



WINTER 2026

THE PINE



## FROM THE DESK OF KELSEY WAITS, PRESIDENT

I didn't grow up in Minnesota, and truth be told, I never expected to live here. While I have always loved snow and winter, Minnesota's brutally cold winters were beyond my comfort level. Things changed in 2013 when our family decided to leave active-duty military service and my spouse was offered a job interview in the Twin Cities.

It was love at first sight. Even though I had lived in four different states, I had never seen the level of community investments that we saw here. Between the local parks, trails, and the robust library system, I knew that this was where I wanted our children to grow up. Over the last 13 years, my love for this state has only grown.

No state is perfect, including Minnesota, and it would be disingenuous to claim otherwise. However, over the last few months Minnesotans have shown that community solidarity is not one of those weaknesses.

Minnesota has a long history of welcoming immigrants. In fact, we have the highest refugee population per capita of any state in the United States. And yet, as thousands of federal agents have flooded our state and used violence against our communities, many of the families who came seeking refuge are afraid to leave their homes. In response, tens of thousands of Minnesotans have answered the call to protect their neighbors through observation and mutual aid. An article in The Atlantic recently called it: “neighborism” – a commitment to protecting the people around you, no matter who they are or where they are from.” I have never been prouder to be a Minnesotan.

I know that the last year has been difficult as we’ve watched the federal government become increasingly hostile toward gender equity, public education, and civil rights; I know that many of us are afraid for ourselves or our loved ones; but I also know that Minnesotans are resilient, and we will find strength by building community.

AAUW is committed to our values and removing the barriers that stand in the way of gender equity. If there are advocacy efforts that you would like the state board to take, please consider introducing a resolution at our upcoming state meeting. This will help the board know where branches want our advocacy efforts to be focused. The state meeting will take place April 24 and 25. There is a lot of great planning being done and I’m looking forward to seeing you all there. Until then, stay warm and remember to take care of yourself.

In solidarity,

Kelsey

BRAINERD BRANCH TO HOST AAUW MN STATE MEETING AT  
RUTTGER'S BAY LAKE RESORT  
APRIL 24-25, 2026

*Growing Together:*



*Rooted in Strength*

By Arlene Wheaton, Brainerd Lakes Area AAUW President

Brainerd Branch member Carla Benjamin designed the logo for our theme, "Growing Together: Rooted in Strength".

If you have never attended an AAUW Minnesota State Meeting, make 2026 the year to do so. Our Brainerd Lakes branch is excited about the interesting slate of speakers we have lined up and the wonderful venue at Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort (just south of Deerwood and east of Brainerd) in our beautiful lakes and Northwoods country.

Our theme, Growing Together - Rooted in Strength, highlights the value of collaborating and coming together to support women with higher education goals that will help them achieve greater economic security. AAUW's long history of advocating for women represents our roots, which keep growing stronger with new ideas and new members.



As usual, this event starts on Friday afternoon, April 24. We invite you to explore optional activities, including a visit to the Ripple River Art Gallery or Ruttger's boutique shops and salon and spa. Then gather for social time in the rustic lodge's Bear Pine Bar at 5:00 with a delicious dinner served in Ruby's restaurant, which features a panoramic

view of Bay Lake. After dinner, Joy Persall, a woman of Ojibwe Metis' descent and Brainerd Lakes branch member, will give a presentation on "Seed Sharing: A World View of Indigenous Seed Stories". Then we'll enjoy a lakeside bonfire and s'mores.

On Saturday, we will offer a continental breakfast in the Island Ballroom, where our meeting will take place starting at 8:30 a.m. The business meeting and awards will run from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.

Our keynote presentation will focus on public policy with our national office sending Meghan Kissel, Senior Director of AAUW Policy and Member Advocacy, to talk about the "It's My Vote" initiative and other public policy activities. To offer local perspectives on hot public policy issues in urban, suburban and rural areas, we will feature a panel discussion with three branch representatives. There will be a Q &A session for you to voice your own public policy concerns.

In the afternoon, we will highlight a Brainerd hero and late member of our Brainerd branch, Lt. Col Hortense McKay, a nurse who served on Bataan in the Philippines in World War II and then went on to help reorganize the Army Nurse Corps. Hillary Swanson, Executive Director of the Crow Wing County Historical Society, will tell us about McKay's life and times. The program will also feature a chair yoga session and an update on the efforts to pass the Minnesota ERA.

We are inviting Minnesota branches to donate a basket of items or one large item for the annual silent auction that raises money for AAUW Funds. The auction, which will be in a room adjacent to our meeting space will begin Saturday morning and wrap up by 3:00 p.m.

The registration form, included with this newsletter, is also posted at [aauw-mn.net](http://aauw-mn.net). The cost of registration is \$140, covering meals for Friday evening and Saturday breakfast and lunch.

Registrations are due March 31 and to get the AAUW discount rate of \$135 for a single (King) or double (Queen) room, you need to make your Ruttger's lodging reservations by March 24. The discount rate is good for three nights—April 23, 24 and 25.

Our Brainerd Lakes Branch looks forward to welcoming AAUW members from around the state to this enjoyable social and educational event. Any

questions about the State Meeting may be directed to Arlene Wheaton at awheaton1989@gmail.com or 218-232-4989.

Registration Form is attached at the end of The Pine.

## **FROM THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

### Nominations for AAUW MN Board

We are still seeking candidates to serve on the 2026-2028 State Board of Directors for the following positions and for the Nominating Committee for 2027 Elections:

- Vice President for Membership, 2026-2028 (Have one Candidate)
- Vice President for AAUW Funds, 2026-2028 (Have one Candidate)
- Secretary/Historian, 2026-2028
- Nominating Committee, 2026-2027 for 2027 elections (3 members and 1 alternate)

All you need to apply is a strong belief in the mission of AAUW and a willingness to learn and grow. Rewards for state service include leadership development, camaraderie and teamwork with other leaders. An applicant may be self-nominated, nominated by their branch or branch board of directors, or any individual.

The State Board usually meets four times a year – two in person meetings (once in July and once at the State Meeting in late April) and two Zoom meetings (usually in October and in January). The Administrative Assistant can provide you with a spreadsheet of your branch counterparts and can set up Zoom meetings on your behalf for ease of communication. There is some flexibility in the position “duties” but following are some of the more important excerpts of the position descriptions taken from our Standing Rules. (Note: The Standing Rules are currently being revised to more accurately reflect what the positions involve):

Vice President for Membership Oversee efforts to recruit and sustain a diverse active membership in the state.

1. Become familiar with the eligibility rules and membership requirements for all types of AAUW membership.

2. Assist branches in promoting membership growth, orientation, diversity, and retention. Write articles for The Pine on membership and/or send links to The Pine with ideas from national.
3. Update the AAUW MN Membership Brochure as needed to reflect current dues, etc. (Note: The current VP Membership is revising the AAUW MN Brochure with updated dues information.)
4. Support branches for growth, retention, diversity and significant anniversaries. Submit a February 1 Membership Count with Branch growth or loss percentage for the State Meeting Booklet and a report of those branches with the most growth based upon the February 1 count. Prepare membership award certificates for branches for the State Meeting.
5. Review the Membership Section of the AAUW Minnesota website annually. Submit updated membership information to the webmaster to keep it current.
6. Attend quarterly State Board meetings and contribute ideas for AAUW Minnesota's success. Prepare a quarterly report in advance of the meeting. Maintain a file to be passed onto the next VP and hold a meeting with the successor by July 1.
7. Endeavor to increase membership in AAUW Minnesota and in branches and serve as a resource for branches.

#### Secretary/Historian

1. Record the minutes of the meetings of the state board of directors and of the AAUW Minnesota State Meeting.
2. Be responsible for sending copies of minutes to all members of the board of directors.
4. Provide copies of the full and complete state meeting minutes to all board members prior to the summer board meeting. After approval by the board of directors, submit the approved condensed state meeting minutes for printing in the next state meeting booklet for approval by membership.
5. Be responsible for collecting and preserving the historical record of AAUW of Minnesota:

- a) Provide guidelines and receive from each retiring board member copies of significant materials which originated during her/his tenure for placement in the archives.
- b) File yearbooks, minutes, convention reports, and other pertinent material of a permanent nature in the archives at the Minnesota Historical Society. (Usually done every 5 years.)
- c) Submit information to be printed in the state meeting booklet (condensed minutes from previous year's state meeting and annual report).
- d) Assume responsibility for the decade history project. (Note: The current secretary/historian is completing the decade history during 2025-2026.)
- e) Assume responsibility for such correspondence of the state, board of directors, and executive committees as the president, board of directors, or executive committee shall delegate.

8. Attend quarterly State Board meetings and contribute ideas for AAUW Minnesota's success. Prepare a quarterly report in advance of the meeting. Maintain a file to be passed onto the next VP and hold a meeting with the successor by July 1.

#### The Nominating Committee for 2027 AAUW MN Elections

- 1. Select a Nominating Committee Chair
- 2. Send out a "Call for Nominations" for the opening of applications September 15 and closing November 15 via The Minnesota Pine and notification to the branch presidents.
- 3. Keep a record of nominating committee business.
- 4. Report to the state board at the January board meeting.
- 5. Send letters of acceptance/rejection to all candidates immediately following board approval of the slate at the January board meeting.
- 6. Report the Slate of Officers to the state membership via The Minnesota Pine.
- 7. Present the Nominating Committee Report and Slate for the AAUW MN State Meeting Booklet.
- 8. Present the 2027 Slate of Officers to Membership during the business meeting at the State Meeting.

Please give serious consideration to applying for a state board position. These leadership positions provide a great opportunity for you to share your talents with AAUW Minnesota. Contact the Nominating Committee to express your interest in a position as soon as possible at [aauwminn@gmail.com](mailto:aauwminn@gmail.com) or by contacting one of the current Nominating Committee members.

The nominating committee must present a slate of candidates to the membership by email no later than February 25, 2026 (60 days prior to AAUW MN state meeting).

Please contact any nominating committee member if you have questions or contact board members who currently hold the position in which you are interested. Also, if you have the name of someone who would be a good candidate, the Nominating Committee is willing to contact them.

The members of the Nominating Committee are Mary Schwanke, Owatonna Branch; Mikel Clifford, St. Paul Branch; Barb Wonson Liukkonen, Ely Branch and AAUW MN VP Funds; and Teresa Sagen, Ely Branch and AAUW MN Administrative Assistant and Finance Chair.

**FROM THE DESK OF BARB WONSON LIUKKONEN, AAUW FUNDS VP**  
Silent Auction at our State Annual Meeting

Come and bid on wonderful items during the silent auction that will be held at our annual state meeting on April 24-25. Proceeds from the auction will support AAUW Funds.

Branches are encouraged to bring new, creative, fun items for the auction. Baskets of books, gardening supplies, or tasty local treats are very popular, as are handmade gifts such as quilts, sweaters, art work or pottery. Event tickets or other opportunities are also welcomed. Your branch will receive AAUW Funds credit for the amount that your item raises.

While you may use your credit card, we hope that you'll bring your checkbook or cash to cover items you bid on. This year we will be asking those who want to use their credit cards to cover the cost of fees. This year, we will also be asking bidders to write their checks to AAUW MN; they will all be cashed here and we will send a single check to the National Office for all the funds raised during the auction. That should shorten the time waiting for your checks to clear.

The auction will be held on Saturday, April 25. High bidders will be able to settle up and pick up their 'swag' that afternoon before the end of the meeting. Branch Funds Chairs will be hearing more from me asking about what items they are bringing and with instructions on when to have them ready for set-up. Come ready to be wowed and ready to bid! I can't wait to see those polite battles that are often waged over that perfect basket of picnic fixings or the stash of mystery books, and wine and crackers that everybody seems to want. Thanks for your support of AAUW Funds.

### **FROM THE DESK OF ELIZABETH MAHAN, VP PUBLIC POLICY**

These certainly are challenging and changing times for AAUW's mission of advancing equity for women and girls. Now more than ever, the tried-and-true work of public policy advocacy matters on the local, state and national levels. Here is how to keep that work at the forefront.

#### How to advocate for Minnesota AAUW's priorities:

- Attend the Rally for MN Equal Right Amendment on Thursday, March 12 at 10 am in the Capitol Rotunda.
- Write press releases that advocate for AAUW's mission on the local level and state level.
- Attend our State Meeting on April 24 and 25. We will welcome Meghan Kissell, Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy in Washington DC as our keynote speaker.

#### How to advocate for AAUW Priorities on the national level:

- Become a 2 minute activist <https://www.aauw.org/act/two-minute-activist/>
- Write letters to Congress that support and advocate for AAUW's mission
- Learn how Members of Congress vote on issues  
<https://www.aauwaction.org/voter-education/congressional-voting-record/>
- Learn how to work collaboratively with other constituents  
<https://www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2025/11/Working-in-Coalition-Building-Power-through-Partnerships-Resource.pdf>

Thank you for all you do to support and advocate for AAUW's mission to advance equity for women and girls.

## FROM THE DESK OF KAREN REICHENSPERGER, VP PROGRAM

This year is working towards its climax. Scholarships are soon due and the state meeting is coming up.

NCCWSL Scholarships We are pleased to share that registration for the 2026 National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL) is now open. NCCWSL offers an exciting program that includes a transformative experience in leadership development, networking, and inspiration. Please visit NASPA's website for the most up-to-date information. The in person conference will be held at the University of Maryland, College Park, from May 27-30, 2026.

AAUW MN has received emails from 8 branches (as of 1-27-2026) stating their intention to send a student to NCCWSL and asking for an AAUW MN NCCWSL Grant of \$1,000. If others are interested, please email Teresa Sagen [tksgagen@gmail.com](mailto:tksgagen@gmail.com) (due February 15, 2026) and she will put your branch on our first come, first serve list. There are two (2) places left. There is no early registration discount this year. The last day to register with on-campus housing is May 18, 2026.

### Strategic Plan Action Grant

Strategic Plan Action Grant applications are due to Teresa by March 10, 2026. To date, no applications have been received. The grant is intended to support branch projects/programs/events that focus on the AAUW MN Strategic Plan as found in the Helping Our Branches Booklet . Branches with limited resources would find this grant helpful. Branch projects/events are to be completed by December 1, 2026.

### Young Women in Equity Grants

This grant recognizes the work of a woman or girl on a project or activity that specifically addresses equity issues of women and girls. There must be evidence of the impact of the action or event. This does not have to be a branch program since high school and college students are eligible for this grant. Young Women in Equity applications are due to Teresa by March 31, 2026. Teresa has been notified that one (1) branch may be submitting a Young Women in Equity award for a high school student.

**FROM THE DESK OF JAN CAREY AAUW MN C/U REPRESENTATIVE****College and University Partners: a path to collaboration**

As we witness the restructuring of the Department of Education and the political actions disarming academic freedom, access to education for women and girls, and threatening scholarship pathways, we can easily see the need to garner C/U institutional membership for the benefits AAUW can provide. As your AAUW MN C/U representative, I will assist you as you continue collaboration with your local colleges and universities through renewal, events sponsorship, Work Smart/Start Smart training sessions, and new membership recruitment.

**Here's how I plan to keep AAUW MN C/U leaders informed:**

1. Develop an email list of MN branch C/U leaders.
2. Use the list to post relevant information and action items to branch leaders. What is relevant information? As a State board position, I will be the representative on AAUW National C/U Committee and a participant to any AAUW National C/U sub-committee meetings. The meetings are packed with information that will be shared with branch leaders.
3. Host Zoom meetings for C/U branch leaders, as requested.
4. Create an enhanced C/U page on the AAUWMN website. I manage the AAUW MN website alongside Teresa Sagen. Together, we will work to complete this.
5. Post relevant C/U information, including branch events and programs, on the AAUW MN FB page. I manage the AAUW MN FB page as well and will post information/events as received from branches.

Some of you have contacted me with your interest in developing stronger relationships with MN universities. A number of you are fortunate to be home to colleges and universities. I live in northern MN, and each major community has a community college. My branch has approached college administrators to attend branch meetings resulting in individual membership. It is a start which can lead to institutional membership.

To assist with the process of maintaining and gaining C/U members, I have included a number of resources and links to various organizations I am utilizing to enhance AAUW National tools.

Explore AAUW National Resources that can be found at AAUW CU-Member-Toolkit here. The toolkit page includes past training webinars, brochures, FAQs, etc. From the website page, you may download the brochures and print them to distribute.

Branch C/U leaders will be informed to events and webinars hosted by other AAUW National and AAUW MN affiliate organizations. (examples below) Each of these organizations are leaders **in education and align with AAUW's mission and public policy** priorities. The Resources List conclude with current AAUW C/U member institutions.

Thanks for your branch work. Please contact me with your thoughts.

## **FROM THE DESK OF JAN CAREY, DIVERSITY OFFICER**

### **EQUITY and INCLUSION: Information and Action**

"In principle and practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. In all areas of AAUW, there shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization based on gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or class." [AAUW of Minnesota Diversity Statement]

This statement is a clear definition which reflects the AAUW Mission and its Public Policy Priorities for the good of the organization and its members. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are being diminished and scrutinized at an unprecedented level.

AAUW National board and CEO recognize actions of the current administration are a detriment to AAUW values and vision. AAUW will continue to inform and promote its principles and practices of diversity, equity and inclusion.

As AAUW MN Diversity Officer, I will communicate, to AAUW MN branch leaders, the issues and actions of the AAUW National Equity/Inclusion committee. The National committee meets the second Tuesday, monthly. Thus, the next meeting will be February 10 th In consort with the monthly meetings, my goals and accomplishments are to the following:

1. Maintain an email list of MN branch DEI leaders.

2. Use the list to post relevant information and action items to branch leaders.

What is relevant information? As a State Appointed position, I will be the representative on AAUW National Equity/Inclusion Committee and a participant in monthly AAUW National Diversity sub-Committee meetings. The meetings are packed with information that will be shared with branch leaders.

3. Host Zoom meetings for DEI branch leaders.

4. Post relevant information, including branch events and programs, on the AAUW MN FB page.

5. Create a DEI page on the AAUWMN website. I manage the AAUW MN website alongside Teresa Sagen. Together, we will work to develop and mount it.

Collectively, our concerns are voiced by branch involvement and maintaining interest to the issues created by federal actions in this political environment. Thus, members will be informed of state and national actions, alongside strategies, policies and procedures, in order to increase awareness and advocacy.

## WHAT ARE OUR BRANCHES DOING THIS WINTER?

**DULUTH BRANCH** Wednesday, February 11, at 7 pm: Fireside Chat via Zoom featuring a discussion with Katrina Sun Breese, Senior Director of Institutional Advancement for AAUW (National). Learn about AAUW's initiatives in today's ever-changing environment, how we can be more involved, and how our work impacts women in our country. PLEASE PLAN TO JOIN US FOR A SPIRITED CONVERSATION!! Contact Program Co-Chair Katie Joseph-Johnson at [katie.josephjohnson@gmail.com](mailto:katie.josephjohnson@gmail.com) for the Zoom link.

**ELY BRANCH** is again offering a Women in the Trades scholarship for fall 2026. Local women pursuing a career in a trade field (construction, plumbing, electrician, welding, HVAC, heavy equipment, etc.) are encouraged to apply.

## AUSTIN BRANCH

These events presented by the Riverland Community College Amnesty International and Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and the Austin Branch of the AAUW.



**HIBBING BRANCH** is reading “Frozen River” by Ariel Lawhon, “The Women of Copper Country” by Mary Russell Gretchen Wright, “High House”, by Jessie Greengrass, “How to Solve Your Own Murder” by Kristen Perrin and “Handmaids Tale, by Margaret Atwood.

**BRAINERD BRANCH**'s programs include Repairing Harm with Restorative Justice by Jeanine Wiley, Caregivers and Care Receivers: Economic & Psycho/Social/Spiritual Factors – Mary Smith and Stacy Starkka and Death Cafe: Open Dialogue about Mortality by Joy Persall and Stacy Starkka.

**ST CLOUD BRANCH** will examine Artificial Intelligence on Feb 14th. What You Need to Know Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already shaping the way we live, work, and study every day, often in ways we don't even realize. This presentation will explore how AI is embedded in the tools we use, the opportunities it brings, and the ethical and practical issues we all need to understand and consider. Join us for an engaging and accessible conversation about how AI is transforming our world.

### **ROCHESTER BRANCH**

PROGRAM: THE CRISIS FACING IMMIGRANTS

SPEAKER: JEAN BINKOVITZ, ATTORNEY AT LAW

Joint program with Rochester League of Women Voters

Saturday, February 21, 2026 10:00 a.m.

Charter house, Northview room

AAUW MINNESOTA STATE MEETING  
April 24-25, 2026  
Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort, Deerwood, MN  
"Growing Together – Rooted in Strength"

Registration:

Name (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code: \_\_\_\_\_ Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Information (please check all that apply):

- Branch Member
- State Board Member
- College/University Student
- Visitor/Guest
- Member at Large
- Past State President
- College/University Rep
- Legacy Circle

The AAUW MN State Meeting fee, \$140, includes Friday banquet, Saturday breakfast & lunch, and featured speakers.

Please note any dietary restriction here:

Please indicate the meals you will attend:  Fri. dinner  Sat. breakfast  
 Sat. lunch

**PAYMENT**

Checks required. Registration deadline: March 31, 2026.

Make checks payable to AAUW Brainerd Lakes. Mail registration form & check to:

Bev Lundorff, 18117 Riverwood Dr., Little Falls, MN 56435

Total Payment Amount: \$140 Registration Check enclosed.

**BOOK YOUR LODGING:**

Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort (double/queen or single/king): \$135 plus \$27 resort fee and 7.385% tax.

Reservation link:

<https://www.reseze.net/servlet/SendPage?hotelid=1723&skipfirstpage=true&page=61969>

Deadline: March 24, 2026, for AAUW discount rate. Later registrations will cost \$176-196 plus fees.

For questions on lodging (some buildings have stairs with no elevator) call 218-678-2885.

Other Area Hotels:

Country Inn, 23884 Front St., Deerwood, 218-676-7317 (5 mi. away)

Forty Club Inn, 960 2nd St. NW, Aitkin, MN, 218-927-2903 (14 mi. away)

**OPTIONAL FRIDAY AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES:**

Ripple River Gallery (outstanding original artwork from regional artisans, free admission, 3 mi. from Ruttger's)

Ruttger's Boutique Shops (clothing, home décor, gift items)

Ruttger's Salon (facial/pedicure/manicure/massage), call for appointment at 218-678-4667