



Request for Proposals

Strategic Portfolio Assessment & Future Investment Strategy for AAUW Fellowships and Grants

1. Background

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy. A central pillar of this mission is its fellowships and grants, which provide critical support to women pursuing higher education, conducting research, and advancing their careers. The program also invests in select organizations and educational institutions that are strengthening the STEM pipeline for girls and women pursuing advanced study.

As AAUW looks to the future, the organization seeks to evaluate how its fellowships and grants portfolio can most effectively increase women's representation in fields and professions where they remain underrepresented – and where their full participation is essential to shaping an equitable and sustainable future. This strategic assessment will guide future program design, funding priorities, and donor engagement strategies to maximize impact.

2. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this engagement is to provide data-driven, actionable recommendations that will guide the future direction of AAUW's fellowships and grants program.

Specifically, the consultant will:

1. Identify 3-5 high-impact opportunity areas in both graduate disciplines and professional fields where AAUW funding can meaningfully increase women's representation, with particular attention to fields that are high-growth, high-influence, or critical to addressing major societal challenges.
2. Assess alignment between AAUW's fellowships and grants programming and current/future higher education and workforce and trends, including how rapid technological, economic and social shifts are reshaping which fields most need women's leadership and participation.
3. Analyze donor interest trends in higher education and gender equity to identify overlap with strategic opportunity areas.

4. Assess the policy and access landscape in priority fields, flagging current or emerging conditions – such as graduate financing constraints, program closures, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) restrictions, Title IX or civil rights shifts, or institutional capacity concerns – that could affect women’s ability to enter, persist in, or advance through recommended fields, and that may create risk or reinforce the need for philanthropic investment.
5. Recommend programmatic priorities, refinements, or new models that position AAUW for measurable long-term impact.

3. Scope of Work

The consultant will conduct a comprehensive strategic assessment including, but not limited to, the components outlined below.

A. Landscape and Data Analysis

- Analyze national data on women’s representation across graduate degrees and professional career fields (e.g., STEM subfields, economics, public policy, AI, business, climate science, etc.) using an intersectional framework that examines variation by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic location and disability status to identify graduate disciplines and professional career fields where:
 - Gender disparities are persistent or widening, particularly where the gap is further compounded by race/ethnicity, resulting in acute underrepresentation for specific communities of women;
 - The projected growth, influence, or social significance of these disciplines and professional career fields elevates the strategic importance of women's participation to address societal, technological, or economic challenges; and
 - Strategic philanthropic investment can produce measurable change
- Review and evaluate existing data on graduate degree programs, certificate programs, professional education and other workforce preparation pathways that prepare individuals for careers in the identified priority fields. Identify the specific academic disciplines, programs of study, credentials and training pathways where women are underrepresented relative to workforce needs and assess which educational pathways present the strongest opportunities for strategic philanthropic investment to increase women’s representation in those professions.

B. Policy & Access Landscape

- Conduct a targeted scan of current and emerging policy and structural conditions that may affect women's ability to access, persist in, or advance through the priority fields identified in Section A. This should not constitute a full policy analysis, but should flag relevant pressures such as:
 - Affordability and graduate financing trends
 - Restrictions on DEI programs or practices at the institutional, state or federal level
 - Civil rights and Title IX developments affecting campus climate and institutional support
 - Program closures or enrollment contractions in key fields
 - Institutional capacity concerns affecting mentorship, research infrastructure or career pathways

C. Portfolio Assessment

- Evaluate alignment between AAUW's current fellowships and grants programming and areas of greatest need and impact, as determined in the landscape and data analysis.

D. Donor and Philanthropic Market Analysis

- Assess trends in current and prospective, individual and institutional donor interest related to:
 - Higher education
 - Gender equity, and diversity, equity and inclusion more broadly
 - Workforce development
 - Specific high-growth or high-visibility fields
- Identify areas where AAUW's strategic opportunity zones overlap with strong or growing current and prospective donor interests.
- Identify positioning opportunities with supporting rationale and implications for fundraising strategy and messaging to strengthen case-making.

E. Strategic Recommendations

Provide clear, prioritized recommendations that identify graduate disciplines, educational pathways and professional career fields that represent the strongest opportunities for future AAUW investment. Recommendations should identify not only priority career fields, but also the specific graduate degree programs, certificate programs, professional training pathways that prepare women for those careers.

Recommendations should be prioritized according to the following criteria, listed in order of weight:

- Degree of women's underrepresentation — graduate disciplines, educational pathways, and professional career fields where gender disparities are significant, persistent, or worsening, particularly where disparities are compounded by race/ethnicity or other intersecting factors, and where women's participation is critically needed to address major societal, technological, or economic challenges
- Potential for measurable impact — the extent to which strategic philanthropic investment by AAUW can demonstrably increase women's participation and advancement, including the strength of evidence linking fellowship support to educational attainment, career entry and long-term professional success.
- Strength of educational pathway — the extent to which identifiable graduate degree programs, certificate programs, or professional training pathways serve as meaningful entry points into priority career fields and present actionable opportunities for philanthropic investment.
- Donor interest and fundraising potential — fields and educational pathways where strong or growing donor enthusiasm creates compelling opportunities to expand AAUW's investment and build upon a sustainable funding base.

Consultants should be explicit about how these criteria were applied and should surface trade-offs where recommendations score differently across them. For example, where donor interest is high, but AAUW's marginal impact may be limited, or where underrepresentation is acute, but philanthropic leverage appears limited.

Recommendations should also:

- Identify the specific graduate disciplines, degree programs, certificate programs, or professional training pathways where AAUW should deepen or expand investment and explain how these educational pathways align with priority professional career fields, projected workforce needs, and AAUW's mission.
- Recommend whether AAUW should shift investment towards particular career stages, learner populations, or target specific geographies or institution types, with rationale grounded in data, projected impact and mission alignment.
- Address implications for program design, eligibility criteria, award structure, outreach strategy and evaluation metrics.
- Recommend how intersecting barriers experienced by different communities of women should inform program strategy — including whether distinct outreach approaches, award structures, support models, or impact metrics are warranted to reach and serve women facing compounded disadvantages.
- Highlight emerging opportunities created by changes in higher education, workforce trends, technology, philanthropy and the policy landscape, and benchmark peer organizations' approaches where relevant to inform AAUW's long term investment strategy.

4. Deliverables

The consultant will provide:

A. An Interim Findings Deck

A summary of key data trends and strategic opportunity areas, including initial findings from the policy and access landscape scan. Identification of overlap between high-impact areas and donor interest in higher education and gender equity.

B. Draft Strategic Framework

A draft outline of:

- Proposed focus areas
- Program implications
- Risk assessment & trade-offs

C. Final Recommendations Report

A comprehensive report including:

- Executive summary
- Clear, prioritized recommendations
- Implementation considerations
- Risk assessment and trade-offs
- Suggested impact metrics

Deliverables should be sequenced to allow for iterative review by AAUW. The Final Recommendations Report and all associated deliverables are expected to be completed no later than March 31, 2027.

Consultants may recommend alternative or phased approaches to the scope of work that maintain the integrity of the assessment while improving cost efficiency.

5. Project Timeline

AAUW anticipates awarding a contract no later than early November, with the goal of completing the engagement and receiving all final deliverables no later than March 31, 2027.

The consultant should propose a detailed project timeline that includes key milestones, deliverable dates, stakeholder engagement activities, and opportunities for AAUW review and feedback. Consultants may recommend adjustments to sequencing or methodology that improve project quality or efficiency while meeting this overall completion target.

6. Project Budget

AAUW anticipates that most competitive proposals for this engagement will generally fall within the range of \$75,000–\$150,000, inclusive of all professional fees and expenses.

While cost is an important consideration, proposals will be evaluated based on overall value, including the proposed methodology, technical expertise, project team, and anticipated impact. Recognizing that there are multiple approaches to achieving the objectives of this engagement, AAUW welcomes proposals that identify opportunities to maximize value while preserving the integrity of the assessment. Consultants are encouraged to:

- Distinguish between core activities necessary to achieve the project objectives and supplemental activities that would enhance, but are not essential to, the final deliverables.
- Identify components of the scope of work that could be phased, reduced in scale, or offered as optional services.
- Describe any trade-offs associated with alternative approaches, including impacts on scope, methodology, timeline, budget, and anticipated outcomes.
- Recommend opportunities to improve cost efficiency while maintaining the quality and strategic value of the engagement.

Proposals outside the anticipated budget range may be considered where the consultant demonstrates that an expanded scope, enhanced methodology, or specialized expertise would provide commensurate additional value to AAUW.

7. Methodology Expectations

Proposals should outline a rigorous, equity-centered methodology that may include:

- Quantitative data analysis (E.g.: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), National Science Foundation (NSF), Bureau of Labor Statistics, etc.) Note: Where possible, data should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity and other relevant identities to illuminate intersecting disparities among women.
- Philanthropic market research and use of global benchmarking reports on gender equity
- Comparative benchmarking against peer fellowship programs
- Qualitative interviews and/or focus group discussions (e.g. with AAUW staff, funding recipients and alumnae, AAUW members etc) and stakeholder synthesis
- Review of relevant policy developments, regulatory trends, and access-related research affecting graduate education and the identified priority fields
- Scenario modeling for funding allocation impact

Consultants should demonstrate experience translating complex data into strategic, actionable program design recommendations.

8. Success Criteria

The engagement will be considered successful if AAUW receives:

- Clear, prioritized, and defensible strategic recommendations
- Concrete guidance for program evolution
- Insight into where mission impact and donor interest meaningfully intersect

Practical next steps that can inform budgeting, fundraising, and program design decisions

9. Consultant Qualifications

The ideal consultant or consultancy will demonstrate the following qualifications. Proposals should provide clear evidence of these capabilities:

- Approximately 7-10 years of professional experience conducting research, strategic analysis or advisory work related to higher education, workforce development, philanthropy or gender equity.
- Ability to conduct rigorous quantitative and qualitative research, such as secondary data analysis, stakeholder interviews or focus groups, comparative benchmarking or scenario modeling or forecasting.
- Ability to synthesize findings into clear, actionable insights and present complex analyses in accessible formats.
- Demonstrated expertise analyzing graduate education, research training pathways, or professional workforce pipelines.
- Demonstrated experience analyzing philanthropic trends, donor priorities or funding landscapes related to education, research or gender equity.
- Demonstrated ability to apply gender equity and intersectional analysis frameworks in research or program strategy.
- Experience designing, evaluating or advising fellowship, scholarship or grantmaking programs.
- Familiarity with U.S. higher education data sources and labor market datasets, such as IPEDS or Bureau of Labor Statistics.

AAUW alumnae (former fellows or grantees) are preferred.

10. Proposal Requirements & Evaluation Criteria

Proposals should include the following components. AAUW will evaluate submissions using a structured review process aligned to the criteria below.

1) Relevant Experience & Expertise (30%)

An overview of experience conducting similar strategic assessments, research or advisory work and demonstrated knowledge of higher education or workforce trends and philanthropic funding landscapes related to education, research or gender equity. Proposals may include up to 3 examples of similar projects successfully completed, accompanied by a summary of the the scope of each initiative, methodology and outcomes achieved. *This section should not exceed three pages.*

2) Technical Approach (30%)

A clear description of a proposed methodology that incorporates intersectional and equity-centered approaches, quantitative and qualitative data sources, and a plan for translating findings into actionable program recommendations. Proposals should describe how the methodology will be applied across all phases of the engagement — from data collection and analysis through to final recommendations.

Specifically, proposals should explain:

How quantitative and qualitative data will be gathered, analyzed, and integrated to identify priority fields and assess AAUW's potential for impact.

How an intersectional framework will be applied throughout the analysis, including how variation by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, disability status, immigration status, and other relevant identities will be examined where data permit.

How intersectional findings will inform the final recommendations — not only the analysis. If the consultant identifies distinct barriers facing specific communities of women, proposals should explain how those findings would shape recommendations related to focus areas, eligibility criteria, award structure, outreach approaches, and impact metrics.

A detailed project timeline and work plan should be included, identifying major phases, milestones, stakeholder engagement activities, review periods, and deliverable dates. The proposed schedule should demonstrate the consultant's ability to complete the engagement and submit all final deliverables by March 31, 2027. *This section should not exceed five pages.*

3) Qualifications & Capacity (20%)

A description of the proposed approach to staffing and delivering the engagement, including:

- The individual consultant and/or proposed team members and their roles and responsibilities;
- How each individual's experience aligns with the scope of work; and
- The approach to project management, coordination and integration of work

Proposals must include resumes for all consultants or team members who will play a significant role in executing the scope of work, including project leadership, analysis and client engagement. *This section should not exceed two pages, excluding resumes.*

4) Cost Proposal (20%)

A clear and transparent cost proposal should, at a minimum, include:

- A total proposed cost for the full engagement
- An itemized budget by major task or phase
- A description of key assumptions underlying the budget
- Identification of any optional or additional costs, as applicable

Fixed-fee proposals are preferred to support comparability across submissions. However, AAUW recognizes that alternative pricing structures may be appropriate. Such approaches will be considered if clearly explained and include a defined not-to-exceed total cost.

11. Submission Guidelines

- Submissions should be in English.
- Questions about this solicitation must be submitted to awards@aauw.org by August 21, 2026, at 11:59pm ET. Responses to all questions received will be posted on the [AAUW Careers webpage](#) by August 28, 2026.
- Applications should be emailed to awards@aauw.org with the subject line "Strategic Portfolio Assessment & Future Investment Strategy Consultancy" by September 14, 2026 at 8:00 a.m. ET.

Shortlisted applicants may be requested for an interview as part of the selection process.