

Volunteers First Abbreviated Version Includes Part 1&2

SLIDE #1

It took a village of AAUW CA and OR leaders to create, produce and introduce Volunteers First. However... ONLY because of the encouragement, passion, time and talent of these two AAUW CA women.... who worked tirelessly with me, was Volunteers First created.

SLIDE #2

As you know... Volunteers First is an awareness and leadership program for member engagement based on a volunteer philosophy.

How many of you have heard of a **volunteer** organization having a **philosophy** to guide **its...** mission-fulfillment and decision-making... **within** a joyful and fulfilling **volunteer** culture?

We had not.... Until, we did...

SLIDE #3

“Volunteers First” is based on a philosophy. Learning the philosophical principles as they apply to volunteerism was enlightening...and we had many “ah ha” moments. I’m here to share those “ah ah” moments with you.

We start our **story** by looking back a ways...

Slide #4

Non-profit, volunteer organizations **worldwide** have been facing a steady decline in members and volunteers for over 30 years.

- As early as the 1980’s researchers noted fluctuation in civic engagement, formal volunteering and donating.
- The [US Census Bureau](#) noted a significant [volunteer rate drop in 2006](#).
- This map shows [rates of volunteerism in the US in 2024](#), from 16% (lighter areas) to 41% (darker areas). Volunteerism is higher in low population areas.

Sadly, research that [could have helped volunteer organizations](#) address this trend was not available until recently.

Slide #5

In the meantime, struggling along, trying to reverse membership decline, AAUW and other volunteer organizations adopted the familiar and popular **Business Leadership Model**.

We just assumed ...if the business model succeeded with marketing, attraction and retention of employees, it would succeed with volunteers. Under this model, AAUW developed wonderful programs, served women and girls successfully [but membership remained in steady decline](#).

We simply could not – still cannot - understand WHY this was happening...when our mission and values and programs were so popular and necessary.

SLIDE #6

In 2020, the AAUW CA board under the leadership of President Sandi Gabe, decided to research the reasons for AAUW membership decline in CA.

This was a first for AAUW (perhaps long overdue...) but not out of character. After all, since 1881, AAUW has conducted research to provide us with fact-based **guidance** for legislative advocacy and program development to educate and empower women and girls **outside** of our organization. This study would look inward.

AAUW CA asked **former** active members **and** leaders from all 100 branches why they left AAUW. A scientifically significant number responded.

SLIDE #7

The results were disheartening but enlightening.

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 Gabe then challenged the AAUW CA Leadership Development Committee to find a new and different but [credible and effective](#) volunteer leader program that would address these findings.

SLIDE #8

Researching this project led us to Barry Altland, author of *Engaging the Head, Heart and Hands of Volunteers*. We ordered his book and liked what we read. We contacted Barry. He volunteered his time and talent to help us. Then, he **consented** to our using his book to develop a leadership awareness program specific to AAUW.

SLIDE #9

Barry was instrumental in **enlightening** our understanding of the **why** and the **how** of volunteering and leading volunteers. He met with AAUW CA leaders via Zoom in two of our Peer Group Meetings. Barry had us look inward to **our** AAUW member-volunteer motivators. We **shared** our motivators looked a lot like those on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Barry said...**Satisfying a volunteer's intrinsic needs** is the non-monetary "payback" that keeps **volunteers** engaging for a cause. [pause](#)

Barry suggested **OUR** collective **INTRINSIC** motivators as AAUW members and volunteers are likely the **SAME** motivators as those of most of our members.

Barry also **suggested**... all AAUW leaders have to do is discover the intrinsic needs – [the motivators](#) - of our member-volunteers; THEN adjust our leadership **practices** accordingly.

Slide #10

We searched for **credible RESEARCH** that might support Barry's theory. And...Here is what we found:

In 2020, Portuguese volunteers who were **seriously** concerned about the drastic decline in volunteerism **worldwide**, conducted a study asking people all over the world WHY they volunteer.

Slide #11

The results! Universally, people said they volunteer to satisfy their **intrinsic needs**.
The need

- **to**...Altruize – give of themselves and make a positive difference
- The need to...Socialize – engage with others
- The need to...Learn

- The need to ...Self-Actualize – to have opportunities for introspection, and personal growth.

These intrinsic, personal needs or a combination of them – **unique to EACH volunteer** - are what research says motivates **volunteers** to serve.

Slide #12

In 2023, Australians expanded on the Portugal study. They compiled many studies of volunteer leadership **from around the world**. Researchers then identified **specific leader behaviors** that resulted in an increase in **volunteer** retention, engagement and leadership.

Slide #13

The Australian study concluded **worldwide** the most successful volunteer leaders **made FACILITATING & building RELATIONSHIPS their #1 priority**.

The Australian study ALSO identified the specific leadership behaviors describing HOW to **facilitate and build relationships**.

Slide #14

These specific “how to” behaviors fell into four *interchangeable* categories:

CARE, CONNECT, SUPPORT AND RECOGNIZE

I’ll touch on each as described from the research...

Slide #15

Effective leaders of volunteers **CARE about every member all the time!**

They passionately and sincerely get **acquainted** or **RE-acquainted** with a new or renewing member AND any member **who is not engaged**. **They do this in person**. They discover what moves each member personally...what interests and activities bring **each member** satisfaction and joy and...what each hope to **gain** – by being a volunteer....

....what each member expects to get “paid” **in an intrinsic way** – in exchange for giving of their time, talent and skills.

“Getting to know” a member’s motivators is KEY to member engagement.

Successful leaders of volunteers discover – and keep re-discovering what each member hopes to gain:

- Altruize
- Socialize?
- Learn and/or?
- Self-Actualize?

Leaders need to know the payoffs EACH member desires and recognize if these intrinsic needs are not met, they may look elsewhere.

Slide #16

Effective leaders of volunteers CONNECT members.

After “Getting to Know” new and unengaged members, leaders are **then** equipped to **CONNECT** them to **other members** involved in activities *of similar interest*.

The need for connection is powerful, especially today. Research shows: **a key difference** between very happy people and less-happy people is good relationships.

Connecting is facilitating and building relationships with and among members.

Assigning tasks does NOT facilitate relationships. Nor does it serve the purpose of putting the wants and needs of volunteers first! At least not at this stage.

Slide #17

Of all the suggestions we’ve included in Volunteers First, **Circles of Engagement** has been the most beneficial to our members. “**Circles**” provide members with an opportunity to **connect** with **members they don’t know** or don’t know well, **to learn** about each other, **to develop understanding** and learn **how to talk to each other in new ways**.

Slide #18

Barry Altland suggests branches limit leader and speaker time to 50% of the allotted MEETING time.

- using the other 50% of meeting time for **formal** Circles of Engagement.
- This is **different** than “social time” that occurs before or after a meeting.

Using 50% of the **allotted MEETING time** for Circles of Engagement gives members time they wouldn't otherwise have - to think and reflect, to **interact and engage in meaningful discussions with each other** – **much like what we do when we are “making friends”**. This is fulfilling and it bonds us to each other and to our cause.

Circles... can be used in as many ways as your mind can create!

Slide #19

AAUW CA and OR branches are using Circles...to quickly help new members become part of the branch during orientation from answering trivia questions about influential women in STEM to mingling with members of a mission-related committee of interest. They arrange members in circles to talk about an array of serious subjects from idea program generation and yearly planning to figuring out how they are going to reach out to the community and even stay alive as a branch.

Slide #20

Members here wore, then told, a personal story about their favorite hat during a fundraising. Taking time to have each member share her favorite book, music or hobby are “get-to-know-you” icebreakers that connects members to each other.

Slide #21

Small Circles provide safe and inclusive space for members to “get to know” each other by talking about challenging life experiences related to ethnic and generational and cultural differences....leading to awareness, common interests and values...or ideas for empowering women and girls. Circle allows new leaders to develop naturally.

Slide #22

Effective leaders of volunteers engage in and model mutual **SUPPORT**. **SUPPORTING** members is following up with each member **PERSONALY**. It's simply “touching bases” with each member who has participated – **or not** -in an activity. Accessing their joy in participating. Learning whether or not their volunteer experience was interesting and satisfying.

Slide #23

Observe for participation and **encourage** members. Recognize their presence and contribution. Confirm afterwards by asking: Was the activity a good “fit”? Did it give **her** joy and a sense of fulfillment? What would make the experience better for **her**? This is what Barry calls “touching base”

Slide #24

TOUCHING BASE” is the single most critical, proactive, effective and caring way a leader can take to sustain a member’s passion for volunteering.

Slide #25

The principles of Volunteers First can effectively be applied to community outreach and collaboration. Let other community leaders know AAUW supports diversity, equity and inclusion by ASKING: “what can WE do to support or help YOU in your efforts to fulfill our common missions and values?”

Responding to community needs, Salem OR Branch 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.

Salem OR members help the NAACP during the Juneteenth celebration. We sponsor Salem Speaks for women, wear our AAUW t-shirts while hosting a refreshment table at the World Beat Festival and help the LWV with a Voter Education Booth for Kids at the Salem Art Festival. Involvement with and for other organizations has gained us new members.

Slide #26

When it comes to **RECOGNITION**, Barry Altland counseled us to “RETHINK” what we do. Elaborate ceremonies, trophies and gifts of appreciation may bring JOY to some volunteers but might make others cringe.

Awhile back, I surveyed our members and asked “how would you like to be recognized. 90% said; “Just a simple thank you will do.” A few said, “I don’t need any thanks.” Another few said, being “Named Gift Honoree would be quite nice.”

During or right after participating in an event, members just want to know **THEY** mattered and **HOW** they made a difference. One branch now sends personal, hand-written thank you notes.

Effective leaders of volunteers bring joy and satisfaction to members by **RECOGNIZING each member** in ways that gives **THEM joy**.

Slide #27

Barry says, the challenge of being a leader of **volunteers** is to **intentionally** step outside yourself and your **personal** goals and **focus on the needs of your MEMBERS**.

Making the volunteer experience **about the member's fulfillment** gives space for member differences, **allows THEM to grow and maintain their identity while engaging in their favorite cause** and having a meaningful impact on others.

Slide #28

The natural outcome of Volunteers First is a volunteer philosophy. The AAUW of CA volunteer philosophy is:

- ❖ We recognize volunteers are the backbone of our organization.
- ❖ We strive to ensure every volunteer experience is meaningful and empowering.
- ❖ We embrace the “volunteers first” philosophy of discovery and care, connection, mutual support and recognition.

Slide #29

Volunteering is an Affair of the Heart

Fulfilling the member's volunteer motivators...touches their heart, drives their choices for volunteering and sustains their passion for serving.

Slide #30

“Volunteers First” leaders put volunteers first!