

Understanding AAUW's STRATEGIC PROCESS

At the 2007 Association convention in Phoenix, AAUW members will be voting on a series of proposals and bylaws changes as part of the ongoing AAUW Strategic Process. Find out what the strategic process is all about, what exactly is being proposed, and what these changes will mean to you.

Like a world-class athlete, an accomplished musician, a talented executive, or any other highly productive individual, most successful organizations have experienced times of peak performance, times when they were at their very best. Through diligence, determination, and hard work, AAUW has enjoyed many such periods of heightened effectiveness. When we look around us at the world today, we can take pride in knowing that AAUW has been an integral part of the positive social changes that have occurred since our founding 125 years ago. But AAUW members also know that equity remains an issue for women today, and much work is yet to be done. To fulfill our mission of advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research, we must persistently strive to be at our very best.

Inevitably, over the course of a long history, most organizations will endure periods when procedural problems, staffing, and other internal issues as well as financial pressures, current events, and other circumstances combine to create a time of weaker performance. In recent years, AAUW members and staff have observed this kind of organizational ineffectiveness in both the Association and the Educational Foundation. Pre-

vious attempts to address this issue and its various symptoms have focused on short-term solutions instead of addressing the underlying causes.

Goals of the Strategic Process

In spring 2005, the boards of the Association and the Educational Foundation decided to meet these challenges head-on. Together, they formed a team of board members, staff, and AAUW members to take stock of our organization, identify the issues and structures that hinder our effectiveness, and outline possible solutions to these problems.

The overarching goal of this initiative, known as the AAUW Strategic Process, is to synchronize AAUW's mission, vision, programs, research, public policy, fellowships and grants, legal advocacy, and membership with the needs of the girls and women we seek to serve. In other words, we aim first to define AAUW's desired future and then to align our programs, outreach, and structures to realize that future.

At the beginning of the strategic process, team members planned and implemented a series of assessment measures that asked AAUW members and select external stakeholders to

- evaluate the structures of and interactions between the Association and the Educational Foundation,
- determine the effect of those structures and interactions on the ability of both entities to achieve their missions, and
- provide suggestions about how AAUW can meet the needs of girls and women in the light of our nation's rapidly changing demographics.

To carry out this initiative, the team collected the ideas and opinions of more than 11,000 individuals, mostly members. The process included extensive interviews, discussions, online dialogues, meetings and other gatherings, and surveys, as well as the 2005 Every Member Poll. Members-at-large, members in branches and states throughout the country, board and committee members, students, college and university partners, scholarship and grant recipients, donors, program partners, and other stakeholders participated.

By including as many participants as possible in a wide variety of forums, the

strategic process team sought to gather both an accurate view of AAUW and a consensus on how best to move the organization into the future. In short, the team hoped to get a firm idea of where we are today and where members would like us to be tomorrow.

Strategic Process Findings

In October 2006, after compiling all the data collected in the self-assessment portion of the strategic process, the boards of the Association and the Educational Foundation released a summary of the findings. This report provides a clear picture of AAUW members' core organizational values, as well as the issues that members believe require our immediate attention.

Core Values

In response to the evaluation process, AAUW members confirmed that education, gender equity, advocacy, and community involvement are the issues that are most important to us. Specifically, members said that the following goals should continue to be at the heart of our decision-making and program initiatives:

- We will be powerful advocates of equity for women.
- We will be visible philanthropists supporting women's education.
- We will be leaders in gender equity research.

Core Strategic Issues

Participants in the strategic process evaluation consistently identified several key issues that impede our ability to effectively implement our mission. These include

- Mission clarity. Confusion about our mission makes it hard for us to articulate who we are and what we

do and also negatively affects member recruitment and retention.

- Program alignment. Because programs and staff are separated between the Association and the Educational Foundation, critical resources are not aligned for maximum mission effect and target audience relevance.
- Response to changing member demographics. Many members and donors are aging: 72 percent of members are age 60 and older, only 3 percent are age 40 and younger, and only 8 percent are women of color. Our program development, mission fulfillment, financial stability, organizational credibility, and future viability all depend on our ability to attract and retain members who reflect the demographics of the U.S. today.
- Financial stability. Both the Association and the Educational Foundation depend on member dues and donations, yet our membership is declining at an annual rate of 5.7 percent. In spite of a dramatic staff reduction and program cutbacks, the financial climate remains depressed, and our ability to serve girls and women and fulfill our mission is compromised.
- Governance infrastructure. Our organizational structures are complex, cumbersome, and often redundant, leading to inefficiency, wasted resources, and a focus on governance over mission. Because board memberships turn over every two years, continuity and experience are often lost; in addition, useful external perspectives are not present on the boards.

In addition to these target areas, members said that they want AAUW

to focus on a number of specific issues. Among many other suggestions, these include

- using technology effectively to encourage cooperative relationships and reach a larger audience;
- promoting an increased presence of girls and women in the science, technology, engineering, and math fields;
- offering relevant programming and membership for young women starting careers, mid-life women seeking basic and advanced degrees, women advancing in professional and nontraditional disciplines, and senior women returning to campuses seeking knowledge to make a difference in the world; and
- using our advocacy, philanthropy, and research to target backsliding in women's rights issues at the local, state, and national levels.

AAUW's Response to Members' Recommendations

As a result of the consensus by members on AAUW's core values, the boards of the Association and the Educational Foundation have already adopted a new shared mission statement:

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

Measures are also already under way to address the core strategic issues that members identified. Five task forces have been created: Vision, Membership, Organizational Structure and Governance, Internal Communications/Roll Out, and Due Diligence. These groups will be focusing on ways to put members' recommendations into action. As they begin their work to revitalize AAUW, the task forces will continue to look to

the membership for guidance, creative suggestions, and support.

Transforming AAUW's cumbersome organizational structure is a vital step, because a streamlined governance structure will be able to implement the other changes more quickly and efficiently. The Bylaws Committee has drawn up a series of proposals and bylaws amendments to address these structural changes. The proposals and amendments, which will be voted on at the convention, include the following member recommendations:

- transferring the assets and activities of the Association and the Educational Foundation into a single entity,
- providing for a smooth transition among boards and programs,
- amending current procedures to allow for enhanced member participation and voting between conventions, and
- establishing a stronger nominating committee to enhance recruitment of candidates for office.

The Next Steps


Once these structural changes are approved, AAUW's leaders will begin to move the organization effectively and efficiently into the future. The five task forces already in place will recommend action to align the policies and practices of AAUW with the priorities that members have identified through the strategic process. A positive vote on the structural changes at the convention will give the joint boards a mandate for change, with the recommendations of the task forces to guide them. As always, members' ideas and opinions will be an important part of the ongoing process. During this critical time, members may participate through discussions at the state and branch levels, visits to the AAUW website, and, especially, attendance at state and national conventions.

Get the Latest Information

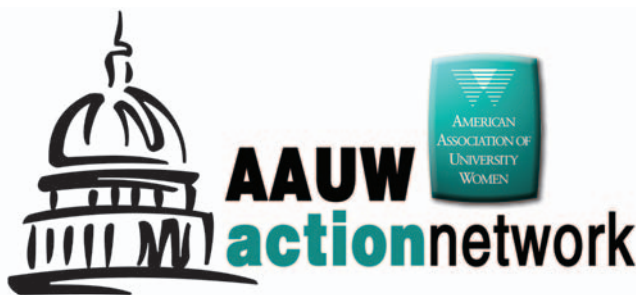
Throughout this exciting and challenging process of revitalizing AAUW, members can get the latest information on the AAUW website. The Strategic Process page, available from the AAUW

home page, currently contains the following information:

- a chart that provides an overview of the proposed bylaws changes
- the proposed bylaws amendments
- the Strategic Process—Joint Boards' Report (Oct. 31, 2006)
- "Legacy, Vision, Mission"—an *AAUW Outlook* magazine article
- Frequently Asked Questions and how to submit new questions
- the strategic planning archive for further background and details

This information is updated frequently. Please bookmark the page and check back often for the most current news and information about the AAUW Strategic Process. 

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