

ITF ORGANISING MANUAL

**ORGANISING**

**STRATEGY**

## ORGANISING STRATEGY

**Employers are powerful.** They have more economic and political resources than unions have, and they often control the way union issues are framed in the media, schools and our cultures.

**When we are organised, workers are powerful.** We have the ability to stop production or services. Transport workers are often in key positions to have an impact on global supply chains, which gives us tremendous power in the global economy.

**Unlike corporations, workers create long-standing bonds with each other that go beyond our immediate individual self-interests.**

The struggle for justice and solidarity surpasses geographies and cultures. Workers can link together regionally, nationally and internationally to have an effect on employers and decision makers.

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*\* How did you learn about unions and labour history?*

*\* Do you teach others about unions? How?*

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**But when we as workers are**

**not involved in unions, we are vulnerable.** We get used to our fear and sense of isolation. We sometimes identify with the employer rather than our fellow workers.

**With uninvolved members and unorganised workers, we need to plan carefully how to move from a position of individual weakness into collective strength.** As worker participation in the union grows, the power relationship with the employer changes, sometimes slowly and subtly, sometimes forcefully. We must be especially strategic during this time to protect ourselves and our co-workers.

**Strategy involves thinking ahead about what might happen – what the employer might do, how workers will respond – and then adjusting our actions accordingly.**

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*\* Has your union ever organised workers to participate in a mobilisation or to seek union recognition, without really thinking ahead about how the workers might respond or what the employer might do?*

**\* What did you learn from this experience?**

In most of the world, workers will face strong anti-union campaigns from the employer.

In parts of the world where unions are well established and strong, the pressure on the workers to avoid the union may be much more subtle.

Whether workers will be facing an anti-union campaign from the employer or not, union leaders and

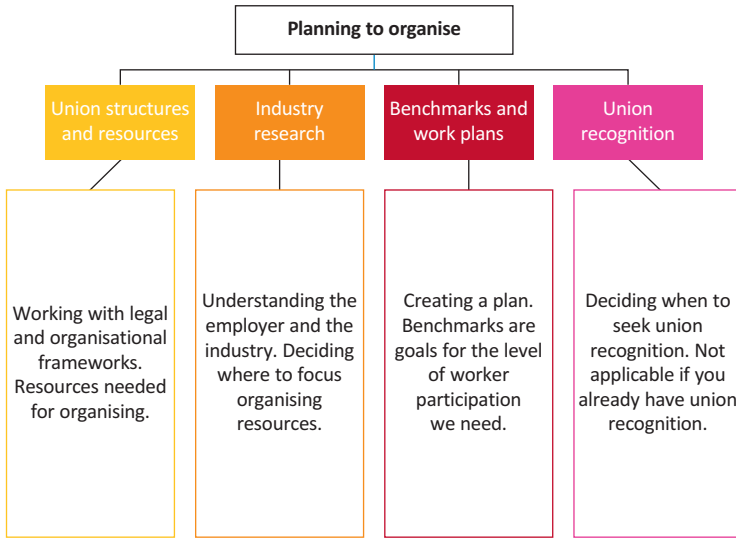
workers need to see that there is a plan to move forward step-by-step to build the collective strength we need to win.

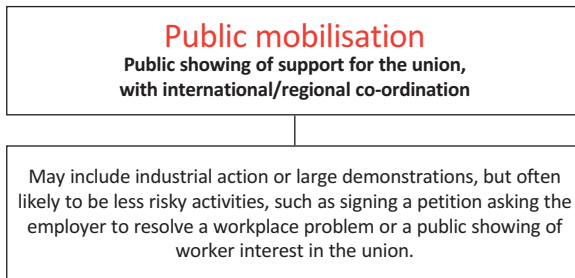
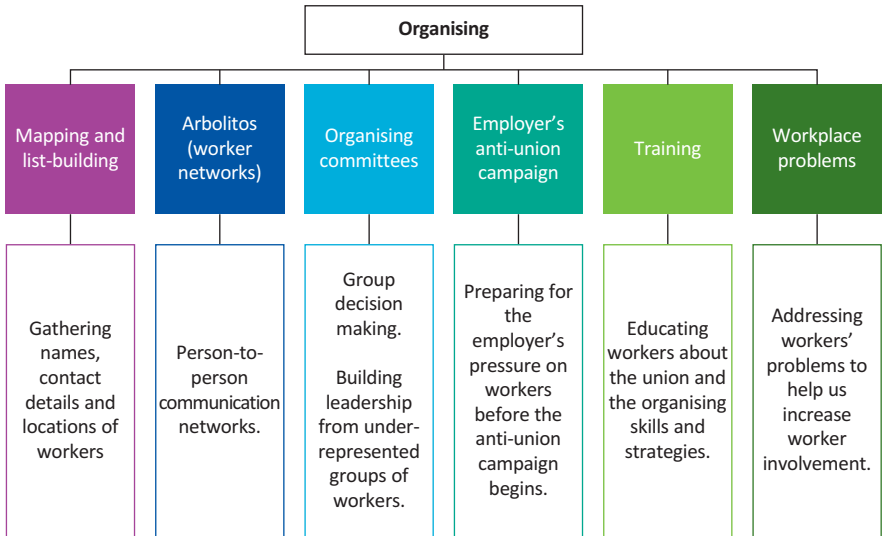
**The ITF organising curriculum gives us a framework from which we can create our own organising strategy. There may be topics that are not relevant to your organising situation, and some topics may be missing. Add to and take from the framework what is useful for your organising.**

**What might an employer do or say?**

- Support workers' efforts to organise
- Befriend workers
- Promote union supporters to management
- Increase discipline or fire union supporters
- Discredit union leadership
- Start an anti-union "loyalty" committee ("yellow union")
- Give raises and make promises
- Terminate unpopular managers
- Threaten to close or threaten to lay off workers
- Meet with workers one-to-one
- Use physical violence
- Say "Give us a second chance, we promise to improve things"
- Say "We are all one happy family"
- Say "The union is the outside party"
- Say "it's not my decision"
- Yell and intimidate
- Hire an outside anti-union consultant
- Create such conflict and pressure in the workplace that workers will stay away from the union
- Other

# ORGANISING STRATEGY





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There is a chapter in this handbook for each topic included in this framework.

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- \* *Which topics in this framework interest you?*
  - \* *Which topics do you want to learn more about?*
  - \* *Which topics are not as useful to you?*
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The next four chapters cover the preparation and planning needed to begin organising.

If you already have union recognition for the workers you are organising, you can skip the chapter on union recognition.

The following six chapters cover six key components of the organising process.

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- \* *Are these terms clear?*
  - \* *Do you need to adjust them to fit your organising situation?*
  - \* *What questions do you have?*
- 

**You will need to adjust the framework to fit your organising situation.** For example, you might want to map the workplace first in order to determine where the

workers are and what they are concerned about. Or you may want to start addressing workplace problems right away as a way to energise workers to become involved.

The public mobilisation is almost always the final stage of the organising process.

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- \* *What kind of mobilisation might you use?*
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### BENCHMARKS

In our organising strategy, **benchmarks are specific goals that measure levels of worker involvement** that we need to meet.

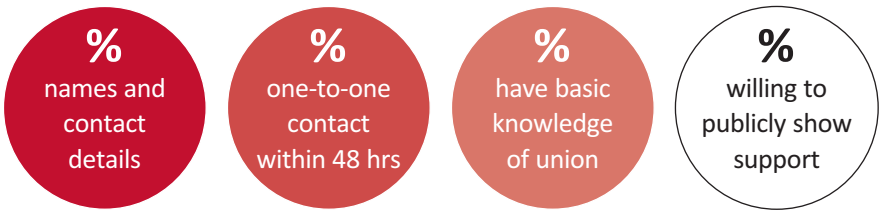
**You will set your own benchmarks.** Set the benchmarks at the percentage that fits your organising situation. Benchmarks should be high enough to build strong union power for the future, not simply enough to meet a mobilisation event or a legal requirement for union recognition.

**In our organising framework, there are four key benchmarks.**

If there is no clearly defined workplace or group of workers,

## FOUR KEY BENCHMARKS

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



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benchmarks are important. The majority of transport workers in the world are informal workers. They may work individually or in small groups and without a central employer, work location or

gathering place. Benchmarks help us decide which workers we need to focus on for organising and how many workers we need to participate.

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### **BENCHMARK EXAMPLE:**

#### **Organising for union recognition**

The next diagram shows how a union organising approximately 400 taxi drivers might set its benchmarks. In this example, the workers are seeking union recognition.

**When there is fear or significant pressure on the workers from the employer, organising might need to be “underground”:** work quietly and with as little public exposure as possible. We would not make public announcements or send out media releases. We would keep to small meetings of two to five workers who trust each other and avoid holding larger meetings. Written union materials would be avoided, as they can be easily passed on to the employer. Once the organising becomes public, the employer is likely to make it harder for the union to reach workers and meet our benchmarks for worker involvement.

**If the employer does find out,** we can continue with our quiet “underground” strategy to the best

of our ability – mapping, talking to workers, training more organisers, social activities – without further engaging the employer and helping to strengthen the climate of fear. If the employer retaliates with firings or violence, we will need to publicly campaign against the violence and firings, but we still continue with the “underground” organising in areas of the workforce where that is still possible.

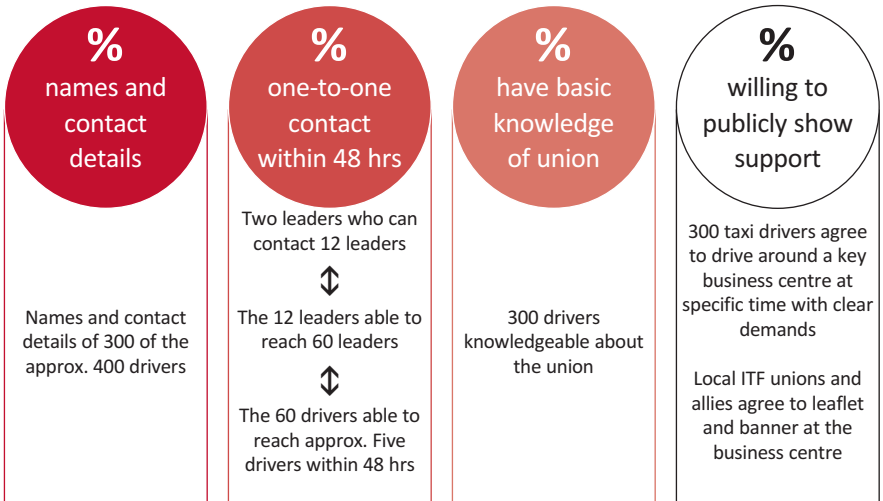
**If workers will be facing pressure from the employer, confronting the employer with less than a majority of the workers can expose the workers and the union to unnecessary risks.** When there is a strong anti-union campaign, our benchmarks might be 75 per cent and not 50 per cent. This is because once we publicly confront the employer, pressure against the workers will increase, and some workers will reduce their involvement, which undermines our majority support.

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*\* Will the workers you are organising face subtle or overt pressure to avoid the union?*



**BENCHMARK EXAMPLE:**  
*Organising for union recognition*



## ORGANISING STRATEGY

### **BENCHMARK EXAMPLE: Organising for a national mobilisation**

The following diagram shows how a union might set benchmarks for organising approximately 4,000 workers to participate in a national mobilisation or strike.

Sometimes with preparations for a large mobilisation or strike, unions will skip the two middle benchmarks related to worker communications and training and go straight from gathering workers'

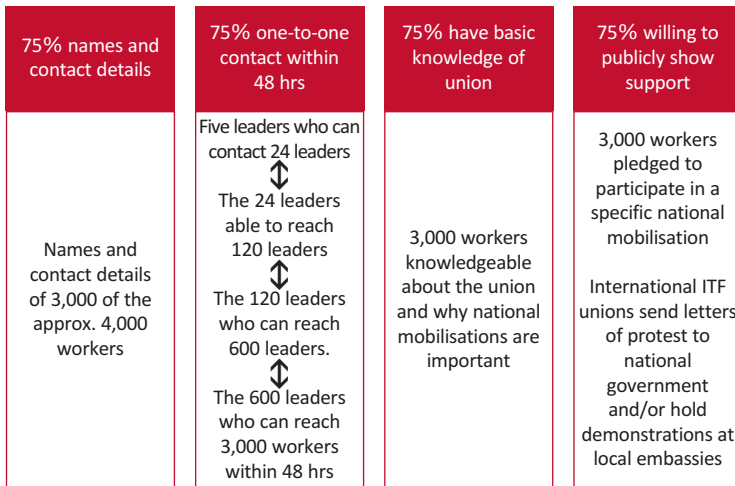
contacts to asking them to participate. We can successfully mobilise workers this way, but if we want to build workers' participation more permanently, then these two middle steps are critical.

**Set the number you need to attend first (whether it is 4,000 or 40), and then set your benchmark percentage accordingly.** If we need 4,000 workers at a national rally, we may need to get 3,000 of them

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## **BENCHMARK EXAMPLE:**

### *Organising for national mobilisation*



(75 per cent) to commit to attend in order to create the necessary momentum to overcome apathy. Or perhaps you only need 50 per cent to create the momentum.

**Make sure to focus your organising on the areas of your union where you want more workers participating.** We all do important union work without increasing worker involvement. Organising is for those situations and locations where the union

needs and wants more worker participation.

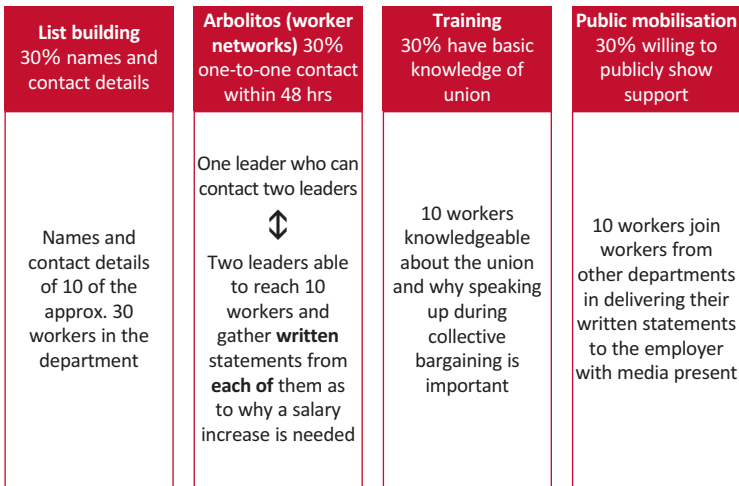
**BENCHMARK EXAMPLE:**  
**Small workplace preparing for collective bargaining**

Benchmarks help protect us from mobilising publicly against the employer before we are ready. They help us focus on key organising tasks.

**There are many reasons why unions publicly confront the employer too early without enough**

**BENCHMARK EXAMPLE:**

*Small workplace preparing for collective bargaining*



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**workers participating.** The union may have run out of time and resources to do the organising work. Or maybe it seems that the workers will never be ready. Some groups of workers are ready to organise sooner than others, and that can create pressure on union leaders to move more quickly.

Sometimes we hope that worker support will increase once we have publicly confronted the employer, but the opposite is more often true.

**If we are not able to meet our benchmarks in the time that we have planned...**

*\* **We stick to our strategy but at a slower pace**, continuing with our mapping, training more union organisers and keeping in touch with workers. We may need to decrease our resources to something we can maintain for the long term. We might want to assign union supporters to regularly keep in touch with other workers.*

*\* **We might want to increase our resources, investing in the growth of our union.** Make sure there is a*

*realistic and well-thought-out plan so that our resources will be well spent.*

*\* **We might wait for new developments.** The employer may change their behaviour. Workers might become more interested in the union or gain more information about how to organise. There may be political or economic changes in the industry or our country.*

**If we do need to adjust our benchmarks, there should be clear reasons that are thoroughly discussed and debated.** When workers understand and share in the decision making about benchmarks, it is easier to create detailed plans to increase or decrease resources.



The accompanying PowerPoint module on “Organising Strategy”

provides opportunities for additional discussion about organising strategy and frameworks, including how to adjust these frameworks for your own organising situations.