**AAUW-MN Public Policy Update: Much to do as we welcome 2020.**

Jan Carey, AAUW-MN VP of Public Policy

There is so very much to do as we welcome the New Year. 2020 is of course building to be the most critical year for our country and AAUW. This update will give you a start to achieving state and branch goals. Much assistance is available using the resources found on the AAUW national website. It begins with our CEO and how we can promote equity for women and girls.

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AAUW CEO Kim Churches is providing ‘issue’ updates regularly in webinar format. Hundreds of members are attending these webinars and sharing national perspectives and actions by branch members across the country. The webinars are archived on the [national AAUW website](https://www.aauw.org/?s=kim+churches+webinars). The December webinar will be posted soon.

The October webinar has new information which should be shared with branch members as soon as possible. Watch the recording of CEO Kim Churches’ special webinar exclusively for members with an update on AAUW’s achievements, including reaching our Work Smart goals, rolling out the new 5-star recognition program, and strengthening our governance and sustainability.

<https://youtu.be/yA7QmpGU4Qk>

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**Getting ready, it’s going to be a Year of Politics –**

There are numerous AAUW Resources branch members may access and use to form actions and strategies to promote the mission of AAUW. Resources targeted to Public Policy are [here.](https://www.aauw.org/resources/by-leadership-comp/vision-and-strategy,goals-and-results,motivation-and-inspiration,engagement-and-inclusion,leadership-and-development,team-building,communication,strategic-relationships,self-development/?leadership_role=public-policy) I recently received print copies of the Congressional Voting Record. Watch for information in a January 2020 public policy update.

As the AAUW Public Policy committee formalizes its Legislative Day 2020, there are key areas member should read to prepare for our day at the State Capitol. Also, I will assemble more information in a special edition of The PINE.

Report the following to your branch members:

1. How to Host a Rally. The public policy committee has not yet considered a Rally. However, the information is useful if your branch is interested in forming a local event.
2. How to Hold a Meeting with Your Elected Officials.
3. How to Organize a Voter Registration Drive. If you do anything in 2020, it should be this. When I worked at my local college, I organized Voter Registration Drives every election year. Seek out faculty instructors for assistance and support. They can be your best allies.

**1. A Strong Showing: How to Host a Rally**



(AAUW of North Carolina members rallied to encourage Gov. Pat McCrory to keep his word and refuse to sign further abortion restrictions.)

A public rally can be a great way to increase visibility for AAUW, generate media coverage, and raise awareness about a policy issue. Here are some best practices for making the most of your rally. If you’re not already in touch with AAUW’s public policy and government relations staff, please e-mail us at [advocacy@aauw.org](mailto:advocacy@aauw.org).

**What Is a Public Rally?**

A public rally is a gathering of a large group of people to raise awareness or voice support or opposition to a policy issue. A rally I can take place almost anywhere, from a street corner to a state capitol, and can take many forms; they can include, a march, a delivery to an elected official, or a press conference.

**Best Practices for an Effective Rally**

Hold the rally in a relevant, easily accessible — and legal — location.

Rallies are most effective when they’re not just for those who attend but also for those walking by. [Visibility](https://www.aauw.org/resource/leader-essentials-marketing-and-visibility/) is key: You want the public to see and hear you, so make sure the location is easy to find. Look at locations that relate to the issue you’ll be rallying about (maybe hold your event at a college or university, health insurance company, or a military base) and the audience you are targeting (consider places such as city hall, the state capitol, or a courthouse). Do some footwork to find out the rules and regulations for your location. Do you need a permit? Do you have to pay a fee? Do you have to submit an application? Is a security presence required? Don’t be overwhelmed! Just a little bit of research can ensure that your rally is not shut down before it has a chance to have an impact.

**Keep the message focused.**

It can be tempting to combine several issues into one event, but that can lead to confusion about the message you are trying to convey to the public, media, and elected officials. Effective rallies have one single, clear message.

**Work in a coalition.**

While we always want AAUW’s presence to be known, your rally will be more effective and better received if you include other organizations to unite around a single message. Reach out to allied organizations and ask for their assistance in planning and executing your rally, especially in when it comes inviting their networks and members to attend.

**Give the media a heads-up**.

Having a media presence will greatly expand the event’s impact. Start your outreach approximately three days before the rally by sending a media advisory to appropriate reporters in your area. Remember to include local reporters as well as journalists who cover the issue you are focusing on (e.g., campus reporters, state legislative reporters, or reporters who cover women’s and family issues). Follow up on the phone as the rally approaches to remind them to cover it. For more tips on working with the media, check out [AAUW’s How to Work with the Media](https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-work-with-the-media/) guide.

**Get out front and take credit.**

Make sure to have AAUW members in the front of the crowd, distribute plenty of AAUW signs for people to hold, and tell any media at the rally that you’re with AAUW.

**Follow up with attendees.**

Be sure to circulate a sign-in sheet at your rally. This way you can accurately report on the crowd number and follow up with attendees to further engage them in AAUW’s grassroots activities. When you follow up, include an “ask,” such as joining the [AAUW Action Network](https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/public-policy/two-minute-activist/), attending an upcoming meeting, or participating in a future rally.

**2. How to Hold a Meeting with Your Elected Officials**



Senator Harry Reid meets with AAUW members.

Connecting with your elected officials about AAUW issues in a face-to-face meeting is a great way to develop a relationship and influence the positions they take on issues important to you. Below are some helpful tips to prepare for your visit. Be sure to report back using our [report-back form](https://www.aauw.org/resource/advocacy-event-activity-report-back-form/) so that we can highlight your efforts.

**Requesting the Visit**

* Locate the scheduler’s e-mail address on the legislator’s website or by calling the district office. Make your request in writing by sending an e-mail to the scheduler, and follow up with a call. Make sure the scheduler knows that you are a constituent.
* The most effective and efficient way of securing an appointment is to be specific about the purpose of the meeting — which issue you want to discuss, a bill number if you are meeting about legislation, and that you are an AAUW member.

**Preparing for the Visit**

* **Who will attend the meeting?** You can meet alone with the official or bring a group of AAUW members or a coalition of people who represent other interested groups. Consider bringing people who represent the constituencies that are affected by the issue you are discussing.
* **Do your research.** Learn about your elected officials’ voting record and statements on AAUW issues. Become familiar with the views and arguments on both sides of the issue. Arm yourself with research, polling data, news clips, and op-eds to support your position.
* **Have talking points.** Make your position clear and keep the meeting focused.
* **Make a clear ask.** Are you asking for the legislator to vote for or against a bill? Co-sponsor a measure? Sign a pledge? If your meeting consists of a group of AAUW members, decide beforehand who will present the talking points and who will make the ask.
* **Bring materials.** Prepare materials to leave with the elected official or staff. AAUW [Quick Facts](https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/public-policy/aauw-issues/gender-pay-gap/), the Public Policy Priorities brochure, and [research reports](https://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/research/) are good examples.
* **Alert the media.** If you recruit a large group of people, [local media](https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-work-with-the-media/) might be interested in covering your visit. .

**Tips and Tricks**

* One of the best times to plan for an in-district meeting is during a Senate or House recess. This time is designated for legislators to meet with their constituents in their home states or districts. They call these recesses “district work weeks” for a reason!
* [Take pictures](https://www.aauw.org/resource/find-images-online/) outside of the office or during the meeting with the elected official if allowed. You can share the pictures on social media and send them to us at [advocacy@aauw.org](mailto:advocacy@aauw.org).
* Personalize your comments and provide local context — elected officials often prioritize issues that directly affect their constituents. Personal stories and local examples help illustrate why your issue is important.
* The legislator’s response won’t always be clear, so listen carefully. What is the person saying about the issue? What questions or concerns do they have that might be answered? Pay attention to the direct and indirect statements of support or opposition.
* If you don’t know the answer to a question your legislator asks, say you’ll find out and then follow up. Contact our national office to assist with answering these questions.

**After the Visit**

* Right after the meeting, compare notes with everyone in your group to confirm what the elected official committed to do.
* Send a personal thank-you letter to your elected official. Remind the official of anything he or she may have agreed to do.
* Follow up in a timely fashion with any requested materials and information.
* Share the results of your meetings with your branch, your state public policy chair, and with AAUW public policy staff. You can [file your report online](https://www.aauw.org/resource/advocacy-event-activity-report-back-form/).

**Just Dropping By?**

**Follow these tips to make the most of a shorter visit:**

* You’ll still want to research the official’s position on the issue and prepare your talking points, your ask, and materials to leave behind with someone.
* After entering the office, identify yourself to the front desk as an AAUW member and constituent.
* Ask to speak with a staff member who handles the issue you want to discuss. If that person is unavailable, ask if there is someone else you can meet with to speak about the issue. Be flexible, as local legislative offices are usually short-staffed.
* Leave a copy of your materials with the staff member. If no one is available to speak with you, leave a note, your contact information, and the materials you brought.
* As always, remember to share the results of your drop-by visit with your branch, your state public policy chair, and AAUW staff. You can [file your report online](https://www.aauw.org/resource/advocacy-event-activity-report-back-form/).

<https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-hold-a-meeting-with-your-elected-officials/>

**3. How to Organize a Voter Registration Drive**



This guide provides some easy steps to running a successful voter registration campaign. Read on, and remember that the AAUW public policy staff is here to help — consider them your resource and sounding board. If you’re not already in touch with them, please email [VoterEd@aauw.org](mailto:VoterEd@aauw.org).

**Get Started Planning Your Registration Drive**

The first step is to set reasonable goals and develop a plan for the voter registration drive. Goals and a plan enable you to work strategically and gauge your progress. When you set your goals, consider the following questions:

* How many people do you want to register?
* Where should you target people to register? Do you want to focus on certain neighborhoods or parts of town with historically low voter turnout, underrepresented groups, or high-traffic areas that will allow you to reach a greater number of people? Because [AAUW is a nonpartisan organization](https://www.aauw.org/resource/political-vs-partisan-guide/), AAUW states or branches may not target any voter registration efforts at members of a particular political party or at individuals likely to vote for partisan candidates who support AAUW issues.
* How will this voter registration drive further the goals of your state or branch voter turnout campaign?

AAUW’s [voter registration drive planning template](https://www.aauw.org/files/2018/08/Voter-Registration-Drive-Planning-Template-nSA.pdf) is a great tool for ensuring you’ve thoroughly planned for your event. Once you have your voter registration event in mind, let us know about your plans through the [upcoming event form](https://www.aauw.org/resource/upcoming-advocacy-activity-events-form/) so we can send you materials and help support your event.

**Know Your State’s Rules on Voter Registration**

Be sure to understand [your state’s rules for voter registration](http://campusvoteproject.org/voter-registration-drive-guides/) before planning an event, and make sure each volunteer at your AAUW voter registration drive understands these regulations before you start registering voters. Ask the local or state elections office these important questions:

* How long before the election do voters need to be registered to be eligible to vote? (Remember that there are primary and general elections, each with different voter registration deadlines.)
* What is the age requirement for volunteers registering people to vote?
* Do voters need to declare a party affiliation?
* What are the rules for people who have been convicted of a felony?
* How must registration forms be submitted to election officials?
* What is the required length of residency prior to an individual registering to vote?
* Are college students eligible to register to vote in the locality and state where they are enrolled?
* Is there a required training for volunteers to be able to register voters?

Be sure to familiarize yourself with [AAUW’s Board of Directors’ policies](https://www.aauw.org/resource/aauw-board-of-directors-policy-book/) before beginning a voter registration drive. The policy book includes guidelines that all AAUW states and branches must follow during any election-related events like voter registration drives. **Legal restrictions prevent the use of advocacy materials, such as voter guides or issue fact sheets, in conjunction with a voter registration drive.**

**Recruit and Train Volunteers**

When you know what your goals are, you can determine how many volunteers you will need and the locations you want to target. Voter registration drives can attract women who are looking for ways to become more involved in your branch or who aren’t even aware that they would be interested in AAUW membership. Let people know that your branch is looking for extra help — who knows, you might end up with more volunteers *and* new members! Once you have your volunteers, you’ll want to train them so they feel comfortable registering voters and confident that they are following the voter registration rules in your community. Training can be easy — and fun! You could hold a voter registration training as part of an upcoming branch meeting, or host the volunteers for a small training party in your home. In your volunteer training session, review the registration form and rules, discuss messages about the importance of voter registration, and practice asking people to register. Make sure volunteers have plenty of voter registration forms. Before the first voter registration drive, identify a volunteer to be responsible for getting additional voter registration forms and coordinating times, dates, and locations for registration drives. Don’t forget to assign someone to return the completed forms by the deadline. Speaking of forms …

**Which Form Do I Use to Register Voters?**

Remember to check with your local election officials to see if you need to use a county- or state-specific form. If a certain form is not required, you should be able to use whatever form is provided by your local election official *or* the national voter registration form. Most states accept the national form, which is available on the [Election Assistance Commission website](http://www.eac.gov/). If multiple languages are spoken in areas where you are conducting your drive, request voter registration forms in those languages.

**Registering Voters**

Just like getting people to vote, registering people is best done through direct, personal, targeted contact. The following ideas are creative ways to reach out to the community:

* Send volunteers with clipboards to places where large groups of people congregate — malls, movie theaters, libraries, neighborhood festivals, rallies, farmer’s markets, etc. As always, be sure to check the rules for each location before planning a voter registration event there.
* Set up a table on the campus of an AAUW college/university partner or other university, college, or community college in your area. Did you know that federal law (the 1998 Higher Education Amendments) requires colleges and universities to make a good-faith effort to distribute in-state voter registration forms to students? By working with your local AAUW college/university partner to register students, you are helping the institution serve its students and demonstrating AAUW’s value to our college/university partners. (P.S. Check out [AAUW’s tabling how-to guide](https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-tabling/) for tips to make your tabling event a success!)
* Use a phone bank to contact branch and national members to let them know you will be registering people to vote. Be sure to ask all members if they are registered to vote. This is also a great way to recruit volunteers for voter registration drives and other activities in your get-out-the-vote campaign.
* Hold an issue forum on a topic important to your community. Work with coalition partners and other community groups to publicize the event, and make a voter registration pitch at the end of each event. Remember, you can register people to vote at any time of the year. For more information, check out our [guide on how to put together an issue forum](https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-put-together-an-issue-forum-town-hall-or-tele-town-hall/).

**Remember to keep it personal** — talk to people about why voting is important and what issues are at stake in the upcoming elections. When you register people, keep track of their information so you can follow up with them before the next election. The people you register will be natural targets for other aspects of your Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout Campaign, such as [issue](https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-put-together-an-issue-forum-town-hall-or-tele-town-hall/) and [candidate forums](https://www.aauw.org/resource/how-to-candidate-forum/).

**Follow Up with Newly Registered Voters**

Know the laws in your state, and be sure to turn in voter registration forms to the correct place by the deadline. A good Woman-to-Woman Voter Turnout Campaign stays in touch with its targets throughout the year. Contact newly registered voters a few weeks after they register to ensure that they received a confirmation of their voter registration, know the date of upcoming elections, and know where to vote and what to bring to the polls.