

 END CORPORATE RULE. LEGALIZE DEMOCRACY.

MOVE TO AMEND

INTRODUCTION TO ORGANIZED LABOR FOR MOVE TO AMEND VOLUNTEERS

This “Introduction to Organized Labor” has been produced by the Move to Amend Labor Caucus to introduce Move to Amend volunteers to the “real world” labor movement as experienced by some of your colleagues. Our hope is that this and other materials we will make available on labor will help Move to Amend Affiliates start or expand your work with unions. Labor is still a potent force in society that we most definitely need if we’re to successfully amend the Constitution.

Since we know that law follows culture, the Move to Amend Labor Caucus believes that working with local unions, right in your own area, is the best place to start. The relationships we build as organizers are more important than any brilliant strategy or tactics. These relationships will develop trust, solid friendships you can count on in the movement and a wealth of creative ideas, skills and resources that will add greatly to Move to Amend. We will eventually have a long list of state and national labor bodies that endorse Move to Amend, but it will all grow out of the roots of our work with local unions.

Some things to know when approaching labor unions about Move to Amend

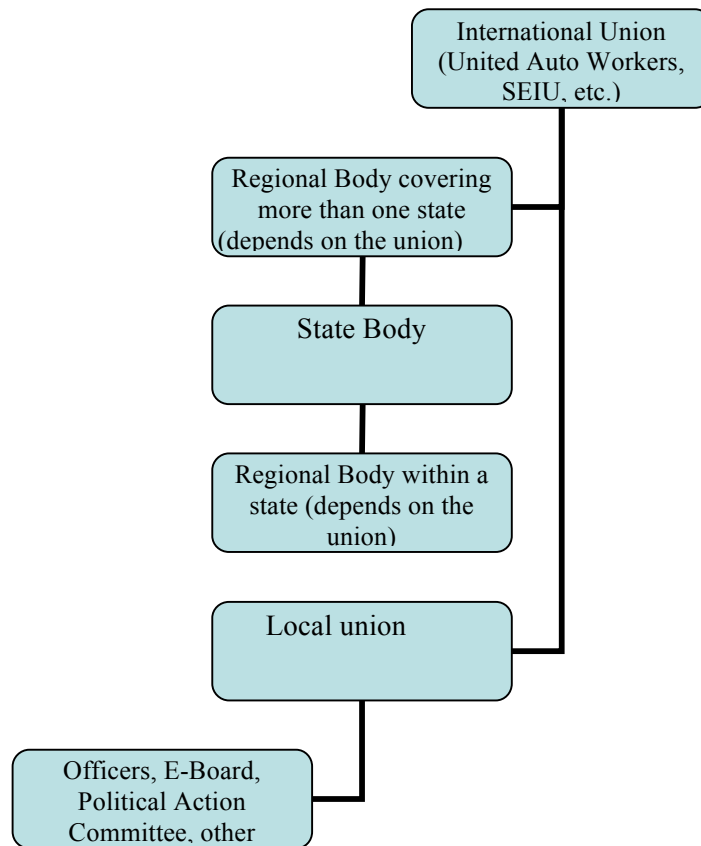
- Labor is not a monolith. Your success or lack thereof in working with unions depends overwhelmingly on the relationships you develop with individual people.
- As with any new relationship, basic politeness and listening to the concerns of the people you meet will go a long way. These qualities are as important as they are rare in society.
- Learn something about the union you are about to call on. Union web sites (for those that have them) can be quite limited. Something as simple as reading the local paper can alert you to concerns a union might have such as layoffs, expired contracts or strikes. Larger unions may still have a regular newspaper of their own. Try assigning someone in the group to do some research to see if you can get more background about what the union has been up to lately.
- Know the kind of workplaces the union represents. For example, the UAW (United Auto Workers) can represent hospital workers, public employees, graduate students and others. Teamsters, Steelworkers and other unions also represent a wide variety of workers in industry and service jobs in the public and private sectors. Don’t go by the name alone -- do your homework!
- Union membership has declined drastically in the U.S. since the 1950’s – when 35% of all workers were in unions – and continues to decline today. In the U.S., only [11% of all working people](#) are in a union (6.6% of the private sector workforce and 36% of

the public workforce). In contrast, in Iceland, 83% of workers are in unions, in Finland 69%, Canada 27%, Germany 18%.

- In fact, [union membership in the United States is lower than most other countries](#), which may help explain the corresponding low numbers in U.S. quality of life indicators such as education, infant mortality, income and wealth inequalities. (NOTE: This is in large part a function of the structural barriers in labor law regarding forming and certifying a union here in the U.S., more so than in any other industrialized country in the world.)
- Don't rely on a union's national reputation or even its national literature to determine how open to Move to Amend a given local may be. You can rely on Move to Amend's message to cut across ideological lines and appeal to union members who know all too well the power of corporations.

Typical Union Structure

Before you get started, it is good to have an idea of how unions are structured and where in the structure you will be doing your outreach. Each union is different to some degree but this chart illustrates a typical union structure to give you a sense of how Organize Labor is structured.



International Union: e.g., United Auto Workers (UAW), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), etc.

Not all “international” unions in the U.S. are truly international in nature. Many typically include only Canada in their jurisdictions outside U.S. borders. One of the largest unions in the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, calls its top level an “international” when by definition they represent state, county and municipal workers in the U.S., plus a smattering of federal workers. But regardless, the “international union” refers to the national level, national headquarters, and national staff.

Regional Body: Some internationals have structures that cover more than one state

State body: Most internationals have a state structure

Regional bodies within a state: depends on the union

Local unions: the organizational foundation

There is a related, parallel labor structure, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), a national coalition of nearly every union in the country.

(Note: Prior to 1955, the AFL and the CIO were separate organizations. The CIO was formed in the 1930s as a way to promote unionizing steel, auto and other industrial workers who had historically not been eligible to join AFL unions based on individual crafts or trades. During the early Cold War era following World War Two, CIO unions were red-baited and required to sign loyalty oaths. One union, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (UE) refused to do so and remains outside the AFL-CIO.)

State AFL-CIO body: typically has its own officers, staff and treasury

Central Labor Council (CLC): covers a given city or metro area, a generic term for that city or area’s AFL-CIO coalition (ie, many different unions), usually has limited staff and treasury, depending on its size.

(NOTE: Contacting a Central Labor Council in your city or area is not necessarily a good “short cut” when doing Move to Amend organizing. Depending on the politics of the CLC leadership, you could find it more difficult to meet with than individual unions. Even if CLC leaders are supportive and give you an opportunity to address a CLC meeting, you’ll address only the leadership of the local unions that attend that CLC meeting, not the memberships. So, if you happen to start with a CLC, be sure you let the local union leaders know you would also like to meet with their locals so you can talk directly with the membership.)

Additionally, there are usually organizations for “affinity groups” within the labor community, such as a public employees council (teachers, city, county, state workers), a building trades council (electrical workers, carpenters, ironworkers, sheetmetal workers, etc.) organized on a city, regional, state and national level as well. Typically these councils meet regularly, have their own officers, staff and treasury and are a good place to meet members of local unions you may not reach otherwise.

“Political action” in a union context almost universally means electoral politics. Depending on the union and the local practice, requests for endorsements/resolutions etc. can be handled by the local union itself or may be sent through the union’s political action entity, such as the UAW’s Community Action Program (CAP) Council. Not to worry, this will all be explained appropriately for each case.

Be aware that many unions aren’t used to working in coalition with community groups. “Active listening,” respect for busy schedules, patience and persistence are all important.

Start Reaching Out

In the “old days,” the Yellow Pages were the go-to source for local union listings. Today, if YPs still exist, they’re likely very much truncated. Getting one from just a few years ago may likely have what you’re looking for. An internet search can probably find similar listings. But don’t forget to check with your public library as well.

Familiarize yourself with Move to Amend’s introductory “Phone Rap for Unions” and start calling.

You’ll likely get a secretary (the most important position in any office) who can work wonders relaying information to and from busy officials. Get the secretary’s name and use it when you call. Take a minute to chat if possible. What you’re looking for is a meeting with the local president or executive board to explain what Move to Amend is about.

Generally, a new idea needs to be vetted by the president and/or the executive board (usually called the “E-Board”) before it’s presented at a membership meeting. If they’re open to you making a presentation at a membership meeting, take it. How long you’ll have will vary greatly, but don’t expect more than 5-10 minutes, tops, if it’s at a meeting of the E-Board or the membership.

See our additional materials in the toolkit for handouts to take with you, and a model resolution the union can use to endorse Move to Amend.