Using Stories to Recruit New Members

While “storytelling” (the art of conveying information or educating people using a story) has been a part of almost every culture throughout history, it was shunned by many nonprofits for decades. Instead, perhaps in an effort to be “corporate-like,” organizations have focused on data and “hard facts.” However, very recently, this trend has begun to change. Both corporations and organizations have rediscovered the tremendous value of “storytelling.” They have come to understand that:

There is no more powerful marketing tool than a story about the organization.

According to Andy Goodman, a trainer and national expert on storytelling, “We [the nonprofit world] remain a sector devoted to data and enamored of empirical evidence. And while we will always need hard facts to make our cases, we often fail to realize that the battle for hearts and minds starts with the hearts. The audience you seek will only give its attention to things it cares about, and caring is not an entirely rational activity. Consequently, it’s incumbent upon us to make an emotional connection before we start feeding them raw facts, and stories have this ability. That’s one of the reasons that they have been around for eons, and, to my mind, continue to be the single most effective communication tool at our disposal.”

Beyond “emotional” response, neuroscientists believe that they have identified a section of the brain whose sole purpose is to take in information and make sense of it by fitting it into the story of our own life. In other words, we are “hard wired” to receive and process stories. Stories make abstract concepts or ideas, such as “good government,” understandable, relatable, and even compelling. Very simply, stories are incredibly persuasive.

It is not difficult to see examples of how corporations have started to embrace storytelling. Ad campaigns have been developed around personal stories by supermarket chains, home improvement stores, and television stations. The League also utilizes this approach as part of the Membership and Leadership Development Program. LWVUS created the LWV Storybank, a vehicle to collect stories from members about the value of League membership.

The LWV Storybank
The Storybank is housed on the LWVUS website. To ensure that the Storybank is as robust as possible, it is very important that League members use the online submission tool on www.lwv.org to submit their stories. LWVUS will forward a copy of any story submitted to the Storybank to the appropriate local and state League president and initiative coordinators for local use. The Storybank form has mechanisms in place (such as an automated “thank you” to the submitter) to make the collection process efficient and easy.

How to Collect Your Members’ Stories
Via Letters/E-mails - Direct outreach to local League members is important. A personal letter asking them to submit a story is a good way to start. Members will feel honored that their personal stories can help put a “face” on the League and assist in membership recruitment.
Via Meetings - League meetings are perfect opportunities to bring up the Storybank. The next time your League gathers, rather than just asking people to participate in the Storybank, start by reading a personal story or asking one or two members to share their stories orally. This is incredibly energizing and a great way to remind those there about why they came to the League. Once they are engaged, explain what the Storybank is and how it will assist your League with membership recruitment. Conclude by asking members to participate by submitting their own stories.

Via a Story Event - Your League may consider holding a “story event” where you spend an evening or afternoon explaining the Storybank, telling stories, and collecting more stories from League members.

Via State and Local Voters - Your local Voter (or newsletter), or any other regular publication (print or electronic) to members, is an easy way to solicit stories and promote the Storybank. The best way to capture the attention of your membership is to provide examples. Your League should include stories in the newsletter paired with information about the Storybank and how they can participate.

Via State and Local League websites - Your League’s website is the public face of your League. Highlighting a member's story weekly or monthly on the homepage is a great way to personalize the value of membership in LWV. Stories also can be sprinkled throughout your website.

How to Use Stories
State and Local Voters - Voters should contain information about how to join the League and why to join the League, including personal stories. Stories can be highlighted in a monthly column format (promoting and soliciting more stories) or more subtly included in articles about issues and events. Your Voter is probably your League’s most widely distributed communications mechanism and should be utilized to the fullest as a membership recruitment tool.

Speaking Engagements - Many Leagues have speakers’ bureaus or are asked on occasion to make speeches on specific issues and/or about the League. Stories can be used to provide a more complete image of the League to your audience.

State and Local League Website - League members' stories should be highlighted on the League website. Not only do the stories build goodwill within your League, but potential new members who are visiting your website will read them. The stories personalize the League and will make non-members aware that the League is a place where they can make a difference in the community.

Press Releases - In some cases, press releases can be strengthened with selected quotes from your members’ stories. This can be done two ways.

- First, if you have a press release pertaining to a specific issue (e.g. land use, housing), search your League story database for members who have worked on those issues. Their stories can show how an individual’s work can impact the whole community. Testimonials are powerful and may give reporters a new angle on the issue/story.

- The second way to use stories is in "soft" releases (e.g. the League's birthday, celebrating 50-year members). Select quotes and/or stories can be used to make the release more appealing by providing some specific achievements as well as “human interest.” Personal stories, though not vital news stories, are regularly reported on because they engage readers. Be sure your communications or public relations chair has easy and quick access to your League stories in case a press release needs to get out fast or a reporter is on deadline.

Excerpts from the Membership and Leadership Development Handbook
Statements/Letters - Though it may not be appropriate or practical in all instances, if your League feels that a personal testimonial from a League member about a particular issue would strengthen your argument, your League should consider including stories from League members in public statements and letters. Personal stories can create a more powerful image for the reader or listener about the impact that your League has had on the community. Be sure that whoever is issuing the statement or letter (presumably your League president) is comfortable with the member's story being quoted in case they are asked about it later by the press.

Membership Brochures - Many Leagues create and print their own membership brochures. Short stories or quotes from stories are wonderful to add to your brochure to create a testimonial for League membership.

Publications - Stories or quotes from stories should be considered for any publication that your League may produce. Study findings or reports, Voters’ Guides, public newsletters, and others can all be membership recruitment tools especially with the inclusion of relevant stories. Please note that if you are using education fund monies to underwrite the cost of a publication, any direct "join" message and membership information (story or other) should be purchased with general/operating fund monies using a calculation based on the percentage of space used for the "join" message. If you are only including quotes from stories to underscore the main purpose of the publication, you do not need to do this.

Bringing the “Ask” into Election Activities
There are many opportunities at League-sponsored events to weave in a membership ask. Below are some possible suggestions about how to do so this election season.

- **Candidate Forums.** From the podium, the moderator could include the following message in his or her opening remarks: “The League of Women Voters is a trusted grassroots organization whose members do the hands-on work to safeguard democracy. While we never endorse or oppose a candidate, we are directly involved in shaping the important issues to keep our community strong. As a League member, I have the opportunity to contribute in a leadership role (such as this one) that has a great impact on local, state and even national issues. If you are interested in learning about how you can make a similar impact, I would encourage you to pick up some of the League’s information available here tonight or visit our web site at [YOUR URL].”

- **Issue Forum.** From the podium, the moderator could include the following message in his or her opening remarks: “The League of Women Voters is a trusted grassroots organization whose members do the hands-on work that safeguards democracy and leads to civic improvement. As a League member, I have the opportunity to contribute in a leadership role (such as this one) that has a great impact on local, state and even national issues. If you are interested in learning about how you can make a similar impact, I would encourage you to pick up some of the League’s information available here tonight or visit our web site at [YOUR URL].”

- **Voters Guide.** You may place an ad for membership in the Guide: “Join the League and play a hands-on role in keeping our community fair, vibrant and strong. As a League member, you are a part of an organization where thoughtful, active leaders work to create change in their communities. To join us please visit: YOUR LEAGUE’S CONTACT INFO/WEB SITE HERE.” An ad like this must be paid for with your League’s operating funds. You may NOT use education fund monies for membership ads.
Practice Your Own League Story

The League’s programmatic work covers a wide range of issues and activities, which can be overwhelming to individuals who are not familiar with them. To be welcoming to potential new members, each of us must act as a “membership ambassador” for the League, using straightforward language to describe what we do and why we love doing it. It’s not about “dumbing down” the explanation of our work—it’s about opening it up so that others can understand it, find it relevant and interesting, and join us.

We have heard consistently from Leagues that while making “The ASK” may be difficult at first, it becomes easier with practice. More importantly, Leagues have also reported that IT WORKS! It sounds very simplistic, but we need to ASK people to join to bring in new members.

The worksheets provided in this section give you an opportunity to practice your personal story as well as “The ASK.” It will help you to speak in an intentional, focused and confident way about the value of being part of the League. We also encourage you to think about one of your own stories (such as Why did you join the League? What your League membership means to you? What impact have you had on your community through the League?) and how you can utilize it. Remember there is no marketing tool as powerful as your own personal passion for LWV!

Helpful Tips to Create YOUR League Story:

Keep it brief. You should be able to say what you need to say in about a minute. Focus on what’s most important and cut away the rest. What does your audience value? What is important to them? Write these down and prioritize them.

Avoid jargon. Nonprofits are notorious abusers of acronyms, buzzwords and “insider speak”. Avoid these, or you’ll see the listener’s eye glaze over.

Speak to Values. What value does your organization provide? What does your audience value, and how does your organization’s values intersect with them? Values can be tangible (i.e., people living longer, healthier lives) or emotional (i.e., making people feel good about providing opportunity). Don’t just list your services or ideology—focus on outcomes, not process.

Show Your Passion! Perhaps the most important part of a good membership ask is the gusto, enthusiasm and commitment to the work it expresses. Don’t be afraid to demonstrate the passion and drive you feel for the work.

Get to the Action Point. Remember to ask them to join or get involved.

Sharing your personal story about what the League means to YOU and the impact the League has had in your life and on your community is the best way to convey the value of membership in the League. Stories are:

✔ Relatable
✔ Memorable
✔ Passionate
✔ Compelling
✔ Motivational

Excerpts from the Membership and Leadership Development Handbook
Very simply, when combined with an invitation to join the League, your story is your best direct outreach tool!

We have heard consistently from Leagues that while making “The ASK” may be difficult at first, it becomes much easier with practice. More importantly, Leagues have also reported that IT WORKS! It sounds very simplistic, but we need to ASK people to join to bring in new members.

This worksheet gives you an opportunity to practice your personal story as well as “The ASK.” It will help you to speak in an intentional, focused and confident way about the value of being part of the League.

***************************

Step 1: Choose a Practice Scenario.

Choose one of the scenarios below to practice combining a personal League story with an ASK to join the League, come to a meeting, or donate money to the League.

1. **At a candidates’ forum:** Imagine that you are a “membership ambassador” mingling with attendees. Engage an attendee in conversation and ask him/her to join.

2. **At a candidates’ forum:** You are the moderator. Use the opportunity to issue an invitation to join the League to those gathered at the forum – as well as those who might be watching/listening to it remotely (such as on cable access, on a web site, or on the radio).

3. **At a neighborhood social event:** Talk with a neighbor that has recently retired. Discuss your involvement with League and ask him/her to join.

4. **At a city council meeting:** You are a member of your League’s observer corps. Issue an invitation to join to an individual that you regularly see at the city council meetings.

5. **At a Sunshine Week event:** Your League is hosting a “viewing party” of a panel of national experts convened in Washington DC to discuss government transparency issues. Use this opportunity to invite those who are gathered locally to get involved and to join the League.

6. **At a coalition meeting on affordable housing:** Talk with one or more of the representatives of the other groups present. Explain to them the unique value of membership in the League and ask them to join.

7. **At a breakfast honoring retiring teachers:** Offer some remarks to thank them for their service to the community. Talk about the League’s mission and the value of League membership. Ask them to join.

8. **At a speaking engagement:** As part of your League’s speakers’ bureau, you are asked to provide an explanation of the upcoming ballot questions to an organization comprised of local women business owners. In addition to providing them with the necessary information about the election, ask them to join.

9. **A local radio interview about the county’s preparedness for an upcoming election:** Explain the League’s work in this area. Remind listeners that the League is a volunteer-lead, grassroots organization. Stress that membership is open to the public, and explain how citizens can be engaged in the “process” and League.

10. **Someone stops to ask you about the League pin on your jacket:** Explain what the League is and why being a member is important to you. Try to explain why the League would be of value to him/her. Assess the interest level and offer an action step, such as joining the League or coming to a meeting.

Excerpts from the Membership and Leadership Development Handbook
Step 2: Tell your story.
Briefly and without using League jargon, relate a story that would be interesting and moving to the audience in your practice scenario.

Consider one of the following topics:
- What motivated me to join the League of Women Voters?
- What does being a League of Women Voters member mean to me?
- How has my work with the League impacted my community?
- How has being a member given me skills and knowledge that has enhanced my career and life?

Remember that a personal story can be very powerful. You do not have to demonstrate some big achievement or “give your resume.” Instead, let your passion for League showcase itself!

My Personal League Story:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Step 3: Make the Ask.
After telling your story, you need to give your listener some follow-up action. In other words, you want to leave them with some way to get involved or engaged. How can he/she have the same kind of wonderful experience with the League? This might be asking them to join or some interim step leading to membership, such as coming with you to a meeting or helping out at a voter registration booth. The key is to provide the opportunity.

Pick one of the scenarios listed on the next page to craft an ASK you can use with your story. As you present your story and your follow-up opportunity, think about your audience. What do they care about? How does their story intersect with yours? What is the right next step for them?

My League ASK:
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Excerpts from the Membership and Leadership Development Handbook
Little Things to Engage Your League Board

As a way to engage your local League Board and to start to promote membership and leadership growth best practices in your League, we have compiled this list 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.

*These simple ideas will help to recruit new members, retain current members, develop new leaders, and engage your Board in this organizational growth effort.*

Encourage your local League Board members to:

- 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.

- Add a membership message to the bottom of the official League letterhead and stationary.

- Always have a membership brochure– and be prepared to ASK someone to join.

- Input their “League story” into the LWV Storybank. 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.

- Designate members to be membership ambassadors or greeters at the next League event. Their role will be to make people (new or potential members) feel welcome.

- Have a sign-in sheet at all events and activities for interested attendees and be sure to follow up with them after the event.

- Include a membership message on all visibility tools - podium signs, banners, flyers, brochures, invitations, etc.

- Identify small opportunities for individuals to get involved in without being overwhelmed. Ask members or potential new members to be involved with a “bite-sized”, one-time project. For instance, bring snacks to a League event rather than planning the whole thing.
★ Engage members or potential new members with an “action” item. Give them a way to influence what is happening in your community now.

★ Have every member invite 3 non-members to your next League activity.

★ Provide "leave behind" informational brochures or post cards at locations with high target demographic or League appeal -- e.g., city or county government offices, neighborhood doctors' office, real estate offices (for new neighbors), faculty lounges at the local elementary, middle and high schools.

★ Wear League buttons to all events so Leaguers are easily identified and can be approached by those who are interested in LWV.

★ Think about the personal gatherings or other groups the Board belongs to (e.g., book clubs, investment groups, issue groups, friends over for dinner) and share stories about the LWV and its value the community and personal growth.

★ Mentor someone on some aspect of their role on the Board. Or, mentor a new member on how to become engaged in League.

★ Watch for potential League leaders at the next League event. Communicate any observations to the Membership/Leadership team.
Becoming a More Welcoming League

Leagues should examine how they welcome potential members and new members. This sounds very simple, but it is a critical piece to recruitment and retention. Think back to when you first joined the League – Were you familiar with League lingo? Did you know everyone at the meeting? We all know that first impressions mean a lot, so make the initial experiences of new and potential members great ones. Make individuals feel welcome and eager to join.

Many League members think of membership recruitment and retention as two separate practices. However…

Good retention practices begin as soon as a new member is recruited and never stop.

Retention is a continuous activity to which League time and resources should be devoted - just like membership recruitment! Below is a list of suggested best practices that Leagues can use to welcome new members, keep members engaged, and reach out to members considering leaving LWV.

WELCOME AND ENGAGE NEW MEMBERS

Every new member of your League should receive a information about your League, including a welcome letter from the president, a calendar of activities planned, a member contact list, and a small League item (such as a pin, lanyard, button, or bumper sticker). New members need to know the basics of how the League works and how they can get involved. Include the most critical pieces of information that they will need to get started, not everything. Overwhelming a new member is not a good strategy.

You can check with new members about topics or issues that interest them as well as how busy or engaged they hope to be – ongoing, one-time task, one task/month, etc. Also, ask some courtesy questions: What’s the best way to contact you? When are you available for meetings?

Ask some questions that might help League: What other groups are you active in? What are your skills – or what skills might you be interested in developing? How did you learn about the League?

Surveys can take different forms: an actual form sent via email or created using a survey tool, a hard copy survey, or a quick phone call.

League members who are engaged, having fun, and feel fulfilled will stick with the League for the long haul.
A new person finally showed up to one of your events. . .and she’s young, too! There are so many ways you could welcome her to your League. So, what should you do? Here are a few tips:

- Make sure new people have time to casually, naturally, and comfortably get to know League members on their own terms by having social time with wine and appetizers before your event or meeting starts. Encourage everyone to mingle with people they don’t know and talk about non-League topics.

- Be open to allowing your new or potential members to decide how involved they’d like to be. Find out what THEY are interested in and look for ways to involve them in those areas. After meeting a new recruit, send a hand-written note to them thanking them for attending and letting them know when the next event will be. When you do approach them with the ASK to be more involved by taking on a larger role like board member, be ready to streamline the role as needed to accommodate their work and personal lives. They will be more receptive if they do not see it as too much of a demand on their time. Once you get them engaged, they will likely remain that way.

- Find the right balance between being warm and welcoming and being overwhelming. Sometimes, our best intentions go awry. While you think it may be a great way to be inviting, it can just be embarrassing or too much to take in for someone just getting their bearings. For instance, introducing every single Board member to a new person at a meeting; singling out a new member to an entire group at an event and asking them to say a few words about themselves, or running an individual’s entire biography in a newsletter to welcome them are all examples of well-intentioned welcoming methods that might make a new person uncomfortable. Let a person feel welcome but not overwhelmed by publicly encouraging your members to mingle everyone, having membership ambassadors ready to chat with newcomers, and by letting the potential members’ relationship with the League burgeon naturally.

Create Small Opportunities
Not everyone has a lot of time to contribute to the League. Many people want to help but are afraid that they will get assigned to be a chair of a committee if they speak up. In all League undertakings, make sure that there are small opportunities for members to help out with and be sure to announce that these small opportunities exist. Whether it is sending out the reminders or delivering voters’ guides to the library, small tasks make people feel like they are contributing without being overwhelmed.

Make Members Feel Special
Always, always, always make members aware that they are special and appreciated. Send thank you e-mails or notes to the committee or members that helped put together an event. Recognize League members who have give 15, 25, 35 or even 50 years of service to the organization. Recognizing birthdays with a cake at one meeting a month is a nice addition to the business at hand. Whatever way your League chooses to express appreciation, just be sure that members know that they are extraordinary for all that they do in the service of the League.

Have Fun!
Above all else, make sure your members enjoy the League and are having fun. Just because we take on the important issues facing our communities does not mean we have to be serious all the time. Bring a bottle of wine or have a potluck at your next meeting. Have educational reception events - combining the League with some hors d'oeuvres or finger foods. Strictly social events can lift the spirits of League members and are just as important in creating change in the community. The League is a social network by nature and League friendships often last a lifetime. Why not make the time we spend together as enjoyable as possible?
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 cliquish 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?

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.
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.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>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</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New/Emerging Leader</td>
<td>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</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Active Member</td>
<td>Attends meetings or issue committee meetings regularly, begins to identify with League as “we”, Leadership Development plan is started</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Sends League a check, has the right to participate in organizational decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>On our contact list, have attended at least one event or participated in at least one Action Alert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, e 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.*

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.