

Volunteers First

Volunteers First Session 2 Narrative

Slide #1

Thank you, Sigrid and **Good** evening! It's WONDERFUL **so** many of you **chose** to... give of your **time** to attend the **2nd part of Volunteers First**.

Before we get started, I want to say, it took a "village" of long-time AAUW California and Oregon leaders and a few non-members who put in many hours behind the scenes to make Volunteers First a reality. I want to especially recognize:

- Sharrell Blakeley former president of AAUW Palm Springs Branch who inspired this program many years ago;
- Barry Altland, author and consultant with AAUW of CA who **enlightened** our understanding of the why and the how of volunteer leadership, the importance of *Engaging the Head, Heart and Hands of Volunteers*, and... **consented** to our using his book for this program!
- Sigrid Moranz, AAUW CA Branch Leadership Development Chair, who was endlessly patient and never allowed me to give up!
- And...Gloria Holland Salem Oregon Branch member for her invaluable narrative coaching.

We thank them all!! Slide #2

Volunteers First is an awareness program designed... specifically for leaders of volunteers to address AAUW's declining membership, engagement and leadership.

Volunteers First seeks serious consideration of AAUW leaders to change their **primary** focus from administering the branch (filling positions and assigning tasks to members) to **first** building and facilitating relationships among members. Hence: **Volunteers First**.

There are four effective, interchangeable "best practices" or ways for leaders – and members - to build and facilitate relationships. They are: CARE, CONNECT, SUPPORT and RECOGNITION.

Success implementing each depends on AAUW leaders' knowing and respecting what each member-volunteer hopes to **gain** or **get in return** for BEING an AAUW member **while working for the cause**.

I think it's important to refresh our memories of the Volunteers First basics:

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- ❖ In the first session, we learned.... WE are not alone!
- ❖ Non-profit, volunteer organizations **worldwide** have been facing a steady decline in

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members and volunteers for over 20 years.

AAUW and other non-profits everywhere did the best they could to address the problem. They adopted the Business Leadership Model for recruitment, retention, productive engagement and leadership. It was familiar and made sense at the time.

Slide #4

AAUW has had excellent success in **SOME** areas using the business leadership model:

- Accountability to donors and members is good;
- And...we used it effectively when developing an array of engaging community programs that have - measurably - advanced and empowered women and girls throughout the country.

With all of this success, why has membership decline? It is puzzling because OUR cause is **one of such great passion...** to so many women.

And...try as we may, we have **not** been able to get out of this pickle.

Slide #5

Research has always been the basis of our **external** AAUW programs. So, in 2022, Sandi Gabe, former AAUW of CA President and her board, made a bold decision to research our “dilemma” **internally**. Former AAUW CA members were surveyed and **asked... why** they dropped their branch **membership**. Particular attention was given to answers of those who had been leaders and/or actively engaged.

Other than moving or illness, a significant number said they left AAUW because they felt unwelcome, disconnected and/or just became disinterested in participating... **even for the cause**.

Sandi then challenged the CA Leadership Development Committee to find a new and different but credible and effective volunteer leader program.

Slide #6

After reading Barry Altland’s book, *Engaging the Head, Heart and Hands of Volunteers* and meeting with him via Zoom, we started to understand WHY we were losing members and HOW to make an effective leadership correction.

Barry had us look inward for **our** volunteer motivators. Interestingly, they were similar to the **INTRINSIC NEEDS** on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs on this slide.

Once done, Barry suggested **OUR collective INTRINSIC** motivators are likely the **SAME** motivators as those of most of our members.

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Barry **suggested**: all AAUW leaders need to do is focus on satisfying the intrinsic needs – the motivators – what members want to gain from volunteering – THEN modify our leadership model accordingly.

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We found two **credible** RESEARCH studies that supported Barry's theory.

The first was done in 2020 by South American volunteers. They asked other volunteers all over the world "what keeps you coming back?"

The results were astounding: universally, volunteers said they do so to satisfy their **intrinsic needs**. **The needs that money can't buy or jobs can't satisfy... The need**

- **to...Altruize**
- The need to...Socialize
- The need to...Learn and
- The need to ...Self-Actualize

The conclusion was simple. Leaders of volunteers can sustain their organizations if they **FIRST** focus on the intrinsic needs of volunteers. The "administrative needs" of the branch - being secondary will be easier and happen more naturally.

Slide #8

In summary, what we learned in the first session is: Volunteerism is... an **AFFAIR of the HEART!**

If leaders learn nothing else from these sessions, remember this:

Fulfilling the member's intrinsic motivators for volunteering is what touches their heart.

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Fulfillment drives their choices for volunteering,

And...**Fulfillment (JOY!)** is what sustains an AAUW member's passion for serving.

The **HEART** you see here represents this new-found awareness. [Slide #9](#)

This revelation gave us pause... In the process of trying to empower and advocate for equity for "other" women, have we, the AAUW mother leaders been treating our members more like employees and unintentionally neglecting to nurture them properly as VOLUNTEERS?

To sustain our AAUW Mother Tree, the research suggests we need to ensure our member-volunteers intrinsic needs– the needs that money or work cannot provide – the needs they unconsciously hoped to gain as an AAUW member - are nurtured **FIRST**.

[Slide #10](#)

In 2023, Australians studied volunteerism – also on a worldwide basis - to determine the most effective leadership practices for leaders of **volunteers**. Practices that would increase volunteer engagement, retention and leadership. The results of the Australian study were universal!

Successful leaders of volunteers made **BUILDING AND FACILITATING RELATIONSHIPS** their **#1 priority**.

[Slide #11](#)

The Australian study further listed the most effective ways to build and facilitate relationships. They are to **CARE, CONNECT, SUPPORT AND RECOGNIZE**. -



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While we have been going through them in detail with session 1 and now in session 2, as if they are steps, they are, in fact, interconnected.

Slide #12

The first way to build and facilitate relationships is to show you **genuinely CARE** about each member as a person.

In the first session we discussed **CARE** in detail. Generally **CARE** means personally getting to know each member, talking in person and learning what moves each member to volunteer: **what** interests and activities bring **each member** satisfaction and joy. Learn by asking what each member **hopes to gain – intrinsically-** by being an AAUW member engaging for the cause.

Slide #13

Also in the first session we discussed the second way to build and facilitate relationships which is to **CONNECT** with each member personally. Then...personally **CONNECT** each member to other members and activities that match their intrinsic needs and interests.

Assigning “administrative or job tasks to members does NOT build relationships. Nor does it serve the purpose of putting the wants and needs of our member-Volunteers First. And, at this stage, it certainly might not bring them joy!

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We'll now talk about how research shows successful leaders of volunteers use **SUPPORT** to build and facilitate relationships among members.

Of all the behaviors found in the Australian study, I think **SUPPORT** will make the biggest difference in sustaining engagement and leadership development.

Slide #15

We've already discussed **CARE**, but, if you remember, the four leadership behaviors are interconnected. So... if you haven't already done so, now is the time to discover, re-discover ask or refresh your memory about the basics - a member's Intrinsic Motivators:

- What does the member seem to enjoy when participating in mission-related activities?
- Generally, is the member satisfied by:
 - Altruizing
 - Socializing
 - Learning **and/or**
 - Self-actualizing?

Slide #16

Your ability as an AAUW leader (and member!) to **SUPPORT** engaged members will be much easier if you **CARE** about their **cultural** and **generational** background.

Cultural CARING means understanding and appreciating each member's unique cultural background, values and beliefs. Having each member share about their culture **creates empathy**, fosters an inclusive and equitable branch environment. And...increases their and YOUR ability to effectively and comfortably **SUPPORT** members as they become more engaged and experiment with leadership.

Cultural **CARING** means simply asking the same cultural questions a historian might ask:

What makes your culture unique in history?

What stereotypes or erroneous assumptions have you experienced?

- What stereotypes or assumptions do you have about people of other cultures?

How has/does has your cultural background impact your life?

- Values
- Hobbies, music, dance, food, dress,
- School, work, family, daily activities
- Socially, psychologically

How have cultural language differences impacted your life?

- What language or communication challenges have you experienced in your life?
- What type of communication do you prefer?

Encourage interest groups or use circles of engagement to give members opportunities to share and learn the cultural impacts that make up our emotional being.

- Ask about the uniqueness of member's cultures
- Show curiosity and appreciation of those differences
- Find similarities

AAUW branches can be a safe haven for members to share deeply with each other and build lasting friendships - inspiring them to return, engage and lead.

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AAUW's 5-Star Program is another way to stimulate ideas for creating a branch environment of **cultural caring** and **support**. This year, Salem Branch began honoring Oregon women of diverse backgrounds. During Women's History Month and Oregon Black and Asian History month, we

created attractive educational and historical pieces. Using Constant Contact sending them out to all members as part of DEI awareness. One piece announced a branch Japanese program lead by a new member of Japanese descent.

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For the last few years, Salem Branch members have made a concerted effort to collaborate and participate in community cultural celebration programs like the World Beat Festival and Salem Speaks.

This year, a member of Ukrainian descent, organized a community Ukrainian cultural event with music and food. Two members shared personal stories – one of her son's experiences fighting with the Ukrainians. Another of growing up in Moscow.

Branch members offered to help the NAACP with their upcoming Juneteenth celebration. We learned, just like AAUW, the NAACP needs help with their community equity events. Our offer of help was most appreciated and, instead of talking *about* them we'll be joining them in a cause we share.

Members of the World Beat Festival and NAACP allowed us to wear our AAUW t-shirts and distribute Salem Branch flyers. At last year's World Beat Festival, the Japanese woman who arranged our May Japanese program, became interested in AAUW and joined our branch.

Reaching out and offering join our sisters with THEIR community activities while advocating for a vision of equity, helps us fulfil our missions together. Attracting diverse members is secondary but we are confident it will happen, just naturally, as we all get to know and work with each other.

Slide #19

As with cultural CARING, **GENERATIONAL CARING** begins with sharing and ends with empathy.

Generational identity is grounded in traits and presences that occur in high frequency within a given group. General traits listed on this slide may or may not “fit” each *personally*. The psychological and social traits and values of people are, like cultural differences, usually a real mix and sometimes seem at odds with each other.

The values of youngers (and older) are shaped by the SAME categorical influences we, as Boomers, experienced in our growing up years: social expectations, educational opportunities, technological growth, health, safety, economic welfare, physical and mental well-being, our parent’s and our work experiences and political influences of the time.

As with cultural awareness, members might find experiences of youngers to be jarringly different. And... we might discover, our general knowledge of youngers might unintentionally be a **BIAS** to overcome.

Encourage interest groups or use circles of engagement to give members opportunities to share and learn the how generational experiences impact a member’s emotional being.

As with **cultural** caring, **generational CARING** begins by asking the same questions a historian might ask:

- What social influences did you grow up with?
- What were your hobbies?
- What educational opportunities and challenges did you face?
- What work challenges did you face?

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- What ways/types of communication have you experiences in your lifetime
 - What are your communication preferences?
- How did health issues - the Pandemic- affect your school, work, family and social life?
- What are your work and family values?
 - How are they different from your parents?
- How did/will you raise children differently than your parents?
- How did you feel about your future growing up?
- What are your current hopes for the future– work, family, socially?

Learning the impact of each member's **generational** experiences is just another way leaders can build and facilitate relationships and more effectively SUPPORT members.

Slide #20

There was a good article published this year (2025), in *The Atlantic* titled "Young People Want to Change the World. Non-profits Can Help Them".

The Atlanta article states, (quote) " While a majority of young people **say** they wish they could do more to help, according to a **report** from DoSomething.org, 42% of them say they **don't know how to get started.**" (unquote)

Since young people in general are quite community-minded and socially conscious, it stands to reason that some could find a home with AAUW.

Lately, we have met some of these young women while demonstrating in our community for a variety of education and equity causes while carrying our AAUW signs.

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In the past, we have had success reaching out to women's groups on college campuses. Why not try reaching out to HELP women's groups on campus with an AAUW-mission-related activity **they** are planning? It's an opportunity to mingle and gently acquaint them with AAUW.

Slide #21

AAUW Salem Branch has recently reached out to OSU and Chemeketa Community College and learned volunteer organizations can apply to offer non-paid volunteer opportunities to students in-person and online.

The idea of possibly offering a Public Policy Chair is in the exploratory stage. A college student volunteer could become members for free. Yes!

A member would need to be there as mentor. But... we're thinking creatively about how to provide growth opportunities for young women and keep our branches alive at the same time.

By reaching out and mingling with younger women, leaders can more comfortably and effectively SUPPORT those who become members.

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With this slide, I would like to introduce Tobi Johnson who is the President of Tobi Johnson & Associates, gave us permission to share her summation of new research she found debunking myths about volunteers of **ALL ages**.

What matters to volunteers **no matter their age – and I would say ALSO** their **cultural background - is:**

- A well-run organization or activity
- Mutual respect
- Challenging work that meaningful and makes a difference
- Short term micro-volunteering opportunities

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- Choices and control
- Support and training
- Knowing where they stand: when they're doing well and how to do better
- When offering SUPPORT, don't hesitate to be assertive in assessing their satisfaction and comfort level.
- **Listen**
- Then **ACT quickly** to make member-specific **VOLUNTEERS FIRST** need-satisfaction changes.

Slide #23

SUPPORTING each member to sustain interest, engagement and renewal is a challenge in the short-term, not to mention the long-term.

AAUW leaders and long-time members want a magic formula we can apply **now** so younger members will **quickly** grow into a beautiful branch of engaged, energetic and committed members who make sustaining AAUW a priority and become leaders.

I wish I could provide you with that magic formula. But, like Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman illustrated in this Zits cartoon, there are many "distractions" that are barriers to a "quick fix". Not to mention MOST PEOPLE do not like change!!

Another reality is, women young and old alike are developing have "**short-term**" attention spans and are more impatient. We want for results and reward instantly. Sometimes it seems volunteer organizations are in competition with iPhones and social media for women we believe could find so much satisfaction and joy in being an AAUW member.

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So...anytime an engaged member **does** choose to show up, it's important to support and touch their heart to better ensure they'll join us on longer "date" rather than sitting alone on the couch or taking a warm bath.

Slide #24

Circling back around to CONNECT...Volunteers First leaders **take time** - while they, themselves, are engaging as a speaker or with the group - to **OBSERVE each member**. Confirm **for yourself** that the member is actually **CONNECTED** to or matched with activities that are aligned with their interests.

- Are they engaging with others or just sitting quietly or off alone?
- Are they smiling or frowning?
- Do they stay until the end or leave early?

Your observations can be used as conversation-starters when TOUCHING BASES with members, which is the next **SUPPORT** step.

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TOUCHING BASE" is the single most critical, proactive and effective support measure a leader can take to sustain a member's passion for volunteering.

"Touching base" means slowing down enough to make time to chat with each engaged member **in person**, over the phone or via Zoom.

- Schedule one-on-one chats when there is plenty of time to talk.

Simply ASK..."**how's it going**"? For more in-depth conversation,

- Express your sincere positive appreciation for the member's participation and any recent special contributions.
- Let the member know their **serving** is what matters - **NOT** how much **time** is served.

- Ask about satisfaction and fulfillment.
- Discuss dissatisfaction and any fulfillment barriers
- Ask for feedback and suggestions
- Offer alternative ways to serve
- Better yet, encourage creative thinking for new ideas for programs, planning and implementation.

Slide #26

“Growing leaders” is usually a slow process of building and facilitating a relationship. Growing leaders begins while **SUPPORTING** their engagement. Not when you’re getting to know someone or connecting them to activities of their interest.

Prioritize your Leadership Development Energy.

Along the way, **assess** which engaged members appear to enjoy leadership

- **Assess** whether or not an interested-potential leader has the HEART for caring, connecting and supporting OTHERS
- Spend your time and energy developing and elevating those engaged members who have the interest and ability and time to be leaders and...most importantly, who CARE about others.
- Leaders of volunteers must be able to reach out to members and **gen-uine-ly CARE** about them.
- Leadership positions are best left vacant rather than being filled with members who have no time or interest in leading or the heart for doing so.

Empower newly engaged members to be AAUW leaders

- Effective leaders create opportunities for members to take a small lead
- Start by creating many, small do-able lead roles with small teams for leading or co-leading activities of their interest.

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- Create many opportunities for member-volunteers to share in branch roles, program and active decision-making;
- Then... allow member-volunteers to “**own**” **implementation** of their mission-related suggestions.
- Effective leaders **MAKE** opportunities for leadership: Sometimes it’s good to bow out of a long-held position – create a vacancy and give others a true opportunity to step up.
- My rule of thumb: say how long you’ll stay in the same leadership position the day you assume the responsibility.
 - For me, it’s 3-4 years and
 - Never in the same role twice.

Empower and challenge all AAUW members to be AAUW sustainers

- Periodically, ask members to brainstorm how they can personally commit to help sustain the AAUW mission and values by keeping the branch alive in the community.
 - These are excellent topics for Circles of Engagement
 - What is needed to make that happen for each?
 - What areas can members focus on to increase participation, lead an activity, engage in advocacy, scholarships/sponsorships fundraising and branch leadership.

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The fourth way leaders can build and facilitate relationships – as well as help bond them to the AAUW mission and to the organization’s sustainability is to **RECOGNIZE** members’ contributions.

Barry Altland, author of EHHH of Volunteers is here via video to share a favorite – and most important - topic: “Rethinking Volunteer Recognition.” Barry....

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Barry's NARRATIVE...

To be effective, **RECOGNITION** must also *touch the heart* of the member-volunteer for continued engagement and retention and to “grow” leaders. Recognition that touches the heart of the volunteer must come from the heart [of the leader]!

Start with awareness of the importance of giving personal (as opposed to organized/organizational) recognition from the heart. Barry introduces food-for-thought discussion questions for attendees. – how many received recognition? Where, when and for what? How did you feel about it – truly? Given an item? Where is that item today?

Coming from the heart means having genuine care for others
Importance of expressing appreciation. Emphasize using love language to recognize and express appreciation ***along the way***. Refer to Gary Chapman's book *The Five Love Languages*.

Challenge AAUW to rethink volunteer recognition: become more inclusive with many recognitions and ASK/DISCOVER from each member how each would like to be recognized for making impactful contributions. Honor and respect their preferences.

Slide #28

In summary, AAUW leaders **can** pivot from focusing first on “assigning tasks to others” to making **building and facilitating relationships their #1 priority**.

Creating a branch where members are “**paid off**” with **satisfaction of their intrinsic needs** WHILE engaging for equity and opportunities for women and girls.

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AAUW leaders **CAN** build and facilitate relationships of our members by:

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- CARING and CONNECTING them to each other.
- By...SUPPORTING member engagement and encouraging leadership
 - By “touching base” and asking members “how’s it going”?
- By RECOGNIZING members contributions
 - *along the way*...saying thank you and showing appreciation for their personal contribution to the AAUW cause.

Slide #30

VOLUNTEERISM IS AN AFFAIR OF THE HEART

Fulfilling EACH member’s volunteer motivators **touches their heart**. Fulfillment and joy **drive their choices for volunteering**,

sustains a member’s **passion for serving** and

commitment to help sustain AAUW well into the future.

And...

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herein ...ladies lie the **JOY** most AAUW leaders **hope to gain** by becoming AAUW leaders! 😊!

Thank you!