

Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania Overview of the Business Planning Results

*“The work of today is the history of tomorrow, and we are its makers.”
-- Juliette Gordon Low*

In August 2009, Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania undertook an accelerated business planning process because our Council needed a financial turn-around. Through this process, stakeholders from throughout the Council were asked for their feedback, analysis and perspective on the current state of the council, past successes and challenges and potential next steps.

Quantitative data and financial analysis, coupled with the input of stakeholders, brought to light that we, as a Council, had come to a crossroads. Sticking with our current operating model would practically guarantee further financial deterioration, declining membership and overdependence on credit. We have therefore chosen to take a different path – one that bears some risks and leads us into “unchartered territory” but is full of hope, promise and opportunity for growth.

After much discussion and debate we are pleased to announce that a plan for the future of our Council has emerged. It is a plan that puts the girls of today and tomorrow first. The following is a summary of our findings and, more specifically, a preview of our future direction and united next steps.

Today’s Girls are Tomorrow’s Leaders

The impact that Girl Scouting can have on a girl’s self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth is undeniable. Time and again, we encounter a Girl Scout alum who will share how much she has learned through Girl Scouts and how much who she is today has been influenced by her formative Girl Scout years.

Today’s girls have more opportunities and more choices to make than any generation before them. With that said, today’s Girl Scouting experience is unique in providing our future leaders with a strong foundation of courage, confidence and character-building activities that are both fun and affordable.

Our commitment to helping girls become tomorrow’s leaders needs to be our guiding principle – everything we do must very intentionally and purposefully align with this principle – we can no longer afford not to.

Investing Now Promises a Brighter Future Tomorrow

“Investing” by definition means “contributing time, energy, resources or effort to an activity, project or undertaking in the expectation of a benefit.” In order to significantly invest in our Council’s future, we must role model true leadership by prioritizing how and where we will allocate our time, our energy and our resources moving forward. The business planning process has confirmed that the

needs and wants of today's girls require us to invest in the following two key ingredients of Girl Scouting in order to attract and retain today's girls: Experiences and People.

Investing in the Experiences that Build Leaders.

Attracting and retaining today's girls does not require us to change the essential activities that we currently associate with Girl Scouting. Camping, troop activities, special events, trips, cookies, etc., will all continue to play a key role in our efforts. But how all of the Girl Scout puzzle pieces come together will need some "tweaking" as we differentiate ourselves on the list of activities girls of today can choose from. The business planning process has confirmed that we need to invest in the following distinctive Girl Scout experiences:

The Outdoor Experience

Considered by many to be a staple of Girl Scouting, almost every Girl Scout alum can share a memory or story about an experience she had while either camping with her troop and/or attending a Girl Scout camp. Whether tales about the songs sung around the campfire, the canoe that tipped over or even the uninvited bear that came to dinner, what a girl can learn while experiencing the great outdoors is one of the many distinctive experiences that Girl Scouting provides.

The quality of the outdoor experience we currently offer at our camps is inconsistent. Keeping up with basic maintenance needs at 12 camp properties has taken precedence over the kinds of improvements our volunteers need and today's girls expect. After careful analysis of our current camps and the types of outdoor programs and services we currently provide, the business planning process has helped clarify what a great outdoor experience could look like. As a result of this process, we have decided to invest in seven key camps rather than continue to try to sustain all twelve. By reducing the number of camp properties we own/operate, we will be better equipped to make key capital (i.e. facility improvements) and operational improvements (i.e. outdoor expertise) to the remaining camp properties and thereby expand the types and caliber of council-supported outdoor programming that is available year-round. Focusing our energies on these seven key camps will also enable us to more strategically market their features and programmatic opportunities to both internal and external audiences and thereby expose more people to the great outdoor resources our Council has to offer today's girls.

Signature Programming

Bringing girls together from different parts of our Council was one of the key benefits of the 2007 merger. We have tried to satisfy the needs of Girl Scouts across 30 counties by offering many smaller programs, many of them through third parties such as parks, museums, and craft stores, with less than satisfactory results. Our current programming model has proven ineffective and less efficient than we may have initially hoped.

Feedback from both girls and volunteers reinforces that both parties turn to the Council to offer programs that they are unable to find anywhere else. The business planning process has confirmed that our programming needs to focus less on quantity and more on quality. We plan to take this

request to heart and change the way we offer council-sponsored programs. Our future efforts will be more focused and more intentional. The resulting signature programs will be the right mix of what girls are looking for and what volunteers are asking for – something that they cannot get anywhere else. We are looking forward to offering programs integrated with Girl Scout awards, pathways and community service and that have an impact across our 30-county council.

Investing in the People Who Make It Happen.

The business planning process has also reconfirmed what many long-time Girl Scouts have known for years – without passionate and committed volunteers and staff working together, Girl Scouting would not exist. Through this process, we have also learned that our volunteers, while still committed and passionate, have been frustrated and confused and that our staff often feel overworked and ill-prepared.

Based on these assessments, we will invest in the following People-oriented initiatives:

Excellent Customer Service

A key business planning recommendation is the need for a cultural shift in the way we provide customer service to our various constituencies. This shift requires a change in our organizational mindset from one of reactionary thinking to one that is more streamlined, proactive and transparent. While this shift will, in the long run, positively impact our relationships with all of our constituencies, our most immediate priority needs to be on the quality of support and guidance we provide to our volunteers.

The business planning process has confirmed that without a shift in the way we work with and support our volunteers, our other change efforts will be less successful. Thus, we are committed to investing in our relationship with the 11,000+ volunteers who make Girl Scouting happen in their local communities by improving the way we provide the training they need, the resources they require and the support & assistance they deserve.

While a shift to excellent customer service will take time, the business plan has helped identify some pivotal first steps. We will begin our work by re-vamping our retail effort. Volunteers, girls and parents agree that our retail operation's main purpose should be to provide essential Girl Scout materials (uniform components, books, badges, etc) when they need them – something that we have not always been able to do within the existing model. This effort will require a consolidation of our existing stores, a greater emphasis on online orders, a staffing model & organizational system that can support it and an improved ability to guarantee timely delivery so that our customers receive the items they need when they need them.

Our retail consolidation is our most immediate step in a series of customer service improvements. Our next step will be to look at ways to streamline communications to help leaders get the answers to questions and the support they need without having to jump through hoops. This will require further research and discussion and will be implemented incrementally over time.

A New Way of Work

In December 2008, we re-organized our staffing structure to more efficiently support Girl Scout activities throughout our Council. But what we failed to do was consider how to best support this more generalist approach. Now responsible for volunteer support and development, program planning and implementation, member recruitment and “other duties as assigned”, many staff struggle with balancing a traditional Monday through Friday schedule when combined with regular evening and weekend work commitments. We also find that with more of our volunteers balancing full or part-time employment, the traditional 9 – 5 office hours are no longer sufficient and fewer in-person meetings happen during the day. The conclusion is that our staff need to have more flexibility and be empowered to be more results oriented when accomplishing their objectives. Moving forward, operational staff will spend the majority of their time working remotely from within the communities they serve while using modern technology to stay connected.

The business planning process also confirmed that we need to re-evaluate our office space needs. The majority of our offices are larger than what today’s staffing structure requires. With an average of almost 800 to 1000 square feet per staff member in some of our office facilities, the business planning process forced us to not only question the way our staff works but also question how, why and where our offices should exist. As a result of the business planning process, we have concluded that either selling and/or relocating our existing offices and downsizing our facilities makes both good programmatic and fiscal sense.

Our Next Steps

By investing in the People and the Experiences as outlined above, we are confident that the future of our Council will be brighter. As has been our practice throughout this process, we will continue to be as forthcoming and transparent as possible. Our most immediate next step is to create task forces representative of our various constituencies that will each focus on a priority area from within the business plan. These task forces will play a pivotal role in turning the vision that we have shared into a reality from which today’s girls will benefit the most.

Both updates about key decisions and the work of the task forces will be posted on our website at www.gshpa.org. We anticipate announcing the seven key camps and a timeline for when and how the new way of work and customer service initiatives will roll out by January 15, 2010. Continuing to take the next steps together will be instrumental and we encourage you to submit your comments and feedback at <http://www.gshpa.org/feedback.html>.