



## **Criminal Background Checks Volunteer Resource Guide & FAQ**

Girl Scouts of Colorado requires all adult volunteers to pass a background check screening. This includes every adult who spends 3+ sessions/meetings and/or activities with girls, handles group funds, or attends an overnight activity. These individuals must become a registered member and submit to a background check as a foundational, required part of holding a volunteer role. All volunteers must complete an updated background check every three years to maintain their volunteer roles.

### **1. What is a criminal background check?**

A background check is the process of looking up and compiling criminal records of an individual.

### **2. Why are background checks required to volunteer with Girl Scouts of Colorado?**

Girl Scouts of Colorado is committed to creating a safe environment for all girls and while we are eager to recruit and retain volunteers, we want to ensure we do it in a responsible and thorough manner that is consistent with industry recommendations. Conducting background checks on adult volunteers is a key part of establishing that safe environment.

### **3. Background Check Cost**

The cost of the background check process will vary based on the costs passed along from the number of counties and states where the potential volunteer has lived for the past seven years and based on the number of aliases.

The minimum cost of a background check is \$21. Girl Scouts of Colorado asks volunteers to pay the base cost of \$21 whenever possible and the council then covers any additional expense connected to multiple locations and aliases. There is an option for volunteers to pay the remainder of the fee for their background check if they choose. By paying for your background screening, you are helping to support even more girls in our community.

Background check grants are available for any adult volunteer who requests support to complete their background check. Returning volunteers needing to renew their criminal background check can reach out to your Volunteer Support Specialist to request a grant. New or prospective volunteers can request a grant for their criminal background check through their staff contact, whether that is a Recruitment Specialist, Placement Specialist, or Volunteer Support Specialist.

### **4. What is included in the background check?**

The enhanced background check includes:

- Social Security Trace
- Nationwide Criminal History search
- Department of Justice Sex Offender Registry search
- Terrorist Watch List (OFAC – Office of Foreign Assets Control)
- Current county/state of residence search

- County/state searches from last 7 years address history (based on SSN)
- Alias/maiden name searches on all of the above

**5. Reported Information**

The background check includes criminal records searches of conviction, arrests, court records, and inmate records tied to the prospective volunteer's address history and all alias names, as well as a search of sex offender registries.

**6. Volunteer Positions Requiring a Criminal Background Check**

All volunteer positions require an eligible criminal background check. This includes the following:

- Troop Positions: Troop Leader, Troop Fall Sale Manager, Troop Cookie Manager, Troop Support Volunteer.
- Service Unit/Area Positions: Service Unit Manager, Service Unit Fall Sale Manager, Service Unit Cookie Manager.
- Outdoor Program Positions: Outdoor Program Volunteer, Outdoor Program Director, Resident Camp Volunteer.
- Committee Positions: Gold Award Committee Member, Statewide Recognitions Committee Member.
- Event/Series Positions: Event/Series Program Coordinator, Event/Series Program Volunteer.
- Mentoring Positions: Highest Awards Mentor

The only role an adult can hold without submitting to a background check is that of Adult Member. This is for adults who will spend less than 3 sessions with girls, will not handle group funds and will not attend any overnight activities.

Additionally, if a troop is meeting in a private home all adults over the age of 18 are required to submit and pass a criminal background check.

**7. How can I tell if I'll need a background check to volunteer with the Girl Scouts of Colorado?**

We recommend that all caregivers become a registered volunteer with Girl Scouts of Colorado – you might want to drive girls for a Girl Scout activity, attend an overnight experience or take on a volunteer position throughout the Girl Scout year. A good rule of thumb is if you're spending 3 or more sessions with girls, handling group funds, driving Girl Scouts other than your own girl or attending an overnight activity, you will need to become an approved volunteer. For overnight activities, a background check is mandatory for all adult members involved unless all attending girl members have at least one legal guardian present.

**8. Do I need to be a member of the Girl Scouts in order to complete a background check?**

Yes. Any level of volunteer participation that requires a background check will automatically require an active membership with Girl Scouts. Every participating girl and volunteer needs an active membership with Girl Scouts of the USA. Our membership year starts on October 1 and ends September 30. The annual fee is \$25 and financial assistance is available to support your participation. To utilize financial

assistance, you will select that you are requesting aid when completing your membership – it's as easy as checking a box.

**9. How will the council conduct the criminal background check?**

Volunteers will submit their information to the online self-service portal operated through Sterling Volunteers to initiate the criminal background check themselves after selecting a volunteer position through our adult registration process (for new members) or through the member account for existing members/caregivers of existing members.

**10. Who are Sterling Volunteers?**

Sterling Volunteers is an online background screening company that offers volunteer screening services to nonprofits and volunteer programs all across the country. Sterling Volunteers is part of the largest background screening company in the world – Sterling Talent Solutions, and is a partner with Points of Light, the world's largest organization dedicated to volunteer service. Sterling Volunteers has offices in many states. Once an order is placed our volunteers can log into their account at any time, from anywhere, for any purpose – whether they need to update their request with missing information or are just curious about the status of their background check. Sterling Volunteers also offers the Volunteer Fast-Pass, so volunteers can get screened once and share with as many organizations on the Sterling Volunteers platform as they'd like.

Volunteers seeking more information about Sterling Volunteers should contact them directly by emailing [TheAdvocates@sterlingvolunteers.com](mailto:TheAdvocates@sterlingvolunteers.com) or calling 1-855-326-1860, Option 1.

**11. How long does the background check take?**

Completing the actual background check request online will take approximately 10 minutes.

The background check results report should be available to Girl Scouts of Colorado within two weeks. This timeline can vary and the average turnaround time for background checks in the 2021-2022 membership year was 2 days. While background check results are often returned faster than two weeks, a quicker turnaround time cannot be guaranteed, and prospective volunteers are encouraged to submit their criminal background check at least 2-3 weeks prior to needing it for participation.

**12. I already have a recent background check from another organization or my job, can I use that to fulfill this requirement?**

Unfortunately, since not all background checks use the same set of criteria and many are tailored to each organization that requires them, Girl Scouts of Colorado cannot accept any other background check, including those conducted by other Girl Scout councils. All volunteers in Girl Scouts of Colorado are required to complete the Sterling Volunteers background check.

**13. How often do I have to repeat the background checks?**

GSCO requires volunteers to complete and pass a background check every 3 years. Background check re-screening is an important, responsible step that youth-serving organizations implement as a way to ensure a safer environment for children in

today's world. It's important to keep in mind the information we gather about an individual during a screening is only as current as the date on which we obtain it. For this reason, GSUSA recommends all councils repeat the criminal background screening process every few years. Additionally, some of our partners, such as American Camping Association, require regular screening and re-screening as part of the accreditation process.

**14. Required Information**

Through the Sterling Volunteers website, the prospective volunteer will enter information to be used for their background check screening. Your first name and last name as they appear on your birth certificate or other legal documentation, date of birth, and Social Security Number are required to conduct an accurate, thorough background check.

Sterling Volunteers does not share your personally identifiable information (i.e. your Social Security Number) with anyone – including Girl Scouts of Colorado.

**15. Why is my Social Security Number required to run a background check?**

When submitting a criminal background check, current and prospective volunteers are asked to provide their Social Security Number (SSN) through the Sterling Volunteer's secure platform. Your SSN is used to conduct a SSN trace that identifies address information associated with the SSN. This is used to conduct a more in-depth search of criminal records and provide an even more extensive background of each prospective adult volunteer.

Using a SSN trace as a part of our volunteer screening ensures that all previous addresses and aliases are considered and an accurate and whole reflection of their record is reported. This ensures that someone is not able to omit an address or alias to avoid having their criminal record discovered.

**16. How do I know my personal information is safe?**

Girl Scouts of Colorado is committed to safeguarding your personal information. You will be submitting your personal information directly to our reputable, secure online vendor, Sterling Volunteers, who operate a secure website. No one else will have access to your information.

More information on how Sterling Volunteers handles security can be found at <https://privacy.sterlingcheck.com>.

**17. Does Sterling Volunteers securely store and transmit my data?**

Sterling Volunteers complies with all national and local regulations with respect to the storage and transmission of sensitive data and is hosted in ISO 27001-audited data centers. These audits include a network perimeter security assessment, an application penetration test, and a physical security assessment.

**18. Who sees the criminal background check report?**

Only select Girl Scouts of Colorado staff see the results of the criminal background check. The results are kept confidential and are never shared with other volunteers or members. Only three Girl Scouts of Colorado staff members have access to view background check results and those results are kept confidential. If a criminal

background is uncovered through the report that does not automatically disqualify you from volunteering, you may be asked to accept a restriction on your volunteer role to continue participating as a volunteer. These restrictions are communicated to other volunteers with your troop or group to ensure you are broadly supported in adhering to those restrictions.

**19. How will I know my background check has been completed?**

You will receive an email from Sterling Volunteers alerting you that your background check has been completed and results returned to Girl Scouts of Colorado. Sometimes this message gets caught by email filters, so be sure to check your spam folder if you are still waiting on an update.

**20. What happens after the results of my background check come back?**

If there is no criminal history recorded on your background check, you will be considered “eligible” and you will not receive additional communication from GSCO about your background check.

New volunteers who are considered “eligible” will be moved forward in our volunteer welcome process and will be contacted by their Volunteer Support Specialist.

**21. Will I get a copy of the background check report?**

As a member of Sterling Volunteers you’ll be able to access all your information through your online account, be able to track where you’ve shared it, your current status and more. To review your background report and other documents on the Sterling Volunteers portal, visit <https://app.sterlingvolunteers.com>.

**22. What if the information is inaccurate?**

All volunteers can submit disputes through Sterling Volunteers by contacting them at 1-855-326-1860 or emailing [dispute.resolution@sterlingcheck.com](mailto:dispute.resolution@sterlingcheck.com).

Volunteers should update Girl Scouts of Colorado on the current status of their dispute and its resolution. Girl Scouts of Colorado will rely upon the information contained in the criminal history report until a corrected report has been provided.

**23. Do Lifetime Members need to complete a background check?**

Yes, Lifetime members are held to the same standards and procedures as other Girl Scout volunteers and are required to complete a background check every three years on a recurring basis if volunteering.

**24. What happens if I don’t submit a background check?**

The policies of Girl Scouts of Colorado state that all volunteers must complete this portion of the screening process. New volunteer applicants are not eligible to volunteer until a clear background check report is received. Likewise, returning volunteers must also complete the background check every 3 years to remain in their volunteer position. If you do not renew your background check as a returning volunteer, your volunteer roles will be suspended and Girl Scouts of Colorado staff will communicate your suspension to other volunteers in your troop or group in order to assist them in transitioning responsibilities away from you or support in finding a new volunteer to support the group in your absence.

**25. If a criminal background is uncovered, will the volunteer automatically be barred from volunteering with Girl Scouts of Colorado?**

Our top priority is the safety and well-being of our girl members and their families. Each criminal background check report that has any activity identified is reviewed by staff members tasked with making eligibility determinations. This process is confidential to ensure the applicant's privacy is protected. Several factors are taken into account when determining whether a person may hold a volunteer position and they are reviewed individually.

The decision to exclude or limit an individual's participation (or continued participation) as a volunteer is made solely at the discretion of Girl Scouts of Colorado. Factors considered include, but are not limited to, the nature and severity of the crime(s), the length since the criminal conduct occurred, age at which the conviction(s) occurred, and whether there are multiple convictions that may indicate an ongoing pattern of behavior. Providing false information is grounds for automatic exclusion from a volunteer position, regardless of the result of the criminal background check. Girl Scouts of Colorado maintains the discretion to exclude or limit an individual's volunteer participation because of non-criminal information or behavior.

**26. Disqualification**

*Automatic Disqualification*

Girl Scouts of Colorado aligns with the expectations the state of Colorado places on licensed childcare providers and therefore does not work with an adult who has been convicted of, has pled guilty to, has received adjudication for, or has pleaded no contest to one of the following crimes. This disqualification applies to all volunteer position indefinitely, regardless of the existence of any extenuating circumstances.

- Crimes against children, child abuse
- Felony offenses against person/s
- Felony offenses against the family
- Crimes defined as public indecency
- Crimes involving the use of weapons
- Arson
- Any violent crime
- Multiple other felonies committed within the past 5 years
- Multiple misdemeanors and/or felonies committed within the past 7 years

*Possible Disqualifications or Restrictions*

Individuals with the following offenses may be permitted to volunteer with some restrictions. Such determinations will be made on a case-by-case basis. In general, GSCO will allow individuals with single offenses within the past 5 years, and no more than 2 offenses in the past 7 years to volunteer with restrictions.

- DUI/DWI and non-felony drug-related offenses (driving restriction)
- Crimes involving theft, fraud, and forgery (financial restriction)
- For all other criminal offenses except traffic violations classified as Class C misdemeanors, GSCO shall review the situation on a case-by-case basis. The

decision whether to appoint or restrict/modify the duties of that volunteer shall be within the absolute discretion of GSCO.

### *Unresolved Situations*

If there is an open warrant for the arrest of the applicant, or there is a pending charge with no disposition, that application to volunteer cannot be approved and the individual cannot be placed into or reappointed to a volunteer role until the situation has been satisfactorily resolved and the criminal background check report updated. If the individual has already begun to serve in a volunteer capacity, their participation must be suspended pending disposition of the case or resolution of the open warrant.

## **27. Disclosure of Pending Criminal Charges**

Current volunteers and volunteer applicants are required to disclose any pending criminal charges. If charges are pending related to any criminal offense other than minor traffic violations and are known to the Council, involvement with the Council as a volunteer will be temporarily suspended pending disposition of the case. An updated background check report demonstrating resolution of the criminal charges must be provided prior to Girl Scouts of Colorado approving an individual to resume their volunteer activities.

The decision to exclude or limit an individual's volunteer service (or continued service) remains solely with the discretion of Girl Scouts of Colorado.

## **28. Volunteer Restrictions: What types of volunteer restrictions might someone get as a result of their criminal background check report?**

Each report is considered individually on its own merit and a determination is made. Some examples of restrictions that might be placed on a potential volunteer include:

- Cannot hold administrative roles
- Cannot supervise/work with girls
- Cannot drive girls
- Cannot handle finances
- Cannot meet in the volunteer's home

Restrictions placed on volunteering may be of varying length of time, based on the nature of the report.

## **29. How is someone informed if there is a restriction placed on their ability to volunteer? Are the other volunteers in their troop/group alerted to their restriction?**

In the case of disqualification or restriction on volunteering, the applicant will be informed by email. The email will contain the initial pre-adverse action letter, a copy of the CBC report, and a copy of the Fair Credit Reporting Act. During the time period in which the initial letter goes out and a prospective volunteer has a chance to respond, the CBC status will be considered "In Process/Pending". No information will be released to other staff members or volunteers other than the fact that the CBC is "In Process/Pending" until the applicant has had a chance to appeal the decision.

The applicant will have five business days from the date of the letter to respond. Prospective volunteers may choose to ignore the letter, or respond with additional information, at which time the decision can be re-reviewed. If the initial letter is ignored, the restriction on volunteering stands. Whether a re-review occurs or the letter is ignored, a final letter will be sent to the applicants. At this point:

- Appropriate Membership team staff at GSCO will be notified regarding the status of the applicant via email with a copy of the restriction letter attached. Staff will then notify the appropriate Troop Leadership Team members and Service Unit Managers about the restriction.
- The only information that is provided in any notifications to others is the restrictions themselves. At no time are contents of CBC reports or the specifics of any criminal charge or activity shared with other volunteers or staff members, outside of those tasked with making eligibility determinations.
- Any adult violating terms of their restrictions are subject to immediate dismissal and disqualification of all volunteer capacity, and this may also include removal of membership from GSUSA.