

Developing Leaders within the League of Women Voters



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*. Thank you to these groups and Carol Reimers, former LWVUS National Board member, for her work to adapt them to the League.

Leadership Development

What is Leadership Development?

Leadership Development is the process of developing leadership skills in people so that they are empowered to be involved in League decision-making processes. It is important to identify League members with leadership qualities, find out what motivates them through an initial one-on-one meeting, help identify new leadership opportunities within the League, and encourage and support them as they learn new skills. 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.

Why do systematic Leadership Development?

The League is a member-driven organization. Members carry out the work of the League and participate in decision-making, organization building, and strategic planning. Sometimes, members feel uncomfortable in parts of this process. The goal of leadership development is to continually expose members to experiences within their “learning zone” that build towards organizational leadership [see p. 3]. When leaders have completed the leadership development process, few parts of organizational work, decisions, or strategy should remain in their “discomfort zone.” If we start by placing people in their discomfort zone all the time very often they leave, are frustrated or cannot make sound organizational decisions. Utilizing these tools and process will help your League move people into their “comfort zone” for leadership roles.

Organizational goals

The goal of the League’s leadership development work is to have all of our active members developing leadership skills and moving up the “Leadership Development Ladder” [see p. 6] to the extent that they want to. The more League leaders there are carrying out our work, the stronger our organization (and our communities) will be. Ultimately, our goal is to have all leaders in the “Leader” category before they can take on essential roles within the organization. This will assure that leaders within the League have a base of knowledge from which to draw on for decision-making on behalf of the League and are in their comfort zone while carrying out their leadership duties. As a part of leadership development, it is essential that we take emerging leaders through this training and help you to understand the basics. We hope that through this training you become a part of League leadership. We can't do this work without members coming in and new leaders being developed!

Zones of Learning:

Leadership development happens when people are in their “Learning Zone!”



Easy Zone Tasks and activities that 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.

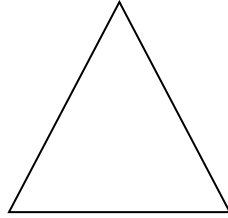
Comfort Zone Tasks and activities that require skill but that a person is really comfortable doing. While staying in this zone is comfortable, they need to move outside the comfort zone to develop new skills.

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.

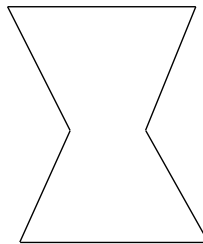
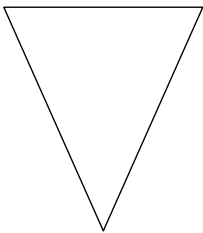
Discomfort Zone This is when one feels completely out of their depth. Think about getting help breaking the project into smaller pieces and picking one that would feel comfortable to a new person trying it with support. We don't want people to be doing work that is in their discomfort zone.

We see leadership development as a ladder.

As we mentor new leaders, think about first thing that is asked of new people by your League. What was that? Be a member? Go to an event? How about when they had more experience? Be on a committee? Speak at an event? Be on the board? Healthy organizations look like this:

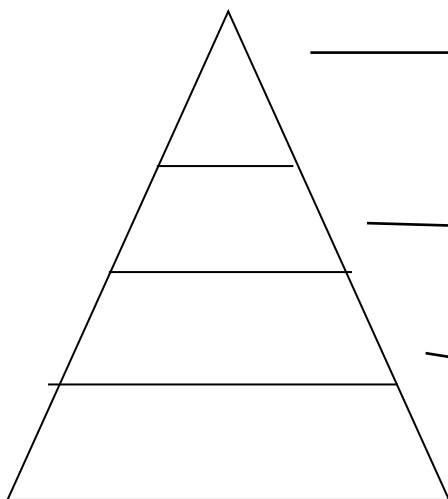


Lots of members are moving up the leadership ladder to positions of more responsibility. To maintain a healthy organization, we have to keep bringing in new members or the organization dies. Have you ever been in an organization like these?



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.

Healthy Organizations look like this:



Leaders

Board members, chairing teams, leaders chairing and involved in committees, regularly participate in actions, events & membership recruitment.

New/Emerging Leaders

Participate and play a role in several events or activities per year and starts taking on specific responsibilities.

Active Members

Pay annual membership dues and come to one or more activities per year.

Members - Pay membership dues, has right to participate in organizational decisions.

What Makes a Good Leader?

Leadership Qualities

Leadership qualities are attributes that we can develop or identify in our emerging leaders.

- **Motivates, inspires, & develops others** A good leader motivates, inspires, and develops others and is recognized as a leader. This is most important – above all, *leaders are people who have followers.*
- **Values & Vision** Good leaders are clear about their values and have some idea about what they would like the world to be like. A good leader is committed to work to advance those values and vision.
- **Positive Outlook** Leaders look for solutions to problems instead of focusing on the difficulties.
- **Imagination** Good leaders rely on their imaginations to find creative solutions to problems, to think of solutions they've never tried before.
- **Confidence** A leader that is confident will understand their weaknesses and ask for help when they need it. They will also stand up for themselves and their organization even in the face of adversity.
- **Trust in people** Good leaders believe in people. They encourage them, listen to them, and respect them. They see the potential in others and want to help them use that potential to the greatest degree possible. Leaders don't violate the *Iron Rule of Organizing*: Never do for others what they must do for themselves.
- **Critical Perspective** Leaders are frequently the people who ask "why" and "why not?" A healthy skepticism – especially of unaccountable leaders and institutions – is a useful quality in a leader.
- **Sense of Humor** A sense of humor acts as a safety valve for anger. It's a way of staying sane during the struggle for social change. Good leaders can sit back and laugh once in a while.
- **Agitation** A leader stirs things up. You can't get clothes clean without an agitator!
- **Courage** A leader has courage and is willing to take risks. As the saying goes, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." A good leader is willing to accept challenges and to work outside their "comfort zone."
- **Passion at injustice** Passion can propel you to act. Passion can be helpful and constructive when it is focused and aimed for good.
- **Lot's more...!** What are qualities that could be added here that we value in our leaders?

Leadership Development Ladder

LD #		Definition
5	<i>Volunteer</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On our contact list, have attended at least one event or participated in at least one Action Alert
4	<i>Member</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sends League a check, has the right to participate in organizational decisions
4+		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have had a 1-on-1 relational meeting with Leadership Development Team member
3	<i>Active Member</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attends meetings or issue committee meetings regularly, begins to identify with League as “we”, Leadership Development plan is started
3+		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Attendance and participation are regular, dependable and accountable, eager to do and curious to learn more, works closely with leader on an activity, Leadership Development plan reviewed with Leadership Development Team member
2	<i>New/Emerging Leader</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Identify as a League leader, take specific responsibility, make specific commitments, are dependable, been through some trainings, helps to support and train new members with Leadership Development Team guidance
2+		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Develop good organizing skills, demonstrate significant leadership on activities, aware of their leadership development, third leadership development meeting is done and plan is revised if appropriate
1	<i>Leader</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Board member or key committee chairperson, can be a leader on key events and projects, League can count on the fruits of their labor, feel skilled and confident organizing others, can be trusted to carry out activities, undergone leadership training and reaches out to develop emerging leaders