

## Facilitating a Group Discussion or Town Hall on Open Membership

The AAUW membership will vote on eliminating the degree requirement as part of the Spring 2021 vote. There are passionate members on both sides of this issue and branches and states are encouraged to plan meetings to promote dialogue on open membership.

There are a few formats you may wish to consider when planning your event:

- **Branch meeting:** Dedicate significant time at a branch meeting (or an entire branch meeting) to discussing open membership. Read the Board of Directors and Racial and Social Justice Working Group statements and show Malinda Gaul's video from [the Open Membership Toolkit](#). Members can be asked to be recognized at the meeting to make a statement in support or in opposition of the proposed changes.
- **Town hall:** A town hall format allows time for discussion as one large group or in smaller breakout groups. Smaller breakout groups (~5ppl each) can be useful to have more in-depth discussions on open membership. Many online platforms like Zoom have breakout room features with how-to guides on their websites. If you do not have access to breakout rooms, you could also schedule separate smaller group discussions. Tips for facilitation and framing questions follow.
- **Hybrid:** If your branch meeting is small, you may want to schedule time for group discussion at that meeting.

## Key Elements of Effective Meetings

Regardless of the format of your meeting, as you plan for your discussion aim for the members to feel these three things when the meeting adjourns:

1. **The meeting was consequential.** Make sure you have enough time to discuss the issue, keeping focus on the future and not what was done in the past.
2. **I mattered.** Be aware of who is contributing to the discussion and ensure there is adequate time and space for input from all who want to participate.
3. **I know what happens next.** Talk through the calendar so participants know when and how to comment and vote.

Key dates:

Comment Period: January 11 – February 5, 2021 via this [link](#)

Voting Period: April 7 – May 17, 2021

How to vote:

All eligible voters are encouraged to vote online. A link to voting (as well as many reminders) will be sent via email to all eligible voters beginning on April 7, 2021. All voters without a valid email on file with the national office will be sent a reminder via snail mail. Paper ballots can be requested from [connect@aauw.org](mailto:connect@aauw.org) on or before April 16, 2021. Paper ballots must be postmarked by April 30, 2021.

## Your Role as Facilitator

Here's what you should do to make sure the meeting or town hall is consequential, efficient, and inclusive:

1. **Be prepared.** Create an agenda and assign roles to volunteers if needed. If there is a group discussion, have the facilitator review the framing questions below and [talking points](#) prior to the discussion.
2. **Be clear in the agenda and purpose of the meeting.** If your format includes discussion, consider sending some framing questions below to participants ahead of time so that attendees are prepared.
3. **Engage participants in meaningful ways.** Be aware of who is contributing to conversations and who is not and explore ways to invite the quiet folks to share their thoughts. You may find that changing the format — for example, having small groups discuss into breakout rooms — will allow space for all voices to be heard. The chat feature can also be used to keep track of outstanding comments or questions.
4. **Keep the group on track.** If the discussion veers off course to other topics, remind participants of the purpose of the meeting. If you think the discussion will be contentious, you may want to set [ground rules](#) at the beginning.

## Discussion Framing Questions

- What does AAUW mean to you and how has that changed over time?
- How has our community and our world changed over the last few years? How can/should AAUW adapt or respond to these changes?
- AAUW's mission is to advance equity. How does keeping the membership requirement help us do this work?
- What work is our branch/state doing to empower *all* women? Does the membership requirement aid or hinder our ability to empower *all* women?

- Show the testimonials\* and lead a discussion: What do you think of the views presented in the testimonials?
- If you have several participants you know are on opposite sides of the issue and can engage in respectful discussion, ask them to give their opinions in a point-counterpoint format.

\*Malinda Gaul's video is available on the [Open Membership Toolkit](#). Additional testimonials will be available in February.