

BACKGROUND

GIRLSCOOUTS AND SCIENCE

Why It Matters

Academic stereotypes and lack of encouragement for girls have caused a major disparity between girls and boys in science. Girls do not take as many advanced science or math classes as boys, nor do they perform as well on standardized tests. Studies show that without direct influence from parents, teachers, and mentors, girls lose interest in science and conform to conventional attitudes about their academic strengths.

Consequently, disproportionately few women pursue science careers in college and the field remains dominated by men. According to the National Science Foundation, women constitute 51 percent of the U.S. population, 46 percent of the U.S. labor force, but only 22 percent of scientists and engineers in the labor force.

Through a program that builds self-esteem and cultivates skills, Girl Scouting addresses this gender gap. By exposing girls to a wide variety of experiences and career choices, Girl Scouts of the USA is opening new opportunities for girls in science.

Program Activities

More girls are gaining skills, confidence, and real world experience through collaborative Girl Scout science programs, including:

- Girls at the Center, a project funded by the National Science Foundation, Lockheed Martin, General Motors, and other funders. Girls at the Center provides girls and family members with hands-on science and technological experience at science institutions and at home. The program currently operates at 31 sites nationwide.
- The National Science Partnership, which trains adult leaders to effectively facilitate science activities in their troops. Available at 80 sites nationwide, the project is a collaborative effort between Girl Scout councils, universities, museums, and other science institutions.
- The Elliott Wildlife Values Project, which funds a natural science workshop for older girls during the summer and provides regional training for leaders on improving troops' environmental education activities. The project supports urban councils by providing workshops on studying nature in a city environment.
- A continuing collaboration with the National Science Foundation that enables one Girl Scout to spend three months in Antarctica participating in ongoing wildlife, weather, and geological research. The NSF provides funding for this opportunity every three years.

Did you know...

- That girls and boys perform similarly on standardized science tests in middle school, but in high school girls' scores drop significantly lower than those of boys?
- That women make up only one-fifth of scientists and engineers in the labor force?
- That marine biologist and *National Geographic* Explorer in Residence Sylvia Earle was a Girl Scout?

History

Since its birth in 1912, Girl Scouting has encouraged girls to pursue nontraditional roles. Challenging girls to investigate the world outside the home, the Girl Scouts' founder, Juliette Gordon Low, prepared girls for professional work in art, business, and science.

Low gave girls the opportunity to develop specialized skills and acquire technical knowledge in practical areas. Girl Scouts could earn badges in "automobiling," electrical work, farming, and telegraphy. Early Girl Scout handbooks dispensed advice on everything from gardening and career opportunities to astronomy and direction finding.

A handbook from 1913 containing instructions on how to teach natural history reflects the Girl Scouts' early connection to science. One passage warned that observing wildlife could "totally fail to accomplish any permanent success if we fail to study nature systematically."

Through firsthand experiences in physics, biodiversity, geology, and technology, modern Girl Scouts continue to explore how the world functions. Although this tradition has been a part of Girl Scouting for nearly a century, today's Girl Scouts are prepared to apply their skills and knowledge as leading professionals in science occupations.

Who We Are

Girl Scouts is the world's preeminent organization dedicated solely to girls—all girls—where, in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnership with committed adults, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives—like strong values, social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self-worth. In Girl Scouts, girls discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together. Through the many enriching experiences provided by Girl Scouting, they grow courageous and strong.

Girl Scouts. Where Girls Grow Strong.

Additional Resources

Girl Scouts can earn age-specific badges and patches in a wide variety of scientific subjects including: "Aerospace," "Geology," "Plants and Animals," "Ready for Tomorrow," "Science in Action," "Science Sleuth," "Science in Everyday Life," "Sky Search," "Water Wonders," "Weather Watch," "Build a Better Future," "Digging Through the Past," "Inventions and Inquiry," "Planet Power," "Space Exploration," and "Why in the World?"

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