

ISSUE ORGANIZING
USING THE LUNCH AND LEARN TECHNIQUE

Questions and Answers

About AFGE's

Highly Successful Lunch and Learn Program

Produced By The AFGE Department of
Membership and Organization

What Is Issue Organizing?

Everything the union does involves an issue that someone cares about. These issues are the reason that people will want a union and they are the reason why people will join. Everyone cares about something -- job security, retirement, child care, or health care. Once we identify that something and do follow-up on that issue, the union becomes important to that person.

Issue Organizing is a systematic way to turn the business of your Local into on-going recruitment for members. It's a way of getting the job of representation done and at the same time building a larger, more active and better informed Local.

Why Is Issue Organizing Different From Other Types Of Recruiting?

All Issue Organizing breaks down into four elements. You must complete all four if you are to succeed. These elements are:

1. Get the issue straight from the workers.
2. Involve and Inform them in the solution.
3. Recruit around the issue.
4. Engage the workers in some sort of direct action, such as writing letters to congress, circulating petitions or workplace rallies.

Sounds Great, But Who Is Supposed To Do All That Extra Work?

Once your Local has recognized the need to increase membership, it should establish a committee of officers, stewards and members to plan and complete the initial groundwork before the Issue Organizing drive begins. This is the Membership Committee, and it will serve as the backbone of your recruitment efforts.

Remember, unless you have a very small Local, the membership Committee needs to consist of more than just a handful of stewards and officers. This is necessary because of the many functions that the Committee performs.

The ideal membership committee should have representatives from all:

- o Departments
- o Racial/Ethnic groups
- o Shifts
- o Various age groups
- o Key jobs/trades (both genders)

How Do We Identify Good Recruiters To Serve On The Membership Committee?

There is an old saying among organizers that "you can't organize from the outside in -- you must organize from within the workplace out."

While an Incentive Organizer, National Organizer or National Representative might assist you in the development of a membership recruitment program for your Local, no "outside" help can replace the experience and familiarity of the "insiders" who work at the agency or installation every day.

Good Potential Committee Members Are:

- o People who self select
- o People who work in high visibility areas
- o People who are positive, outgoing, popular and respected by the workforce
- o People who exhibit good work habits
- o People who are self-motivated
- o People who work well on a team
- o People who like to have fun

Okay. So I've Set Up A Committee, How Do We Identify The Issues?

As a leader, it is your job to know what your people want. Sometimes the issues seem obvious, like pay or contracting out. At other times they are not so clear.

Because our goal is to increase membership, we must ask non-members what they think and want too. To find out what the workers want and think, is to determine what direction the Local should be moving in.

One of the best ways to determine which issues are important is to hold a worksite meeting. These meetings can be useful in internal organizing because they give employees the opportunity to hear what the union is doing and to tell the union what they want it to do. Workers appreciate the fact that someone is providing them with credible information and asking for their opinion. In addition, these meetings provide an excellent, non-threatening opportunity for contact between the Local union activists and the workforce.

There are several standard methods of finding out about issues present at the work place:

- o Surveys
- o Petitions
- o Newsletters
- o Office grapevine
- o Special meetings at the worksite which are targeted for recruitment

When Would Be The Best Time To Hold Such A Meeting?

Experience has taught us that holding issue organizing meetings during the lunch and/or break periods produce the best results. Workers usually have family or other personal commitments after work which make it difficult for them to hang around for a union meeting. By holding the meeting during a scheduled break or lunch period, workers are more likely to attend -- especially if we provide a snack or beverage! Hence, the term "Lunch and Learn".

How Can I Be Sure My Lunch and Learn Is Successful?

AFGE's Lunch & Learn program has a proven track record. Each Local fine tunes the concept to meet its needs, but the basic how-to is the same.

The Organizing Committee should be assigned to target an area or shift for the Lunch & Learn and be responsible for seeing to it that all four steps are followed.

There are four keys to holding a successful Lunch and Learn:

- o Planning
- o Logistics
- o Luncheon
- o Follow-up

Sounds Easy, But Exactly What Must Be Done?

Planning: Planning the Lunch & Learn is the most important aspect of the event. This is the time that the Organizing Committee decides who is to do what and when tasks are to be completed. Each person should be responsible for a specific task. For instance: one person should be responsible for selecting the room and getting the invitations or notices printed and distributed. Another should order the food, utensils and table decorations. Still another should order drinks and condiments.

Also, someone should be in charge of the literature table and make sure that the membership applications and ballpoint pens are available. If a video is to be shown, someone should make sure the VCR and monitor are available, set up and ready to go at the touch of a button.

Logistics: Logistics -- such as getting the word out to co-workers in plenty of time -- is the next hurdle. Desk drops, word of mouth, the Union Bulletin Board or an announcement in your Local newsletter are some good ways to alert

workers that the Local is hosting a Lunch and Learn. Announcement flyers should be simple, stating the topic for discussion, the date, time and place, as well as any special interest speakers. Flyers should be easy to understand and visually appealing. Try using colored paper or computerized graphics to dress it up.

Luncheon: If the first two steps are undertaken carefully, the Luncheon itself takes on a festive air. The food is there *on time*. The table is full of goodies, the video is playing our song -- "AFGE & Me" -- and the people are coming in to enjoy their lunch and learn more about the topic the Union has publicized. It is important that someone serve as a host to greet the employees as they come in. This may be the first time many of them will have direct contact with the Union, so the host must be friendly and helpful.

The literature table should be properly stocked and staffed to answer questions and sign up new members. Remember, many of your guests only have a short time (usually no more than 30 minutes) for lunch, so start your program as soon as everyone is seated.

Who Should Do The Actual Presentation?

Whenever possible, the Local President or other officer of the Local should welcome the group and introduce the featured speaker. That speaker -- perhaps a National Representative or Local legislative rep depending on the issue -- should then address the topic publicized on the invitation or announcement flyer. The featured speaker should be well prepared to discuss the issue and should speak no longer than ten minutes. This will give the final speaker -- "the closer" -- an opportunity to make a membership pitch.

Remember, your goals are to inform and recruit. This means that the person who closes the presentation (usually a member of the Local Organizing Committee) must have enough time to announce any special incentives the Local is giving for new members (such as an AFGE coffee mug, cap or cash rebate) and solicit membership.

Good Topics For Lunch & Learns Are:

- o Federal retirement
- o Partnership initiatives
- o Adequate staffing
- o Reorganizations
- o Health or safety concerns

Do We Have To Take A Public Speaking Course To Participate As A Lunch And Learn Speaker?

No way! Nearly every Local steward and officer is an expert of sorts on workplace issues. All you really have to have is a strong sense of union pride to be a good Lunch

and Learn speaker; however if you want to spruce up your Lunch and Learn presentation, most Districts provide some sort of organizing training as part of their regular seminar sessions. In addition, the companion video which accompanies this workbook should provide you with all the training you need in this area.

What Is Involved In The Follow-Up Phase?

Well, after you've recovered from counting all your new membership applications and submitting the add forms to the National, you will need to make sure those new members feel welcome. Someone should be assigned to let them know when the Local holds its regular membership meetings, who their area steward is and how they can get involved. That's right! Find out what they like to do and put them to work as part of the union team right away. Explain the steward system and the numerous committees -- health and safety, organizing, PAC, legislative, communications -- they can choose to serve on to "make their dues dollars work for them."

Who knows, maybe one of your new members might want to get involved in hosting the next Lunch and Learn!

APPENDIX I

Organizing Committee Report Form

Potential Member: _____

Worksite: _____

Job: _____

Name of Recruiter: _____

_____ **Gave literature (put the show date)**

_____ **Signed petition or letter to Congress**

_____ **Asked for home address** **Refused to give it**

Home address: _____

Phone number: _____

_____ **Gave filled-out membership application and asked to join (first visit)**

Said Yes

Said No -- why did he/she say no? _____

_____ **Actions taken by recruiter or reason(s) for refusal to join (for example:
answer question, solve problem)**

_____ **Gave filled-out membership applications and asked to join (second visit)**

Said Yes

Said No -- why did he/she say no? _____

APPENDIX II

Job Descriptions For Union Activists

Which of the following would you be willing to participate in?

JOB	TIME REQUIRED
New Employee Welcome Committee-- <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with new hires, give packet, discuss union	1-4 hours per new employee
Benefit/Insurance Expert-- <input type="checkbox"/> Learn about insurance programs and answer employee questions	1 hours per week
Newsletter Committee-- <input type="checkbox"/> Write articles	1-2 hours per month
<input type="checkbox"/> Design or locate art work	1-2 hours per month
<input type="checkbox"/> Lay-out and editing	2-3 hours per month
<input type="checkbox"/> Distribute newsletter	½ hour per month
Bulletin Board Committee-- <input type="checkbox"/> Update items, solicit art work, posters, etc.	1 hour per week
Social/Recreation Committee-- <input type="checkbox"/> Organize softball or bowling league	4 hours start-up time, plus participation
<input type="checkbox"/> Bring refreshments to social events	1 hour per event
Workers' Compensation Committee-- <input type="checkbox"/> Attend training on law	4 hour program
<input type="checkbox"/> Assist employees in your area who are injured	2 hour per incident
Communications Committee-- <input type="checkbox"/> Get acquainted with local journalists, tour facilities, learn about	3 hours per

deadlines, etc.

newspaper, TV or
radio station

- **Keep reporters informed about events at local union**

**1 hour every two
weeks**

Fair Practices Committee--

- **Attend training on discrimination laws**
- **Answer questions for employees concerned about race, sex, age, nationality, handicapped, or religious discrimination**

4 hour program

1 hour per week

Community Action Committee--

- **Participate in union-related coalitions, such as CLUW, APRI, Rural Coalition, LCLAA, etc.**
- **Become community counsellor**
- **Help at booth at state fair and other community events**

2 hours per month

**10 hours initial
training, then**

2 hours per month

2 hours per event

Political and Legislative Action--

- **Follow particular bill, keep in contact with legislator, keep local informed on progress**
- **Attend a legislative hearing**
- **Attend breakfast meeting with legislator**

1 hour per week

4 hours per year

**2 hours per
meeting**

Administrative roles--

- **Help keep updated list of members and non-members, with addresses, phone numbers**

1 hour per month