When the Indianola Branch of AAUW received the membership grant to devise ways to increase membership we began by forming a committee to develop and implement a plan. The committee consisted of 2013-2014 Branch Member President Janet Heinicke (janetheinicke@earthlink.net), 2014-2015 Branch Member President Kathie Farris (katfarris@gmail.com), Vice President Membership Rebecca Swainey (Rebs51@outlook.com) and members Cynthia Tracy and Virginia Foelske whose input and creativity were invaluable to the final implementation of our plan.

We quickly agreed that public recognition or, more precisely, the lack thereof was our biggest stumbling block. It’s hard to create interest in joining an organization when potential members know little, if anything, about the group. We also knew we wanted to develop a stronger relationship with Simpson College. While we had cohosted four “Math Magic and Science Secrets Workshops” (a STEM program for third and fourth grade girls) with Simpson, we had little presence or recognition on the campus as a whole.

Phase one of our plan to create more awareness of AAUW in our community was to quickly place informational pamphlets in public locations. In June membership informational pamphlets were dropped off at the front desks of the YMCA and two medical clinics in a new development area of town. They were simply given to the person at each front desk with a brief explanation and the request they be on display available to the public. They were informed that inside was contact information should anyone wish to pursue it further. We did no follow-up, waiting to see what might develop from this strategy. As you might imagine, we got zero response.

Phase two was, in reality, the main focus of our plan. Both Indianola Public Library and Dunn Library at Simpson have centrally located display cases. We asked to be allowed to provide displays for both libraries. Once we received permission, an ad was placed in the local newspaper announcing the upcoming displays. Large, colorful banners proclaiming AAUW were created, using the organization’s colors, and placed prominently in both cases. While the displays each contained information on the history, both local and national, of AAUW, and the above mentioned STEM program through which our local branch provides important ties between the college and community, they also held some differences. Celebration of our branch’s 90th Anniversary coming in 2015 was featured in the Public Library while information on student membership and the Distinguished Faculty Award presented to Dr. Jackie Brittingham by AAUW of Iowa were featured in Simpson’s display. Each display was on exhibit for one month. However, the Public Library display ran from August 1-31, while Dunn Library’s display ran from August 15-September 15 giving us some additional time in the public eye.

The Public Library display increased awareness and brought several guests to recent meetings to learn more about our group. The college display has born even more fruit. Dr. Brittingham became enthused about AAUW. She became a member. She took information to disseminate among her fellow professors. She worked with others to earn the grant for Tech Trek to be cosponsored by Simpson and Indianola AAUW. Three young ladies have also become members, excited about the prospect of assisting with Tech Trek in the summer of 2015. The college-age youth of these three brings diversity to our group and the addition of four new members met our increased percentage membership goal.

Our biggest goal was to not only increase our membership, but to create higher public awareness of our organization which would lead to more lasting interest in sustaining its imprint in the community. We feel we achieved our goal.