

Summary of Focus Group Discussions

ELECTING – 5/2/09 GSHNJ Council Meeting

The group was questioned on how they currently find their delegates and the overwhelming response was that it is very difficult. They often have to BEG or make “cold calls” trying to find someone for the position. Often the Service Units (SUs) will have the same delegates for many years as it is so hard to find someone else to step in.

Each SU now has 2 delegates (as per the GSHNJ by laws). Some larger SUs felt they should have more representation, based on the number of girls, however it is often difficult to get just two volunteers for Delegate position, and once two are named, very difficult to get replacements or new comers.

1. What qualities are they looking for in delegate candidates?

- Looking for someone who has demonstrated Leadership,
- Responsible
- Interested
- Dependable
- Will attend Council meetings as well as SU / Leader meetings

2. Where are they looking (or are possible places to look) for delegates?

- Sometimes Delegates are members that have rolled out of Service Unit team positions, or previous Leaders
- Identified at Leader meetings
- Look outside leader meetings –
 - Evergreens
 - Gold Award Parents or recipients
 - College Grads / alumni
 - Volunteer forms
 - Scholarship recipients

3. What could make being a delegate or recruiting a delegate easier?

- Alternates - This was definitely requested, with alternates in place, if scheduling conflict exists, SU may still have representation.
- Electronic reporting – of Delegates reports to be included in SU meeting. The suggestion of having something pre-prepared for the delegates coming out of Council meetings with all of the highlights and touch points. A downside to this idea is it may enable delegates not to attend SU meetings, or others not attending with reduced attendance as a by-product, or that members may never get to know their delegates or even other members to discuss concerns.

- Service team is the “HUB” – for larger SUs, the delegates may only meet with the smaller Service Team – and let them deliver the information back and forth with members / leaders.
- Yahoo groups set up to facilitate member / delegate and delegate / other delegates communications

4. What should the election process look like?

This is where the attendees stressed flexibility. SUs vary in size tremendously, and therefore the methods of operation greatly differ. If a quorum is set by a percentage of representation, the larger SUs may have a very difficult time reaching a quorum unless the percentage is small, at which point the quorum is silly for smaller SUs (i.e. if quorum set at 50% of troops represented, and the SU has 10 troops – getting 5 members to vote is not difficult, but if the SU has 120 troops – getting 60 to be in the same place at one time can be very difficult.) They also wanted flexibility for the election process itself.

Some ideas presented included

- Email ballots – offered only to those with registered email addresses
- Electronic voting –Conference call, webinar, or Council Website tools
- Paper ballots – can be handed out and collected at different venues or mailed back

INFLUENCING POLICY – A DELEGATE PERSPECTIVE **5/2/09 GSHNJ Council Meeting**

The purpose of this focus group was to discuss methods and procedures for communities/delegates to create, draft, react and otherwise influence council and national policy. The dialogue focused on the most efficient and effective means to do two things:

- 1) identify potential policies that a community might wish to bring forward for consideration by the board and/or the delegates at the annual meeting
- 2) provide feedback to board/council generated policies prior to adoption and/implementation.

The key topics that were discussed related to:

- Finding effective means for the board to communicate to the delegates and members and conversely, members to communicate to the delegates and the board – whether directly or indirectly.

- The role of girl members in providing feedback on policy matters.
- Utilizing delegates to serve as advocates on the local, state or national level.

1. HOW DO WE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATE POLICY MATTERS FROM THE BOARD DELEGATES MEMBERSHIP?

- Regular meetings of delegates with Board.
- Utilize website (technology) to communicate draft policy statements and solicit feedback from delegates.
- Delegates establish system to share message/information with members, leaders, girls, and parents on policy issues.
- Identify a Board member to serve as liaison to delegates to generate periodic meetings, channel communication or visit Service Units.
- Establish a Board Task group to communicate with Service Units and to periodically attend Service Unit meetings in tandem with delegates.

2. HOW SHOULD DELEGATES INTERFACE WITH THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS WHEN POLICY QUESTIONS ARE RAISED?

- Establish an email account for Board Members to access correspondence from delegates on policy matters.
- Post draft policy statements on-line and solicit feedback from delegates and community.

3. DO DELEGATES VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCE OR CARRY THE VOTE OF THEIR CONSTITUTENTS? HOW SHOULD DELEGATES COMMUNICATE WITH MEMBERSHIP TO UNDERSTAND THEIR POSITION?

- Disseminate information electronically and take consensus opinion from those that respond.
- Do delegates vote their conscience or carry the vote of their constituents?

- Debate at the meeting may supersede opinions expressed by the membership because they were not fully informed.
- All Service Unit delegates should be bound by the same procedures for voting.

4. WHAT TECHNIQUES SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED TO PROMOTE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION?

- Identify Point person(s) from Board to interface with delegates periodically.
- Include Delegate reports on Service Unit agendas regularly.
- Establish policy influencing procedure to encourage feedback and representation by community level volunteers.
- Allow ample time for policies to be “field tested” before adoption.
- Sponsor an annual girl Governance day to help girls understand or experience the first task of policy making.
- Provide a newsletter for girls on policy related matters
- Form a “Governance and Advocacy” Troop to focus on strengthening the girl leadership role.

5. WHAT OTHER TECHNIQUES OR ROLES SHOULD DELEGATES PREFORM?

- Provide advocacy leadership on the local, county, state and national level as is deemed necessary.
- Conduct annual “Legislative Day” with state leaders serving our jurisdiction
- Run con-current Girl Congress with Annual Meeting to have girls discuss, debate and bring forward policy recommendations as part of the annual meeting process.

DEMONSTRATING GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP – 5/2/09 GSHNJ Council Meeting

An issue that strongly emerged from the discussion was that two-way communication is crucial for creating true governance leadership.

- Listen and be aware of what is happening in the world and issues important to the girls and the leadership in the service units.
- Create mechanisms to communicate better. For example, the weekly email should be sent to all constituents from the council rather than relying on the service unit managers to do so locally.
- There should be a designated person, phone number and/or email to collect feedback from the service units.
- Be more 2.0 (i.e., utilizing current technology to communicate)
 - All communications should be more two-way
 - Utilize the website more for
 - online training
 - forms and operational needs
 - interactive forums

6. HOW DO YOU DEFINE LEADERSHIP IN A GOVERNANCE MODEL?

- Making the effort to understand and relate to today's issues and the girls' culture
- Listen to our girls and service unit leaders
- Be responsive
- Engage at all levels
- Facilitate the ability for our constituents to be effective
- Mentoring
- Be a sounding board

7. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE GIRLS IN A GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP MODEL?

- They can tell us why they are involved in girl scouting
- They will give us feedback
- They will help us to learn which communications tools work best (2.0 technology)

8. HOW DO YOU EDUCATE YOURSELF ON EVENTS AND NEWS IN THE WORLD THAT COULD INFLUENCE GIRL SCOUTS?

- Read popular newspapers, magazines and websites
- Be aware of global as well as local issues
- Be aware of how girls are portrayed in popular media
- Be aware of issues from the girls' perspective
- Be aware of what girls are talking about and who are the celebrities they admire, what kind of social pressure they face in dating.
- Ask girls to talk about current events that are important to them
- Most important: Be a sounding board – LISTEN

- Use older girls (cadets & seniors) to get feedback from all the girls (this could create mentoring opportunities, which may keep them more engaged)
 - Create a girls “planning board”
 - Have focus groups
 - Bring to service unit meetings
 - Let them tell us why they are involved in Girl Scouts
- Issues that affect communication
 - Size of the council/geography
 - Driving age of the girls
- Tools to facilitate communication
 - Online forum
 - Improved website
 - Facebook group for disseminating information and polling