

Symposium 2014 Café Sessions

Turning Girls' Ideas into Meetings

Kirsti Harris - Facilitator

Valerie Zaloum - Subject Matter

Esther Keller - Recorder

It is all about involving the girls in the decision-making process. This does not mean doing everything they want. Rather, give them age-appropriate responsibility in choosing what their unit does. This can range from saying whether they prefer science experiments or crafts to planning entire events!

“As Guiders, our role is to create a program where girls are actively involved in all aspects including planning, decision-making and leadership of activities. By valuing and encouraging girls’ contributions, they develop confidence, self-esteem and decision-making skills and stay committed to their program and Guiding. As the girls mature, their share of the responsibility increases.” (*Because of the Girl - Tips for New Guiders, Aug 2011*) :D

And from *Orientation to Guiding* (p5):

Girl engagement is the process of putting the words of our Mission in action to enable girls to become:

- confident
- resourceful
- courageous
- and to make a difference in the world

This is done by engaging girl members actively in making decisions about as well as implementing their plans and activities based on their interests and developmental ability. Beginning from Sparks through to Rangers, engagement evolves and expands as girls grow older, gain maturity and experience, and thus increase their share of the responsibility.

Here is a great way to engage girls that happens to be a good decision-making tool that allows you to get input from all the girls, not just the most outspoken.

Have the girls line up along a virtual line, where one end is zero/none/false/no and the other is 100%/yes/awesome/true. They place themselves along the line to convey their answer. It's a great girl tool since it encourages consensus building and helps them understand that their way isn't the only way to go. It also allows for nuanced data.

The various branch programs include a lot of material to cover in just two or three years; it can seem like a real challenge to engage girls while still getting it all done. Simply having your girls choose which badges they want to do together is an effective way of engaging them. Here are a few more ways to make group decisions or gather information:

- voting
- dot-mocracy (each girl puts a certain colour dot beside her choice(s); different colours can have different meanings)
- posters with questions on them
- happy/sad-faced voting sticks

The program book is essential to Guiders so that we can help girls become confident leaders. That being said, it is not necessary to tick off all the little boxes all the time. Each badge is designed with a goal in mind. The ideas in the book are there to help girls reach the goal. Use your judgement to decide what is appropriate for your girls to reach the goal.

As an example, let us take the First Aid badge from the Brownie program. You could have a first aid expert come in to talk to the girls or you could talk about it yourself and have the girls practise on their teddy bears. As long as the goal is met, the choice is yours!

Remember that one activity or project can count toward multiple badges and challenges!

Guiders still have to make some decisions to ensure that activities are age-appropriate and realistic (consider time, cost and distance). Here are some ridiculous, impossible scenarios of things girls want to do that we turned into something workable during the 2014 Symposium.

- Take a trip to Disneyland: have a Disney themed night or sleepover.
- Go whale watching: contact a Guider from a place with whales, fundraise, rent a bus, invite someone with experience to help plan.
- Whitewater rafting: do the "Family Run", the same experience with a lesser level of difficulty.
- Skydiving: go to the Cosmodome for the weightless experience.
- Overseas travel: have pen pals, invite someone who has been overseas, talk about travel opportunities in Guiding when they are older (member retention).
- Take a plane: tour an airplane at the airport, visit the Airplane Museum in Ottawa.
- Horseback riding: if you are unable to do an activity, invite others to help out.
- Make a fuzzy stick (Sparks): have older girls show them, make other fire starters that don't involve a knife, use paper towel rolls to make one. Learn about knife safety and do it one on one in a safe environment.
- Having a week-long Spark Camp: have a day camp with sleepover or a shorter Mommy & Me camp (good for recruiting new leaders).

- Go to La Ronde: fundraiser, have a sleepover with another unit, ask for volunteers for the day.
- Go to a concert (Pathfinders): fundraiser, get group prices.

Some parents will have worries when their daughter learns to light a fire or use a knife. It is a good idea to keep parents informed about what we are learning, including safety, and referring them to the program book for more details. Teaching girls safety means they will be safer later on, when they do the things we are teaching them about. It also includes knowing when something is appropriate and when it is not.

A note about fundraising: start early and get a commitment from the participants. You can also join forces with others; you are probably not alone in wanting to do a particular activity!

Group decisions can still be challenging: imagine a large group of very energetic girls... The following ideas might be useful in such a case:

- try more kinetic strategies for decision-making (lineup activity or four corners)
- split up into groups with secret missions (each group making one of the choices)
- offer the girls a choice of two groups: decision & planning or tag (respect the group and person talking or leave it)
- try this rule: "if you don't have a better idea, you are not allowed to put down anyone else's idea".
- give the girls a doodle pad or a fiddling toy to help stay focused
- give each girl three tokens so that she chooses which ideas she most wants to express (one token per contribution)
- use different media to allow more girls to express themselves

The Quebec Spin Challenge is another tool that can be used to engage and inspire girls. Let them figure out how a certain segment could be incorporated to their project! This can be combined into any program work. The "sharing" part of the wheel can seem difficult. To share your challenges, you could send a blog post to Province, take photos, or draw pictures and hang them up at the library. The choice belongs to you and your girls!

To sum it up...

Girl engagement:

- **involves the girls in planning** their program.
- gives girls the opportunity to **learn by doing**.
- **builds leadership skills** and allows girls to set their own goals and to challenge themselves.
- **fosters partnerships and communication** between the girls and Guiders.

- can be **adapted to meet the needs** of the girls in the unit.
- is **appropriate** to the developmental needs/requirements of girls of **different ages**.
- focuses on developing a personal **sense of accomplishment** in addition to earning external rewards, such as badges and crests.

The goal of Guiders is to build girls' leadership skills and confidence, increasing their share of responsibility in girl-focused program planning and decision-making.

There is an excellent video from Girl Scouts USA that presents the idea of Girl Engagement in a very simple way. You can find it at this address:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnStDynsIng>

Girl engagement and girl-centred programming

(from *Because of the Girl – Tips for New Guiders* p.11-12)

<http://forms.girlguides.ca/GuiderResources/Shared%20Documents/because-of-the-gir-tips-for-new-guidersl.pdf>

A key ingredient in Guiding is a successful girl/Guider partnership.

As Guiders, our role is to create a program where girls are actively involved in all aspects including planning, decision-making and leadership of activities. By valuing and encouraging girls' contributions, they develop confidence, self-esteem and decision-making skills and stay committed to their program and Guiding. As the girls mature, their share of the responsibility increases.



Girl leadership development

Many girls define a leader not only by the qualities and skills she has, but also by how she uses those skills to make a difference in the world. Each experience a girl has allows her to develop or gain skills that can help her to be a strong leader. Guiders can support girls' efforts to lead by mentoring them in the process.

There are many ways that you can encourage and facilitate leadership skills for any age:

- **Sparks** demonstrate leadership when they suggest activities; list the items they will need for an activity; help their peers; work well with other Sparks; or when they ask lots of questions and make observations about the world around them.
- **Brownies** demonstrate leadership when they suggest activities; lead simple activities and Unit functions; assist with Brownie circle and Unit activities as Circle Leaders; listen to each others' opinions when making decisions; or describe ways to make group projects more fun.
- **Guides** demonstrate leadership when they suggest, initiate planning and lead activities; lead Unit functions; assist with patrol and Unit activities as Patrol Leaders; apply strategies for promoting cooperation within the Unit; or identify concrete steps needed to effect desired changes.
- **Pathfinders** demonstrate leadership when they suggest, plan and lead activities; lead Unit functions; act as role models for younger girls; use good communication and relationship-building skills; or begin to address deeper causes of issues in their communities.
- **Rangers** demonstrate leadership when they are better able to independently suggest, plan and lead activities and Unit functions; act as role models for younger girls; act consistently with a considered and self-determined set of values; set challenging goals for the future; or are able to promote cooperation and effective team building.

Program evaluation

Being able to give feedback, evaluate program activities and have their voice heard is an essential part of leadership development. Girls in all branches should regularly be given the opportunity to evaluate the activities done in the Unit.

- **Sparks** and **Brownies** can easily give feedback using the Two Stars and a Wish format. (You can find a description of this technique in *Sparkling Ideas: Program Ideas for Spark Guiders* and in *Let's Share Ideas: Program Ideas for Brownie Guiders*.)

- **Guides** should be introduced to reviewing activities as a learning experience, expressing their likes and dislikes, debriefing what happened and keeping ideas for the future.
- **Pathfinders, Rangers and Extra Ops** regularly evaluate activities as part of their activity planning cycle, assessing whether objectives were met, if things were forgotten or miscalculated and celebrating success.

The Guider's role

Your role in helping girls develop their leadership skills includes:

- Taking the time to **discover each girl's strengths and skills** and providing opportunities for these to develop will help the girl to increase her self-esteem and prepare her to take a leadership role. Recognizing girls for their contributions (whether it is recognition during a meeting or activity or at the end of a longer session) can really help to boost self-esteem.
- **Demonstrating leadership** and providing a role model to girls as they develop their own skills.
- Using **appropriate communication** (verbal and non-verbal) during meetings reinforces positive role modeling for our girls.
- **Team building** activities in the Unit can really help in developing strong teams and identifying leadership styles among the girls. Use team building activities throughout the year.