



Why is it important to develop ESP leaders?

NEA believes Education Support Professionals (ESPs) are key partners in building a strong union and ensuring student success. With our long-standing commitment to strengthening schools and in the midst of increasing attacks on public education, increased ESP leadership and organizing within our union is critical. ESPs are the fastest growing membership category within the NEA and make up almost 500,000 of NEA's 3 million members. From the bus, to the office, to the hallway to the cafeteria and everywhere in between, ESPs spend several hours every day directly interacting with students, staff, administrators and parents. A majority of ESPs live in the communities they work in, making them a powerful asset in influencing local education policy through their relationships with parents, school boards, and lawmakers. Our schools and associations cannot be successful without them. We must harness the power, experience, and energy that our ESP members bring to the table and help them develop and strengthen the skills and knowledge needed to build strong affiliates.

NEA ESP Leadership Institute (formerly Leaders for Tomorrow)

NEA ESP Leadership Institute (ESPLI) is a powerful leadership development program, grounded in diversity, equity and cultural competence that brings together the overarching NEA Leadership Competencies (Advocacy, Communication, Governance and Leadership, Leading Our Professions, and Organizing) to train ESP members to be effective leaders in their associations. ESPLI is designed and collaboratively delivered by ESP members. This eleven-month program requires participants to commit to three in-person trainings, webinars, outside reading and completion of a capstone project designed to elevate the goals of their association and NEA's core values.

All participants are required to work closely with the state and/or local affiliate throughout the program, and take the NEA Leadership Competencies assessment both before and after program completion. NEA will cover all costs to participate, including release time in accordance with the NEA non-staff travel guidelines.

The NEA Leadership Competencies are meant to be a resource for identification, reflection, guidance and inspiration for participants of ESPLI throughout their leadership journey. Using the NEA Leadership Competencies, ESPLI will help participants self-identify where they are on the competency progression and offer direction for where their leadership can take them. In exploring these competencies, ESPLI helps leaders:

- Learn how diversity, equity and cultural competence are integral to education leadership;
- Experience overarching competencies as transferable skills for all education leaders;
- Participate in experiential learning opportunities designed to apply new skills and knowledge to help address the needs of their students, colleagues and schools;
- Design and implement individual leadership projects to put these competencies into action in ways that strengthen and/or support their associations;
- Experience the benefit of professional learning communities.

Participants of ESPLI will engage in a thorough and targeted training across an array of leadership areas, including:

- Understanding and use of self;
- Personal strengths and weaknesses;
- Advocacy through political action;
- Taking risks and engaging in change;
- Communication and presentation skills;
- Knowledge of association history and structure, as well as the mission, vision and core values;
- Strategies and impact of internal and external organizing;
- Setting realistic goals;
- Decision making; and
- Intentional engagement with their association.

Core beliefs of NEA ESPLI

- **ESP leaders are ignited by a common passion for their association.** Regardless of their journey so far, ESPs became engaged in association leadership because an issue, need or opportunity moved them to action and/or someone believed and encouraged them. In many cases, without union-provided support, ESPs might have been left on their own to grow and develop without formal guidance.
- **ESP leadership cannot be done in isolation.** One of the most important roles of the ESP leader is to make connections with others (including fellow ESPs, teacher colleagues, and other stakeholders) to strengthen their resolve and secure partnership and support in meeting their goals.
- **ESP leaders are driven by a desire to meet the needs of all students.** Their leadership is always grounded in creating equitable learning environments that value and promote diversity and inclusion in our schools across the nation.
- **ESP leaders possess unwavering support for their colleagues.** An authentic desire to support the excellence of other educators is an unselfish and visionary goal, enhanced by a spirit of mutual respect and care for their fellow educators.
- **ESP leaders share a high regard for their professions and their association.** ESPs share a passion for improving their professions and associations through seeking relevant professional development and leadership opportunities and uniting with all educators to improve public education policy and working conditions.

What are people saying about the program?

Past participants and NEA leaders overwhelmingly report the program (formerly known as LFT) to have been transformational. Leaders at the local, state and national level regularly commend the clear impact of the graduates.

“Since its 2007 creation, the NEA ESP Leaders for Tomorrow program has prepared more than 180 ESPs with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to lead relevant, thriving associations and to lead their professions, schools, and communities. Now named ESP Leadership Institute (ESPLI), the program will continue the critical work of increasing the number of ESP union leaders whose talent, expertise, and passion will grow strong unions for NEA members and the students we serve.” Becky Pringle, Vice-President, NEA

“LFT was what I needed to become the person I always wanted to be, but was always worried I could never become. I am a much better person because of the program and the immense support I received both during and after the program. The best part is being able to pay it forward so that others can benefit from it as well. LFT will always be my turning point in life.” Saul Ramos, Class of 2015

“Through the LFT program, I gained confidence to speak before my local board about issues affecting our members. When I started LFT, I was a leader in my local. After the program, I was elected as the region president on the state level and to the NEA BOD on the national level. The skills and knowledge I gained in LFT have been used to build more leaders and 36 Campus Reps which has strengthened our association.” Linda Estrada, Class of 2010

“Leaders for Tomorrow changed the way I view myself. It taught me to believe in myself and use that to influence others. We (ESP) are educators. We come alongside the classroom teacher and help engage, support and challenge our students. LFT helped me to look beyond myself, see the possibilities and know that together, we have the power to make a difference.” Donna West, Class of 2011

“LFT was life changing for me both personally and professionally. I changed my leadership style which made it possible for my local and my state members to benefit from what I had learned and applied. I am a better person, not because LFT made me that way but because it taught me how to get there myself.” Marie Glass, Class of 2009