

Sea Services Leadership Association

2025 Annual Report



Mentor - Inspire - Lead

SSLA Background:

The Sea Services Leadership Association (SSLA) is the only national non-profit organization dedicated to the mentorship of women leaders in the uniformed services. SSLA's mission is "Mentor, Inspire, Lead;" achieved by focusing on providing networking, connection, and education to women in all branches of the military through our annual symposium, online membership services, and local events.

Originally established as the Women Officers Professional Association (WOPA) in 1984 for women in the three sea services (USN, USMC, USCG), SSLA transformed itself to become more inclusive, serving women in all branches and ranks (including NOAA and USPHS service members.) SSLA now focuses on providing opportunities for service members to improve their leadership through education and workshops, find and connect with mentors and mentees through networking events and online membership platforms, and increase the effectiveness of the organizations in which they serve through feedback and focused discussions. SSLA remains one of the longest standing and consistently supported Non-Federal Entities (NFE) by the uniformed services, a title we are proud to hold and intend to keep. SSLA is dedicated to women in service and to our leaders who serve them - together our nation and our military are stronger.

2025 Executive Summary:

This report highlights our activities as an organization during the calendar year of 2025 in pursuit of our mission to Mentor, Inspire, and Lead women in the uniformed services. SSLA's contributions to its membership and the services were significant, despite the

In addition, this report documents our efforts to become a more mature organization as we have been working to change our status from a 501(c)(6) to a 501(c)(3) organization. 2025 was SSLA's second full year implementing its new bylaws, which were approved in summer of 2022, to facilitate the transition to 501(c)(3) status.

The primary challenge for SSLA for 2025 was the current administration's cancelling the Memorandums of Understanding the Services had with SSLA. This precluded the Services supporting the Joint Women's Leadership Symposium (JWLS). Without support, SSLA's leadership had no choice but to cancel JWLS 2025 and 2026. In response, SSLA pivoted to providing smaller events around the United States that will serve as the foundation for SSLA's expansion into regional and eventually local chapters to better reach and support women in service on a more frequent and local basis.

SSLA's Effectiveness to The Services

Survey data from JWLS indicated that SSLA provides vital contributions to uniformed services through education and networking, directly resulting in increased retention of women in uniform. Through SSLA's efforts, survey data taken from JWLS indicated that women who attended SSLA's conference felt that the networking, education, and connections they received "kept them motivated to stay in the military."

SSLA also provides critical access to women in uniform for our service leaders and chiefs. JWLS provides one of the largest and most professional forums for our service leaders to meet, discuss, and receive feedback from women in uniform in both a larger joint setting and in a more concentrated service specific breakout. This invaluable opportunity has long been a major benefit that SSLA has been able to provide the services.

2025 - 2026 SSLA Board of Directors and Staff

Vice Admiral Shoshana Chatfield, USN

Chair of the Board

Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds, USMC (Ret.)

Chair of the Board Emeritus/Acting Chair of the Board since March 2025

Captain Heather H. Quilenderino, USN

President

Lieutenant Commander Bre Strand, USN

President Emeritus

Captain Leslie A. Kindling, USN

Executive Vice President

Sergeant Major Ronda Kirkby, USMC (Ret.)

Senior Enlisted Advisor

Lieutenant Commander (Ret.) John H. Dittmer, USNR

Vice President of Administration

Logistics Specialist Master Chief Petty Officer (Surface Warfare/Aviation Warfare) Lucia M. Johnston, USN

Secretary

Commander Katrine Kat Lazenby, USN

Treasurer

Ms. Vanessa Ybarra

Vice President of Membership

Staff Sergeant Rebecca Burdick, USMC

Public Affairs Officer

Command Master Chief Rekiya Jassen, USCG (Ret.)

Vice President of Awards

Ms. Vanessa Ybarra
Vice President of Chapters

Lieutenant Command Rachel Pryor, NOAA and Lieutenant Julia Ferris, USCG
Co-Vice Presidents of Events

Lieutenant Commader Adam Jaffe, USCGR
General Counsel

Additional SSLA Staff Serving as Service Representatives

ITC Christine Brown, USN
Navy Representative

Vacant
Coast Guard Representative

Staff Sergeant Rebecca Burdick, USMC
Marine Corps Representative

Technical Christina Ingram, USAF
Air Force Representative

Master Sergeant Melisa Correa, USAR
Army Representative

First Lieutenant Caelan Barranta, USSF
Space Force Representative

Lieutenant Command Rachel Pryor, NOAA
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Representative

Commander Yvonne Santiago, USPHS
Public Health Service Representative

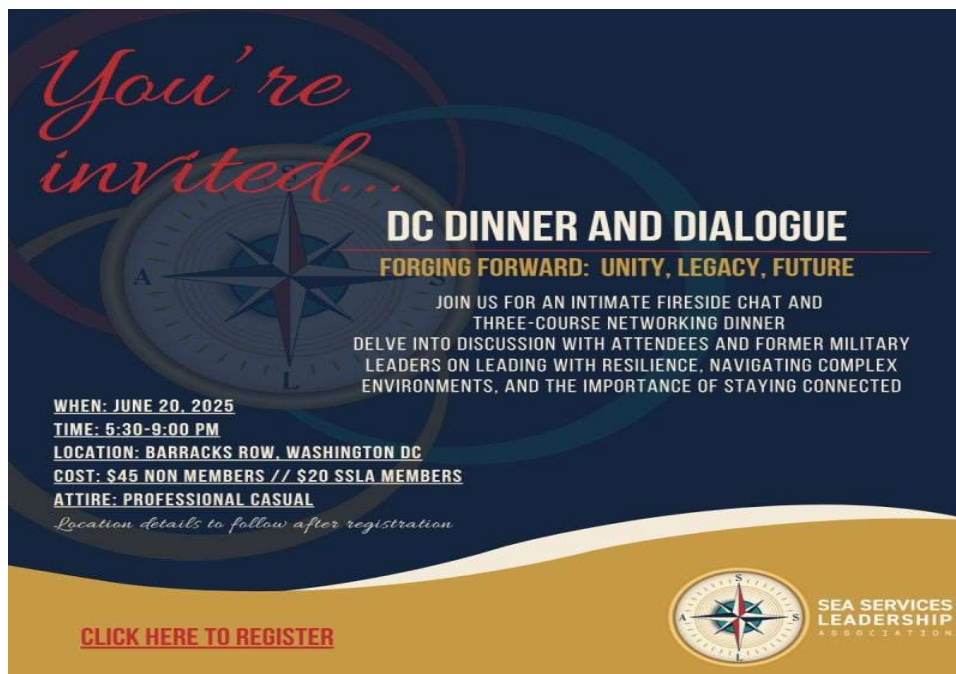
2025 Overview: Key Activities (in chronological order):

1. On March 20, 2025, SSLA sponsored a no-host social hour at the Mujeres Brew House in San Diego, CA.

2. On May 17, 2025, SSLA hosted an event for veterans to network and build skills at the UCLA-Anderson campus on May 17, 2025. SSLA collaborated with the Association of Veterans of Anderson and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The event was also shared online with our membership via Zoom.



3. On June 20, 2025, SSLA hosted an event called Dinner and Dialogue at a restaurant at Barracks Row in Washington, DC. The dinner was a three-course meal, followed by discussion with retired military leaders. The discussion focused leading with resilience, navigating complex environments, and the importance of staying connected.



4. On July 29, 2025, SSLA collaborated with Academy Women for a special event with the Washington Mystics as they honored active, veteran and reservist military women at the Academy Women annual Salute to Service game presented by Leidos. All these organizations worked together to empower and inspire current and past women military leaders. Join us for a special pre-game networking reception and panel focused on the topic high performance female leadership. Come connect with fellow military women, and cheer on the Mystics as they take on Chicago Sky.



5. On August 1 & 2, 2025, SSLA joined eMilitary at their Professional Development & Training Summit at the Hyatt Regency hotel in Crystal City, VA.
6. During the months of August and September, SSLA held its elections for positions on the Board of Directors and the staff. The new members of the Board and staff are listed on pages 3 and 4. Voting ended on SEP 12th with a record-setting 23.8% participation. Shortly, afterwards the candidates were notified, and the Bord of

Directors accepted the results. The official results were announced by the SSLA President on SEP 13th.

7. SSLA Board & Staff Onboarding Meeting (OCT 20)

The SSLA Board & Staff held an onboarding meeting via Zoom on OCT 20, 2025. The SSLA Staff and BOD members met to conduct a leadership turnover and coordination meeting

What we specifically accomplished - We facilitated turnover of several positions and the establishment of the positions of Regional Chapter Presidents; dedicated time to discuss 1-3-5-year plans for SSLA, Chapters, and JWLS; held training on SSLA by-laws and organization; reviewed the 2025 financial report; and discussed how to improve the organization for its members. In addition, we conducted training on the use of our online tools to facilitate our activities as a geographically dispersed board.

Value to our members - The offsite meeting ensured critical coordination by our staff and Board of Directors to strategy and discuss the tangible ways in which our staff can best serve our members. The staff of SSLA discussed the various focus areas of the organization, specifically: membership capabilities, and chapter growth over the next year, to ensure SSLA continues to provide the best opportunities for our members to learn and improve their leadership, have opportunities for meaningful mentorship, and to inspire them for continued service.

Offsite Goals:

- 1) Understanding our roles:
- 2) Understanding our organization
- 3) Understanding our connections:

Conclusion: The meeting has led to several improvements in how the SSLA is organized and operates to serve the interests of its membership.

8. Annual Membership Meeting

SSLA's 2025 virtual membership meeting was held on December 17, 2025, via Zoom. Each member of staff and board introduced themselves, and shared what SSLA meant to them and the contributions they were most proud of. Topics discussed included:

- Reflection on goals from last year, including JWLS 2025
- Transformation into a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization
- Providing value for the organization
- Financial security of the Association
- Accomplishments of the year/ year in review

After these topics were discussed, we held a question-and-answer session with the membership.

Looking Ahead into 2026

As SSLA concludes 2025, we have three primary goals for 2026:

1. 501(c)(3) Status- make the transition to charitable non-profit under education.
2. Membership Platform- Complete the updating and enhancing access and tools to better facilitate networking, interacting, and educating of SSLA members.
3. Chapters- Stand up SSLA Chapters with an Eastern and Western Region, to be expanded into local chapters within these regions.

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