

GSUSA Leadership Failures & Volunteer Discontent

Date: January 2024

Subject: Analysis of Critical Issues Facing GSUSA Based on Online Discussions

Sources: Condensed from "PC - 2024-01-31 GSUSA Leadership Failures - r_girlscouts January 2024 meeting notes"

Executive Summary:

This briefing analyzes concerns raised by parents and volunteers regarding GSUSA's leadership and management, as discussed in an online forum. The primary issues revolve around technological deficiencies, financial mismanagement, lack of transparency, and a disconnect between the national organization and the volunteers who are the backbone of the program. There's a palpable sense of frustration and disillusionment, stemming from a feeling that GSUSA has lost sight of its core mission of empowering girls and instead focused on consolidating power and resources at the national level.

Key Themes and Issues:

1. Severe Technological Deficiencies:

- **Website Failures:** The GSUSA website is described as consistently unreliable, with frequent crashes that disrupt important processes like camp registration. "Like, imagine waking up early determined to get your kid into summer camp...and then the website crashes and it's down for hours."
- **Outdated IT Infrastructure:** GSUSA admits that their IT infrastructure is a "complete mess" and that it could take seven years to fix, a timeline that is deemed "mindboggling".
- **Lack of Basic Digital Tools:** The organization lacks a functional communication app and has a "nightmare" digital cookie platform.
- **Disconnect from the Digital Age:** There's a strong sentiment that GSUSA, an organization meant to prepare girls for the future, is failing to utilize modern technology effectively. "It's 2025, not 1995. You'd think an organization that's supposed to be preparing girls for the future would be a little more tech-savvy."

1. Financial Mismanagement & Lack of Transparency:

- **Questionable Spending Priorities:** Concerns are raised about where membership fees and program costs are being spent, especially given the lack of resources and poor technology. "And it makes you wonder where are all those membership fees going if not towards basic functionality, right?"
- **Executive Compensation:** The contrast between high executive salaries and the financial burdens faced by volunteers is highlighted as a significant source of anger and resentment. "Six-figure salaries for executives while volunteers are having to pay for basic troop expenses out of their own pocket. It's unbelievable."

- **Lack of Transparency:** GSUSA is criticized for a lack of transparency about its spending and decision-making processes. "Transparency is a huge problem here. It's hard to trust an organization when you have no idea how they're spending your money or why they're making the decisions they're making."
- **Nickel and Diming Volunteers:** The national organization is accused of constantly raising membership fees and program costs, while simultaneously pushing costs and responsibilities onto the volunteers.

1. **Erosion of Volunteer Support:**

- **Burdened Volunteers:** Volunteers feel overburdened by the increased responsibility and financial strain. "They're constantly being asked to do more with less, to compensate for shortcomings."
- **Burnout:** The cumulative impact of the issues is causing volunteer burnout.
- **Shifting Costs:** There is a perception that GSUSA is shifting costs and responsibilities onto the volunteers while simultaneously centralizing power and control.
- **Feeling Underappreciated:** Volunteers feel their contributions are undervalued and are not supported by the national organization. "They're the backbone of this whole organization and they're being treated like this."

1. **Disconnect from Core Mission:**

- **Loss of Focus:** GSUSA is perceived as having lost sight of its mission of empowering girls, and instead appears to be focused on building a "bureaucratic empire." "It feels like somewhere along the line GSUSA lost sight of its core mission."
- **Lack of Accessibility and Inclusivity:** The emphasis on finances and fundraising is seen as undermining the core values of accessibility and inclusivity.

1. **Abusive Relationship Analogy:**

- One comment from a Reddit thread suggests that volunteering with the Girl Scouts feels like being in an "abusive relationship," as volunteers feel compelled to stay due to their love for the organization despite poor treatment. "Someone said it felt like being in an abusive relationship with Girl Scouts. Like you keep putting up with the bad behavior because you love the organization."

Volunteer Reaction & Calls for Action:

- **Widespread Resentment and Disillusionment:** The general sentiment among volunteers and parents is one of anger and disappointment with GSUSA's management.
- **Call to Action:** The online discussions include calls for action, including letter-writing campaigns, board actions, and potentially even switching to Boy Scouts.
- **Creative Ideas:** The online forum also offers numerous ideas for how to improve things, indicating a desire for reform.

- **Belief in the Core Values:** The criticism comes from a place of love for Girl Scouts and a desire to see the organization thrive. "People are passionate about Girl Scouts... because they believe in what it can be."

Conclusion:

The audio excerpts reveal a critical situation within GSUSA, marked by significant discontent among its volunteers and a perception that the national organization has lost its way. The issues extend beyond mere technological hiccups, encompassing deep-seated concerns about financial management, transparency, and a shift away from the organization's core mission. There is a strong call for accountability and change, driven by the belief that the Girl Scout program, and those who support it, deserve better.

Recommendations:

- **Immediate Review of IT Infrastructure:** Prioritize a rapid and transparent plan to address the failing technology.
- **Financial Audit and Transparency:** Conduct a thorough review of GSUSA's spending and provide full transparency to its members.
- **Re-Engagement with Volunteers:** Create open channels of communication with volunteers and address their concerns.
- **Re-evaluation of Mission:** GSUSA needs to reaffirm and recommit to its core mission of empowering girls.

This briefing highlights a critical moment for GSUSA. The organization needed to take these concerns seriously and act swiftly to restore trust and support among its volunteers and members. In future episodes we will explore their actions and the outcomes.