

## **Statewide Organizing Committee Plan**

Committee expectations:

- Regular *organizing* communications from the committee—tips and shared success (and failures) stories; helpful materials (like the “Are you a member?” flyer and the contact/interview form)
- Regular committee meetings—a published schedule
- Clear assignments for committee members, with benchmarks and deadlines
- *Real* chapter support (for the entire board’s efforts on campuses, not just organizing chairs)
- Recognition for great efforts (if not results)
- Promotion of the “Healthy Chapter” program
- Promote the creation and implementation of an organizing program based on the “organizing model” for chapters (using the Chapter Development Plan created by Brian Young)
- Get good lists to chapters; help each campus set up data base with tips on how to use it effectively (e.g. setting up “cells” in every building or work area; getting lists out to members to help their recruiting by identifying non-members)
- Create long-range plan for contract campaign support; calendar ahead
- Plan training program for chapters with communications, organizing, and legislative action integrated in one program (stay in member’s homes to cut travel costs)
- Promote visibility campaign: New Employee Orientations; new-employee programs; “stuffed” new employee packets with local information on how to get involved;
- Create and promote on-going education efforts: provide materials (paper, online, film)
- Promote the use of “new media”
- Hit the ground running: 1) Contact all current committee members to gauge interest in staying on; ask Kris re. competency and contribution so far; 2) Require all members of committee to read organizing book (research and recommend different ones, assignment list) and report back to committee (written for UE and verbal for committee); 3) Interview all current chapter org. chairs (and get schedule for e-board meetings) for current efforts and plans and to sell “Healthy Chapter” program; 4) Plan campus visits with either full chapters or e-boards (can do in concert with statewide president or parallel to or each take half the load); 5) Review communication program (do we even need separate committees)?

## **12 Steps to a Healthy Union Chapter**

Step 1: Hold regular meetings

Step 2: Put out regular communication – acquire or develop (and maintain) chapter e-mail list; include a mix of information passed along, rights-in-the-workplace tips, produce a chapter newsletter from time to time, create a system of distribution for bulletin boards and other information

Step 3: Make yourselves visible – Start a student scholarship (could have an internship component); attend university functions for staff (retreats, retirement and holiday events, university budget committees, academic senate meetings, etc.); start a community service program; promote labor studies departments, encourage members to take classes; hold special-day events (black T-shirt Fridays, hats for custodians, etc.)

Step 4: Agitate – Take every opportunity to stir things up (always respectfully, of course) when the chance presents itself. For example, when management does something really stupid and the union saves the day, take advantage of it and turn it into a lesson for the “value added” to the workplace.

Step 5: Educate – The only dumb questions are those never asked. Be patient. Take the time to explain. The world of unionism is very foreign to most people. It takes time to get acclimated to a foreign culture.

Step 6: Plan – Hold yearly executive board retreat; create yearly calendar; adopt the Chapter Development plan created by Brian Young;

Step 7: Make it fun — anyway you can – the more fun it is the more people will be involved.

Step 8: Challenge management – have your facts straight and don’t let them off the hook.

Step 9: Cooperate with HR – even HR managers recognize when they have difficult managers, and they appreciate the help in educating them (to the extent that is possible).

Step 10: Set achievable goals – vow to do one small thing each day; slow and steady tiny steps do add up over time.

Step 11: Bring up new leaders – recognize that the littlest contribution is what makes it a united effort.

Step 12: Celebrate your success! – And toot your own horn because everyone loves (and are more inclined to join) a winner.

### **Union-building notebook:**

Growing a chapter is hard work. It doesn’t happen overnight but is a long-range commitment. There are no easy paths; the way is riddled with obstacles and challenges. It’s difficult to keep your “eyes on the prize,” but that is exactly what you must do. Like the saying: A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step—take it one step at a time, one day at a time. If you try to reach somewhere all at once you will get nowhere.

To get somewhere you have to have a destination, a travel plan, and a commitment to take at least one step every day. Convincing some people to join can sometimes take years. You have to keep coming at them with positive messages and slowly chip away at his or her doubts. You have to educate about the value of unions generally and specifically about this union’s value and especially the value of having good people involved locally. It’s really not a hard sell because we know the value is there. We are up against powerful cultural forces, but we can use the even more powerful person-to-person connections to counter that. Education takes time, and real education unlocks self-knowledge in the student and empowers him or her to act.

Organizing is more than just achieving an increase in members. The overall goal is to have a healthy chapter. A large family isn't necessarily a functional one. A healthy chapter is made up of many components, each one an important part of the whole. The dominant, default union model we have been practicing is the representation model, which offers services to those in need (those who come to us) but does little for the majority beyond an occasional event or salary increase. This model allows the phenomenon we see in the workplace where some represented employees say they "didn't know there was a union." Our task is to gradually migrate to a different model, sometimes called an organizing model.

At its core the organizing model replaces a small group of activists with an active *chapter*. It's more vibrant and engaged. It shares the workload among many and is much more fun than a small band struggling against the odds. An organizing model strives to be inclusive; this can sometimes mean more conflict among people, but leaders need to take things in stride. Leaders need to remind those involved when there are conflicts to keep the goals in mind. Remind members of our mission and that a little contribution from many is more valuable than a huge contribution from a few. Leaders need to recognize that giving up a little control means more involvement.

### **What does a healthy chapter look like?**

A healthy engine is one where all the divergent parts are well oiled and moving the way they were intended, a competent driver is at the wheel, one who has a sense of direction and purpose, the tank is full and the road is clear. There may be obstacles and hazards along the way but the destination must be reached. With a healthy chapter—creating a range of well-attended, highly visible activities that look like fun—the union is that much easier to join (always in the background a small group will be doing the serious work). If we build it, they will come.

### **What can an Organizing Committee do?**

Give direction and support to organizing efforts: support in communication techniques and skills, support in using chapter member data, support in getting people actively involved in their union, support in getting new employee programs started, support in recruiting board members and stewards trained, support in convincing one new member at a time that this is the place to be.

### **Regarding sign-up incentive campaigns (paying someone to join):**

Offering a signing incentive sells us short. In the long run it offers an incentive for members who joined (for the wrong reasons to begin with) to un-join at the first opportunity (to prepare for the next signing incentive to come along). It may be a way to get a short-term spike in membership but it does nothing to build long-term loyalty. We need to "make the sale" on its own merits. When we are strong our union is an easy sell, even in hard times. There will always be a few non-joiners but many of the rest can be reached. The challenge to us is to find out how to reach them. We are up against powerful cultural anti-union forces but there is at least some positive history and a strong democratic tradition to draw upon. People are basically selfish. We just need to convince them that it's in their own interests to join, but beyond merely signing a card, we need to make them see the empowerment and enrichment in union work.

The numbers: Promising an increase in membership by a particular percentage in a set timeframe is silly. Yes we do want higher totals but that should not be our focus, merely goal setting will not get the job done. We've had goals and plans before; we can examine their success or failure but each chapter is unique. Our focus needs to be on supporting enough activists so that we can do what needs to be done: convince one member at a time. With that the numbers will come.

SEIU support: It's not about being afraid of SEIU. The fact that we are affiliated is something we have to deal with realistically. It would be extremely costly to pick a fight and try to leave that affiliation. Instead we can choose to take or leave their support. We can choose what we want to focus our efforts on and whether any resources from SEIU would support our goals.