

Building Branch Success through Programming

Summer Leadership Conference, Cazenovia, NY, July 2016

1. Branch Programming and its Role

What Constitutes Branch Programming?

NYS AAUW Branches offer many activities to their members. Traditionally, branches have viewed community programs, recreational activities, international affairs, public policy, and diversity as distinct and separate from each other.

In actuality, all of these comprise Branch Programming and should be seen in an integrated manner

Why is this view important?

This view is important because it helps us to:

- ✓ Collaborate within our branches at the leadership and member level so that we aren't working in silos
- ✓ See and act upon organically cross- over ideas that enhance our programming in general and make each activity more purposeful
- ✓ Create cohesion within our branches
- ✓ Create a coherent branch narrative to current and prospective members. It simplifies our "elevator pitch".
 - We can say that we "offer a number of activities that support education for women and girls in our own communities and at the national and global level" *or words to that effect*, rather than trying to explain all the various categories such as recreational, community, diversity, etc.
- ✓ Remember our mission and consistently develop mission- based programs
- ✓ Pay equal attention to and provide equal resources for every part of our branches because everything we do is programming

What is the role of Branch programming?

Branch programming has a three-fold purpose

- To engage current members and reduce annual attrition
- To continuously attract new members
- To make a social impact

Programs are considered to be successful when they fulfill this three- fold purpose

2. Discussion and Analysis of Successful Programming

Three successful NYS programs were presented: Court Watch – Poughkeepsie; Public Policy Express – Rochester; STEM – Westchester

These were discussed with the audience and analyzed to understand the roots of their success. We found that all three programs had the following characteristics or qualities in common:

Social impact –*raised awareness of an issue or reduced the problem within a given community or influenced institutional policy and practice or contributed towards the development and passage of legislation*

Advocacy with government agencies – *worked with one or more government agencies in the pursuit of a community-based goal*

Collaboration of non-profits – *developed a community of interest and worked with other nonprofits to make program more effective*

Well planned and organized – *programs had a time –linked goal, objectives, volunteers, clear expectations of volunteers, common understanding of time commitment from volunteers, meeting schedule, training and evaluation of results*

Raised Branch Profile – *Branch members were seen a change agents within the community*

Mission-Based – *programs were either directly related to education of women and girls or related to issues that are obstacles to education and decent livelihoods*

Participation in issue-related coalitions – *Programs understood the power of coalitions in influencing public policy*

Leadership opportunities – *programs provided encouragement, space and mentorship to allow members to step into leadership roles*

Use of college interns – *built branch capacity with interns and relationships with colleges*

Appeal to women throughout their life span – *programs appealed to all demographics and could therefore attract all demographics to branch membership*

3. Concluding Remarks

- a) Successful programs as characterized above take a period of time to develop.
- b) It is not necessary for a program to embody all of the above characteristics. However, the more we understand the role that these characteristics play in a program's success and the more effort we make to ensure that our programs embody as many as possible, the more successful our programs will be
- c) Sometimes, a branch's programs (once successful) reach a plateau, no longer fulfilling their three – fold purpose. Understandably, branches are reluctant to give up these programs because they have invested time and effort in these. You don't have to give up on these programs: try to think of ways in which you can widen and deepen your existing programs by:

- Adding dimensions to them that raise the profile of the branch locally and regionally
- Providing a new critically important service to the community
- Attracting new populations of graduate women that may have been hard to reach
- Attracting funding and other resources
- Building diversity into the program which has its own rewards
- Raising the collective consciousness of Branch members from the local to the global.