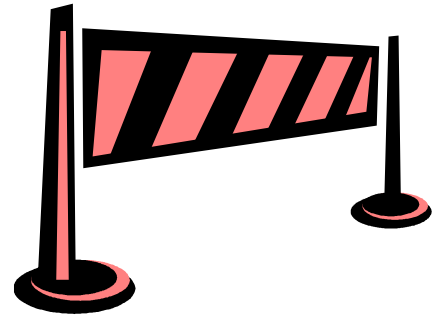


Engaging Members to Lead the League

Leadership Development is the process of developing leadership skills in people so that they are empowered to be involved in League decision-making practices.

The League, at all levels, has a system for almost everything. We have a system for determining our program for the upcoming year, a system for studying an issue and coming to consensus, and so much more. The one thing for which we don't have a system is succession planning to ensure each League has a prepared, supported, and motivated leadership team.

Leagues are faced with different leadership challenges. Some Leagues have one League leader who has been the President for years, who is tired and who would love to step down if another leader could be found. Some Leagues have 50 members but are on the verge of disbanding because no one can be found to step up and lead the League. Still other Leagues have a very cliquy Board who does not want or welcome newer leaders to take the helm. Many League Presidents across the country are brand new members who were immediately asked to become President and who were not ready to take on the responsibility. While the challenges are myriad, the solution is the same.



To survive and thrive, we must start systematically preparing and encouraging individuals to lead the League.

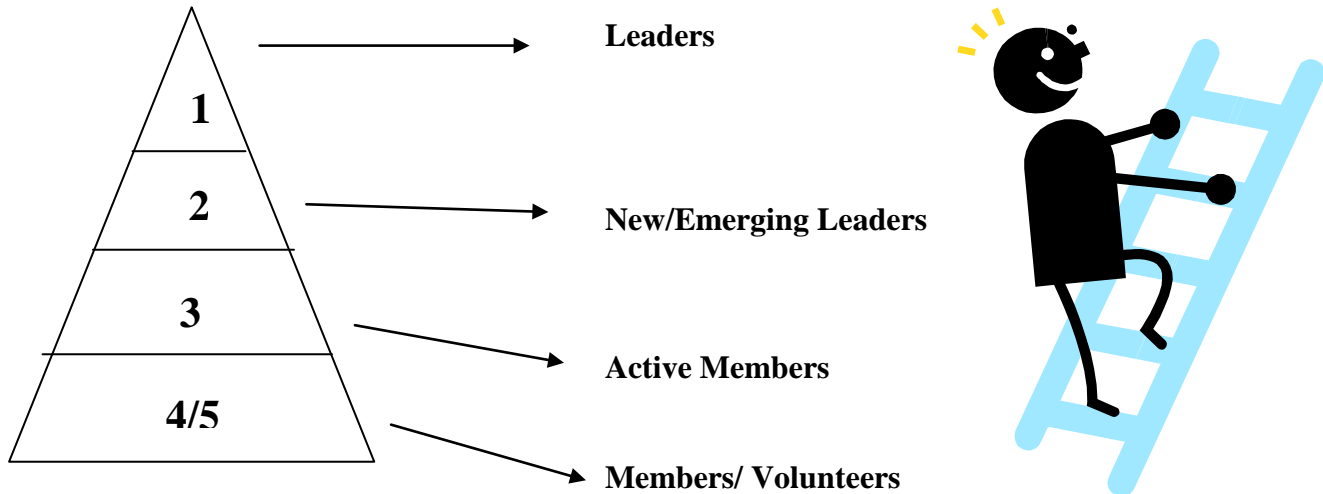
This has been done at times and by some Leagues, but doing this in an organized and intentional way ensures new leaders are developed. Leadership development is a key component for successful Leagues and will lead to more engaged members, stronger communities and a more vibrant democracy.

The question is: what systematic structure should we use to ensure members are developing and using leadership skills?

Utilizing the Leadership Ladder

LWVUS has done extensive research on leadership theories and on the practical leadership challenges facing our local Leagues. We found that the best way to view the process of developing League leaders is as a ladder, on which we continuously try to move capable and enthusiastic individuals up and up.

The basics of the leadership ladder can be seen in the diagram below.



1	Leader	Board member or key committee chairperson, can be a leader on key events and projects, the League can count on the fruits of their labor, they feel skilled and confident organizing others, can be trusted to carry out activities, have undergone leadership training and reach out to develop emerging leaders
2	New/Emerging Leader	Identify as a League leader, take on a specific responsibility, make specific commitments, are dependable, been through some trainings, helps to support and train new members with Leadership Development Team guidance
3	Active Member	Attends meetings or issue committee meetings regularly, begins to identify with League as “we”, Leadership Development plan is started
4	Member	Sends League a check, has the right to participate in organizational decisions
5	Volunteer	On our contact list, have attended at least one event or participated in at least one Action Alert

Basically, a League will (ideally!) have a large group of members and volunteers who start at the base of the ladder. These are individuals who have may come to a League event or two, are on your contact list, and may pay dues to support and be affiliated with the League. Each



member should be seen as a potential leader. While not everyone who is in this group will want to join the League and take on responsibilities to lead the League, some will. Continue to ASK these individuals to attend League events and engage them by sending them action alerts and newsletters.

Once a member or volunteer has officially joined the League by paying dues and has come to multiple events, they should be considered an active member. Active members are prime candidates for future leadership positions and should be engaged to start moving them up the ladder. A great way to engage an active member, who has shown interest in being involved in the League, is to reach out to them to find out what they like best about the League and how they'd like to be more involved.

It's important to start ASKING active members to take on small tasks and get involved with the League more and more little by little.

The way we communicate and ask members to take on leadership opportunities is just as important. Much like we need to change the way we speak to potential members about why to join the League, we need to change the way we speak to our current members about leadership opportunities with the League. Instead of looking at League leadership as a chore, let's remember what makes League great. We need to reframe how we think about and offer personal leadership development opportunities to potential new League leaders. By doing so, we can continue to ASK capable and enthusiastic individuals to take on more and more responsibilities to move them up the ladder.

It will be easier to find individuals, who would like the opportunity to take on the unique benefits of leading the League, when we emphasize the wonderful opportunity it has afforded so many of us.



Check out the "Tools You Can Use" section at the back of the manual for a worksheet to help your Nominating Committee and Board reflect and brainstorm how to talk about League leadership in a positive and enticing way!

Having a larger pool of individuals will obviously help in your efforts to develop League leaders gradually. Perhaps there is "old guard leadership" that discourages any new leaders? Or lots of long time leaders and lots of new members, but no pathway between them for new leaders to advance? There should always be more new people coming in than leaders at the top of an organization, so there are lots of new people to grow into leadership positions. Successful organizations are always bringing in new members who have leadership qualities, building relationships with them, understanding their interests and motivations, and finding new roles in the organization that develop their leadership skills and qualities. That is how organizations grow and stay strong. The more members you recruit, the easier the leadership development



process will become. However, no matter what size your League, the important part to remember is to have this systematic structure in place to continuously develop the leadership skills of interested individuals.

As individuals move up the ladder, it is important to make sure that the individual is being fully engaged, without being completely overwhelmed. A good way to ensure this is true for all of your emerging leaders is to consider their level of comfort in taking on new tasks. There are four different “zones of learning,” ranging from the easy zone, in which a task can be done with very little effort or discomfort, to the discomfort zone, in which a leader is overwhelmed and ill-equipped to complete the task at hand. Leadership development happens when people are in their learning zone.

Here is a description of the different zones of learning:

Easy Zone: Tasks and activities are so comfortable that the person doing it finds no challenge. While these tasks may be boring for one person, they may be a challenge for someone else. Consider training a new leader to take over this task or activity.

Comfort Zone: Tasks and activities that require skill but a person is really comfortable doing. While staying in this zone is comfortable, they need to move outside the comfort zone to develop new skills.

Learning Zone: Experts say that a person learns best when they are outside your comfort zone trying a newly mastered skill – this is the learning zone. Here it is good to have support preparing for the activity and an evaluation of their work afterwards.

Discomfort Zone: This is when one feels completely out of their depth. Think about getting help breaking the project into smaller pieces and picking one that would feel comfortable to a new person trying it with support. We don’t want people to be doing work that is in their discomfort zone.





Remember to always try to keep individuals within the circles. Going outside the learning zone will not be fun or interesting for a leader, only overwhelming. If you see someone is very comfortable doing a task, you can start to consider trying to push them towards more responsibilities and think of a newer leader to take on the easier tasks.

Engaging the Board in Leadership Development

While leadership development is not simply a job for the Board or the Nominating Committee, it is important to fully engage them in your leadership development efforts.

Aside from having the Board brainstorm reasons why it is great to be a League leader, you should engage them in reaching out to League members to be more active and to continuously move up the Leadership Ladder.

Basically, the Board should always be incorporating succession planning into the everyday work of the League.

Here are a few ways for the Board can develop future leaders:

- When planning each event or activity, have the Board (or the respective committee) incorporate leadership development into their planning before, during, and after the event/activity. They should consider asking “who else” can be incorporated into planning the event, discuss what small tasks can be divvied up and given to potential future leaders, find ways to publicly thank individuals for helping to make the event possible, and showcase the opportunities provided to League leaders throughout.
- Board members can start mentoring rising leaders in the organization. Have the Board brainstorm a few names of individuals who could be great League leaders and then should interview these individuals to find out what their interests are. The Board should reach out to these individuals to assist in planning and executing events and activities that pertain to their interests. A great way to learn is to shadow others. Give someone the opportunity to start learning what the Board does *before* they are thrown into their discomfort zone as a new and unprepared Board member.
- Have the Board brainstorm things they wish they had, such as an up-to-date website or some extra help on program planning. Can you then brainstorm ways to get League members involved in achieving these goals? Maybe a younger member of the League is very tech-savvy and could help update the website. Maybe you’ve seen a couple individuals consistently come to program planning meetings in the past. Can you ask them to help this year?



Engaging the Nominating Committee in Leadership Development

Engaging the nominating committee in leadership development is absolutely necessary to ensuring prepared, enthusiastic, and welcoming leaders are chosen to lead the League for years to come.

Evaluate the strengths of your current leadership team

It is useful to assess the skills of your current leadership team to identify the skills you currently have and what you may want to build or strengthen within the Board of Directors. Sometimes this assessment or dialogue affords an individual board member the opportunity to look for ways to strengthen their own personal skills in an area, take on different responsibilities that suit the member's interests and time better, or help find others who can support them or fill the needed role.

Take Concrete Steps towards Creating a Strong Board

The excitement and energy, generated by enthusiastic League members in the communities where they live, is palpable. Here are some concrete steps to initiate a recruitment process:

- Determine what qualities you are seeking.
- Create a job description.
- Invite new prospective leaders to participate with the board in activities of the League.
- Advertise positions you want to fill. Use word of mouth to see if there are already good candidates in your midst. Always remember to ask yourself “who else” could do this job?

ASK Individuals to Become Leaders

Asking someone to take on a leadership position is much like asking a potential new member to join the League. It may be awkward at first, but it will get easier (and hopefully more rewarding!) over time.

What to Say to a Potential Leader:

- Stress the fact that the League offers a good learning experience, that the League is fun and that it is the basis of lasting friendships.
- Remember to share what the League has personally meant to you, to your own development as a leader, and to your community.
- Ask the individual what types of activities would be of interest to them and listen carefully to what they like to do and where they feel they can be successful.
- Offer a chance for them to become involved in areas that fit their interests.

*These materials were adapted from materials developed by the Maine People's Alliance with *excerpts of some materials developed with Northeast Action, the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (NWFCO), and Midwest Academy* and from the *Little Green Book*.