



*A Union of Professionals*



**"TRYING  
ONE IDEA  
MIGHT LEAD  
YOU TO THE  
NEXT... AND  
THE NEXT...  
AND THE  
NEXT."**





# **99 GREAT IDEAS**

FOR MOBILIZING  
MEMBERS  
TO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE IN  
THEIR UNION  
AND IN THEIR  
COMMUNITY



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## FOREWORD

**99 GREAT IDEAS** is a “menu” of tactics aimed at engaging and mobilizing members, prospective members and the community. The ideas in this booklet range from tried-and-true ones that the AFT and other unions have found effective over the years, to newer, more cutting-edge activities. Some are “easy lifts.” Others are more complex projects and initiatives.

These specific tactics don’t replace great strategy and messaging. Instead, they are meant to help generate ideas that can be incorporated into campaign strategies aimed at achieving your union’s goals. So, whether you’re running a membership drive, negotiating your next contract or fighting for key legislation, many of these tactics can help you achieve your larger strategic goals.

Each idea in this menu of a book is a la carte—every idea can be considered as a self-contained effort. However, they do relate and complement one another, simply because the steps and principles for building a strong union are intertwined. So trying one idea might lead you to the next ... and the next ... and the next. We hope so, anyway.

We’ve tried to provide an accurate sense of the pros and cons of each idea and how it can help your union, but this booklet is more of a sampler than a step-by-step guide. If you find an idea intriguing, but think you might need more information, resources or just a sounding board before trying it out, start by calling your regional director or your state federation. They can help you get any assistance you might need to carry out the ideas.



## Send advocacy e-mails to your members

### How it works:

Advocacy e-mails are a great way to educate and engage your members in the political process. The idea is simple: The union sends members an e-mail (usually to their personal addresses) with a message on a specific issue being debated by lawmakers, such as public employee pensions or state budget cuts. Included in the advocacy e-mail is a link members can use to send a message to those lawmakers.

### You'll need:

A *Salsa* account and training through the AFT—(Salsa is the application used to generate the e-mail and provide a link allowing members to send a message to their lawmakers.) You will also need a list of your members' e-mail addresses (preferably personal e-mail addresses).

Acquiring a list of personal e-mail addresses for members can be a challenge. Several proven methods include:

- Asking building representatives to speak with members and collect their e-mail information. (It's a good idea to collect cell phone numbers at the same time.)
- Sending a message to members at their work e-mail address that provides a link they can use to fill out a form to send the union their personal e-mail address.
- Putting information on your website, such as the contract, in a "registered user only" section, and requiring personal e-mail addresses as part of registration.
- Collecting e-mail addresses on all sign-in sheets, petitions, etc., distributed by your local.

### How it helps your union:

Advocacy e-mails can be very effective. When members open the e-mail, they can learn more about an issue facing them and their colleagues, get a better understanding about what the union is doing to address the issue, and take action by sending a message to their lawmakers. Even if they don't send a message to their lawmakers, they'll get a very clear sense, just from reading the e-mail, that the union is taking action on important issues.

Unfortunately, open rates for advocacy e-mails vary greatly (from 5 percent to 30 percent), and the percentage of people clicking through to send a message is even lower. Using Salsa, however, provides the union with the added benefit of being able to track which members open the e-mail and which send messages to their lawmakers. This information is valuable for further organizing/mobilizing efforts.



## Conduct online surveys of your members

### How it works:

Members want to know that their union is listening to them and acting on their concerns. One way to achieve this is through an online survey that solicits members' attitudes and opinions on the issues and challenges they face.

Locals have created surveys ranging from the very simple ("How do you think the school district should make up snow days?") to the very complex (multiquestion bargaining surveys).

You also can conduct surveys on topics of interest to the community, such as, for example, "What should parents know to help kids succeed in school?" and release these findings to the media.

### To conduct an online survey, you'll need to:

- Create your survey using the survey tool that is part of LeaderNet. (You can register for LeaderNet at <http://leadernet.aft.org/register>.)
- E-mail the survey as a link to your members, with an appropriate message covering what the survey is about and how it will be used.
- Post a link to the survey on your website.
- Ask your building representatives and work-site leaders to tell members about the survey and encourage them to take the survey.

### How it helps your union:

Most locals get very good responses to member surveys. To ensure good responses in the future, you should be sure to report survey results back to the members. You can post survey results on your website and send your members an e-mail summarizing the results.



## Do worksite surveys

### How it works:

Worksite surveys are similar to online surveys, but far more effective. This approach usually involves a building representative taking a survey to each member and collecting it in person (or through a survey return box at work sites). The process of distributing the survey usually creates an opportunity for one-on-one interaction, something you can't get with an online survey.

**You'll need to:**

- Create the survey and have copies printed or photo-copied.
- Distribute the survey to building representatives, along with instructions.
- Give the building representatives at least a week to distribute and collect the survey in their work sites.
- Collect survey results.
- Compile results and report back to members.

**How it helps your union:**

As mentioned above, work-site surveys are more effective than online surveys because they create opportunities for one-on-one engagement. However, this tactic only works if your building representatives actually distribute and collect the survey.

If you conduct a work-site survey, plan to track the percentage of returns from each work site. In this way, a work-site survey can help you test the effectiveness of your building representative structure.



## Launch petition drives

**How it works:**

Petition drives give members, potential members and the general public an easy way to participate in a union effort or campaign. Petitions also give you a chance to define your campaign (in the petition statement) and show broad support for your position (by collecting and showing a significant number of signatures).

**What it takes:**

There are two basic types of petitions. The first is a paper petition circulated in the workplace (or in a public place, if you want signatures from the general public). Your work-site leaders (stewards, building representatives, etc.) are provided with a few paper copies of the petition and a list of members and potential members they are responsible for approaching. It helps to give work-site leaders a palm card with a couple of talking points about the petition issue and why member/public support is crucial.

The second type of petition is an online petition, hosted on a website. With online petitions, you can use work-site leafleting, public leafleting, paid media, earned media, and social and organizational networks to drive people to the website to sign the petition.

**How it helps your union:**

Petitions give members and potential members an easy way to get involved in their union. Petitions also help the union connect with parents, neighbors and other members of the public, and gather information about how to contact them in the future.

Petitions that garner large numbers of signatures can be useful for generating media and demonstrating to elected leaders that your union has strong support for its position.



## Hold a button or sticker day

**How it works:**

Button or sticker days are visibility and solidarity actions—planned, organized events that demonstrate broad support among your membership and community for the union's position on a matter of importance. Button or sticker days are what they sound like: a predetermined day when as many people as possible in your targeted group (members/potential members, parents, neighbors, etc.) wear a button (or sticker, patch or lapel pin) for a predetermined amount of time (generally, for the workday, but it could be for a longer or shorter period of time).

**What it takes:**

Button or sticker days take some planning. First of all, you have to think about what message you want on the button or sticker. You'll need to come up with something short and to the point, as there isn't much room on the typical button or sticker.

Then, you need to determine the quantity needed and how to produce them. If there is a large quantity, you can work with a union printer to produce. If it is a smaller quantity and you can do them in-house. Button makers are an inexpensive alternative to ordering from a vendor.

Next, you'll distribute the buttons or stickers through your work-site structure. That means getting them into the hands of your work-site leaders before button/sticker day. You may also want to provide work-site leaders with two or three bullet points addressing questions they are likely to hear from members and other groups you are asking to wear the buttons or stickers ("Why are we doing this?" "What does the slogan mean?").

Also, provide your work-site leaders with a printout of the members and potential members in their work area, unit or school, so the work-site leader can check off the



names of those who wore the button or sticker on button/sticker day. Collect those sheets when you are done and enter the information into your member/potential member database.

#### **How it helps your union:**

If you get a good number of your members/potential members to wear the button, you visually establish their solidarity and support for your position, sending a clear message to managers, school principals, school boards and other decision-makers.

Button/sticker days also help you test the effectiveness of your work-site structure (from who does and doesn't wear the buttons or stickers, you'll be able to see pretty quickly where you have deficits in your structure's ability to reach and activate members/potential members).

Also, if you make sure you get the check-off sheets back from your work-site leaders, button/sticker days can give you more information about which members/potential members are willing to take a stand with their union. A person who wears a button or sticker might be someone to call for an activity that involves a similar or greater commitment, such as phone-banking or leafleting.



### **Pass out 'tchotchkes'/giveaways**

#### **How it works:**

Your union distributes items such as t-shirts, bumper stickers, pens or similar low-cost visibility items that provide a way for members to show their union support.

#### **What it takes:**

For many items, you can use a local union printer. For specialty items, the AFT most often uses K&R Industries. This company has a good selection of union- and American-made products. (For more information, see K&R's website at [www.gokandr.org](http://www.gokandr.org).)

The kind of giveaways your union distributes is limited only by your creativity and your ability to find low-cost, union- and American-made products, from basketball game thundersticks to lollipops with the union logo. You can tailor giveaways or tchotchkes to reflect a general message of union "branding" or support, or you can customize them to a particular campaign your union is running.

Giveaways don't have to be fancy to have an impact. For example, a common tactic when leafleting sports events with the union's message is to put a free scorecard, sports quiz, or team roster on the back of your flier,

then pass out fliers to fans by calling out, "Get your free scorecard [or roster, or quiz] here." Giveaways for kids (such as balloons) at family events are also very popular.

#### **How it helps your union:**

People love giveaways, from a "keeper" t-shirt to a useful key chain. Giveaways can be an important part of an overall union visibility program. They can have a very strong impact when displayed en masse (think of auto sunshades in car after car in an employee parking lot) during a union campaign.



### **'Wear blue' day**

#### **How it works:**

"Wear blue" days are another visibility and solidarity action. This tactic (in which members and potential members wear the AFT's signature color blue) doesn't require you to distribute buttons or stickers, but it does require reaching members/potential members early and often enough that they remember to wear blue on a specific day.

#### **What it takes:**

Since you aren't making and distributing any product (such as a button), there is less initial production work with this tactic, but there is a greater burden on your communications with members/potential members. You will need to remind people to "wear blue on Friday" many times, in many forms. Leaflets, Facebook, e-mails, and especially repeated work-site conversations initiated by work-site leaders, may all be necessary to make this tactic even moderately successful.

Given the investment in getting the word out, there is some economy-of-scale in making "wear blue on Friday" a regular weekly event—at least until a specific outcome is achieved (such as a contract settlement).

#### **How it helps your union:**

Assuming you can get a good turnout, "wear blue" days can be a nice morale-building exercise that, like any good solidarity action, demonstrates to the opposition the unity and strength of the group. And, like a button or sticker day, a "wear blue" day is a great way to test your union's strength at specific work sites and identify potential supporters.

Of course, sometimes your opposition may not be paying attention, or they aren't spending much time in the work site (or both), so you are going to want to communicate that your members/potential members actually

do “wear blue on Friday” by, say, taking photos of those wearing blue and posting them on your website, in your newsletter (inserted in a story on the progress of negotiations, for example) with a brief caption explaining why members/potential members are wearing blue), or on special posters to remind members/potential members to wear blue next Friday.



## Make patch-through calls

### How it works:

Patch-through calls are provided by a specialized service that your union can access through a contract with a vendor. Essentially, the vendor calls members/potential members and reads them a series of statements on a particular subject (generally, on a decision that an elected leader is about to make), then asks them if they would be willing to speak with the elected leader and express their support for the union’s position. If the member/potential member agrees, he or she is “patched through” (directly routed) to the phone line of the elected official.

### You will need:

- A contract with a vendor that does patch-through calls.
- A script for the vendor to read to members/potential members.
- A good list of members/potential members you want the vendor to call.

For more information on patch-through calls, contact AFT’s political department.

### How it helps your union:

Patch-through calls demonstrate to elected officials that your union has member (i.e., voter) support for your position and can mobilize that support. Vendors that do patch-through calls say this tactic is especially effective because it does not overwhelm the switchboard of elected officials with angry calls, but instead creates a manageable number of actual conversations between elected officials and concerned constituents.



## Make classroom/ cubicle/office posters

### How it works:

Another visibility and solidarity action is to create posters for union bulletin boards and other areas declaring a simple message of support for the union’s position on a matter of importance.

### What it takes:

You have to produce some posters. Though poster sheets can be large (11”x 17” is a nice poster size), resist the temptation to fill the page with words. Here’s a good guide: Use a big, simple graphic that takes up the top third of the poster, then a simple slogan or headline, then a sentence or two of text. Then add directions about where people can go for more information. (“Speak to your steward” is good; a website address works too.) If printing the posters out-of-house, use a local union printer.

Distribution of posters is similar to distribution of buttons: Give the posters to your work-site leaders, along with some talking points and a checklist to track who puts up the poster in their work areas.

### How it helps your union:

Posters complement other visibility and solidarity tactics. Posters show your union’s presence even when you aren’t there, they convey the union’s position, and they tell members/potential members how to find out more (and, hopefully, get more involved).

Be aware that many employers place strict limits on displaying political messages within the worksite.



## Hold a teach-in for your members and the community

### How it works:

Teach-ins are a tradition in which unions and other progressive groups gather to learn and exchange ideas about a common (often, social policy) issue, such as access to high-quality healthcare, protecting affordable higher education, or addressing economic injustices such as massive income disparities. A teach-in features a panel or a series of presenters who are experts on a given subject; these can be professors, labor leaders, advocacy group representatives, faith leaders or student leaders. Presenters can come from your community or be national experts.

**What it takes:**

A successful teach-in takes weeks of planning and coordination with other sponsoring organizations. You'll need:

- A venue for your teach-in that is big enough to hold expected participants.
- An agenda/program planned in cooperation with all the organizations sponsoring the teach-in.
- A roster of presenters, with expertise in the teach-in subject and a commitment to your sponsoring group's position on the subject.
- A strategy for publicizing the event to your members and other potential participants.
- A plan for press outreach, including a press advisory explain who your headline speakers will be and the topic on which the teach-in will focus.
- If your group can afford it, it's a great idea to offer basic refreshments.

**How it helps your union:**

A teach-in is a great chance for your members to meet and form bonds with activists from other organizations who care about the same issues as they do. Your members who participate in the teach-in will gain expertise in the teach-in subject, as well as some perspective on how your union's work fits into a larger progressive and labor movements. A teach-in is also a chance for your union to work with other organizations on a big issue that can serve as a launching pad for future coalition work.

**EIVR robo surveys****How it works:**

EIVR (electronic interactive voice response) robo surveys are similar to robo calls except that they are much more effective because they solicit the listener's opinion. Unlike traditional surveys administered by a live interviewer working for a polling or research company, EIVR surveys are done through a prerecorded script that allows the person taking the survey to use the key pad on the phone to answer the survey questions, as well as to add spontaneous comments. You may have taken an EIVR survey as a customer (if you were called with an automatic survey about your customer satisfaction after purchasing an item or service).

**What it takes:**

In general, the setup for an EIVR robo survey is similar to that of other robo calls. You can contract with a vendor to set up the survey. You'll want to keep in mind that,

because there's no live interviewer with an EIVR survey, you'll want to write a very clear, precise survey script.

**How it helps your union:**

People like to give their opinions and have their voices heard. An EIVR survey is a way to gauge your members' opinions on key issues, and to let them know that their union really wants their input.

**Hold social events for your members****How it works:**

This effort might be the heaviest of the "light lifts" in this section, in that it requires a fair amount of work for the union. It also asks members/potential members to socialize with people they don't know (which can be an intimidating proposition for some). So you'll want to make these events appealing and build "buzz" around them so they become popular with your members. Member social events might include after-work pizza parties, union-sponsored picnics, awards banquets for members/potential members, bowling nights, pub nights, fundraisers, etc.

**What it takes:**

You can make a social event more attractive by being clear about what the event is for (or whom it is for: for example, a welcome party for new, young employees where experienced employees have volunteered to answer questions). Let people know that resources will be available as well: "Your union steward will be there to answer your questions about surviving the first year at ABC Academy."

You can make these events easy to attend by scheduling them for places and times that people will find convenient. Childcare really helps. Parking matters.

Let people know that the event won't go on all night, that speeches will be kept to an absolute minimum, and that you won't be pressuring them to do anything else. Open houses are nice, because they imply people can come and go at their convenience. Many locals have had success creating social events for newly hired workers.

Regular union social events, dominated by established union activists, are probably a little intimidating for marginally involved members/potential members. But you can phrase the invitation in a way that welcomes new attendees especially, and you can also ask your longtime activists to make a special effort to welcome new attendees at these events.

**How it helps your union:**

Member social events demonstrate to your members and potential members that the union is making an effort to reach out to them and build relationships. They're also a great way for your members to meet each other, discover common union-related and professional interests, and build morale and solidarity within the work site and within your union.



## Hold Tele-town halls/ Tele-forums

**How it works:**

Think of a tele-town hall meeting as a giant conference call, with potentially thousands of participants.

**What it takes:**

The AFT can recommend several vendors that can help you put together a tele-town hall meeting.

The way these town halls generally work is that, at the time of the meeting, members of your target audience receive an automated call asking them to push a button on the phone if they want to join the meeting. You can give participants the option of asking questions (which can be screened and then asked of the person presiding over the meeting).

**How it helps your union:**

If you can afford this tactic, tele-town halls can be a very effective way to discuss a vital issue with your members or a target group within the general public, and to communicate a message very quickly to them.

With a tele-town hall or tele-forum, you can reach an audience that generally would not go to a town hall meeting at a physical location. Much like regular town halls, tele-town halls provide an opportunity for people to ask questions of the presenter(s).



## Send text messages

**How it works:**

With text messaging, you can send short (up to 140 characters) messages directly to a cell phone. Text messages can be sent to any text-enabled mobile phone number.

The AFT's communications department can help you set up text messaging capability.

Text messages are very effective ways of communicating small amounts of information (a meeting address, for example, or the answer to a yes-or-no question) to people with whom you have an existing relationship and who are expecting to hear from you.

**What it takes:**

Work with the AFT communications department to set up text messaging for your local. Individuals must opt in or subscribe themselves; cell numbers cannot be "dumped in" to the text messaging system.

**How it helps your union:**

Nearly 100 percent of all text messages are opened. Text messaging is good for: volunteer recruitment, crowd building, getting the word or the vote out quickly, or any other situation in which you need to quickly reach your members, your allies or any other group.



## Ask your members to join COPE

**How it works:**

One way members can get involved in your union that does not require a significant time commitment is by contributing to the union's COPE (Committee on Political Education) fund, the union's political action committee.

**What it takes:**

If your union doesn't already have a local COPE program, you'll need to set one up (or you can raise money for your state COPE). You will also need a plan for reaching out to members and asking them to contribute. With COPE, members usually sign up to give a certain amount each month.

There are legal requirements for the language you must use on your COPE sign-up card, and for how COPE funds are used and tracked. The AFT's political department can provide more information on setting up a COPE program and encouraging members to contribute.

**How it helps your union:**

COPE fundraising is critical in helping to elect lawmakers who support high-quality public services and Americans' union rights. But beyond the obvious benefits of being able to financially support pro-working family candidates, COPE can also be a good way to involve members in your union's political activism program. Just asking a member to sign up can generate conversations around politics and the union's legislative and political goals and values.



## 16 'Count Me In' cards

### How it works:

Count Me In (CMI) cards are often the first step in an effort to build a base of volunteers. Count Me In cards are most often used before political elections, although you could use them for your union's major campaigns as well. The card identifies various activities members can potentially volunteer for (door-knocking, letter-writing, phone-banking, etc.). Members are asked to fill out the card and indicate which activities they are willing to help with.

### What it takes:

CMI cards involve:

- Writing and printing the cards.
- Distributing them to worksite leaders.
- Having worksite leaders talk with members and distribute the cards.
- Collecting the cards.

### How it helps your union:

CMI cards are an effective first step in building a pool of volunteers. The initial "ask" of members is for them to just fill out the card and think about what activities they want to volunteer for. This simple first step sets the stage for you to come back to them later and ask them to volunteer for specific events.

CMI cards are also a good way to test and shore up your building structure—by seeing which work-site leaders produce filled-out CMI cards and which don't—in advance of major union efforts.



## 17 Recruit members to serve as work-site leaders\*

### How it works:

Work-site leaders are the union in the work site. They are responsible for member education, engagement and mobilization. In most cases, they are also responsible for enforcing the contract, handling grievances and providing member feedback to elected leaders. Recruiting, training and keeping good building representatives is essential for making your union strong and effective, and for building member participation.

### What it takes:

Developing an effective work-site leader program requires:

- Clear expectations for the role of the work-site leader.

- Appropriate training and support materials.
- Adequate systems for checking in with and supporting work-site leaders, including ways to spot and help work-site leaders who are struggling and need assistance to be more effective.
- Recognition for the contributions of work-site leaders.

The AFT's Union Leadership Institute (ULI) department can provide detailed suggestions for developing an effective work-site leader program.

### How it helps your union:

A work-site leader program is the foundation of a strong, effective union. It is vital to all member education and member engagement efforts. When your union has a terrific work-site leader structure, you have a strong, accurate sense of your members' concerns and feedback. This enables you to mobilize your members to support the union's key efforts and campaigns, and gives you the power and the trained leaders necessary to enforce and protect your contract.

\* **Note:** "Work-site leaders" are also often called building representatives or stewards)



## 18 One-on-one worksite conversations

### How it works:

Engaging less-involved members and potential members is essential for building broad member support for and participation in a union campaign. Nothing replaces one-on-one outreach and organizing efforts like members talking to members.

### What it takes:

Once your union decides that, as part of a campaign, every member/potential member will be engaged in a conversation and will be assessed as to their level of support for the campaign, the union then has to figure out who (exactly) is going to talk with them.

Work-site leaders are probably your best resource for initiating one-on-one conversations, but you may need to recruit additional volunteers, as a broad one-on-one assessment and mobilization effort is a big lift.

Be sure to provide work-site leaders with a flier or some other item they can give out at the beginning of each conversation.

Also, give your work-site leaders a little help in approaching this conversation: Generate palm cards that



provide the work-site leader with a few short talking points, and remind him or her to ask questions and listen for the answers. Palm cards make the whole thing a lot easier, especially for volunteers who are not used to this sort of member engagement.

#### **How it helps your union:**

When confronted with the complexities of contract negotiations, job actions, school board elections, etc., most members/potential members will look to familiar and trusted colleagues for direction on what they should do. Work-site conversations with a trusted colleague are the single most effective way of getting someone to understand and support the union's position on the issues, and to do something (volunteer, speak out, attend an event) that they might otherwise not have done.

Finding and preparing that trusted colleague—whether it's a building representative, steward, or well-liked and respected union member at a certain school or work site—to engage with his or her marginally union-involved friends is the key to building broad support for the union campaign.

## **19 Hold worksite meetings**

#### **How it works:**

Work-site meetings are small meetings, generally scheduled at the workplace immediately before or after work hours, or during lunch.

#### **What it takes:**

- Some initial logistics—the work-site leader has to find a room and a time to meet.
- A meeting announcement flier, circulated to the intended meeting participants.
- A short agenda on a piece of flip-chart paper posted at the front of the room. Some people feel impatient or uncomfortable when they come to a meeting and there is no visible agenda.
- A handout for the meeting. It helps to give out a flier that essentially states what you plan to say at the meeting.
- A bullet-point script for the work-site leader hosting the meeting.
- A reminder for the work-site leader to encourage attendees to ask questions as the meeting progresses.
- A check-off sheet for the work-site leader to track who attends the meeting.

#### **How it helps your union:**

Work-site meetings are a great way to give general

information, updates and answers to members/potential members. They also can be an effective way of getting feedback from members/potential members.

## **20 Host phone parties**

#### **How it works:**

Need a lot of members to contact their legislators? One way to do this is to get people together immediately after work or on lunch breaks and ask them to make calls to their legislators on their cell phones.

#### **What it takes:**

This is one of those activities that requires someone in the work site to coordinate it—in this case, by inviting colleagues to get together for a few minutes after work or during a lunch break.

Participants should be provided with talking points or a script, and appropriate phone numbers.

#### **How it helps your union:**

While not as large-scale as a phone bank at the union office, this tactic can be a very effective way to generate calls to legislators. It's also a great way to introduce members to other members in an informal setting.

## **21 Recruit volunteers to work on campaigns**

#### **How it works:**

The idea here is to build on the enormous excitement that is generated around some elections (local, state and federal) by plugging members and potential members directly into the union's program in support of endorsed candidates.

#### **What it takes:**

Very early in the electoral process, communicate with members/potential members to seek volunteers to participate in the union's political action and voter mobilization efforts. Leaflets, posters, regular union communications, websites and e-mails all can help recruit members/potential members to join their colleagues in backing candidates that support your schools (or colleges, public services, high-quality healthcare, and the other public institutions and values your union champions). In these

communications, make it clear that there will be a range of activities people can participate in, and that time commitments will be kept within reasonable limits.

#### **How it helps your union:**

This idea probably is easiest to implement during elections in which there is a high level of excitement about the candidates. In many cases, your members/potential members are going to volunteer anyway to support some of these candidates. By plugging these members/potential members into the union program, you are essentially piggy-backing on a level of general excitement and energy in the air during election season. But don't forget low-turnout, sleeper elections either—such as school board and off-year elections. You may have to work harder to recruit volunteers for those elections, but their volunteering will matter more—and might even make the difference—in low-turnout, low-profile elections.



### **Ask your members to write member-to-target personal notes**

#### **How it works:**

Member-to-target notes are handwritten notes on personal stationery from familiar co-workers, meant to persuade a colleague to support the union position on an important matter.

#### **You'll need:**

- Union leadership and work-site leadership to identify activists who can help write these notes.
- Union leadership and work-site leadership to identify members/potential members who might be open to a little more gentle persuasion on the issue at hand.
- Union leaders, work-site leaders and activists to review the list of members who should receive notes, and to divide up the list according to whom they know on the list.
- Union leaders, work-site leaders and activists who can write these notes to their colleagues. Notes should be written by hand, on personal stationery.
- The notes can be mailed or hand-delivered.

#### **How it helps your union:**

The effectiveness of these notes rests in their personal nature; a member-to-target note conveys to the recipient that the member cares enough to write to someone he or she knows about an issue he or she considers important. The effectiveness of the notes is enhanced by follow-up conversations between the sender and recipient. You might want to give your activists a short, very general script for starting off these conversations.



### **Field a union team for another organization's charity event**

#### **How it works:**

Your state AFL-CIO, local charities or local branches of national charities may sponsor yearly events, from a walk to fund cancer research to an auction to raise money for a local playground. Consider fielding a group from your local to support such an event. For example, fundraising events such walkathons and bikeathons lend themselves to group participation.

#### **What it takes:**

This one is easy. You put out the word—in an e-mail, through your website or through your work-site leads—that your union is looking for member volunteers to participate in the charity event. When you participate in the event, it's a nice idea to wear something (hats or t-shirts) with the union logo on it. It's also good to reach out to the event organizers to let them know your union would like to help. After the event, post a report about and photos from your union's team participation on your website, or put it in your newsletter.

#### **How it helps your union:**

You probably already have members involved in specific charities and fundraisers who would be delighted and motivated by the union's support of their work. Participating in charity and fundraising events is a great way for your members to get to know each other and get to know more about their union. And it's a terrific way for your community to get to know your union, in a context that illustrates how much union members care and want to give back to their community. If your chosen charity is one sponsored by another labor group, you'll also win goodwill and appreciation from your fellow trade unionists.



### **Place lawn signs in your community**

#### **How it works:**

Lawn signs are a visibility and solidarity action. They're real attention-grabbers, which is why candidates for political office and community groups use them all the time.

If your campaign has a large public outreach component in a fairly compact geographic area (one city, for instance), lawn signs are worth considering for their visibility and impact.

**What it takes:**

- Lawn sign design is like poster design: You'll want to resist the temptation to fill the sign with words. Instead, use a big, simple graphic, a simple slogan or headline, and a few words of text, and indicate of where people can go to take action or get more information (such as a phone number or website address).
- Your local union printer knows how to produce these signs, which now come in several designs, including a water-resistant version that slips over a wire frame.
- Produce a leaflet for all members/potential members letting them know that lawn signs will be available, and identifying the campaign or message for the signs. In the leaflet, tell them how they can get lawn signs for themselves and their neighbors.
- Ask work-site leaders to identify member activists who would be willing to go door to door asking people to put the signs on their lawns.
- Door-to-door canvassers will need leaflets to hand out explaining the campaign, as well as a palm card with a couple of bullet points on what to say (and the etiquette for leaving informational materials at someone's door when no one appears to be home).

**How it helps your union:**

As with any visibility and solidarity item, if a significant number of your lawn signs are displayed, your campaign looks broadly and deeply supported. If few of them are displayed, the cause appears weak and slightly sad. If your campaign hinges on certain decision-makers—such as school board members, legislators, college administrators or corporate management—one tactic some unions have found successful is to put lawn signs in the neighborhoods where these decision-makers live or work.



## Speakers bureau/ Surrogate speakers program

**How it works:**

Local presidents cannot be everywhere the union needs them to be, speaking on every issue your union needs to address. They need help in getting the union's message out and persuading key groups to support your efforts and campaigns. That's where a speakers bureau or surrogate speakers can help, particularly when it comes to bringing the union's message to community groups.

**What it takes:**

Setting up a speakers bureau generally involves three things:

- Identifying good spokespeople (for tips, see Idea #16,

"Find the Right Spokespeople").

- Training them on the union's message and helping them tell their (or members') own compelling personal stories to illustrate to other organizations why your campaign or issues is vital.
- Scheduling them to speak with community organizations, other potential ally/partner organizations, and the media.

**How it helps your union:**

Speakers bureaus can be very effective as part of your union's efforts to get your message out to community leaders, other potential allies and the media. Speakers are particularly effective if they have moving personal stories to tell (their own or stories gathered from members) about why your union's issue or campaign matters. A speakers bureau is also a good way to involve members in union issues and campaigns.



## New employee welcoming meetings

**How it works:**

All unions should have some kind of program in place that welcomes new colleagues to the union community and explains what the union is all about

**What it takes:**

Work-site leaders should be expected to take on the role of welcoming new employees. Because new colleagues' first impression of the union is crucial, you'll want to give your work-site leaders training on message points and on conducting an initial organizing conversation that urges the new employee to become a member of the union and get involved in the union's work. Along with asking the new employee to become an active union member, you'll also want your "welcome messaging" to strongly emphasize how the union can help new employees learn the ropes on the job and succeed professionally.

**How it helps your union:**

A good introduction to the union during a new colleague's first days on the job can make a tremendous difference. If you show new employees that the union cares about them, wants to help them succeed in a new job (see Idea #27, "Mentor Programs"), and is there to answer questions and help resolve problems, they will form a favorable impression of the union and are far more likely to become active, engaged members.





## Mentor programs (First Friend/Best Friend)

### How it works:

We all know that the first months on a new job can be very stressful. One way that local unions can help new employees (and make a good first impression) is to have a mentoring program through which experienced union members help new employees succeed on the job.

### Your local will need to:

- Meet with newer workers to identify the kind of help and advice new employees would most like to receive.
- Identify and train volunteers to serve as mentors. (Most locals that run an effective First Friend/Best Friend effort find a volunteer to coordinate the entire effort.)
- Periodically check in with mentors to make sure they are contacting new employees and to see what kind of issues new employees are raising.

### How it helps your union:

Where done right, First Friend/Best Friend programs can be very effective in demonstrating, through actions, the union's commitment to helping members succeed on the job. Mentoring programs are also a good way for new members or potential members to learn about the work of the union.



## Documenting health and safety issues

### How it works:

Health and safety issues are a concern in many work sites. One way to involve members in the union's efforts to address health and safety issues is to engage them in efforts to document health and safety problems.

### What it takes:

Basically tactic involves identifying volunteers to coordinate the program in the work sites and then training the volunteers on what to look for and how to document possible hazards. Documenting possible hazards often involves a simple reporting sheet that a member can fill out and turn in to the union for follow-up.

Your union's health and safety committee, if you have one, is a good choice for spearheading this effort. You'll want to pick a point person to run the effort to document

health and safety problems. The AFT's health and safety program can provide advice on setting up this program.

### How it helps your union:

A program to document health and safety problems has many benefits for your union. First, it provides management with clear, specific evidence of health and safety risks your members are facing in the workplace—and that's a first step toward eliminating or lessening those risks. Also, it's a great way to involve members in an aspect of the union's work that's value will be immediately clear to them.



## Stage visibility events

### How it works:

Visibility events usually involve groups of members placed in strategic locations (highway overpasses and major intersections) carrying signs or posters. These events are most often organized as part of political campaigns or when your union is engaged in a major campaign or initiative, such as contract negotiations.

### What it takes:

- Recruiting volunteers. Your work-site leaders and political action committee can help with this task.
- Identifying strategic locations. (For example, for a contract campaign, you might want to place your visibility signs outside the school board office, at a central town location, or across from schools.)
- Creating signs (as with lawn signs, go for fewer words and big graphics—and list a website or number where people can go for more information). You can use home-made signs, but you might also want large signs or a large banner, for impact. There are union vendors who can create large, weather-resistant signs and banners for your union. You will want your banner or signs to be clearly branded with your union logo, unless you are involved in a coalition effort or campaign. One tip: Because banners can be expensive, if you believe your campaign or effort might be a protracted one, try to pick graphics and language for your banner that you can use again down the road.

### How it helps your union:

Visibility efforts are great for attracting television cameras, because TV news reporters like a good visual to go with their reporting. Visibility events are also a good way to demonstrate support for a candidate or a cause. And,

they can be a morale-booster for members, as people who support the union's position will often honk their car horns or stop by to voice support. (However, if your issue is a highly divisive one in the general public, you might want to give your volunteers a few tips on how to respond if they are challenged by angry or loud opponents.)

## **Ask members to serve on local union committees or Central Labor Council (CLC) committees**

### **How it works:**

Looking to get more members to help with the work involved in running the union? Ask them to serve on a committee.

### **What it takes:**

Most unions have committees that help run the union program, such as communications, community outreach and political action, whose work could always benefit by having more people involved. Identifying members with an interest in these types of committees is one way to help build activists.

### **How it helps your union:**

Asking members to serve on committees is a very effective way to build activism within the union. Getting members involved in your union's or your Central Labor Council's committees can help spread out the work—and can help groom new leaders and activists. Involvement in CLC committees also builds your union's relationships with other unions in your town or region, thus strengthening the labor movement in your area as well.

## **Lunch-and-learns**

### **How it works:**

Lunch-and-learns are lunchtime meetings on topics your union chooses. Topics can range widely, from effective classroom management to a primer on recent political attacks on public employee unions and their members' rights. These meetings are conducted during lunch (assuming that is when your target audience of members/potential members is available), and food is often supplied. A lunch-and-learn allows you to present a topic, in a fairly in-depth format, to members/potential members who might not always attend union events.

### **What it takes:**

For a successful lunch-and-learn, you'll want to:

- Publicize the lunch-and-learn beforehand through your work-site structure and with work-site fliers, e-mail communication, and any other pre-event outreach you can think of.
- Arrange for the meeting space and for food. Pizza or subs and soft drinks are probably sufficient.
- Provide your meeting facilitator (this can be a union steward or building rep) with a sign-in sheet to track who shows up; (make sure you ask for e-mail and cell numbers on the sign-in sheet).
- Provide your main speaker, if he or she needs it, with a script and a guide to frequently asked questions on the topic, so that once attendees have settled in and started eating, the host can give the brief talk and then answer questions. (If you have invited an expert in your specific lunch-and-learn topic to speak, he or she probably would not need the topic background but still might find it helpful to hear in advance what kinds of questions or responses your members might have on the topic.)

### **How it helps your union:**

Lunch-and-learns are a good way of bringing together groups of regular members and potential members who are not always union-involved. (Some will show up mostly for the food, which is fine as long as you encourage them to stick around for the presentation and Q&A).

Lunch-and-learns give your union time with members/potential members, allowing you to cover topics that might require a little more detail and attention. You'll really connect with members and potential members if you choose topics they've shown an interest in, or if you can present the chosen topic in your pre-event materials as one that is highly relevant to their lives and professions.

## **Offer professional development opportunities to your members**

### **How it works:**

Your members care deeply about their professions and increasingly are looking to their union to be an effective advocate for quality within their professions. Providing relevant, high-quality professional development gives you an opportunity to connect with members/potential members who might not be regularly involved in other union activities, and helps you define the union as the primary advocate for their professions. Many AFT locals are already offering high-quality professional develop-

ment programs or opportunities for their members. If you'd like to explore creating or enhancing your union's professional development program, contact the AFT educational issues department.

#### **What it takes:**

Remember that you can "start small," since it takes time to develop a professional development program. You don't have to create such a program overnight; you can begin by offering a single course, lecture or seminar. To offer professional development opportunities to your members, you'll need to:

- Identify the professional concerns of members and potential members. A professional issues survey conducted at the work site is a good way to identify these issues.
- Identify professional development program elements that would address those issues. For example, if classroom management emerges as a key issue for your members, your union could offer a seminar on classroom management techniques. If safe staffing comes up as an issue for healthcare members, you could offer a workshop on the range of ways in which healthcare unions have approached staffing concerns.
- Take advantage of the research and resources that will assist your members/potential members on their professional issues. (These resources might be found either within the AFT's national structure, your state federation or your local union, or externally—for instance, at a local community college that has a program or professor specializing in the professional issue your union has chosen.)
- Schedule training events and publicize them to all members and potential members.
- Take photos during the trainings, and report on the trainings in every communications medium your union uses (your website, e-mails, newsletter, work-site posters, etc).

This is a good way to connect with members and potential members, while emphasizing the commitment of the union in promoting quality in the profession and in helping members/potential members *be the best they can be* at their job.



#### **How it works:**

If there is a major issue relevant to your union, your sector or your members' professions being debated at the school board or city council, then your members should be there to make their voices heard and their power as voters and community members felt.

#### **What it takes:**

This tactic is all about turnout. Numbers matter to politicians and the media. Thus, the majority of your effort should go into working with work-site leaders to turn out your membership. You may want to consider marching to the event as a group, and notifying the media that you are doing so. If the event also includes an opportunity to address city council or school board members, you will need to identify a spokesperson and review major talking points with him or her. You may also need to get on the agenda ahead of time.

#### **How it helps your union:**

A good membership turnout can make the news, if you have invited the press to cover your members' participation and your remarks to the city council or school board. A strong member presence at these meetings is also a clear demonstration to school board or council members that union members care about the issue under discussion and will hold elected leaders accountable for their positions and for the way they vote on that issue.



#### **How it works:**

A union-sponsored dinner is a chance to recognize and reward members who volunteer their time to assist their colleagues, their institutions and their professions through their union work.

#### **What it takes:**

Here are a few things to think about when planning a member-recognition awards dinner:

- You'll need a budget for some food, drinks and decorations, and a space in which to hold the dinner.
- Publicize this event to your membership and all others who are invited. You'll want to ask for RSVPs so you can plan the amount of food needed.
- Develop awards for newer activists, along with the awards for your union's core, experienced activists. The member-recognition dinner is an opportunity to shore-up the support of those who are just now starting to make a bigger commitment to the union; recognition at this dinner is a way to give them social benefits for the sacrifices they are making.
- As with all social events, let members/potential members know that the event will start and end promptly, and that parking and childcare (if possible) will be avail-

able. You want to convey that the event will be fun, not overlong, and as hassle-free as possible.

**How it helps your union:**

An annual member awards dinner is a great way to build up an expectation within the union that volunteerism is recognized and rewarded, that hard work is appreciated, and that there are pleasant social experiences to be had and friendships to be found through union participation.



## 35 Hold Activists for Congressional Education (ACE) meetings

**How it works:**

ACE meetings are opportunities for members to meet with their elected representatives to have frank discussions about an issue.

**What it takes:**

If your state federation runs an ACE program, contact it about having some of your members/potential members participate.

Ask work-site leaders to identify appropriate members/potential members for these meetings. For ACE meeting attendees, you'll want to look at members/potential members who are interested in the political process, have some work-site leadership potential, and will conduct themselves in a way that reflects well on the union.

If your state federation doesn't have an ACE program, or if you want to set up ACE-style meetings with local elected officials, extra work will be necessary, in addition to member/potential member recruitment, including:

- Identifying key political leaders with whom to meet.
- Getting time on their schedule.
- Preparing the ACE team beforehand (including a discussion of goals for the meeting).
- Dividing up bulleted message points among your ACE meeting participants.
- Developing a specific request of the elected leader.
- Planning for follow-up, such as a thank-you note to the elected leader, future meetings with him or her, and monitoring of that leader's votes and positions on the issue on which you focused the ACE meeting and the specific request you made of the elected leader.

**How it helps your union:**

If your members are participating in ACE meetings, or your local is setting up its own ACE meetings, let your membership know about it. Get photos of the ACE committee and meeting participants (maybe even with the political leader, if he or she is willing), and let members/

potential members know what professional and labor issues were discussed in the meeting. Letting your membership know about the ACE meetings shows them that your union is an active political advocate for your members' views, concerns and professional issues.

Participation in an ACE meeting is also a great involvement mechanism for members/potential members who want to be more engaged in the political process.



## 36 Hold candidate forums

**How it works:**

Candidate forums are a good way to engage members in the political process and to demonstrate to candidates that union support matters.

**What it takes:**

- *Deciding on the format*—e.g., several candidates, an individual candidate, a panel. You'll want to include an ample question-and-answer period so your members can ask questions and voice their concerns.
- *Inviting the candidates*
- *Building member turnout*—You'll want to get a good turnout. A candidate forum with a big, enthusiastic audience can be a huge success; a candidate forum with few people in the audience isn't.

**How it helps your union:**

Like ACE meetings, a candidate forum demonstrates to members that your union is an effective political advocate for them. A candidate forum also shows politicians that you can mobilize members (and turn out the vote for or against a candidate). Just as important, a candidate forum lets political leaders meet your members personally and engage with them on the issues. Hearing firsthand from voters and members about an issue educates the candidate about the issue, and can give the issue new importance and relevance in the candidate's eyes.



## 37 Member-organizers

**How it works:**

Your members are the most effective spokespeople for your union. For members who are ready to take on a challenging, sustained role in your union, participation in

an organizing, issues or contract campaign can help them build leadership skills while contributing a valuable boost to the campaign.

As part of any organizing drive, AFT state federations and locals should look for opportunities to train and deploy volunteer member-organizers.

#### **What it takes:**

Identifying good organizers should be the job of work-site leaders. Ask your work-site leaders to recommend potential member-organizers. Volunteer organizers must have good communication skills, self-discipline and the drive to help others form a union.

Volunteer organizers will have to be trained in the specific skills of organizing. The training can be done on site and “just in time” (right before organizing activities).

Release time provisions in union contracts strengthen the union by broadening the pool of potential volunteers who can take time away from their jobs to work as organizers.

#### **How it helps your union:**

Being a volunteer organizer is a great opportunity for members to build their skills and take a larger role—and real ownership—in their union. Your union will also see lasting benefits from developing a cadre of skilled member-organizers. Member-organizers will help your union grow, enhance your mobilization ability, and enable you to achieve more in just about every effort or campaign your union undertakes.



#### **How it works:**

Home visits involve AFT members visiting their colleagues at their homes to discuss union issues.

#### **What it takes:**

If home visits are deemed necessary, it is very important to figure out which of your union-involved members have relationships with those members or potential members your union plans to visit at home. You can then ask those union-involved members to accompany union staff or activists on the home visits where (because of pre-existing relationships) they can do the most good.

Home visits can require enormous logistical planning. You'll need to:

- Know where your members or potential members live.
- Guess when they will be home, and arrange your

home visitors' schedules to match.

- Arrange for transportation to the member's or potential member's house.
- Show up prepared with materials to facilitate the conversation (and to leave behind).
- Have a goal for the visit (something your union is asking the visited person to do).
- Assess the visit after it is over,.
- Enter the visit information into some sort of data base, and then review the data for planning next steps in the overall campaign.

#### **How it helps your union:**

In some cases, home visits may be the only way to effectively reach every member/potential member. Home visits are significantly more effective if they are made by colleagues who know or live in the same area as the person being visited.



#### **How it works:**

A well-organized rally—in which members/potential members, parents, neighbors, allies, political officials and community leaders demonstrate their support for your campaign or issue—can be a highly effective visibility and solidarity action.

#### **What it takes:**

A rally can involve several moving pieces, so you'll want to plan carefully and delegate specific responsibilities, checking in often with your leads for each aspect of the planning process. A rally takes:

- A comprehensive plan that includes the date, time, location and purpose of the rally.
- A staging area. In choosing a staging area, consider traffic, weather, and the convenience, visibility and significance of the location. You'll need a permit for closing streets or using public spaces. (The permit will detail other requirements such as portable toilets, trash cans, parking, etc.)
- Signs, banners or other visuals, plus a stage and a sound system to broadcast speeches, chants and songs, along with megaphones for your rally marshals. Involve members/potential members in making banners, signs and other props ahead of time; have them brainstorm chants.
- A “marketing” strategy to get your own members, and those outside your union, to attend. Your marketing strategy should include publicizing the rally in advance, using your website, e-mailing your members and other



potential attendees, and distributing printed materials in the work site. Provide work-site leaders with check-off lists of members/potential members to help them encourage attendance at the rally.

- A roster of speakers, including leaders from other community organization and advocacy groups. You'll want to prepare members of your union to speak at the rally and speak to the press.

- A media strategy for drawing coverage for the event—including a clear message and stated purpose for your rally that all media leads should know and follow.

- Press packets, plus assigned staff to keep an eye out for press, distribute the packets and facilitate interviews.

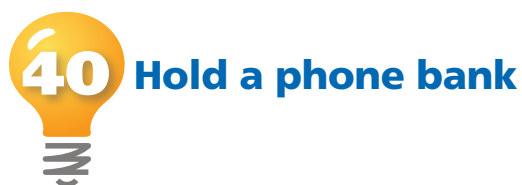
- Photos and videos of the rally, for posting on your website and providing to press.

- Water (essential in hot weather), and in some cases, a medical services/resting tent (depending on the length, size and weather conditions of your rally).

- Volunteers with rosters to staff an attendance table or to move among the crowd, so that the union can capture the names, organizations and contact information of individuals who attend. Also, volunteers may be needed to circulate petitions or pledge cards, or to enter the names of attendees to build a database to keep stakeholders informed and involved.

#### **How it helps your union:**

A rally can be a great way to generate press coverage and to strengthen solidarity among members. Rallies build public awareness, draw press, inspire enthusiasm for the cause/issue your union is advocating, and help the union to connect with other stakeholders in the community. Rallies also demonstrate to politicians and policy-makers that voters care about your issue—which often makes politicians care more, too.



#### **How it works:**

Phone banks are a good way to reach a large group of members or supporters quickly.

#### **What it takes:**

For a successful phone bank, you'll need to:

- Find a location with enough phones for your volunteers (your Central Labor Committee may be a good resource).
- Provide phones, scripts and call sheets.
- Recruit volunteers through worksite leaders.
- Provide a brief training for your volunteers right be-

fore phone banking starts.

- Make sure you have refreshments and comfortable surroundings for your phone bank volunteers.

#### **How it helps your union:**

Phone banks are highly effective because they allow for one-on-one conversations with members, voters and other groups the phone bank calls.



#### **How it works:**

It is very common for affiliates to participate in large rallies at the state Capitol and to have many of their members meet with their lawmakers before or after the rally. You can also hold standalone lobby days, where members visit their statehouse to lobby legislators on a key piece of legislation or a policy position that your union is supporting.

#### **What it takes:**

You'll need to provide a brief "lobby training" with key message points for members who will meet with their representatives. It often puts your lobby day volunteers more at ease to role play a lobbying visit right before you head into the statehouse.

You'll want to provide your lobbying volunteers with materials on your issue or legislation that they can leave behind with their legislators. If you have enough seasoned volunteers or staff, it's a good idea to pair new lobby-day volunteers with members or staff who have lobbied before.

Determine which volunteers live in which districts, so you can try to fill in any holes and cover the districts of as many legislators as possible.

Plan to meet with your volunteer group after lobbying has concluded to thank them and hear their feedback, including their reports on what they were told by legislators.

For assistance with planning and running a lobby day, please contact the AFT political department.

#### **How it helps your union:**

Of all the member volunteer activities your union can try, lobby days can be one of the most exhilarating and interesting for members, particularly for members who have never made a lobbying visit before. Lobby days also demonstrate to your elected representatives that the union can mobilize member/voter support in favor of your positions.

## 42 Run a lit drop

### **How it works:**

One way to take your message to the community is to go door to door (literally) throughout your community.

While this is most often done in literature drops to union members in political campaigns, neighborhood lit drops can be used to take the union's message on key issues directly to the community

### **What it takes:**

- Creating a flier and/or other informational materials for your volunteers to hand out. This material can include campaign bumper stickers or buttons for your volunteers to leave behind.
- Recruiting volunteers
- Selecting target areas

**Note:** Political literature (specifically endorsing a candidate or group of candidates) can only be distributed to labor union members. However, issue-based literature can be given to the general public.

### **How it helps your union:**

Literature drops provide an opportunity for your members to have direct one-on-one conversations with the community. They introduce the "faces" of your union to the community. They also energize and mobilize members. And they increase your chances of helping your endorsed candidates and positions prevail in elections.

## 43 Do informational picketing

### **How it works:**

Informational picketing is often used in situations where your union wants to educate the public and enlist its support. Informational picketing simply means that members and supporters of your union stand on a sidewalk or in another public space and pass out leaflets, fact sheets, buttons and other information on the union's issue or position. It is often used in contract campaigns, corporate campaigns and legislative initiatives. In contract and corporate campaigns, informational picketing can be a first step toward more

significant action—a signal to management that the union can ramp up its visibility and its campaign in the near future.

### **What it takes:**

- One or more public places to pass out fliers and other materials. (You'll want to consider holding your informational picket in places that will be visible for the public and management target audiences, and that will provide good visuals for the press.)
- Member volunteers to pass out your fliers and materials.
- Signs and other visuals.
- A press release or press advisory and press calls (if you plan to seek press coverage for your picket, as is often the case).

### **How it helps your union:**

Informational picketing is a "shot over the bow"—a signal to management, elected leaders and other key decision-makers that your union is ramping up its campaign and taking its case to the public. Informational picketing is a great way to educate your community about the union's campaign or issue, and ask for community support. For members, informational picketing is a way to build morale and camaraderie, and give members experience in reaching out to their community. Informational picketing is also a good way to build member-mobilization strength and structures before you escalate your union's campaign activities.

## 44 Go on strike

The vast majority of union contract negotiations and other labor-management disputes are resolved without a strike. Strikes are far too complicated to cover in a document like this one. They require intensive preparation and mobilization of your members, along with a host of other logistical and financial preparations.

If you are considering a strike, please contact your state federation and regional director for assistance and resources well in advance of any actions.



## **Tell your members that their work is appreciated and meaningful**

### **How it works:**

Have you ever volunteered for something and had a bad experience? Maybe you were left to figure things out for yourself, or you weren't welcomed into the organization, or your time and effort didn't seem to count much. If so, you'll already know how important it is to tell members how much their work on behalf of their union matters, and how much their time, energy and contributions are appreciated.

### **What it takes:**

This one is easy. Whenever you can—at the beginning and end of union actions and events, in e-mails, in your newsletter, in notes and member awards—tell your members just how much their volunteering, their support and their work matters. Tell them that what they do for the union is needed and appreciated.

### **How it helps your union:**

Yes, it's true that in a perfect world, members wouldn't need to be told how vital their contributions are, because they would know that they are the union. But until we achieve that perfect world, think about the simple tactic of expressing to members that their work counts (for example, with a statement such as "It made a big difference that all of you showed up to make this phone bank a success today."). Letting members know that their union work matters and is appreciated is free, it's simple, and it works.

It may sound hokey, but being appreciated and believing that they are making a difference keeps people coming back. It's an old saying that people don't join organizations, they join people. These days, there are a lot of worthy organizations and causes asking for your members' presence, time and contributions. If you want your union to be the organization your members choose to put near the top of the list, take a moment to welcome them whenever they volunteer, and to tell them that their presence and their contributions matter. Ask your staff, your work-site leaders and your activists to do the same.



## **Create a campaign website**

### **How it works:**

If your union is conducting an issue-based campaign geared toward influencing the public and winning their support for your positions, a campaign website is virtually a must. The public has come to expect that organizations will have websites they can visit to obtain additional information.

Moreover, a website provides you with a vehicle for monitoring the effectiveness of your campaign (through checking on website traffic/visits and other responses, such as visitors' participation in online petitions and surveys). It gives you a way to provide visitors with opportunities to take action in support of your agenda. It can also serve as the central hub for all other social media activities, such as Facebook, text messaging, YouTube links, etc.

### **What it takes:**

AFT's communications department can help your union set up your campaign website. You'll also need:

- A plan for what you want your website to accomplish and how complex a website you will require. For example, you may want your site to include subpages with more information or information targeted to a specific audience, an online petition capability, current news links or other features. On the other hand, you may want to launch it in a simple form and add more features later;
- A staff or member-volunteer who can serve as the point person to maintain the website. You'll want to make sure the person you pick for this responsibility has the time to carry it out; and .
- A writer or writers (either the same person who maintains the website or a different person) to write fresh content for the website and keep it updated. If your website looks stale or outdated, visitors might not return.

### **How it helps your union:**

The effectiveness of campaign websites can vary greatly, depending on the issues surrounding your campaign as well as the efforts you put into promoting your site and driving traffic to it. (AFT's communications department can help you with tips on how to increase your website traffic and widen your website's reach to the media and to other organizations' websites.) Done right, a website is a terrific campaign communications strategy.





## 47 Set up a Facebook fan page

### How it works:

Facebook fan pages provide your members and supporters with an easy way to “opt in” to receive ongoing updates about your union and/or campaign.

### What it takes:

When people “like” your Facebook page, they become a “fan.” Updates to your page are then pushed to your fans as news feeds. When fans “like” or comment on your content, it becomes shared so their friends can see it, too. You’ll need:

### You’ll need:

- A staff person or member to set up the Facebook page (AFT communications department can assist); and
- A staff person or member-volunteer to maintain the page. Daily updates are vital to keep your audience engaged. Watching and responding to fan comments and posts are extremely important.

### How it helps your union:

Facebook fan pages can be an effective way to share current information and to encourage your supporters to take immediate action. Today, nearly half of all Americans have a Facebook page. Facebook now accounts for one out of every four page views on the Internet.



## 48 E-mail, e-mail, e-mail!

### How it works:

Email is still the most common form of electronic communications. It’s a great way to stay in touch with members, since it can be read day or night (whenever they have time), and it provides an easy channel for member input and questions.

### What it takes:

To be most effective at e-mailing your members and other target audiences, you’ll need:

- A Salsa account (this is the application used to generate the e-mail) and training on Salsa. To get a Salsa account, contact the AFT communications department;
- A list of your members’ e-mail addresses (preferably their personal e-mail addresses) and the e-mail addresses

of other target audiences you may be e-mailing);

- A point person for writing and sending the e-mails. This can be a staff person or a member-volunteer; and
- A review system for signing off before an e-mail is sent out. (E-mails get circulated widely. You or someone on your union’s staff should review e-mail content for messaging, accuracy and other concerns before e-mails are sent.)

### How it helps your union:

E-mail can be very effective and can be done at little or no cost. However, “open rates” (the number of e-mails actually opened) can vary greatly (usually from 5 to 30 percent).

An added benefit of the Salsa application, however, is that the union can track who opens the e-mail and who sends messages to their lawmakers. This information is often valuable for further organizing/mobilizing efforts.



## 49 Post web videos on YouTube

### How it works:

YouTube provides a free service for posting videos online. You can link to, or embed, these videos in your campaign or union website.

### What it takes:

Making your own videos to post on YouTube isn’t hard, and your videos don’t need slick production values. All you need is a digital video camera, some editing tools and a computer with Internet access. Often, one or more of your members may already know how to make simple videos, so you might have some member talent to draw on here.

### How it helps your union:

YouTube is a great way to bring your issue to life—engaging members and documenting events.



## 50 Twitter

### How it works:

Twitter is a “micro-blogging” tool on which you can send out updates and messages to key audiences.

### What it takes:

Sign up at Twitter.com. Keep in mind that Twitter limits you to 140-character updates, but aim for 100-120 to allow comments in “re-tweets.”

#### How it helps your union:

Twitter is a great way to:

- Reach your members and influential people.
- Instantly communicate with key audiences and to activate members quickly and build relationships with them.
- Have a vehicle for listening to what people are saying.
- Get feedback. Wondering if you should push a certain position? Throw the question out to your Twitter peeps and you’ll hear loud and clear.
- Be a leader. Twitter gives you the opportunity to position yourself as a leader and opinion-maker in an unfiltered way.
- Make news. You should follow on Twitter (and engage) all reporters who cover you. Want to get a quote out there without having to deal with pesky follow-up questions and getting sidetracked with issues you don’t want to talk about? Tweet it to reporters and other media.



### Run Facebook advertisements

#### How it works:

More than 500 million people are on Facebook. Most of these individuals have completed profiles indicating their interests and hobbies. You can buy advertisements that are targeted toward Facebook users based on these interests and geographical locations. For example, the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers bought ad placements targeting all residents of Minneapolis who indicated that they have an interest in either politics or education.

#### What it takes:

Facebook advertisements are easy, and they are inexpensive. You can pay either by impression (you pay each time an ad is displayed on a Facebook user’s page) or by “click through” (you pay when someone clicks on an ad).

- Facebook ads are limited to a small graphic, a 25-character headline and 132 characters of ad text.
- To get started, go to: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)
- Depending on the market, the cost of a Facebook ad campaign can run from a few hundred dollars to upwards of \$1,000 a week.

AFT’s communications department can help you develop your ad.

#### How it helps your union:

Facebook allows you to target your audience very specifically, and it can be extremely effective in reaching a targeted audience.

Facebook advertising is most often used when targeted to your audiences as an effort to drive them to a campaign website for additional information.



### Run Google advertisements

#### How it works:

You’ve seen the ads—you type a search word into Google and, in addition to the search results, a series of advertisements runs down the right side of the screen.

#### What it takes:

Google advertisements work by allowing you to tie your advertisement to specific key words people are using in searches on Google.

As with Facebook ads, you can choose to buy ads based on impressions (you pay each time an ad is displayed on a Facebook user’s page) or by “click through” (you pay when someone clicks on an ad).

Google ads can be text only, banners and videos. Unlike Facebook, Google ads are a bit more challenging to set up.

Google ads have other restrictions: There is a 25 characters limit on headlines; ads must be two lines of text, limited to 35 characters per line; and the third line of your ad should be a Web link.

AFT’s communications department can help you develop your ad.

#### How it helps your union:

Depending on the campaign, costs for Google text ads are only slightly more than Facebook ads. Banner and video ads are more expensive.

Google ads can be cost-effective in reaching a targeted segment of the population and providing those people an opportunity to click through to your campaign site for additional information.



## Run online banner advertisements

### How it works:

In addition to Google, your area's media outlets (such as your local newspaper's online edition) likely have websites that accept advertisements. There may also be a number of local blogs and other political websites that accept ads.

If your union is trying to reach targeted groups within your community, online banner advertisements are definitely worth checking out.

### What it takes:

The cost of banner advertisements varies greatly, depending on the audience reach and the quality of the website or blog.

AFT's communications department can help you develop your ad.

### How it helps your union:

Banner ads are useful for building name or campaign awareness. They are not always targeted, and click-through rates usually are not very high. Often, banner ads can be negotiated as part of an overall buy with local media outlets.



## Run transit advertisements

### How it works:

Transit advertisements are ads placed outside or inside buses or subways, at bus stop shelters, on taxi tops, etc.

### What it takes:

A month's cost of transit ads will generally run:

- In a large market:.....\$25,000 – \$30,000
- In a medium-sized market:..... \$10,000 - \$15,000

You'll also want to add on production costs, which vary.

AFT's communications department can help you develop your ad.

### How it helps your union:

Transit ads reach a wide audience, and can be very effective in urban areas, where people use mass transit in greater numbers.



## Try outdoor advertisements

### How it works:

Outdoor advertisements are simply standard or electronic billboards, with a run time of four-six continuous weeks.

### What it takes:

Production time for outdoor advertisements is generally about two weeks for traditional billboard (non-digital/non-electronic) ads and one week for digital/electronic ads. The cost for billboard ads general falls in the range of:

- Digital/electronic ads:.....\$2,000 – \$3,000
- Traditional ad:.....\$3,000 – \$5,000

AFT's communications department can help you develop your ad.

For outdoor advertising, you'll want to book space as far in advance as possible to ensure a good location. Location is the key to reaching your target audience with a billboard ad. The cost can go up significantly for a prime location. Finding the right concept for your billboard ad is important. You want a simple and clear message and a "grabbing" image that people can "get" very quickly as they drive by.

### How it helps your union:

If you strategically place your billboard ad, it can reach the right audience and even garner media attention. For example, do you want to draw attention to an unfair employer? Think about a location near the company headquarters or near the work site where you are trying to organize or to win a fair contract. (But you'll want to remember that, in confrontational situations such as tough negotiations or a divisive piece of legislation, a billboard ad is a very public, high-stakes tactic—so you might want to save it for times when lower-key efforts aren't enough.)

And keep in mind that location is vital—sometimes more important than your ad's sheer reach in numbers. In other words, billboard ads' effectiveness depends as much on which people (key legislators, corporate management) see the ad as on how many people see the ad (you don't need your whole city's rush hour driving population to see it). You can try to get media coverage for your billboard ad, too. For example, you can issue a quick press release or media advisory a day or two before the billboard goes up. A billboard makes for a great TV visual or newspaper photo.



## Consider print advertisements

### How it works:

Print advertisements can be placed in daily, weekly or other community newspapers.

### What it takes:

**Money**—Newspaper advertisements are generally considered to be very expensive. However, in recent years, the costs have become lower due to decreases in print newspaper readership. Print ads usually run in quarter-page, half-page and full-page sizes. In general, the estimated cost for a half-page print ad in color will be about:

- Large media market:.....\$10,000 – \$30,000
- Medium-sized media market:.....\$5,000 – \$15,000
- Small market:.....\$500 – \$3,000
- Top 10 media markets:.....\$30,000 - \$50,000

**Creatives**—If you decide to place a newspaper advertisement, you will need to create ad copy and art.

AFT's communications department can help you develop your ad.

### How it helps your union:

Is a newspaper advertisement worth the cost? There is a great deal of debate about this question. In general, newspaper advertisements are an expense you'll want to think about carefully. However, if you are in a major fight with your employer or in a significant legislative battle, a half-page or full-page advertisement will get employers' and politicians' attention. Newspaper advertisements usually catch your members' attention as well. (Often, locals that do take out advertisements will post copies of the ad on their union's bulletin boards.) Finally, a newspaper ad can be a great way to enlist and highlight the support of community leaders. For example, your ad can be in the format of an open letter or a "call for justice" that community leaders can sign on to (you'll want to get their specific permission to have their signatures used in an ad).

Advertisements also can be repurposed by posting them on websites or turning them into fliers. As is often done with the "open letter" concept above, you can greatly increase the size of the ad and paste the blowup on a foam-board display that can be used as a visual for media/public events. (Your printer or a local copy shop can mount your ad on a foam board.)

Newspaper advertisements should not stand alone. They should be part of a broader media strategy and should be used to draw people to other aspects of your campaign.



## Run radio advertisements

### How it works:

You purchase radio ads to run at certain times of day on a particular station (or on a group of stations under the same ownership). Radio advertising reps can advise you on the demographics of their stations' particular listeners, and can tailor the "radio buy" to your budget by customizing the times of day your ad will run, and the frequency with which it will run. (For example, "drive time," or morning and evening rush hour, can be a more expensive time slot, so you may get more bang for your buck by spending less and having your ad run at less popular, but still listened-to, times. Consider your audience—including your key decision-makers—and think about what times they will hear your ad.)

### What it takes:

Radio can be very expensive. In general, a week's worth of radio can cost:

- Large media market.....\$15,000 – \$20,000
- Medium-sized media market.....\$8,000 – \$15,000
- Small media market.....\$2,000 – \$5,000

In addition, a professional production of a 60-second spot can cost \$4,500.

AFT's communications department can help you develop your ad.

### How it helps your union:

Radio audiences have been declining over the years, especially with the increase in popularity of iPods and other similar devices.

However, if your union needs to make a big splash in a short amount of time, you may want to consider radio advertising. You also can use radio ads in repurposed ways: You can send your radio ad out virally, post it on YouTube, and put it on your union's phone "hold message." In other words, once you've produced a good radio spot, there are many ways to use it. As with newspaper ads, radio spots raise the visibility of your campaign and can be targeted to reach key decision-makers and show your members you are fighting for them.

## 58 Try television advertisements

### How it works:

Your union can buy television ads to run on a wide variety of stations, from your local cable station to the evening news on the big network affiliates in your area. But TV ads cost a lot to air—and to produce in the first place.

### What it takes:

For the overwhelming majority of local unions and state federations, TV advertisements are prohibitively expensive. A week's worth of TV advertising can run at the costs below, depending on the market:

- Large market.....\$15,000 –\$ 60,000
- Medium-sized market.....\$10,000 – \$40,000
- Small market.....\$5,000 –\$ 20,000

This pricing does not include production costs, which can easily run more than \$15,000 per spot.

AFT's communications department can help you develop your ad.

### How it helps your union:

Like newspapers, radio and other traditional media, t.v. audiences have been declining in recent years. Also, with the increasing use of DVRs, more and more TV viewers are skipping through the commercials. Given all the other ways there are to get your message out and increase your visibility (including through social media), television simply may not be the best choice for your communications dollar.

That said, if your union needs to make a big impact in a short amount of time—and you have a lot of money to spend—TV may be an option.

## 59 Arrange media interviews

### How it works:

The media are as interested in telling a story as you are in having your story told. The challenge is to generate their interest and to do all you can to make sure the resulting coverage reflects your message points. Sitting down with reporters, or talking with them on the phone, to tell your side of an issue is one of the best ways to get your message out.

### What it takes:

*Message*—Before you arrange any media interviews, make sure you have honed your message to a few key points and that you stay on message!

*Messenger*—Decide who the best person is to carry your union's message. Often, that is not the local's president but, instead, a rank-and-file member who can share his or her personal story.

*Media outreach*—Reach out to the media. Look for opportunities to build relationships, and for opportunities to make news. Find ways to hook your union's stories and messages to issues that already are in the news. And find ways to have your message pack an emotional punch; look for the stories your union can tell that will move and intrigue reporters.

### How it helps your union:

A great article or interview is worth all the effort you put into it. A good article can define your issue for the public in ways that are favorable to the union and express your values. It also can help call into question the positions or motivations of your opponents. Don't be discouraged if you reach out to specific reporters or news editors a few times and they say no. If you present the media with well-thought-out pitches and quality stories, eventually you'll get more of the story you want, covered the way you had hoped for—and the ongoing relationships you build with the media will serve your union well in times of crisis.





## Write letters to the editor

### How it works:

Most newspapers accept readers' comments on articles as letters to the editor. Many unions have found it effective to ask members to write these letters, particularly when there is an important issue being debated that affects your members or the people they serve.

### What it takes:

It's usually best to identify a small number of members to submit the letters to the editor; you should work with them on drafting their letters. Newspapers often edit letters for length. Letters to the editor are especially appropriate when the newspaper has just covered something about your union or an issue that is relevant to your union and your members' work. A letter to the editor, ideally, should not be more than a few paragraphs; try not to exceed 250 words.

### How it helps your union:

A surprising number of people read the letters to the editor. This is particularly true of reporters and community leaders.



## Find the right people—the ones with most moving stories to tell

### How it works:

Who is the best spokesperson for your union on a particular issue? Media outlets want to put a human face on issues by focusing on people who are directly affected by developments, such as attacks on the labor movement, criticism of public schools, sweeping new legislation or tough contract negotiations. This principle doesn't apply just to media outreach. Your members, telling their stories, are also some of the best people to carry the union's message to community and advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, policymakers and other potential allies. There are very few people who aren't persuaded by a personal story that is well told and connects emotionally.

A big part of your media strategy should be helping the media identify and talk to members who have personal stories to tell about the issues that affect your union and the people in it. For example, if a reporter is doing a news story about attacks on union health benefits, you could guide that reporter to a member who has

a health concern and relies on having decent healthcare coverage, or to one who cares for a family member with a serious health problem. That sort of interview puts a human face on the need for quality, affordable health insurance. Another example: Many political and media figures are attacking teachers (and their unions) these days, and reporters will often come to your union for a response. That's when, in addition to making the union's larger policy points, you also can set up media interviews with a few of your many teacher members who work their hearts out and go the extra mile for their students.

### What it takes:

How do you find members with good stories to share? You probably know some of these members already. One great way to find them is to put the word out to your executive committee, stewards and building representatives about the kind of story you're looking for regarding a specific issue or situation.

It helps to prepare for interview requests in advance, rather than search for the right people with the right stories when a reporter on deadline is asking for them. For example, let's say your union is a healthcare local, and contract negotiations are coming up that will center on nurse-patient staffing ratios. Certainly, you'll want to have a few points of research data to give reporters and community allies about the way safe and adequate staffing affects both the quality of care and patient outcomes. But you'll also want to identify in advance a few members who have moving, firsthand stories to tell about the difference adequate staffing makes for their patients.

Your members can be your best spokespersons, but they need to be prepared. You'll want them to tell their stories in a relaxed, natural way, but you'll also want to work with them to make sure they understand the union's main message points and some basic tips for working with the media. More information about preparing your members for media interviews can be found on LeaderNet ([http://leadernet.aft.org/leading\\_your\\_local/press/](http://leadernet.aft.org/leading_your_local/press/)) under the "Working with the Media" tab.

### How it helps your union:

Audiences relate first and foremost to human stories, not abstract concepts—that's why the media so often use human interest stories. A good story, told from the heart, can make a tremendous difference. It puts a human face on the issues and on the union, making it much harder for your opponents and critics to demonize the union and your members, or portray unions as "the other." Telling your stories is a way to present union members in their true light—as real people just trying to do the best job they can, often with extraordinary dedication. Telling these stories shows just how much your members contrib-

ute to their communities and the economy. To sum it up: Members are the best witnesses for our unions and our professions, the best way for your union and our labor movement to move and persuade people.

And, once you find a member with a moving story to tell, you can repurpose that story in many ways, with the member's permission. Use it on fliers. Feature it on your website. Use it in letters to politicians and other decision-makers. Stories persuade, move and motivate audiences—from your mayor to your own members. Find the people with those stories, and your effort will be rewarded many times over.



## Write and place op eds

### How it works:

Most newspapers accept guest op-ed pieces from leaders and members of the community on issues of concern or interest to their readers.

### What it takes:

If you want to do a guest op-ed, contact the newspaper's opinion page editor to see if he or she is interested in your topic before writing your article. For space reasons, most op-eds should be limited to 800-1,000 words; your newspaper's opinion page editor can often give you a ballpark length.

Pitching an op-ed is a lot like pitching a news story. You have a better chance of placing your op-ed if it:

- Relates to an issue that is already "hot" in the news (such as your state's budget challenges or your district's closing of a beloved neighborhood school).
- Focuses on a topic the newspaper has written about, preferably recently. This can be a breaking news development (such as a layoff announcement by your district); a continuing story (such as ongoing workplace safety violations at a company whose employees your union represents); or an ongoing policy or political issue (your state's governor has an agenda to limit the bargaining power of public employees).
- It helps your chances of placement to refer specifically in your op-ed to an article or editorial the newspaper has recently run regarding the topic you're writing about.
- Sometimes you can ask an ally to "guest write" an op-ed supporting your union's position, if you feel the writer and his/her organization will lend your position credibility and moral authority. Faith leaders, for example, can be powerful voices for your union's position.
- You often don't have any control over what headline

the newspaper will put on your op-ed. Suggesting a title is a great idea; just be aware that it may change in the printed version.

### How it helps your union:

Placing an op-ed is an effective way to get your union's message and positions out to your community and its key decision-makers. The editorial pages are read by most community leaders and politicians.

An op-ed gets your message out in a clear, direct and, most often, unfiltered way that is not subject to any media distortion or misunderstanding.



## Start blogging

### How it works:

A blog (the name is a contraction of "Web log") is an on-line journal that allows its writer or writers to reflect on and share opinions about various topics; the blog's readers in turn can comment on the posts. A blog post can be used to break news or react quickly to breaking news. A blog post can include text, videos or photos. It frequently includes Internet links to news stories, research data, or coverage of the topic at hand on other websites and blogs.

Blogs have proliferated in recent years, with topics ranging from cooking to politics. If your members are reading blogs and blogging, being part of the "blogosphere" is one more great way to get your union's message out and keep your members and allies informed and engaged.

### What it takes:

While your union has the option to create your own blog, you'll find a wider audience by becoming a regular contributor to existing blogs targeted to community groups and leaders in your area, or to a blog that is focused on particular issues, such as education funding or patients' rights. Watch for other blog postings that are relevant to your union and comment on those.

### How it helps your union:

Blogging is a terrific tool your union can use to get your message and positions across to members, allies, your community and key decision-makers. Blogs are an immediate, engaging way to reach out to people. Blogging lets you respond quickly to events in "real time."



## Have a postcard- or letter-writing party

### How it works:

This technique is tried, true and simple. Many local unions ask their members to write personalized postcards or letters to decision-makers or colleagues on important issues, from voting for a particular candidate to supporting the union in contract negotiations. Letter-writing or postcard campaigns are often carried out by getting members together for a postcard- or letter-writing party.

### What it takes:

- Secure volunteers to write the post cards or letters;
- Develop a target list of addresses for recipients of the letters;
- Provide writing materials and postage; and
- Provide your member-volunteers with suggested talking points for their letters or postcards, while encouraging them to customize their message.

### How it helps your union:

Personalized letters or postcards can be very effective, depending on the issue and the target audience. A postcard- or letter-writing campaign is also an easy way to involve members.



## Hold a news conference

### How it works:

News conferences often are used to make important announcements. However, with newspaper staffs stretched thin these days, and more and more stories being written based on phone interviews, it can be challenging to get reporters to attend a news conference. That's why you'll want to save news conferences for major announcements and significant campaign efforts—the times when you have big news to offer, or when your union's issues are hot, or play into hot news topics.

### What it takes:

Putting together a news conference is relatively easy. It involves:

- *Selecting a place for the event*—usually a meeting room at your union's hall or office, a meeting room at a hotel, or a meeting room borrowed from a community ally who has suitable facilities

■ *Thinking about what makes your news conference newsworthy*—Are you announcing major news, such as a contract settlement or a legislative push on a prevailing wage bill? Do you have new information on a topic of interest to your community—for example, is your union releasing a new report on crumbling school buildings in your district? Do you have a high-profile speaker to offer? Can you provide members who can tell human interest stories? Is your news conference “hooked” into a larger news event—a presidential candidate's visit to your town, or a budget crisis in your state? All of these enhance the news value of your press conference.

■ *Sending a media advisory*—(preferably by e-mail to a targeted list of reporters and assignment editors at newspapers, radio and TV stations). The advisory is simply a brief announcement that invites the media to the event. In your advisory, highlight the news value (or “news hook”) of your press conference with a “grabbing” headline and a one-paragraph pitch, followed by the logistical “who, what, when, where, and why” details. You should send the media advisory out a few days before your news conference, but you'll want to resend it the day before, since news assignment desks often can't make final decisions about what they'll cover until the day before—sometimes even the day of—an event. It's a good idea to follow up with phone calls to pitch the event to assignment editors and reporters.

■ *Selecting spokespeople for your press conference*—Think about adding “celebrity headliner” speakers to your speaker list to increase your press conference's news value and up the chances that reporters will come. For example, if your union is supporting a new bill that is being introduced in your state legislature, ask if the bill's sponsors will agree to speak briefly at your news conference. Your community allies also can be a source of good, newsworthy speakers. (You'll want to give your guest speakers key suggested message points to help them prepare their remarks.)

■ *Developing your message and talking points*—Imagine the story you'd like to see written after your press conference. Then tailor your message and talking points to that story. Remember to prepare and use some “sound bytes”—quotable quotes that sum up your points in powerful or catchy ways.

### How it helps your union:

The effectiveness of a news conference is directly proportional to the reporter turnout you get. If the issue or subject of the news conference is important enough—and if you conceptualize and pitch your conference to highlight its news value—you have the opportunity to get significant media coverage.





## Produce an informative, engaging membership newsletter

### How it works:

Most local unions have newsletters to keep members informed and updated. A truly good union newsletter also educates members about the union's issues, tells members how the union is fighting for them and lets members know that the union's work is vital—and encourages them to get involved.

### What it takes:

For many locals, newsletters can be a challenge to produce. They require a point person with the skills to write and design the newsletter, and the time to do it. Printing the newsletter can be costly, although one way to cut down on cost is to do an electronic newsletter. Don't worry if you can't afford a splashy newsletter. It's not so much the slick design or fancy paper your newsletter is printed on that makes it a valuable tool. It's the way it engages, informs, persuades and involves your members.

### How it helps your union:

It is hard to judge the effectiveness of union newsletters; you should ask your members for their input and views on the newsletter. Writing and producing the newsletter is a way to get members involved—you can even start a newsletter committee to build your newsletter "staff" and make your newsletter the best it can be.

Union newsletters that are clearly focused on issues of concern to members tend to be read far more than those that simply report union activities and events (without connecting them to issues in the work site). In every issue of your newsletter, you want to show members that their union cares about what they care about and that the union is doing important work to address their concerns on those issues. Reporting on member's own stories is a great way to illustrate these core messages.

Newsletters that are handed out by work-site leaders also are more effective than those that are mailed. The reason is that handing them out creates an opportunity for a conversation between the member and the work-site leader or building representative who is distributing the newsletter.



## 'Robo call' your members

### How it works:

Everyone knows what a robo call is. The phone rings, you pick it up, then hear a recorded message from your congressional representative or a nationally known politician endorsing a candidate for office. Robo calls can come from any organization or leader, with any message—including from your union.

### What it takes:

Robo calls aren't difficult to record and send out. Here's what you'll need:

- *A list of your members' home phone numbers*—Most local unions have this information. However, be aware that many members, especially younger ones, don't have land lines, and robo calls cannot be made to cell phones. The AFT can provide help in matching your members' names and addresses to current land-line phone numbers. For more information on this, contact your regional director.
- *A robo calling service*—Many state AFL-CIOs and local Central Labor Councils can provide robo call services.

### When creating a robo call, make sure to:

- Quickly identify that it is the union calling.
- Get to the issue right away.
- Be clear about the "ask."
- Keep it short.

### How it helps your union:

Robo calls can be very effective, especially when used as a reminder or "head's up" about an event. For example, if you are planning on sending out an important e-mail and want to increase the likelihood that members will open it, you may want to consider doing a robo call the day before to alert them to watch for the e-mail. Or maybe your local is supporting candidates in a school board election (a typically low-turnout election). Reminding members to vote by robo calling them the day before the election can make a significant difference. Robo calls also can be used to remind members about rallies and other events.



## Make the most of your union bulletin board

### How it works:

Use your union bulletin boards to place posters, work-site leaflets, newsletters and other communications to members. Bulletin boards may seem a little old-fashioned, but they work. They raise your union's visibility and create a reliable place for members and potential members to get union information.

If you have bulletin boards available at the worksite, use them.

### What it takes:

Keeping your union bulletin boards fresh and engaging isn't tough. Provide work-site leaders with fresh material for the bulletin boards at the beginning of every month (more often if you can), and ask them to take down old and irrelevant postings.

Making posters for the boards is inexpensive and effective. The posters can be light on text, focused on a graphic or a Web address where members/potential members can get more information about a union effort/campaign.

### How it helps your union:

Bulletin boards are a good way to raise your union's visibility in the workplace. If you try to keep your bulletin board updated and relevant, members will check it and appreciate it. Create pieces (posters) for the boards, assist your work-site leaders in maintaining the boards (by giving them material), and use the boards to redirect members/potential members to other more extensive union communication sites (such as your union's website or e-mails to members, etc).



## Launch a website for your union

### How it works:

Members have come to expect that their union will have a website where they can go to contact the union and to acquire information.

### What it takes:

The easiest way to create a website for your union is through the AFT StateWeb program. StateWeb is a simple-to-use application for creating and maintaining

websites. More information on StateWeb can be found at: <http://leadernet.aft.org/communicating/webmasters/index.cfm>.

Creating your website takes an investment in time and thought. You want it to be more than just a list of union leaders, staff, committees and contact information, as important as that material is. Your website is the place to highlight your union's main issues and campaigns. It's a way to get your key messages across. And it's a way to mobilize your members, from increasing turnout on Election Day, to asking for their input in an online member survey, to launching online petition campaigns.

A website involves a true commitment of time and energy to write, update and administer the site. It can't be just a side duty for your existing communications person or team. You may want to check among your staff, leaders and members for people with expertise in website creation and development, and with writing and Web design skills.

### How it helps your union:

In the Internet Age, more and more people go to an organization's website as their first stop for getting information and learning more about that organization's mission and activities. That's one reason why more than 400 local affiliates now use AFT StateWeb. Your union doesn't have to have a website to implement an effective communications program, but it sure helps. If your union doesn't have a website, consider launching one. Your website can be as simple or sophisticated as your resources permit, and you can build on its effectiveness and uses—one step at a time.



## Use a toll-free phone number to keep your members updated

### How it works:

An toll-free number (often an 800 area code) can provide an easy way for your members to get an up-to-date recorded message on the status of a major effort, such as a contract campaign fight.

### What it takes:

Your local telephone provider should be able to set you up with a toll-free number and the necessary equipment.

### How it helps your union:

In the age of Twitter, Facebook, e-mails and websites, toll-free telephone numbers are probably not the most effective way to reach members with breaking updates. However, you may want to consider this tactic as part of

an overall communications program during a fight around a major issue, such as winning a fair contract or fighting a legislative attempt to curtail collective bargaining rights.

## **Create a community outreach committee**

### **How it works:**

Your union appoints a small committee to: (a) identify important individuals and groups in the community that could be strategic allies in your efforts and initiatives, and (b) develop and implement plans for reaching out to these groups and individuals to build long-term relationships.

### **What it takes:**

Make sure that key constituency groups in your local are represented on the committee to ensure the broad support and participation of your membership. When recruiting, it's often best to identify people within your union who are already active in the community.

### **How it helps your union:**

Gaining community support has become increasingly important in union campaigns, whether we're organizing new members, fighting for funding or trying to win a fair contract. A standing committee able to coordinate community outreach and involvement, build strong community coalitions and forge personal relationships with key community members is enormously helpful.

## **Do a community power analysis**

### **How it works:**

To guide your outreach work, you will need to analyze the community in which your union operates. You'll want to determine who has influence and credibility, who has values compatible with your own and whose interests line up with yours in vital areas. When it comes to common values and interests, consider looking beyond the obvious or usual allies. For example, if your governor or school board is proposing budget cuts, parent groups would be a natural ally in fighting cuts. But so might be your chamber of commerce or realtors association—because school funding cuts affect school quality and thus a community's reputation and property values.

### **What it takes:**

With the assistance of your community outreach committee, you should do a careful review of potential community allies. Although you may select these allies based on your key issues, there always are some groups and individuals that it will be great to get on board. You should consider a range of community leaders and organizations:

- Politicians, including elected and appointed leaders in your town government and mayor, your school board, your state legislature and its committees, your governor's office and your congressional representatives;
- Parents' groups, from the PTAs/PTOs to special education parents' groups;
- Advocacy groups, ranging from civil rights organizations to environmental groups to healthcare organizations;
- Student groups, including groups from your local colleges and universities (students are often excellent allies with time, ideas and enthusiasm for social justice causes, including labor and education issues);
- Faith organizations, which can be powerful allies and advocates (religious leaders can be highly credible and effective spokespeople for your issue with the press);
- Other unions and union organizations, ranging from unions represented within the schools, higher education system, local government or hospital where your union represents members, to the unions in your Central Labor Council;
- Local businesses and business groups, from major area employers to the Chamber of Commerce and local and state realtors associations;
- The media and other opinion makers, from your town newspaper to popular blogs; and
- Any other significant forces in your broader community.

### **How it helps your union:**

A community power analysis is an essential tool in helping you make efficient choices about which community organizations and people to approach first (depending on your key issues and initiatives) and in prioritizing limited resources. But it's more than that: You may discover, in reviewing your community's organizations and power players, that you come up with potential allies and coalition partners you didn't expect to find. Surveying your members (see Idea #3) about their existing community ties and activism can be helpful in this area—and so can a simple brainstorming session.



## Survey your members about their current community ties and activities

### How it works:

Use a simple survey to identify the community organizations in which your members already are active.

### What it takes:

Develop a membership survey and distribute it to members through your work-site leaders (such as your building representatives and stewards). You'll need to educate work-site leaders on the importance of this activity and provide them with talking points that explain to members why you are asking for this information and how it matters.

### How it helps your union:

The survey can help identify members who can provide the union with links to community groups. You may be surprised by the number of connections to your community the union already has, through your members. Taking the time to survey members is a good investment in the success of your community outreach program—after all, it's far more effective to approach a potential community ally through a person who is active in that organization, someone the ally already knows and trusts.



## Stage a 'flash mob'

### How it works:

Flash mobs are gatherings of individuals for a specific purpose and focus. Generally mobilized through new media (e-mails, text messages, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), they invite friends to spread the word that members of the community are going to show up at a particular place for a limited amount of time for a specific action.

### What it takes:

Flash mobs take less intense planning than do rallies. You'll need several people to e-mail information to their networks of friends asking them in turn spread the word to their own networks. You'll also need to prepare signs if it's a protest. Finally, make sure you're prepared to document the event and post information and report about it online (for example, on YouTube and other social media sites).

### How it helps your union:

The flash-mob tactic is great for mobilizing particular segments of your community to make a specific statement. Flash mobs have been used for everything from having protesters meet in front of their local Wal-Mart for a noontime demonstration to denounce working conditions, to having people show up in Washington, D.C., for a neighborhood snowball fight.



## Launch a petition drive

### How it works:

A petition drive is an organized effort to gather signatures from the public in support of an issue, usually requesting action from elected leaders, business owners or other decision-makers. These days, petition drives can be launched online or in person. If you're interested in initiating an online petition, the AFT communications department can help.

### What it takes:

Thinking through your messaging and strategy on petition drives is key. Petition drives usually make a specific request (asking the legislature to pass a certain bill, or a company to reform its sweatshop practices in measurable ways). You'll also want to think about how you want to collect and manage your petition signatures. It's better to have signatures on paper petitions gathered within your control, for example, than to have postcards or paper petitions sent directly to the recipient. When you control the presentation of hard-copy signatures, you get to decide when and how to present them, and how many signatures make a significant statement. Online petition campaigns have their own advantages and pitfalls: It's easy to measure participation, but if too few online petitions are sent to recipients, it can signal weakness to decision-makers.

### You'll need:

- Language for the petition, with a clear message to decision-makers and a request for them to take specific action;
- A system for training volunteers to collect signatures and deliver them to the union;
- A system for counting the signatures and developing a database of names and contact information for future mobilization efforts;
- A strategy for delivering the signed issue-specific petitions to the decision-maker(s)—school board members,

your mayor, governor, etc.; and

- A media outreach strategy and message for the petition presentation (you can also send out a news release when you launch your petition campaign).

#### **How it helps your union:**

Petition drives are very effective for demonstrating community support for an issue. They are easy “asks” of stakeholders, allies and activists; they’re also a good way to involve new community groups and engage members. Consideration should be given to the time frame of the petition drive and to whether enough signatures can be gathered within that time span to send a strong signal.

## **76 Convene a roundtable discussion**

#### **How it works:**

Roundtables are informal gatherings of key leaders to meet and discuss issues of common concern—on education, healthcare or public policy, for example—based on the priorities of your members.

#### **What it takes:**

To hold a roundtable, you’ll need:

- Personal (oral and written) invitations to key leaders;
- A meeting agenda and a meeting space;
- A good facilitator;
- Any research materials or background you want to present and have participants take with them;
- Refreshments; and
- Follow-up after the meeting.

#### **How it helps your union:**

Roundtables are excellent for keeping key leaders and decision-makers informed about issues that are important to your union and your members. Framing the issues for leaders and giving them background ensures that they will be knowledgeable on the topic when action is needed. This tactic also helps the union build personal relationships with leaders. It’s harder for your opponents to demonize or misportray you to decision-makers when you have met the decision-makers and briefed them on why your union takes the position it does.

## **77 Have a community drive**

#### **How it works:**

For a community drive, your union asks members to donate items that are needed by a specific segment of the community. For example, your union could hold a community winter coat drive, or have a toy drive for the holidays.

#### **What it takes:**

- Advance planning
- Notification of drive to members
- Drop-off site for items
- Volunteers to sort and package items
- Identification of an organization to partner with to distribute.

#### **How it helps your union:**

A community drive is a very successful activity for partnering with homeless shelters, women’s shelters and the faith community, among other possible partners. When your union gives back to the community, it builds good will and shows the caring, involved face of your union and your members.

## **78 Send VIP mailings**

#### **How it works:**

A VIP mailing allows your union to identify local opinion leaders and to make your case directly to them through the mail.

#### **What it takes:**

Most VIP mailing programs involve sending post cards to key policymakers and decision-makers; the cards feature members telling their stories about the value of the work they do. Finding members willing to participate is usually not difficult. Members are rightly proud of their work and understand the importance of their jobs. The toughest part, however, is building a VIP mailing list of influential individuals and organizations in your community. Sometimes your local Central Labor Council already will have a VIP list, so start by checking with your CLC. If it doesn’t have such a list, you may have to build your own.



**How it helps your union:**

VIP mailings take your message directly to the people having the greatest sway in public decision-making.



## Have a back-to-school drive

**How it works:**

In a back-to-school drive, your union collects items that students or teachers can use in the classroom.

**What it takes:**

The easy thing about a back-to-school drive is that your own members already will have an excellent sense of what supplies and materials are needed. To hold a drive, you'll need:

- Advance planning, including volunteers or a committee to plan and carry out the drive;
- Ways to notify your members and community about the drive;
- A drop-off site for items;
- Volunteers to sort and package items;
- Identification of organizations to partner with, if you so choose, including any that can help you distribute the donated items; and
- Volunteers to collect contact information from donors and recipients to enter into a database for future community mobilization.

**How it helps your union:**

This is a very successful activity for supporting students, parents, teachers, school staff and the schools themselves. It's a morale booster for your members and the students and families they serve, as well as a way to make a positive connection with schools and school administrators.



## Host a briefing session

**How it works:**

A briefing session is an ad hoc meeting held by your union to brief leaders and decision-makers on a specific issue or situation in advance (for example, contract negotiations, safe staffing or the importance of public employees' work), so that these individuals are knowledgeable about the union's position and the reasons behind it, and prepared to act if needed.

**What it takes:**

A briefing session isn't a tough lift logistically, but you will want to reach out to your invitees to make sure they come to the session. You'll also want to plan your invitation list and include the relevant policymakers and decision-makers for your issue. To host a briefing session, you'll need:

- A list of leaders;
- Briefing materials, including easy-to-digest research and talking points that support your position;
- Personal and written invitations to the briefing;
- Volunteers (preferably your union's leaders) to follow up after the event; and
- A meeting space and refreshments.

**How it helps your union:**

Briefing sessions are an excellent way to keep key leaders informed about union issues so that they are knowledgeable and can take action quickly if necessary. It helps the union build personal relationships with leaders.



## Show your union's spending power

**How it works:**

Distribute stickers to members that they can affix to the paper money they spend at community businesses. The sticker can say something like "I'm a member of the AFT supporting your business."

**You'll need:**

- A timeline for the sticker effort, after you strategically determine the best time frame for the campaign to have an impact (for example, at the holidays or during the back-to-school weeks). Some unions also use "labor dollars"—these are clearly "pretend" bills given to businesses at the time of purchase to indicate that union members' cash is being spent at local businesses;
- A system for distributing the stickers to your members;
- A flier explaining to members why this effort is important;
- Printed stickers (you can run them off on your workplace printer, or get your regular printer to make simple stickers for you).

**How it helps your union:**

This simple idea is effective in two ways: It's a great way for members to demonstrate that they are part of the union. And it's a great way for the community to un-

derstand the financial impact union members have—especially if your members do not live in the communities where they work.

## **82 Invite community leaders to a union meeting**

### **How it works:**

Inviting community leaders who are potential or current allies to one of your union meetings can help build a relationship that is mutually beneficial. It's a way to support the issues of your guest's organization, and help community leaders and activists get to know the terrific people who belong to your union. It's also a great way to identify members who are interested in the work of your guest's organization. Those members can then become your link to that community organization.

### **What it takes:**

You'll want to think carefully about which community leaders you want at a meeting. You can invite clear allies and partners. You also can invite guests who aren't on board with your union on the issues, if you think it might help your union's position for that guest to hear from your members; if that's the case, you may want to invite those guests to attend only the part of a meeting when a specific topic or agenda is being presented.

### **You'll need:**

- A personal invitation to the invited community leader; and
- A decision on whether to list the leader on your agenda. Depending on the politics of the situation, you can put guests' names on the agenda or just invite them to the stage for brief comments. You also can allow your invited leader to distribute information/fliers about his or her organization.

### **How it helps your union:**

This tactic is very effective if the issue the community leader wants to address is something that members are interested in and will support. It might not be a good idea if the issue is controversial—you'll want to think about it carefully and decide if the pros outweigh the cons.

## **83 Attend other organizations' events**

### **How it works:**

Your union's leaders and members attend regularly scheduled meetings or gatherings of other organizations, or attend meetings called on specific issues, such as school funding or cuts in healthcare services. You can ask to deliver brief remarks and for permission to distribute basic information.

### **Here's what you'll need to do:**

Ask the other organization's leader if you can attend the meeting or gathering.

Then prepare materials that are appropriate for the audience. For example, if you're attending a meeting of a group of parents, you might want to pass out fliers that focus on how your union and your issues affect learning and school conditions—and you'll want to leave out any union "inside jargon." If you're attending a meeting in which some participants are likely to speak a language other than English, it's courteous and helpful to have your materials prepared in that language. You'll just want to think about the primary concerns of the group whose meeting you're attending, and then tailor your remarks and information to how your union's work and positions relate to those concerns.

### **How it helps your union:**

This is a simple, very good way to build good will; increase the union's visibility; learn about the issues, concerns and needs of the community organization you're visiting that the union might be able to support; and identify existing or potential supporters of the union within that organization.

## **84 Offer to speak at and have members attend events hosted by others**

### **How it works:**

You simply need to personally contact the leader of an event (such as a rally, media event or meeting) being held by one of your community or labor partners (or potential partners) and offer to demonstrate the union's support of their issues. You can offer one of your leaders or activists as a speaker. You also can offer to send a delegation of members to increase turnout at the event.

**What it takes:**

A personal request to the organization whose event you want to attend.

**How it helps your union:**

Being present for your community allies at their key events and activities builds a sense of solidarity between those organizations and your union, and between the larger community and your union. Being present at other community groups' events also increases your union's visibility and helps make other community residents more familiar with your members and your issues.



## Invite community leaders to speak at your union's public events

**How it works:**

Community leaders are invited to demonstrate support of the union's issue by speaking at your union's event.

**What it takes:**

Asking other community leaders to speak at your event doesn't take a lot of work, but you will want to put some thought as to which leaders you might want to invite and how many. You don't want an overly long agenda for your event—but you also don't want to leave out key community leaders who might want to speak on your issue. It's a balancing act.

**You'll need:**

- A personal invitation to the leader to speak; and
- A private briefing/discussion with the invited leader about the situation, issues and concerns. (provide the leader with talking points, and make sure he or she is not the last speaker on the agenda).

**How it helps your union:**

This is one of the most effective ways to demonstrate community support. When a leader is willing to stand with labor and publicly speak on your issues, he or she is providing unions with a powerful form of support. Also, the leaders you invite to your event will invite members from their own organizations to attend—helping with the turnout for your event and showing politicians and the media that your issue or goal has wide support.



## Share information and materials

**How it works:**

Regularly develop community-friendly versions of union materials (op-eds, talking points, news releases, parenting tips, research reports that support your union's position, etc.) and distribute widely among community leaders. Ask them to distribute these materials to their base, or ask them to share snail-mail and e-mail lists so that you can send information directly. You can offer to do likewise for their materials and information. Sharing materials and resources with other community groups keeps them and their constituents aware and knowledgeable about your union so that they are in your corner and ready to act when you need them.

**You'll need:**

- A list of your partner organization's e-mails and/or a database for the organization's mailing addresses;
- A writer who can "tweak" union materials for other audiences and who is routinely willing to do this task; and
- A way to distribute your partner organization's materials to your own members (by e-mail or by passing them out at membership meetings, for example).

**How it helps your union:**

Sharing information and materials is a cost-effective way to keep the community informed about your issues and inoculated against union-busting campaigns.



## Join coalitions that are driven by other organizations

**How it works:**

When feasible, participate in coalition efforts of other organizations. For example, attend their working group meetings or send a union representative to attend on your behalf. When possible, offer to host the meetings at your union's hall, or to help sponsor an event that supports the efforts (for example, by buying food, water or supplies).

**What it takes:**

This one simply takes constant monitoring of community coalitions and activities, including the scheduled activities of your community partners. A member of your union's community outreach committee could take on this task.



**How it helps your union:**

Supporting coalitions led by other community organizations is a highly effective way to build community support for your union. It helps increase the visibility of your union. If your union volunteers to handle some of the work of a community coalition, you can integrate some of your union's messages/information into the work of the coalition. And, participating in coalitions is a good way to make contacts in other organizations—and to determine the level of power and/or influence that various organizations and leaders have.



## Volunteer for the committees, events and programs of other organizations

**How it works:**

Your union can volunteer to chair or create the education or labor committee of other organizations. Your union can also volunteer to participate in the programs or events of strategic allies.

**You'll need:**

- A member or staff person who is interested in the issues of the other organization, and willing to take on a leadership role in driving the union's efforts to volunteer for that group's committees, events and programs; and
- Members who are willing to roll up their sleeves to participate in a community event (e.g., "Walk for the Cure") and wear their union T-shirts/hats/buttons.

**How it helps your union:**

Getting involved in other organizations' efforts and initiatives is a successful activity for building visibility and good will with the community.



## Be a part of neighborhood fairs

**How it works:**

Your union's participation in neighborhood fairs can raise union visibility. Events like this offer an opportunity for community members to make a positive association with your union.

**What it takes:**

To start with, contact the fair organizers and find out what you have to do set up a booth at the fair.

If you're an education local, consider some sort of giveaway (pencils and erasers, for instance). If you are a healthcare local, put out a couple of chairs and offer to take free blood-pressure readings.

**How it helps your union:**

Participating in these events gives you access to many members of the community who otherwise might not come into contact with your union.



## Sponsor parent academies

**How it works:**

Parent academies are designed to help parents develop the skills they need to help their children succeed academically.

**What it takes:**

You need to recruit volunteers among your own membership to help with the logistics of setting up the academy and to provide the program. In the academy curriculum, cover things that your members are already experts in—for example, the keys for academic success, strategies for getting kids to do their homework and information on accessing resources from the district or online.

**You'll need to:**

- Publicize the program to parents by distributing leaflets about the academy at the end of the school day, and by visiting community functions and events and distributing the leaflets there;
- Ask for RSVPs;
- Provide food, childcare, and parking; and
- Take photos and publicize the event to members and potential members.

**How it helps your union:**

These programs are an effective way to form a bond between parents and your union. They clearly send the message that you share the same goal: the academic success of the kids.



## Hold community hearings

### How it works:

Community hearings are organized events, planned with community organizations and supporters, that provide a platform to express your concerns on an issue of mutual interest.

### What it takes:

Publicity is the biggest challenge when it comes to organizing a community hearing.

### You'll need:

- A place for the hearing;
- Supportive community leaders to participate; and
- Promotion and publicity beforehand, to drive attendance from your members and the general public.

If the hearing is on an explosive issue, or highly recognizable community leaders are involved, it may be of interest to local journalists. Send out a news release and follow up with phone calls to area TV stations and newspapers. Sometimes local access cable channels will be willing to show the event if you provide the videotape.

### How it helps your union:

The effectiveness of these events is almost entirely driven by the level of media coverage, which in turn is largely driven by the attendance of recognizable figures in the community. Planning and recruiting community leaders make (or break) these events.



## Sponsor beautification areas

### How it works:

Generally, sponsoring parks or highways is a matter of committing to cleaning them up, but it also can involve helping to purchase or set up equipment.

### What it takes:

Check with your local government to find out the policy for sponsoring a park or section of road. You'll also need to contact members about participating in the effort. Let them know that the commitment is brief (a couple of

hours) and limited (just show up and help). Take lots of pictures and publicize the effort on your website.

### How it helps your union:

Sponsoring playgrounds, parks, highways and other projects that improve daily life in your community is a low-effort, low-cost way to connect with and give something meaningful to your community.



## Sponsor a union food bank

### How it works:

Your union collects food from members at the union office and contacts other community organizations and local media to put out the word that food is available for those in need. You also can collect the food and then work with a community partner, such as a faith-based organization or existing food bank, to distribute the food.

### What it takes:

- Ask members to bring in shelf-stable foods (cans and boxes).
- Visit local community organizations and let know you are running a food bank. Ask them if their members can donate food, but also let them know that you (and your food distribution partner organization) can help out any of their members who are hungry.

### How it helps your union:

Food banks show that your union is a concerned member of the local community that cares about helping people in need.



## Make your union visible at school events

### How it works:

When your union is visible at school events, it promotes the value of your members and the role of the union in the school and district.

### What it takes:

If possible, and with the agreement of school officials, your union should seek to promote the work of your members and the role of the union at events such as parent/teacher evenings or other events. This can be as simple as having a table where the union can offer coffee

or other refreshments.

**How it helps your union:**

Visibility at school events provides an opportunity for your members to be the real face of the union. It helps parents, families and community members understand who you are and what you stand for.



## 95 Conduct listening tours

**How it works:**

With listening tours, your union invites community leaders to join you in spending some time at your members' schools or work sites to see the work done firsthand and to talk with members.

**You'll need to:**

- Identify community leaders who would be willing to participate and determine their availability;
- Contact the administration at the work site to ensure access and arrange a time;
- Invite local media to participate in the event; and
- Prepare some members at each site to talk with the community leaders.

**How it helps your union:**

Listening tours can strengthen your ties with important community leaders and provide ready-made opportunities for media coverage favorable to the work your members do and the importance of that work to the community.



## 96 Partner with other community organizations

**How it works:**

Your union agrees to support the work of a community organization and its efforts to meet the needs of the community and connect with parents, activists and community leaders. In return, that organization agrees to support your union's efforts.

**You'll need to:**

- Meet with the leaders of the organization and discuss possible ways to collaborate;
- Agree on the terms of the partnership;

- Inform your members about the partnership;
- Have the union's name listed as a supporter in your partner organization's events and programs; and
- Recruit members to volunteer for your partner organization's events and programs.

**How it helps your union:**

Partnering with other community organizations is a great way to help your community. It builds community trust in your union, and it's a good way to involve members. And, when you support other organizations' events, it's an opportunity for the media to position the union as a "good neighbor."



## 97 Invite community leaders to join you for a lobby day

**How it works:**

Lobby days educate legislators about the union's position on an issue or piece of legislation, and demonstrate union support for legislators to vote the right way. When other community organizations and their leaders join you in a lobby day, it sends a message to legislators that you have wide support for your lobbying position.

**What it takes:**

For a successful lobby day, you'll need to:

- Issue a personal invitation to the leadership of the community organization to participate in your union's lobby day. (Be prepared for a request by that organization for your support of its lobby day, and try to say yes to that request.)
- Offer to take care of any direct expenses related to the organization's support (e.g., buses, materials, food, mailing, signs, etc.).

**How it helps your union:**

A joint lobby day with other community organizations sends a strong message to decision-makers about the political strength and voter support your union has.



## Make in-kind donations

### How it works:

Make your office space available for community meetings; provide in-kind copying services of fliers; donate union-branded items (pens, notepads, key chains, etc.).

### What it takes:

You'll simply need a system (and perhaps a point person) for community organizations to request your support.

### How it works:

Making in-kind donations is a great way to increase your union's visibility and to be a "good neighbor." The organizations that receive your in-kind help will get to know your union and see firsthand the value of the work you do.



## Launch a letter-writing campaign

### How it works:

Ask your members and community leaders to have their members write letters to the editor, to elected officials or to company owners/managers, etc., in support of a union issue.

### You'll need to:

- Issue a personal invitation to your partner organizations;
- Draft letter language that your partners can review and sign on to;
- Offer to cover the mailing/production expenses for your partner organizations;
- Create a system for collecting letters from the organizations and disseminating them to the intended recipients;
- If you have a letter-writing bank (similar to a phone bank), provide refreshments for the volunteer letter-writers;
- Send thank-you letters to your partner organizations; and
- Follow up to tell your partner organizations about the impact of the campaign.

### How it helps your union:

A letter-writing campaign helps educate the community about union issues, demonstrates support of the community to legislators and other decision-makers, and builds and expands ownership of an issue beyond the union.





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