

Volunteer Essentials 2012–2013

Section six: Volunteer policies, standards and practices

Although girls and adults work as partners to encourage the development of leadership and decision-making skills by girls, it is the adult volunteers who make Girl Scouting a reality in the majority of communities. Adult volunteers are fundamental to Girl Scouting as role models and for the direct delivery of the Girl Scout Leadership Experience.

River Valleys' Board of Directors has established volunteer policies based on the principle that knowledgeable, well-trained and motivated volunteers are essential for Girl Scouting to accomplish its goals and objectives. If volunteers are to consistently perform to a high standard, it is necessary that they understand the policies directly affecting their pivotal role in Girl Scouting. This chapter presents the basic policies concerning volunteering with Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys and identifies what is expected from board members, other volunteers and staff.

River Valleys' volunteers are expected to welcome, embrace and appreciate people of every race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin or culture, age, ability, educational and economic background and to create an inclusive environment where all girls and adults feel safe, secure and welcome.

Information found in this section:

Definition of a volunteer

Volunteers' rights and responsibilities

Confidentiality

Dress code

Equal opportunity and volunteer management

Representation of River Valleys

Training

Climate and safety

Working with children

Safety standards

Background Check Policy Statement

Criminal background check procedure

Disqualification from volunteer participation

Volunteer grievance

Discriminatory harassment policy

Sexual harassment policy

Conflict management policy

Conflict of interest policy

Definition of a volunteer

River Valleys is a membership organization. The membership policy states that adults participating in the Girl Scout Movement as volunteers must be registered as members with Girls Scouts of the USA. Membership as a Girl Scout is granted to any person who:

- Meets GSUSA membership standards

- Has paid annual membership dues for the membership year (financial assistance is available through River Valleys), which is October 1 to September 30, or is a Lifetime Member
- Abides by GSUSA policies, standards and guidelines, River Valleys policies and operational procedures, governmental and affiliated organization regulations and standards, and the Constitution of GSUSA

Although female role models are essential for carrying out the purpose of Girl Scouting, men are welcome to serve as board and committee members and in other volunteer capacities. Girl Scouts also requires that at least one of a troop's leaders be an adult female not related to other adult leaders.

An adult volunteer is defined as anyone who contributes his or her time to River Valleys without compensation or the expectation of compensation beyond reasonable reimbursement for allowance for expenses, or any other thing of value in lieu of compensation. Volunteers typically give their time as troop leaders, coaches, mentors, facilitators, board members, delegates or provide assistance to girls on projects in their area of expertise.

Volunteers' rights and responsibilities

Girl Scout volunteers are expected to serve as appropriate role models for girls and for other adults. Any behavior that violates the law or Girl Scout policy or standards, or that compromises the image of Girl Scouting as well as the individual involved, can be grounds for termination or failure to be re-appointed to a volunteer position. In performing their assignments, volunteers must exercise common sense and sound judgment and be courteous and respectful to council employees and other Girl Scouts.

While functioning in the capacity of a Girl Scout volunteer, adults must:

- Promote the positive image, goals and standards of Girl Scouts at all times
- Use council property and the personal property of other volunteers, employees and girls with care
- Make an effort to be punctual for Girl Scout events and keep absences to a minimum.
- Adhere to River Valleys' financial policies and use Girl Scout funds responsibly for Girl Scout purposes only
- Follow Girl Scout safety and program standards

In addition, volunteers must NOT:

- Use tobacco in the presence of girls at Girl Scout programs, activities and events, including travel to and from
- Consume alcohol while they are responsible for girl members or when present at girl activities or events
- Possess, sell or use illegal drugs or misuse prescribed drugs
- Perform volunteer duties or drive to or from Girl Scout events while under the influence of alcohol or prescription drugs that impair alertness or judgment
- Promote religious preferences during Girl Scout activities, except as permitted in the context of Girl Scouts' Faith-Based Initiatives Programs
- Promote political preferences during Girl Scout activities

- Promote an individual opinion or philosophy inconsistent with the Girl Scout Mission during Girl Scout activities

Confidentiality

Volunteers are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of all proprietary, privileged or sensitive information (confidential information) to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer—whether this information involves a staff person, volunteer, girl or River Valleys business in general. Volunteers are prohibited from discussing or sharing confidential information with River Valleys’ employees or volunteers who do not have a need to know such information, or with individuals or organizations outside of River Valleys, including family members. Failure to protect confidential information may result in termination of the volunteer’s relationship with River Valleys.

Dress code

Girl Scouts of the USA is a uniformed organization in which the uniform is a symbol and mark of distinction. Although a uniform is encouraged, it is not required for participation in Girl Scout activities. The uniform may be worn when appropriate at Girl Scout activities and is recommended for River Valleys’ functions (a limited number of adult uniforms are available for loan through River Valleys). Proper placement of the insignia is required. Volunteers are representatives of River Valleys in their communities. Personal appearance, public conduct and attitude should exemplify the best in Girl Scouting.

Equal opportunity and volunteer management

River Valleys provides equal opportunities to all volunteers and applicants for volunteer positions without regard to race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, pregnancy, age, ability, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, membership or activity in a local commission, or status as a covered veteran in accordance with applicable federal, state and local laws. River Valleys complies with applicable state and local laws governing non-discrimination in its provision of services in every location in which River Valleys volunteers perform their assignments. This policy applies to all terms and conditions of the volunteer program, including but not limited to, selection, placement, supervision, training, recognition, evaluation, release and volunteer career development. Program activities and educational materials for both girls and adults will respect and reflect the nature of a global society.

Representation of River Valleys

Volunteers are not agents of River Valleys. Unless authorized to do so by River Valleys management, volunteers must not take any action or make any statement which might obligate River Valleys with respect to third persons or the general public, including statements to the media, coalition or lobbying efforts with other organizations, or any agreements involving contractual or other financial obligations. Volunteers are only authorized to act as representatives of River Valleys as specifically indicated within their position descriptions.

Training

Training is offered to help volunteers gain the skills and knowledge to provide exemplary Girl Scout programming. All volunteers are required to complete the GSUSA Volunteer Orientation to Girl Scouting. Adult volunteers working directly with girls are required to complete a Fast Start Meeting (one adult per troop) and Leadership Essentials. Detailed information on adult learning

requirements can be found at GirlScoutsRV.org. Training is developed to accommodate adult learners and is offered through various approaches: facilitated learning sessions, online or self-studies. Volunteers who work directly with girls should complete the required adult learning sessions within four months after the first day of appointment. Additional training is available to volunteers working with girls on particular activities such as outdoor cooking, camping, and archery.

Climate and safety

River Valleys is committed to an environment and climate in which all relationships are characterized by dignity, respect, courtesy and equitable treatment, including relationships between volunteers, volunteers and staff members, volunteers and parents/guardians and volunteers and girls. River Valleys also maintains environments that are free of child abuse and neglect. Under these basic tenets, the policy is divided into six sections: working with children, safety standards, background check, discriminatory harassment, sexual harassment and conflict management.

Working with children

Prohibition of maltreatment of minors

River Valleys provides an environment for all girls that is free of child abuse, exploitation and neglect, and safeguards the health and well-being of girls. River Valleys will not tolerate any behavior that may physically, emotionally or sexually abuse, exploit or neglect girls, or put girls' safety at risk. Conduct prohibited by this policy includes, but is not limited to:

- Sexual advances toward girls
- Touching girls in a sexual way
- Any display or demonstration of sexual activity in the presence of girls, including but not limited to kissing, etc.
- Exhibitionism or voyeurism in the presence of girls
- Involvement of girls in sexual activities
- Use of sexual materials or objects in the presence of girls except as part of an approved education curriculum (to be approved by each girl's parent/guardian)
- Infliction of physical injury on a girl other than by accidental means
- Use of physical restraint or force on a girl that exceeds the amount necessary to prevent harm to the girl or others
- Threatening to inflict physical injury or use excessive restraint or force on a girl
- Intentional, reckless or negligent failure to provide adequate safety measures, care and supervision of girls during Girl Scout activities
- Emotional maltreatment of girls including, but not limited to, verbal abuse or verbal attacks such as comments that berate, belittle or demean; comments that tend to stigmatize or victimize; and name-calling

Reporting child abuse or neglect

As a matter of River Valleys policy, any volunteer who has reason to believe that a Girl Scout is being abused physically or sexually, or neglected, must immediately report the information to the following:

- **Minnesota:** Local child protection, police department or county sheriff's office

- **Wisconsin:** The county Department of Health and Family Services, the sheriff or police department
- **Iowa:** The Iowa Department of Human Services, county attorney or law enforcement Agency

Safety standards

The Girl Scout program largely rests with River Valleys volunteers. All volunteers must be thoroughly familiar with the information in “Section four: Safety-Wise” and be responsible for ensuring that all Girl Scout activities meet required safety standards. No animals, including service dogs, may be brought onto River Valleys’ properties by a service unit, troop or non-Girl Scout group/organization without prior council authorization. No weapons may be brought onto River Valleys’ properties by a service unit, troop or non-Girl Scout group/organization without prior council authorization.

Background check policy statement

In order to ensure the safety and well-being of the girl members of River Valleys, River Valleys has the right to disqualify or restrict the duties of any person who has been convicted of certain crimes, who has pleaded guilty or no contest to certain crimes, who has been placed on probation or deferred adjudication for certain crimes, and/or who resides on the same premises as a registered sex offender.

The criminal background search is one component of the River Valleys’ volunteer screening procedure, the goal of which is to screen prospective adult volunteers and place capable and qualified adults in all operational positions. Prospective River Valleys’ volunteers must complete and sign the volunteer application authorizing River Valleys to conduct a criminal background search. Without a completed and signed volunteer application, a person cannot serve in or be appointed to a volunteer position with River Valleys.

River Valleys will conduct a criminal background search on new volunteers every year and on all volunteers every three years. For the 2012–2013 membership year, ALL volunteers will be required to complete the background check process. The primary concern of River Valleys is to safeguard the safety and best interests of its girl members. Below is a list of criminal offenses that will disqualify a person from volunteer participation in River Valleys, as well as the process used to determine disqualification of a person from volunteer participation.

Criminal background check procedure

Application and authorization form: Volunteers must complete and sign a volunteer application which provides reference information and authorization for River Valleys to verify information provided on the volunteer application.

Online background check: Volunteers must complete an online background check to process a criminal history and sex offender record check. The background check will determine eligibility to volunteer with the Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys. It is free and accessed through a third-party vendor at GirlScoutsRV.org. The user name is GIRLSCOUTS and password is SCOUTS999. Both are case sensitive.

Accuracy of application and authorization form: Providing false information on the application, including driver’s license number, Social Security number or date of birth, is

grounds for automatic exclusion from participation in River Valleys regardless of the result of the criminal background search.

Disqualification from volunteer participation

The following rules shall apply if River Valleys learns (via a criminal background search or otherwise) that a prospective volunteer has been convicted of, has pleaded guilty to, has received adjudication for, or has pleaded no contest to one of the following crimes.

Automatic disqualification:

- Crimes against children
- Felony offenses against persons
- Felony offenses against a family member
- Crimes defined as public indecency
- Crimes involving the use of weapons
- Any violent crime
- Any felony drug-related offense
- Any felony conviction within the five (5) year period preceding the background check
- Residing on the same premises as a registered sex offender*
- Any offense involving driving under the influence, driving while intoxicated or equivalent within the five (5) year period preceding the background check will be automatically disqualified but may be eligible for reversal upon appeal by prospective volunteer.

**Registered sex offenders are not eligible for membership in Girl Scouts of the USA and may not participate in any capacity with Girl Scouts. Any adult living on the premises with a registered sex offender may participate only as a parent/guardian.*

Possible disqualification:

For all other criminal offenses, or felony convictions older than the five-year period preceding the background check, River Valleys shall review the applicant's situation on a case-by-case basis. The decision whether to allow service shall be within the discretion of River Valleys. Factors to be considered by River Valleys in making such determinations include, but are not limited to, the nature and severity of the criminal conduct, the position for which the person seeks to volunteer, the length of time since the criminal conduct occurred, the circumstances under which the crime was committed, the degree of rehabilitation, the likelihood that the person will commit the crime again, and the number of crimes committed by the prospective volunteer. Residing with a convicted felon may also disqualify a prospective volunteer from being eligible to volunteer depending on the severity and frequency of the conviction(s).

Confidentiality:

River Valleys will maintain the confidentiality of all criminal background search information, including information regarding disqualification decisions.

Volunteer grievance

A grievance is a complaint that policies and/or procedures related to a volunteer's position are not being administered properly. If a volunteer feels that the policies and/or procedures related to a volunteer's position are not being administered properly, she/he may use the council's volunteer grievance procedure.

Procedure: While serious conflicts are rare among positively motivated volunteers in Girl Scouting, disagreements can result in uncomfortable relationships. We encourage people in conflict to talk to each other openly and calmly. If an individual feels the need for help resolving a conflict, the circumstances should be discussed with the immediate supervisor and all parties involved. If a solution is not reached by this group, the unresolved conflict should be taken to the next level.

Discriminatory harassment policy

It is the policy of River Valleys that our volunteers enjoy an environment free of discrimination and discriminatory harassment. Accordingly, all forms of discriminatory harassment are strictly prohibited. Anyone found to have violated this policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including discharge.

This policy refers to discriminatory harassment. Discriminatory harassment is harassment based on race, color, creed, religion, age, sex, national origin, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, status regarding public assistance, or membership or activity in a local commission. Any discriminatory harassment action based on the above criteria by an employee or volunteer toward another that has the effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's volunteer performance and creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment will not be tolerated. It could include, for example:

- The display of written materials or pictures that are offensive to gender or to racial, ethnic or religious groups, or to persons who have a different sexual orientation
- Verbal abuse, jokes or insults directed at members of the opposite sex, members of a particular racial, ethnic or religious group, or people who have a different sexual orientation

Responding to discriminatory harassment

Any volunteer who believes that she/he has been subject to discriminatory harassment should make her/his concerns known by:

- Telling the person engaging in the harassing conduct or communication that the conduct or communication is offensive, is against this policy, and must stop.
- Advising her/his supervisor, the CEO, or any other member of River Valleys' management of the incident(s). This option should be used if an individual does not wish to communicate directly with the person whose conduct or communication is offensive, or if direct communication has been unsuccessful.

All complaints of prohibited harassment are investigated promptly and impartially. If it is determined that a violation of this policy has occurred, appropriate action up to and including discharge or other disciplinary action will be taken. The type of action taken will be determined by the severity, frequency and nature of the offense, as well as other relevant considerations.

Retaliation

No retaliation will occur because a volunteer has, in good faith, reported an incident of suspected discriminatory harassment. If any volunteer is found to have violated this policy, she or he will be terminated from her or his assignment immediately and may be reported to the appropriate authorities.

Sexual harassment policy

One particular category of discriminatory harassment is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct or communication that is sexual in nature when:

- Submission to such conduct or communication is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a term or condition of volunteer service
- Submission to or rejection of that conduct or communication by an individual is used as a factor in decisions affecting such individual's volunteer service and/or that the conduct or communication has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's volunteer service, or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Examples of sexual harassment include, but are not limited to:

- Sex-oriented verbal "kidding," abuse or joking
- Subtle or overt pressure for sexual activity
- Intentionally brushing against another's body
- Demands for sexual favors accompanied by implied or overt promises of preferential treatment or threats concerning an individual's volunteer status

Sexual harassment can be perpetrated by both men and women and may be directed at the same or opposite sex.

Conflict management policy

River Valleys' staff members will work to resolve conflicts between volunteers and staff members in an equitable manner consistent with its policies and procedures. Additionally, River Valleys is committed to the timely resolution of conflicts between volunteers and between volunteers and Girl Scout adult family members. Girls' welfare is River Valleys' highest priority in resolving conflicts among adults, and River Valleys will resolve such conflicts in the context of the values, traditions and purposes of Girl Scouting as stated in the Constitution of GSUSA.

Conflict of interest policy

At times, volunteers may be faced with situations where the decisions they make in their volunteer capacity may conflict with their own personal or family interests. An actual or potential conflict of interest occurs when a volunteer is in a position to influence a decision involving River Valleys which may result in a personal gain or benefit to the volunteer or the volunteer's relatives or in a gain or benefit to a business or other organization which is owned or managed by the volunteer or the volunteer's relatives.

If a volunteer is in a position to influence a decision involving River Valleys which may result in an actual or potential conflict of interest, the volunteer must report the actual or potential conflict of interest to a member of River Valleys management and must not participate in or influence the decision without prior written consent of a member of River Valleys management.