

## Membership Leadership Development (MLD) Program Background and Overview

*Imagine If . . .*

- YOUR League was growing in membership and funding
- YOUR League had its own coach for support, ideas, and guidance
- YOU and YOUR League leaders had training and mentoring *before* leading
- OUR League's voice was as strong and powerful as our reputation in *all* communities across the United States

In the fall of 2005, LWVUS confronted a single question that perhaps has been the biggest challenge for the League over the past 30 years of our over 90-year history: *Can something be done about membership decline?*

To answer this question, we did our own research and engaged outside specialists to assist us. We conducted interviews with stakeholders, examined organizations who conduct similar work, and reviewed news clips that featured LWV. Their research was the foundation for the strategic decisions that created this program. We discovered that . . .

*The League has a highly respected reputation and a strong and proud history. However, while there is great name recognition of the League of Women Voters, there is limited awareness about the value that the League membership offered to potential members.*

For example, the media scan, which included over three years of coverage from major media markets, found over 700 articles. Of all these articles, 50 percent were news pieces, but of that group, only one communicated the value of the LWV – the mission.

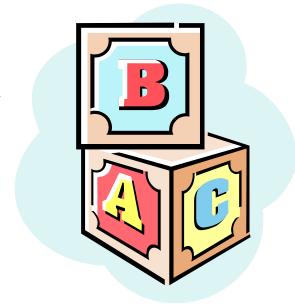
The greatest overall finding was that communications about the organization's work and about the value of LWV membership are inconsistent. While LWV has a solid reputation – largely stemming from our long history and work on election-related issues - it was clear that LWV did not have a strong, easily defined position that is distinct among groups who are engaged in similar work in similar issue areas. In other words, individuals outside the organization do not have a clear understanding of the value in becoming a member of LWV because current members are not communicating this in a consistent way that resonates with potential members. The best practices of this program were designed to address this challenge.

We also realized that many Leagues are also struggling to find trained leaders who are ready and willing to lead the League. We've begun adding components to the program to help Leagues develop leaders within their community and League. This helps to engage and retain members who have been recruited, makes the League stronger and ultimately serves our democracy.



### The Building Blocks for Success:

1. Conducting regular and intentional outreach to potential League members
2. Connecting with and becoming visible in the community
3. Developing local League leaders' skills and confidence
4. Annual training for League leaders and League coaches
5. Consistent coaching by dedicated and knowledgeable League volunteers



## 1. Conducting Regular and Intentional Outreach to Potential Members

The membership outreach campaign has been specifically designed to help League leaders communicate the benefits of League membership to potential members and to highlight the great work that League members across the country do to keep their communities healthy, vibrant and strong. The communications tactics that are outlined here are based upon marketing principles. They offer opportunities for local Leagues to weave membership outreach efforts into the unique activities that are already planned.

Being consistently “present” in the community is one of the keys to successful recruitment. The “Outreach Best Practices” section of this handbook provides tips about working with the media, collaborating with other community organizations, and maximizing the League’s own activities to generate visibility.

*The common theme in all of these techniques is to be intentional and consistent in reaching out to our community and to create and take advantage of all opportunities to invite or ASK potential members to join the League.*

## 2. Connecting with and Becoming Visible in the Community

Research has time and again shown that the segments of our communities who do know us perceive the League as an elections-time only organization. All of us at the League need to better promote and use the core work of the League as vehicles to engage potential members throughout the year. As you know your community best, we will help your League see the potential marketing and visibility opportunities in the activities you have already planned. This handbook also includes an “a la carte” menu of suggested activities, as a resource for local Leagues. *You* may choose to include some or all of these as part of their annual calendar.

**The goal is to have Leagues visible each month if possible. This will:**

- Ensure that Leagues have consistent visibility in the community and debunk the myth that we are an elections-time only organization
- Enhance what the Leagues are already doing and play up our local successes/assets
- Establish a foundation for sustained growth by offering valuable media hooks for local Leagues to raise awareness about the LWV and strengthening the way the LWV is defined both internally and externally, which will result in new members.

LWVUS has designed numerous tools and resources to help Leagues succeed in this area. These are in this handbook and available online in the program's Yahoo! Group.

### **3. Developing League Leaders' Skills and Confidence**

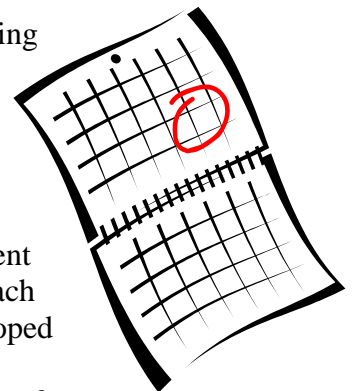
Many times, Leagues have a good number of members, but find it difficult to identify individuals to take on leadership roles. Local Leagues need to consistently and intentionally develop the skills of League members through mentoring and training. Leagues, also, need to begin to think about how they communicate the value of League leadership to potential League leaders in a way that shows it as the opportunity it is, rather than as a burden. And, once in leadership, we need to provide support to ensure that we are setting individuals up to succeed – for the good of the organization and our democracy.

### **4. Annual Training for League Leaders**

Training and planning are essential to the success of the program. The training for state coaching teams and local League teams are important components of this. Using various training methods (such as in person, over the phone and via the web), training sessions serve to orient the Leagues, answer questions, and assist in developing and carrying out outreach strategies.

During the training, we begin the process of thinking about how to implement the best practices of the program. We identify some opportunities for outreach based on what is already on your League's calendar. Using the tools developed as part of the program, we build the outreach, visibility, and leadership development components around LWV activities, and this becomes the start of your League's roadmap to success.

LWVUS provides an initial face-to-face training for newly participating state and local Leagues. After this initial training, LWVUS provides training and networking opportunities via phone and webinar. LWVUS encourages State Leagues to conduct training for local Leagues within their states after the initial LWVUS-funded opportunity.





## 5. Consistent Coaching by Dedicated and Knowledgeable League Volunteers



Past experience has proven that coaching is absolutely critical to each local League's success in growing and becoming more vibrant. By participating in this program, each local League will have the technical and emotional support of a state coach who will champion their successes, mentor them through challenges, and act as a bridge to connect the local and national coaching teams. Each state coach will likewise work with a national coach who will help them through any challenges they're facing and celebrate their successes as they connect with and advise local Leagues.

Coaching is done mostly through over-the-phone conversations, which take place each month. Coaches are given ideas from the national League to communicate to local Leagues and help provide guidance and support during these monthly phone calls. Coaching is a rewarding experience for both the mentor and mentee and builds a League support structure through which all three levels of our League work together to make our voice strong and powerful.

### Our Main Goals:

1. Experience a net increase in League membership
2. Establish a year-round, powerful and visible League presence in communities across the United States
3. Tool League leaders with the necessary training, materials, and support to lead enthusiastically and effectively

