

A whole lot of work has been done to reach this point, yet the heart of the campaign has not yet begun. In preparation for the campaign, we established the Member Action Team, developed the plan, refined the message and trained the MAT members. Now is the time to reach out to the rest of the workers.

In an internal organizing campaign, a key test of support is whether a non-member signs a dues deduction card.

Listening to workers is a continuous process. Regardless of how much time has been spent listening and developing our message, we are never finished. Every worker has their own issues. **One-on-one contacts are an opportunity to discover what issues are of importance to each worker and to test our message.** One-on-ones are also an opportunity to move the worker to action and assess their support for the union.

Sample House-Call Outline

1. *Introduce yourself.*
2. *Listen to the worker's experiences and concerns.*
3. *Educate the worker about the union and employer.*
4. *Assess the worker's support.*
5. *Move the worker to action.*
6. *Ask non-members to become members.*

PREPARING FOR AND TRACKING HOUSE CALLS

Good record-keeping saves more time than it takes and is vital to an effective organizing drive. Preparation for house calls starts with building a good list including home addresses. Time spent finding accurate home addresses reduces time wasted visiting bad addresses. Similarly, spending time mapping and preparing house-call routes reduces time wasted driving around neighborhoods. Time spent recording the results of your house calls saves time for future contacts and helps to direct future organizing activity.

In an internal organizing campaign, a key test of support is whether a non-member signs a dues deduction card. It is important to keep track of who has joined as well as who hasn't joined and why. The AFSCME Model calls for the use of a simple rating system for all contacts. When making one-on-one contacts, we should assess the worker's support and willingness to participate in union actions. We must also keep track of the specific reasons why the worker did not join.

KICKING OFF THE CAMPAIGN

HOUSE-CALL TIPS

- **Wear appropriate clothes.** Don't wear clothing that calls attention to you or makes the worker feel uncomfortable. Clothes that are too fancy or too casual can make a bad first impression that is hard to overcome.
- **Plan your route in advance.** Use a mapping computer program or an up-to-date street map and plot your route so you are not wasting time, but are visiting people in a logical order.
- **Use your time effectively.** Don't take meal breaks during prime house-calling hours. Know what shifts people work and/or if they work other jobs. Visit from the end of the shift until as late as possible. Saturdays and Sundays after church are very good times to house call.
- **Don't call ahead.**
- **Try to make the visit last 30-40 minutes.** Have a clear agenda and goal in mind for each worker you visit.
- **Bring a committee person or another worker with you.** But don't put off house calling if a worker can't accompany you.
- **Let the worker do most of the talking.** You're not a salesperson—draw people out with open-ended questions. You are developing a relationship and moving the worker to action.
- **Don't assume anything.** Ask questions and listen.
- **Be honest.** If you don't know something, tell the person you will find out and get back to them (and make sure you do!).
- **Don't argue.** Look for common ground. Winning an argument won't do any good.
- **Involve a worker's family members.**
- **Fill out a house-call report form.** You should do this immediately after leaving the house, but drive far enough away so you aren't sitting out in front filling out a form.
- **Only provide literature at the end of the visit, if at all.** If the person isn't home, don't leave literature and return another time.

AFSCME INTERNAL ORGANIZING RATING SYSTEM

When assessing support for the union, use the following scale to code workers.

1. **ACTIVE** *Regularly participates in union actions and is a member.*
2. **SUPPORTER** *Existing or new member who does not participate in union actions or has not yet been assessed with respect to participation.*
3. **PERSUADABLE** *Has been contacted, but hasn't signed a card. May be interested in some union issues, may orally support the union at times, may be skeptical about union motives or ability to deliver, may voice some anti-union sentiments.*
4. **ANTI-UNION** *Strongly anti-union or opposed to joining the union. Will not participate in union actions.*
0. **UNKNOWN /** *Non-member who has not been contacted or fully assessed.*
INSUFFICIENT INFORMATION

The purpose of rating workers is to help identify the most likely supporters to recruit for organizing activities. In an external organizing election campaign, one of the objectives of the rating system is to focus on turning out union supporters to vote. Internal organizing is not about an election where there are winners and losers – it involves building majority support and unifying workers, first by transforming a minority into a majority, and then by reaching as close to 100 percent as possible.

The initial house calls should also include a tool to begin the process of moving workers to action and to show that the union is interested in important workplace issues, not just dues dollars. For example, a petition to the boss encourages workers to take a public stand and helps test a non-member's interest in the union. A worker who won't join the union but will sign a union petition is a good prospect for future membership. You may want to distribute contract surveys to help identify issues, show that the union is interested in worker participation and help to prioritize issues. Getting worker commitments to help distribute literature, collect surveys, get involved in negotiations or put their name and picture on union literature, all help to identify supporters and increase worker commitment.

COUNCIL / LOCAL STAFF AND HOUSE CALLS

House calls are not just for the Member Action Team and full-time organizers. Council and local service staff must be involved in every facet of the campaign, including house calls. Staff cannot fully appreciate the issues and dynamics of the campaign without personally participating in house calls.

KICKING OFF THE CAMPAIGN

DEBRIEFING HOUSE CALLERS

When multiple staff and leaders participate in a house-call effort, it is important to debrief after each session of house calls. Debriefing is the systematic analysis of every house call. The debriefing process has two primary functions: (1) ensure detailed information is accurately collected; and (2) provide feedback to house callers on their techniques. Debriefing should take place immediately after the house call (if the lead organizer is riding with the house caller) or at the end of the day. The lead organizer should question the house callers about each worker they visited, concerning their issues, their support, their willingness to participate in actions and their leadership potential. The lead organizer should also ask how the house caller felt about their own performance. Were they comfortable? Did they ask the right follow-up questions? Did they listen enough? What did they do well? What would they do differently?

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Debriefing is indispensable if the lead organizer really wants to understand the workers in the campaign and build the skills of the Member Action Team. How the debriefing is conducted will affect how well activists conduct house calls, as well as their willingness to do more. The debriefing process should encourage and motivate house callers.

MOVING THE MIDDLE

In order to build majority support for the union, we must organize around issues that appeal to the undecided and persuadable workers in the “middle.” Organizing campaigns that appeal to the most militant union members will alienate the workers you are targeting. But don't confuse emphasizing issues that appeal to the center with timidity. By its very nature, worker action is militant. It is a fight for change. Playing to the middle does not mean avoiding a fight — it does mean fighting effectively about issues with broad appeal. It also means making sure that the workers in the middle are with us. The union will be marginalized if workers and the boss believe it only has the support of “radical” unionists, even if it acts on issues with broad appeal. Focusing on the middle means understanding that local union leaders, members and non-members have different viewpoints. The goal is to devise strategic plans that bring together both members and non-members to create a majority union.

It is important to make sure that membership actions as well as the message appeal to the middle. Don't use overly aggressive actions if the majority of workers aren't ready. Start with actions that a majority of workers find comfortable. As participation increases, we can intensify the militancy of our actions.
