

## Welcoming New Members and Engaging Leaders

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. Creating positive initial experiences of new and potential members—and new and potential leaders—is crucial to the success of the League in recruiting and retaining members and developing new leaders.

Being welcoming should be a priority for every League before, during and at each event. Engage all individuals, including non-members, members and leaders.

### **Before the event:**

- **Who else?** Think if there are other ways to involve potential League leaders and ask them to help you plan an event in a friendly, upbeat way. If a League leader isn't ready for a big task, ask them to take on something small.
- **Mentor new league leaders** during the planning phase. Don't leave one new person stuck doing everything by her or himself, especially if they've never planned an event. Have a seasoned League leader partner with a new League leader to plan an event. Working together can be fun and can be a learning experience for both people!
- **Be open to new ideas** when planning an event. One of the great things about new leaders is that they bring fresh eyes to long-standing issues and new perspectives to the group. Telling someone "that's not how we do it" or "Marilyn always moderates the candidates forums" can be deflating to an enthusiastic League leader who just wants to be involved. Is there a different way to get this person involved? Can you incorporate some of their new ideas? Is there another way we can use this new leader's creativity?
- **Always remember your tone** when inviting individuals to an event or asking members to help out. Remember that sometimes the League can be intimidating. For instance, when planning a hot topics luncheon, remind people that they don't need to know anything about the issues to come to a forum- the League is here to help educate!
- **Invite a friend.** Encourage each member of your League to invite a friend to the event! Suggest that you go together to the event and build a positive relationship and experience for them with the League.

*Although you may think your League is welcoming, put yourself in a new member's shoes! It can be hard to be the new person, especially if everyone else has known each other for years. Have greeters welcoming attendees to all your events and have a seasoned League member sit with each new member to help explain what's going on and answer questions.*

**At the event:**

- **Have greeters welcoming all participants** to an event. Make everyone feel equally welcome. How would it make you feel if you attended a meeting as a potential member and everyone who is in the League is hugging and talking about things you just don't know while you are standing alone? You'd probably not feel very welcome and may not return! Talk to everyone and invite people to join!
- **A sign-in sheet** is a great way to collect information from individuals so you can contact them in the future and welcome them to join the League.
- **Mingle!** League members should all be encouraged to mingle with non-members. This will show potential members that the League is a friendly group that loves to meet new people. Did a League member bring a friend? Encourage them to introduce their friend to other members at the event. Next time, this friend will already know people in the League and will be more likely to return.
- **Check in on your new leaders** in a friendly, helpful, and nonjudgmental way. Have a seasoned leader ask the new leaders how they are doing and if they need any help.
- **Pay attention to your new members.** Have a seasoned member sit with them to answer questions, explain what's going on, and introduce them to other members.

**After the event:**

- **Say Thank You!** Remember all the members and leaders who helped make your League event a success! Did Tim bring the cups and ice that he promised? Did Susan sit with a new member to make them feel welcome? A simple thank you goes a long way to making people feel appreciated and excited to help out again. Thank everyone who helped contribute to the event by sending an e-card, making a phone call, or acknowledging them at a meeting or in your newsletter.
- **Always Follow-Up** with individuals who signed the sign-in sheet. Ask someone to call or email everyone on the list, thanking them for attending and inviting them to join the League. Remember to do this in a timely manner- a potential member will feel more welcomed if an email comes a few days after the event, rather than a few weeks. If someone shows a particular interest in the event topic or other aspects of the League, contact them and connect them with a committee or other League members who are working on that area. Feeling connected helps retain members and leaders.
- **Remember the new leaders** who helped out with the event for your next event. Make a spreadsheet of who did what to ensure you're keeping track and can call upon them again.

**Other things to remember:**

- **Got a new member?** Great! Here's how to make them feel welcome:
  - **Cash the check!** Don't make them feel unwanted. Cash the check as soon as possible. It sounds obvious, but little things like this can be overlooked. Is someone in charge of making sure this happens?

- **Send a welcome packet.** Send a welcome packet- but make sure it's actually welcoming. Don't bombard your new member with too much information. Thank them for joining the League, send a small token (like a button, a pen, etc.), and let them know when the next meeting is. Let them know who to contact if they'd like to get involved with an upcoming event or work on a specific topic. Don't send your bylaws or old information. This won't look good for the League and won't make the new member more likely to get involved.
- **Dues renewal** is an important way to stay connected with League members and welcome them to continue being a part of the League. Make sure someone is in charge of contacting individuals whose dues need to be paid. Many League members who want to continue with the League don't because no one asks them to renew. Don't let this happen to your League!
- **Orient new members and train new leaders.** Teaching new members and leaders about the League in a fun and welcoming way will help your League create informed, confident leaders from the beginning. Hold an orientation meeting for new members every six months. Give them a brief history of the League, explain how the League functions, and how they can help. Hold trainings for new League leaders about topics that are interesting and will help them one day lead the League, such as a training session on event planning, on running a candidates forum, etc. Don't have the resources for a full-fledged orientation or training? Meet over lunch with interested individuals.