



Breaking through Barriers - AAUW's Unifying Focus

AAUW **Current Topics Briefing #5**
June 30, 2008

At the June 22, 2008 joint meeting of the AAUW and AAUW Educational Foundation Boards, both boards unanimously supported **Breaking through Barriers** as the unifying focus for AAUW. This action followed two years of dialogue and market analysis to identify the program focus for AAUW that embodies our legacy, personalizes our mission and illuminates our path into the future.

WHY does AAUW need a unifying focus?

- It expresses the essence of AAUW — what we have been, are and will be -- our DNA.
- It amplifies our Mission Statement to make clear **how** the organization will “advance equity for women and girls” and **in what pursuit/s** we will apply our advocacy, education and research.

WHAT is a unifying focus?

- Since our new Value Promise, “As a member of AAUW, you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance” identifies what AAUW does -- our unifying focus, **Breaking through Barriers** captures both the spirit and the strategy implied by the Value Promise.
- Our unifying focus is more than a program “theme.” It becomes the foundation, the rationale and the catalyst for program initiatives that address societal needs.
- An organization’s unifying focus identifies something that coalesces its membership. **Breaking through Barriers** brings us together, describing what we believe and what we do. It announces that we do what we value, and what we do brings value—to members, to those we serve and to society.
- Our unifying focus mandates integration of AAUW’s program components: public policy, Educational Foundation and Legal Advocacy awards, research (study + action), NCCWSL, Campus Action Projects, etc., in service of our goals.

HOW will we use our unifying focus, **Breaking through Barriers** ?

- Our unifying focus has contextual flexibility, equally appropriate for application to women’s educational, economic, legal, political and socio-cultural challenges.
- It conveys both power and intentionality. It is somewhat provocative, identifying our target issues as externalities to be attacked, rather than limitations in women’s ability or will to succeed. And it suggests the confidence we have to break through those targeted barriers to achieve our goals.
- Breaking through barriers-- not breaking them down, is an artful way of describing our methodology. We make strategic decisions that: (a) carefully identify barriers that we are prepared and equipped to attack, and (b) select tactics that capitalize on the strengths of our association.
- **Breaking through Barriers** establishes a filter for programmatic decision-making, reminding us of our Value Promise. **Breaking through Barriers** focuses us as a community on our shared dedication to helping all women to have a fair chance.
- At the same time, **Breaking through Barriers** unites membership with program, since it also focuses us individually on our promise that by joining AAUW we are committed to taking personal action to help to break through barriers on behalf of women and girls.

Because of our size, 100,000 members, we “carry a big stick.” Because of our research, credibility is always a key part of our arsenal. Because of our history of achievement, we have a reputation for effectiveness. Because of our commitment to investing in our mission – “putting our money where our mouth is” – our adversaries know that AAUW is a force to be reckoned with, and that we have “staying power” in our dedication to breaking through the barriers that we target.

In announcing our new unifying focus, **Breaking through Barriers**, we are issuing fair warning – we ARE breaking through barriers. We mean it; we’ve done it before; and we are “coming after them” again....and again and again, if we have to! All of us, all the time.

This briefing is the fifth in our **AAUW Current Topics Briefing Series** issued by Linda Hallman, CAE, Executive Director.