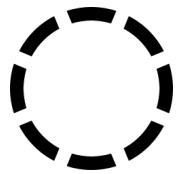




# Union Organizing 101

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A model used by professional organizers and successful AAUP chapters

# 1: Intro to Organizing



Basic principles of organizing  
Why they are effective

# Organizing is Building for Power

Organizing takes many forms:

- **Increasing membership\***
- **Moving members to be active in their chapter\***
- **Communicating with members about needs, concerns, victories\***
- Planning and carrying out actions to improve working conditions
- Obtaining commitments from members to complete tasks, come to meetings, and participate in actions
- Building reciprocal relationships with allies

\*These building blocks precede all other forms of organizing. They must be constantly performed for the other forms to succeed.

# Democratic Principles

- Organizing brings people together to collectively determine the direction of their chapter.
- The most basic building block for organizing is the one-on-one conversation.
- Building for power requires large numbers of active members.
- **Everyone is necessary, not just an elite few.**
- No one wants to be part of a group in which they don't have a voice.

# Member-Based Unionism

- We organize because there is strength in numbers
- A union is as strong as its members! We need high membership numbers **and** high rates of active participation.
- Everyone pitches in.
- We build and strengthen our union through repeated one-on-one conversations.
- We both educate and learn in one-on-ones.
- We don't "third-party" our union. The union isn't just officers or activists or national affiliates—it IS the members.

# What Can We Achieve?

- A contract and/or handbook that offers job protections
- Access to budgets and financial documents
- Seats on university committees
- Input on planning, financial, and academic decisions
- Faculty senate resolutions that work with chapter goals
- Better legislation

In many states, once a union achieves majority status and is certified, the employer is compelled by law to meet with them and bargain in good faith over working conditions.

# Identify Organizing Issues

When identifying issues around which to organize, focus on issues that

- Come up repeatedly in conversations across many departments and important to many people
- Reflect the goals of the chapter
- Motivate people to get involved
- Are actionable—can be addressed through practical, measurable solutions

Develop plans for how the chapter will address the issues, refining them based on feedback in one-on-ones.



## 2: Presentation to Give to an Organizing Committee



A model used by professional organizers and successful AAUP chapters

# The OC

The first step in organizing a new chapter or building membership in an existing one is to put together an Organizing Committee (OC)—a group of committed activists who are willing to serve as department representatives and talk to their colleagues.

**New chapters:** OC members recruit other OC members until there is a group large enough to talk with all potential members.

**Existing chapters:** If there's already a department rep structure, they perform the functions of an OC. If not, one will need to be formed.

# Organizing Committee Structure

One department rep for every 10 potential members

Reps do office visits to all 10 people every 2 weeks, asking them to join union and actively participate

Reps meet every 2 weeks and turn in completed membership forms, discuss problems and what is/isn't working, help develop strategy

Repeat until everyone in bargaining unit has either joined or made obvious will not join.

# Before Conducting Visits

Recruit department reps for organizing committee

Map departments. List:

- Everyone in the dept. who is eligible to join
- Each person's office location

Create a piece of lit for organizing

- Useful to have ready when asked for more info
- Can provide a reason for later visits
- Do not overly rely on lit! Conversations are essential

# Why Office Visits?

People rarely join other than through face-to-face visits. Visits provide an opportunity to:

- Answer questions, address fears and anxieties
- Educate about what union members are facing and what they are doing about it
- Learn about potential member's issues
- Agitate around those issues
- Combat misinformation
- Move to commit and become actively involved
- Recruit new OC members to talk to colleagues

# The Organizing Conversation

- Get their story – find out the person’s issue
- Inoculate – answer questions, address misinformation
- Give union’s vision – educate about:
  - Importance of standing together
  - What our union can accomplish
- Assess and agitate – figure out where they are, use their issue to move them
- Move to action – ask them to:
  - Join
  - Be active in the union

# Common Issues to Discuss

Whatever issues your faculty are facing, whatever they are planning to do about those issues, and whatever issues potential members bring up. These commonly include:

- Compensation and benefits
- Academic freedom
- Class size
- Workload
- Voice
- Job security
- Shared governance – Unionism and shared governance work to strengthen each other! (Recruiting members of shared governance bodies will be helpful down the line.)

# Common Objections and Responses

## Can't afford it

“I understand we make very little, but you’ll be even less able to afford everything if we don't have a strong union.”

## We can't do anything due to law, administration, state funding....

“Legislators, administrators, funding, etc. don't determine whether a union has power. Unions existed long before union-friendly policies.”

## My colleagues aren't going to join/do anything

“You have to create the momentum.”



## Academics don't need unions

“Know anyone compressed? Underpaid? Struggling with an unclear tenure process?” Too much committee work?”

## We have a good relationship with our administration, and a union will transform it into a bad relationship

- “Unions aren't an entity outside their members; they ARE the members. If we already have a positive relationship, then our union will reflect that.”
- “If our admin works constructively with us, they should be happy to have that arrangement formalized.”
- “The next administration might not be so friendly.”

## Other staff on campus have a union, and it's terrible. How will an AAUP union be any different?

“The AAUP's unions are member driven. If you think the union isn't working, you can be a voice of change.”

# Membership Forms

During visits, have new members fill out a membership form.

Try to make sure they do it then.

If not, let them know when you'll be back to pick it up!

# Contact Sheets

- After finishing a visit, complete a contact sheet for each person. On the sheet, assess them as a 1-4 and write notes.
- The contact sheet is used to find out how many visits it takes to move people and note issues/concerns.
- The goal is to move a member up the scale over the course of visits.

## **Assessment Scale**

- 1: Activist
- 2: Member
- 3: Undecided
- 4: Anti-union, will not join

# Follow Up!

- It may take several visits to see a member begin to move in their assessment. The average is 6-7 visits before a potential member joins.
- Each rep keeps visiting the same 10 potential members every 2 weeks until they have signed up or stated they will not join.
- Track assessments in a database to see who still needs to be talked to and where membership is strong.
- The OC should meet every two weeks to debrief and to turn in completed membership forms and contact sheets to a data entry person.

# Materials for Dept. Rep Packets

- Membership forms
- List of potential members
  - Each rep has a list of 10 people
  - Contact sheets
- Lit piece
  - Can be used occasionally as a reason to visit someone yet again. Also to address issues or motive to join.
  - Don't rely on lit. To be introduced during a conversation if necessary, never a substitute for one-on-ones.
- Script
  - Provides an example of how a conversation might go

# Keep the Rep Structure in Place

Once the OC has built up the membership, the department rep structure remains in place. It is

- A two-way communication system between the general membership and union leadership
- A system for obtaining commitments for future actions/events (general membership meetings, rallies, protests, other actions/events). Absolutely necessary for ensuring strong turnout!
- A system for organizing new hires each semester

Unions don't derive their power from politicians, administrators, or state budgets, but from the collective efforts of members willing to come together and stand up for their rights. Power isn't bestowed upon us--we create it.

- Questions? [organizing@aaup.org](mailto:organizing@aaup.org)