

Union Organizing 101 for Contingent Faculty





1: Intro to Organizing

A general overview of basic principles of organizing and why they are effective.



2: Presentation to Give to an Organizing Committee

Outline of the specific steps of a tested systematic model for organizing in higher education.



1: Intro to Organizing

Basic principles of organizing and why they are effective.

What Is Organizing?

- Organizing is building for power. It takes many forms:
 - Increasing membership
 - Moving members to be active in their chapter
 - Communicating with members about needs, concerns, victories, etc.
 - 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

Principles of Member-Based Unionism

- We organize collectively because there is strength in numbers.
- A union is as strong as its members. We need 1) high membership numbers and 2) high rates of active participation.
- 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 an entity outside of the members. It isn't officers or activists or national affiliates—it IS the members!

Why Do We Organize?

Organizing provides us the people power we need to win effective changes.

- Administrations are more likely to respond if we can demonstrate we have large numbers of people involved.
- If they see that everyone is standing together on an issue, they will have a harder time refusing to move on that issue.
- Members have to be willing and ready to act together.
- Nothing is as persuasive as a lot of members speaking and acting with one voice.

Why Do We Organize?

Organizing fosters 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, which ensures that members communicate with one another.
- No one wants to be part of a group in which they don't have a voice.
- Building for power requires large numbers of active members, which means that everyone is necessary, not just an elite few.

Why Do Contingent Faculty Need to Organize?

To protect the quality of student learning

- Contingent faculty are now responsible for teaching over 70% of students. Teacher working conditions = student learning conditions.

To protect equity among academic colleagues

- Contingent faculty have less access to resources, less job security, and less voice within their institutions than their tenure-track colleagues. They are also generally drastically undercompensated.

To protect academic freedom

- Contingent faculty lack the protections of tenure.

Identifying Organizing Issues

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

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

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

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, not against, 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.



2: Presentation to Give to an Organizing Committee

A professional model for organizing commonly used by professional organizers and successful chapters.

Identify Organizing Issues

- When identifying issues around which to organize, focus primarily on actionable issues that are important to a lot people. These will
 - come up repeatedly in conversations across many departments;
 - reflect the goals of the chapter;
 - motivate people to get involved; and
 - be addressable through practical, measurable solutions.
- Develop plans for how the chapter will address the issues, refining them based on feedback in one-on-ones.

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, reps 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 the 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 it obvious that they will not join.

Before Conducting One-On-Ones

- Recruit department reps for organizing committee
- Map departments. List:
 - Everyone in the department who is eligible to join
 - Each person's office location, if they have an office
- 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
- Talk about issues 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

How Do I Find These People?

- If they have offices, drop in for a visit. Write down their office hours so you know you can always find them at a certain time.
- If they are in large, crowded offices, it's fine to either:
 - Use the opportunity to talk to several people at once
 - Ask if you can make a personal appointment, perhaps in the lounge, the student union, or a local coffee shop
- Look up or ask department for their class schedule and meet them outside their classroom before or after teaching
- Last resorts (try to use to set up personal meetings):
 - Phone calls
 - Emails

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 union members are facing, whatever union members are planning to do about those issues, and whatever issues potential members bring up. But also:

- Compensation
- Benefits
- Office space
- Access to resources (copiers, printers, etc.)
- When do contingent faculty learn which/how many classes they will teach?

- Academic freedom – Can the faculty choose texts, create course content, etc.?
- Class size
- Workload—How many classes do/can they teach?
- Voice – What kind of presence, if any, do contingent faculty have in department meetings, shared governance, committees, budgets, curriculum decisions?
- Job security (letters of appointment, length of appointments, contract renewal, paths for promotion)
- What happens if/when classes are cancelled?
- Relationship to education/program, if a graduate assistant

Common Objections and Possible 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”
- No time, teach too many classes or at too many schools
 - “I understand we are all very busy, but you’ll have even less time if we don't have a strong union”
- My colleagues aren’t going to join/do anything
 - “You have to create the momentum”
- Already belong to a union at another school
 - “Great! So you understand the importance of organizing.”

- Fear of retaliation: i.e., I have no job security and am afraid joining will cause them not to re-hire me.
 - “The only way to get job security is through organizing collectively. Otherwise, each individual is at the whims of a single department head or other administrator each and every semester.”
 - It can also be helpful to let people know that in the rare case of retaliation, the most effective response is for the chapter to respond as a collective. Use pressure tactics to get administrators to reverse retaliatory decisions. (Once the chapter has a contract, the AAUP policy and standards language in the contract will make retaliation even less likely. And a grievance process should be incorporated into the contract for if and when contract violations occur.)

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.

Keep the Rep Structure in Place

Once the OC has built up the membership, the department re structure remains in place. It provides:

- 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

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

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

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