THE PERIOD FOR CHANGE IS NOW

How Girl Up USA Clubs and Leaders can Advocate for Menstrual Equity

Advocacy Toolkit
October 2023
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Spotting isn’t just for periods! Spot these symbols throughout the toolkit to navigate through the content:

Just like tampons, we have tips too! Look for the tampon to learn about some helpful tips for advocacy.

Like a pad soaks up menstrual fluid, look for the pad symbol to soak in these supplemental resources to gain more topic knowledge, practical skills, and creative ideas to build your advocacy efforts.

Cup half-empty or half-full? Advocacy on any topic related to identities and basic needs can be mentally and emotionally exhausting. Look for the menstrual cup for practices to maintain mental and emotional well-being and motivation throughout your work.

Period underwear come in a variety of colors, sizes, abilities, and more – and so do people! Look for the period underwear to explore how to recognize the intersectional, diverse identities and experiences of people everywhere.
About the Toolkit

This toolkit provides tools and resources for Girl Up Clubs and leaders to engage in menstrual equity advocacy activities utilizing grasstop, grassroots, and digital activism approaches. Tools provided include a template letter to one's representative and guidelines for recording social media content. Resources provided include publications on menstruation and menstrual equity from leading advocacy organizations and partners, in addition to a look at how Girl Up Clubs around the world and in the US have included menstrual equity advocacy in their work toward gender equity.

This toolkit was developed by Girl Up, an alliance at the United Nations Foundation, and funded by the Global Menstrual Equity Accelerator.

This toolkit features youth stories submitted by:

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Menstrual Equity

An estimated 500 million girls, women, and people with periods around the world lack access to period products and adequate facilities for period management.¹ When people who have periods have limited access to affordable and safe period products and facilities, serious physical health risks increase while their ability to menstruate with confidence and dignity decreases. Meanwhile, misinformation and misconceptions around menstruation perpetuate outdated cultural myths and damaging social taboos, ultimately leading to generations of unwarranted discrimination toward all those who menstruate.²

What does menstrual equity mean to you?

"I got my first period when I was only in fourth grade. To me, menstrual equity means having access to free, safe period products and also menstrual education and healthcare. One reason why period poverty and menstrual equity need to be at the forefront of the movement for gender equality is because girls' educations get cut short because of their periods, and no girl should have less of an opportunity for an education because of her reproductive system."

Téa T.
Illinois, USA

"In middle school, I remember talking with my principal about putting period products in the restrooms. She wrinkled her nose and told me the school 'doesn't promote that type of thing'. To me, menstrual equity means de-stigmatizing menstruation, promoting education surrounding sexual and reproductive health, and ensuring that every girl has access to the products she needs."

Katie M.
Maryland, USA

"I was interested in menstrual equity after learning about period poverty through a documentary that we screened with our school club. I had seen other Girl Up clubs organizing drives and was inspired to start our own! Menstrual equity and justice means every girl has access to the period products she needs; we have to end the stigma around periods to normalize it and ensure every girl's needs are being met."

Tanya V.
California, USA
Menstrual Equity Advocacy

Menstrual equity for all involves promoting equitable and sustainable access to menstrual care products, dismantling misconceptions and misinformation related to menstruation, and reducing social stigma of menstruation through approaches such as policy and legislative advocacy, community education, and awareness campaigns.

"I first realized that access to menstrual products was an inequity in middle school. I had to either insert 25¢ in the machine or bring my own. While fortunate to be able to afford everything I needed, I was still finding myself missing class time going across the school to get my products from my locker. This made me see the importance of menstrual product accessibility in schools, so I joined a group called Free the Tampons.

We started stocking all the girls' bathrooms with pads and tampons. I faced cultural stigma — specifically, weird looks — for carrying around the products and restocking the bathrooms during my lunch breaks. This experience showed me the social taboo and lack of awareness and education around menstruation and menstrual health.”

Téa T.
Illinois, USA

Three Ways to Get Started

1. **Grasstops Advocacy**: writing petitions, letters to your representative, articles in local publications, or organizing phone banking and more promoting menstrual equity to high-level decision-makers such as school administration, community leaders, and legislative representatives

2. **Grassroots Advocacy**: facilitating community-based educational and awareness-building opportunities on menstruation and menstrual equity; could include participating in local community meetings, hosting a movie screening for documentaries about the issue, or even passing out flyers

3. **Digital Activism**: using social media to dispel menstrual misinformation and campaign for menstrual equity awareness and action

Call-To-Action

Throughout any advocacy activities, remember to not only identify the problem, but also propose a solution. **What exactly are you asking them to do?**

This is your call-to-action; a specific request or instruction that encourages people to make a change or solve a problem.

**As a Girl Up advocate, you should always include a call-to-action when you engage in advocacy!**
The following is adapted from Girl Up’s US Advocacy Toolkit – check it out for more in-depth information on advocacy in the US for gender equity, including a government breakdown and step-by-step guide on meeting with decision-makers!

1. Grasstops Menstrual Equity Advocacy

Choose your issue/topic

Examples include:
- Repeal of sales tax on menstrual products
- Increased standardized education surrounding menstruation
- Specific policy or legislation related to menstrual equity

Choose your decision-maker

Examples include:
- School administration
- Community leader
- Local, state, or federal policymakers

Choose your method

Examples include:
- **Make calls to your decision-makers’ offices** to advocate for your call-to-action - the more calls, the louder your message!
- **Create a petition with a banner full of signatures** from your Club and community members to show how many people support your call-to-action!
- **Host a letter-writing party with your Club members** to write to your decision-makers. Personalized letters work the best, but you can find a sample letter in the appendices for guidance. Make it a real party with music and food!
- **Organize your Club and community members to write opinion-editorials or articles about your advocacy call-to-action and ask the local newspaper to publish it.** You can even take it a step further and call your local radio, TV station, or newspaper to ask if they’d like to interview you about your advocacy!

- **Schedule an in-person meeting with your decision-maker** – it’s the best to make an impact on policies that directly affect people who menstruate globally or in your own backyard. Most elected officials hold regular town halls where they meet constituents to talk about issues of concern. Your elected official’s website has information about when the town halls will be and who to contact to set up an in-person meeting. When setting up these meetings you can either call or email the office - if it has been more than a few weeks, don't be afraid to send a follow-up reminder. Visit your local or state electives' websites or call their office to set up a meeting.

For more in-depth information on menstrual equity legislative advocacy, check out the **ACLU's Menstrual Equity Legislative Toolkit**!
### Grassroots Menstrual Equity Advocacy

#### Choose your issue/topic

**Examples include:**
- How to get involved in the movement for menstrual equity
- Sustainable menstrual care products to examine intersection of menstrual equity and the climate
- How schools can respond to the diverse needs of people with disabilities

#### Choose your audience

**Examples include:**
- Peers at school and/or in the community
- Adult community members such as parents, caregivers, and teachers
- Allies who don’t have periods

#### Choose your method

**Examples include:**
- Develop and/or share educational materials
- Organize an arts-based community event to bring awareness to menstrual equity
- Facilitate community and/or peer trainings

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#### Ally Inclusion

Allies can be part of the menstruation equity movement too! By inviting everybody to engage in educational opportunities, your message can reach more people and have a greater impact. However, remember to engage allies with intentionality – in a setting that may involve the sharing of personal and sensitive information, consider the overarching goal of the space and the potential impact – positive or negative – that ally-inclusion may yield.

#### Diverse Experiences

“Women and girls with disabilities face even greater challenges in managing their menstruation hygienically and with dignity. [They] face a double stigma due to both social norms around gender and menstruation and having a disability. It is often assumed that girls with disabilities do not menstruate, so education is needed to dispel menstruation and disability myths.”

- UNICEF

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Check out the free [WASH United Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Education Guide](https://www.wash.org/menstrual-hygiene-management-ed-guide) for MHM training content, planning tips, logistics guidance, and more!

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**Girl Up's Step Up for STEM Toolkit** includes a detailed 10-step event planning guide you can use to plan your community engagement and/or education event for menstrual equity!

1. Gathering a planning committee
2. Identifying an event topic
3. Choosing a date, time, and format
4. Setting event goals
5. Organizing an event run-of-show
6. Inviting speakers and launching registration
7. Gathering event materials
8. Facilitating the event
9. Debriefing the event and following-up
10. Sharing your success story
Digital Activism for Menstrual Equity

Choose your issue/topic  
*Examples include:*  
- Short menstruation-related myth-busting facts  
- Highlight awareness days like Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28th  
- Fundraise for your community education/organizing efforts

Choose your audience/platform  
*Examples include:*  
- TikTok  
- Instagram  
- LinkedIn

Choose your content-type  
*Examples include:*  
- Spotlight your own advocacy activities through sharing videos/pictures  
- Share menstrual equity posts from other pages (like Girl Up!)  
- Post videos/pictures with messages to spread awareness of menstrual equity – find guidelines for recording your own social media content at home in the appendices!

Remember to tag @girlupusa!

Diverse Identities

Not only people who identify as women and girls can menstruate! Menstruation involves the shedding of the uterine wall, a process that is separate from one's gender identity and only requires menstruating reproductive organs. Women, girls, non-binary individuals, transmen, and others may all menstruate and thus face barriers to care and social stigma, although uniquely experienced.

By using the term “people who have periods” in addition to “women” and “girls”, you can promote a gender-inclusive approach in your menstrual equity communications and messaging!
Check out these social media posts on menstrual equity from Girl Up Manipal and Girl Up Bhiwani!
How Direct Service and Advocacy Work Together to Make Change

Direct service involves participating in activities that directly provide a necessary resource to those who need it. For example, creating menstrual kits with your Club and donating them to a local shelter is a direct service. Direct service helps people now; when it comes to menstruation which occurs on a repetitive cycle, the recipient will need access to the resource – in this case, menstrual care products – continuously.

Advocacy involves participating in activities that aim to shift wider socio-cultural attitudes and change systemic-level policies to promote long-term, sustainable access for needed resources. For example, writing a letter to a policymaker to remove sales tax on menstrual care products is an advocacy activity. Advocacy may take time to see the change; when it comes to menstruation which occurs on a monthly cycle for most, each period without adequate period products or facilities can have an impact.

Girl Up Namibia collected period products and visited local primary and high schools to donate these materials.

Advocacy

During the collection and distribution of these materials, they discussed myths surrounding menstruation and brainstormed ways their community can work together to tackle menstrual discrimination.

You’ve Already Started

It can be overwhelming to think “Where do I start?” But remember that you already have! Advocacy is the long game – consider what you are doing now and build upon that. Whether it's sharing social media posts, engaging in direct service in your community, or exploring a toolkit for advocacy, you've already started!
Check out Girl Up Voices’ story “It’s Time to End Menstruation Stigma – PERIOD!” for Menstrual Hygiene Day to see how other Girl Up Clubs worldwide are advocating for the health, rights, and dignity of women, girls, and people who have periods!
US Girl Up Leaders and Clubs
Taking Action

"As a region leader for the Midwest, I worked with a team of international girl leaders for International Lobbying Day to raise awareness against period stigma and collaborate with menstrual advocates globally to together co-founded International Period Advocacy Network — a group that provides menstrual lobbying toolkits and facts for girls to join the movement against period poverty and stigma.

While president of UC Lab Girl Up at my high school, we hosted a screening of the documentary 'Period. End of Sentence.' and facilitated a school-wide period product drive for two consecutive years. The products we collected were donated to Connections for Abused Women and Their Children and The Love Fridge, two Chicago-based non-profits."

Téa T.
Illinois, USA

Working together can help self-care! When you work with others as a Club toward a common goal, it helps to maintain motivation and allows you to take a break when you need it – the collective keeps the work moving forward.

"To advocate for menstrual equity, I led other Girl Up Teen Advisors in a group statement regarding menstrual inequity across the globe. I am super proud of the work these girls put together and I feel as though the topics we covered are so important for a wide variety of audiences to hear."

Katie M.
Maryland, USA

Look for the full Girl Up '22-'23 Teen Advisor Statement on Menstrual Equity coming soon across Girl Up's digital platforms!
"**Caddo Magnet High School Girl Up** began by asking for donations from students on campus. We created a menstrual products (MPs) 'closet' in a teacher's classroom. We set up a sign-up system where girls would volunteer to stock and monitor every campus bathroom's use of MPs. We found that in under a month, our school's population of around 700 females used over 1,000 MPs. This was accompanied by a social media campaign that was ultimately followed by over 1,500 people.

We faced extreme backlash from our school administration, which included multiple calls to the principal's office and being told 'girls do not need to be getting political'. We then took our story and data to our local school board where we asked they fund or create a program similar to ours at every high school in the parish. After a 6 month long back and forth fight, they agreed and that process is now in motion.

We then contacted state representatives about a bill in Louisiana (LA). They drafted HB117, which would require all schools in LA to provide MPs in an accessible location on campus. Our club led lobbying efforts and worked with state and other national campaigns like the PERIOD. Movement to raise awareness. This included helping over 300 girls, teachers, and community members to email state legislators. We created email and call templates, Instagram infographics, and made our club a hub for resources and ways for other schools to copy our model.

I had the opportunity to testify two years in a row at our state capitol. I shared my school's story and the story of girls counting on our state legislators to make the right decision. The bill made it to the final round of the Senate Finance Committee but has been blocked by the excuse of it being an unfunded mandate on schools."

**Ananya B.**  
Louisiana, USA

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"In 2022 as **Girl Up Los Angeles Coalition** leader, I organized the Los Angeles Feminine Products Drive for 10 Clubs in our area, raising 4,000+ pads and tampons, and 400+ feminine hygiene kits with shampoos, soaps, toothbrushes, and other basic necessities. We donated these together to a women's shelter as a bonding event for Club Leaders and call-to-action for Clubs in our area. Our club was featured in our school district news!"

**Tanya V.**  
California, USA
Call-to-Action for US Leaders

Support the Menstrual Equity for All Act!

In May 2023, the Menstrual Equity for All Act was re-introduced by U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, the Democratic Representative of New York’s 6th congressional district; originally introduced in 2017, this bill is “a whole-of-government approach to eradicate period poverty and achieve menstrual equity” in the United States.\(^\text{v}\)

The Menstrual Equity for All Act advocates that:

- States will be able to utilize federal funds to provide free menstrual products in schools
- Individuals who are incarcerated, detainees, and those in immigration detention centers will have access to free pads and tampons
- Individuals experiencing homelessness will be given access to menstrual products through funds that cover shelter necessities
- Medicaid will cover the cost of menstrual products for recipients
- Individuals will be able to use pre-tax dollars from their health-flexible spending accounts to buy menstrual products
- Employers with more than 100 staff on company payroll will be required to provide free pads and tampons in the workplace
- All public federal buildings will be required to provide free pads and tampons in female toilets\(^\text{vi}\)

While this bill was not passed in 2017, you can help it pass today! Using the tips, tools, and resources from this toolkit, you and your Girl Up Club can help advocate for passage of the Menstrual Equity for All Act, from writing letters to your representatives and spreading the word on social media to writing op-eds in your local newspaper and meeting with your elected officials in-person.

Be sure to utilize our template advocacy letter in the appendices, ready for you to personalize and mail or email to your representative!

Let us know about your advocacy! Share your action on social media tagging @girlupusa, remember to submit a report on the Girl Up Community, and let us know how we can help you in your menstrual equity advocacy journey.


APPENDICES
Template Letter/Email to Representatives in the US

Use this template to write to your member of Congress or any decision-maker! Visit GovTrack to find your representative's mailing or email address. As an advocate on behalf of Girl Up be sure to write your letter on our official letterhead (download the file from Google Docs).

[Insert date]

The Honorable [insert member of Congress' name]

[Insert office address, applicable if via mail]

United States House of Representatives or United States Senate

[Insert city, state, zip]

Dear [insert title – e.g., Representative, Senator, etc.] [insert last name],

My name is [insert name] and I am a [insert Girl Up affiliation – e.g., youth leader, club leader, club member, etc.] for Girl Up, a girl-centered leadership development initiative that engages girls and youth to take action to advance gender justice worldwide.

I am also your constituent and would like to say thank you for representing me and the issues I care about. I am writing today to discuss [insert the reason why you are writing - if writing about a specific bill, include bill name and number]. [Insert facts related to the issue].

[Insert your call-to-action, the proposed solution to the issue and how your representative can be involved in being part of that solution – what do you want them to do?].

I care about this issue because [insert how the issue affects you and/or your community – this is where you can share YOUR personal story].

I attend [insert school name, if applicable] in your constituency, and urge your support on [insert your call-to-action again] so that [insert positive outcome(s) of taking action – e.g., lives of those directly affected are improved, access is equitable, etc.].

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working with you to make equality a reality for every girl.

Sincerely,

[Insert your full name]

[Insert your email address]

[Insert your home address]
Tips for Filming High-Quality Social Media Content

- When recording using your phone, whether iPhone or Android, always use the rear-facing camera (as opposed to the front facing, or “selfie”, camera). Resolution and motion stability options on the rear camera will provide the best quality recording.
- Stabilize your phone using books to prop it in a stable, upright position that won’t shift or slide while you are filming. Even better, use a tripod if you have one. Set the phone far enough away so you fit in the center of the frame but close enough to capture audio.
- Do NOT zoom in on your phone to achieve the desired framing - this will lower the quality of the video overall. The camera should be zoomed all the way out to record. Just step closer to the camera or move the camera position closer to you as needed.
- Be sure to speak loudly and clearly. Consider using headphones with a built-in microphone to ensure you have the best audio quality possible.
- If possible, film yourself in a carpeted space to help limit echoes, and make sure others in your home are quiet during your recording. If recording outdoors, be mindful of other environmental noise (e.g. passing cars).
- If speaking in the video, please add subtitles on screen to create more inclusive and accessible content.
- For the best lighting, sit facing a window with full, even exposure, or use a ring light or other recording light placed directly in front of you. If you are in a room with multiple light sources, turn them all on. If you are wearing glasses, just be mindful of any glare that may appear on the lenses.
- Be cognizant of your surroundings and background. A bookshelf, some plants, or colorful artwork always make for a nice backdrop.
- Feel free to add a youth-friendly song of your choice for fun background music!
- Make sure to replay your video to confirm the sound and video quality are good.
- Film directly in the social media platform such as TikTok or on IG Reels, and directly add the stickers, gifs, text, and any other edits you want so it reflects your unique personality and is ready to post!

Mobile Device Set-up:

When recording on a phone, whether iPhone or Android, use the newest model accessible to you to record your content.

For iPhone, follow the steps below to film in 4k at 30 fps for best results:

1. Go into “Settings” and then “Camera”
2. Select “Record Video”
3. Select “4K at 30 fps” (make sure it is checked)

For Android, follow below to film in 4K UHD or 4K (Ultra-high Resolution) for best results:

1. While in video-recording mode, enable 4K UHD or 4K (Ultra-high Resolution) from under the drop-down settings menu.
   a. On some Samsung Galaxy or other select models, you may need to enter Video settings using the gear icon; then select the option for “UHD” under the “Video Size (Rear)” menu. Note: “UHD (60 fps)” may be selected by default or may even be the only option available for UHD. You can use that to record your video, however 30 fps is best when available.