**A Climate Change for Women and Girls**

The sun was shining brightly as over 1000+ “dangerously educated” women gathered in San Diego to exchange ideas, get training and resources to take their skills to the next level — in their states, the country, and the world. Why? The issues AAUW advocates for are urgent and evolving. At the 2015 National Conference we became “One AAUW” as we learned from each other’s experiences and clarified how best to empower women and girls and make history in 2015-16.

*“It was just terrific to get to meet and greet so many fellow AAUW members from across the USA. At roundtables, during presentations and at meals we shared our branch highs and lows and talked about what works for us and what hasn’t.” Pat Barber, Olympia Branch.*

Clearly Washington State is making history as attendees were delighted to learn that Washington State was chosen as one of AAUW’s “Top 10 States in contributions to AAUW Funds” In addition, the Kirkland—Redmond Branch and the Seattle Branch were recognized as two of AAUW’s “Top 50 Branches” in the country for their contributions to all AAUW programs in 2014. Washington State is also #2 behind California with 53 visionary members in the Legacy Circle who have made a commitment to the future of women and girls by making a planned gift to AAUW. Congratulations to everyone who gave of their time and donations to make these awards possible!

Since the journey toward woman’s equality is far from over, AAUW continued to challenge the climate of injustice for all women and girls at the Conference by launching a “**Charting the Course**” campaign which will give AAUW the dexterity to act quickly in the wake of challenges facing women and girls. The goal is to raise $1 million in unrestricted funds for cutting edge programs and initiatives in the next 2 years. AAUW will be able to use these funds wherever the need is greatest. All gifts are tax deductible. Supporters who invest in this campaign with a gift of $5,000 or more will receive a Charting the Course donor pin. Remember, we have highest rating in value in charity evaluation by companies like Guidestar and The Huffington post. “We are the largest funder of women’s graduate educations in the world,” according to Mark Hopkins, AAUW Chief Strategy Officer.

The Conference focused on our mission for 2015 which is developing **leadership skills** in women and girls. We wrestled with the issues around what it takes to be a woman leader and what it would take to make a woman a U.S. President. AAUW has embraced a program on empowering women at every stage of her career. In the past, AAUW has trained 100,000 women in the last 5+ years with the Start Smart salary negotiation program. 225 campuses were reached by 2500 workshops across the country. But since learning negotiation skills is critical for success in every woman’s career, AAUW has acquired the rights to Start Smart and Work Smart and plans to launch a very significant initiative this fall to teach these leadership skills far and wide. Start Smart will continue to expand on c/u partner campuses. Work Smart will focus on local alumni associations, local businesses, and local government institutions. As one of our “Fast Forward” speakers said, “We excited that finally a woman is on a $10 bill but want all the $100 bills we deserve.”

There’s no doubt, together we are more powerful and are now 180,000 strong. We’ve made great strides, but there are still injustices and working together we will pave the way to the day when women have the same value and respect as men. The conference emphasized one important way members can help accomplish our goal is through renewed efforts to support gender equality in education. [Catherine E. Lhamon](http://convention.aauw.org/speakers/plenary/), the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education spoke about the important work being done to enforce **Title IX** and to end sex discrimination in schools. The Department collected data every 2 years across public K-12 schools and “have found shocking disparities.” The case stories are not isolated or only in 1 part of the country. Assistant Secretary Lhamon cited recent case investigations in Pennsylvania, Washington, Ohio, Virginia, Colorado, Texas S. Methodist University, California, Indiana and Michigan.

Title IX is at the core of AAUW’s mission to empower women and is a key focus this year. [Title IX protects all students](http://www.aauw.org/title-ix/) and covers everything from campus sexual violence to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. The U.S. Department of Education has just released [new resources](http://www.aauw.org/2015/04/24/title-ix-coordinator-resources/) for Title IX coordinators at schools so that they understand the full scope of their jobs. But not all Title IX coordinators know about these tools. That’s where you come in! You can help by delivering these Title IX resources to local schools. AAUW is asking us to [pledge to do so](http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50796/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=14551&killorg=True). They’ve also published a how-to guide to make it easy. “We are standing for girls who need us to stand for them, ” Assistant Secretary Lhamon said.

*“Learning what Title IX really encompasses was very enlightening and I want to find out if Bellevue Schools have the current guidelines. At least by asking, the District will be aware that someone knows there are guideline that should be followed,” Sandy Heidergott, Lake Washington Branch.*

One exciting development in Public Policy arena is the expansion of the Two-Minute Activist Tool to include state and local level politics to track legislation. AAUW expects this tool to be used to fight the battle for equal pay, against campus sexual assault and against human trafficking. The tool will also provide a template of best practices across the country. There will be a strong **public policy** focus on voter registration for the 2016 election. Liza Maatz reported that “97% of AAUW members are registered to vote and she wants to track down the 3% who aren’t registered!” AAUW will continue to use state impact grants to make progress on equal pay and voter registration.

*“My goal is to discover new ways to weave public policy into all that we do (without being a pest).” Chris J. Blackman, Walla Walla Branch*

Of course there were many additional exciting speakers in plenary sessions, workshops and at special events covering STEM initiatives, NCCWSL and YWFT growth, branch marketing, membership growth and retention, continued growth of c/u partnerships, fellowships and grants, and more.

*“I especially loved the workshops on the prescription for recruitment and retention of new branch members. Wonderful…made me hopeful for our future!” Rosemary James, Lake Washington Branch.*

There were too many exciting program results for 2014-15 to describe here. But the good news is that you can dive into the area that interests you the most online and see the workshop presentations, talking points, and other interesting resources at [convention.AAUW.org](file:///C:\Users\Kelvi_000\AppData\Local\Temp\Temp1_National%20Conference%20Article%20-%20Rev%200%20-%20For%20your%20review.zip\convention.aauw.org). National AAUW is putting more materials from the conference online every day.

“We are the Proctor & Gamble of women’s issues,” Mark Hopkins stated. In his marketing workshop he offered some new ways to describe AAUW such as “AAUW is Climate Changer for Women and Girls. We were founded by the 1st women who went to college; that was when it was scandalous for women to go to college.” Mark said he’s found that statement more engaging and effective in social situations than trying to explain the history of American Association of University Women in a sentence or two.

Finally, perhaps the best way to describe the Conference is to see what some of the Washington attendees say about it:

*“The marketing workshop strengthened my ideas about branch marketing”. Judy Prince, Everett Branch.*

*“Talking with members at the conference re-energized me,” Kay McMurry, Hudson’s Bay Branch.*

*“I’m thrilled to put this new energy into action right away.” Tonna Kutner, Seattle Branch*

*“Informative and Inspiring”, Dorothy McBride, Tacoma Branch*

*“I particularly liked hearing about the successes with Tech Trek in California and how the experience has changed lives in profound ways.” Helen Smith, Stanwood-Camano ~~Island~~ Branch*

The Convention provided us with many tools to begin to address our need for more (diverse) members. Hopefully a year from now we can tout the results with energy and enthusiasm and say we are truly “breaking through barriers!~~,~~” Pat Barber, Olympia Branch.

“AAUW changes the lives of women and girls; this convention was affirmation of the power of AAUW from start to finish.   Some of us were able to do the business of AAUW at convention; some of us saw dear friends and caught up on news; many of us learned more about what we need to do in our branches from programming to marketing and fundraising. All of us went home renewed and reinvigorated.” As for me, I look forward to Convention 2017.” Kelvie Comer, Kirkland-Redmond Branch

*“It was a totally profound experience for me.” Phyllis Keiley-Tyler, Edmonds-Sno-King Branch.*

As the gentle San Diego sun set on the 2015 National Conference, we hugged and waved good-bye to new and old friends. The sparkle on the tranquil azure ocean gave each of us the hope that we’d meet again at the 2017 National AAUW Convention in Washington DC.

“If we want to go far, go together” An African Proverb