

Member Mobilization:

Planning and Implementing a One-on -One Organizing Campaign

Overview

One-on-one organizing within the workplace aims at educating the membership on union issues and mobilizing them to take specific actions around those issues. Many unions currently employ this model of communicating with their members, and it is fast becoming the primary tactic for both political and legislative organizing.

The following section highlights the measurable advantages of one-on-one organizing, teaches the basic steps of implementing a mobilization plan, and troubleshoots common challenges to using this approach.

Member Mobilization

One-on-one Organizing is at the Core of the Labor Movement

Here are just some examples from public sector, industrial, building trade, and transportation unions using member-to-member worksite organizing to communicate with their membership.



"[We] must increase our phone banking; increase our **worksite contacts**; and increase our door knocking. We must mobilize, mobilize, mobilize."

- AFSCME President Gerald McEntee



"**Member-to-Member** is not "another program". It is how a local union should be run... each Building Rep. (with the help of assistants) contacts all the members in their building."

- AFT Political Action Center: Member to Member System



"You can do even more without violating the Hatch Act. You can invite members and potential members to a **meeting at work** to discuss issues affecting them. [You can] circulate fliers on federal employee issues **before and after work at entrances to your worksite**."

- AFGE Guide to Political Activity



"The **Worker-to-Worker** program is a communication method to be used by local union officers and activists as the talk to members **one at a time, face to face**."

- UAW CAP Manual



"**One-on-one communication** [is] the heart of Rapid Response"

- USW Guide to Rapid Response



"**Worksite mobilization** is the best method to educate on issues and build support for those issues"

- IBEW National Political Training Manual



"Person to person communication is the most effective way to involve members. Grassroots power sets up a **face to face communications network in the workplace**."

- TWU Grassroots Organizing Manual

The list of unions goes on, but all aim to encourage their locals to adopt a one-on-one organizing model when communicating with their membership.

Member Mobilization

Advantages of One-on-One Organizing

For a number of reasons, worksite mobilization is the best method to educate on issues and build support for those issues as well as solidarity among individuals.

1. You can be sure the **message reaches everyone**, especially those who are less active in the union or do not attend union meetings.
2. It is **personal**. People respond more readily when someone they know takes the time to talk to them or they see a co-worker hand them a flyer.
3. It gives union members **a chance to be heard**. Worksite mobilization is a two-way communicating tactic that requires members to both talk and listen.
4. It shows **the union is active and solving the problems** members face.
5. Showing concern and respect **builds support for the union leadership** and increases participation by members.
6. **Management's attitude toward the union improves** as activism from the members grows.
7. Worksite mobilization **counters management's depiction of the union as an outside bureaucracy** by showing that union members *are* the union.

Most advocacy groups find it difficult to implement a person-to-person organizing plan. Often, these organizations have limited opportunities to talk with their members and rely solely on less personal methods like phones banks and large mail programs to reach out to members with their message.

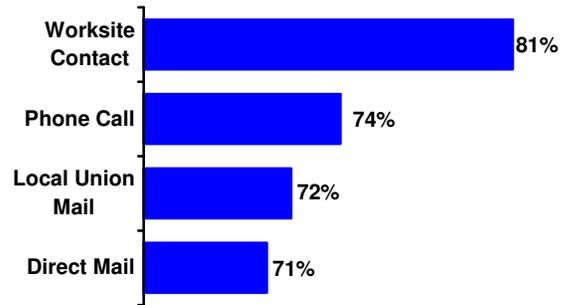
Thankfully for unions, our members have an overwhelming advantage when it comes to mobilizing. For eight hours a day, and sometimes longer, we have direct access to the majority of our fellow union members while at work. In addition to union activists and volunteers, **unions have official worksite representatives, like stewards and bargaining committees, who can distribute information easily**. Because of our presence at the workplace, our ability to communicate to our membership is unmatched by any other organization or political party.

Member Mobilization

Measuring the Effectiveness of Worksite Mobilization

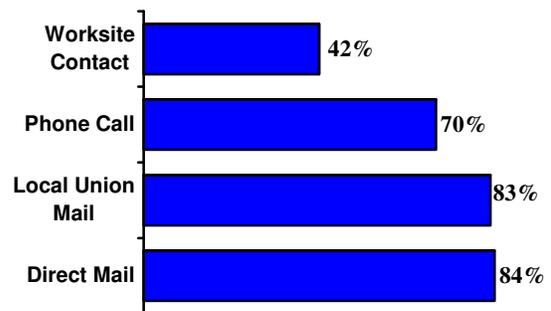
Our members trust worksite outreach. A recent poll of union members revealed that members trust a workplace contact from a fellow union member more than any other form of contact.

% of Union Members who say they trust the following sources of information



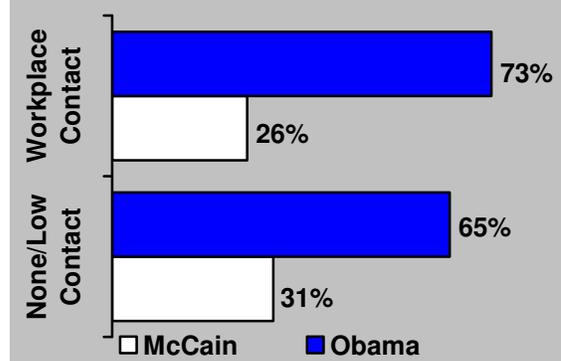
Yet historically, when unions communicate with their members, **workplace contact has been used the least, while bulk direct mail is used the most.** This is ironic considering bulk direct mail is the least trusted method for communicating. Fortunately, this trend has begun to change in recent years. Unions have been steadily increasing the amount of one-on-one organizing taking place with the membership.

Actual % of Union Members contacted by these methods during 2008 Election



When members talk with each other, the power is undeniable. For example, in the 2008 presidential election, **union members contacted at work voted 8% points higher for the union-endorsed candidate (Obama) than did members without a worksite contact.**

The Effect of Worksite Contact on Vote Preference in 2008 Election



* All polling data from Peter Hart Research 2008

Member Mobilization

Basic Steps of a Member Mobilization Campaign

Worksites, local unions and union members vary greatly from place to place—a building trade construction site runs differently from a private-sector business office. Each worksite has unique opportunities and challenges to mobilizing its members. Asking the four questions above will help you develop a worksite plan appropriate for your situation.

The following blueprint describes how to execute a member mobilization. The precise details of how each step is implemented will depend on the particulars of each worksite, but following the steps of this blueprint is necessary for effective mobilization.

- 1. Identify your “ask” from the membership.** In and of itself, educating your membership on an issue is not your end goal. The purpose of member mobilization is to get your members active in your grassroots campaign. You want your members to do something on the issue. Is it to vote for a particular candidate or ballot initiative? Do you want them to call an elected official or write a letter? Do you want them to show up for an event or rally? Are you recruiting activists to join a leadership team or committee that will work on a particular issue? Decide now what your members will do.
- 2. Set goals and a timeline for the work.** Set goals for your outreach. How many members will you reach through this mobilization? How will you track that progress? How many volunteers will you need? By what date do we need to accomplish our goal? Is it Election Day? Is it a legislative session? Whatever date we are working towards, work backwards from that date, and set a calendar for outreach activities.
- 3. Prepare your written materials.** Leaflets and other handouts help carry the message and are useful props for initiating conversations and raising awareness around the workplace. The AFL-CIO’s Working Families Toolkit (www.workingfamiliestoolkit) allows you to create and produce issue flyers by selecting from a wide variety of issues that matter to workers in your union. Fact Sheets can be produced as flyers and used to train activists how to talk about the issues.

The importance of leaflets is under-appreciated. Handing out flyers puts a face on the issue. When workers see their co-workers leafleting, they know something is up and will take notice. A flyer also provides a conversation starter for our activists. “What did you think about that flyer on outsourcing?” is an easy way to begin a conversation. It is easy to be discouraged when flyers end up in the trash, but good flyers are read and understood in a matter of seconds.

Member Mobilization

4. **Identify key contacts and recruit activists.** Personal connections and relationships matter. People will hear things differently from someone they know than from a stranger. Begin by identifying leaders and trusted members. Think of the person who knows 10 other people. Then begin recruiting those individuals to assist the mobilization effort.
 - a. List and contact **known** activists—Stewards, bargaining committee members and known union activists will shoulder much of the responsibility in getting information to the membership and recruiting new activists.
 - b. Identify and recruit **potential** activists—Talk to known activists and write down the names of members they think could be recruited to help organize. Look for natural leaders at the worksite, well-respected people and people for whom the issues would be particularly important. New and young employees deserve extra recruitment effort to get them involved in the union early. For potential activists, identify who is responsible for recruiting them.
5. **Make a plan to distribute written materials.** Answer the following questions to develop a plan and schedule for distributing flyers at work.
 - a. What are the best times and locations for communicating to the membership?
 - b. What times and locations should be avoided?
 - c. How many flyers/postcards/etc. will be needed to cover the whole worksite?
 - d. How many activists are needed?
 - e. What will the schedule be for distributing materials?
 - f. What obstacles exist to reaching the membership and how do we overcome them?
6. **Make a plan for activists to talk to each member one-on-one.** Decide who each activist will contact and make a plan for one-on-one organizing.
 - a. What are the **formal networks** that exist, such as stewards, bargaining committees, etc. for member-to-member outreach? Does each member have a corresponding steward to reach out to them?
 - b. What **informal networks**, like groups of friends, exist for reaching out to members? Writing this information down will allow you to visualize if there are any gaps in the organizing plan. Is every shift and department covered?
 - c. Who should each activist talk to?
 - d. How can we reach each union member one-on-one?
 - e. What is the schedule for completing the one-on-one conversations?
 - f. What are the obstacles to one-on-one organizing and how will we overcome them?
7. **Measure your effectiveness.** Set goals and make sure you troubleshoot throughout the process. Is your message getting out to the membership? What areas of the worksite/work shifts have been missed? How many people have been contacted? What is their response?

Member Mobilization

Troubleshooting: Obstacles to Building Member Mobilization

Management Opposition

You may hear union leaders or members say management does not allow worksite communication. In fact, unions have the legal right to distribute information and talk to union members during non-work time (lunch, break time, and before or after work) and in non-work areas (break rooms, bathrooms, cafeteria, hallways, etc.) As long as your outreach does not interfere with the work of the members, unions can communicate to them.

Worksite Size & Geography

Some areas of a worksite might be inaccessible or have staggered work schedules. The key to overcoming problems in worksite geography is to recruit a union member in each area and shift of a worksite to be in charge of communicating with the membership there. These activists should be encouraged to recruit new activists to the union.

Lack of Activists

A lack of activists should not stop a local union from engaging its members at the worksite. The action of mobilizing generates activism in union members once they see activities taking place. Think “Action Builds Activism.” Engage your current activists (stewards, bargaining committee members, etc.) in worksite mobilization, and make sure they are asking for volunteers to help. New activists can be brought on by asking them for help with a specific tasks. **See “Activist Recruitment” Handout for more information.**

Fear of Member Reaction

Extensive research has shown union members want to hear from their union about issues related to their work. Social Security, health care, trade, education and workers' rights are just some of the issues that members respond positively towards, if presented in a credible and factual manner. What union members don't like is when their union tells them how to vote, or sounds too partisan and rhetorical. Union members want to hear about issues and have their opinions heard, so take a “listen and inform” approach.

Perception of Partisan Motives

A common criticism of unions is that they are tied too closely with Democratic politics. While the Democratic Party has been a better advocate on workers' issues, our membership is politically diverse, with many Republican members. To unite our movement, we must make it clear to our members that issues matter most, not the partisan politics.

Member Mobilization

Troubleshooting: Obstacles to Building Worksite Mobilization

Doubt about Effectiveness

Often people will mask an unwillingness to engage in worksite mobilization with doubt about its effectiveness. “*It doesn’t work*” or “*My members won’t like that*” are common refrains. Share the data and information presented earlier about worksite mobilization effectiveness. This is not a “Program of the Month,” but a way to run a union. The effectiveness of worksite mobilization is not theoretical. It has been measured in real-life situations with proven results. Challenge this doubt by asking for alternative tactics and reasons why those tactics are better.

Member Apathy

Overcome apathy by making the issue compelling and inform members about the organizing plan. They are more likely to participate in the outreach effort if they understand the issues and are confident in the plan to win. Recognize that union members must be educated about work-related issues. The importance of certain issues is not instinctively clear, so it is up to us to show relevance to our members.

Hatch Act (Public Employees)

The “Hatch Act” is a federal law that limits “political activity” of public employees while they are working. However, it does allow for non-partisan issue education during break time or before/after work. As long as you do not interfere with work, or link the issue with the election of a particular candidate. You can hand out flyers on issues like:

- Your Pay
- Funding or Staffing of Your Agency
- Quality of Service
- Your Rights at Work
- Contracting Out / Privatizing
- Health Care and Other Benefits

The Hatch Act allows you to do many things, including:

- Invite employees to a meeting at work to discuss issues
- Post fliers about issues on union bulletin boards
- Circulate fliers about issues before or after work

Check with your union for state-specific laws that govern state employees.

Member Mobilization

Planning a Worksite Mobilization Campaign

1. Define your area of responsibility. What group of people are you responsible for mobilizing? Be as specific as possible. Ten Locals in your state? Five worksites in your Local? One shift at your worksite?

2. Who are the key contacts in your area of responsibility? What makes them “key”?

3. What do you need these people to do? Why?

4. Who are potential activists you can contact? What makes them important?

5. What are the best times and locations for reaching these people?

6. What materials or information do you need to bring to your mobilization?

7. How are you going to track your progress? How will you know if you are doing well?

Member Mobilization

Create a Worksite Mobilization Plan

It is the 1st of the month and you have been asked to help organize member communications at a specific worksite. As part of your plan, you have been instructed to do the following:

- ✓ Communicate with 85% of the membership and educate them on the issue of universal health care by the 30th of the month
- ✓ Get at least 75% of members to sign a post card in support of universal health care, which will be mailed to their Congress-member on the 30th of the month
- ✓ Produce equivalent of 5% of the membership to an AFL-CIO kick-off door canvass on the 1st of the following month

Assignment: You will meet the Union President and the AFL-CIO Coordinator in two days and you must outline a complete plan to achieve the above goals, with a timeline leading to the kick-off canvass on the 1st of the following month.

Worksite	Worksite Layout	Number Of Employees	Worksite Coordinator
County Government Office Building	One building, 12 floors	700	6 Stewards
Manufacturing Plant	Two plants – gated, one office building 3 floors	600	3 Stewards
Construction Site	Multi-Union Construction Site	150 total	1 Business Agent
City School District	3 Separate Schools – Elementary, Middle, High School	65 at each school	3 Building Reps

Break into small groups and select one worksite that you will mobilize. Develop a plan and a timeline for achieving your three goals. **Be Specific.**

Five points to consider as you make your plan; use these questions to guide your planning process.

1. Besides the information included here, what else do you need to know to make your plan?
2. What will you need to carry out your plan?
3. Who are the key people to contact first? What do you ask them to do?
4. How do you expand your worksite network beyond those key people?
5. How do you track and measure your progress?