

So, You're the New Link Adviser – Now What?

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Introduction

This module is designed for you to work through on your own, perhaps with the help of a mentor. As there usually aren't enough Link Advisers in one place to do a specific "Link Adviser training session", it was thought that such a module would be helpful.

Objectives:

- to help you get started as a Link Adviser
- to give you some of the basic information you need to know
- to make you aware that there are certain issues/procedures/policies that are handled differently from council to council,
- to point you in the right direction to get the information you need about your specific responsibilities in your specific council.

You should be sure to identify people who can answer questions for you when needed, perhaps different people for different topics. Examples:

- other Link Advisers for Link-specific information
- the Chairwoman of the committee you are a part of or someone on council you report to for council/committee-specific information
- Area/Provincial staff people for iMIS and administrative questions.

Link Basics

What is Link?

Link is a hybrid of a number of different models, such as Campus Girl Scouts in the USA, Scouting's Rovers, the girl branches of Guiding, a younger Trefoil Guild - but unique in its own way and not exactly like any of those. Link is a networking opportunity for young women to find out about Guiding opportunities that fit their schedule, and a place where young women can participate in activities with their peers. It helps in the transition between Senior Branches and adult Guiding, and helps women to stay involved and connected with Guiding even if they don't currently have time to be very active. Here is the formal definition of Link and a statement approved by the Provincial Link Advisers to be used in explaining/promoting Link:

POR Section 11-18 – revised December 2001:

Women between the ages of 18 and 30 may register as Link Members, but may also hold positions in Guiding. Link Members are encouraged to support Guiding however they can, and may participate in activities with other Link members, Units, Districts, Divisions, Areas, and Provinces.

For women who have not been enrolled as Adult Members, the Commissioner concerned is responsible for ensuring they meet the requirements for adult enrolment, become enrolled, and are registered. They may register as individuals or groups with a District, Division, Area or Provincial Office.

Link Members wear the Link Pin. Time spent in Link is counted towards Long Service Awards.

Consult local Commissioners, Link Advisers, or Provincial Offices for more information.

Link "Who We Are" statement (to be used for promotion of Link):

Link are women aged 18 to 30 in Girl Guides of Canada who are encouraged to support Guiding however they can, and are made aware of opportunities for further involvement in Guiding.

Important Points to Remember

There are a number of important points that you should realize about Link, so that you can help to correct any misinformation or old stereotypes that people have, as part of raising awareness and promoting Link:

- 1) Link members can also be Guiders, or hold other adult positions in Guiding. This has been in POR since 1995, so it's not actually new anymore. However, some people still believe that Link is only for those young adults who have no time to do anything else, which is incorrect.
- 2) Not all Link members are post-secondary students; any 18 to 30 year olds may join.
- 3) Link are full adult members of Guiding, meaning that they can apply to attend any events for which they are eligible, are expected to participate in the Leadership Development Program, and are eligible for awards including Long Service Awards and Guiding scholarships.
- 4) There is no formal "Link program", and in fact Link should not really be considered a "branch" like a girls' branch of Guiding, because Link is for adults. There may be different initiatives or challenges that Link members can participate in, either Link-specific (e.g., National Link Service Challenge), or Guiding-wide.

Guiding's Mission Statement and Link

It is also important to think about how Link fits into Guiding's Mission, *Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada is a Movement for girls, led by women. It challenges girls to reach their potential and empowers them to give leadership and service as responsible citizens of the world.* Link activities that involve service fit directly into this Mission – for example, when a group of Link members plan a camp they are directly helping the girls. Activities that appear to be purely social are important also, as they keep women involved in and committed to Guiding. Theories about human development include a distinct “young adult” stage, which corresponds to the place of Link in the Guiding structure. Participation in social activities is important for young adults and Link can provide such activities.

Role of Link Adviser

General

First and foremost, remember that Link are adults within Guiding. There is no “Guider” planning Link activities, and doing all the planning for such activities is not your job as Link Adviser. In general, your job is to provide a connection between council, committees and Link members, administering registration and screening, and general promotion and raising awareness of Link.

Adviser Vs. Chairwoman

The term "Link Adviser" is used throughout this module, as this is the most commonly used title. In some jurisdictions the term "Link Chairwoman" is used instead, depending on the administrative structure and where Link fits in. According to POR, "A Chairwoman provides leadership and management for a committee that is responsible for the development and promotion of a particular aspect of Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada within a specific jurisdiction" (section 11-31). Section 11-40 of POR states, "An Adviser is responsible for a specific aspect of Guiding within a specific jurisdiction, in which she has qualifications or a special interest". Therefore, in the context of Link the two positions would have basically the same roles and responsibilities, with the implication that a Link Chairwoman is responsible for a committee about Link (e.g., a committee of Area Link Advisers).

Where Do You Fit In?

Many Link Advisers belong to the Membership Committee of their council, others may sit directly on council (e.g., at an Area level), or report directly to someone on Council (e.g., Provincial Commissioner or one of her Deputies). It is important that you know where you fit in so that you know:

- a) who to report to about Link activities, concerns, and general input, and
- b) who you should be giving you information about the council's activities and issues to pass along to Link members.

You may have specific committee or council meetings to attend as well. If the Link Adviser in your jurisdiction does not attend meetings based on the council/committee structure, make sure you know who will bring up Link concerns for you at the appropriate meetings. You should have received information about where you fit in when you took on the position, or else ask your contact person (e.g., the person who recruited you to the position).

Job Descriptions

You should read the general job descriptions for an Adviser and for a Chairwoman as listed in POR (sections 11-40 to 11-43 and 11-31 to 11-34 respectively), as a guideline for your position as a Link Adviser. You may already have been given an official job description for your specific Link Adviser position within your council/committee. Make sure you read this and understand it – ask your council/committee contact person if you have any questions.

If you have not been given a job description, ask if one exists, and consider creating one if not. This will help you avoid situations where others expect you to do things you do not consider to be part of your job – if there is a specific job description available, it is much easier to clarify what your responsibilities are and what things are not. A Link Adviser job description would include many of the responsibilities listed later in this document, depending on the specifics of your jurisdiction. You can contact other Link Advisers for copies of their job descriptions, as a base from which to start creating your own. Many councils also have a "Terms of Reference committee" that can help you with this; your council may have specific items that go in every job description for that council.

Responsibilities to Girl Guides of Canada – Guides du Canada

As with any position in Guiding, there are responsibilities to the organization as a whole. These include the following:

- presenting a positive image of Guiding at all times
- acting as a role model for Link members plus other girls and Guiders.
- participating in ongoing self-development, e.g., Leadership Development Program
- participating in the Volunteer screening program and keeping your Police Records Check up to date.
- being aware of the importance and significance of your signature when required.
- maintaining confidentiality.

Responsibilities to Link Members

Obviously, as a Link Adviser you have responsibilities to the Link members in your jurisdiction. Always remember that Link members are adults, so they have certain responsibilities as well, and it is not up to you to do absolutely everything for them. Your overall role is to ensure that Link members get the information and support they need to be able to participate in Guiding at whatever level of commitment they choose.

Communication

It seems only reasonable that Link members should receive some sort of communication from their Link Adviser (Area and/or Provincial) each year, e.g., phone call, e-mail, letter, Provincial Link newsletter. This should include a description of Link in general and its organization in your jurisdiction, and what information the Link Member can expect to receive (e.g., *Canadian Guider*, Provincial Guiders' newsletter, Link newsletters, etc.). You could put this in a Provincial Link newsletter, or in a "confirmation of registration" letter to each Link Member at the start of the year. In places where there are ongoing Link activities or regular meetings, there would need to be more communication to ensure that Link members have the opportunity to attend.

Link members should have access to contact information for other Link members in their location (area and/or province), such as an iMIS report of the members in a specific "Link Unit". This enables Link members to contact others for activities, especially where

there may not have been regular Link activities previously – even two Link members getting together for coffee is a start.

Link members should also be given information about local Guiding activities as encouragement to participate. This could take the form of Area/Division Guiders' newsletters, or direct information about such activities from the Link Adviser. Local Guiding contact information is also important for the Link members to have, so that they can volunteer to help with whatever time they have available. This might be the contact information for the Area/Division/District Commissioner or perhaps a Membership Adviser as appropriate.

Link members need to know how to contact you (the Link Adviser) when necessary, for up-to-date information about Link, about relevant Guiding issues, about LDP and for opportunities for Link members to participate in Guiding. Think of yourself as their "link to Guiding".

Administration

Many of the administrative tasks a Link Adviser may carry out will vary from location to location, so it is important to check exactly what you are responsible for, and what will be done by someone else. Here are some basic tasks that need to be done– your responsibility would be to ensure that someone has completed them:

- ensuring proper registration of Link members, such as volunteer screening procedures, payment of membership fees as appropriate. Membership fees should be paid at the most local level of involvement, e.g., generally the District level if someone is also a Guider. No one should ever be required to pay the National /Provincial/Area components of the membership fee twice in order to be registered in Link.
- updates to iMIS, including contact information, trainings attended, qualifications.
- pins (Link pin, LDP, Long Service, other awards) – your role may be to pay for these from your budget and present them to Link members, or to let Link members know that these pins exist and how they can obtain them. Generally, the level at which a Guiding member is registered should be paying for such pins (such as the Link unit at an Area or Provincial level), so check with your council as to how this should be handled. This is an important aspect of membership retention, as Link members who feel properly recognized for their membership will be more likely to stay in Guiding.
- promotion of Link and recruitment of new Link members.

Support

For many Link members, you may be their main connection to the rest of Guiding (their "link to Guiding"). You can provide support for Link members to ensure their membership in Guiding is a positive experience. This may involve encouraging Link members to get involved and helping them when necessary, and encouraging participation in the Leadership Development Program. This could also include conflict resolution assistance if necessary.

Planning

The Link Adviser is involved in both short-term and long-term planning of Link activities. In locations with active Link groups, this may involve organizing meeting times and locations, chairing planning meetings with Link members, and helping to organize activities. Remember to delegate – your job is not to plan everything, but to facilitate and support the Link members in their planning. In locations with less activity, this may include trying to organize an Area or Provincial Link event, or encouraging and supporting a cluster of Link members in one location to get together. As stated previously, always keep in mind that Link are adults within Guiding, so you are not their “Guider” planning all the Link activities for them.

Responsibilities to Council/Committee

Communication

The Link Adviser will need to ensure transfer of information from the council/committee to her Link members, such as events or policies. It is also important to give the council/committee information about Link members and their activities, such as regular and annual reports. The Link Adviser can represent the Link members on the council/committee, and give their input where appropriate.

The Link Adviser should cooperate and communicate with other relevant Advisers, for example, Senior Branches and Trefoil Guild (for bridging), Program (for opportunities for Link members to help), Membership (for recruitment/retention).

The Link Adviser should be active in promoting Link as a resource for Guiding, and as a membership tool to keep young adults involved in Guiding. This may involve communication to other Guiding members through articles in Area/Provincial Guiders' newsletters, or speaking about Link at Guiding events.

Administration

These may vary from location to location, so check your job description and check with your council/committee to ensure all of these are being done by yourself or others:

- reports to council/committee about Link activities
- attending council/committee meetings
- financial – budgets, proper use of and accounting for funds allocated to Link, check if fund-raising is allowed for Link members in your location and under what circumstances if so?
- volunteer screening – ensuring all Link members are screened as per policy, the Link Adviser may need to do this herself, or may simply need to get the proper information to an Area Screening Adviser or team. The national screening policy information is contained within the document *Adult Member Support Procedures- A Guide for Commissioners, Advisers and Chairwomen*, available online in the "Membership Resources" section of the national website (<http://www.girlguides.ca/default.asp?id=145>).

Resources Available To Help - Checklist

- National Link e-group/mailling list - http://groups.yahoo.com/group/national_link/
- good for asking questions of and sharing ideas with Link members and Advisers.
- Link Connections national newsletters, stored at the national website -
<http://www.girlguides.ca/default.asp?id=156>.
- Link Resources page, at the national website under Resource Centre – Downloadable Publications (<http://www.girlguides.ca/default.asp?id=304>), includes the following documents:
 - *Link Contact Information across Canada*
 - *Guidelines for Provincial Link Advisers* (October 2002)
 - *Suggestions for Link Registration and Screening* (November 2002)
 - *Ideas for Link Promotion* (February 2002)
 - National Link Service Challenge information (an annual project).
- Other Link Advisers – get an iMIS listing so you can share ideas and ask questions.
- Other Guiding members – particularly those on the committee/Council of which you are a member.
- Other books/documents:
 - *Policy, Organization, and Rules* (POR)
 - *Adult Member Support Procedures- A Guide for Commissioners, Advisers and Chairwomen* (<http://www.girlguides.ca/media/pdfs/14-3/module1.pdf>)
 - *Safe Guide* (<http://www.girlguides.ca/default.asp?id=141>)
 - Area/Provincial Council policy manuals - for policies and administrative procedures.
- Guiding newsletters (Area, Provincial, *Canadian Guider*) - for ideas and to keep up-to-date with general Guiding activities.
- National website, at <http://www.girlguides.ca>.

Check with your Provincial/Area Office for further resources available to you beyond those mentioned here.