

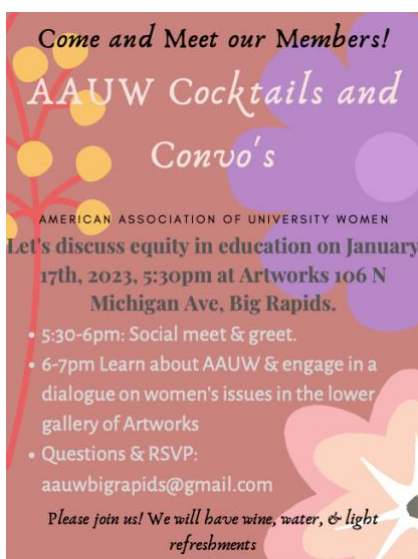
**Cocktails and Convos 2022-2023**  
**Big Rapids Branch**  
**Deb Kennedy and Sarah Lucas, Membership co-VPs**

Cocktails and Convos is a program series initiated by the Big Rapids branch in May 2022 as an outreach to community members to discuss issues of importance to women in a safe space and to attract new members. The program has been very successful and yielded several new members to the branch. Three or four of the new members attended our April 2022 book sale or attended a women's rally where the branch had an information table. They were invited to attend C & C and subsequently joined AAUW!

This series of events has served the local community with the opportunity to hold dialog on women's issues, and our members have become better informed on AAUW's mission.

We publicize on Facebook, post flyers around town and the Ferris State University campus, send a press release to the local newspaper, and submit information to our area Convention and Visitors Bureau that publishes an e-newsletter and online community calendar. In addition to posting C & C events to our branch Facebook page, we share the post to local Facebook groups to expand the reach. We strongly encourage members to bring friends! They also volunteer to bring light appetizers and wine for our refreshments.

Each C & C session is scheduled to last 1.5 hours. We respect people's time and make sure we conclude on time. Sessions have averaged 14-16 attendees.



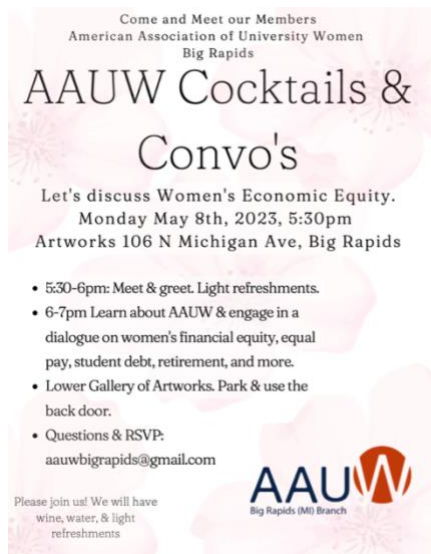
We have a registration table with our brochures, membership forms, and a sign-up sheet to be notified of future AAUW programs. Name tags are available and numbered 1, 2 or 3 to divide attendees into small groups with facilitators.

The first half hour from 5:30-6:00 p.m. is a meet & greet time with light refreshments and beverages. The program starts at 6:00 p.m. with a welcome from the evening's MC. The MC spends 5-10 minutes introducing discussion facilitators and the evening's conversation topics with some relevant AAUW data and statistics. We break into three groups, and the facilitator at each table leads 13-15 minutes of discussion on three prompts. One attendee at the table volunteers to act as a notetaker. The facilitator tries to get everyone's input. At the end, each table shares their top ideas with the whole group. We ask attendees to fill out a brief survey at the end of each session.

The survey responses from the first C & C were so positive we decided to continue quarterly. The theme of our first C & C in May 2022 highlighted AAUW's three priority issues of Education, Economic Equity, and Leadership. We decided to focus discussion on each priority issue individually for the next three C & Cs.

Our second C & C was on Leadership, then Education, and our final session will be on Economic Security. For each topic we select 3 specific areas to discuss, based on AAUW's website and research.

Longtime members have enjoyed these conversations as much as guests. Several members have commented that they've found these events very informative, and the discussions have increased engagement among branch members. We've continued to receive



positive feedback following each session.

We are likely going to incorporate the C & C concept into our regular monthly meeting schedule in future. During this pilot year, C & C events have been coordinated by the co- Membership VPs separate from monthly programming. We're thinking of a slightly new format for next year, with a speaker on the evening's topic (e.g., the director of the local domestic violence shelter) followed by 30-40 minutes of discussion. A business meeting could follow the presentation.

The C & C format would be scalable to larger branches, and the concept could be modified for a different time of day (e.g., Coffee & Convos for a morning event).

