

Leadership Training and Transitions

In a strong League, training is ongoing, just as it is in the corporate world. Board members should learn all they can about the League itself. They should have ongoing training about their job as board member. They should learn about marketing the League, as well as how to manage League policies. They should fulfill their roles as “frontline ambassadors” for the organization, inviting people to join, creating a welcoming presence for new members and a dynamic organization that attracts new leaders. There are additional areas where training is helpful to board members, such as understanding League positions, understanding the organization’s finances, and other best practices in board governance areas.

Develop an Annual Orientation for the Incoming Board

Each year, the board of directors should participate in an orientation. Both newly-elected and incumbent directors should attend. Leadership staff (if there are any) is also invited. The Nominating Committee, in conjunction with the new president or management team, can help outline the orientation. A good orientation sets the tone for the year’s activities. Key elements include a discussion of board roles and League’s purpose and programs.

Establish Intentional Learning Opportunities for Board Members

Is there an outside speaker that could participate in a board meeting to provide League leaders with insight on a given topic, such as marketing or new technologies? Is there a webinar that the board can view together and discuss? Is there a book that a League leader can preview and share with the leadership team? In other words, how can we provide some “brain stretching” time for our League leaders? How do we help to ensure that they feel satisfied in the role they have -- that there is some opportunity for personal growth or evolution?



Set Up Mentors

We don’t often use this term in League. However, when asked why members enjoy their time in League, consistently one of the top reasons is: “Because of the smart individuals in the League.” And, another common response is “Because I learn so much in League.” Most Leagues don’t have formal mentoring programs established, but it does happen to a certain extent informally. But, what if this were more formalized? What if Leagues intentionally mentored individuals to be new leaders?

Instead by association or happenstance, League leaders can seek out individuals to “shadow” them. They can provide a meaningful and challenging experience for individuals who want to learn more about the League, learn some specific skills, and gain new confidence as a leader.



Transitions in Leadership

To ensure a smooth transition from leader to leader, it is critical that a structured process is in place. Once a new leader has been identified, the current League leader should schedule a meeting to review the core components of their role and provide a report on the League's specific successes and challenges in their given area/portfolio. The overall goal of this meeting is to provide the new leader with as much detail as possible about the efforts made to date.



It's also useful to create a small transition packet, which will provide a new leader with the comprehensive overview of the current board's goals and their progress toward achieving them. This packet might include an evaluative piece by the current board (or the individual member). How did their tenure go? Were they personally satisfied? Does it feel like the organization is on track? What are the challenges or unfinished business items that need immediate attention?

The meeting or conversation between the outgoing and incoming members might include some of the following discussion topics:

- What are the priorities of the incoming board? How do these relate to those of the outgoing board?
- How do these goals support organizational growth? Will they help to build membership? Will they continue to support leadership development?
- Did the current board make key contacts or build relationships with media and allied organizations? If so, how can these be fostered?
- Do you have any advice for building teams with the League?
- How can we continue/build stronger ties with the community?

While these suggestions about transitioning leadership may sound very obvious, these intentional one-on-one meetings between leaders don't automatically happen. We often don't find a structured way to value the experiences of our past leaders, and their knowledge is invaluable to the health and vitality of the League.

In some cases, there are personality challenges. Or, in other instances, a leader may just feel so "burned out" that they don't want to make this final effort of leadership transition. But, it is an important part of a leader's legacy and it can help to ensure that new leaders get off to a strong start. It helps to ensure that the League moves forward in a positive way. If these types of conversations are difficult to have, leaders can look to a third-party (such as another board member or their coach) to help facilitate.

THE LEAGUE WAY OLD VS. NEW

As the organization continues to evolve (e.g., embracing new technologies, adopting new ways of doing business), it is sometimes difficult for longtime League leaders to embrace these changes. It is critically important that we value their experiences in the League, AND at the same time, we need to be more nimble to ensure that we continue to have a strong impact in our communities.

With some notable exceptions regarding areas such as nonpartisanship, there are few absolutes on how we MUST do things in League. Guidance on streamlining League operations are on the LWVUS website.

One of the important parts of being a leader is being able to listen and appreciate different perspectives and points of view. Leaders need to balance what has worked in the past and embrace what may work better in the future – all while not sacrificing our core mission.

Some Leagues have intentionally set up “wisdom councils” or other vehicles for past leaders to continue to share their knowledge and experiences. Others have asked these former leaders to mentor new members, serve on off-board committees, or even take on whole new portfolios (if they want more learning).

Our history as an organization is one of our greatest assets and also one of our greatest challenges. Current leaders need to be forward-thinking while not sacrificing the efforts, reputation and trust that the League has established in its 90 years. There is no easy or quick answer to finding this balance, but it provides opportunities for learning, mentoring and building an even stronger organization if acknowledged and intentionally addressed.



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