

ITF ORGANISING MANUAL

BENCHMARKS AND WORK PLANS

Before you begin setting your benchmarks, you will need to know who the employer or decision maker is and approximately how many workers you will be organising. **“Benchmarks” are specific goals that measure levels of worker involvement that we need to meet.**

If there are external deadlines or constraints – for example, with contract negotiations or a threat of privatisation – it is essential that the union begins organising early. Too

often we wait or delay our organising work and then blame the workers if they are not involved when we need them.

For your organising, what do you think the four benchmarks for worker participation should be?

___% names and contact details

___% one-to-one contact within 48 hours

___% have basic knowledge of the union

___% willing to publicly show support

FOUR KEY BENCHMARKS

Benchmarks are specific levels of worker participation we want to meet before we confront the employer.

%

names and
contact
details

%

one-to-one
contact
within 48 hrs

%

have basic
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%

willing to
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As we get closer to meeting our benchmarks, a false sense of security can occur. Workers from strong areas or shifts may not realise what other workers are facing. Some groups of workers may still be afraid to contact the union or may still lack information about the union. The union may lose sight of these workers because they are not in contact with them. The employer may be holding back its anti-union campaign because it is underestimating the union's strength.

Union supporters will want to imagine that momentum will build naturally. But usually workers slow down their involvement once the employer increases the pressure on them.

Planning is a key component of organising. There are many benefits. Planning helps us build the collective and can hold us accountable to each other. We need to know what everyone is doing and when so that we can co-ordinate our work. If we do not plan, we simply react, so without planning, there is no

strategy. Planning takes time and effort. It can show us our weaknesses as well as our strengths. And any plan is useless if not implemented.

We need to search out people in our union and our workplaces who have skills that can help us with organising. And then we need to delegate specific tasks to them.

We cannot organise alone. Delegating helps us build new leaders and bring new ideas and energy into our work. Sometimes we resist the amount of planning and work it takes to delegate tasks, but if we are not delegating, we are not organising.

** What skills do you have that can help with organising?*

** Who else can assist us? How can we get them involved?*

To begin a group planning process, we will want to select a time period for your plan. It might be one week, three months or five years. List the tasks that need to be done. For every task, decide who will be responsible and when they

PLANNING PROCESS

Tasks	Who will be responsible?	When will they report to whom?

SAMPLE 3 MONTH WORK PLAN

Tasks	Who will be responsible?	When will they report to whom?
List Building Create list of workers we are in touch with including contact details	Richard	Give list to Sangam by March 1 with copy to Sharon
Communication Networks Keep in regular contact with 30 non-union workers	Sangam (with the help of the participants present who agree to keep in touch with 5-7 workers each)	Every 2 weeks detailed written report to Sharon
Education Request time at the next membership meeting to discuss organising	Sharon	Union officers and union education committee

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will report to whom. The person responsible does not have to do all the work but is responsible for working with others to get it done. Be specific and realistic. Include an evaluation plan.

The next step is to create a calendar. Again, decide on a time period. Write in all major union events and holidays. Then add the tasks and deadlines from your work plan, and adjust your calendar as needed.

Whom would you need to involve in planning?

- * Elected leaders*
- * Union members*
- * Non-union workers*
- * Union staff*

How often would you meet to plan?

Learning from each other

There must always be a second layer of leadership so that we are ready for succession if anything happens. And the organising must include knowledge about trade union issues such as privatisation. All leaders must be able to represent the interests of the union and be involved locally in organisations such as our national federation, COSATU [Congress of South African Trade Unions].

We must have 90 per cent membership to build the union; until we reach that point, I am not truly satisfied that we have built the union.

Veronica Mesatywa

ITF affiliate, South Africa



The accompanying PowerPoint module on “Benchmarks and Work Plans” contains activities that will help you create your benchmarks, an initial work plan and calendar, as well as additional information about delegating and planning.

Learning from each other

In English-speaking Africa, the labour requirement for a union to get and keep recognition is usually a union membership of “50 per cent plus 1” (simple majority). What we are doing now is encouraging the unions to recruit 75 per cent so that if anything happens, the union is still safe. Many unions are happy with this because we all know that employers can be very tricky. Employers have sacked workers who have joined the union or transferred them to a parent company to defeat the “50 per cent plus 1” (simple majority) requirement.

Before we seek union recognition, unions keep the recruitment forms secret to help protect the workers from intimidation. It is easier to recruit

before the employer knows. We need to extend this secret period of time.

We should not just go with “50 per cent plus 1” (simple majority) because that’s what the labour regulation is. We need to do what is best for the workers and the union. In most cases, once the union gets the recognition, more workers usually join because their jobs are secure, and they feel safer, but we can’t rely on this. Sometimes something changes in the company – a merger or an ownership change or the shop steward changes.

When you have “50 per cent plus 1”, you are just there, just enough, but if you have 75 per cent, you have the momentum with you.

Anna Karume
ITF secretariat