

INTRODUCTION

BUILDING POWER IN THE WORKPLACE

Internal organizing is about strengthening our union and broadening the fight for change in the workplace. Across the country, AFSCME local unions are working to improve the lives of their members and to build their membership. Local unions undertake internal organizing campaigns when they realize that the union just isn't strong enough to win the critical fights. This guide describes best practices that local unions can use to create successful internal organizing drives, and distills those practices into a model that can be adapted to a broad range of situations:

- **Open shops**
- **Agency shops**
- **Organizing in the absence of collective bargaining**
- **Fighting to win collective bargaining rights**
- **Fighting for a new contract**
- **Building to prevent decertification threats**

While AFSCME local unions have a proud history of success, the International Convention in 1998 recognized the need to focus on internal organizing. In turn, the International Executive Board has adopted policies to encourage internal organizing efforts based on proven principles including strategic targeting, worker action, systematic planning, house calls and other one-on-one communications. **Under the AFSCME Internal Organizing Model, increasing worker participation and winning changes in the workplace are the primary objectives.**

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Local unions launch internal organizing drives when they conclude that the union isn't strong enough: not strong enough to achieve contract bargaining goals; not strong enough to block privatization; not strong enough to implement changes through the grievance process; and not strong enough to force the employer to make important changes. To win key fights and make real change, local unions need power, and internal organizing is the solution.

Most local leaders instinctively understand that low membership is a sign of weakness. The number of non-members is inversely related to the power of the union. Workers join a union because it is effective, and they refrain from joining if it is not. In turn, getting workers to join the union helps build strength, and getting workers involved in actions is the catalyst that increases power. Workers will only remain members of the union if it is a powerful organization that gets results. Worker mobilization demonstrates that power.

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Internal organizing is not about selling union membership. It is about fundamentally transforming the workplace and the union. An active union attracts members, and a powerful union keeps members.

A minority union is a weak union, while an organization that maintains majority membership (or ultimately 100 percent membership) will have power and influence. By strategically applying the principles outlined in this guide, we can build organizations with overwhelming membership and achieve real successes in the workplace.

The practices that have proven effective in external organizing campaigns are also effective in internal organizing. Organizing must be a thoughtful and strategic process, where we plan, commit what it takes to accomplish the plan, and evaluate progress through concrete benchmarks. **Most of all, organizing is built on personal relationships, and the best way to build personal relationships is through one-on-one communications.** *That means that the AFSCME Internal Organizing Model is built on house calls — no other form of one-on-one communication has proven more effective.*

Finally, internal organizing drives should be intensive and fast-paced efforts, defined by a real sense of urgency. We must motivate and mobilize workers, confront the boss and accomplish our goals within a reasonable time frame.

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TEN PRINCIPLES FOR BUILDING UNION POWER

The AFSCME Internal Organizing Model is part of AFSCME's effort to clearly define what makes a successful organizing campaign. It joins the *AFSCME Organizing Model and Manual* and *Communicating to Organize — AFSCME's Campaign Message Guide*, which outline how to run and win external organizing drives. *Building Power in the Workplace — The AFSCME Internal Organizing Manual* is based on the following ten principles:

Ten Principles for Building Union Power

1. *Internal organizing targets should be built on an existing base of membership.*
2. *Current leaders must take responsibility for the campaign.*
3. *Campaigns should be driven by systematic one-on-one communications, including house calls.*
4. *A representative organizing committee (Member Action Team), recruited from members and non-members alike, is key to success.*
5. *Campaigns must incorporate worker action around important issues.*
6. *Campaigns must communicate a clear, concise and relevant message.*
7. *Council/local staff must take a participatory role in the campaign.*
8. *Systematic record-keeping and tracking of contacts is crucial.*
9. *Every organizing campaign is different and strategic planning is imperative.*
10. *Strong unions are built on majority membership.*