

Overview and FAQs: LWVUS Membership & Leadership Development (MLD) Program

Overview: LWVUS achieved its goal to have the MLD program active in all 50 states by the end of 2013.

The long term vision of the Membership and Leadership Development (MLD) Program is to ensure:

- Leagues grow in membership and funding.
- Leagues have their own coach for support, ideas, and guidance.
- League leaders have training and mentoring before leading.
- The League's voice is as strong and powerful as our reputation in all communities across the U.S.

The MLD Program is founded on the principles of using the partnership among the levels of League (local, state, and national) to grow and revitalize our organization from the grassroots up. As part of the program, local Leagues employ best practices intentionally focused on strengthening and growing the League and the League's impact, with the help of state and national coaches for support. Local Leagues, state Leagues, and coaches are all trained in tried-and-true techniques proven to recruit new members and engage and retain current members.

Currently, over 100 state coaches are working with 23 national coaches (also known as the Ruth S. Shur Fellows) to provide guidance, mentoring, and moral support to local Leagues across the country.

Through the MLD program, the League is becoming more effective and more powerful in communities throughout the nation.

LWVO History with LWVUS' Membership Programs: LWVO participated in this program's predecessor, the Membership Recruitment Initiative (MRI), from ~ 2008-2011 with ~ 5 local League and 5 coaches involved. We withdrew in the spring of 2011 after a number of conversations with LWVUS on the following issues:

- Most of the participating local Leagues (LLs) and coaches perceived MRI to be a top-down, one-size-fits-all program that didn't meet the needs of individual Leagues.
 - For example, all LLs were expected to focus their recruiting efforts on recent retirees.
- Most coaches felt the calls with their Shur Fellow were unproductive and felt she wasn't being responsive to what they were saying.
- Most coaches felt the MRI was inefficient and ineffective -- and at least one of the coaches lacked training.
- Local Leagues didn't see the kind of growth they expected.

LWVUS listened to our critique and approached us at national Convention in 2012. They said the program had been revised, addressing our concerns, and invited Ohio to join again. Knowing that Ohio Leagues are asking for support in their membership recruitment and retention efforts, LWVO joined the MLD program in the spring of 2013. Following are answers to FAQs.

FAQs

1. How does the new MLD framework compare to the old MRI framework?

The MLD *framework* remains the same as the Membership Recruitment Initiative framework in some respects, e.g., each state has a Shur Fellow, a state coordinator, and the coaches each work with 1-2 LLs. LWVUS provides support via the Shur Fellow, materials and training.

The framework *differs* from MRI in that it has been loosened so that each LL can determine its own target group / audience (v. the focus on the retiree of the earlier MRI) – and create a very specific plan for itself that enhances the activities it is already doing.

MLD does not add a whole new set of tasks, but provides guidance and support as LLs take regular activities and enhance them with MLD best practices to create a culture of membership and leadership growth and development.

2. What are the general expectations for LWVO regarding the MLD program?

- To provide leadership in the MLD initiative.
- To support the state coaching team and LL teams:
 - o To provide opportunities for training coaches and LL teams.
 - o To provide opportunities for state board training and MLD board reports.
 - o To provide MLD resources on the state website.
 - o To provide opportunities for MLD articles / blurbs in LWVO publications, i.e., VOTER and League Leader Update.
 - o To provide training opportunities on MLD best practices at state and regional meetings.
- To recruit a coordinator and assist in recruiting coaches / LLs.
 - o Coach: each has responsibility for 1-2 LLs.

3) What are local Leagues (LLs) joining the MLD program expected to do / commit to?

- Identify a team, ideally 3-4 people, to work with a state coach and their local board.
- Have a 1-hour board training from an MLD coach during the LL's first year of participation.
- Have regular MLD presentations / training / reports to the board.
- The local MLD team will participate in the annual training offered by LWVO.
- The team will participate in a monthly phone call with its state coach.
- The team will work with their board to develop and implement a plan for their LL - building MLD best practices into their activities.
- The local board, team and committees will regularly incorporate MLD best practices (e.g., for visibility, membership asks, leadership asks/development, etc), into the events that are already on their calendars.
- The initial commitment is for 2 years, with the hope that the LL will continue indefinitely.

4) Should the LL MLD team members be on the board of their Leagues?

At least one member of the MLD team should be on the LL board. This ensures there is regular communication between the MLD team and the board – and there is ease of integration of the best practices.

The MLD team is not established to do all the thinking, planning and work themselves. Their job is to work with the board and committees to create a goal and a plan to achieve that goal—and support its implementation by providing resources and accountability. For example, they can raise questions about how events are being approached (e.g., What are the membership and visibility components in each activity or event? Where are the opportunities for leadership development?) – and provide options for the board and committees to use.

5) What is the cost to LLs and to LWVO?

There are no direct costs to a local Leagues to participate, as coaches, training (including room and meals) and materials are provided by LWVO. will be provided), there are costs associated with the training. However, a small registration fee of \$25 per local team member is charged to Leagues the first year they send a team for training, primarily as a means to build ownership within the LL.

LWVO also provides free training to coaches and again covers expenses for meals, hotel and materials.

LWVO has budgeted \$4000 annually for MLD.

6) Will recruitment of LLs into the MLD program be an annual / one-time-a-year thing or on-going?

Leagues' initial commitment is for two years – but once in the program, it is hoped that they will remain in the program indefinitely.

The MLD Program is not something that is envisioned to have a beginning and end because membership and leadership development issues never go away; they need constant care. Furthermore, leadership and team changes occur over time.

Thus, trainings for both new and continuing team members take place annually. We find that the annual trainings are welcomed by LL teams because they provide an opportunity for ongoing team members to be “refreshed,” new local leadership trained and for new local Leagues to join the MLD.

7) What skills should a coach have besides communication skills (listening, etc.)?

There are many qualities that make a “good” or successful coach. These include: enthusiasm, patience, flexibility, sense of humor, commitment, and passion for League. But the most critical skill for a coach is to be a good listener, and this is emphasized at the state coaches' training sessions.

LWVUS developed a framework for the coaches based on an approach called “appreciative inquiry.” In this, coaches learn to ask strategic questions to help their LL team problem-solve – rather than have the coach tell a LL team what to do. Thus our coaches keep in mind that they should be doing much more listening than speaking during their calls. Key coaching roles: mentor, cheerleader, accountability coach and communicator / resource.

8) Can a coach be assigned to her/his own LL?

We have avoided this thus far. In this way, the LL team 1) gets an “outside perspective and voice” from their coach; 2) more easily recognize that they are the experts on their League's issues; and 3) it helps the coach maintain their mentor, cheerleader, resource provider, and accountability roles.

9) Do coaches have to be trainers?

No, coaches are not expected to provide training to LL members. If interested, however, coaches can assist in training the LL MLD teams and LL boards.

10) What training will be provided to coaches and new MLD team members who come on board after the initial training?

New coaches are recruited and trained in coaching techniques annually, both to replace coaches who are no longer able to participate and to cover new LLs joining the program.

New MLD team members, both from new LLs joining the program and new members joining existing MLD teams, are expected to participate in an initial comprehensive training designed for them.

12) Has the MLD Program been successful?

As of January 2015, LWVUS reports that the overall membership of LWV has stabilized; that is, for the first time in years, total membership is no longer declining.

As for LWVO, Executive Director Carrie Davis reported in December, 2015, that:

Our progress on membership goals has been mixed. Over half of our local Leagues have joined the MLD program, which is positive. Some local Leagues have been experiencing growth, while other smaller Leagues continue to struggle. Not surprisingly, the Leagues that are the

most intentional about recruiting new members and asking new people to join have been having the best results. The growth in some Leagues seems to offset the shrinkage in others.” After several years of declining memberships totals statewide, it appears to have leveled off the last 2-3 years. We’re very interested to see the annual membership numbers that get reported in January to see if we’ve finally turned around and started growing again.

For both LWVUS and LWVO, however, the fundamental goal of increasing the effectiveness of the LWV through membership growth, leadership development and greater community visibility remains difficult to measure.

13) For more information about the MLD program and MLD resources, go to <http://www.lwvohio.org/site.cfm/Member-Area/MLD-Program.cfm>