



The Democratic Process: The Role of the Delegate

The purpose of this pamphlet is to interpret the role of National Council delegates, as members of the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. corporation, and that of Girl Scout council delegates, as members of separate corporations. It distinguishes between these two similar groups of individuals who, in meeting assembled, give direction to the Girl Scout Movement in the United States and in Girl Scout councils. The pamphlet emphasizes the role of the delegates in the corporate planning process and focuses on their responsibilities and their importance in guiding the Girl Scout Movement.

The Girl Scout Movement in the United States is rooted firmly in the belief that all of its activities shall be guided by the democratic process. Over the years, Girl Scouting has created a wide variety of systems for involving its membership in this process. This is evidenced at all levels of the Movement, from the decisions made by girl members in a Brownie Ring to the deliberations of the National Council.

The National Council Delegate: A Member of the Corporation

At the end of each triennium and the beginning of the next, the members of the corporation of Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. gather at a central location, in meeting assembled, to conduct the business of the National Council. The members consist of delegates elected by Girl Scout councils and those from lone troops outside the United States where there can be no council (Troops on Foreign Soil), members of the National Board of Directors and of the National Nominating Committee, past presidents of Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., and other persons who may be elected by the National Council. The number of delegates elected from councils and lone troops, although not to exceed 2,000, must at all times comprise at least four-fifths of the entire membership of the National Council.¹

It is this membership body, charged with the responsibility for giving broad policy direction to the future of the Girl Scout Movement in the United States, that represents the philosophy of our founder: The democratic process shall guide all of our activities; and the ultimate responsibility for the Girl Scout Movement rests with the volunteers.²

The number of delegates from each council, elected at a council's annual meeting, is based on a membership formula that allows one delegate from each council and, in addition, "one further delegate for each eighteen hundred girls under (the council's) jurisdiction who are members registered with GSUSA as of September 30 of the year preceding the regular meeting of the National Council."³ When necessary, this figure is adjusted up or down by 300, or multiples of 300, to keep the total number of members of the National Council as close as possible to 2,000, without exceeding that figure. The delegates are elected to the National Council and serve in the position for three years.

A deliberative assembly, such as the National Council, is defined in *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*⁴ as follows.

The kind of gathering to which parliamentary law is generally understood to apply has the following distinguishing characteristics:

- It is an independent or autonomous group of people meeting to determine, in full and free discussion, courses of action to be taken in the name of the entire group.
- The group is of such size — usually any number of persons more than about a dozen — that a degree of formality is necessary in its proceedings.
- Persons having the right to participate — that is, the members — are ordinarily free to act within the assembly according to their own judgment.
- The opinion of each member present has equal weight, as expressed by vote, in the decisions made.
- Failure to concur in a decision of the body does not constitute withdrawal from the body.
- If there are absentee members — as there usually are in any formally organized assembly such as a legislative body or the the assembly of an ordinary society — the members present at a regular or properly called meeting act for the entire membership, subject to such limitations as may be established by the body's governing rules.

1. GSUSA, *Blue Book of Basic Documents* (New York; 1982), 10.

2. *Blue Book*, 9.

3. *Blue Book*, 10.

4. Robert, Henry M., *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (Atlanta: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1981), 1.

Responsibilities of Delegates

Individuals who accept nomination and election from councils as delegates to the National Council assume one of the major rights and one of the most serious responsibilities in Girl Scouting. At the National Council Session, as members of the corporation, they hear the National Board of Directors' report of its stewardship of Girl Scouting in the past triennium, with reports on innovation and progress in such major areas of activity as program redesign, membership initiatives, corporate management, communications, fund development campaigns, GSUSAs participation in international events for girls, and the triennial Conference of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. A detailed report of sources of revenue and expenses and the status of GSUSAs financial position is also heard.

Delegates to the National Council carry responsibility for determining the direction Girl Scouting will take throughout the country. Therefore, each delegate carries a responsibility to the total Girl Scout Movement in the United States. Delegates fulfill their responsibility to the Movement by:⁵

- Being fully prepared on the business of the National Council.
- Attending all meetings of the National Council and participating in the proceedings.
- Reporting to their councils on the National Council decisions and the reasons for such decisions.
- Sharing insights and information gained at the National Council Session within their councils.
- Exercising follow-up leadership through frequent interaction and assuming new leadership roles in the council.
- Studying all business items on the agenda, background information, and recommendations of the National Board of Directors.
- Attending briefing meetings conducted by their councils; participating in council, board, and association meetings, as requested, when reactions to National Council business are being considered; and obtaining a broad view of opinions of Girl Scout people from all parts of the council.
- Becoming thoroughly informed on the various facts about their councils.
- Becoming thoroughly informed on facts about the national organization.
- Being familiar with the contents of the current *Blue Book of Basic Documents* (a copy should be brought to the National Council Session).
- Knowing about parliamentary procedure and *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.
- Planning with the council president the information to be gathered and the kind of reports to be made to the council when the National Council Session is over.

Through participating in floor debates, voting on proposals submitted by councils and the National Board of Directors, hearing presentations, and taking part in discussions on non-action items, delegates fulfill their mandate to give guidance to the direction of the work of the National Board of Directors until the next session of the National Council. It is through this process that National Council delegates influence GSUSAs corporate planning and play a major role in the evaluation of organizational effectiveness.

The specific responsibilities of the delegates and other members of the National Council, while they are participating in the National Council Session, are to "determine the general lines of policy of the Girl Scout Movement and program by considering and acting upon proposals directed toward the fostering and improvement of Girl Scouting, by receiving and acting upon reports of its Board of Directors, and by giving guidance to the Board upon general lines of direction of the movement and program,"⁶ and "to make and amend a constitution and bylaws,

5. GSUSA, *Workbook: Girl Scout National Council, 42nd Convention* (New York: 1981), 10.

6. *Blue Book*, 10.

and to elect a board of directors, and officers and agents."⁷ The members of the National Council, then, not only determine the general lines of direction of the Girl Scout Movement; they also select those persons who are responsible for carrying out such direction.

Delegates are responsible for approving the agenda and parliamentary rules of the meetings; participating in, and closely following, all floor discussions; and, finally, voting upon proposals and nominees for elective office. Each voting member of the National Council is obligated to check any special interest at the door; to open her/his mind to the opinions and situations of others; and, finally, to vote as conscience guides, keeping in mind the welfare and progress of members of the entire Girl Scout Movement in the United States.

Again, it is important to remember that National Council delegates are elected by their council delegates and that, even though National Council members are not required to vote as representatives of their council's views, they must be informed about such views.

Selection of Nominees to Become Delegates to the National Council

One of the most challenging tasks facing a council nominating committee is the selection of qualified members 14 years of age and over to fill the positions of delegates to the National Council. In selecting nominees for delegates to the National Council, council nominating committees look for people with qualifications similar to those of their own board of directors. It is important that the background and experience of each potential nominee for a National Council delegate be considered as carefully as those of corporate officers and directors of the council.

In their capacity as members of the National Council, delegates are closely involved in strategic planning, as they take action in meeting assembled and participate in and react to major policy issues that will have a long-term effect on Girl Scouting. Therefore it is critical that persons in councils who are responsible for strategic planning — officers, executive directors, board members, association chairmen, and people who have served as delegates within their council — are selected as nominees for delegates to the National Council. The council president should be selected because she/he is responsible for giving leadership to the strategic planning process; the executive director, because she/he is responsible for the corporate planning/management system; and council board members, because they carry out the responsibility for policy-making and corporate affairs.

Association chairmen and council delegates also have the kind of background needed by National Council delegates. They are responsible for helping interpret and implement the direction of the National Council, as it is communicated from the National Board of Directors.

Many of the discussions that take place at the National Council Session are carried over, to be reported on or reacted to at the National Meeting of Presidents and Executive Directors that takes place in the year following the National Council Session. If the two participants from each council who attend this meeting have had the benefit of firsthand participation in the actions of the National Council, it helps them provide input for future organizational planning, a major focus of the National Meeting of Presidents and Executive Directors.

Official Visitors to the National Council

Along with the selection of delegates to the National Council, each council selects official visitors to attend the business meetings and other convention events. During council training sessions for delegates, visitors should be briefed on the proposals and discussion items on the National Council agenda. However, it should be made clear that visitors attend business meetings as observers only; they take no part in discussions, nor do they vote on proposals. Being an official visitor entitles the individual to receive the convention workbook and program and to take part

7. *Blue Book*, 6.

in all convention events except those specifically planned for delegates. Special passes to the convention arena are issued to all official visitors. This opportunity, which should be viewed as an educational experience in watching the democratic process in action, is appropriate entry for persons new to Girl Scouting who have potential for administrative and policy-making positions.

Preparation of Delegates

Prior to the National Council Session, each council should prepare its delegates to fulfill their responsibilities. As the convention workbooks are received, councils will:

- Plan a series of meetings (for delegates and persons elected to fill vacancies) to discuss the agenda and proposals.
- Study the parliamentary procedures that will govern the meeting and also examine *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.
- Enlist the help of a registered or certified parliamentarian to give training sessions.
- Call upon the expertise of council members who have been delegates to previous National Council Sessions.

An important part of delegate training may be to review the most significant decisions reached by delegates at previous National Council Sessions, particularly those decisions made at the most recent session that have been carried over for final action or progress reports. For example:

- In 1972, the Promise and Law were revised.
- In 1975, it was decided that all members of the organization, including Brownies, would make the same Promise and that GSUSA would remain an all-girl organization for members under the age of eighteen.
- In 1981, a Lifetime Membership in the Girl Scout Movement was established.
- In 1981, an Alumnae Membership Feasibility Study was approved, with the findings to be reported in 1984.

In the last analysis, delegate training is essential to ensure that each National Council member understands the working of the meeting, participates fully in the decision-influencing process, proposes motions, if desired, and takes a real sense of pride in participating in the deliberations of this assembly.

Participation of Delegates During the National Council Session

When delegates from every council chartered by GSUSA arrive at the meeting site, the months of preparation and study, the quality of council delegate training, and the commitment of those who have been nominated and elected as delegates, will have a focus. Then is the time for action — deliberative, responsible action. Delegate credentials will be validated; schedules will be checked; and opening ceremonies will reaffirm the purpose that has brought together thousands of concerned, committed members of Girl Scouts of the United States of America.

While participating in the meetings at the National Council Session, National Council members sit in a designated section of the meeting room reserved for them. To be admitted to this area, members must wear the special identification obtained at the credentials desk. They should attend each meeting of the National Council. They should listen to all opinions expressed, enter into debate to present new points of view or take issue with others, weigh all pros and cons, and vote independently on all matters requiring a decision.⁸

8. *Workbook*, 11.

The following delineation of the nature of voluntary organizations as different from private industry might describe our own National Council: "(A voluntary organization) has a constituency. Typically, they have members (our delegates) who have a special relationship to the organization which is distinct from a stockholder, employee, or customer relationship. There is often a loyalty on the part of the constituency. . . . Often there is a feeling of both 'ownership' and 'belonging' on the part of the individuals involved to a greater degree than in business."⁹

The National Council delegates do have feelings of both ownership and belonging. As the business of the meetings proceeds, the interaction it generates offers an outstanding example of participatory democracy. The delegates' solid preparation, derived from their local delegate training, becomes evident as they fit smoothly into the process. They are aware of the rules of debate, equipped to participate, prepared to influence, and eager to learn from others. Each delegate member has one vote — all are equal. When the last meeting ends, the members of the National Council return to their communities to share their experiences with local colleagues and with girls.

The Role of the National Council Member During the Triennium

Upon returning from the National Council Session, the National Council member has an obligation to share and interpret the decisions taken by the National Council at her/his council's annual meeting, where the members of the council corporation are assembled. The National Council decisions should also be discussed with the council's board of directors, with persons elected to fill vacancies who were not in attendance at the National Council Session, at association meetings and with staff, in light of implications for the council's planning. They should also be disseminated to the total registered membership through council bulletins and other written communications.

Each council delegation will plan in advance how to report on the results of the National Council Session. Delegates should tell their councils about:¹⁰

- Discussions held at the meetings.
- Decisions made and the reasons for such decisions.
- Speakers heard.
- Audiovisuals seen and heard.
- Colorful and interesting exhibits visited and materials obtained.
- Persons they have met and talked with from all parts of the country.
- Perceptions of Girl Scouting as national and international movement.

At various times throughout the triennium, the National Board of Directors may communicate directly with the members of the National Council, to keep them informed on important issues or to get their reactions on decisions that will affect the future of Girl Scouting. For example, they will be asked to give their reactions to proposed GSUSA corporate goals.

National Council delegates can contribute to the democratic process by helping the council understand its potential role in proposing agenda items for the next triennium's National Council. Time limits are important, for proposals must reach the National Board of Directors approximately twelve months prior to the National Council Session. Any proposal considered by a council should be discussed at a local council meeting when council delegates are present to voice their opinions. Proposals submitted by the council must be approved by the council board of directors and signed by the council president. In the year preceding each National Council Session, the National President sends to every council president a letter announcing the date

9. Mason, David E., "As I See It," *Voluntary Action Leadership* (Spring 1979).

10. *Workbook*, 11.

established by the National Board of Directors as the deadline for mailing council proposals for consideration as agenda items for the National Council Session. The calendar and procedures for handling council proposals, a guide for councils submitting proposals, and the format for submitting proposals or suggestions for agenda items are also sent at that time.

Proposals act as recommendations having a nationwide impact on the Girl Scout Movement and requiring formal action by the National Council. Suggestions for agenda items should involve issues of nationwide Girl Scout interest, and should generate discussion that provides the National Council with the opportunity to set direction without taking formal action. Agenda suggestions may also deal with subjects or areas of interest that would be informative or inspirational to the National Council.¹¹

In communicating their impressions of the National Council Session and the National Convention to others, delegates will have an opportunity to analyze their own experiences. They have been privileged to be elected by their peers in Girl Scouting, and they have no doubt been inspired and renewed by the overwhelming size and scope of the National Council. Most of all, they have been part of a process that reinforced their ability to further the democratic way of life.

Perhaps the most important fact for National Council members to remember as they return to their councils is that, in sharing their experiences, they may be helping educate Girl Scout members who, one day, will be elected to the very special position they themselves hold.

11. *Guide for Girl Scout Councils Submitting Proposals or Suggestions for Agenda Items for the 1984 Session of the National Council* (sent to council presidents, February 1983).

The Girl Scout Council Delegate: A Member of the Corporation

In Girl Scout councils, delegates are elected through associations to be members of the corporation. Individuals who accept the nomination and subsequent election as a delegate take on the responsibility for giving direction for Girl Scouting within the council's jurisdiction. In their capacity as delegates, in meeting assembled, they receive the stewardship report from the board of directors, including a report of the council's financial status; hear other reports; take part in discussions about major areas of concern or future actions that will have an impact on the total council; may take action on proposals that have been approved by the board of directors; amend the council bylaws; and elect the officers and members of the board of directors and nominating committee and the delegates to the National Council.

In order for the delegates to fulfill their obligations to those who have elected them, the council board of directors must establish and sustain systems that foster and support the delegate. Such systems include: establishing the method through which delegates are elected, for example, associations; training the delegate; providing challenging agendas for association meetings; establishing substantive agenda items for associations; organizing a cycle of meetings that allows for communication flow; forecasting the corporate business of the council far enough in advance to allow preparation for the participation of the delegate; preparing council meeting agendas involving grassroots thinking on major issues that give direction to the future of the council.

Those who are elected as delegates should be familiar with the democratic process as practiced by the council; they must be afforded the opportunity to enter into this process as soon after their election as possible. Providing such opportunities is the responsibility of the council's top leadership.

It is essential that councils have a well coordinated plan for all delegates to be trained as soon as possible after they have been elected. Whether the training is conducted in a central location or decentralized into geographic subdivisions, it should be the same for all delegates.

Delegate Training

For several reasons, it is helpful if training teams are composed of the council president, vice presidents, corporate officers, members of the board of directors, and association chairmen. First, the council is likely to have a core of officers and members whose terms are continuing and who are experienced policy-makers. Second, these persons are familiar with current issues before the board and are able to differentiate policy from operational issues.

The training should focus on:

- The responsibility of the delegates as members of the corporation.
- The process for delegates becoming informed about the issues to come before them at the annual meeting of the council.
- How the board of directors refers issues to the associations and constituencies for reaction.
- How proposals may be originated by individuals and groups to the board for action and/or referral to operations or placement on the annual meeting agenda.
- How the delegates — acting in meeting assembled upon proposals, and participating in discussions about program events and major projects — give direction to the board of directors as the board conducts the annual organizational performance review, adjusts the council's corporate goals, and generates new thrusts that feed into tactical planning.
- Delegates as members of a deliberative assembly.

Trainers should emphasize how important it is for delegates to understand that — with the exception of the adoption of the agenda and standing rules, the election of officers, board members, nominating committee, and delegates to the National Council, and the amending or revising of the council bylaws — there are few items that actually require them to vote as a deliberative assembly. The discussions on major issues in which they participate are for the purpose of giving guidance to the board of directors in making the most appropriate policy decisions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the training session is the familiarization of the delegates with the systems that enable the presentation, to the board of directors, of matters of concern to the membership, for possible inclusion as proposals or discussion items for the council meeting agenda. This responsibility enfranchises the delegates, as they seek to understand the sometimes conflicting opinions of their constituents, weigh their own opinions and attitudes, and remember that a decision made by the delegates at the council annual meeting will have an impact on Girl Scouting throughout the jurisdiction.

Most councils have adopted procedures that allow associations to develop proposals for the council board of directors that provide discussion items at association meetings, thereby aiding the board in making decisions and providing content for discussion items at the council's annual meeting.

Trainers should review the corporation's planning cycle, emphasizing any deadlines set by the board of directors for the submission of proposals or discussion items for association meetings and for the council meeting agenda. It is helpful to provide delegates with a calendar or chart of the council's cycle of meetings.

During the training, the council's system for maintaining a dialogue between the policy-makers (the board) and policy-influencers (the delegates and members of the associations) must be outlined. The process that enables delegates to properly assume their role occurs after the training session has ended. Then the council's ability to utilize its corporate membership as a whole is tested; in order to initiate positive informed change — for example, major policy decisions — the policy-influencers and policy-makers must be in touch with the larger membership.

The Council Annual Meeting of the Corporation

Council annual meetings are of importance in several ways. The corporation is required by state law to meet at least once a year. The council meeting also provides the opportunity for delegates to become involved in the council's planning process and be informed on the anticipated future of Girl Scouting in its jurisdiction. Most important, the business conducted by the council at the meeting — the election of its volunteer leadership and discussion of major policy issues — legally enables the corporation to continue its work. The delegates, then, have the authority both to give guidance to the overall policy direction of the council and to elect those responsible for ongoing policy decisions — the corporate officers and board members.

The delegates comprise the majority of electors among the attendees at the council meeting. They have been chosen by the geographic subdivisions, based on membership formulas outlined in the bylaws.

The council meeting, then, is a Girl Scout council's deliberative assembly — the factual reality of its democratic principles and practices. According to Webster, a democracy is a system in which "supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them . . . through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections." In Girl Scouting, the people are the members. They exercise power through their delegates, using a system of representation — at the council meeting — that results from free elections in geographic subdivisions.

Planning for the Corporation Meeting

Planning for an effective council meeting takes concentrated effort on the part of the officers, the board members, and such policy-influencing arms of the board as associations. This planning is especially evident in the work of delegates, as they deal with the members of the association, getting their reactions to, and ideas about, the major issues that will come before the board of directors or the council. It is particularly important that the issues placed on the annual meeting agenda be of a substantive nature, so the delegates feel the contribution they make, as they prepare for and participate in the council meeting, has some influence on the direction of the council and some impact on the lives of girls.

Some examples of issues that might become discussion items for council annual meeting agenda are: future funding for the council; newly adopted or modified corporate goals; a projected alteration of jurisdiction; plans for such major changes in real property as acquisition or divestment; actual or anticipated modifications in community institutions important to Girl Scouting, such as the restructuring of school systems or the sharp decline, or growth, of social services, other youth organizations, or federated funds.

Planning should begin well in advance of the annual meeting, so that tentative council meeting agenda items are available to associations by the time of the delegate elections. This advance planning should serve to remind delegates of the importance of the reactions of the associations to focus their attention upon major concerns — the business items of the council meeting. These items provide the main focus for association/constituency meetings.

As delegates participate in the official business of the corporation, they become members of a select group of individuals who are fulfilling our founder's dream that representatives from every community be involved in making decisions about the future of the Girl Scout Movement in the United States of America.



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