

## Olympia Snowe Women's Leadership Institute

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*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.*

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### Background

In 2012, the Honorable Olympia J. Snowe, former United States Senator, founded the Olympia Snowe Women's Leadership Institute as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with the mission of raising the confidence and aspirations of high school girls. Our goal is to help them develop leadership skills and provide them with opportunities and encouragement to step into leadership roles, through participation in our three-year program.

The Institute formally launched in 2015; today the Institute partners with 36 high schools across Maine's 16 counties. With the 2021/22 school year the Institute will welcome its seventh class of Olympia's Leaders, serving 540 girls in all schools across all grades.

Early on the organization recognized the value of engaging women mentors to deliver the program to the girls, known as Olympia's Leaders (OLs). Our mentors, Olympia's Leaders Advisors (OLA), are the heart of the Institute's program. OLAs are women from across Maine who connect meaningfully with Maine girls and facilitate activities and conversations designed to elevate their confidence and raise their aspirations. Not only do OLAs advise the Olympia's Leaders through the monthly meetings and activities, but also share their journey, demonstrating the value of growth through personal experiences.

### Our Program

Studies indicate that girls are losing confidence 3.5 times faster than boys as they transition from middle to high school. This decline in girls' confidence often leads to them dropping out of sports and other school activities, thinking that they are not good in math or science and a reluctance to try new things or take on bigger challenges. To address these challenges, the Institute designed a program around the progressive themes "My Values," "My Voice," and "My Vision."

The focus of each year is as follows:

- The 10th grade focus, **My Values** (*What do I believe?*) Olympia's Leaders 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 encounter unrealistic expectations. They also begin to build a network of support and learn how to appreciate differences.
- The 11th grade focus, **My Voice** (*How do I communicate?*), builds on the foundation of the "My Values" year by helping girls develop their communication skills to effectively convey their beliefs to a broader audience. Olympia's Leaders learn how to share what is most important to them, how to listen, how to connect with people who hold different opinions, and how to have important conversations—all while being true to their values, strengths, and passions.
- In 12th grade, **My Vision** (*What does my future hold?*) culminates with the girls defining plans for their future paths, sharing those plans and networking with both men and women in the community, and using the skills they have learned to put their plan in action. Olympia's Leaders graduate with increased self-knowledge, confidence, goals for their future, and a network of support across the state.

## Outcomes

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The Institute's evidence-based program leads Olympia's Leaders 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 to 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 adult women advisors with five high school girls entering their sophomore year. These students have been identified by teachers and guidance counselors as having leadership potential yet who would benefit from an additional layer of support to realize that potential. Olympia's Leaders attend monthly meetings, either virtually or at their school when possible, facilitated by their OLAs, where they participate in activities targeted to the seven key outcomes.

## The Role: Olympia's Leaders' Advisor (OLA)

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The OLA is the primary connection between Olympia's Leaders and the Institute, delivering the program and serving as both a mentor and role model. Olympia's Leaders and their advisors become like family, building bonds that endure beyond the years they are in the program. OLAs can have a meaningful, sometimes life-changing, impact on the young women in their cohort. For this reason, we ask that women 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.
- Attend and facilitate, with your partner OLA, all regular monthly meetings from September through May of each year.
- Attend Institute events including:
  - the Welcome/Orientation Meeting with OLs and families (Sept 2021)
  - the annual, full day Fall Forum (tentative date for 2021 is Thursday, October 14)
  - the year-end celebration (a luncheon held in late May each year)
- Complete the annual, online training before the start of each school year (August 31<sup>st</sup>)
- At the first meeting of the year, collaborate with the school contact and girls to set a monthly meeting time that is convenient for all participants and supports strong attendance. This meeting generally is held during school hours.

- In advance of each meeting, review the monthly facilitation guide on Google Classroom and prepare for the meeting (estimated time is 30-45 minutes).
- In collaboration with the school contact, remind the girls of meeting dates and times.
- Reschedule meetings canceled because of weather or changes in plans as quickly as possible, understanding the program is cumulative and that a missed meeting means missed content—content that is needed to be successful in future meetings.
- After each meeting, report attendance and share feedback on the meeting's content with the Institute via Google Classroom (estimated time is 5-10 minutes).
- Participate in Regional meetings/conference calls, approximately 3-4 per year, usually last less than one hour.
- Be willing to share your personal story, as appropriate, with the girls because hearing how women have overcome challenges gives the girls ideas 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, invest time outside of the program to get to know Olympia's Leaders (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**

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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).
- Provide annual, online training that covers Institute policies and guidelines (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 to both OLAs and OLs through Google Classroom.
- Create regional groups of OLAs that gather by phone or in person to share their experiences, best practices, and 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 within one business day to answer questions, provide support, or to schedule a time to talk.
- 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 girls;
- are interested in working with this age group of girls (approximately 16- to 18-year-olds);
- are willing to share personal experiences/stories with the OLs, 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 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 approach as needed to engage the group and respond to the girls' needs, including "sitting with silence" to allow girls who may need more time to respond the time they need;
- are willing to suspend judgment of OLs and encourage all leadership styles;
- and are willing to invest time between meetings to checking 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 personal interview.*
- *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.***
- *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.*
- *may not seek nor hold elected office where there is an affiliation with a political party.*

## **OLAs References**

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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*  
*Finance Authority of Maine (FAME)*  
[nvachon@famemaine.com](mailto:nvachon@famemaine.com)

*Kelly Parnell*  
*KEPRO*  
[kparnell@kepro.com](mailto:kparnell@kepro.com)

*Marcia Benner*  
[marcialbenner0810@gmail.com](mailto:marcialbenner0810@gmail.com)

*Heather Pouliot*  
*Core Marketing and Design*  
[heather@coremaine.com](mailto:heather@coremaine.com)

### **Next Steps**

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

Christina McAnuff, Executive Director  
[christina@snoweleadershipinstitute.org](mailto:christina@snoweleadershipinstitute.org)  
207-774-4296

## Participating Schools

<b>High School</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>County</b>
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
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	Sanford	York
Skowhegan Area HS	Skowhegan	Somerset
Spruce Mountain High School	Jay	Franklin
Westbrook High School	Westbrook	Cumberland
Winslow High School	Winslow	Kennebec