vision, organizing efforts, and leading a team to create change. A leader's job is not to do everything, but to make sure everything gets done.

Sustainable Impact: A plan that ensures the project or the work toward addressing the issue continues after the Girl Scout's direct involvement ends.

Measurable Impact: Evidence that shows the project's results. Impact is measurable when information or data is collected to demonstrate that the project had a positive effect or contributed to addressing the issue.

Understanding Take Action vs Community Service

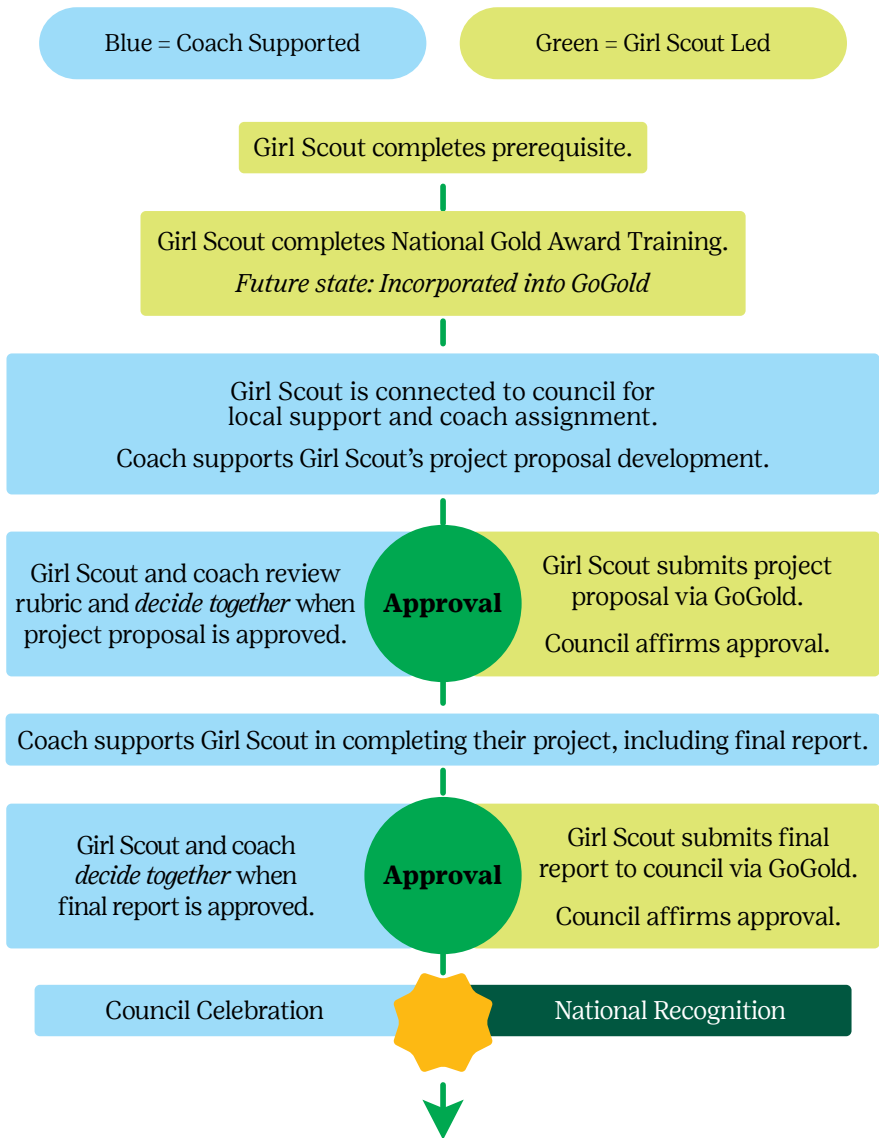
One of the most important aspects of the Gold Award is understanding the difference between community service and Take Action. While both contribute to positive change, Gold Award projects are designed to address root causes and create lasting impact. Understanding this distinction can help coaches support Girl Scouts as they develop strong project ideas and make decisions throughout the process.

Take Action	Community Service
A long-term project with sustainable and ongoing impact that addresses a root cause of an issue	A short-term effort that helps something or someone fulfill an immediate need
Done WITH the community	Done FOR the community
Creating a unique initiative to address an issue	Join an existing effort to solve a problem
Creating and leading your own team of volunteers	Done as part of an existing team (usually as a volunteer)
Setting the goal and leading a team to achieve it	Working towards a goal that's set by others



The Gold Award Experience

The graphic below provides a simplified overview of the Gold Award experience and the key stages a Girl Scout may move through as they develop their leadership and create meaningful change.



Working with Teens

The Gold Award experience occurs during a period of significant growth and change in Girl Scouts' lives. Teenagers are developing leadership skills, independence, confidence, communication styles, and decision-making abilities while also exploring their values, identity, and future goals. They are balancing school, activities, relationships, work, family responsibilities, and other commitments.

During adolescence, opportunities to make choices, exercise autonomy, take on meaningful responsibility, and be treated with respect are especially important. Supportive relationships with caring adults can help young people build confidence, resilience, and leadership skills.

Because of this, Girl Scouts may:

- Feel highly motivated one week and overwhelmed the next
- Need reassurance before taking risks
- Struggle with time management or organization
- Avoid difficult conversations when feeling uncertain
- Change ideas as they learn more
- Need help breaking larger goals into smaller steps
- Communicate differently depending on stress, confidence, or workload

These moments are a normal part of growth and do not automatically reflect a lack of leadership potential or commitment to the Gold Award.

Supporting Autonomy

A growing desire for autonomy is a normal and healthy part of adolescent development. Teens are developing a stronger sense of identity and increasingly want opportunities to make decisions, contribute meaningfully, and have their perspectives respected.

When young people feel trusted and respected, they are often more engaged, motivated, and willing to take ownership of their goals. When young people have fewer opportunities to make decisions, they may become less invested in the process.

For Gold Award Coaches, this means recognizing that a Girl Scout's desire to make their own choices, test ideas, revise plans, and learn through experience is not a barrier to leadership development—it is an important part of it.

Autonomy

A Girl Scout's ability to make decisions, take ownership of their project, and learn through the process of leading and problem-solving

Coaching Skills

Mindset

The way coaches support Girl Scouts is just as important as the support itself. Strong coaching is built on four key practices:

- **Ask Instead of Tell:** Encourage the Girl Scout to think through possibilities and make informed decisions rather than directing the next step.
- **Listen Before Giving Input:** Take time to understand the Girl Scout's goals, vision, concerns, and communication style before offering perspective or guidance.
- **Encourage Reflection Over Perfection:** Focus on helping the Girl Scout process experiences, challenges, leadership, and growth rather than producing a “perfect” project.
- **Support the Girl Scout's Ownership and Agency:** Keep the Girl Scout at the center of decision-making throughout the process by encouraging their ideas, voice, and choices. If the project begins to feel coach-led, it may be time to step back and create more space for the Girl Scout's leadership. This includes respecting a Girl Scout's decision if they choose to step away from the Gold Award process.



Reliability Matters

Timely communication helps build trust. Coaches should aim to respond within 2-3 business days whenever possible.

Building Trust

A strong relationship is the foundation of a successful Gold Award experience.

- **Meet The Girl Scout Where They Are:** Every Girl Scout communicates differently. Early on, discuss their preferred communication methods, their schedule, and how they like to receive feedback. Be sure to share your preferences as well.
- **Create a Safe Environment:** Reassure the Girl Scout that they don't need to have every answer before reaching out. Use language like: "It's okay if things don't always go according to plan."

The Power of Thoughtful Questions

Questions are your most effective tool for building a Girl Scout's confidence and problem-solving skills.

Goal	Example Questions
Exploring Ideas	"What change would you most like to see in your community?" "Why is this issue important to you?"
Developing the Project Proposal	"What elements of your project or its impact do you want to continue after the project is complete?" "Who might be important to involve in this work, and what role could they play?"
Navigating Challenges	"What part feels most challenging at the moment?" "What options are you considering moving forward?"
Reflecting on Growth	"What have you learned about yourself through this process?" "How has your perspective changed since you started?"

Constructive Feedback

The goal of feedback is to help the Girl Scout strengthen their ideas without taking over the planning.

- **Be Specific:** Focus feedback on a particular idea, section, or standard rather than offering general criticism. Instead of saying, "Can you explain this more?" try, "Can you walk me through how you see this part of the project working?"
- **Focus on the Standards:** Ground feedback in the Gold Award standards to help the Girl Scout strengthen their project and understanding of the requirements. Instead of saying, "I'm not sure this is enough," try, "How does this meet the Gold Award standards?"
- **Use Supportive Language:** Frame feedback as an opportunity for growth rather than judgment. Instead of saying, "This part needs more work," try, "What opportunities do you see to strengthen the leadership or long-term impact?"
- **Normalize Revision:** Treat revisions and adjustments as a natural part of the experience. Instead of saying, "Let's revise this before moving forward," try, "Your core idea is strong. Let's make sure the project proposal clearly communicates your vision."

When Additional Support Is Needed

Some situations may require additional guidance. Contact council staff when you have questions about Gold Award standards, safety requirements, accommodations, or concerns that may affect a Girl Scout's ability to participate fully in the experience.

Determining Approval Readiness Together



Before submitting a project proposal or final report, the Girl Scout and coach review the work together using the National Proposal Rubric and Gold Award resources. These conversations are intended to be transparent, collaborative, and focused on helping the Girl Scout evaluate their work against the Gold Award standards. Together, they determine when the work is ready to be approved and submitted via GoGold for council affirmation.

Coaches are not expected to independently interpret or redefine Gold Award standards. Use the National Proposal Rubric and established Gold Award resources as the foundation for approval conversations.

Reviewing a Project Proposal

Review the project proposal together using the National Proposal Rubric. A project proposal is ready when both the coach and Girl Scout agree that it meets expectations in each area of the rubric and aligns with the Gold Award standards. If either person identifies an area that needs further development, use the conversation as an opportunity for reflection, clarification, and growth.

Helpful questions may include:

- What part of this project feels strongest to you?
- How does your project address the root cause of the issue?
- How do you see your leadership showing up in this project?
- What elements of your project or its impact do you want to continue after the project is complete?
- Is there anything you would like to strengthen or clarify before submitting? You might say: “Let’s update your response to ensure your answer reflects this additional information. We want to be sure your proposal accurately reflects your plan.”

Reviewing a Final Report

Review the final report alongside the approved proposal. Reflect together on the Girl Scout's project, leadership, impact, and learning. Consider whether the project was completed as intended and whether the goals of the project were achieved. If the project changed during implementation, use those changes as opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Helpful questions may include:

- What change were you trying to create?
- How do you know whether that change occurred?
- What did you learn during implementation?
- What adjustments did you make along the way, and why?
- If you had more time or resources, what would you do next?

If additional work would meaningfully strengthen the project's impact or completion, discuss together whether those next steps are realistic and appropriate. In many cases, thoughtful adaptation and reflection are evidence of leadership growth rather than reasons to delay completion.

When Questions About Readiness Arise

Differences in perspective are a normal part of the coaching process. When questions about readiness arise, use the National Proposal Rubric and Gold Award resources to guide the conversation. Explore where perspectives differ, seek clarification when needed, and work together toward a shared understanding of the project's strengths and any remaining areas for development.

Note: If questions remain after reviewing the available resources together, consult council staff for additional guidance and support.



Supporting Girl Scouts with Disabilities and Additional Support Needs

Every Girl Scout should have access to the Gold Award experience. Supporting Girl Scouts with disabilities, learning differences, medical needs, mental health needs, or other special factors is not an extra part of coaching—it is a fundamental part of centering the Girl Scout and helping them succeed. The goal is not to change the Gold Award standards. The goal is to remove unnecessary barriers so the Girl Scout can fully participate in the process and demonstrate their leadership.

What Coaches Need to Know

- **Start with the individual Girl Scout:** Get to know the Girl Scout's strengths, interests, communication style, and support needs. Avoid assumptions and remember that every Girl Scout's experience is unique.
- **Provide accommodations, not modifications:** Accommodations change how a Girl Scout accesses the Gold Award process. They do not change what the Girl Scout is expected to achieve.
- **Focus on the person, not the paperwork.** If a family chooses to share information such as an IEP or 504 plan, use it to better understand what supports may be helpful. Treat all information with care and confidentiality.
- **Partner with others when needed.** Parents, caregivers, educators, counselors, council staff, and other trusted adults can be valuable partners in helping a Girl Scout access the Gold Award experience.



Contact council staff for additional guidance and information.

Bringing It All Together

The Gold Award is about more than completing a project. It is an opportunity for a Girl Scout to discover their strengths, develop leadership skills, and create meaningful change in their community and beyond.

As a coach, you play an important role in that experience. By offering encouragement, asking thoughtful questions, and helping the Girl Scout navigate the process, you support their growth while ensuring the experience remains truly Girl Scout-led.

No coach has every answer, and no two Gold Award experiences will look exactly alike. Use the resources available to you, lean on your council when questions arise, and trust the process. Your support can help a Girl Scout gain the confidence, skills, and sense of accomplishment that come from earning the Gold Award.



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