



ORGANIZING TO BUILD POWER







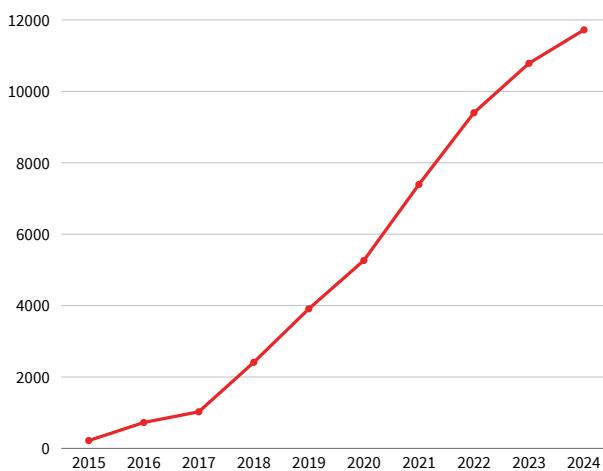
If you're organizing for a better, more equitable workplace, you're not alone.

Nearly 12,000 of The NewsGuild-CWA's 27,000 members joined between 2015 and 2025 at more than 270 newly unionized worksites. Our newest members are part of a surge in organizing among employees in news organizations, nonprofits, publishing houses, unions and more across the U.S. and Canada. They're joining a long tradition of Guild members and other members of the Communications Workers of America fighting for better pay, better benefits, job security and respect at work.

Organizing is how we work together to achieve our common goals. It's how we wield our collective power to improve our lives at work and in our communities through strategic, escalating collective actions.



Cumulative Workers Unionizing with The NewsGuild-CWA



The NewsGuild-CWA's organizing strategy rests on us — workers and our communities coming together with other union leaders and staff. Our ability to achieve a better life comes directly from us, the members, using our knowledge and skills to advance our interests together.

This handbook is a primer on how we can build a vibrant union so that we have a voice in the decisions that affect our lives. Join our growing movement. Together we can build a better world. We have more power than we know.

—Jon Schleuss, President, The NewsGuild-CWA, 2025



For more information contact us at organize@newsguild.org or call 202-434-7177.

To keep up with the latest news and information from the Guild, subscribe to our email newsletter at: newsguild.org/newsletter

Much of the material in this handbook is adapted from the work of Labor Notes and Jane McAlevey, and our parent union, the Communications Workers of America.

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[TNG Organizer Digital Binder](#)

THE NEWSGUILD-CWA ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The **American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)** is a coalition of dozens of international unions representing millions of union members who support one another in the labor movement. It is not itself a union.



The **Communications Workers of America (CWA)** represents workers across seven dedicated sectors and eight geographic districts. CWA has almost 450,000 members in more than 750 locals.

(<https://cwa-union.org/about>)



The NewsGuild is a CWA sector representing workers in the U.S. and Canada. The Guild formed as an independent union in 1933 and merged into CWA in 1995.

- The elected leadership includes a president, executive vice president, sector chair, six regional vice presidents and the president of CWA Canada. Each member serves a four-year term.
- National decisions are made by member delegates at biennial sector conferences, which occur just prior to CWA's biennial conventions.
- The NewsGuild provides support for members and locals, oversees a national collective bargaining program and knits together the larger union.



A local union, or “local,” acts as a branch of the union. A local can contain multiple bargaining units or just one. Each local elects its own officers, has the duty and authority to bargain contracts and is responsible for local finances and union and legal compliance.

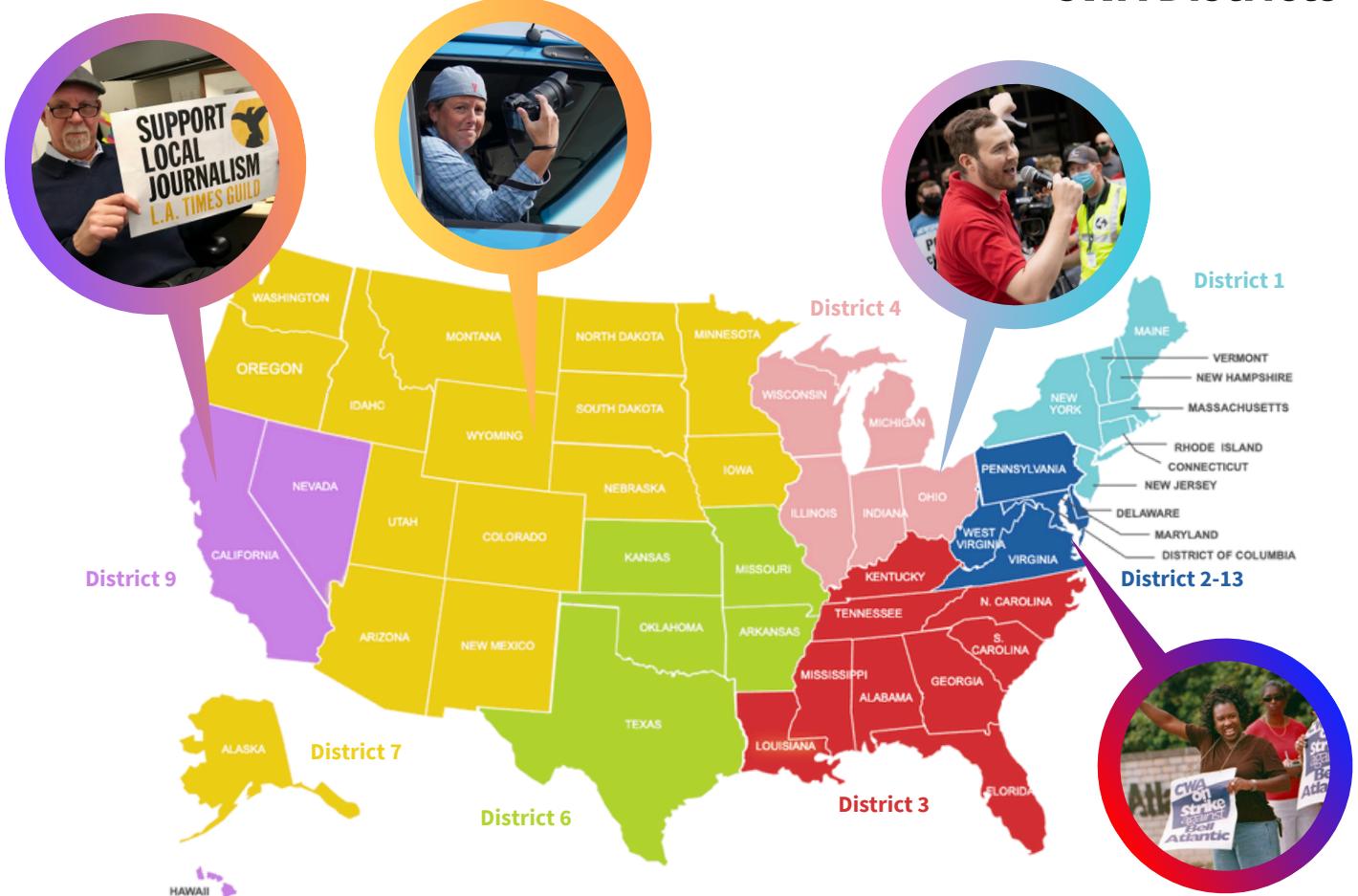
- Many CWA locals fall under an industrial sector (NewsGuild in our case), a sectoral region (based on geography) and a CWA district (based on geography).
- Members at the local level decide the dues rate, with a constitutional minimum of 1.3846 percent of base pay and administer the local budget.
- The NewsGuild has more than 27,000 members in more than 60 locals in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico. There are more than 700 locals across CWA.



A bargaining unit is composed of you and your co-workers and operates under a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). A CBA is a tool to build long-term power on the job. Each unit exists within a local and may have its own internal structure, including stewards and a unit council of elected officers.

- The NewsGuild has more than 400 bargaining units.

CWA Districts



CWA Sectors and Industries



The NewsGuild (TNG-CWA)



Association of Flight Attendants (AFA-CWA)

CWA

CWA Telecommunications



CWA Telecommunications and Technologies (T&T)



Public, Healthcare and Education Workers (PHEW)



Industrial Division/International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE-CWA)



National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET-CWA)

Organizing Principles

Always Ask Questions

What's the best way to build with our co-workers? Ask them lots of questions. And listen to what they say.

Learn, Do, Teach

Leadership is about developing others to participate by providing the resources and opportunity to do so. Every time you have a task to complete for your union, ask yourself: How can I use this as an opportunity to build up my co-workers? Who can I recruit to prep to do this task with me to help develop their skills as an organizer?

Stick to the Plan

Always have a plan and make sure you and your co-workers know and understand that plan. We will win or lose based on our ability to stay focused and stick to our plan. Most anti-union tactics are less about actual content and more about creating distractions to derail us. Avoid being in reaction mode. Keep the boss in reaction mode to our plan.

We Thrive on Positivity

Organizing is hard! It is also transformational. The boss has lots of resources to try to beat us. The key thing we have is each other. We build a strong union by treating each other with lots of kindness, constantly pumping each other up through difficult work and acknowledging a job well done. We want to create a movement that our co-workers feel good about participating in.

What are we *not* building? Toxic positivity. A healthy union is not afraid to admit when we make mistakes. In fact, we are at our best when we regularly debrief and learn from our previous experiences. Positivity means building off our past experiences, learning, growing together and believing we can win.

How do we define leadership?

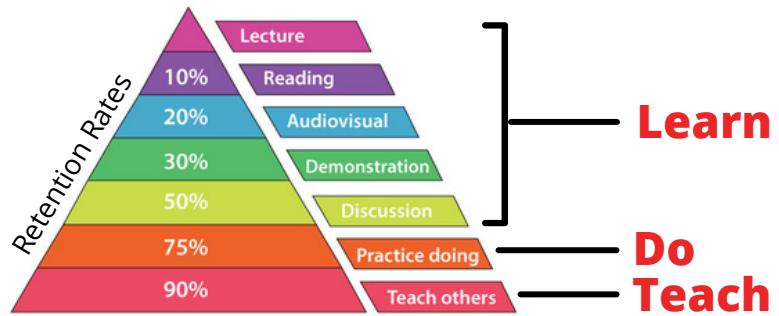
Learn, Do, Teach!



Leadership isn't about taking on the tasks of our union ourselves. It's about developing others to participate by providing the resources and opportunity to do so. The strength of our union is tied to our commitment to developing others!

How have you seen this play out in your union?

The Learning Pyramid shows how much we retain based on various learning methods. Teaching others is the most effective way to develop and learn yourself.



Your union is taking action one week from now. Twenty people need to be called and invited. What do you do?

- Call them myself because no one else will do it well. → **NOPE**
- Send a text message to our unit's group chat asking others to do it. → **GETTING THERE**
- Identify two co-workers who I think would be good, make the first call together with them, assign out people to call and then schedule a debrief. → **GREAT**

REMEMBER, a task is not just something to get done. It's an opportunity to grow your union by developing fellow members. A task absent of development loses much of its value. Make the most of every opportunity!

Learn, Do, Teach!

Organizing Basics Training Agenda

Introduction

(30 mins)

Why we are here and what we can achieve through collective action.

1. Name, pronoun, position, what is one thing you would like to get out of today's training? (5-10 min.)
2. Learn! Do! Teach! (5 min.)
3. What are some ways we can build power? (10-15 min.)
 - a. Where does our power come from?
 - b. What are examples of collective actions?

Four Stages of Organizing

(30 mins)

The process of securing union certification and ratifying a first contract.

See pages 11-21.

Organizing Fundamentals

(60 mins)

The basics of being an organizer and how to have effective one-on-one organizing conversations.

1. Organizing Committee. (5 min.)
 - a. See page 23.
2. Qualities of a Good Organizer. (10 min.)
 - a. See page 25.
3. One-on-one Conversations. (20 min.)
 - a. See pages 26-29.
4. Semantics Exercise. (10 min.)
 - a. See pages 35-37.
5. Trauma-Informed Listening. (10 min.)
 - a. See pages 39-40.
6. Assessing Power. (5 min.)
 - a. See page 42.

Organizing Fundamentals

(85 mins)

Working through common pushback and practicing the conversation.

1. Yeah Buts. (35 min.)
 - a. See page 30. Read Yeah But exercise out loud.
2. Role Plays. (50 min.)
 - a. Facilitator model one. (8 min.)
 - b. Debrief model conversation. (2 min.)
 - c. See page 31. Read Role Play exercise out loud.
 - d. Practice in pairs. (35 min. total — 28 for role play [14 min. each]; 7 minutes for debriefs [3.5 min. each])
 - e. At the end of each role play, fill out Organizing Conversation Debrief (page 32) with your partner.
 - f. Share back with group. (5 min.)

Inoculation

Intro

(15 mins)

Common tactics employers use to fight our unity.

1. Discussion question: Why would your company fight your union?
 - a. See page 45-46.

Next Steps

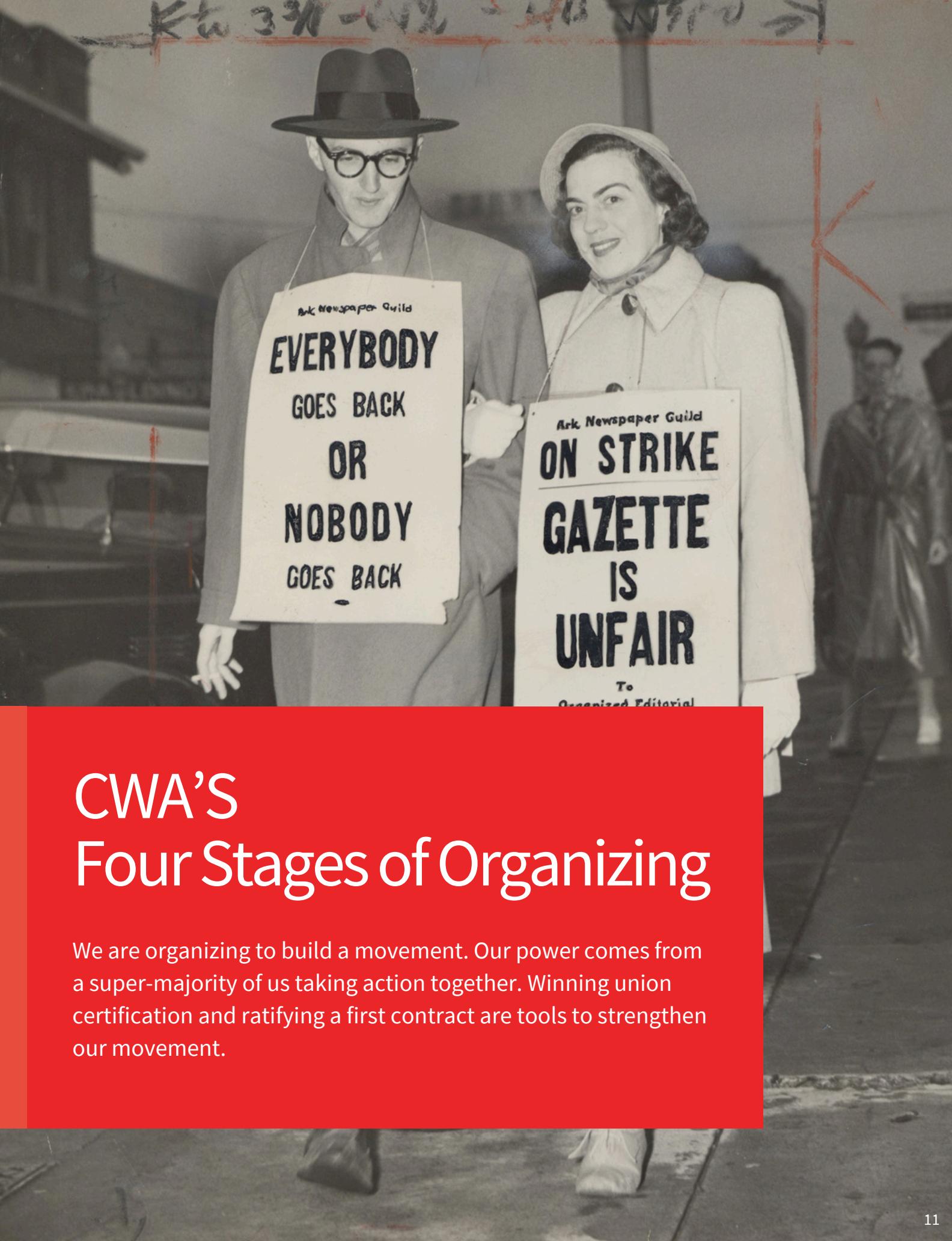
Popcorn

(15 mins)

Action items to build our union.

1. Set a goal date for when we will reach 80% support.
2. Assign each participant an outreach target.
3. Create group chat.
4. Set time for weekly Organizing Committee meetings.
5. Create facilitator/notetaker schedule.





CWA'S Four Stages of Organizing

We are organizing to build a movement. Our power comes from a super-majority of us taking action together. Winning union certification and ratifying a first contract are tools to strengthen our movement.

STAGE 1: CONTACT

We make contact with our colleagues and build a list of everyone we believe will be a part of our union. We gather basic information, map out the workplace and evaluate the potential leverage and community support that will inform our planning.

STAGE 2: COMMITTEE

Having a trained, diverse and respected inside Organizing Committee (OC) is the most important part of a successful organizing campaign. We will identify respected leaders in the workplace and talk one-on-one with them to build a strong of at least 10-15% of the workforce. The OC will talk one-on-one with colleagues to learn their workplace issues, educate everyone on how unionization works, and build democratic structures in our workplace.

STAGE 3: CAMPAIGN

Go Public

This means announcing to our employer, and to the public, that we've launched a union drive.

Release a Mission Statement

This statement is a public document written by the Organizing Committee that outlines our broad reasons for organizing.

Sign Union Authorization Cards

This is a card on which we fill out our contact and job information and sign at the bottom to indicate support for our union in the workplace.

Our goal for this phase is to win legal union certification. This can happen in one of two ways:

- 1) We'll demand our employer grant voluntary recognition of our union and agree to recognize our union based on a majority of workers having shown support.
- 2) If our employer refuses to grant voluntary recognition, we'll file our cards with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to trigger a union election.

After filing a petition for a union election, an NLRB representative works with representatives from our union and the company to reach a stipulated election agreement. This agreement outlines the size and scope of the voting unit as well as voting date, time, type and location.

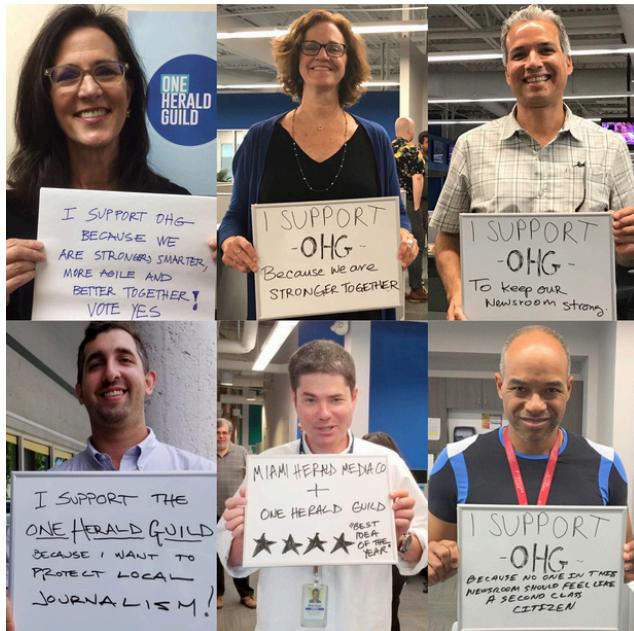
We then vote in an election that is supervised by the NLRB. If a simple majority votes for union representation, our union will be certified. The company is then legally obligated to negotiate in good faith over wages and working conditions, provide responses to our information requests and maintain status quo.

STAGE 4: CONTRACT

Organizing never ends. We'll build an infrastructure to maintain communication and facilitate collective action. Our group will build a Bargaining Committee and train Shop Stewards. Shop Stewards take on 8-12 members each and are responsible for regularly communicating with them, organizing around workplace issues, and ensuring members' rights are respected.

Contract Campaign

Collective action is the root of our power as workers. We'll plan a series of escalating actions on a timeline aimed at bolstering the proposals we advance at the bargaining table. We'll work to steadily increase our participation and the intensity of the actions. A contract campaign plan and the accompanying actions not only represent best practice for winning a first contract but also are a regular practice of any strong union. The strength of our contract is dependent on the strength of our union.



Negotiations

We'll build a diverse and representative Bargaining Committee. The Bargaining Committee will survey the workforce to identify and prioritize key issues. Then the Bargaining Committee along with union staff negotiate with the company to make proposals based on workers' issues. The law requires that the employer bargain in good faith. During this period, our working conditions go into "status quo," which means management is obligated to provide advance notice and bargain over most changes to our working conditions.

Contract Ratification Vote

Once the company and the Bargaining Committee agree on a proposed contract, workers in our unit vote on whether to ratify it. If a majority votes to approve the contract, then the provisions in the contract take effect.

UNION!

A Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) typically lasts 3-4 years and then is renegotiated. The company must adhere to the contract and cannot simply change working conditions.



1

Contact

Stage I Checklist: Moving from
Contact to Committee



[QR code to
digital
template](#)

BEFORE MOVING TO STAGE II, REVIEW THE CHECKLIST BELOW

01

Issues

- Have we identified enough broadly shared noneconomic issues to sustain a campaign? What are they?

Focusing our campaign beyond just economic issues ensures our co-workers maintain a long-term focus and makes it harder for management to kill the campaign by offering us money or other economic concessions.

02

Organizing History

- Do we know the organizing history of the unit (e.g., have there been previous organizing attempts; has another union been in contact with the workers)?
- Are other locations or groups within the company organized by CWA or another union?

03

Company Research

- Do we have a clear understanding of the products or services we produce, the company we work for, and the industry within which our company operates?
- In light of industry restructuring and consolidation, is this potential unit likely to exist in the future?
- Do we have the employee handbook and other policies?

04

Mapping

- Do we have a complete list of workers (with phone, email, home address, etc.)? If not, what is the plan to get it?
- Have we identified leaders in our workplace? Have we mapped out departments, job functions, and job titles? Do we have a pretty clear idea of what job titles would be included in the bargaining unit? If not, what is the plan to get it done?
- Do we have an organizational chart showing the chain of command?
- Have we determined a minimum of 15% support? Have we identified enough potential committee members? If not, what is the plan to achieve it?

05

Legal

- Have we assessed potential legal questions regarding the unit? (E.g., what agency would oversee the process: NLRB, National Mediation Board, state or federal agency? Could the workers legitimately be classified as independent contractors?)

06

Leverage

- Have we honestly evaluated the viability of the campaign and identified the sources of leverage to gain a first contract? Is there a path to an election victory and first contract?
- Have we evaluated if the risk, effort and resources needed to win are worth the potential gains for the workers and the union?
- Is the company a strategic organizing target? Is it geographically close to other NewsGuild units? If not, is there a plan to reach out to other workplaces within the same ownership chain or geographic area to organize? How can we provide support?
- Have we reached out to the following to involve them in the campaign? NewsGuild local, NewsGuild members, NewsGuild national staff, CWA local, CWA district?



Committee

Stage II Checklist: Moving from
Committee to Campaign

BEFORE MOVING TO STAGE III, REVIEW THE CHECKLIST BELOW

01

Organizing Committee

- ✓ Do we have an Organizing Committee of at least 15% of the workforce, or for workplaces of fewer than 100 workers, at least 20% of the workforce?
- ✓ Is our committee representative of the different work groups, job titles, shifts, departments, seniorities, etc.? Do we reflect the racial, ethnic, gender and age diversity of the workforce? If not, where are we lacking and what is our plan to correct for it?
- ✓ Has our committee developed and signed a Mission Statement? Are the issues clearly identified, and is the committee focused on those issues?
- ✓ Has our committee been trained on:
 - Four Stages of Organizing?
 - What is a union? What is collective action?
 - What is a strike?
 - One-on-one organizing conversations — Agitate, Educate, Inoculate, Organize, Union?
 - Semantics — how we talk about our union?
 - How to work through “Yeah Buts”?
 - Affirm, Answer, Redirect?
- ✓ Is our committee aware of the risks involved in organizing? Have they committed to one another that they would see the process through regardless of what happens?
- ✓ Is the committee fully inoculated about what to expect from the employer’s campaign and prepared to fully inoculate their co-workers?
- ✓ Do we have a timeline and plan of activities for demonstrating public support? Is our committee excited about going public and able to explain to their co-workers the importance of each union supporter showing their support publicly?

02

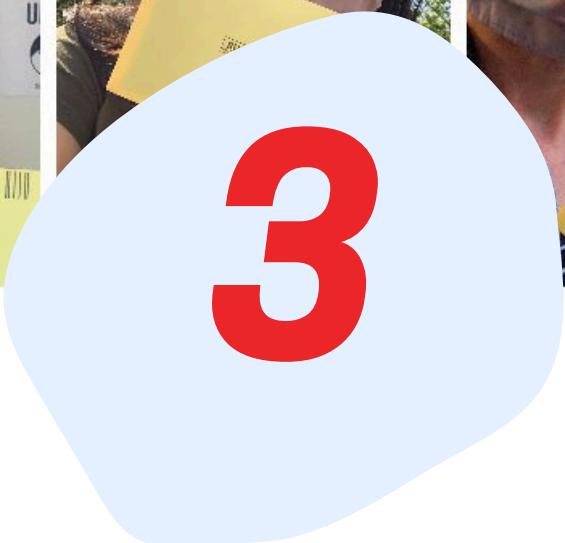
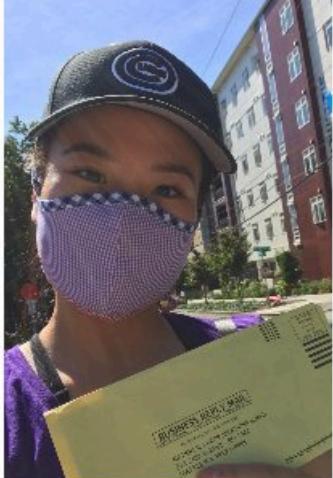
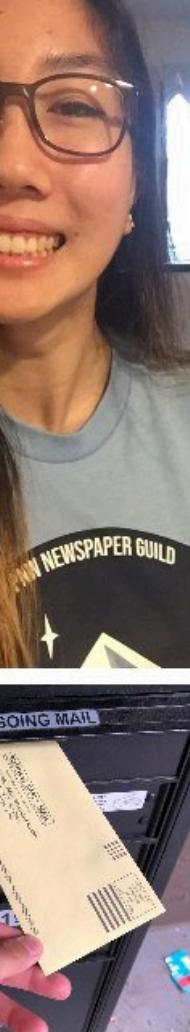
Support

- ✓ Do we have assessments of support from a majority of the work group (and no more than 25% assessed as opposed) and a plan to reach a minimum of 75-80% public support?
- ✓ Has our committee made a commitment to a systematic plan to reach out to workers on a one-on-one basis (including house-visits, phone-banking, etc.) and agreed to a timeline for achieving our goals? Does each committee member have assignments?
- ✓ Have we developed a list of community connections and natural allies in the community, including among elected officials with whom we can work toward collective goals? Power mapping can help show us our own power and where that power overlaps with our employer’s power.

03

Legal

- ✓ Have we conducted an analysis to determine if the bargaining unit we are likely to propose would be deemed appropriate? Are we prepared to argue for the unit we want if it should come to a hearing (i.e., have we identified the employer’s likely position and identified our general arguments, evidence and witnesses)?
- ✓ Have we made a list of each potentially challenged department and position that includes the duties and basic information about each?
- ✓ Have potentially challenged voters filled out eligibility questionnaires?



Campaign

Stage III Checklist:
Moving from Campaign to Filing
for Certification Election

BEFORE MOVING TO A NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT (NLRA) CERTIFICATION CAMPAIGN, REVIEW THE CHECKLIST BELOW

(This checklist applies to NLRA elections only! For all other campaigns, talk to your Organizing Coordinator.)

01

Broad Support

- ✓ Do we have 75-80% of the unit signed up on the petition and demonstrating public support (e.g., wearing a union button, wristband, T-shirt, etc., and signed onto a public mission statement)?
- ✓ Is the entire unit assessed? If not, how many are unassessed and why?

02

Messaging

- ✓ Have we successfully maintained the focus of the campaign on issues we've identified? How do these also reflect the point of view of community partners?

In other words, are the workers discussing the issues we've developed rather than the concerns raised by the employer?

For additional guidance on messaging, review Communications for Organizing on pages 53 and 54.

03

Timeline

- ✓ Do we have a timeline of collective actions the unit is excited about participating in that support Get Out the Vote (GOTV) activities? Is the timeline broken down into weekly themes with members assigned to organize messaging and actions associated with each theme?
- ✓ Has our communication structure been tested to demonstrate an effective GOTV?

04

Legal

- ✓ Will we be prepared for an NLRB hearing? Do we have our arguments, witnesses, evidence and strategy lined up?
- ✓ Have we determined when and how we would like the election conducted (e.g., mail ballots, on premises, etc.)?



4

Contract

Stage IV Checklist:
Post-certification and getting to the
table



01

Structure Engagement and Communication

- ✓ Do we have defined representative structures in the shop?
 - Unit Council — elected officers from our bargaining unit.
 - Bargaining Committee — develops contract campaign plan, bargaining proposals, attends bargaining sessions.
 - Shop Stewards/Contract Action Team — have regular one-on-ones with co-workers, move co-workers to action.
 - Subcommittees, e.g., communications, job actions, research, community allies.

- ✓ Are members aware of and do they have access to regular meetings?

- ✓ Is communication possible for members in at least the following ways?
 - Regular (monthly) membership meetings.
 - Maintained group chat.
 - Newsletter and bargaining bulletins.

02

Training

- ✓ Have most members received training on being a member, steward, officer?
 - Weingarten rights.
 - Who is my steward? Who are unit officers?
 - Organizing basics (one-on-one conversations, moving a co-worker to action).
 - Contract campaign.
 - Assessments/tracking participation.

03

Contract Campaign

- ✓ Are we prepared for the contract campaign with the following:
 - Timeline of escalating actions.
 - Tracking participation in actions.
 - Bargaining subject specific actions.

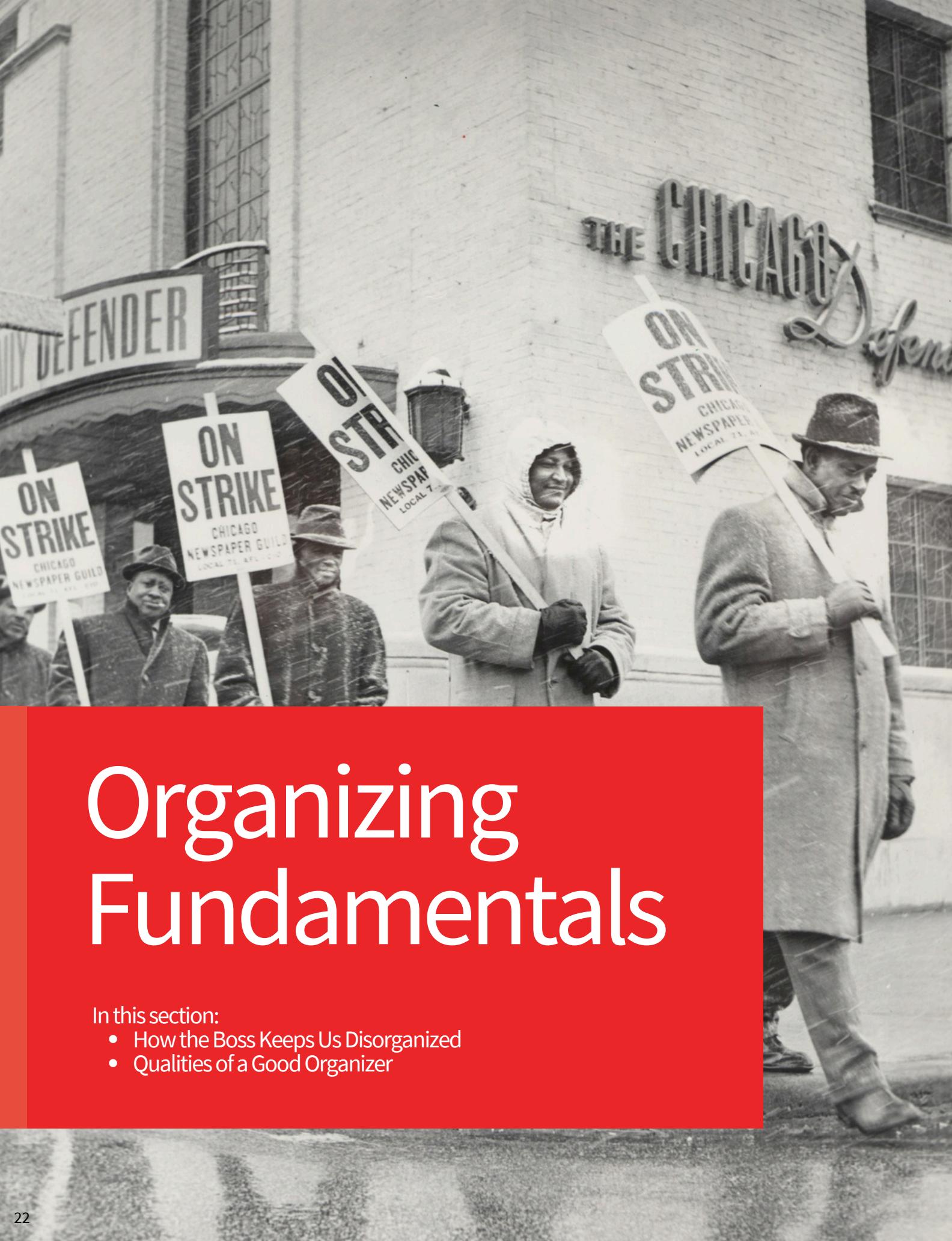
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New Hire Outreach

- ✓ Do we have a packet of material for new members?

- ✓ Is there a regularly scheduled new hire orientation?

- ✓ Is there a point person assigning new hires to stewards?



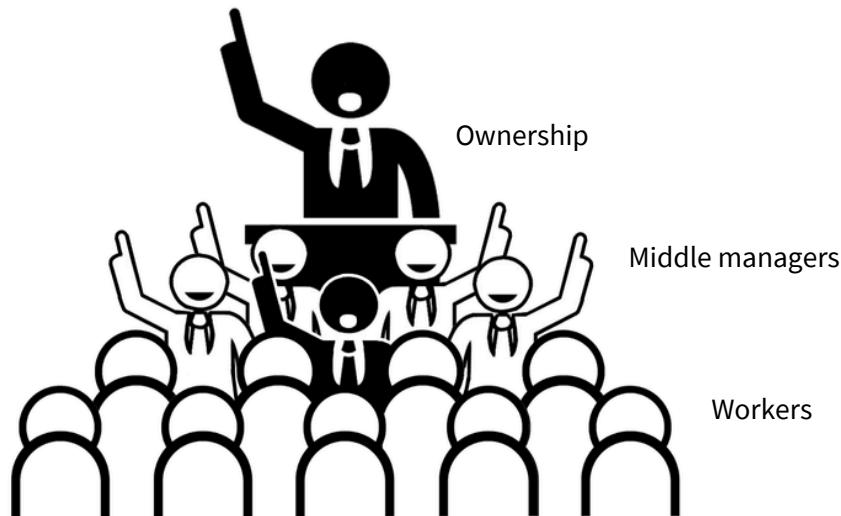
Organizing Fundamentals

In this section:

- How the Boss Keeps Us Disorganized
- Qualities of a Good Organizer

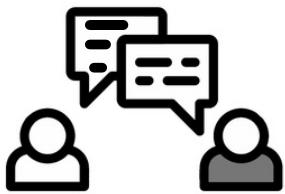
Organizing Fundamentals

How The Boss Structures The Workplace



Management is organized in a hierarchy, which helps it wield power over an unorganized workforce.

How We Organize Ourselves



Organizer has one-on-one conversations.



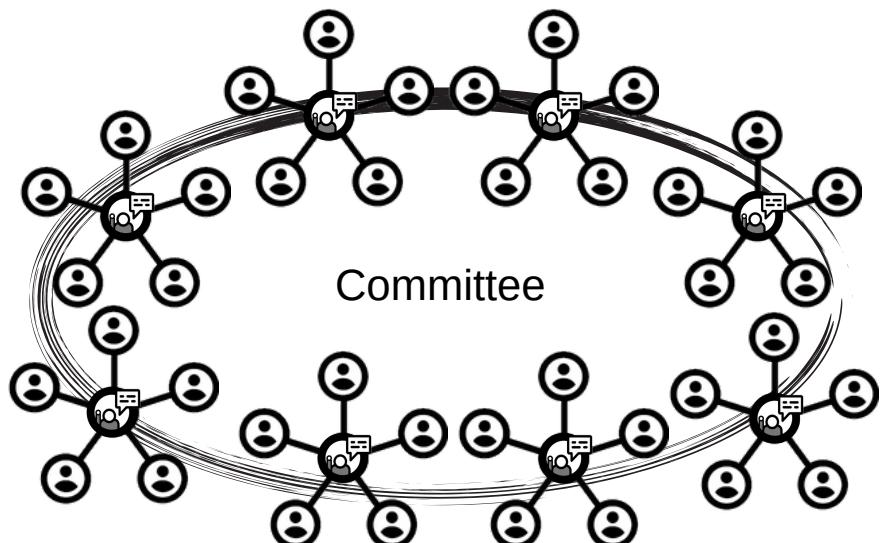
Organizer identifies leaders.



Organizer recruits leaders to the Organizing Committee.

An Organized Workplace

The Organizing Committee is composed of respected employees who move their co-workers to action and build power.



HOW THE BOSS KEEPES US DISORGANIZED

What holds people back from confronting the boss about workplace issues?

This chart shows four common obstacles the boss relies on to keep us from getting organized — and how we can help our co-workers get past them:

Adapted from LABOR NOTES: Secrets of a Successful Organizer

THE BOSS RELIES ON ...	THE ORGANIZER ...	THE CO-WORKER FINDS ...
... fear of conflict and retaliation.	... taps into righteous anger about workplace injustices.	... the courage and determination to act.
... hopelessness , the feeling that things can't change and we have no power.	... helps develop a plan to win , and shares examples of victories elsewhere.	... hope that change is possible and worth fighting for.
... division , pitting workers against each other.	... identifies common ground and builds relationships.	... unity to act together.
... confusion , passing around messages that will alarm or distract us.	... and shares information.	... clarity to see through the boss's plan.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD ORGANIZER

- Effective organizers are good at their jobs and respected by the people they work with.
- They have the trust of their co-workers. Their opinions carry weight. When they offer advice, people listen.
- The best organizers are motivated by a strong sense of justice and clear principles.
- They're responsible, honest and compassionate.
- They're confident, even courageous.
- Organizers must be good listeners. They know you don't have to be the most vocal to have the biggest impact.
- They bring people together, welcoming new co-workers on the job and looking for ways to involve every member.
- They put the interests of the group first, ahead of their individual concerns.
- They don't operate as lone rangers. They respect group decisions.
- Good organizers are knowledgeable about their contract but not afraid to admit when they don't know the answer.
- They're willing to stand up to management — and they can inspire others to stand up for themselves as well.
- They can stay cool under pressure and handle stress and conflict.
- Organizers move people to collective action. They don't just solve problems alone — they equip their co-workers to solve problems together.



Organizing Conversations

In this section:

- One-on-one Conversations and AEIOU
- Yeah, Buts and Role Plays
- Organization Conversation Debrief
- Answering Difficult Questions

ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS & AEIOU

Always Ask Questions

One-on-one organizing conversations are a key part of how we build solidarity with our co-workers. What's an organizing conversation? It's just talking to your co-workers! Everyone talks to their co-workers — an organizing conversation just adds some structure and purpose to the conversation.

First rule of organizing conversations: always start by asking questions and listening.

AEIOU

AEIOU is a helpful framework that you can use to guide an organizing conversation. It is meant as a tool in your toolkit that you can draw from to structure a conversation.

A – Agitate
E – Educate
I – Inoculate
O – Organize
U – Union

Framework for an organizing conversation:

Introductions

Introduce yourself, be confident, and set the context for the conversation that relates to the specific situation of your co-workers.

Discuss: Why do we introduce ourselves?

Read example out loud: “We are ready to make improvements at work; some of us have been talking about how we can build the strength we need to win the changes we want.”

Your turn! How will you introduce yourself?

AEIOU

Agitate — Questions about issues — ask questions, learn about their workplace issues, listen.

Discuss: Why do we agitate?

Read example out loud: “I’d like to start by talking to you about work. What are some things you’d like to improve about your job?”

Your turn! What questions will you ask to learn about your co-worker’s workplace issues?

Educate — Questions about Our Power — ask them what they know about our union and how they think we build power; connect their story or concern to the reasons for organizing. The goal is moving personal issues into a collective solution.

Discuss: Why do we educate?

Read example out loud: “I’d like to talk to you about our union and what we can achieve with collective action. How do you think we can win improvements at work together?”

Your turn! What is a question about our power that you can ask? And then, how will we define what our union is and share our collective vision for what our workplace could look like?

Inoculate — Questions about the Boss’s Power — prepare for anti-union campaign; dispel myths; explain they are generally formulaic and all flow from company’s desire for unilateral control.

Discuss: Why do we inoculate?

Read example out loud: “Management typically fights workers from coming together to form a union. Why do you think that is? How do you think management will respond to us building our power?”

Your turn! What anti-union tactics and messaging will you prepare your co-worker for?

Organize — Move to Action — talk to a co-worker, join committee, sign mission statement, etc.

Discuss: Why do we move our co-workers to action?

Read example out loud: “The way we build power is by everyone taking on a small piece of the work. A representative Organizing Committee is the core body that will move this effort forward. You are well respected here, and we want you to be on the Organizing Committee. Will you join us?”

Your turn! How will you move your co-worker to action?

Tip: Don’t use soft language! Examples of soft language: might, maybe, kind of. Be confident in your move to action.

Union — Positive Vision — end with a positive vision and follow-up.

Discuss: Why is it important to end on a positive note?

Read example out loud: “It’s exciting we are taking steps toward building a better workplace.”

Your turn! How will you end the conversation?

TIPS FOR ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

 **Be confident:** Taking collective action to improve your workplace is something to be proud of!

 **Be curious:** Try to get to know your co-workers and learn about their lives. Successful organizing is based on building relationships.

 **Be comfortable being uncomfortable:** There will be some discomfort in moving your co-workers to action. Don’t shy away from it, embrace it, and you’ll get more comfortable with every conversation you have.

 **Leave long pauses** to give the person a chance to talk.

 **Make a follow-up plan:** When someone commits to a task, give a date and time that you’ll check in with them to see how it went.

 Take time for the **Educate**, do the **Organize** later in the conversation.

 You’re not polling, you’re educating and moving to action! Don’t ask: “Are you interested in a union?” Rather: “Do you have any experience taking collective action with your workers? Let’s talk about what this all means.”

Yeah Buts & Role Plays

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

People will have questions about our organizing effort. That's common. We call these "Yeah Buts."

1. With the full group, brainstorm the top Yeah Buts you've been hearing, or anticipate hearing, from your co-workers.

2. Read out loud:

Tips for responding to Yeah Buts:

- **Affirm:** “I hear you. That’s a valid concern.”
- **Bring it back to the issues:** “You said you want better severance pay. Don’t you think we deserve that?”
- **Frame the issue:** “We can’t afford to not do this. The riskiest thing we can do is nothing.”
- **Ask questions:** “Why would management be antagonistic simply because we are coming together to improve our work lives?”

3. Break into small groups. In your small group, discuss how you would respond to two of the Yeah Buts. Choose a spokesperson for your small group to report to the larger group.

4. Return to the large group. Each small group spokesperson: Share your responses. Record responses to each Yeah But below.

YEAH BUTS & RESPONSES

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Role plays are awkward! That's OK! Practice is good.

Exercise (40 min.)

Break into pairs. Take turns being the organizer and the co-worker. Practice having an organizing conversation in which you ask your co-worker to join the Organizing Committee.

For the co-worker: In advance of your conversation, choose one or two main workplace issues, and choose one Yeah But. Don't tell the organizer what these are. Bring these up during your conversation.

For the organizer: Reference the AEIOU framework in Organizing Fundamentals as you work through the conversation. Start by listening and asking good questions. Figure out their workplace issues, address their Yeah But when it arises, and move the person to action.

Debrief: After your role play, fill out the One-on-One Debrief form with your partner.

Sample Scenarios

1. Chris — 6 years, reporter.

ISSUE: He's worried about the future of the paper and all of the focus on page views and clickbait. Management seems indifferent to developing the next generation of investigative reporters.

2. Amanda — 4 years, reporter.

ISSUE: Amanda has big student loans, so she's living with her parents. She's desperate for a raise, and the reference to merit pay in a recent company memo has her curious.

3. David — 3 years, copy editor.

ISSUE: Worried about the use of temps as well as about copy editors being separated and marginalized through the reorganization plan.

4. Sam — 5 years, photographer.

ISSUE: Concerned that local photographers will be phased out.

Name

Name of Co-worker

Date

Organizing Conversation Debrief

After your one-on-one conversation, fill this out:

Introductions — Did you introduce yourself? What did you say?

Agitate — What questions did you ask? **What workplace issues did the person talk about?**

Educate — **How did you explain what a union is?**

Yeah Buts — What were the person's Yeah Buts? How did you overcome them?

Inoculate — What myths did you dispel? Did you talk about how management will fight your campaign, and ask why the person thinks management will oppose it?

Organize — What was the move to action? Did you gently push three times? What is the follow-up plan?

Union — How did you end the conversation? Did you end with a positive vision?

Answering Difficult Questions: Affirm, Answer, Redirect

Keep the focus on our message. When people come to you riled up over the spin from management, a good method for responding is “**Affirm, Answer, Redirect.**”

Example: I support the union effort, but I can’t afford to be fired.

AFFIRM:

Let them know you’re listening, you understand, and their feelings are valid.

Example: I hear you. I don’t want to get fired either!

ANSWER:

Give a truthful, concise answer to the question. Don’t be evasive. If there’s a grain of truth to management’s message, say that up front. If you don’t know the answer, don’t guess. Tell the person you’ll find out and get back to them. Make sure you follow through.

Example: Even though it’s illegal to fire people for organizing, employers do break the law if they think they can get away with it. That’s why we’re building supermajority support—so we can exercise our power and stand strong together.

REDIRECT:

Once you’ve answered the question, don’t get bogged down in too much back-and-forth about it. Instead, be ready with a question that brings the conversation back to our message and points out what management is trying to distract them from.

Remind your co-workers of the issues that inspired them to organize in the first place. Ask whether that’s changed. Steer the conversation back to the plan to win and the next steps.

Example: How else are we going to push back against unequal treatment and huge pay disparities if we don’t band together?

Answering Difficult Questions: Affirm, Answer, Redirect

Now you pick one!

Pick a message management has used, or might use, to undermine your campaign. If there's a concern that's already been getting traction with your co-workers, use that one. Write the concern the way a co-worker might phrase it.

A Yeah But you might hear:

Now write what you would say to answer it, using the three steps:

AFFIRM:

ANSWER:

REDIRECT:

Semantics

HOW WE TALK ABOUT OUR UNION IS IMPORTANT.

THE WORDS WE USE CAN HELP US
BUILD THE UNION WE WANT.

Principles

- Center collective action and shared ownership.
- Use “we” and “our” language.
- Focus on member leadership, agency and impact — the member is necessary to the movement.
- Frame the union as members working together, not a third party.
- Emphasize collective power over individual actions.
- Avoid service provider framing — you’re not providing a service for your fellow member; you’re moving them to action.
- Replace excessive gratitude with recognition of shared purpose and achievement.
- Don’t reinforce a hierarchy or power dynamic where you as the organizer are an authority figure.



Liz Bowie speaks at a rally protesting the planned takeover of the Baltimore Sun by Alden Global Capital, April 2021.
Photo: Amy Davis

Semantics Exercise

For each example, evaluate which principles may be ignored and the impact that might have on your organizing. Then, brainstorm what you might say instead and enter it into the spaces below. Work to avoid using “the union,” “thank you” and “I.”

1 “Let me explain what the union does for you.”

2 “I need you to call the boss and oppose this policy.”

3 “We’re a big union and have the resources to protect members.”

4 “Thank you so much!”

Semantics Answer Key

1

“Let me explain what the union does for you.”

“Given the outrageous behavior of management in this time of crisis, it’s never been more important for us to build the strongest union ever.”

2

“I need you to call the boss and oppose this policy.”

“The only way this bad policy will be stopped is when the boss hears directly from all of us.”

3

“We’re a big union and have the resources to protect members.”

“When workers unite and pool our resources, we can build the power to effectively challenge the boss and the hedge funds!”

4

“Thank you so much!”

“Great work!” or, “It’s so good to see so many of us here, ready to fight for what we deserve!” or, “That’s terrific work getting all the workers in your unit to sign the petition.”

As 1199's Advice to Rookie Organizers says, “Don’t be afraid to ask workers to build their own union.” And, “Don’t be afraid to confront them when they don’t.”

These two principles relate to why we do not say “thank you” in union-building efforts. A third principle says, “Communicate to workers that there is no salvation beyond their own power.”

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RUBRIC: MAKING THE HARD ASK

In the five steps of an organizing conversation, the “hard ask” can be considered the “O is for Organize” part of the conversation, where we move our co-worker to action. View the full rundown of an organizing conversation, AEIOU, [here](#).

A Hard Ask ...	We've got lots of room to grow!	We've got the basics down!	We absolutely crushed it!
Assertive The organizer was confident and decisive when making the ask; not hesitant, fearful or worried about awkwardness.			
Specific The ask was narrowly defined and explicitly connected to the member’s life and/or something they care about.			
Actionable The ask was something that the member can actually do and/or participate in. There is a clear role or set of next steps for the member to complete.			
Time-bound The ask was specific to a particular timeline and tied to a deadline rather than being open-ended and general.			
Persistent The organizer did not back down at the first sign of resistance from the member, but thoughtfully pushed back when confronted with “yeah buts.”			
Made without qualifiers The organizer avoided using qualifiers while making the ask, e.g. “if you can,” “but no pressure,” “it’s cool if not,” “if you’re not too busy,” etc.			
Made with an expectation of follow-up The organizer set an expectation with the member that they will be following up at a set later date and time.			

Trauma-Informed Listening

TRAUMA BACKGROUND

Trauma occurs when an experience is so harmful to us that it overwhelms our ability to cope with that harm. Everyone experiences trauma differently. What's (more) traumatic to one person might not be (as) traumatic to another. That's OK. What's important is to hear them out, support and generally meet someone where they are. Experiences and identities inform how we handle our own trauma — and respond to others' trauma. In talking about trauma, it's important to be mindful of a person's identity and power. You are not taking on the role of therapist. However, your responses can help shape how they feel about the decision to come forward and the experience that follows.

TRAUMA RESPONSES

There is no "normal" trauma response — or, put differently, all responses are normal. At the time of trauma, fight, flight, freeze and appease (attempting to bargain with and/or calm down the perpetrator of trauma so they will stop harming you) are common responses. We glorify fight and sometimes flight but look down on freeze and appease, even though these responses are most common. Remember, when someone describes how they acted in a traumatic episode, your response should be validating. It's not for us (or anyone) to judge. The person did what they needed to do in order to get through the experience.

WHEN TALKING ABOUT TRAUMA

A person's affect — whether they're emotional or stoic, engaged or detached, precise or foggy — doesn't "prove" or "disprove" that they experienced trauma or show how severe it was. There isn't one "appropriate" affect while speaking about trauma.

There may be uncontrollable mood swings, spacing out, unexpected or even flat emotions. The body is trying to communicate to the brain that something is not OK.

You can ask about someone's response to a traumatic event in a nonjudgmental way by saying, "People have many different ways of responding in this kind of situation. What was your reaction?" or "That sounds really scary. How did you manage in that situation?"

SHAME, BLAME & TRAUMA

Feelings of shame and self-blame (“If I had only ...”) after trauma are very common. Validating the person’s choices, the work they’ve done to come forward, etc., can be reassuring — if it feels appropriate. Use your judgment and emotional intuition. Self-blame can reflect that it feels more manageable/safer to say “I messed up” than to admit the world is a scary place where terrible things happen beyond our control.

Similarly, people listening to friends’ traumatic experiences may have the urge to make themselves feel in control/feel safer by identifying what they would have done differently (“Oh, I never would have ...”). This lets us tell ourselves that the same thing couldn’t happen to us. This is false and ultimately victim-blaming. Fight this urge.

WHEN BUREAUCRACY/DEADLINES MEET TRAUMA

Bureaucracy is structured in a way that often makes a traumatic experience even more upsetting (having to rehash the experience over and over again, meeting deadlines, recounting the experience to strangers in perfect detail, etc). When navigating those processes, remember these principles:

- Give the person control/agency by explaining the goal and structure of the relevant grievance/reporting process and asking them how they would like to proceed.
- You can explain that what the traumatized person is about to undergo may be difficult but that they have a chance to tell their story and be heard and that you will be there to help however you can. Preparing yourself emotionally to participate in this kind of difficult process is sometimes called anticipatory coping.
- Acknowledge that this process can be difficult and frustrating. HR systems are poorly set up to address trauma. Acknowledge that what the person is doing is hard and that they are doing a strong and resilient thing.

Remember: There are a lot of things we cannot control. There are a lot of things we cannot do. But by showing support where we can and being honest about our limitations, we can help shape the way the person relates to their trauma going forward and can make the process of reporting and addressing that trauma less isolating and shaming.



Assessment and List Keeping

In this section:

- Assessing Our Power
- Using Power Builds Power
- Sample Working List

Assessing Our Power

To build our union, we must continually assess our strength. To do that, let's imagine our co-workers distributed on a dartboard. Our goal is to always move them closer to the center of the circle through escalating actions. Mass participation is key to winning victories, and maintaining and building support must be ongoing.

1. Organizing Committee

These are organizers committed to actively building our union, having one-on-one conversations with co-workers, and moving co-workers to action.



5. Actively Opposed

These individuals do not support forming a union and actively oppose the effort by participating in the anti-union campaign.

2. Active & Public Supporter

These are active participants who follow through on tasks and have agreed to show public support.

3. Uncommitted

These individuals have not shown clear support and/or failed to follow through when they agreed to participate.

4. Passively Opposed

These individuals do not support forming a union but are not committed to actively opposing the effort.

- ✓ Requires ongoing contact by Organizing Committee members.
- ✓ Not static — Where someone stands can change from day to day.
- ✓ Are based on a person's actions — not just what they say.
- ✓ Organizing Committee maintains roster with assessments to track support.

USING POWER BUILDS POWER

We begin with easier-to-win issues and tackle harder, more important issues as we build power. We involve members regularly, celebrate small wins and assess engagement in actions along the way.



We identify the top three issues we want remaining on the table if we go out on strike. What issues will build the greatest level of support in the union and with the public?



Identify what you believe will be your peak of strength and the date by which you want to reach a settlement and work backward to develop a timeline.



Schedule key moments on a calendar (bargaining team trained, action team formed, unit surveyed, bargaining pledge signed, bargaining dates, strike vote and deadline, etc.). This builds momentum that your colleagues will feel.



Identify key dates for the employer(s) that can be leveraged strategically (e.g. Amazon Prime Day, The New Yorker Festival, sports events, etc.).



Build in ongoing opportunities to assess progress on the calendar.



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SAMPLE WORKER LIST

First	Last	Title	Team	Assessment	Assigned To	Info Call	Last Contact Date
PAT	EXAMPLE	Reporter II	Breaking News	1 - OC	Stephanie Basile	Yes	3/25/21
JESSIE	SAMPLE	Sports Editor	Sports	0 - Unassessed			
KENNEDY		Photographer	Visual	3 - Not Taken Action	Kevin Brokt	Need to ask	3/26/21
TEM	TEST	Client Coordinator	Development	1 - OC	Alex Organizer	Yes	3/20/21
TAYLOR	SAMPLAR	Reporter I	News	2 - Active Support		Yes	
SAM	PLE	Reporter I	County	4 - Passive Oppose	Alex Organizer	No	3/27/21
CHRIS	STANDARD	Call Agent	Fundraising	0 - Unassessed			

Last Action For Assessment	Notes with Dates / Initials	Workplace Issues	Personal Phone	Personal Email	Inoculation Training	Mission Statement	Authorization Card
Info Call Attendance 3/25/21	SB 3/25: Very excited about organizing after call! Wants to join organizing committee	No notice layoffs, workload, transparency	555-555-5555	example@gmail.com			
	AG 3/26: Kennedy agreed to join the next info call and shared that Jessie is likely to support	On-call work and pay equity	555-555-5555	123@outlook.com			
Info Call Attendance 3/25/21	AO 3/20: Attended info call and agreed to join OC.	High quota and little transparency	555-555-5555	power@workers.org			
Info Call Ask	AO 3/27: Declined invitation to an info call. Feels that his issues can be resolved 1/1 w/ supervisor. Shared issues and should be revisited after he speaks with supervisor about expenses on 4/12/21.	Reimbursement delays with work from home expenses	555-555-5555				

THREE THEMES OF AN ANTI-UNION CAMPAIGN

When workers organize a union, employers almost always respond with an anti-union campaign of their own. Tactics vary, and some are more subtle than others, but it's rare for managers to remain truly neutral. Employers often hire high-priced consulting to try to convince workers that forming a union is counterproductive.

Preparing your co-workers for what they can expect from your company can limit the effectiveness of managements' efforts.

STRATEGY OF AN ANTI-UNION CAMPAIGN

- The company's strategy during an anti-union campaign is to **dominate the atmosphere** and create a negative environment. The best tactic for our union is to not respond point by point but rather to stay focused on our plan.
- Anti-union campaigns are **never actually called anti-union campaigns**. That would be too obvious! They are branded as neutral and described as providing information that is in our "best interest."
- The most effective anti-union tactics **don't seem like anti-union tactics at all!** There are obvious tactics like anti-union meetings, but there are seemingly casual day-to-day interactions in which managers or co-workers will make comments aimed at eroding our solidarity.

THEME 1: MISINFORMATION — ‘THE UNION IS BAD’

GOAL	TYPES OF MISINFORMATION
To confuse workers about the union.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Things can get worse with a union.2. Unions are great! ... Just not here, not in the broadcast industry.3. A union is a business.
APPROACH	COMMON TACTICS
Managers and co-workers will say that they're not against unions so as to appear neutral, then provide "facts" in order to "inform" workers about the dangers of unions. Companies frequently bring in "neutral union experts," who are actually professional anti-union consultants paid to bust our union.	<p>Managers often tell workers the following, none of which are true:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Once workers unionize they will no longer be able to talk directly to their managers.• The union will impose rigid work rules.• The union tricked people into signing union authorization cards.• The union's constitution is full of rules that will govern your life.• You will lose everything in contract negotiations.

THEME 2: 'GIVE US ANOTHER CHANCE'

GOAL	COMMON TACTICS
To claim they didn't know about the problems and promise to change their ways if the union goes away.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff meetings are used as an opportunity for workers to vent and for managers to act like they are listening. • Upper level managers suddenly take an interest in workers, take them to lunch and try to get to know them outside of work. • The CEO visits the workplace. • Upper management sends letters and emails promising to address issues. • Managers suggest the company is poised to make big improvements but can only do so if the union goes away. • Co-workers suggest voting against the union, giving the company a chance to change, and then bringing the union back if the company doesn't change. • Management promises a "big surprise" scheduled for right after the union election.
APPROACH	
Front-line supervisors, midlevel managers, HR reps and even the president or CEO will visit the office and say no one brought these issues to their attention. They will start giving the workers attention and listening to their problems.	

THEME 3: EMOTIONAL APPEAL AKA 'WE'RE SORRY'

GOAL	COMMON TACTICS
To exploit personal relationships in order to emotionally manipulate workers into abandoning the organizing drive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers or colleagues tell workers they're hurt that the workers are organizing. • A manager cries at meetings in front of workers. • The company claims the Organizing Committee is creating a negative atmosphere. • A popular manager implies that they will be fired if the union is voted in. • The company orders food and drinks for workers. • Managers or consultants get a few workers to campaign against the union. • Splits and factions develop in the workforce that appear organic but are being created by consultants or management. • Managers having positive "bonding" meetings with workers.
APPROACH	
Managers and co-workers often personalize the union drive, acting as though workers' desire to organize is a personal attack on managers or co-workers. They try to divert attention from the real issues to get people to focus on their personal relationships.	

SAMPLE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA

Before the meeting starts

- Open the [roster](#).
- Identify a notetaker.



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Report Backs (15 minutes)

Report back on conversations

10 minutes

Name of person you spoke with, workplace issue in 1-2 words, what their action item is (e.g., attend an info session, attend an organizer training, connect you with a co-worker).

Review numbers

2 minutes

What is our OC % and overall support % this week compared to last week?

Goals

3 minutes

Did we meet our goals? Why or why not?

Facilitator: model the first one.

Facilitator Tips:

- For each person ask, "What did that person say? What issues were they most concerned about/interested in resolving as a group? What was the 'ask,' and did they do it? Based on that, what is their assessment, 1-5?"
- As somebody shares the assessment, put it into the roster. Flag pushback to cover in the "Yeah Buts" section.

Yeah Buts & Role Plays (15 minutes)

Think critically about last week and prepare for next week.

1. What pushback are we getting?

2. How do we overcome it?

Facilitator Tips:

- Work through one example from the group and build a response together.
- When you've come to an agreement on good messaging, practice by role playing.

List Work and Stats Update (10 minutes)

Provide the group with an overview reviewing your goals and progress from the roster.

- Who should be prioritized next? Which teams need more attention? Do we have leaders from across the roster?

Facilitator Tips:

- Guide the group through identifying next steps for outreach based on looking at your roster together.
- Who should be prioritized next? Who should be avoided? Which department needs more attention? Do we have leaders from across the roster?

Next Steps (15 minutes)

What are the assignments for this week?

10 minutes

- Based on the list work, break out assignments for the week.
- For each assignment, clearly identify who will be speaking to whom and what the move to action will be.
 - Move to action examples — attend an info call, join the OC, speak to a co-worker, attend a workshop, take an action.
 - Notetaker should post the assignments in the chat after the meeting.

Housekeeping

5 minutes

Facilitator Tips:

- Reference facilitator/notetaker rotation to confirm who will be facilitator and notetaker for our next OC call.
 - Confirm the date and time.
- Confirm who will be facilitator and notetaker for our next info call.
 - Confirm date and time.
- Any other calendar events?

PRE-MEETING

DURING THE MEETING

- ✓ Set a regular time to prep and debrief.
- ✓ Create an agenda with an allotted amount of time for each section.
- ✓ Share the agenda with the group in advance (early enough to solicit feedback).
- ✓ Assign a notetaker and a timekeeper.
- ✓ Send confirmation messages and reminders.
- ✓ Prepare the room (or virtual room) in advance: prepare materials, set up breakout rooms, have document links ready to share.
- ✓ Practice how you will introduce the meeting and each section of the meeting.
- ✓ Set up a WhatsApp chat with the whole facilitation team to use before, during, and after the meeting.
- ✓ Role play this scenario: We are at the end of the allotted time in a section and someone is talking. How will you cut in to move the meeting along to the next section?

FACILITATOR CHECKLIST



- ✓ Get hyped! Start with an energetic welcome.
- ✓ Start on time.
- ✓ Follow the agenda. Keep the meeting focused on one item at a time and stick to the time allotted for each section.
- ✓ Give context for each agenda item, i.e., "Now we're discussing Yeah Buts so that we can respond to pushback we've been getting."
- ✓ Give notice when a minute or two are left in each section.
- ✓ Ask follow-up questions to guide the discussion.
- ✓ Silence is your friend. After you ask a question, let it sit. Don't jump in and answer.
- ✓ Ensure everyone speaks. Call on people who haven't spoken.
- ✓ Help the group deal with conflict. Be attentive to underlying issues and emotions. Help bring them out so they can be addressed.
- ✓ Challenge disruptive or discriminatory behavior and put-downs.
- ✓ End on time. If necessary, extend the meeting time by checking with the group.
- ✓ Remind the notetaker to post the notes in the relevant chat after the meeting.
- ✓ Remind them to be upbeat about accomplishments.
- ✓ Make sure everyone leaves with a task. Unassigned members can call people who missed the meeting.



Escalating Campaigns

In this section:

- Escalation Mountain
- Escalation: Turning Up The Heat
- Communications for Organizing



ESCALATION MOUNTAIN

5

Resolution

- Reach tentative agreement.
- Provide vote recommendation to members on tentative agreement.
- Members vote to ratify the contract .
- If the membership votes no, go back to the table
- Debrief campaign.
- Identify how to implement new contract provisions .
- Train CAT as stewards to enforce contract.

4

The Peak

- Strike or threat of strike.

3

Escalation Period

- Evaluate management's proposals.
- Plan and execute escalating structure tests, building in solidarity and confrontation.

2

Kickoff

- Create language for proposals.
- Set bargaining dates.
- Meet with management's negotiators.
- Present proposed contract language to management.

1

Foundation

- Elect Bargaining Committee.
- Research the company.
- Survey members' bargaining priorities.
- Develop Issue Platform and Contract Campaign "Theme."
- Recruit and train Contract Action Team (CAT).
- Bargaining Conference to train BC and CAT, develop timeline.
- Build relationships with community groups and elected officials .



ESCALATION: TURNING UP THE HEAT



Communications for Organizing

Comms is not social media – it's a tool to win.

What is communications for organizing?

Effective communication supports the campaign's goals by moving people to take action, reinforcing the campaign's structure and increasing pressure on targets. Comms should help everyone know what we're doing, why we're doing it and what comes next.

Best Practices:

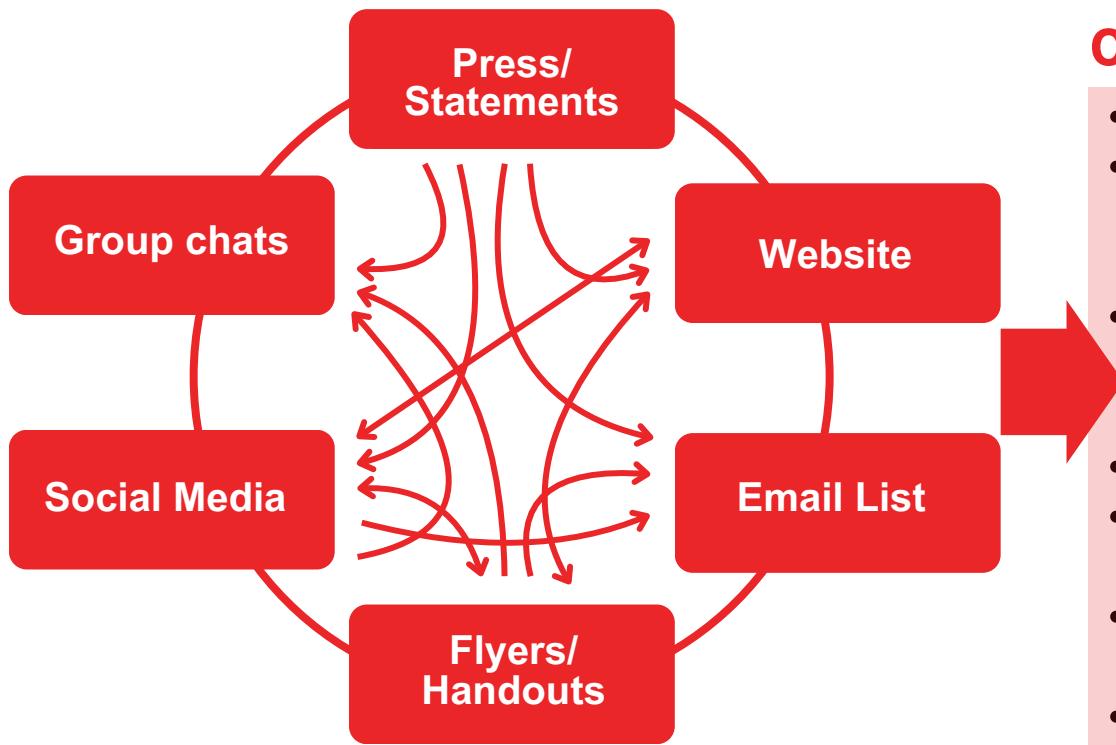
Communications is about clarity, direction and repetition. It is strategic, action-oriented, grounded in organizing and built to WIN. **It should:**

- **Drive action:** Every flyer, message or post should lead to an action – turnout, sign-up, vote, pressure, escalate.
- **Frame the fight:** Name the boss as the problem, define who we are, what we want and why we'll win. Make demands visible and clear!
- **Scale conversations:** Comms lets us expand the conversation about our struggle and gives us an opportunity to expand our support base.
- **Inoculate against the boss:** Use comms to prepare people for anti-union tactics and narratives so they're not surprised, confused or divided.

A clever slogan that does not match the strategy is just noise and a campaign without a consistent narrative feels scattered and loses trust. **Comms organizing is not:**

- Posting on social media every day for the sake of posting once a day.
- Raising awareness/expressing frustration. (That is activism, but we are trying to organize people. Not just inform them of an issue.)
- Reaction to what the boss says. We set the narrative and the vision for our union.
- Just branding/aesthetics. Good design is nice, but branding should serve the campaign and not distract from it. (Ex: A nice looking post with no next step.)

Communications for organizing is made of a whole ecosystem that should reinforce itself. Flyers become posts. Posts feed email blasts. Emails push turnout. Group chats coordinate attendance. Everything works together to move people *toward offline action*.



Offline Action:

- Mail your ballot
- Attend an event (town hall, rally, HH, etc)
- Call/write management or Congress
- Sign a petition
- March on the boss
- Donate to a strike fund
- Boycott

ALL TOOLS SERVE THE SAME GOAL: BUILD POWER BY MOVING PEOPLE TO ACT.

Communications Training & Support:

For training, support or help developing your communications strategy, contact our Communications Coordinator, Dylan Manshack, at dmanshack@cwa-union.org.

For more resources and training, you can also visit:

<https://cwa-union.org/CommsTrainings>





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