



AAUW PROGRAM IN A BOX

COCKTAILS AND CONVOS

AT A GLANCE

COCKTAILS AND CONVOS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Cocktails and Convos (convo is short for conversation) is a great way to draw in the community in a fun and casual setting where members and nonmembers alike come together and discuss women's issues. Use this Program in a Box to market your branch to your community and potential members in a low-pressure setting.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This program has been particularly successful with recent college graduates, college faculty, young professionals, and older executives who want to stay plugged in to what the younger segment of the workforce is thinking and the issues that are important to them.

PROGRAM FORMAT

Cocktails and Convos is an open-attendance happy hour held at a different bar or restaurant every month. It is recommended that you hold the event regularly, as this encourages an increase in attendees.

TIME CONSIDERATIONS

Time frame: A weeknight (Tuesday or Wednesday are typically best) for two hours

Time line: The date and location should be determined at least six weeks in advance. We recommend you always have three months' worth of events scheduled in advance.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Staff: One volunteer to secure the location, two or three to promote the event, and as many as possible to be on hand the evening of the event

Space: A local bar or restaurant convenient to public transportation and in the business section of town

Advertising: The branch should get the word out through its channels, including e-mail, Facebook, and flyers. Consider using free, electronic invitation websites like [Eventbrite](#) to send event info out to friends and contacts. How successful your event will be is dependent upon how many Listservs and networks are distributing your invitation.

Handouts: AAUW membership brochures and a schedule of upcoming Cocktails and Convos events

Budget considerations: There are none! This event is free to attendees and costs your branch absolutely nothing.

BENEFITS TO YOUR STATE, BRANCH, OR COMMUNITY

- Offers an opportunity to recruit prospective members in an environment that's not intimidating
- Allows members of the community to learn about AAUW and become involved in whatever manner they choose
- Creates great connections with like-minded organizations and companies

PROGRAM DETAILS

COCKTAILS AND CONVOS

Typically, a branch hosts the program in a local bar or restaurant during happy hour. The program may take many forms, but the idea is to follow the motto “no pressure, no PowerPoints” and incorporate one or more of the following components:

- A special guest who gives a brief talk (five to 10 minutes maximum) and then answers attendees’ questions. Past guests have discussed
 - Women’s roles as contributors to new media, particularly the blogosphere
 - Woman-owned, American small businesses selling crafts produced by women in developing nations
 - A woman entrepreneur’s consulting work with Fortune 500 companies to advance women to the C-suites
 - The ins and outs of creating your own blog
- An opportunity for networking
- Personalized food and drink specials
 - For example, one happy hour featured a beverage called the Equalizer, concocted by the bartender specifically for the event.
- A co-host
 - If there are other organizations in the community with which the branch wants to partner, this is a low-pressure environment where the two organizations can come together. By including a co-host, you also increase the attendance at your event.
- Door prizes
 - Instead of having a sign-in sheet, attendees can put their business cards into a bowl for a door prize, and the branch members can use the business card information to assemble an e-mail list for future events. The door prizes are donated by area businesses that are interested in reaching new clientele. [Watch this short clip](#) to see AAUW staff requesting a door prize donation from a local merchant.
- A short video screening
 - For example, AAUW national unveiled the [Equal Pay Day flash mob video](#) at Cocktails and Convos in Washington, D.C., in April 2011.

SELECTING THE RIGHT DATE

The best day to hold this event is during happy hour on a Monday or Tuesday, when business would otherwise be slow for a bar or restaurant. You’ll also attract more attendees if your event is not held on a weekend, when other events compete for attendees’ time. We suggest your event begin between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. and end between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. It should ideally last about two hours, and you’ll frequently find that people stay afterward and continue the conversation. We also suggest you stick to the same day of the week month after month. For example, if you schedule your events for the second Tuesday of every month, people will come to expect it and keep that day free on their calendars.

SELECTING THE RIGHT VENUE

You could hold Cocktails and Convos at the same place every month, but we recommend that you change locations. This way, you'll attract different demographics, particularly in a large town where different areas often have a preponderance of a certain type of employer. For example, in Washington, D.C., Capitol Hill has lobbyists and congressional staffers, while Connecticut Avenue attracts lawyers, paralegals, and law firm staff. Most importantly, your location must be near public transportation or have plenty of free parking! It also makes sense to book three or more venues in advance so you can use the night of your events to promote future ones!

Here is a sample script you can use when contacting possible local venues.

- “Hello, my name is Marion Talbot, and I'm with the American Association of University Women here in [name of town]. I'd like to speak to someone about having our upcoming Cocktails and Convos happy hour at your bar or restaurant.”

When they put you through to the appropriate person, reintroduce yourself and continue.

- “Every month [or whatever amount of time you've predetermined], we hold a happy hour called Cocktails and Convos. We expect around 50–75 people, and we're looking for popular bars and restaurants where we can gather. We do all the advertising, so all you have to do is provide the space. Would you be interested in hosting us on [the date you have in mind]?”

There is no reason you need to pay a bar or restaurant to hold the event there. That's why Cocktails and Convos makes sense for the parties involved. Your branch needs a space to gather people, and the bar or restaurant wants clientele on a slow night. Infrequently, someone will misunderstand and think you are trying to “book” the restaurant. Just explain that you aren't paying any reservation fees or catering minimums. All you are doing is bringing approximately 50–75 people to their establishment on a slow night. It is business they would not have had! Should you experience an inordinate amount of difficulty in procuring a free venue, please do not hesitate to contact us at marketing@aauw.org, and we'll be happy to assist you via conference call.

OBTAINING DOOR PRIZES

Door prizes add to the fun and help increase the number of attendees, which is the ultimate goal. Contact local merchants such as boutiques, salons, manicurists, flower shops, or restaurants that would be interested in increasing their clientele. Tell them that in addition to on-site exposure, you will add their name to promotional materials. [Watch this short video](#) to see an AAUW staffer asking for door prize donations.

PUBLICIZING YOUR EVENT

There are many ways to let potential attendees know about your event. You are limited only by your creativity. Here are some of the more tried and true methods.

1. Events section of your local paper—Every local paper has a calendar where organizations can post upcoming events that are of interest to the local community. Most papers list their time and format requirements, along with contact information, in that section. For others, you might have to call the paper and inquire.
2. Flyers—There's still much to be said for the trusty flyer displayed in your community. Some great spots are libraries, campuses, supermarkets, coffee shops, or carwashes. If you have a large employer in town, they might let you post a flyer on their lunchroom wall.

3. Listservs—If you are unfamiliar with creating an e-mail group, [watch this video](#) for information on how to get started. As you create a Listserv for Cocktails and Convos, inevitably someone on your list will be sending your messages out via other Listservs. Even if you have only two people on your own list, your message could end up going out to 1,000 people. Whether you call it pyramid marketing or going viral, the end result is the same: more people learning about your event.
4. Local radio station—Many radio stations will play a notice about an upcoming event during their public service announcement time slot. Contact your local radio station to see what they require in order to read an event announcement.
5. Word of mouth—Ask people you know to spread the word! This is the most basic of all ways to bump up attendance, and yet many groups think that everyone will automatically do this, so they don't ask. Don't make that error. Make sure everyone you know is spreading the word.

TIPS FOR THE DAY OF YOUR EVENT

You've done the preparation, now it's the day of your event.

1. Have greeters at the venue about half an hour before your announced start time. You can arrange the glass bowl to collect business cards for the door prize drawing and put up signs in the windows that indicate it's Cocktails and Convos night. Visit the [Program-in-a-Box tool kit](#) to download a template to create your own signs with our event logo.
2. Thank guests as they arrive and point them toward the area where you'll be gathering. Invite them to drop in a card for the door prize drawing.
3. About a half hour into your program, have your branch president move toward the center of the group for a very brief speech. It should do the following:
 - Welcome and thank attendees
 - Give the name of the branch president and briefly explain what AAUW does
 - Introduce Cocktails and Convos as a forum for women to talk about the issues of the day that affect them
 - Transition into the topic by saying that to give today's conversation a spin, we'd like to introduce today's speaker, [insert name], who will be talking about [insert area of expertise]
4. After the speaker finishes a very short presentation (no more than 10 minutes), have branch members move from group to group to help foster conversation and mention substantive things AAUW is doing to help the issue being addressed.
5. Ten minutes before the end, draw names for the door prize and remind everyone of the next Cocktails and Convos dates and locations.
6. After the event, add the names and contact info from your business card bowl to your Cocktails and Convos Listserv.

INCORPORATE MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

Membership matters! Help grow the AAUW community by inviting prospective members to your event and encouraging them to join AAUW. Visit the [membership campaign website](#) to learn more.

If your event involves college and university faculty or students, invite schools that are not yet AAUW college/university partner members to join AAUW and offer their students the benefits that go with AAUW membership. All students attending a C/U partner member institution are eligible to join AAUW for free as e-student affiliates. For more information, visit the AAUW college/university partner member [recruitment web page](#).

TOOLS

COCKTAILS AND CONVOS

COCKTAILS AND CONVOS TOOLS

- [Sign template](#) that you can edit with your event information

PROGRAM-IN-A-BOX TOOL KIT

The tool kit includes forms, checklists, and templates that you can modify and adapt for your program or event. The following might be useful for this program:

- Event planning checklist
- Photograph release form
- Sample press release
- Sample time line

MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT TOOLS

- [Individual members](#)
- [AAUW college/university partner members](#)

CONTACTS

- For questions or information about this Program in a Box, call Connect2AAUW at 202/785-3325 or e-mail connect@aauw.org.