

Since 1987, men have been eligible to be members of AAUW. Yet they have hardly been coming in droves seeking membership. Is the reason, as one male member observed, that "AAUW doesn't seem to really want men as members.?" When men do join, do they continue their membership?

In an effort to answer those questions, an all male sub-group of the Membership Committee, chaired by committee member David Kirkwood, put together the following thoughts on AAUW membership:

Men Joining AAUW?

You bet! We are few in number, we share a common respect for equity and we'd like to see more of us. However, just as we've found with young women, recruiting and retaining male members has proven to be a challenge. As we look forward to developing a more diverse membership, focusing on the value that an organization provides is fundamental to a successful program.

Defining and Delivering Membership Value

Branch/Association Value: Before a recruiting activity is launched, we need to be able to communicate a clear and concise view of the value that the Association and Branch provides to prospective members. Value exists in both the Work and Fun of AAUW and can take many forms including: opportunities to learn, participate, set new directions and serve. This is a good time to take stock of both the needs and aspirations of our organization.

The Work (our Mission): This is the reason why many of us joined AAUW. Have mission-oriented activities declined over the past few years? Is it becoming increasingly difficult to staff leadership and committee positions? Will it be obvious to a prospective member that the mission is being actively pursued?

One possible area of contribution for new members relates to rapid increase in the use of on-line communication versus regular mail. Basic services required for living are being increasingly delivered on-line and yet a recent AAUW survey indicates that a modest portion of the current membership is not connected. During the past 10 to 15 years, both women and men in business have had to develop technology skills. As new members, many of them can help existing members with computer setup and provide basic instruction on e-mail and internet access.

The Fun: There are many opportunities here for member couples to share in enrichment and education through program activities, outings (golf, museums, plays, etc.), and gender neutral group activities (supper, gourmet groups, etc.).

New Member Considerations: Many prospective members, men included, find it difficult to attend regularly scheduled meetings. They are generally highly scheduled, "multi-taskers" and use e-mail, blogs and chat-rooms to communicate and exchange work assignments. Branches may want to imagine how they can benefit from these new avenues for communication.

In some cases, the additional cost of dues for spouses or partners of current members may be an impediment. To avoid losing a potentially important resource, perhaps we should consider a dues reduction for a person closely related to a current member.

The process of thinking through how we define and deliver value can help us develop a consensus view of who we are, what our needs are and where we'd like to go. Now its time to go get a new member!

Making the Case for Membership

Establish credibility: AAUW has a 125 year history of driving positive societal change, but our image and brand is not as well known as we'd like. Here is the opportunity to show how proud we are of our accomplishments. Example conversations are: "Did you know: that AAUW contributed to the purchase of 1 gram of radium for Marie Curie in 1920", "AAUW was instrumental in the passage of Title IX in 1972", ..., etc.

The AAUW Online Museum (<http://www.aauw.org/museum/welcome/index.cfm>) documents those accomplishments and is a great resource for both members and non-members.

Sell the mission: "AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education and research". Men who believe that gender equity is important will join. They may understand how important AAUW has been to a mother or wife. They may wish to honor their daughters and granddaughters and view AAUW membership as a way to help them succeed.

Share our commitment to diversity: It becomes quickly obvious to potential candidates that we do not have a diverse membership. Many men have backgrounds where diversity is important to both competitive advantage and workplace success. Men need to know that they will be welcomed and can help in driving the mission with expanding membership diversity.

If you haven't read it, the "Strategic Process – Joint Boards' Report" provides background and proposed direction that confirms the need for us to develop a more diverse membership. It is available at the Member Center, AAUW Strategic Process web page.

We need their help: It is an intimidating prospect for a man to consider joining a strong women's organization. We need to feel useful, so a good way to overcome this concern is to simply put us to work. Based on the needs and aspirations discussions, there are many opportunities for men to employ their backgrounds and skills. Possible contributions include: computer/software support, program/event planning, newsletter editing, website design, financial analysis, publicity, etc. A branch may wish to consider identifying selected co-leadership positions.

Close the deal: So how persuasive have you been? Is there more information that can be provided? Would he like to talk with a member? When can you talk again?

Within AAUW, we know that we are at a crossroad. It is important that we take action to increase both the size and diversity of our membership to ensure that AAUW will remain the strong voice for equity.

This is an organization that will remain for and about women. Men can play an important role. So let's get some more men onboard, and put them to work.