

April 2015 Guidance on Opportunities: Engaging With New Local Leadership

Appreciative Icebreaker

Think about your League and discuss the following questions:

- What are the organization's strengths?
- How do we maximize them for impact in our community?
- How do we maximize them to build our capacity?
- What else might we do to build on our strengths or assets to achieve greater success?

Guidance

Growing the League and developing new League leaders is not an undertaking that one person can manage on their own so ensuring that members of your local board are fully engaged with the MLD program is critical to its success. As this is the time of year when many leadership transitions occur at the state and local levels of League, it is important that new leaders are fully introduced to the MLD program so that they can continue to build upon the work that was done by their predecessors.

There will likely be three "baskets" of learning that can help new leaders understand and integrate the best practices of the MLD into League work (i.e., create buy in) --

1. **Understanding what MLD is (and isn't):** How much does the local League board understand what the MLD is and how it works?
2. **Understanding specific roles within the MLD:** Who is our state coach and what can we expect from him/her? What is expected of us?
3. **Sharing content:** What resources exist? How can they be shared on a consistent basis and integrated into our "regular" work?

While different situations will require different actions, there is a common theme: **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**. MLD team members will need to build relationships with each other, with their state coach, and with the incoming local League board. Coaches should brainstorm about some good team-building/relationship-building activities. They might include:

- Identifying some common goals for the League,
- Setting expectations and/or ground rules about how everyone will work together,
- Getting to know each other personally, perhaps by using some of the appreciative icebreakers from past guidances.

Another important conversation for MLD teams to have with the local League board is: **What does success look like?** This will help to create some common goals and to plan more strategically. It allows the MLD to become more of a "way of doing League" than an additional program that requires extra work.

While one way to measure the success of MLD in your League is the membership numbers, it is critical that you share with your board the importance of other ways to measure success. In an ever changing volunteer landscape, success is more than just the membership numbers and often this can make gauging how successful your League has been difficult. Success is not solely defined by the outcomes like membership

In baseball, my theory is to strive for consistency, not to worry about the numbers. If you dwell on statistics you get shortsighted, if you aim for consistency, the numbers will be there at the end.

- Tom Seaver

growth. It is also defined by the inputs (i.e., what local Leagues do). By being clear about what success looks like beyond just the numbers, you reduce the chances for frustration and burnout. Our experience to date has been that over time, successful inputs will result in successful outcomes.

Leagues are encouraged to envision what impact they want the League to have on their community. Then, consider what a successful leadership development strategy would look like that could get them there. Working with their state coach, local League teams can then start to think about options for achieving this.

Other measures of success might include:

- Strong relationships with allied organizations
- Consistent messaging about the value of membership and asking members to join
- Strong relationships with local media
- Greater visibility in the community
- Engagement of numerous League leaders (including some new ones) in all League activities
- Stronger retention rates among current members
- Strong relationships with state coaches and state League
- League members' stories highlighted consistently
- Renewed attitude about and enthusiasm for future of LWV

The best way to ensure that membership and leadership development becomes a top priority for your local League is to engage your board in making intentional and routine use of membership and leadership best practices. There are a number of *little things* that you can model yourself and encourage your Board members to do, too. With an engaged board, incorporating best practices into every event or opportunity becomes much easier and more effective.

Some examples of "little" engagement opportunities might include:

- Include a membership message in their e-mail electronic signature. It's easy to add and reaches everyone they e-mail without any effort. Add a link to the "Join Us" information on your League's website.
- Always have a membership brochure– and be prepared to ASK someone to join.
- Share their own "League story" on your website or via social media. This will help your Board members have their most powerful marketing tool – the reason why League is important to them – at the ready to use when talking with potential members.
- Mingle at the next community event that they attend; don't just sit with League members. Make a conscious effort to meet new people and share the value of being a member/leader in the League, as well as find out what brings them to the event.
- Have a sign-in sheet at all events and activities for interested attendees and be sure to follow up with them after the event.

Additional Resources

-[Chapter 2](#) of the MLD Handbook

- Membership Forum Group: <http://forum.lwv.org/group/membership>