

# Leading with Values: A Nonpartisan Playbook for AAUW Affiliates and Branches

## THE AAUW PROGRAM

This overview is for informational purposes only and is not legal advice. Contact the AAUW Policy & Member Advocacy team at [Policy@aauw.org](mailto:Policy@aauw.org) for specific questions.

AAUW has always been political — we work to change policies and systems so women and girls can thrive. Over the decades, that's meant advancing Title IX protections, pay equity laws, college affordability, and support for student parents.

Being political, however, is not the same as being partisan. Partisanship means supporting or opposing candidates or political parties. Our strength comes from an issues-first approach that welcomes people across the political spectrum.

## AAUW's Nonpartisan Standard

While most AAUW affiliates and branches are 501(c)(4) organizations, regardless of affiliates' tax status, AAUW's Board Policies require that all AAUW-branded activities and communications — at every level — be conducted in a nonpartisan manner. That means:

- We advocate for policies and impacts, not for or against candidates or parties.
- No AAUW social post, email, newsletter, website, flyer, or event remark may support or oppose a candidate or political party.
- Members may engage personally in election campaign activities as private citizens, but may not use AAUW titles, logos, mailing lists, or resources in ways that imply an AAUW endorsement.
- When representing AAUW, follow AAUW's civility expectations. Focus on issues and impact, not personal attacks.

**Bottom line:** Keep the focus on issues, facts, and civic access. That's how we build power and make change.

## Rules of the Road

1. **Talk issues, not candidates.** Use AAUW's Public Policy Principles & Priorities as your compass.
2. **Use party-neutral language.** Avoid campaign slogans, partisan hashtags, or candidate imagery.
3. **Separate roles.** Personal campaign activity is great — just not on AAUW time, channels, or platforms.





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4. **Engage public officials in office.** If you invite a public official to an event in their official capacity, keep the agenda focused on their duties and policy — not the election.
5. **If candidates are invited (or the event could be seen as a campaign forum):** Use clear, written criteria and offer comparable opportunities (invitation, time, questions, and visibility) to all invited candidates.
6. **Ballot measures = policy.** Educating and advocating for ballot measures — including taking a “vote yes/no” position — is allowed and counts as lobbying; track time/expenses and follow state rules.
7. **Document your neutrality.** Save invitations, criteria, and agendas that show even-handed planning.

## Try language like this:

It’s always appropriate to say: “We don’t endorse candidates, but we care deeply about [issue]. Here’s how our community is affected and how to get involved.”

## How to Engage

### Demonstrations, Rallies, and Public Events

#### You can:

- Participate in issue-focused public events that align with AAUW’s mission (e.g., pay equity, Title IX, campus child care, student debt and affordability).
- Represent AAUW with a respectful, solutions-focused tone — center the policy, the impact, and what change is needed.
- Use signs and messaging that name the issue and the outcome (e.g., “Fund Campus Child Care,” “Protect Title IX,” “Fair Pay Now”), not candidates or parties.

#### Try language like this:

- “This is about the impact on students, families, and communities, not personalities.”
- “AAUW’s position is clear: we support policies that expand opportunity and remove barriers for women and girls.”

#### Avoid:

- Personal insults, name-calling, or character attacks on public officials — even if you strongly disagree.
- Any language, imagery, or messaging that looks like supporting or opposing a candidate or party (including campaign slogans/hashtags).
- Escalating conflict or engaging in confrontations while representing AAUW — keep interactions calm, factual, and focused on the issue.



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### Working with Elected Officials

#### You can:

- Meet with officials about policy in their roles as public servants.
- Invite officials to speak about topics related to their duties/expertise (e.g., implementing a new higher education grant program).
- Thank an elected official for a policy action (e.g., cosponsoring a bill) without mentioning an election.

#### Try language like this:

- “We appreciate Senator Rivera’s work on student parent support and welcome collaboration with all offices to advance student success.”

#### Avoid:

- Any reference to a campaign or reelection or sharing campaign materials at AAUW events.
- Any political fundraising.

### Ongoing Civic Engagement

#### You can:

- Host issue-focused events with a clear policy focus — for example: “What Title IX changes mean locally,” “Pay equity 101 for our community,” or “Student parents and campus child care: what’s needed now.”
- Attend school board, city council, and campus/governing meetings to learn what’s happening and spot opportunities to engage.
- Meet with elected officials and staff to share AAUW’s priorities, local impact, and clear policy asks — in a way that’s open to all offices.
- Build relationships with community partners year-round — especially organizations rooted in the communities most impacted — so future civic engagement (including voter education) is grounded in trust and shared understanding.

#### Try language like this:

- “We’re here to learn and to share what AAUW supports and why it matters locally.”
- “AAUW works with offices of all parties on policies that expand opportunity — we’d like to be a resource.”
- “Democracy is a year-round practice — stay registered, stay informed, and stay engaged.”



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## Avoid:

- Turning issue events into campaign-style messaging or candidate commentary.
- Using public meetings to vent about individuals — keep remarks on policy, impact, and solutions.
- Showing up only when you need something — sustained engagement and partnership build credibility over time.

## Voter Education

### You can:

- Provide factual voting information — key dates, how and where to register, ID/mail/ballot rules, and options for language access or disability accommodations.
- Share nonpartisan voter resources and sample ballots from trusted, official sources.
- Encourage voters to check their registration and make a plan to vote — in a way that's factual, non-editorial, and available to everyone.

### Try language like this:

- “Check your registration and make a plan to vote.”
- “Find your polling place and ballot information at your local election office.”

## Avoid:

- Editorializing about candidates, parties, or outcomes — or presenting information in a way that looks like it favors one side.
- Targeting reminders to favor or disadvantage any candidate or party.
- Using campaign slogans/hashtags or campaign-style messaging.

## Voter Registration

### You can:

- Host voter registration tables at community events and campuses throughout the year.
- Provide clear, neutral help on how to register and meet deadlines (and where to go for official information).
- Keep registration separate from issue advocacy materials so the registration effort stays unmistakably nonpartisan.

### Try language like this:

- “Want to register to vote or update your registration today?”
- “We can help you find the right form and confirm the deadline for your state.”

## Avoid:

- Targeting registration outreach to benefit or disadvantage any candidate or party.
- Offering incentives to vote.



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## Social Media & Communications

### You can:

- Post neutral voter information and issue education grounded in AAUW research and priorities.
- Announce candidate-neutral civic events (e.g., “All qualified candidates were invited to discuss higher education policy trends”).

### Try language like this:

- “We don’t endorse candidates. We do believe in informed participation. Check your registration and learn about the issues shaping higher education.”
- “Join us for a community conversation on college affordability. This event is nonpartisan and open to all.”

### Avoid:

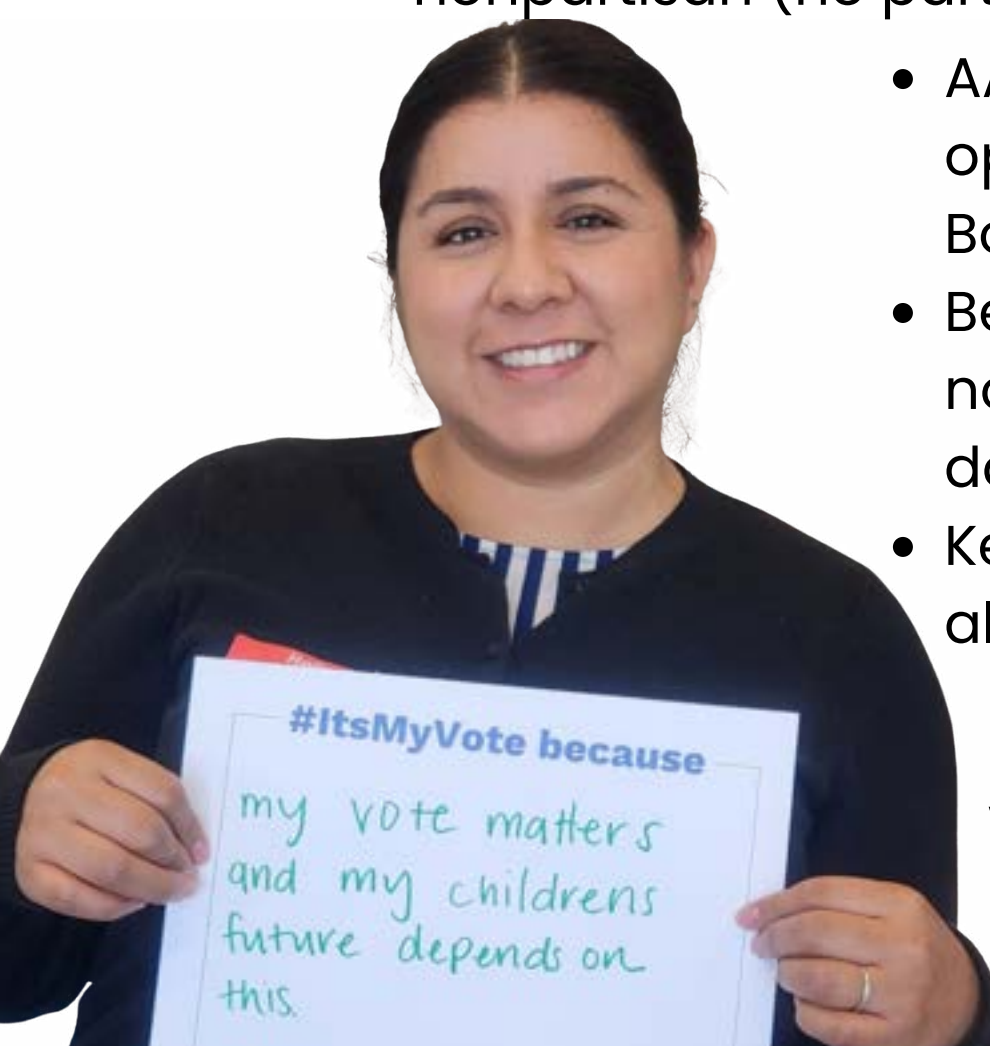
- Any post, caption, graphic, or link that supports or opposes a candidate or party (including shares that imply support).
- Ratings/scorecards of candidates, endorsements, or fundraising appeals for campaigns.

## Election Season: Special Guidance

Election years add extra scrutiny. Keep the focus on issues and civic access.

- **Forums & education events:** If you host issue discussions close to an election, keep them candidate-neutral (no endorsements, no ratings, no unequal promotion).
- **Public thanks and timing:** Consider the optics of praising an official immediately before an election; keep it strictly about policy or wait until after Election Day.
- **Nonpartisan races:** Some local races — often including school boards — are legally nonpartisan (no party labels on the ballot).
  - AAUW affiliates that are 501(c)(4) organizations *may* endorse or oppose candidates in nonpartisan races if consistent with AAUW Board Policies and any state/local rules.
  - Before endorsing, confirm that the race is legally designated as nonpartisan in your jurisdiction, adopt neutral, written criteria, and document a fair process.
  - Keep all communications focused on qualifications and issue alignment, not party cues.

If you’re uncertain whether a race is legally nonpartisan, check with your local election authority.



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## Ask Before You Act

- What is our goal — to inform, register voters, or discuss policy options, for example — and is that goal clear in our materials?
- Does all of our language stay neutral — with no campaign slogans, partisan hashtags, candidate imagery, or links to campaign sites?
- If public officials are involved, is the agenda focused solely on their official duties and policy, with no reference to campaigns or elections?
- If we're looking at a nonpartisan race, have we confirmed it's legally designated nonpartisan, adopted written neutral criteria, and documented our process?
- If we're addressing a ballot measure, are we tracking time and expenses as lobbying and following all applicable state rules?
- Do our invitations, agendas, and promotion reflect even-handed outreach (e.g., comparable opportunities, access, and visibility for all)?

## Where to Learn More

- **AAUW Board Policies** — Standards for nonpartisan conduct across all AAUW entities.
- **AAUW Civility Matters** — Responsibilities of AAUW members.
- **AAUW Public Policy Principles & Priorities** — Policy principles and biennial action priorities that guide AAUW advocacy.
- **Alliance for Justice (Bolder Advocacy) Resource Library** — Practical guidance on nonpartisan advocacy and state lobbying laws.
  - The Advocacy Playbook for Gender & Reproductive Justice
  - The Advocacy Playbook for Democracy & Voting Rights
  - The Advocacy Playbook for Racial Justice & Immigrant Rights
- **Nonprofit VOTE** — Toolkits on nonpartisan voter engagement, election season FAQs, and planning guides.
  - Nonpartisan Advocacy Planning Tool

**Reminder:** AAUW's credibility — and impact — grow when we stay issues-first and nonpartisan. Keep campaigns out of AAUW channels, keep the public informed, and keep the focus on solutions that help women and girls thrive.

For additional resources and to join the AAUW Action Network, visit [www.aauw.org/act](http://www.aauw.org/act).



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