

TOOLS

FAQs on Organizing Campaigns

Here are some typical questions that come up during an organizing campaign.



Q: What exactly is a union, anyway?

A: A union is an organized group of people who use their collective power to have a say in their workplace. Through their union, people have the power and the right to directly impact wages, work hours, benefits, workplace health and safety, job training and other work-related issues.

Q: What's a union contract?

A: Our union contract will be the result of our negotiations with our employer about our jobs and workplace. The contract is the set of rules we all agree to live by; it is agreed to by us and our employer.

Q: What will be in our contract?

A: Together with our co-workers, we will decide what to negotiate for. After we win union recognition, we will establish a negotiating committee. Our negotiating committee will get input from co-workers and then sits down with management to begin negotiations (with help!). The contract only will take effect after it is approved (or “ratified”) by a majority of our co-workers.

Q: What if we lose benefits that we have now in negotiations?

A: The purpose of forming a union is to *win* improvements, not lose them. We start with what we have now and build upon that. If our employer wants to take away benefits after we form a union, it will have to negotiate with us first. We will vote on whether to accept the change or not.

Q: What if our employer doesn't want to negotiate with us?

A: The law requires both sides to bargain “in good faith” to reach an agreement on wages, benefits and working conditions.

Who Runs the Union?

We do! Unions are democratic organizations run by members. We will elect our own officers and vote on all issues of importance, including our contract.

Q: Can I be fired for joining a union?

A: It's illegal to fire someone for forming a union. The best safeguard against the employer harassing anyone is for everybody to stick together. Without a union, management has a free hand to treat people as it pleases. But with a union, everyone has the protection of our union contract.

Q: Won't it cost the company money if the union comes in?

A: It's true that union members usually earn higher wages and benefits, and these things cost the company money. With a union there is higher morale, because there is a mechanism for workers to have a voice in how the workplace operates. For the company, satisfied employees are more productive and less likely to quit, so there is less turnover. Also, management benefits when it gets real input from employees on how the operation could be run better.

Q: What about strikes?

A: Strikes can be painful for the employer, and for union members and our families. This is why 98% of negotiations are completed successfully without a strike. A strike is usually the last resort when the stakes are high and the employer is refusing to cooperate. Bottom line? We have to vote to strike. So it better be important.

Q: What can the union do about favoritism?

A: Fairness is one of the most important parts of a union contract—the same rules apply to everyone. If anyone feels that he or she is not being treated fairly, then he or she still has the opportunity to complain to the supervisor, just like before. But under a union contract, the supervisor or manager no longer will have the final say—they no longer are judge and jury.

Q: What do we have to do to form a union here?

A: The first step is to form a committee, including people from all different job titles and departments. The committee's job is to educate its members about the union, so they can help their co-workers learn and dispel rumors and false information. Next, the majority of employees show they want to form a union, typically by signing cards or a petition. At that point, the employer can recognize our union or we can request that an election to be held.

Top Three Answers to Just About Any Question

- We are the union. We make the decisions.
- When it comes to rights and power, more is better than less.
- Union negotiation is a democratic and rational process to gain more rights and power.

Q: What does signing a union card mean?

A: It means you want to form a union. Signing a union card is a commitment of support for your co-workers and for the process of forming a union. It also can include legal language to satisfy the requirements we must meet to have our union recognized.

What About Dues?

Dues will be \$ _____.

Unions are democratic organizations run by and for the members of the union. Dues help us run the day-to-day work of our organization and ally ourselves with other people to build more power for working people in our town, industry or company.