



The mission of the Olympia Snowe Women's Leadership Institute is to raise the confidence and aspirations of high school girls by helping them develop the skills required to be leaders in their lives, families, careers, and communities.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, former United States Senator, Olympia J. Snowe, retired from public service and founded the Olympia Snowe Women's Leadership Institute as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

After an intense period of research and development, the Institute formally launched in 2015 and has continued to develop and expand since. The Institute now partners with 37 high schools across Maine's 16 counties—annually engaging 218 mentors, called Olympia's Leaders Advisors (OLAs), and serving 545 students, called Olympia's Leaders (OLs).

The Institute's program is built around the value of engaging women mentors to connect meaningfully with high school girls to develop their leadership skills and raise their confidence and aspirations.

These OLAs are from across Maine and represent a broad range of backgrounds, life experiences, and career paths, and they volunteer to facilitate the Institute's program—comprised of activities and conversations designed to achieve the Institute's mission. Not only do they advise OLs through the monthly meetings, but they also share their own journeys to demonstrate the value of growth through personal experiences. OLAs are the heart of the Institute's program, which is only possible due to their vital contributions.

PROGRAM

Studies indicate that girls lose confidence 3.5 times faster than boys as they transition from middle to high school. This decline in confidence often leads to them dropping out of sports and other school activities, thinking that they are not good at math or science, and a reluctance to try new things or take on bigger challenges or leadership roles.

To address these challenges, the Institute designed a three-year, evidence-based program around the progressive themes "My Values," "My Voice," and "My Vision."

- **My Values** (10th grade) – "What do I believe?" – OLs define their own values, strengths, and passions. Once identified, participants learn how to take responsibility for their values and use them when facing challenges or encountering unrealistic expectations. They also begin to build a network of support and learn how to appreciate differences.
- **My Voice** (11th grade) – "How do I communicate?" – OLs build on the foundation of the "My Values" year and develop their voice by considering what they want to say and how they want to effectively convey their beliefs to a broader audience. OLs learn how to listen, to share what is most important to them, to connect with people who hold different opinions, and to have important conversations—all while being true to their values, strengths, and passions.
- **My Vision** (12th grade) – "What does my future hold?" – OLs use their values and voices to refine their future plans by sharing those goals and networking with both men and women in the community, and using the skills they have learned to put their plans in action. OLs graduate with increased self-knowledge, confidence, aspirations, and a statewide network of support.

OUTCOMES

The Institute's evidence-based program leads OLs through activities, reflections, and dialogue that will achieve seven key outcomes:

- **Self-knowledge:** Olympia's Leaders can understand and embrace who they are, their values, strengths, and passions.
- **Appreciate difference:** Olympia's Leaders can appreciate and navigate difference.
- **Build new skills/perspectives:** Olympia's Leaders can be active listeners and keep an open mind to new ideas and different opinions.
- **Communicate proactively/appropriately:** Olympia's Leaders can communicate proactively and appropriately and present their ideas clearly and respectfully.
- **Take action/take responsibility:** Olympia's Leaders can tackle challenges outside their comfort zone, stand up for what matters to them, and take responsibility for their actions and futures.
- **Mentor others/connect:** Olympia's Leaders can mentor others and connect meaningfully with successful and caring women and men.
- **Stronger network:** Olympia's Leaders can build and nurture a supportive network that will serve them for years to come.

The Institute achieves its mission by pairing two trained, volunteer OLAs with 5-7 OLs entering their sophomore year at each partner high school. These OLs have been identified by teachers, counselors, school administrators and other adults in their school community as young people who have leadership potential yet would benefit from an additional layer of support to realize that potential. OLs attend monthly meetings facilitated by their OLAs, at which they participate in activities targeted to the seven key outcomes.

OLYMPIA'S LEADERS ADVISORS (OLAs)

The OLA is the primary connection between OLs and the Institute, delivering the program and serving as a mentor and role model. OLs and OLAs often become like family, typically building bonds that endure beyond the years they are in the program. OLAs can have a meaningful or even life-changing impact on the OLs in their cohort. For this reason, we ask that those who apply for placement as an OLA carefully consider their ability to not only prepare for and attend regular and special meetings, but also to fully open themselves to creating relationships, sharing their stories, and embracing all aspects of this rewarding and sometimes challenging role.

The Institute asks that OLAs:

- Make a commitment to the Institute for the duration of the three-year program. Should unforeseen conflicts arise, the Institute will work with each OLA to address them.
- With your partner OLA, facilitate all regular monthly meetings from September through May of each year.
- Attend Institute events including:
 - The Welcome/Orientation Meeting with OLs and families
 - The full-day Annual Forum (usually held in Bangor at the end of September)
 - The year-end celebration (a luncheon held in mid-May each year)
- Complete the annual OLA Training before the start of each school year.
- Collaborate with the School Contact and OLs at the start of the school year to set a monthly meeting time that is convenient for all participants and supports strong attendance. These meetings are generally held during school hours.

- Review the monthly facilitation guide on Google Classroom and prepare for activities in advance of each meeting (estimated time is 30-45 minutes).
- Remind OLs of meeting dates and times, and encourage their attendance and work completion, in collaboration with the School Contact, so all OLs are afforded the opportunity to earn credit for participation.
- Reschedule or adjust to virtual meetings when in-person meetings are canceled because of weather or other reasons, understanding the program is cumulative and that a missed meeting means missed content that is needed to be successful in future meetings.
- Report attendance and share feedback on the meeting's content with the Institute via Google Classroom after each meeting (estimated time is 5-10 minutes).
- Participate in Regional meetings (primarily virtual, some in person) that are held approximately 3-4 times per year, usually lasting less than one hour.
- Be willing to share with the OLs aspects of your personal journey, as appropriate. Learning how OLAs have overcome challenges provides the OLs with examples and inspiration for how they, too, can move through and beyond adversity.
- Model leadership and proactive communication for the OLs.
- Maintain confidentiality except for any issue that falls outside the parameters of the program and training provided, which you will refer to the School Contact.
- If interested and available, invest time outside of the program to get to know OLs (e.g. attend an OL's basketball game, see an OL's theatre or music performance, send group texts to let the OLs know you are there for them).

SUPPORT FOR OLAs

The Institute is invested in each advisor and wants to ensure each woman is supported so she can feel successful in her role as an OLA.

The Institute will:

- Match the OLA candidate, to the extent possible, with a school close to her community (personal/professional).
- Deliver annual training to review and reinforce Institute policies and guidelines, as well as teach basic tenets of effective facilitation (July/August).
- Provide detailed facilitation guides for the monthly meetings that include agendas, activities, talking points, and desired outcomes.
 - Note: The training and curriculum is provided through Google Classroom.
- Create regional groups of OLAs that gather virtually or in person to share experiences and best practices, as well as to encourage one another.
- Send a monthly newsletter with updates, announcements, best practices, tips, and other information (September – June).
- Respond to OLA emails and phone calls in a timely manner to answer questions, provide support, or to schedule a time to connect.
- Request OLA feedback at least annually to ensure the Institute is learning from, and improving, the OLA experience.

OLAs who feel successful in the role:

- Have a passion for the Institute's mission of raising the aspirations and confidence of high school students.
- Are interested in working with this age group (approximately 16- to 18-year-olds).

- Are willing to share personal experiences/stories, including challenges faced and how they were handled.
- Have a schedule that allows them to commit to the attendance requirements of the program, understanding meeting times should work for OLs and OLAs and be during the school day.
- Are open-minded about the wide variety of life choices and paths that OLs may choose to explore.
- Are good listeners with sensitivity to deeper issues that would require referral to the School Contact.
- Are open to learning and developing as facilitators, which is different from managing meetings.
- Are able to facilitate meetings that encourage OL participation—shifting the approach as needed to engage the group and respond to the OLs' needs, including “sitting with silence” to allow OLs who may need more time to respond the time they need.
- Are willing to suspend judgment of OLs and encourage all leadership styles.
- Are willing to invest time between meetings to check in with OLs as the relationships are being established.

To be considered for placement as an OLA, candidates:

- Must complete the online application.
- Will participate in a virtual information session.
- Must complete and successfully pass a background check.
- May not be employed by the school in which they wish to volunteer.
- May not have children attending the same school as the OLs during the years of their volunteer commitment.
- May not seek nor hold elected office where there is an affiliation with a political party.
- Must have a schedule with enough flexibility to be available to meet with their cohort at a time convenient for all, usually before school or during the school day, and be available if meetings need to be re-scheduled.

REFERENCES FOR OLAs

You are welcome to connect with the following current OLAs if you would like to learn more about the OLA role and experience:

Nikki Vachon, OLA
nvachon@famemaine.com

Kelly Parnell, OLA
kparnell@kepro.com

Marcia Benner, OLA
marcialbenner0810@gmail.com

Heather Pouliot, OLA
heather@coremaine.com

NEXT STEPS

The selection process takes place during the first several months of the year. Placements will be confirmed by late spring. If you have questions or would like to discuss the role in more detail, please contact:

Kristin Ryan, Director of Networks & Partnerships
kryan@oswli.org
207-774-4776

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

HIGH SCHOOL	CITY	COUNTY
Bangor High School	Bangor	Penobscot
Belfast Area High School	Belfast	Waldo
Biddeford High School	Biddeford	York
Boothbay Region High School	Boothbay Harbor	Lincoln
Calais Middle/High School	Calais	Washington
Camden Hills Regional High School	Rockport	Knox
Cony High School	Augusta	Kennebec
Edward Little High School	Auburn	Androscoggin
Ellsworth High School	Ellsworth	Hancock
Houlton High School	Houlton	Aroostook
Lawrence High School	Fairfield	Somerset
Leavitt Area High School	Turner	Androscoggin
Lewiston High School	Lewiston	Androscoggin
Lincoln Academy	Newcastle	Lincoln
Lisbon High School	Lisbon Falls	Androscoggin
Medomak Valley High School	Waldoboro	Lincoln
Morse High School	Bath	Sagadahoc
Mount Ararat High School	Topsham	Sagadahoc
Mount Blue High School	Farmington	Franklin
Mount Desert Island High School	Mount Desert	Hancock
Mount View High School	Thorndike	Waldo
Narraguagus Jr/Sr High School	Harrington	Washington
Nokomis High School	Newport	Penobscot
Oak Hill High School	Sabattus	Androscoggin
Oceanside High School	Rockland	Knox
Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School	South Paris	Oxford
Penquis Valley High School	Milo	Piscataquis
Piscataquis Community High School	Guilford	Piscataquis
Poland Regional High School	Poland	Androscoggin
Portland High School	Portland	Cumberland
Presque Isle High School	Presque Isle	Aroostook
Sacopee Valley High School	Hiram	Oxford
Sanford High School (until Spring 2024)	Sanford	York
Skowhegan Area HS	Skowhegan	Somerset
Spruce Mountain High School	Jay	Franklin
Thornton Academy (beginning Fall 2023)	Saco	York
Westbrook High School	Westbrook	Cumberland
Winslow High School	Winslow	Kennebec

TIMELINE OF A TYPICAL YEAR for OLAs	
	For CURRENT OLAs For PROSPECTIVE OLAs
AUGUST	
<i>early August</i>	Self-Paced Training begins in Google Classroom (req'd for new OLAs)
<i>before the start of the school year</i>	Connect, or reconnect, with OLs, Co-OLA, and SC
SEPTEMBER	
<i>early September</i>	OLA Facilitation Training (req'd for new OLAs)
<i>before Fall Forum</i>	FIRST Monthly Meeting
<i>typically last Thursday in September</i>	Fall Forum
OCTOBER	
	Monthly Meeting
NOVEMBER	
	Monthly Meeting
DECEMBER	
	Monthly Meeting
	Application Opens (for placements for the following fall)
JANUARY	
	Monthly Meeting
	Application Review Begins
FEBRUARY	
	Monthly Meeting
	Virtual Information Sessions (all applicants req'd to attend one session)
MARCH	
	Monthly Meeting
	Virtual Information Sessions (all applicants req'd to attend one session)
<i>mid-March</i>	APPLICATIONS DUE
APRIL	
	Monthly Meeting
<i>mid-April</i>	OLA Placement Announcements
<i>late-April</i>	Welcome Orientations Begin (new cohorts - OLs & OLAs - are introduced)
MAY	
	Monthly Meeting
<i>mid-May</i>	Year-End Celebrations
	Welcome Orientations, continued through end of school year