

## 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 . . .

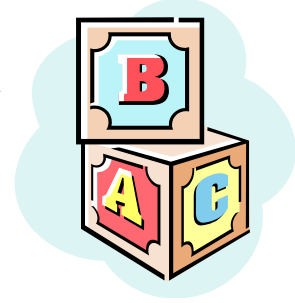
*The League has a highly respected reputation and a strong and proud history. However, while there is great name recognition of the League of Women Voters, there is limited awareness about the value that the League membership offered to potential members.*

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 in the MLD Program:**

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.

### **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. The MLD program provides “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.

### **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 program. 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.



## **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.

### **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



## **Support Structure: National, State, and Local Partnership**

The Membership and Leadership Development program is a partnership among the local, state and national Leagues. For the League to grow and strengthen, all levels of League need to work toward the common goals of the program. With that in mind, we have defined (in brief) the expectations or roles for each of us:

### **1. Local League Teams/Coordinator**

- Participates in face-to-face 2-day training for initial group of participating local Leagues and state League (and future state League-sponsored trainings as appropriate)
- Communicates with the League's assigned state coach via regular monthly coaching calls to receive guidance and support
- Consistently and intentionally engages local League board to implement the membership and leadership development best practices
- Consistently and intentionally engages local League board to use the Event/Activity Planning Checklist
- Uses the materials, activities, and messages provided by the state coach
- Seeks counsel from state coach as needed
- Serves as membership ambassador whenever possible
- Updates local League members information in LWVUS membership database regularly for correct membership number reports
- Submits personal stories to the LWV Storybank

### **2. State Coaching Team**

- Participates in face-to-face training for initial group of state coaches and/or periodic webinar training for new coaches and refreshers for ongoing state coaches
- Participates in face-to-face 2-day training for initial group of participating local Leagues and state League
- Provides guidance and support to 2 local Leagues in the state, per state coach, via regular monthly coaching calls
- Communicates with the state's assigned Ruth S. Shur Fellow (national coach) via regular monthly coaching calls to receive guidance and support
- Completes a monthly report on each of the 2 local Leagues coached via a monthly online survey
- Participates in on-going training experiences via webinar presented by LWVUS
- Provides additional materials to local Leagues as necessary (with support of state board and LWVUS)
- Serves as membership ambassador whenever possible

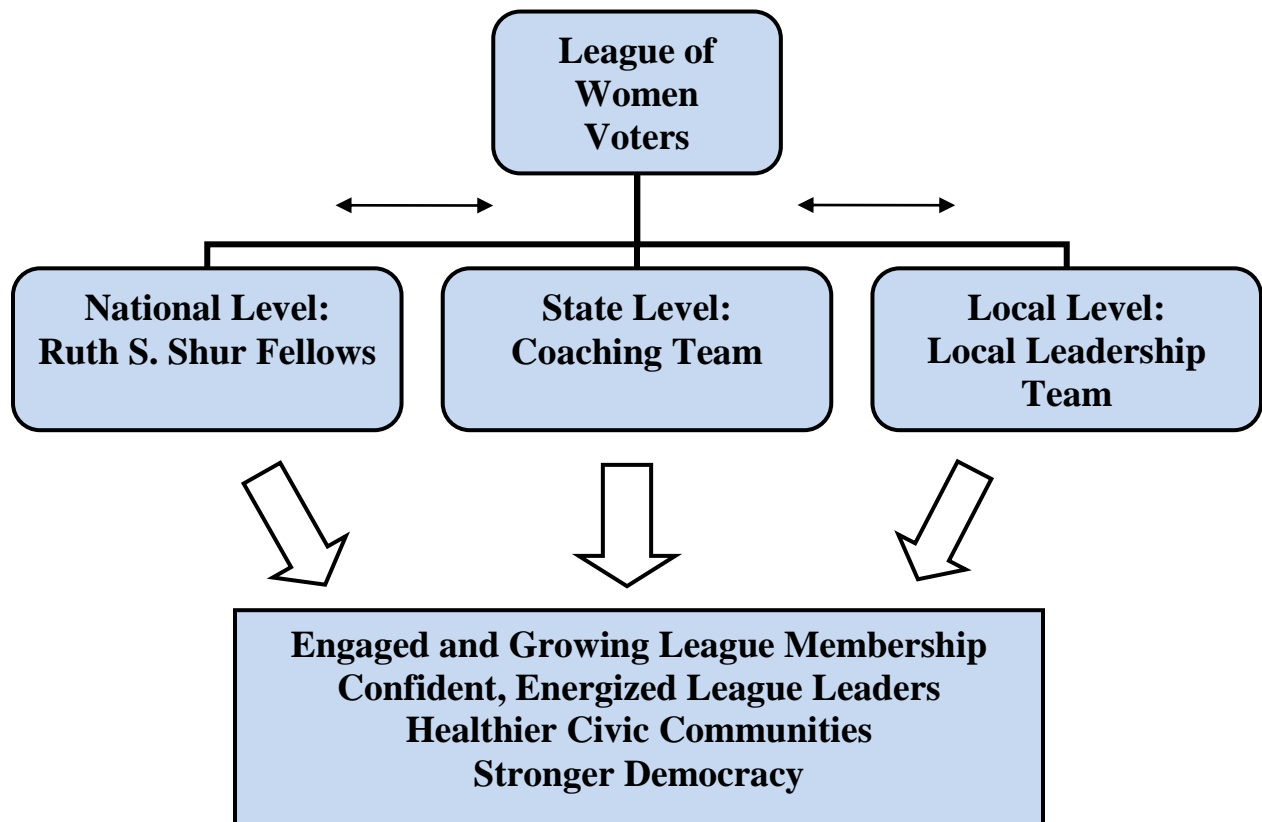
### **3. LWVUS (Board, Staff, and Ruth S. Shur Fellows National Coaching Team)**

- Sponsors, funds, and conducts face-to-face training for initial group of state coaches and periodic webinar training for new coaches and refreshers for ongoing state coaches
- Sponsors, funds, and conducts face-to-face 2-day training for initial group of participating local Leagues and state League



- Provides a trained national coach (Ruth S. Shur Fellow) for monthly coaching and training calls with state teams
- Creates and distributes materials and tools to participating Leagues
- Provides monthly guidance on opportunities distributed via the national coaching team
- Creates and provides online survey links to participating national and state coaches to send LWVUS feedback on progress of the program
- Monitors feedback and modifies materials to ensure success and program is sustained over time
- Provides membership numbers bi-annually to state coaches concerning participating local Leagues, based on numbers currently available in the LWVUS membership database
- Maintains LWV Storybank on [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org).

Below is a diagram of the coaching structure for the MLD program. Local, state, and national levels of League work together to make the League’s voice more powerful and our democracy stronger.





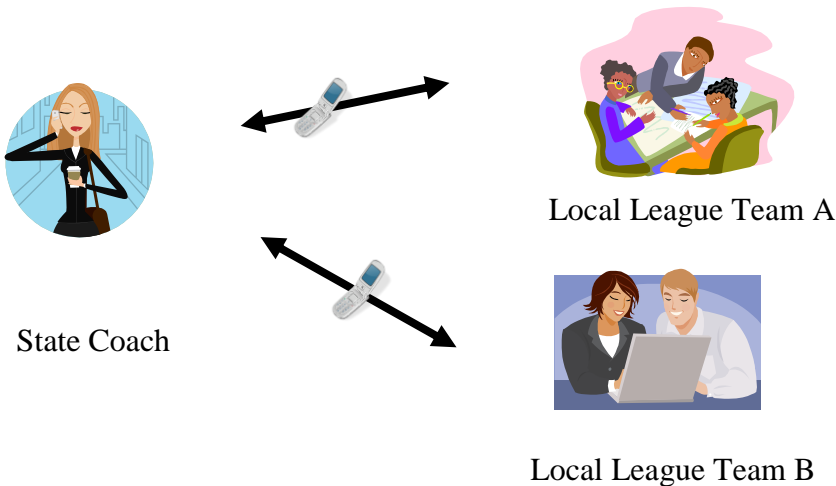
## How Coaching Really Works

State and National coaches work as mentors, cheerleaders, accountability coaches, and communicators to support local Leagues in strengthening themselves and providing better, more effective services and events to the communities they serve.

State coaches are dedicated and experienced League leaders chosen by the State Board to support and mentor local Leagues within the state. Each state coach usually coaches 2 local Leagues and is trained in coaching techniques and membership and leadership development best practices. State coaches hold monthly, regularized phone calls with each assigned local League. LWVUS recommends that these calls take place during the first two weeks of each month. During the call, the local League team can discuss their challenges, share their successes, and receive valuable guidance on growing and strengthening the League. These calls last approximately 30-45 minutes each.

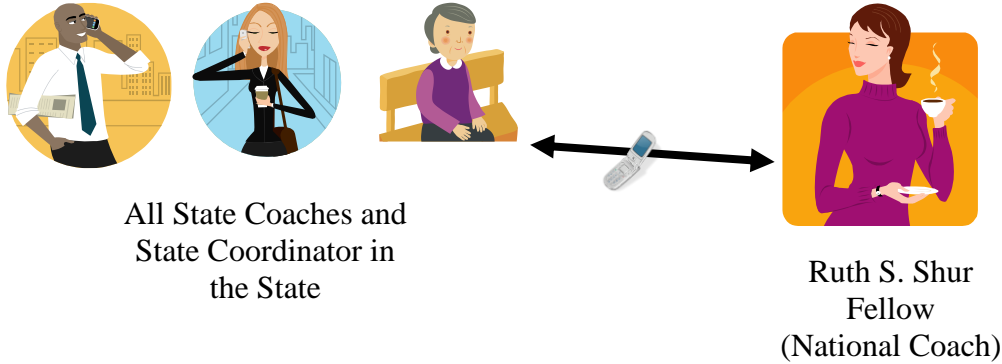
The Ruth S. Shur Fellows are dedicated and experienced League leaders selected by the LWVUS Board who act as national coaches to support and mentor state coaching teams. Ruth S. Shur Fellows usually coach 2 state coaching teams and are trained in coaching techniques and membership and leadership development best practices. The Ruth S. Shur Fellows work very closely with the national office to best support the League. Ruth S. Shur Fellows hold monthly, regularized phone calls with each state coaching team. LWVUS recommends that these calls take place during the third week of each month. During the call, the state coach can discuss challenges in supporting local Leagues, share successes of the local Leagues they coach, and receive valuable guidance on growing and strengthening the League. These calls last approximately 60 minutes each. During the fourth week of every month, Ruth S. Shur Fellows have a team call with the LWVUS Support Team.

### During the first two weeks of the month:



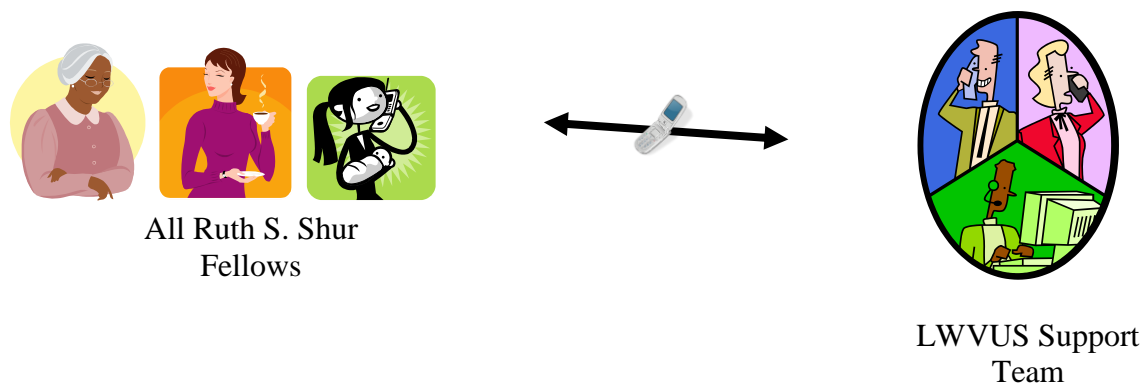
The state coach calls each local League coordinator/team separately during the first two weeks of the month. State coaches keep all of your conversations confidential.

**During the third week of the month:**



The national coach conducts a conference call with all of the state coaches in the state during the third week of the month. National coaches keep all of these conversations confidential.

**During the fourth week of the month:**



The LWVUS Support Team conducts a conference call with all of the national coaches across the country during the fourth week of the month. The LWVUS Support Team keeps all of these conversations confidential.