

## CHAPTER SIX: EVENT PLANNING

- ◆ Issue Forums
- ◆ Candidate Forums
- ◆ Promoting Your Event
- ◆ Event Guest List

## Issue Forums

Issue forums are community dialogues on current issues on which AAUW is working. Issue forums should not last more than two hours.

### Issue forums are opportunities to:

- generate in-depth public discussion on issues;
- draw media attention to AAUW's national issue priorities;
- reach out to potential new AAUW members;
- inform women how actions in Congress affect their lives, families, and communities; and
- energize the community to spread the word to women voters by talking face-to-face, writing letters to the editor, or distributing written materials on the issue(s) discussed at the forum.

### Planning an Issue Forum

- **Decide on an audience.** Everything about the forum, including the issues, co-sponsoring organizations, speakers, location, date, and time, should be designed with the audience in mind. Examples of audiences you might consider: women of all ages, young women, elected officials and coalition partners and/or women's groups.
- **Choose a theme.** Choose one of AAUW's priority issues that has local appeal. Use AAUW materials such as *Action Alert* and *Get the Facts*, to get ideas. In addition, the Public Policy Department has developed resource kits designed to help you hold issue forums on social security reform, welfare reauthorization, or Title IX. The packets include: event timelines; checklists for organizing, outreach, and visibility; sample press releases; and relevant AAUW position papers.
- **Work in coalition.** Recruit diverse organizations in your community to co-sponsor the event.
- **Appoint a planning team.** Put together a team of interested AAUW members and coalition partners to help decide details and share workload.
- **Schedule the event at a convenient time.** Avoid business hours, religious or government holidays, dates when other community functions are scheduled.
- **Choose an accessible site for the event.** Choose a location that will attract a range of women from the community, preferably a well-known and wheelchair-accessible site such as a local school or community center with access to public transportation.



### PLANNING TIMELINE

#### 6 Weeks Before Event

Choose a theme.  
Decide on an audience.  
Appoint a planning team.  
Secure coalition partners.

#### 5 Weeks Before Event

Plan Budget.  
Invite moderator/speakers.

#### 4 Weeks Before Event

Finalize date and location.  
Finalize panel speakers.

#### 3 Weeks Before Event

Begin advertising event.  
Create media packet.  
Choose spokesperson.

#### 2 Weeks Before Event

Re-confirm speakers  
Increase audience recruitment.

#### 5 Days Before Event

Fax media advisory.  
Finalize media packets.  
Call coalition partners to assess attendance.

#### 2 Days Before Event

Make media reminder calls.

#### Day of Event

Make news release and media packet available to reporters who attend.

#### After Event

Follow up with media.  
Thank participants.  
Collect media clips.

- **Select panelists.** Choose three or four nonpartisan, credible panelists who will bring media attention to the event. Panelists should bring different backgrounds to the forum. Pick speakers varying in age, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and occupation.
- **Invite a familiar face to be a moderator.** A well-known, nonpartisan moderator who is respected in your community will generate interest in the event and give your work added credibility.
- **Plan media outreach and select a spokesperson.** Outreach to the media will help you advertise your event to the public and gain visibility for AAUW.
- **Provide membership materials.** Have AAUW membership materials available on a table with a guest list. Use the sign-in information on the guest list for future outreach and don't forget to send a copy of the list to AAUW for membership recruitment.
- **Make it easy for the media.** Generally, events that are held earlier in the day receive the most amount of media coverage. The best times are between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursdays. If you hold an event earlier than 9:00 a.m. or later than 3:00 p.m., you risk losing media attention because of start-up times and deadlines. If you hold a later event, tell reporters that evening events are important because that is when members of the community are most likely to attend. At the event, don't forget to allocate central, unobstructed space close to electrical outlets for TV camera crews and media personnel.

*While having six weeks to plan an issue forum is ideal, you can put together an urgent issue forum in much less time—a week or even a few days—if necessary.*



#### Other Event Ideas

**Host a panel discussion on an AAUW issue, and/or women in politics** – Ask women office holders at the local, county, state, and federal levels to participate in a discussion of their experiences in politics.

**Women's Debate Watch** - Televised debates, such as the presidential debates, offer an easy venue for media attention. Invite TV, newspaper, and radio reporters who would be interested in seeing how women respond to candidates' positions on issues.

**Hold a press conference on an upcoming or recent congressional vote**- Press conferences are great ways to draw public attention to AAUW priority issues under consideration in Congress. At your event, highlight why the coming vote is important to women and families and to your community, and urge your member of Congress to support or oppose the issue at hand.



## Candidate Forums

Candidate forums, like issue forums, are best if planned and held in coalition. They should be carefully managed to be fair to all candidates and last no more than two hours.

### **Candidate forums accomplish the following four goals:**

1. Allow voters to learn the candidates' positions.
2. Provide candidates an opportunity to express their positions on AAUW issues.
3. Raise awareness of AAUW and its priority issues with voters.
4. Let candidates know that AAUW issues are important to voters.

### **Inviting Candidates**

AAUW must invite all major party candidates for office and make every effort to treat them in a non-biased manner. The forum can be held only if two or more of the invited candidates agree to attend. If a candidate cancels at the last minute, a surrogate for the candidate may attend. After the forum, publicize the results and include the names of all candidates contacted.

- **Send a written request well in advance.**  
Invite candidates in writing several *months* in advance, if possible. Then call the candidates' offices and work with their schedulers to agree upon a convenient date.
- **Brief the candidates and their staff.**  
Send candidates AAUW position papers, fact sheets, and the AAUW public policy program brochure. Ask candidates to limit their remarks to three or four specified issues.
- **Have a moderator to manage the forum.**  
The moderator opens the forum by introducing the candidates and issues to be discussed. The candidates then give brief opening statements. The remainder of the forum should be open for questions from the audience. Ask members of AAUW or co-sponsoring organizations to be prepared to ask tough questions.
- **Thank all candidates and the moderator.**  
Thank the candidates with letters or phone calls to promote a good relationship. Be certain to send a letter of appreciation to the moderator.

### **Legal Guidelines**

All election activities carried out in AAUW's name must adhere to the following rules:

#### **DO**

- Conduct election-related activities that do not expressly advocate the election or defeat of any clearly identified candidate or political party.
- Gather and publicize information about a candidate's position on issues.
- Invite all major party candidates running for office to the forum.

#### **DO NOT**

- Endorse candidates in ANY partisan election.
- Coordinate election-related activities with any candidate, campaign, or partisan organization.

*See chapter eight  
for more  
information on  
legal guidelines for  
working in  
coalition on Voter  
education and  
GOTV activities.*



## Promoting Your Event

### Generating an Audience

- **Inform AAUW members of your event and recruit them to attend.** Invite neighboring branches to your event. Spread the word early for branch public policy chairs to recruit members to attend.
- **Send invitations to coalition partners and other important guests.** Invite as many groups as possible to participate, even if they did not help plan the event. A broad and diverse group of co-sponsors will have more credibility and will attract a much wider audience.
- **Invite the public.** You can find women voters living as close as next door. In addition to reaching your neighbors and co-workers, make an extra effort to market the event to the women you would like to attend. Outreach to coalition partners and your community can help you gain visibility and expand membership. AAUW's *Shape the Future* membership campaign offers membership incentives to women who join AAUW on the spot at such events. For information on the membership campaign, log on to our Member Center on the AAUW website at [www.aauw.org](http://www.aauw.org), or contact the AAUW membership department at 202/861-8068.
- **Advertise the event on your website.** Be sure to include information about your event in a prominent place on your state or branch website.
- **Encourage the panelists and moderator to promote the forum.** Speakers may have access to mailings, media interviews, and other organizations with which they work. It is often in their best interest to promote an event where they will be featured.
- **Advertise your event for free on community calendars and through PSAs.** Most local papers and other community publications include a community calendar section that lists upcoming local events. Local radio stations may also promote your event on the air as a public service announcement (PSA).

### Working with the Media

#### Pre-Planning:

- **Make a list** - Compile a media list. Identify the reporters, editors, and departments in your state's newspapers and broadcast stations that focus on AAUW priority issues and are likely to use AAUW's news. Create an information sheet that includes their phone and fax numbers and, if available, e-mail addresses.
- **Designate a media spokesperson.** Keep the spokesperson available to the media by placing their name on all news releases and mailings.

#### Prior to the Event:

- **Send a media advisory** - Three to five days prior to your event, fax a media advisory to the appropriate reporters on your media list. The advisory should include the "who, what, when, where and why" of the upcoming event. Be sure to include contact information in case reporters have any questions.
- **Follow-up** - Call reporters the day after you send your advisory. Explain that you are following up on your written materials. If they haven't seen the materials, offer to fax them again.

- **Prepare a news release** –The purpose of a news release is to capture a reporter’s interest. Your news release should give full details of the event, including quotes from spokespersons and/or participants. In addition to your story, the release should include an attention-grabbing headline and the name and phone number of a contact person. Try to keep the news release to only one side of one typed page. Distribute a news release to the reporters who come to your event. Afterward, fax or e-mail it to reporters on your media list who did not attend, and follow up with a phone call.

**At the Event:**

- **Prepare a table with a sign-in list and media kits** - Sign-in sheets help you identify what reporters have attended your event. Media kits should provide all the vital information a reporter will need to cover your event. Include items such as a forum agenda, statements from the speakers, a copy of the news release, and background information on AAUW and other event co-sponsors.
- **Talk with the media** - Help reporters write a complete story by talking with each reporter in attendance. Offer reporters a quick interview before or after the program.

**After the Event:**

- **Follow-up again** - Contact reporters who covered the event later that day to see if they need any additional information or quotes to complete their stories. Even if they already have enough information, you may get an opportunity to correct any inaccuracies. Also call reporters who did not attend the event to offer additional information, including the media kit, in case they intend to publish an article on your event.



**Tips for Keeping Your Message on Target**

**Media Advisories:**

**Keep it short.** Media advisories should be short and concise. Include only the vital details of your event: who, what, when, where, why.

**News Releases:**

**Grab their attention.** Use the title line of your news release to attract attention. Think of the title as the ideal headline you would like to see or hear if the media covers the story.

**Keep it direct.** Your news release should read like a news story. Say the most important things first, and use a catchy lead sentence to engage your reader.

**Use catchy quotes.** Quotes in news releases should include a sound bite or visual image.

**Interviews:**

**Plan ahead.** When possible, plan ahead for interviews by preparing 3-4 talking points. Identify the message you would most like to convey about the event or issue you will be discussing, and try to stick to it.

**Take time to gather your thoughts.** If you receive an unexpected call from a reporter, ask what the topic is and deadline is for the story. If the deadline is not immediate, ask to call them back in ten minutes. Take the time to consider the issue and formulate what you want to say.

**Nothing is ever “off the record” in an interview.** Never say anything to a reporter that you would not want to see in print.

*See chapter seven for more information on visibility and working with the media.*



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## EVENT GUEST LIST

<u>NAME</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>PHONE NUMBER</u>	<u>E-MAIL ADDRESS</u>	<u>AAUW MEMBER?</u>
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____	_____	_____
13.	_____	_____	_____	_____
14.	_____	_____	_____	_____
15.	_____	_____	_____	_____
16.	_____	_____	_____	_____
17.	_____	_____	_____	_____
18.	_____	_____	_____	_____
19.	_____	_____	_____	_____
20.	_____	_____	_____	_____