

Alternative Leadership Structures

The key to determining what leadership structure will work best for your branch is to understand your branch culture. What is a branch culture? It's the overall personality a stranger would perceive when attending a branch meeting or function.

Let's talk about some questions you can ask to better understand your branch:

- How large is your branch? Board?
- Average age of members? Mostly retired or working?
- What is your retention and new member rate?
- Do you see your branch as 'friendly' and 'open' to visitors?
- At a meeting, are visitors welcomed and introduced to the leaders?
- What interest groups/sections does your branch currently have?
- Are they well attended?
- Do members ever start new ones?
- Does your branch/board meet every month? If not, how often?
- At what level is your branch's understanding of and commitment to AAUW's mission and programs?
- What programs/projects does your branch support?
- Do you have programs/projects that are no longer of interest to your members?
- If a project/program is no longer supported by the branch, is it willing to let it go?
- Do you have difficulty filling leadership positions and 'recycle' members?
- Is your branch concerned about change because of 'the Bylaws'?
- Do you need to meet every month as a branch? As a board?

Alternative Leadership Structures:

- Explain AAUW bylaws: what is required and what is not.
- Discuss breaking programs/projects into individual tasks. No one wants to be 'chair' but might volunteer for a part of the job and get friends to help.
- Share what other branches have done, how well/not well it has worked.
- Discuss the pros and cons of options such as:
- Co-Officers, Leadership Committees, Rotating Officers.
- Ask for ideas from the group.

Evaluating a leadership structure: Discussion

- What is working and what is not?
- Are member's needs being met?
- Do leaders feel good/bad about their roles?
- Has member participation improved/decreased?
- Does the branch 'like' the leadership structure?

Things to keep in mind:

- Every branch is unique and important. Just because something works for one branch doesn't mean it will work for every branch.
- As a leader it is important to understand who your branch is now, not who it used to be. There is no 'shame' in accepting that what members need/want from AAUW have changed.
- There is no 'right answer'. Don't be afraid to try something, and if it doesn't work, try a something else.
- As the song says "let it go". Don't hold onto projects, programs, or structures because "we've always done it that way"
- Embrace change, even when it's uncomfortable.
- Change is a process. It can't happen overnight, or without good preparation.
- AAUW CA leaders are available and willing to help. We're only a phone call, email, or branch visit away.