

Audio Script: Organizing 100 - Introduction to Organizing

Welcome to Organizing 100

This course should take you about one hour to complete.

This is a required course in the Organizing track, and it is the prerequisite course for all other Organizing courses.

The sections in this course are:

Overview

Preparation, and

Organizing Techniques

Section 1: Overview

The past few decades have seen the labor movement pushed to the brink of extinction. As employers continue to weaken unions, we are faced with the challenge of having to revitalize our local, and renew our members' commitment to the labor movement.

An important tool for fighting back against this anti-union trend is organizing. Simply put, organizing means building the strength of our union through recruitment of new members and through maximum participation and involvement of all of our members.

Active members are our best source of strength and effectiveness, whether we are involved in bargaining a new contract, trying to correct workplace problems, working to pass important legislation or electing labor-friendly candidates to public office.

"The worksites are already organized. Your job as an organizer is to find out who the leaders are at the worksites, where they are and who do people respect and follow."

[Why organize?]

Why organize? Organizing is the key to strength and success for our union in several different important activities.

The most obvious, of course, is in contract bargaining. An organizing campaign strengthens our position at bargaining by presenting the employer with a unified workforce across the bargaining table. Organizing helps raise a credible threat of effective work actions as we prepare our membership for executing those actions if needed.

A second reason for organizing is to provide help in settling grievances or correcting workplace problems. Whether or not a grievance or a problem is covered under our contract, organizing can usually result in a much faster solution and make the solution stick.

A third reason for an organizing campaign is to mobilize our members for lobbying and for other political activities.

And a fourth reason is new membership recruitment based on the issues the employees and the union support.

[Two Models]

There are two basic models for representing union members. The 'servicing model' focuses on representing and solving problems for individuals, helping one member at a time, and using a small group to represent everyone.

However, some have found that using an 'organizing model' - that is involving members in solutions - results in a much higher degree of success for many more of our members. Use of the organizing model will build the union into a force of many instead of representing a few at a time.

['Servicing' Model]

The 'Servicing' model of unionism is an example of how power can stay with management.

First, the steward talks with a member and writes up a grievance for their issue. That same steward then hands the grievance form to the member's supervisor, saying, "Here's my grievance, call me so we can set up a meeting."

Then, management responds with something like, "Oh, sure, I'll call you when I get a chance. I need to check my schedule 'cuz I'm really busy." At this point the paperwork begins to work its way through and, in a couple of months, the member's issue is resolved for that member only. There is no sense of group power developed and no organizing takes place.

In this model, stewards, union representatives, and leadership are only around and solve issues when they arise, like an insurance agent. This creates a weak powerless union - and it's a very piecemeal approach.

['Organizing' Model]

Our second example is an organizing model in which a series of actions will help move power to our union.

First, a member comes to the steward with an issue.

The steward holds one-on-one conversations with the member and with others in the workplace asking how strongly people feel about this issue. A meeting is planned and everyone is invited: Come to the meeting! Let's organize!

All of these conversations create a buzz - everyone is talking about Local 1000! Conversations are frequently overheard asking "*Are you going to the meeting?*" with lots of positive responses: "*Yes, of course. See you there.*"

As a result, 80% of the department comes to the meeting. After discussion of the issue at hand, the consensus is to do a group grievance and a petition, and ALL of the workplace employees will go together and hand the petition to their boss.

This is a group action. When the grievance and the petition are given to the boss, the members are heard and the boss solves the problem while the group is still in the office delivering the petition.

This is a real victory and a good example of what a group can do when they work together, all focused on one issue! Members in this department leave, saying, “WE did it, as a union! Our boss won’t dare mess with us again!”

This ‘organizing’ model builds the kind of power we need. It gives us a strong powerful union at our worksites to truly improve working conditions for state employees.

[Examples of Both Models]

Let’s examine a few situations and how they might use these two different models.

In our first example, a state department is violating a safety standard.

Under the old servicing representation model, a union representative would file an individual grievance or complaint with a safety agency on behalf of the single employee who had the issue.

Under the organizing model, Local 1000 organizers and member leaders actually go to the affected worksites and engage all affected employees to ask them to sign a petition, take part in a protest or go as a group to OSHA to file a complaint on behalf of all the employees. All employees affected are thereby represented in the organizing action.

In our next example, our contract is up for re-negotiation.

Under the servicing model, a small group of Local 1000 staff and/or bargaining team members negotiates the entire contract and then presents it to membership for ratification.

Under the organizing model, members participate in formulating demands, electing bargaining team members, participating in pressure actions, and then vote to ratify or reject the contract.

In our last example, Local 1000 wants to pass an important piece of legislation. Under the old servicing representation model, the staff lobbyist talks to legislators about the issue in question.

Under the organizing model lobbyists continue to talk to legislators while members demonstrate union strength by signing petitions, sending emails, visiting legislators and attending or testifying at hearings.

[Advantages of the Organizing Model]

There are several advantages of the organizing model.

The first advantage is that it gives our members a sense of power as a group by encouraging them to share in the decisions and victories. It is one thing to read in the weekly update newsletter that Local 1000 won an arbitration or resolved a health and safety problem or delivered a decent contract; it is quite another to know that by attending a rally or participating in a worksite action *you* actually affected the outcome.

Second, the organizing model is simply more effective. The state is more likely to bargain fairly if there is a clear indication that a large number of our members are involved in and supporting Local 1000. Public agencies are more likely to help solve a problem when they know that many people want it resolved, and politicians are more likely to support Local 1000’s legislation if they know that the

people affected by it are involved in the organizing action and knowledgeable about the issues.

Third, the organizing model educates members about the nature of the dispute between Local 1000 and the employer. In the servicing model, when our union wins a grievance or a negotiation, the affected members give Local 1000 the credit. This success usually only affects the person filing the grievance and the wider membership is not aware of the success.

The organizing model will allow greater participation and therefore a wider awareness of the successes accomplished by our union.

If we can continue to educate our members throughout the process they will know what is going on and may participate more.

In the short run, using the organizing model requires a lot of work, flexible leadership and a commitment to the growth of Local 1000 and the improvement of working conditions for all employees.

In the long run, it helps build Local 1000 into a force of many, rather than representing just a few members at a time.

Section 1 Review

Why do we organize?

- a) Strengthens our position at the bargaining table
- b) Helps settle grievances or correct worksite problems
- c) Mobilizes our members
- d) Increases membership recruitment
- e) *All of the above*

The answer is E - All of these are good reasons to organize around a particular issue.

Of the two basic models for organizing, which one involves members in solutions?

- a) The 'servicing model'
- b) *The 'organizing model'*

The answer is B - The 'organizing model' involves members in finding and implementing solutions.

One advantage of the Organizing Model of representation is:

- a) It serves one member at a time
- b) It is the only way to resolve a grievance
- c) *It gives members a sense of power by sharing in decisions and victories*
- d) It creates the best organization for effective meetings

The answer is C - One advantage of the organizing model is that it gives our members a sense of power as a group by encouraging them to share in the decisions and victories.

Section 2: Preparation

[Getting Prepared]

Before beginning an organizing campaign, there is preparation, research and data gathering that must be done.

You will need to gather information on the workforce – who the members and non-members are, where they work and how they feel about Local 1000.

One useful technique is to draw a diagram or map of your workplace, listing each employee by name and identifying each by membership status and position in Local 1000 – if they are a steward, an officer or an activist.

This workplace map will tell you where you need to recruit new activists. It will also give you an idea of which union members might be enlisted to talk with their co-workers about joining. If your workplace is very large, ask each steward to diagram their own work area.

In addition to a workplace map, you should establish and maintain a chart on each worksite. Include information such as name, phone numbers, email addresses and job classifications and note any other information that may be helpful in recruiting.

Using workplace mapping and charting you can construct a worksite profile that will help you make decisions about your organizing campaign. You'll also be creating a record-keeping system that will allow you to record progress.

For more information on mapping and charting the workplace, take the Leadership Academy course Organizing 120: Building Networks.

[Information Gathering]

In addition to gathering information about your worksite, it is also important to analyze and assess Local 1000's history and performance in your department. What is the bargaining history with your department? And, what gains have been made over the years? How has the membership and leadership changed?

This information will be important for teaching new members as well as recruiting new activists.

Other vital pieces of research needed on your department include: What is the financial condition of the department? What are the factors influencing this condition? And, how do the wages and benefits provided compare with other wages in the state? How does your department fit into the overall state structure? And, what kind of resistance can be expected from management during an organizing drive?

Finally, it is important during the preparation phase to investigate all aspects of your department's community and any other communities that are served by the mission of your department. What other agencies impact your department? Who are local politicians who might sympathize with the employees? What other labor organizations exist and how might *they* be able to help? Who are the local journalists who cover labor stories for newspapers, blogs, and radio and television stations? Who are the faith leaders who are potential community allies? And who are the other community allies – citizen's groups connected to the mission of your department, veteran's organizations, or other associations?

All of this information needs to be assembled before you begin to plan your campaign.

Providing Local 1000 leaders with background on the union will equip them to explain past efforts and accomplishments. A clear understanding of the employer's situation and attitudes will help our leaders explain why action is needed.

[Forming an Organizing Committee]

The next step toward a successful organizing campaign is to form an organizing committee. This committee will be responsible for guiding as well as implementing the campaign – whether it's a recruitment drive for new members or outreach to existing members for mobilization.

Your organizing committee should consist of members from each work area in your worksite. Ideally, it should reflect the workforce in terms of age, sex, race, job classification and work unit.

Many times you may have to start out with a committee that is less than ideal in terms of numbers and scope. If so, your first and most important continuing goal should be to expand your committee.

In most cases, your committee should not be limited to stewards. Often a steward may be good at processing grievances, but may not be as good at organizing as some co-workers. You can get good organizing help from other employees who don't have the time to be a steward but are supportive and want to participate. The most important thing is to find individuals with leadership qualities who are willing to play a key role in the campaign. The organizing committee is an excellent opportunity to inspire and develop leaders.

Once you have recruited a committee, you need a program to train the members, usually with a formal start-up session and periodic follow-up meetings.

The agenda of the first meeting should include training on how to talk to co-workers. Often, it is intimidating to ask someone to join Local 1000 or to participate in an activity. There is no substitute for effective one-on-one communication. With training and practice, any activist can improve their communication skills.

A good way for committee members to practice one-on-one communications skills is through role-playing conversations. The committee should make a list of all the questions or responses a co-worker might give them, and then brainstorm about how to answer them. Then they can role-play and critique the responses as a group.

The first meeting for the internal organizing committee should end with a discussion of goals and an agreement on a plan of action.

Goals must be tangible and specific, not vague or general. For example, your worksite may set as a goal the recruitment of 100 new members within six weeks. Or your goal may be to obtain 800 names on a petition to a state legislator within two weeks. By giving yourself a specific attainable goal, and a definite timetable, you will have a basis for measuring your progress.

Once the goals are agreed upon, you should draw up a campaign calendar listing dates when goals should be reached and when activities should take place.

Remember, it takes time to win trust. Be patient and don't give up. Be consistent and follow up individually with committee members to make sure that they feel part of the team. Members sometimes get discouraged or scared of management but will not necessarily talk about this in a meeting. Your ongoing support and reassurance is important.

[Working Effectively with a Committee]

There are certain principles for working effectively with committees. One important principle is to assign each committee member a specific task with a specific timetable to accomplish it. These assignments should be written down. For example, each committee member could agree to contact five individuals within two weeks.

Each member should then explain to the committee when, where and how he or she plans to make contact with those individuals, whether it's during a coffee break, before work, or perhaps a visit to the home.

At the end of the two-week period, the committee should meet again to report results, with everyone held accountable for their assignments. At this meeting, the committee can discuss new approaches for talking to people and can issue new assignments.

Tailor the assignments to people's interests, skills, and available time. If you ask someone to do too much, or to do something he or she is not skilled at, the person could drop out and you might lose them.

Good record-keeping is an essential part of making sure people understand their assignments and holding people accountable for those assignments. The committee should develop a form for each committee person to fill out which describes their efforts.

To keep the committee members motivated, it is also important to keep meetings short and well-organized. They should take place at a convenient time and place, and there should be a set agenda. Stick to the agenda, give out assignments, and adjourn the meeting on time.

People can stay and talk after the meeting, but end the meeting on time - otherwise committee members will not keep coming to meetings.

Another principle for working with committees is to give recognition for achievements. This recognition can include keepsakes from the union such as a coffee mug or t-shirt, or special mention at the local worksite meeting or acknowledgment in the union's newsletter.

Section 2 Review

It's a good idea to form a committee for any campaign or action. Why is a committee helpful? [Choose all answers that apply]

- a) There is much to accomplish*
- b) To get more people involved*
- c) It is easy to get a committee to agree
- d) It takes less time than doing it by yourself

The answers are A and B - Committees can be hard to work with and it usually takes longer to do the work than an individual would take, but working with a committee will produce more thorough results and will end up having more people supporting the work.

An organizing committee is responsible for: [Choose all answers that apply]

- a) *Guiding the campaign*
- b) *Implementing the campaign*
- c) Reaching consensus
- d) Assembling all fliers and handouts

The answers are A and B – The organizing committee will be responsible for guiding as well as implementing the campaign – whether it's a recruitment drive for new members or an outreach to members for mobilization. Any organizing committee should consist of members from each work area of the worksite. Ideally, it should reflect the workforce in terms of age, sex, race, job classification and work unit. This will help the effectiveness of the committee in all of its responsibilities.

When preparing an organizing action it is important to:

- a) *Analyze and assess Local 1000's history and performance in your department*
- b) Verify the existence of a majority of Local 1000 members in your department
- c) Determine the 'winnability' of the issue
- d) Come to consensus on the plan for the action

The answer is A – When planning an organizing action, in addition to gathering information about your worksite, it is also important to analyze and assess Local 1000's history and performance in your department.

Section 3: Organizing Techniques

[Dos and Don'ts]

One of the most important techniques to learn about one-on-one organizing is to listen effectively.

Learn to draw people out by asking questions. This will let them know that you are paying attention and you care what they think.

Keep an open mind so you can be responsive to that person's concerns.

If someone makes negative comments, try to find common ground and build on that.

And, as much as possible, agree that the person has a valid point.

Things to *avoid* include interrupting - when you interrupt, you won't hear a person's real concerns. Also, don't make assumptions about the member's priorities. The issues you think are important are not necessarily the issues your co-worker cares about.

Avoid any tendency to lecture people or to try to deliver a canned pitch. This will put you into 'automatic' and you will stop listening to the other person.

Don't argue or make the other person feel defensive – if you do, they'll never change their mind.

Don't evade the tough questions. If you don't know an answer, don't try to fake it. People respect honesty, so admit that you don't have the answer and tell them you'll get back to them. And then be sure you get back to them.

[Choosing Issues]

Every worksite has many issues around which good organizers can attract new members and increase membership participation. But some issues are better to organize around than others. Here are some criteria for deciding whether a given issue should be the basis for group action.

- Is the issue popular among the affected employees?
- Is the issue winnable, at least in part?
- And, does the issue have an underlying moral dimension that may attract public as well as membership support?

One way to determine which issues are important is to conduct a survey. Surveys are useful in organizing because they give employees the opportunity to tell union leaders what they're concerned about – employees appreciate the fact that someone is asking them for their opinion. In addition, surveys provide an excellent, non-threatening opportunity for one-on-one communication between stewards, activists and members.

The simplest way to conduct a survey is to print up a short questionnaire and give it to stewards or committee activists. They will then distribute and retrieve it from all employees – both non-members and members.

After surveys are completed, the results can be compiled and form the basis for selecting the right issue or issues to work with. A good follow-up step is to publish the results of the survey and distribute it to the entire worksite.

Organizing issues can also be chosen through worksite meetings where employees are encouraged to volunteer problems. The important thing is to involve the members in selecting the issues.

[Planning an Internal Organizing Campaign]

In today's anti-union climate, major events in the life of Local 1000 must include membership participation. Contract negotiations or key legislative fights cannot be left to the leadership alone to handle, business as usual.

We must plan for participation of the membership any time we conduct organizing activities, bargaining or lobbying.

To conduct an organizing campaign around an event such as bargaining or legislation, the key to success is advance planning. If a contract is due to expire in a year, it is not too early to begin formulating the strategy for the campaign now, because if we don't plan ahead, we end up reacting rather than acting – and often it is too late.

[Choose a theme]

One of the first tasks is to decide on a theme for the campaign. The theme is the public expression of your goals, and it should appeal not only to people's self-interest, but also to their sense of justice. People need to believe not only that they are fighting for themselves, but that their cause is just. A positive moral tone is particularly important for building good public relations and community support.

Some examples of successful themes are "We care about patient care," or "Save Our Schools," and "Justice for Janitors". Keeping your theme positive will serve

you well as you gain increasing public and member support than more negative slogans like “Stop Busting Our Union” or “Fight Back Against Concessions.”

After choosing a theme, the organizing committee should sit down with a calendar and decide what activities will take place during any particular time period. This timeline will give you an overview of what work needs to be done and when it needs to be finished.

A basic principle of organizing strategy is to begin with smaller activities and to gradually escalate the amount of activity so that the peak coincides with a key moment in the overall effort.

[Gradual escalation]

There are several reasons for this gradual escalation of organizing actions. One reason is that you cannot ask people to take a big step until they have taken smaller steps.

For example, an employee who has never been involved with our union may be quite willing to fill out a survey, but he or she would not necessarily want to come to a rally, confront a boss, or engage in a job action. Gradually this employee will become more accustomed to taking part in Local 1000 actions, and will become more committed to the justice of the issue.

Also, you don’t want to burn people out by asking for too much too often. No campaign can sustain itself with a mass rally every week, week after week.

Another reason for gradual escalation of activities is to maximize the impact on the employer. If the union calls a major rally one month before contract negotiations begin, then by the time the contract is due to expire the employer will figure that interest has diminished. So it is better to time the big rally to coincide with a key bargaining session near the end of the talks.

Practice is an important part of any new behavior. Hold as many actions as possible so that members feel more comfortable with participating. You might have to lead them to be part of an action that they have never done before. They may be afraid and won’t think that they can do it. Because it’s a new action, people usually feel uncomfortable with the unknown. However, as a leader you must be in front of them guiding them and reassuring them. In the end, they will be glad they followed you and everyone will celebrate the success.

[Escalating activities]

Here are some specific activities that can be part of an organizing campaign, at various levels of escalation. On the mild end of the range are tactics that are visible activities such as buttons or armbands, contract rejection votes, holding a series of union days, or doing health and safety whistle-blowing. You can hold workshops to keep employees informed and circulate petitions to make sure management knows how many concerned employees there are. Phone-flooding board members and holding silent vigils will also keep your issue visible.

More involved tactics pick up the pace in terms of visibility. Informational picketing can be followed by daily rallies before and after work as well as talking-up bargaining with members.

Sending letters to the editor of local and state-wide publications keeps everyone informed. And, you can hold a one-minute moment of solidarity at work to clearly demonstrate the numbers of employees who are involved.

Strong tactics should be well thought-out and should complement the other actions.

Examples of strong tactics are work-to-rule, bargaining in 'Public' - that means talking to the media about the bargaining issues, holding public hearings, boycotts or moving on a legal action.

Targeting the board and having rolling job actions such as sick-outs are also strong effective organizing tactics.

These events should make a point by dramatizing the issue, and they should also be fun. Every worksite has a wealth of creativity in our members - tap into ideas and you will capture the imagination of your whole community.

There are many creative ways to publicize an issue and involve people in the campaign. Some worksites have candlelight vigils, union sing-a-longs during lunch, parades through town, solidarity breakfasts and holiday events such as wearing costumes. The particular events should be tailored to your worksite and your community.

Establishing employee committees is an important part of the organizing campaign - not only because you can accomplish more as part of a group, but also because we are always trying to find more ways to involve more people.

In addition to your organizing committee, you may want to form:

- A community support group to reach out to allies in the community;
- Or a public relations committee to keep in touch with the media;
- Or even a legislative committee to enlist the support of local politicians;

You should also use committees to plan special events, write leaflets, provide refreshments, produce signs, or make costumes - always resisting the impulse to 'do it all yourself.'

[Making Our Union Visible]

Organizing actions like these make our union more visible to all employees - both members and non-members.

On a day-to-day basis, the majority of members will only have *direct* contact with Local 1000 if he or she has a grievance.

Most Local 1000 members have not attended a regular membership meeting, have not known the support member leaders can provide at the workplace and have not experienced the power that an organizing action can generate.

One way to have a better informed and more active membership is to create greater visibility for Local 1000 in the workplace. Our union should have a presence that people can identify with - a presence that goes beyond the adversarial relationship with management.

Becoming more visible will give Local 1000 a strong presence that empowers state employees who are represented by Local 1000.

There are a number of things member leaders should do to increase the visibility of our union. For example communicating with and motivating our members on a regular basis – during an organizing campaign, during a workplace action and between campaigns.

Here are several specific ways to increase our union's visibility at your worksite:

A program for new employees. Local 1000 has the right to hold new employee orientations as stated in our contract with the state of California. Article 2.10 states that Local 1000 can hold 20-minute orientations with new employees. This can be part of the existing new-employee training, or it can be a separate meeting.

Whenever a new employee is hired there should be an automatic procedure for approaching that person and welcoming him or her to the union.

You should prepare a new member kit with orientation materials. And a member – whether it is a steward, an organizing committee person, or a special “new employee committee” – should sit down with the new employees either at work or at home to explain the history of our union, to discuss the contract, and to invite the person to join.

Members-only benefits. Local 1000 has the ability to offer members several special benefits that are not available to non-members.

One example of member benefits is the ability to vote. Local 1000 members vote on changes in dues, they vote to elect officers and, of course they vote for a new contract.

Members can also run for office and can execute responsibilities as elected officers. In this way we can be the change we want to see happen.

In addition, our union has negotiated several benefits such as special discounts on computers, cell phones and gift certificates; the ‘PayCheck PC’ program to purchase personal computers by having the price deducted from pay checks; group pricing on insurance including life, home, auto and pets; affordable rates on hotel lodging, cruises and airfare; discounted admission to theme parks like Disneyland and Six Flags; and value-priced movie and event tickets.

Union paraphernalia. Many of our DLCs produce coffee mugs, t-shirts, hats, etc., that create a sense of identity and pride in our union. Try to have these items designed creatively and in purple, so that they can identify with Local 1000.

Community services. There are many members who participate in charitable events. Such events foster friendships among our members, and create good will in the community. Activities our union has sponsored include: backpacks for school children, holiday toy drives, Habitat for Humanity, homeless shelters, creek week cleanups and other worthy causes.

To find out what community action programs our members are already involved in, try doing a survey. Then contact individuals at your worksite who can form the link to community organizations.

Worksite newsletters and bulletin boards should be lively, interesting and fun. Take the opportunity to spotlight personalities. Everyone likes to see their name or their friend's name in the paper. If someone has a baby or celebrates a 25th anniversary, post a notice or publish a picture. You can also write about peoples'

hobbies, or publish a favorite website. Publicize your successes, and change the bulletin board often.

To make a newsletter or leaflet effective, keep it simple, clear, short, and humorous, and keep out jargon that members might not understand.

[Remember]

Remember, people should see the union as something more than just a vehicle for fighting with the employer. The union should be the employees themselves.

Section 3 Review

Benefits of being a Local 1000 member include: [Choose all that apply]

- a) *Special discounts on computers, cell phones and gift certificates*
- b) *Purchase personal computers by payroll deduction*
- c) *Group pricing on insurance*
- d) *Affordable rates on hotel lodging, cruises and airfare*

All of these are benefits of being a member of SEIU Local 1000.

A member or a steward should sit down with any new employee to explain which of the following?

- a) History of our union
- b) Contract
- c) Invite them to join
- d) *All of the above*

The answer is D - Any new employee at a worksite should receive an orientation to Local 1000 that includes a history of our union, an explanation of the current contract and an invitation to join.

A basic principle of organizing strategy is:

- a) To always use medium-level organizing actions
- b) To start right away with a strong organizing action to get the attention of management
- c) *To begin with smaller activities and to gradually escalate the amount of activity*
- d) To never repeat any organizing action, but always use new ones

The answer is C - A basic principle of organizing strategy is to begin with smaller activities and to gradually escalate the amount of activity so that the peak coincides with a key moment in the overall effort. This escalation is the best way to utilize any worksite and community energies that are focused on the issue.

End of Course

This completes Organizing 100.

Your next step is to take and pass the Final Exam to finish this course.

Take the other required courses to earn the Certificate of Completion in the Organizing track.