



Take Action Projects

Versus Community Service Projects

Is our project a Take Action project or a service project? What's the difference? These questions come up frequently from both volunteers and girls who are delving into the Journeys and Highest Awards and exploring how they can make a difference in their community.

Service has a very simple definition which is, “a helpful act” [Merriam-Webster’s dictionary]. Community service projects are frequently organized for the community to help them with a specific and short-term need. Coordinating a food drive for a local food pantry is a great example of a community service project. It addresses the very specific need that a food pantry has for goods. And its impact is short term as the shelves will likely be empty again in a few weeks and another food drive will be needed to refill them. This project in partnership with the food pantry would be a great way for CSA girls to earn their [Girl Scout Service to Community Bar](#), but it’s not a Take Action project.

A **Take Action project** picks up where that short-term fix of the service project leaves off with these three essential elements; it **identifies the root cause** of that community need, it has **long term benefits**, and **sustainable** community support. Remember the most essential difference is that Take Action projects do something **WITH** the community to meet a need while service projects do something **FOR** the community. So in our example of a community need from above (food pantry needs food) one solution could be to approach community organizations about establishing a community garden for the food pantry and creating a “simple tips to growing your own food” pamphlet with seeds to distribute to food pantry customers to enable them to grow their own food in the future. This project directly involves those who will benefit from it in meeting the need, has a long term-plan, and the community organization sponsoring it will ensure that it continues when the Girl Scouts who began it have moved on.

Take Action Projects are process-oriented instead of results-oriented. This means that the most important part is how the girls achieve their goal, not just that they achieved it.

Keep in mind that Girls Scout Leadership Journeys are prerequisites for Girl Scouting's highest awards. Why? Because they engage girls in the fundamentals of project planning:

- Finding issues that matter to them and motivate them to be leaders for change
- Working in teams and networking in the community
- Exploring how-through a plan that is well scaled, scoped, and focused-a lasting impact can be achieved even when a project is small

Girls put their teamwork and leadership skills to work to make a sustainable impact on an issue affecting their community.

Community Service versus Take Action

Community Service is a short-term impact on the issue at hand.

Take Action Projects are aimed to create long-term impacts on the issue at hand.

Example of a Community Issue:

The girls notice that the school playground is scattered with trash.

Community Service Approach: The girls tell their leader and suggest that they could clean it up. They get trash bags and gloves and go pick up the trash on the playground.

Impact: After the clean-up, there is no trash on the playground. But what happens tomorrow... next week? Unclear but, most likely covered in trash again.

Take Action Approach: The girls tell their leader and suggest that they could clean it up. Their leader asks the girls to consider why the trash is there and charges them to investigate and to try to figure out if this was a one-time event or something more long-term.

Sample Root Causes	Sample Take Action Solutions
Lack of trashcans on the playground	Talk with the principal then... 1. Campaign for the PTA to purchase more trashcans 2. Participate in money earning activities themselves to purchase trashcans
Students don't use the trashcans that are available	Talk with the principal and student council, then... 1. create a campaign of posters and PSAs on the morning announcements promoting use of trashcans 2. create a clean-up club after school to make sure that the playground is regularly cleaned up

<p>The trash truck drives by every Tuesday with the back hatch open and trash always falls out</p>	<p>Talk with the student council and principal, then...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start a letter writing campaign among students, teachers, and school neighbors to the trash company to have them make sure that the hatch is closed 2. Attend a city council meeting and ask that they require that trash companies' drive with their hatches closed.
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Giving girls the opportunity to explore and strive toward lasting change is a great learning experience that stays with them—even if the end result is not all they hoped for. For example, if Cadettes on the *aMAZE* journey decide to advocate for a new board of education policy that would benefit girls, it would be wonderful if that policy were adopted. But even if it is not, what the Cadettes did was important: They spoke up and networked, and now they understand what it takes to influence change.

Community: "For" versus "With"

Girl Scout Take Action Projects should be created after investigating the community to identify issues and then working to make sure that the proposed project is suitable or useful for the community by involving it in the planning process. This should be a project completed with the community, not just for the community.

Consider this story, and then answer the questions below:

A Girl Scout Cadette troop completes a badge about pets. They visit the shelter during their badge work and notice that the dogs don't have any toys. Their guide also mentions that sometimes the dogs get bored just like kids when they are in their cages.

The girls return home and decide to do this as a great opportunity to help the community; they will make dog toys to donate. The girls complete a money earning activity to purchase supplies, gather to make the toys and go to deliver the toys to the shelter. The director welcomes them and shares that they won't actually use the toys for the dogs but will use them at a fundraiser to help raise money for the shelter.

Is this a Take Action Project?

Did the girls:

1. Look in their community for a problem?
2. Think about the root cause of the problem (identify the issue)?
3. Identify a way to affect this root cause?
4. Look in the community for resources/assets?
5. Identify steps to achieve their identified way to affect the root cause using the community resources?
6. Connect with community members to see if these steps will meet their needs and update the steps as needed?
7. Consider sustainability options?
8. Implement the steps?
9. Evaluate the successes and lessons learned from the project?
10. Celebrate the completion of the project?

How do we define a successful Take Action project?

The key to a great Take Action Project is determining what the community needs are before creating the Take Action Project. There is nothing worse than creating a project, and then to find out that it was not needed.

When girls pursue Take Action projects, they need to take time to identify and understand the root cause of the issue they are addressing. Girls also must make sure that each project is sustainable and that the impact is measurable. Because these two words are difficult to define in concrete terms, be prepared to take the time to define each with participants.

- o **Measurable:** The success of the project can be determined based on the number of people the project helped, the number of people who were involved, any reduction in the community's need, and other concrete numbers.
- o **Sustainable:** Girls must make arrangements (such as collaborating with community leaders and/or organizations or building alliances with mentors) to ensure that the project creates lasting change and is not a one-time event.

Is sustainability differentiated at each grade level?

The guidelines for girl awards give girls tools to examine the underlying root cause of issues, develop a sustainable project plan and measure the impact of their project on their community, the target audience and themselves. There is progression. While Girl Scout Juniors working on their Girl Scout Bronze Award will *reflect on how the project could be kept going*, Girl Scout Cadettes *plan for sustainability*. Seniors and Ambassadors *work to ensure the sustainability* of their project in order to meet the Gold Award standards of excellence.

The benefits of Take Action Projects go far beyond the reach of the project itself. Not only does the community see sustainable changes, girls will develop strong leadership skills that will help them through their lifetime. As the community sees how girls are changing the world through Girl Scouts, they will want to get involved as volunteer, and may even want to serve as project advisors on other Take Action projects.