

## Highest Awards: What to Do and Not Do?



- **Complete the Pre-requisites:** girls must be **registered members**, the **appropriate age level** for each award ([check here](#)), and must have **completed a Journey** at that age level before they can begin planning their Highest Award project. Girls earning their [Gold Award](#) who have not previously earned their [Silver Award](#) must complete 2 Senior or Ambassador Journeys before beginning the Gold Award process.
- **Learn from an Expert:** we highly recommend girls **attend one of our Highest Awards** workshops or webinars, (check [event calendar](#) for upcoming dates) OR contact the Highest Awards support email for the award you would like to work on. It is especially important for the Gold Award that the girl does the contacting about her specific Gold Award Project! Your support contacts are:
  - Bronze Award- [bronzeaward@gscwm.org](mailto:bronzeaward@gscwm.org)
  - Silver Award- [silveraward@gscwm.org](mailto:silveraward@gscwm.org)
  - Gold Award- [goldaward@gscwm.org](mailto:goldaward@gscwm.org)
- **Explore Your Community:** every community is unique and has different assets and organizations that effect the needs of the community. While community A may have access to awesome STEM programs for children because of a local university's outreach department, community B may have no STEM programs available for children that don't require driving to community A. What is a need for one community

may be a strength for another and vice versa. Good places to start checking into the needs of your local community are the local newspaper and news channels. You can also interview longtime residents of the community about the needs and assets they see in your area. Check out your Guide to Girl Scouting Award packet to learn more about Community Mapping and use it to help you explore your community.

- **Identify Issues You Care About:** you'll be spending a large amount of time on your project, so consider what things you value and skills you have that you enjoy sharing. ***What sparks your interest?*** Whether it's music, science, or animals find a community need that relates to that topic so that your project centers around something you're passionate about and enjoy.
- **Investigate the Root Cause of the Issue:** when you hear about a problem or an issue, **always ask "why"** this is an issue so that you can trace it back to the root cause of the problem. Need an example? How about you discover your town has a low employment rate. Now find out why. *Are there not enough jobs for the amount of workers available? Do the workers available not have the right skill level for the open positions? Maybe a lack of transportation in the community means the unemployed cannot get to the open positions?* Although multiple communities may have the same issue, the root cause of the issue may be very different. When investigating:
  - Demonstrate courage as you investigate your issue, knowing that what you learn may challenge your own and others beliefs about your community.
  - Use a variety of sources- interview people, read books and articles, find professional organizations online.
  - Remember to evaluate each source for reliability and accuracy. Bob'sAngryRant.com is not as reliable a source as a reputable news-site or organization in your community.
  - Make a global connection-think about others who may have worked on the same problem in the past, or check the internet to see how others around the globe deal with your issue. *What can you learn from their approach?* For example, if your local park has noticed a sharp decrease in their bee

populations find out what other parks/towns/places have done to help with this issue. Research why being a world without bees is a bad thing and how it affects other issues (for the curious here's [why](#)).

- **Find a Mentor:** seek out a project advisor who has expertise in the topic of your project either through their own job, volunteer opportunities or general knowledge of the topic. \*Note: your parent/guardian or troop leader cannot be your project advisor.
- **Build Your Team:** seek out people with valuable skills who are also passionate about your issue. Remember to respect different points of view and ways of working and that they are your volunteers so this is a choice for them, not an obligation. Work with their schedules and be prepared to be flexible in your timeline to accommodate their schedules.
- **Develop Your Project:** identify a main goal for your project that everyone involved can understand and seek a way to meet that goal. The basic thing each girl should be able to say is “**through our efforts we achieved X, and because of X, we lessened/made a positive impact on issue Y in our community**“. A simple example is “through our creation of a bee friendly garden at the local park and our bee advocate junior gardening workshops we created a place for bees to thrive and educated community members on the importance of bees and because of this the bee population will grow in our community”.
- **Make a Plan that Lasts:** being organized and thinking through a probable timeline are essential to a quality project. *Consider the impact too: is it short term or are there aspects that will have an effect beyond your initial involvement?* As a leadership Take Action project the goal is to make a lasting impact on a community need, so the project needs long-term benefits and community support. **This is the difference between Service and Take Action. Service projects are done FOR the community** with a short impact, while **Take Action projects are done WITH the community** so that the impact is sustained. *Still not clear?* Check out our Take Action vs Community Service Handout on our website.

- **Silver and Gold Award Only- Get Approval from GSCWM:** while the Highest Awards support staff welcome questions about projects from all levels, the [Silver](#) and [Gold](#) Award has an added requirement in its approval process. **Girls must submit a Silver or Gold Award Proposal with a detailed project plan to council.** Once received, for the Silver Award, a member of GSCWM's staff will review and provide project feedback on the Silver Award. For the Gold Award, once received it will be sent to members of the Gold Award Committee who will contact the girl with project feedback and dates of upcoming committee meetings so that each girl can **present her project plan to the committee** in her region for approval before officially starting the project.
- **Put the Plan in Motion:** you've made a plan, found your team, plotted out a timeline and (for Silver and Gold Award) gotten the approval needed. All that's left is taking action to make your world a better place! **Don't be discouraged if something does not happen exactly as you thought it would or if there are unforeseen obstacles that you must overcome.** This is all part of being a leader and making an impact. **So keep brainstorming your way around obstacles, consult your team, troubleshoot issues with your advisor as they occur, and reach your goal!**
- **Share Your Story:** demonstrating to an audience what you have learned sets the stage for even broader impact, and is sometimes the best way for you to recognize what you have accomplished and see how much you have grown. It will also help you get others inspired to act! Need ideas? Here are a few ways to share your story:
  - Create a website or blog about what you have learned and how your project will help your community.
  - At a workshop for community members, present what you have learned and what your project will do for the community. Or do a presentation for a group of younger Girl Scouts—you will definitely inspire them!
  - Write an essay or an article for your local or school newspaper
- **Reflect:** congratulations on completing a project that makes a difference! Take some time to think about all that you have accomplished. *Who did you meet that you didn't*

*know? What did you learn from others about your project issue, about your community, and about yourself? What would you do differently if you did it again?*

- **Make it Official:** all awards must turn in a final report (in the [Highest Awards](#) section of our website) to be official. Each award requires a slightly different final report (Bronze is a short questionnaire, Silver is a Final Report with attached questions, and Gold is a Final Report and Presentation before the Gold Award Committee) and approval process. The **Bronze Award is leader approved** and the pin can be purchased in our shop but, requires the approval letter from council after final reports are received. The **Silver Award is leader approved but council must confirm** after they receive an individual final report from each girl and pins are purchased by GSCWM for the girls to be given out at the annual council-wide Gold Award Ceremony in June. The **Gold Award is approved by the Gold Award Committee** after the Final Report and a presentation before the committee and pins are purchased by GSCWM for the girls to be given out at the annual council-wide Gold Award Ceremony in June.
- **Celebrate:** you've accomplished so much, it's time for a celebration. Invite friends and family to an end of the year party and recognize the girls in your troop who earned this award. *Does your service unit have a picnic/banquet/end of year event?* If so, take a moment to recognize all of the girls in your community who have earned these awards. It doesn't have to be big and splashy to be meaningful!

#### **What Not to Do:**

- **Set up a project where you show no leadership:** You need to have a volunteer team working on your project assisting you. For each award every girl must take on a role in the project to make it happen.
- **Set up a project team that is different than described in the guidelines:** Bronze award projects are team projects, Silver can be individual or team, and Gold is an individual project but requires a team of volunteers helping with the project. If an individual girl does everything for the project with no team of volunteers, this is not a leadership project.

- **Work on an award (or a journey pre-requisite) that is not in your current grade level.** Bronze awards are for Juniors in 4th-5th grade, Silver awards are for Cadettes in 6th-8th grade, and Gold awards are for Seniors and Ambassadors in 9th-12th grade. Girls are considered to be part of the new grade level on September 30 after they move to a new grade. All portions of the project must be completed and submitted by the September 30th deadline.
- **Put together a project that is a fundraiser to donate money to an organization:** This is not allowed for any of the Awards.
- **Have your parent as your Award adviser:** recruit an adviser who is knowledgeable about the root cause of your identified issue. Also Silver and Gold Award advisers cannot be your Troop Leader. They may help and cheer you on, but your adviser should be someone else.
- **Set up a Silver or Gold project that is serving Girl Scouts:** The project can include Girl Scouts in it, but must be primarily for the community OUTSIDE of Girl Scouting. This includes a Girl Scout project/ program that collects items to donate to another organization.
- **Submit a different Bronze Award final report for each girl, or submitting a single Silver Award final report as a group:** Each troop earning a Bronze Award must submit one report for the whole troop submitted by the Troop Leader. Each girl earning a Silver Award must complete her own Silver Award Final Report in her own (typed) words.
- **Have your mom or Girl Scout Leader call the Gold Award Committee or the council for you to ask questions about your project:** This is your project and not your mom's or your Troop Leader's. Show your leadership skills by making that contact yourself.

- **Plan a project that is less than the minimum hours:**
  - Bronze Award projects require 20 hours per girl and you must plan for that amount.
  - Silver Award projects require 50 hours per girl and you must plan for that amount.
  - Gold Award projects require 80 hours per girl and you must plan for that amount.
- **Plan a project that is just collecting and donating items to an organization:** collecting and donating is a great SERVICE project but it is just service.
- **Put a few small projects together to make up the hours:** these awards are one complete project, not a set of smaller projects combined.
- **Find a project online that someone else did and copy it:** You should be finding a problem in your community that needs fixing and developing your own project to fix it.
- **Turn in your paperwork at the last possible moment and expect a quick turnaround to fit your schedule:** Bronze and Silver Awards are processed as fast as possible. However, processing can take longer depending on how many final reports are submitted before yours. The Girl Scout Gold Award committee volunteers do their best to help every girl, but they are not available around the clock. Remember your manners and be polite in your requests to the committee and staff.
- **Turn in a project report (proposal or final) that is vague:** approval can be delayed for the Silver Award if the proposal or final report is not filled out completely. This includes not answering all parts of the questions asked. For the Gold Award you must have a project plan that is complete, already investigated, and a proven need before you approach the committee.

Now that you've got a handle on what to do and not do for your Highest Award, go out and start investigating how you can make a change in your community. Dream big, you've got a lot of power inside of you and a whole team of people cheering you on as you make your world a better place!