

Report of the AAUW-AZ Bylaws Committee

April 9-10, 2010 Annual Membership Meeting

State Governing Role/Functions

The AAUW bylaws adopted at the 2009 convention allow branches to “establish a state or multi-state organization as they deem necessary” (Article X, Section 1).

At the November 2009 Fall Forum we asked attendees to tell us whether they wanted to continue the state organization and, if so, what the state governing role and function should be. Responses to the Fall Forum questionnaire indicate 80% of Arizona branch members, representing 12 of the state’s 14 branches, support continuing the state organization. However, 75% favor a structure that *provides for wider representation from the branches* and, in order of preference, *facilitates inter-branch communication and promotes public policy*.

Paring Down

In choosing to continue the AAUW-AZ organization, at minimum, the state is required to have “a designated contact for administration and finance” (Article X Section 3). What other officers are needed to carry on the business of the state depends on what members see as the role and necessary functions of a state organization.

Less than a third of the Fall Forum respondents see *program development* as a necessary state role. The state is required to hold one membership meeting each year which may include programs and workshops.

Less than one fourth of respondents identified *membership* recruitment and retention as a needed state role. Members see the branch as the primary unit for recruitment and retention, as well as reporting. Under the revised AAUW bylaws, the state has no official role but may facilitate in membership reporting.

Only 10% of respondents see *fundraising* as a state function. The state has no official role but may facilitate fundraising for AAUW Funds.

Ramping Up

The state board can and should provide a conduit for communication and promoting public policy at the state level, according to Fall Forum attendees.

Inter-branch Communication is important to 81% of Fall Forum attendees. Since its inception in 2004 the Presidents Council has provided a forum for communication among branches statewide. In addition, the state maintains a website (aauwarizona.org) and publishes a quarterly

newsletter (Arizona Sun) as well as a directory of branch and state officers and committee chairs. The 14-member Presidents Council is currently represented on the state board with one vote. The webmaster and the newsletter editor each serve as voting officers. The directory is part of the elected corresponding secretary's duties.

Public Policy, under our current bylaws, is a standing committee with an appointed chair and one vote on the board. The public policy chair is the designated AAUW-AZ lobbyist at the state legislature, develops the AAUW-AZ public policy program, and tracks state legislature activity pertinent to the AAUW mission. Sixty-three percent of the branch members at Fall Forum listed public policy as a priority role for the state organization. (This position on the board is currently unfilled.)

Re-visioning

In our first meeting on January 10, 2010, the bylaws committee reviewed the results from the Fall Forum questionnaire and two proposals: one submitted by AAUW-AZ member Pat Zajicek, who has been an officer at the branch and state level for several years; and a second presented by the Prescott branch at Fall Forum. The first proposal is based on the success of the Presidents Council and emphasizes more involvement by a wider range of branch membership through counterpart groups for functions such as community action grants, newsletter, and public policy. The second proposal also includes a branch council governing structure but adds four elected officers: chair, chair-elect/public policy, treasurer, and recording secretary.

Based upon the response from the Fall Forum attendees and the inspiration provided in the two proposals, the committee adopted an operating philosophy to move forward unfettered by the “what was” and embracing the “what could be.” As poet Adrienne Rich encourages us to do, the bylaws committee “re-visioned” AAUW-AZ: looking back but with fresh eyes, seeing an old and familiar text with a new critical perspective.

What we learned from our AAUW-AZ members is that the patriarchal hierarchical structure, a top-down governing by a few, was not what members wanted. The first, and easiest, decision for the bylaws committee was to follow AAUW’s lead and propose the change from delegate voting to the popular *one-member-one-vote* process which *gives each member a voice in AAUW-AZ policy decisions*.

Next, we proposed replacing the appointed committee chairs that make up the current state board with a branch council which provides every branch with the opportunity (and dare we say it, the *responsibility*) to participate in state governance.

The branch council structure also is a logical extension of the AAAUW bylaws premise that the state organization exists only if the branches want it---there is no other mandate.

Each branch will have one representative serving a one year term. The branch will decide who that member is and whether their representative is appointed or elected by branch members. The AAUW-AZ proposed bylaws require the representative to commit to one year but do not limit the number of terms that person can serve. That decision belongs to the branch.

Focusing Goals

In our second meeting on January 24, 2010, we looked at the seven elected positions and dozen or so committees that currently make up the board of directors. We weighed the options of electing versus appointing individuals to fill the required administrative and financial positions. We again discussed the directive from Fall Forum attendees that the two important functions for a state organization are to facilitate inter-branch communication and promote state-wide public policy.

Selecting the individuals who represent the state at AAUW and keep the checkbook should fall to the membership. Likewise, involving members in the selection of these key positions assures accountability. We also agreed it is important to have an individual who is responsible for record keeping and found that we could combine and reassign duties into one position---also elected.

The two standing committees named in the proposal are communication and public policy. The chairs will be appointed with the approval of the branch council. The proposed bylaws allow for other standing committees to meet future needs but put the decision to expand clearly with the branch representatives on the governing board.

Renewing Energy

One other issue the bylaws committee addressed was the often stated belief that we see the same faces year after year on the state board.

We find that when members become involved at the state level, they add so much new energy to the organization. Yet, as with most organizations, AAUW-AZ members are hesitant to commit to long-term assignments at the state level.

In considering the chief administrative position, we opted to look at the personal commitment the individual was being asked to make and make it more attractive. Under the proposed bylaws, the member who agrees to be president serves two years rather than three: her first as president-elect, learning the ropes and taking on committee assignments as needed, and her second as president with the up-coming president-elect as a help-mate. This job-sharing has worked for other states and often goes by the co-president title at the branch level.

We also found that many of the standing committees named in the current bylaws can be convened ad hoc. Just as the Presidents Council has been a resource for finding new energetic volunteers for short-term committees, the branch council will provide a resource for recruiting volunteers for projects---such as revising the bylaws.

Making It Work

During February the bylaws committee became an e-committee working through the articles, honing, clarifying, fine-tuning, reading and re-reading, writing and re-writing always with an open mind.

During this time we decided that the term "Board of Directors" did not describe the newly envisioned governing structure. A ***Governing Board*** including a ***Branch Council*** and the executive committee distinguished the new organization.

One critical issue the bylaws committee was required to address is the ***article on dissolution***. We looked at what other states are doing and received suggestions from the AAUW Governance Committee Chair Carolyn Hayek. North Carolina, for example, has put the dissolution topic on their convention agenda for this spring. California has adopted a simple 2/3 vote process which can be initiated by a motion from a single member. Carolyn Hayek suggested a year-long petition process.

We opted for a ***combination dissolution petition process and member vote within 120 days***. This proposed process will prevent a single member from calling for dissolution while giving the final decision to the membership within a reasonable time period.

Though not a requirement from AAUW, the committee felt it is important to include a process in the bylaws for ***joining multi-state groups such as the former Rocky Mountain Region***. Some state leaders in the former RMR have opted to continue activities, such as the June conference, on an informal basis. The proposed article puts the decision to join a formally organized and overlaid multi-state organization with the membership since it may have a fiscal impact on members.

Making the Rounds

On March 4, 2010, the AAUW-AZ bylaws committee published and distributed its proposal (dated 2/28/2010) to state board members and branch presidents for dissemination to the membership as required. A copy was sent to AAUW Governance Committee as required by AAUW. Bylaws committee members began making presentations to branch boards and answered email inquiries from AAUW-AZ members prior to the convention.

Submitted by Susan H. Youngdahl, Chair

Committee Members: Martha Boerner, East Mesa; Catherine Cunningham, Prescott; Donna Houglund, SE Valley; Mary Shenefield, Prescott, State Parliamentarian; Karen Willett, Scottsdale, State Webmaster; *ex officio*, Barbara Neubert, Tucson, State President.