



BEST PRACTICES FOR BRANCH SURVIVAL

Mission Statement: AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.

1) Background

AAUW-PA is concerned about the branches which are struggling to survive and realizes that many healthy branches could become struggling branches. The AAUW-PA Board has conducted research into the needs of these branches over the past year and has developed this Survival Best Practices to help. It contains suggestions for proven activities throughout the year to strengthen your branch, while focusing on what makes AAUW such a vibrant organization across the country.

The Survival Best Practices was developed to help smaller branches. If yours is a larger, vibrant branch, consider adapting the suggestions upward to the scale and enthusiasm of your membership. For example, consider increasing the number of goals, and develop an implementation plan for each.

We wish you success, appreciate your efforts, and would love to hear from you with your experiences and suggestions to improve this document. Contact the AAUW-PA President at aauwpa.org with any comments.

2) Changes at the National Level That Affect Branches

a) Reduction in number of required officers

As of the AAUW Convention 2009, each branch is required to have only an Administrative Officer, who is responsible for the functioning of the branch, and a Financial Officer, who is responsible for collecting dues and submitting the required funds and reports to the state and national organizations. (You may need to change your bylaws if you reduce the number of officers.)

b) Simplification of donation process

Donations may be made online to the various AAUW entities (Educational Foundation, Legal Advocacy Fund, National Training Institute [co-sponsor of the annual National Conference for College Women Student Leaders], Eleanor Roosevelt Fund, etc.).

c) Reorganization for tax purposes

The major AAUW entity is now a 501(c)(3) corporation. This means that \$46 of the \$49 national dues are tax deductible as a charitable contribution. (The remaining \$3 supports our public advocacy activities, such as lobbying for women's issues on Capitol Hill.)

d) State organization no longer required

Due to popular support in our Every-Member Survey last year, AAUW-PA will be retained. Since state organizations are not required, AAUW encourages other geographical entities.

If your branch believes it would benefit from this provision, contact the AAUW-PA President.

3) Research Results

a) Member unwillingness to take leadership roles is a key component in the struggle.

As our members age, they feel they have “been there, done that,” and are reluctant to take on volunteer responsibilities, particularly as unforeseen commitments and the desire to travel become increasingly important.

Suggestions:

i) Share the load

Many branches share each office, thus allowing a reduction in responsibility for each individual while supporting a strong branch organization. Your branch might also consider two members for each key position, with one member coming into the position each year and one member leaving the position each year. . This approach helps with year-to-year continuity. Some branches share positions by month so officers can spend the winters in the sun. Some branches use a management team of 3 to 4 persons, even switching responsibilities mid-year.

What’s important is that you agree on who is responsible for what and by when. Write your agreement down—it will prevent misunderstanding this year and make next year easier.

ii) Reduce the number of officers

Only two are currently required. Focus on function. Take a look at branch activities and skills of members. Figure out a structure that may better meet the needs of members and activities.

Consider working in teams, leadership councils, or other alternative ways. Decide how voting may take place (in person, email).

You may decide that your current structure works well and decide to make no changes.

iii) Make sure your Special Interest Groups (SIGs) have leadership

Include Special Interest Group members in your leadership structure. Don’t have any SIGs? See below and try to start one.

iv) Mentor your less experienced members

Consider “shadow” members of your leadership structure.

Invite interested members to attend meetings so they can learn.

- v) Recognize your leaders and thank them.
- b) What makes branches strong?
- i) Interest groups and strong programming to support the mission
- Build on what works. Start small. Do you have something that your members really like? Celebrate that success! Build on it when the opportunity presents itself.
- Query these happy members for ideas. Although there has been criticism about meeting for a social event only, many branches find that a food or wine interest group is a successful start to a more ambitious program of SIGs. Consider combining an event with a cultural activity such as a museum visit or an architectural stroll.
- ii) Suggestions for dynamic programs:
- Become familiar with the Leader-on-Loan program sponsored by AAUW-PA. Leaders will travel to your branch at state or personal expense to present a program tailored to your needs. See the brochure and application at aauwpa.org.
- Use Program-in-a-Box ideas available at aauw.org and aauwpa.org.
- The Membership Vice-President has other suggestions for meetings and can put you in touch with the PA Humanities Council, which can supply your branch with one free speaker each year (meeting must be open to the public, a great opportunity for a Shape the Future membership event).
- Do you have a dynamite member whose program will be welcome? How about a travel program with multiple speakers?
- Will a faculty member from a local college share a research project?
- AAUW Educational Foundation winners are available to speak. Contact AAUW Funds Chair or EF Chair at aauwpa.org (Association does not provide contact information for these persons on the web).
- National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL) attendees are available to speak. Contact the College/University chair at aauwpa.org (AAUW does not provide contact information for these persons on the web).
- Consider a partnership with a nearby branch or another community organization—the League of Women Voters is a favorite—and sponsor a joint meeting. Be sure to encourage members of both organizations to mingle.
- iii) Be welcoming to newcomers at your meeting
- Quite often we are so delighted to see good friends that we forget to make visitors comfortable.

Consider appointing an official greeter whose job is to introduce the visitor around and make sure she knows you are delighted she came and hope she will return. Even better, rotate the responsibility among your interest groups.

Have nametags for everyone. Some branches have specially colored tags for guests or new members.

Introduce any guests or new members and visitors at the beginning of your program or business meeting.

Consider carpools and mentors for prospective new members.

Be personal. Follow up with a phone call and the offer of a ride to an upcoming event.

c) Community visibility helps recruit new and enthusiastic members

i) Publicize your meetings.

Posters may be placed in the public library, the student center of a nearby college, or in hair salons. Real estate agents and the local Newcomers group may be willing to share information about local AAUW branches. An Internet presence is also good.

ii) Consider awarding a local individual or group the Gateway to Equity award.

Details and form are available on aauwpa.org. Be sure to photograph the event and submit a story to the local paper.

iii) Promote the mission/use the media

Work with a local writer to publish an article in recognition of Equal Pay Day in April to promote equal pay for women. Data are available at wageproject.org and aauw.org.

Many struggling branches fund scholarships and girls' recognition activities. Ensure good publicity for these key activities. Pictures are great and easy with a digital camera. Many branches write their own articles with accompanying pictures and submit them.

Cultivate your local news sources, including TV and your county webmaster.

4) Use technology

a) Have a branch e-mail contact if possible.

AAUW-PA and the national organization are doing much better communication, usually by e-mail.

b) Use aauwpa.org and aauw.org

These are invaluable resources that make it easier to be a leader. Consider for program ideas, recent research reports, AAUW news, etc.

- c) Use the Emerging Leader Intern (ELI) program to improve your technology skills, or attend a course at the library or college
See aauwpa.org for details of ELI program.
- d) Consider subscribing to AAUW e-mail newsletters to stay better informed.
See aauw.org

5) Know what's going on

- a) Attend the State Convention or Business Meeting in April.
- b) Attend and bring members of your leadership group to the Leadership meeting in July.
- c) Read and use FYI
FYI (For Your Information) is sent to the branch president 4 times each year (end of July, mid-October, late February, early May) to keep you up to date. It is posted at aauwpa.org. Encourage your members, especially your leadership group, to read it. Actively decide what information you will use at this time, what you will use later, and what is not valuable.
- d) Read and use the Keystoner
The *Keystoner* contains articles of a more general nature, promoting opportunities within AAUW-PA. It is published 4 times each year (schedule similar to the FYI schedule) and is posted at aauwpa.org. Encourage your members to read it.
- e) Chat with your District Coordinator
She's well informed and there to help.
- f) Log in to aauwpa.org and aauw.org at least a couple of times each month
- g) Open, scan, prioritize, delegate, and use what's relevant in the August mailing from AAUW.
- h) Help AAUW-PA help your branch.
Read and complete the annual Conversations questions; share your experiences—both good and bad—with the AAUW-PA board member who calls. Request confidentiality if appropriate—it will be honored.

MODEL 1 FOR A SMALL BRANCH

1) Overview

OK, so you've strong-armed some members to lead the struggling branch for the next year—that's GREAT.

Think of the year as:

June to August: evaluation and planning phase

September to November—learn and enjoy

January to April—learn and enjoy

May—Celebrate!

It is not necessary to have a meeting every month from September through June. What is important is to have interesting meetings that combine fun, fellowship, and social/intellectual value.

Consider a summer meeting or event if that would better suit your membership. Some branches do service projects or social events in the summer and are pleased with the benefits of increased camaraderie and a more relaxed schedule; quite often members who are not able to attend during school months welcome summer opportunities.

2) Detailed plan

a) June through August

i) Get your membership registered by July 1. Keep your membership roster up-to-date.

ii) Submit your Branch Officer Form by June 1. Update as necessary.

iii) Hold a training program

Include old and new officers; ask each officer to say what she did during the past year; discuss what your successes were and where you want to go during the coming year; discuss in a non-accusatory manner whatever you felt did not go as well as it might have, learning along the way.

Develop two goals for the branch for the coming year—make them achievable.

Make the meeting informal; keep to your agenda; restrict time to a maximum of two hours. If all this goes well, consider a “stretch” goal.

Provide notes of the meeting to all attendees (and leaders unable to attend).

iv) Assign responsibility for program content and schedule speakers

Note: Many times it is difficult to contact speakers from mid-June through mid-September due to vacations, so tackle this critical area quickly. In some branches, a different member facilitates each meeting. Perhaps an interest group could bring nibbles and be assigned greeting responsibility, thus strengthening ties between the interest groups and the general membership.

v) Print copies of the fall FYI from AAUW-PA for your leadership group and open the membership package from AAUW

Delegate what seems useful (be sure to keep a list of who is responsible for each item you delegate); focus on your branch goals, but keep the extra information for reference (don't be overwhelmed, figure out what is useful in a timely manner, and don't worry about the rest)

vi) Have a leadership meeting in late August or early September

Assess where you are against your plan from earlier in the summer. What's done? What's not done? Assign the task to be completed by a specific individual by a certain time.

Who has not renewed? Why? What is appropriate action?

Schedule the next leadership meetings.

vii) Contact your membership about events of the upcoming year

Phone call, an email, a newsletter, whatever you can do. Ask them to calendar the dates. Don't have a specific program for a date yet? That's ok, set the date and fill in the blanks later. A holiday social event in November will probably draw some folks who don't normally attend membership events.

viii) Have a financial plan

Will you live on your dues revenue? Will you have a fund raiser? Will you ask for contributions to AAUW Funds?

Even if members make in-kind donations to keep the branch running, it is important to know how much the branch needs to function, so accumulate these "in kind" donations, in addition to the monetary expenditures.

Resolve to send in checks within two weeks of getting new members.

ix) Have a membership contact list for each member and encourage members to communicate with each other.

x) Have a membership plan

What will you do to recruit new members? Consider the national plan Shape the Future, where members pay half-price dues. Ask members to bring friends. An additional benefit may be a free membership at the AAUW level. Some branches award this to a leader in the community to strengthen community ties.

Remember that graduates of nursing schools and 2-year accredited colleges are eligible for membership.

Do you have a College/University Partner nearby? Consider recruiting student affiliates.

Know recent college grads? Give a Grad a Gift provides free national membership.

Many branches have a confidential dues-assistance plan for members in need.

xi) Have a communication plan—members need to be informed to feel valued

Be sure to read and print FYI for your leadership group. Update your activities as appropriate. Share with members.

Have a monthly newsletter if possible—it doesn't have to be fancy. Email saves a lot of cost. However, BE SURE to provide hard copy to members who prefer it.

Be sure to celebrate marriages and births!

Some branches choose to alert members when other members are having difficulty so that support can be provided. What would be appropriate for your branch in case of illness, death of a family member, etc.?

b) September through November: Learn and Enjoy

i) Have one meeting or two with an excellent program and a convivial spirit.

Assess what was great and what was not so great; publicize it beforehand to the community.

ii) Have a leadership meeting no later than mid-October

How are you doing against your two goals? Is there an opportunity for an additional Special Interest Group? Do you have programs lined up for the entire year? (Some branches prefer to schedule a spring meeting later to address any timely topic that may have developed late in the year.)

iii) Consider a holiday social event

November works well for many branches.

- iv) Many branches have no formal meeting in December
 - January and February weather should be considered when you plan meetings—daytime? Will the meeting place be accessible if it snows? How do you cancel a meeting if necessary?
 - v) If you plan to award a Gateway to Equity award, do your planning now
 - Invite the membership to submit candidates and a brief write-up; select a committee to decide who the winner is and how the award will be made.
 - vi) Contribute to AAUW Funds as able.
 - The research and grant funding that AAUW is well-known for depends on generous donations.
- c) January through April: Learn and Enjoy
- i) Branch membership records **MUST BE** current with AAUW-PA and AAUW no later than January 31!
 - ii) Have one meeting or two with an excellent program and a convivial spirit.
 - Assess what was great and what was not so great. It's also an excellent time to attend a cultural event with snacks or a meal before or afterward; publicize the event beforehand to the community.
 - iii) Read and complete the annual Conversations questions.
 - Share your experiences—both good and bad—with the AAUW-PA board member who calls. Request confidentiality if appropriate—it will be honored.
 - iv) Evaluate how the current leadership structure is working and what changes should be made for the next year.
 - Line up the incoming officers; get the current officers thinking about what they need to do to wrap up the year, while achieving the goals, perhaps even the “stretch” goal, you set.
 - v) Make the Gateway to Equity award, coordinating with AAUW-PA and publicizing it.
 - Consider joining with a community partner in preparation for a joint event next year.
 - vi) Consider a small recognition (NOT a celebration) of Equal Pay Day—informational.

- vii) Make sure your members know the value of the branch and ask that they renew for next year.
- viii) Consider writing up your successes.
 - Submit them to AAUW-PA for branch recognition. Consider recognizing your Emerging Star and Outstanding Women through the AAUW-PA process.
 - Do you have a really outstanding member? Review the guidelines for the Susan K. Nentiel Humanitarian Award (aauwpa.org) and consider submitting an application.
- d) May: Celebrate!
 - i) Enjoy your successes and your AAUW friends
 - Welcome your new members; recognize the accomplishments of the branch and those of individual members.
 - ii) Consider going out for an inexpensive meal or have a potluck
 - Invite an interesting speaker; invite members to join the leadership group for next year.
 - iii) Ask new members to assume responsibility within the branch
 - An involved member is usually a happy member; experienced members can serve as mentors if they wish.
- e) Go back to mid-June training [paragraph 2)a)iii] above--and start the next year with renewed energy and vision.

MODEL 2 FOR A LARGE BRANCH

Adapt the preceding suggestions upward to the scale and enthusiasm of your membership. For example, consider increasing the number of goals, and develop an implementation plan for each.