

ITF ORGANISING MANUAL

ORGANISING COMMITTEES

There are many reasons to have an organising committee. Organising committees help spread the work around, develop leaders and increase commitment and ownership. They help hold us accountable to each other. Within the framework of the overall union decision-making structures, the organising committee usually makes daily decisions about organising strategy and work plans.

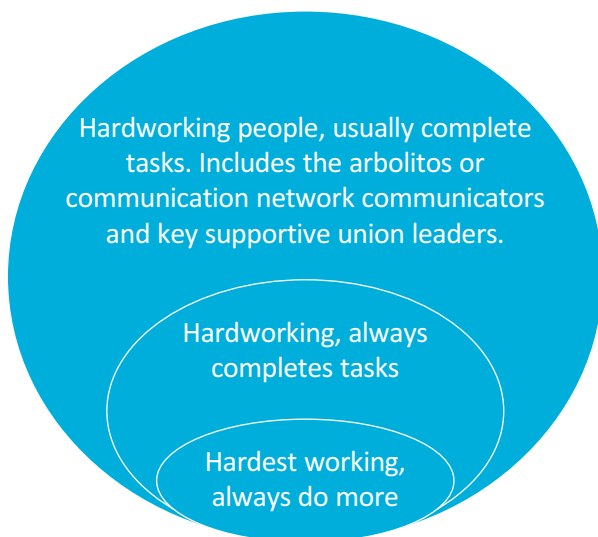
Learning from each other

Unions should concern themselves equally with women and men in the workplace. In my opinion, a union which does not represent women or young workers is only doing half its job.

Kalthoum Barkallah

ITF affiliate, Tunisia

ORGANISING COMMITTEE



Usually a minimum of 15% of the workers, reflecting all jobs, genders, languages, ages and ethnicities

Includes key union leaders and decision makers who are able to support the work of the committee. The organising committee cannot be separate from the union and union leaders.

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Forming an organising committee:

- 1. Make a list of everyone who is working on organising. Include the arbolitos (worker networks) and union leaders. Are there any under-represented groups that you will need to focus on?*
- 2. Discuss when, where and how often to meet. The hardest-working people can meet more often, but they will want to report in regularly.*
- 3. Discuss how the organising committee fits into your union decision-making structures. Discuss who can perform the facilitation and record-keeping jobs.*

You will want to create tasks for the organising committee that fit what workers are able and willing to do.

Do not form the organising committee too early. Use arbolitos (worker networks) first to build support. If your first meeting is too weak and not representative, it could give the impression of a small clique. Once the committee is formed, continue to focus on workers where union support is weak.

Once the committee is formed, do not make the mistake of spending most of your time with the active union supporters. Spend time

EXAMPLE

I want to be a member of the LAN Airlines organising committee

I'll take responsibility for:

- Attending committee meetings once a month*
- Speaking to one or more LAN workers about what they like and dislike about working for LAN*
- Helping in the union office once a month*
- Attending soccer games*
- Attending social events*
- Helping organise soccer games*
- Helping organise social events*
- Making calls to union members from the union office*
- Keeping 5-7 union members updated about organising*

with the workers and the areas of the workforce where union support is weak.

Keep the meetings brief, discuss who was able to do what, plan the tasks ahead of time, and give out assignments. Make sure that people do not commit to more than they can do. Develop a culture of helping each other.

If someone does not complete the work they agreed to do, designate someone to contact them and find out why. You might want to set a policy for removal from the organising committee after a designated number of absences or if

no work tasks are completed. Encourage rejoining after attendance at two or more meetings or completion of work tasks.

Two important jobs are facilitation and record-keeping. These responsibilities can be shared or rotated, but it should be clear who is responsible for doing them.

Sometimes there are groups of workers who are under-represented in our union structures and organising committees. They might be a certain age group, gender, ethnicity or race. Perhaps the day-shift workers are less

Sample organising committee agenda

12:00 Attendance / Sign in

12:05 Report results of previous assignments

– Give recognition to people who completed assignments

– Plan what to do about work not done

12:10 Discussion of the next phase of the organising

12:20 Practice next assignments

12:50 Assignments

13:00 Adjourn

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involved than the night-shift workers. Work classifications, language or length of time on the job might divide us.

Employers will often use existing divisions in the workforce to further divide workers. They may reward or punish some groups to divide workers. Sometimes this will be done subtly, sometimes not. The more united the workers, the stronger the union.

** Think about an under-represented group that is important to your organising.*

** What problems might occur as they become more involved?*

** If we did nothing about these problems, what would be the consequences?*

** How might we go about changing the situation?*

Organising-committee members will want to share their visions of the union. What should our union be like at our workplace? What are the rights and responsibilities of union leaders and members to each other? How is our

union involved in our industry, the economy and politics – both nationally and internationally?

You will want to spend time thinking about ground rules for your organising committee. Some common ones are: start on time and end on time; confidentiality; no public showing of weakness or division, especially to the employer; and even participation (if you speak a lot, speak less; if you don't speak much, speak more).

You will need to stick with a clear and democratic decision-making process and use participatory teaching methods to involve everyone and generate ideas and discussion.

There will always be some committee members we don't trust. This can be difficult to deal with, especially if there is fear of employer retaliation or violence. Employers benefit from an atmosphere of secrecy and mistrust; unions need trust to build the collective.

Share information openly in meetings unless it will directly harm your organising. Keep your

METHODS FOR MAKING GROUP DECISIONS

Vote	By hand / informal ballot / formal ballot
Consensus	All members share in the decision and take responsibility for implementation. Those who disagree, show willingness to experiment for a period of time or try alternatives.
Consensus plus vote	An effort is made to reach consensus within a given timeframe. A member can then call the question by asking for a show of hands or ballot vote.
Group decisions are mandates	Once a group decision is made and becomes a mandate, any changes must be taken back through the collective decision-making process.
Other...	

GATHERING IDEAS

Brainstorming	Define the subject or question. Take a few moments for everyone to think quietly. Call out ideas or go around the room. Sort and discuss ideas	
All on the wall	Write down your ideas on paper. One idea per paper, block letters, print clearly and about 5-7 words. Gather the papers, sort, post on the wall and discuss.	
Advantages and disadvantages	When you have to decide between two alternatives: * Divide into small groups * Identify as many advantages and disadvantages as possible * Share and discuss	
	Advantages to #1	Advantages to #2
	Disadvantages to #1	Disadvantages to #2
Small groups	Divide into pairs or small groups. Return to larger group, share ideas and discuss.	
Other...		

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suspicious to yourself until you know for sure, and do not overreact.

Spend personal time getting to know workers you don't yet trust. Give work assignments to them that will not cause harm, such as gathering information about the industry or employer, or attending union events. Do not create an atmosphere or culture of mistrust because of one or two individuals.

Conflict will arise. Have clear decision-making processes. Think ahead about what conflicts might arise. Discuss potential conflicts early. Create a culture where we can respect and learn from each other's differences. Practice deep listening. Find out what is behind the differences. Continue to build strong personal relationships of trust – before, after and during conflict.

Above all, keep your organising committee meetings hardworking and fun. The culture that you develop as you organise will affect the culture of the overall union.



The accompanying PowerPoint module on “Organising Committees” contains activities that will help you (1) plan how you want to form your organising committee, (2) create a plan for recruiting under-represented workers to the committee, and (3) practice decision-making in a group. There is a sample organising committee agenda and an opportunity to conduct a practice organising committee meeting.

Learning from each other

NETWON is organising trekking guides in the tourism industry. The union made a significant achievement in lobbying the government for a tax on the tourists who go trekking. A portion of the tax is the workers' share, and the union will have input into deciding how it will be used.

There are about 9,000 licensed trekking guides, but there are many non-licensed guides. The government has not checked this trend. There is no compulsory system for official insurance for the trekking guides and no social security. The trekking companies do not provide the necessary equipment for the workers. There is not a permanent system of employment in the companies.

The union organised a three-day education seminar to discuss problems in the industry, what a union is and what a democratic union is like. The 22 participants from the seminar then recruited 200 members by talking to their friends in the workplace. The union keeps in touch with the 22, and they came into the office every few days to meet and plan. After about a year or more of person-to-person conversations with workers, we will hold a founding congress which will form a national organising committee. The newly elected leaders will hold a two-day education programme and continue to organise and educate more workers.

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