

Interested in LLL Leadership?

Participant: Rachel Concitis, LLL Alliance [RCLA] English (US)

Hello, and welcome to La Leche League International's online conference, celebrating 65 years. This is Interested in La Leche League Leadership, and I am Rachel Concitis.

Just a little bit about me: my name is Rachel Concitis. I have been a leader since 2017. I have been involved with the Leader Accreditation Department, or the LAD, in a variety of roles since 2018. I am currently the Coordinator of Leader Accreditation for La Leche League Ohio. I'm a Regional Administrator of Leader Accreditation for La Leche League Alliance for Breastfeeding Education, and I'm the Managing Editor for LADders magazine, a quarterly newsletter for LAD representatives worldwide that's written by LAD representatives for other LAD representatives.

I live in Columbus, Ohio with my family. I have two children: Bradley, who's six, and Bekah, who just turned two. Outside of La Leche League, I am a third grade teacher here in Columbus City Schools where I have taught for 17 years. I love teaching children to read, and I have a passion for using children's literature to learn about equity, diversity and inclusion.

What is La Leche League? So La Leche League is an international nonprofit organization that's dedicated to peer to peer breastfeeding support and parenting through breastfeeding. The general purpose of the organization is to help the mother learn to breastfeed her baby to encourage mothering through breastfeeding, and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding and related subjects.

La Leche League is an international, educational, non-sectarian, non-discriminatory service organization, and there's a strict policy of not mixing causes.

La Leche League was founded in October 1956 - 65 years ago, outside Chicago, Illinois in the United States. Seven mothers began to meet to talk about nursing their children at a time when breastfeeding rates were low in the United States and breastfeeding information was scarce.

These mothers met each other in a variety of ways and discovered that they were each breastfeeding their children, which was fairly unusual at the time. They decided to get together. They started meeting at the park or in each other's houses.

They would talk about challenges that they had with breastfeeding and how they overcame those challenges. They would talk about the advantages of breastfeeding. They would talk about the successes they had, and over time, more mothers would find out that they were meeting, and they would ask to come while they had so many people coming that they couldn't all fit into the same house, and so they would ... they started having different meetings at different people's houses, and it spread from there.

Now, La Leche League was founded to give information and encouragement mainly through one-to-one helping to all who wanted to breastfeed their babies. La Leche League recognizes that unique importance of one mother helping another to understand the needs of their children and to explore the most appropriate ways for them to meet those needs.

La Leche League, today, is an international organization.

As of January 2021, there are over 4,000 accredited leaders worldwide.

There are La Leche League leaders in approximately 81 countries and territories around the globe. All leaders across the organization go through the same process to become an accredited leader, no matter where they live, no matter what language they speak.

What is a La Leche League leader? And who is a La Leche League leader?

A La Leche League leader is an experienced breastfeeding mother familiar with research and current findings dealing with breastfeeding who offers practical information and encouragement to nursing parents through monthly meetings and one-to-one help. All La Leche League leaders are volunteers who have breastfed their child at least one year.

Leaders believe that breastfeeding, with its many crucial physical and psychological advantages is best for the mother and baby, and it's the ideal way to initiate effective parent-child relationships.

The basic philosophy of La Leche League is expressed in the book *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, and it's summarized in ten concepts.

The La Leche League concepts ... the La Leche League has ten concepts that guide the organization's philosophy and its leaders.

These ten concepts are that mothering through breastfeeding is the most natural and effective way of understanding and satisfying the needs of the baby, that human milk is the natural food for babies uniquely meeting their changing needs.

Alert and active participation by the mother in childbirth is a help in getting breastfeeding off to a good start.

Mother and baby need to be together early and often to establish a satisfying, breastfeeding relationship and reliable milk production.

Breastfeeding is enhanced by the loving support of the baby's father, a co-parent a partner, and/or close family members who value the breastfeeding relationship.

In the early years, the baby has an intense need to be with his mother, which is as basic as his need for food.

For the healthy full-term baby, human milk is the only food necessary until the baby shows signs of readiness for complementary foods - about the middle of the first year after birth.

Good nutrition means eating a well-balanced and varied diet of foods, and as close to their natural state as possible.

Ideally, the breastfeeding relationship will continue until the child outgrows the need, and from infancy on, children need loving guidance, which reflects acceptance of the capabilities and sensitivities to their feelings.

So, what does a leader do?

Most leaders fulfill the five basic responsibilities of leadership, and they are helping mothers and parents one-to-one, either by text, telephone, e-mail, social media, or in person, and keeping accurate records of these helping situations. Planning and leading monthly series meetings. Supervising the management of the group. This could also include helping maintain a group library of books about breastfeeding and other related topics that parents might want to check out to read.

It could also mean supervising a group treasury, if a group has funds with that bank account. Keeping up-to-date on breastfeeding information. Helping others find out about leadership and prepare to become La Leche League leaders.

Then you might be wondering, how does one become a leader?

The prerequisites to applying for leadership fall into three categories. Those three categories are personal experience, organizational experience, and personal skills. And rest assured, organizational experience does not mean that you are organize. It's talking about organization as in the La Leche League organization.

So, a potential applicant has breastfed a child for 12 months or more, did not introduce complementary foods or supplements until the baby demonstrated a nutritional need for other foods around the middle of the first year for the healthy full-term baby, and has chosen breastfeeding as the optimal way to nourish, nurture, and comfort the baby.

Additional personal experience requirements – special consideration will be given to someone whose personal breastfeeding experience is outside the realm of the normal and physiological course of breastfeeding.

Now that organizational experience requirement: a potential applicant is a member of La Leche League, either their local group or their area. They support the purpose, mission, and philosophy of La Leche League.

They've attended at least four meetings. either in person or through the internet. They've demonstrated a clear understanding that leadership is volunteer work. The potential La Leche League leaders all across the organization are volunteers.

A potential applicant has knowledge of the information contained in the most recent edition of *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding* in the English language or in the eighth edition, there are also translations available in a multitude of languages.

A potential applicant is willing to create time to fulfill the basic responsibilities of leadership or provide other service to La Leche League.

They're willing to complete the application work, and they have a recommendation from a La Leche League Leader.

Those personal skills: potential applicant has communication skills in their preferred language necessary to begin the application and preparation for accreditation.

The demonstrate an accepting and respectful attitude towards others.

They provide information and support without judgment, and they're willing to develop further communication skills as needed to fulfill the responsibilities of leadership, and there are communication skills workshops that are available for both leader applicants and active leaders to help develop those communication skills.

Now, what does an application involve? During your application, you'll work with a representative of the Leader Accreditation Department. That's also called the LAD ... as well as your supporting leader - that's the leader that wrote that recommendation for you. Think of your LAD work as a triangle. Sometimes, you will be working with your LAD representative, sometimes, you'll be working with your supporting leader, and sometimes you'll be working on your own.

With your LAD representative, you will correspond about La Leche League philosophy and leader responsibilities, and you'll also explore your understanding of La Leche League philosophy, and how it relates to being a leader.

With your supporting leader, you'll discuss aspects of leader work and practice responding to helping questions. You'll learn about La Leche League as an organization, and about leading meetings and fulfilling other leader responsibilities.

I know when I was going through my application work, my supporting leader would talk about maintaining the group library. She would talk about maintaining attendance records and the bank account, some of the various tax forms that here in the United States, we have to fill out. I know it's different for every state and every country, but a lot of those more ... just the paperwork aspect she would talk about and share with me, or during the time that I was going through my application, if it was time that she had to do some of the semiannual reporting, like how many people have attended our meetings or things like that. How many helping contacts we had had, she would make sure that she included me in those e-mails so that I would see what was involved in reporting those, or she would make sure that I was there with her while she was reporting those.

Then on your own, you'll become familiar with breastfeeding topics and learn about resources available to parents and leaders. You'll read some required books and other publications, and you'll attend La Leche League events where available. You know, one thing with the global pandemic is that so many leader events are now online, and anyone can attend them anywhere in the world, and so that's really opened it up for both leader applicants and active leaders ... that they can attend a wide variety of events on a wide variety of topics from breastfeeding information related topics to communication skills events to leader development seminars.

Maybe there's ... I know there was one that focused on the various tax forms that a group might have to fill out or other, kind of, side topics that you wouldn't necessarily think about, but they are very helpful for those that needed that information.

And what will you be doing during your application?

So during your application, leader applicants will write their personal history of breastfeeding and mothering. They'll read required readings, including *The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding*, the *Leader's Handbook*, and a comprehensive text on natural childbirth, and they'll dialogue with their LAD representative.

You'll have conversations about how these required readings would help you as a leader, and how you might use those resources once you're accredited.

You'll also complete the Breastfeeding Resource Guide. You'll complete the checklist of topics to discuss in preparation for leadership with your supporting leader. If you choose, there's the optional bias exercise, or a mixing causes exercise that can be very helpful, and you'll complete the Preview of Helping Questions and Group Dynamics with their supporting leader.

That preview exercise, which a lot of applicants choose to do towards the end of their application work, will allow you to roleplay various helping situations where you will get to put on your leader hat and pretend that you are, maybe at a meeting, or receiving an email, or receiving a phone call about different questions from mothers or parents that need help, and you'll get to practice, kind of thinking on your feet, or practice finding resources that you need to use in your response. And those group dynamics, that's role playing with your supporting leader about how you would respond to different situations that might happen at a group meeting, and that do happen at group meetings. And all of that really helps prepare you for when you are accredited.

A lot of people ask, how long does an application take?

There really is, no single answer to that, and that's because it's different for every individual, and it depends on a lot of different factors. It depends on your available time. It depends on the number and ages of your children, and it depends on other time commitments that you have. Many applications are completed within six months to a year, but there are plenty of applicants that take longer than a year to work through the entire application. You are welcome to proceed at the pace that enables you to prepare yourself for leadership actively and effectively.

So, how do you show that you're ready to be accredited? Together you, you're supporting leader, and your LAD representative will ensure that you have met the criteria for leader accreditation. And that is set by the Leche League International Board of Directors, and it's described in Applying For Leadership, which is a document that's part of La Leche League Policies and Standing Rules, also called the PSR.

To be credited, an applicant meets the La Leche League International prerequisites to applying for leadership. They demonstrate understanding and practice of La Leche League philosophy. They've completed all steps of the La Leche League leader application work. They have read The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding, and the Leader's Handbook, and they've signed the La Leche League Leader Statement of Commitment.

Once your LAD representative that you're working with receives your signed statement of commitment and an accreditation fee, if applicable, the applicant is accredited as a leader and is covered by La Leche League International liability insurance.

Now, there is financial help available for LAD fees through the Karin Gausman Scholarship Fund. This scholarship is meant to cover leader application fees, for those in financial need. La Leche League does not want finances to be a barrier to becoming a leader. Please talk to your Coordinator of Leader Accreditation, your CLA, if you wish to apply.

Now, what are the next steps? Once you decide you wish to move forward with applying for leadership, you will need to contact the Coordinator of Leader Accreditation, or the CLA, for the geographic area in which you live.

For example, if you live in Ohio, you would contact the CLA for La Leche League Ohio.

If you live in Great Britain, you would contact the CLA for La Leche League Great Britain.

If you do not know how to contact the CLA for the area in which you live, you can complete the Leader Inquiry Form at LLI.org/get-involved/.

Thank you for learning more about becoming a La Leche League leader. Leader Applicant Department representatives worldwide are eager to help you along the journey towards La Leche League Leadership.

If you need to contact me, my name is Rachel Concitis, and my email is here CLA@LLLOhio.org.

Thank you so much, and I hope you enjoy the rest of the conference.