

CHAPTER SIX: EVENT PLANNING

- ◆ Issue Forums
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- ◆ Promoting Your Event
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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.