

WAGGGS' POLICY ON YOUNG WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING



Introduction

1. WAGGGS' Mission:

“To enable girls and young women to develop their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world”

2. WAGGGS' Constitution:

“To further the aim of the Girl Guide/Girl Scout Movement which is to provide girls and young women with opportunities for self-training in the development of character, responsible citizenship and service in their own and world communities;”
Article III b)

3. One of WAGGGS' Goals as adopted at the 29th World Conference 1996, Canada:

“To involve young women at all levels of decision-making.”

Policy

WAGGGS is committed to involving young women at all levels of decision-making within the World Board and its Committees and Member Organizations.

Explanation

- ◆ In general young women are under-represented within decision-making structures at all levels (national/regional/international).
- ◆ WAGGGS is an organization of girls and young women and it is essential to involve young women in the decision-making in order to be in touch with its members.
- ◆ Effective leadership of WAGGGS and its Member Organizations requires a partnership between women of all ages.
- ◆ Traditionally nomination to serve at regional and world level has only taken place after the individual has served for a number of years at national level.
- ◆ The 29th World Conference defined young women as those under 30.

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GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVING YOUNG WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING



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GUIDELINES FOR INVOLVING YOUNG WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING



Introduction

WAGGGS adopted a policy in January 1997 to promote the involvement of young women in decision-making. A set of Guidelines has now been developed in order to assist Associations in implementing the Policy.

The Guidelines include three sections:

- 1) Rationale – why Girl Guide/Girl Scout Associations should involve young women in decision-making.
- 2) Identifying barriers to youth involvement.
- 3) Methods of increasing youth involvement.



1. Rationale

WAGGGS' mission:

"To enable girls and young women to develop their fullest potential as responsible citizens of the world."

WAGGGS' Constitution, Article III Object:

"To further the aim of the Girl Guide/Girl Scout Movement which is to provide girls and young women with opportunities for self-training in the development of character, responsible citizenship and service in their own and world communities;"

Youth participation is necessary to fulfil our Mission and Object for a number of reasons:

a) Loyalty to the Girl Guide/Girl Scout Method

Through the Girl Guide/Girl Scout Method we encourage our members to take on responsibilities at a very early age. By applying the patrol system and the principle of 'learning by doing', we encourage and reward girls for progressively taking on responsibilities from brownie age until they are guides or rangers. If we want to be loyal and consistent with our Mission and Method, it is necessary to continue giving young women responsibilities within the Association when they pass the guide age, by giving leadership responsibilities, and responsibilities within the democratic structure of the Association. Another significant aspect of the Girl Guide/Girl Scout Method is its emphasis on partnership between young people and adults. This is interpreted differently according to the age of the girl/young woman and as she gets older the adult gives her more responsibility.

Giving young women these responsibilities is thus a way of recognizing and having confidence in our own Method. These tasks and positions represent opportunities for training as well as personal development which the young women should benefit from and enable Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting to contribute towards dispelling the image of a 'generation gap'.

b) Image of Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting

Many Girl Guide/Girl Scout Associations have identified that their existing image in society is not corresponding with how they themselves want Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting to be presented. Broader participation of young women in positions as elected representatives in the Association could improve and strengthen the image of the Association as a dynamic organization which is able to adapt to changing times.

Having young women in positions as elected representatives gives credibility to the Association as an organization representing young people. Young women in elected positions also provide important role models for the younger members.



c) Democracy

WAGGGS is an organization based on democratic principles. In respect of these principles, none of our members should be excluded from participation because of age.

Training in democratic working methods is an important element of responsible citizenship. It is therefore necessary to open up for participation of young members in our own democratic structures, in order to contribute to their development towards responsible citizenship.

d) Input of Young Women

An important success factor for our activities and programme is the ability to identify the needs of our members. In a rapidly changing world, it is important that we are able to identify the needs of our potential members and that we are able to communicate our message to them in a way they understand.

Including young women in decision making will ensure that the needs of young people are better communicated to the Association and considered when developing the programme and activities of the Association. They are closer to our members ...



2. Identifying Barriers

Even if there is a common understanding to increase the involvement of young women and the number in decision making bodies there may be several barriers which makes this very difficult or impossible. In order to face and start removing the barriers, it is very important to analyse what they might be.

Attitudes

“I have tried my best when working in the Board but I often find that my opinions are rejected by saying “You are so young and you don’t understand - you will find out when you are older”.

People of different ages working together to create better Guiding for young people is a challenge. People with lots of experience may find it difficult to face the fact that even though they have this experience and they know a lot, the world has changed and the young people represent a new way of thinking and doing things. The young people may also think that only they know how to do things because they have had better opportunities to enter higher education and they represent the voice of young people. At its best, the co-operation is very fruitful and benefits everybody. The opposite is frustrated people not understanding why the communication is not working. The basic condition for fruitful co-operation is mutual understanding of the different worlds of young and older people and respect for each other’s experiences. Both younger and older people can learn a lot from each other and working together as equal partners or colleagues is the first step in this process. Young people do not want to feel excluded from a group they are part of and will leave if they are unhappy. Questions to be discussed include:

- *What is the best combination between experience and knowledge and how do we achieve it?*
- *Why should there be both younger and older people working together to offer better Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting for young people?*
- *How can we diminish ageism?*

Term of office

“How can I promise to be a member of the Council for 4 years when I do not even know what I will be doing next year?”

The term of office varies widely between Associations and positions. If the term of office is very long, it is difficult for young people to commit themselves to it. This is not because they do not want to, but because they face big changes and challenges in their lives in general. When choosing a place to study and thinking about future career and family they feel unsure about accepting a job which goes beyond their current situation. Therefore it would be useful to analyse how long the term of office should really be so that the work of the decision making bodies can still run smoothly. Questions which we could pose would be for example:

- ***How long should the term of office be so that the tasks can be carried out without difficulties?***
- ***Is there some reason for the term of office to be more than 3 years?***



Minimum age

“I have lots of experience in Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting but I am only 24 years old. Why do I have to wait 16 years until I am 40 in order to be a member of the National Board?”

In some countries there may be an age restriction for membership of certain bodies due to legal or fiscal demands. However, more often there may be a minimum age for certain positions to ensure that the person has gained certain experience during a number of years. The age, however, does not reflect the experience in Guiding that the person has. There can be a young very competent person with an extensive background in Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting and an elderly person with only a couple of years experience or experience from 20 years ago and she is seen to be more competent only because of her age! Clear job descriptions help the Association to think what qualifications are really needed, for example for membership of the National Board. The decisions should be made according to the needs of the role and not the age. Some questions to discuss:

- ***At what age are you capable of taking responsibility at regional/district or national level?***
- ***How old do you have to be before you can decide what is best for the development of the young people?***

Expectations

“I want to use my time in the best possible way by dividing it between Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting, studying and working. If I can only give 3 days a week for Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting then does it mean I cannot be a member of the National Council?”

Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting is time consuming but how much time can we realistically expect of our volunteers? Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting is a voluntary movement and this is a hobby for most of the persons. Therefore it is very important to create a clear framework for the roles and responsibilities and to define how much time each task needs. If the expectations are unrealistic we end up with frustrated young people who try to divide their time between Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting, working, studying and having a family without succeeding in any of them. It is important to clarify the supporting role of the paid staff (if there are any) and the volunteers and to set realistic expectations which are very clear for everybody. The role of the paid staff should be to support the volunteers in their work and to carry out the decisions which have been made in the respective decision making bodies. They should not employ the volunteers by giving them extra time consuming tasks which the office could take care of. Questions to be discussed:

- ***Which tasks are reasonable to give the volunteers and which could easily be done in the office?***
- ***Who is responsible for dividing the tasks?***
- ***How much time can we expect the volunteers to use for Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting?***

Meeting times

“I am working full time and am at the beginning of my professional career. If the meetings are always in the middle of the day, then should I join another interesting organization which can arrange the meetings in the evenings or at the week-ends if I want to be involved at regional/national level in a youth organization?”



The changing world creates new challenges for the ways of work of organizations. More young women have studied at university and want to have a professional career instead of having a traditional role at home taking care of the family. At the beginning of a professional career, it is not easy to take time off during office hours. Therefore it would be a good idea to organize the meetings so that as many young women as possible would be able to participate. Only a small minority can organize their jobs and other obligations so that they are free to join meetings which are held during office hours. We should not have this as a criteria when choosing/electing people.

- ***What is the best time to hold meetings so that there are equal possibilities to participate?***
- ***Are the times set according to the needs of the office or the needs of the volunteers?***

Cultural Role of Young Women

“In our country young people are expected to respect their elders and not to disagree with them. If I am a member of one of their Committees then I cannot express my views freely.”

Often the involvement of young women within an Association reflects their involvement in society as a whole. In some cultures, young women are not expected to take responsibility within organizations and there is no expectation of a partnership between the generations. However, Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting can take a lead in order to fulfil its Mission. Starting to involve young people is a long term project which needs a lot of support from the higher level and preferably also a system of training. The amount of responsibility should be given little by little and should be seen as a learning process. To be an active member of society means being involved at all levels of the society, also outside Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting. It is very important to show that the young women can take responsibility which encourages other young women to try, too. Step by step the system will change so that the young women can join the local councils, regional/ district decision making bodies and the Parliament. Questions to be asked:

- ***How can we support young women to take responsibility?***
- ***What kind of role models of the decision makers do we offer to our members - young women?***
- ***How to encourage young women to be active citizens and the members of the society?***

Election procedures

“How can I hope to be elected when I am not known by the people who have a vote... it takes at least ten years to be known by all the right people.”

In many Associations there are only a limited number of people qualified to elect the National Board or other Committee. This means that people wanting to get elected must be known by these people. Usually this happens when they are working in another Committee or function but for young women it is often very difficult to get known in the first place. Some Associations have overcome this by opening up to applications from any member of the Association for different Committees; this ensures that all qualified people may apply.



Social Situation of Young Women

“I would love to be involved more in my Association but I am expected to work long hours to provide some income for my family.”

In many parts of the world voluntary work is a luxury which young women in particular cannot afford to be involved in. The expectations of family that women will work all they can to reduce the poverty of their family means that other work, especially unpaid work, is unacceptable.

This means it is very important to show the contribution of Girl Guiding/Girl Scouting to local communities, in particular through community development projects that demonstrate tangible benefits to the lives of local people.



3. Methods of Increasing the Involvement of Young Women

There are various different methods that can be used to increase youth involvement:

Youth Council/Forum/Committee

Many Associations have decided to set up a separate structure in order to involve young women in the decision-making process. This is usually a parallel structure (Committee or Forum) which includes representatives of different parts of the country. It provides a place where young women can discuss issues together. It may have direct representation on the decision-making bodies of the Association or may be advisory. Many Associations have used this method successfully, however there are several issues to consider when deciding whether this is the most appropriate method for your Association:

- ◆ Often a Youth Council/Forum/Committee is the first step towards improving youth involvement in decision-making - it is not an end in itself.
- ◆ It may be appropriate for the younger age groups e.g. the Guide section as a preparation for involvement in the main decision-making structures.
- ◆ The success of this method will depend on whether the Youth Council/Forum/Committee has any direct representation on to other bodies or whether it is purely advisory.
- ◆ It is very useful for providing a place where large numbers of young women can discuss together, offering them training and increasing their confidence.
- ◆ It enables skilled young women to be identified from this group and offered further opportunities.
- ◆ This method may limit the opportunity for dialogue between younger and older people as there is a risk that young people discuss alone and then bring their conclusions to the main decision-making structures which can result in quite a confrontational approach rather than a more consensual one.
- ◆ Setting up a parallel structure for young women uses considerable resources.
- ◆ Unless the structure has a clear role and opportunity to feed into the main structure then it may be seen as mere tokenism

How to set up a successful Youth Council/Forum/Committee:

- ◆ Consult with the young women to ensure that this is what they want and are committed to it.
- ◆ Establish an open and democratic method of choosing the young women which everyone understands - at the beginning it may be good to advertize and encourage young women who are interested to apply.
- ◆ Give the Youth Council/Forum/Committee a clear role and a system for feeding into the main decision-making structures.
- ◆ Provide training and support for the members
- ◆ Set objectives for the Youth Forum and monitor their implementation. How is the impact and effectiveness of the group - has it made a difference to the Association? Has it increased the involvement of young women in the decision-making structures?





Special Measures to Promote Young Women

An Association may decide that it wants to take special measures to promote young women within the usual election/appointment system. This may be to try and reduce one of the barriers mentioned earlier and is usually for a fixed period of time. It can take different approaches:

a) Fixed Places for Young Women - If you want to ensure that a minimum number of young women are on particular committees then you may decide to reserve places for them. This means that those places are only open for 'youth' candidates so you must find suitable people or the places will be empty. It is good to have a minimum of two places otherwise it can be hard for one young woman alone on a Committee of older women. A disadvantage may be that at the beginning there are not enough young candidates so active encouragement and training of young women is essential.

b) Promoting Young Women within Elections - Often young women are less well known and those electing a new Committee will not take time to meet candidates they don't know. So it may be useful to insist that everyone votes for one young woman within the people they vote for so they are encouraged to get to know the young candidates. In many cases, encouraging the electorate to meet potential candidates will also benefit older candidates who are not known but have skills to offer.

c) Special Training for Young Women - If you identify that young women do not have certain knowledge or experience e.g. of the working of the Association or Committee procedure, then you may decide to offer them training which would mean that they were better prepared to stand for election and to take on particular responsibilities. This may result in some opposition from older women who also lack training and would like to stand for election so again. This may raise a wider discussion on training within the Association.

d) Promoting Networks among Young Women - Usually it is necessary to be well known in order to have a position in an Association. This is harder for young women who have had less time to build up a reputation and contacts. Occasional events for young women can give them the chance to meet, share ideas and work together. During these events the young women may well identify leaders among them who they will encourage to stand for election in future.

However, often this sort of event raises the expectations of young women and it is important that follow-up takes place so that the contacts made and skills gained can be channelled.

e) Reviewing Structures and Ways of Work - Consult young women about why they are not more involved in the decision-making structures of the Association and propose changes that will make it more attractive for them. This may include changes to the Constitution, meeting times or roles and responsibilities of committee members. It may be necessary to establish a system of identifying young women to ensure that it is not just a small group of young women known to existing decision-makers who have the opportunities.

f) Encouraging Young Women in Promotion – Once some young women have positions on Committees it is important to encourage and support them in reaching out to their peers. They can show how accessible decision-making structures are and can also discuss openly some of the frustrations of being involved.



g) **Job-Share** – Often volunteer jobs are just too big for one person, especially if they are combining it with the demands of a family and job. It is worth considering whether each job can only be done by one person or whether it could be shared. This has the advantage of enabling a younger person to work with an older person, encouraging team-work and a gradual increase in responsibility.

h) **Support for Young Women** – Giving opportunities to young women is only the first step in ensuring their effective involvement in the decision-making structures. It is equally important to provide them with support, encouragement and information that enables them to be effective once they have been appointed. A system of ‘mentoring’, pairing up young women with more experienced Committee Members can be a very effective way of providing this support.



4. Conclusion

In many Associations, decision-making structures have remained the same for many years. It may be that the debate around promoting younger women could encourage a wider debate around making structures more open to a wider variety of people. Many of the 'Special Measures to Promote Young Women' could also benefit the Association by bringing in other skilled women who have not previously been encouraged to offer their services.

Many young women who have been involved in decision-making bodies within their Associations would agree that the support of others is a key factor in making the experience a positive one. This support can be shown in developing particular structures or ways of work, but perhaps more importantly through the attitude of older women to young women and to their contribution.

“At the beginning I had no idea what I was doing there; I didn't understand what was being discussed and I found the formal approach in meetings very strange. However, people took time to answer my questions, I spent time reading lots of papers and I realised that my experiences were needed – now I feel as if I can make a real contribution as a member of the National Board of my Association.”

