

Building Power

Through Education
and Mobilization



The cornerstone of union power is an informed and active membership that drives an increasingly effective union at the local, district, and international levels. And members are far more likely to get involved when the union provides training specifically designed for this purpose. In addition to basic contract and grievance administration, such education should:

- ⇒ Advance a specific program or goal, such as winning a better contract or stopping unfair trade.
- ⇒ Explain how union members can help make a difference.
- ⇒ Ask members to take a specific action, such as writing a letter, attending an event or walking a picket line.
- ⇒ Continue to build awareness of the strength that flows from our Union's diversity.
- ⇒ Connect the objectives of a program with the broader goals of the Union.

That's how the Union won the Westray Bill in Canada, steel tariffs in the United States, and mobilized member support to beat the odds in labor disputes such as Ravenswood Aluminum, IOC, Wabush Mines, Inco, AK Steel and CF&I.

To ensure that our education program remains both targeted and relevant, periodic reviews of the program are in order. Such a review has just been completed in Canada, building on the strengths of what is known as "back to the locals" education, which focuses on local union instructors and building activism through education. Another activist program that has generated leadership at all levels of the union in Canada is "Women of Steel," the enthusiasm for which has not diminished since the program was launched in the 1980s.

Building on Success

To replicate these successes, it is essential that our education and training activities mobilize our members to strengthen the Union — in short, that they build power through education. This means:

- ⇒ Designing and continually updating courses so they clearly relate to both the Union's goals and, perhaps even more importantly, to issues and activities which impact the lives of members, retirees and their families.
- ⇒ Ensuring courses build respect, understanding and appreciation for diversity.
- ⇒ Making sure there is follow-up to see how members are using their skills to build collective action both inside and outside of their workplaces.
- ⇒ Developing standardized training material that is easy to understand and that relates to members' needs and concerns.
- ⇒ Improving coordination between the Membership Development/Education Departments and district education programs. This should include conducting up-to-date surveys of existing programs and plans, as well as providing resources and materials for district programs.
- ⇒ Making the most effective use of resources.

Improving Basic Training

While the Union's innovative Leadership Scholarship Program is providing the next generation of Steelworker leaders with an in-depth education, it is equally important that local union officers, committees and stewards receive the education and resources they need to effectively represent our members and meet the challenges our Union is facing.

To achieve these objectives, it will be necessary to:

- ⇒ Standardize the courses and materials used to train local union officers, committees and stewards.
- ⇒ Ensure that course materials, resources and follow-up actions enhance the diversity of the Union by increasing the participation of women and our multicultural membership.
- ⇒ Make education and training available to local unions on the constantly evolving issues of paycheck economics, health care, safety and environmental issues, trade, pension security and global union solidarity.
- ⇒ Provide locals with information on the improved political clout and financial strength that results from amalgamating.

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Strengthening Local Activism

Our Union's greatest success in strengthening member activism, in both bargaining and politics, has resulted from the teaching of two courses, "Building Power" and "You and Your Union."

"Building Power" is offered to locals in anticipation of contract talks to:

- ⇒ Organize a contract action team.
- ⇒ Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of both the employer and the local union.
- ⇒ Develop bargaining goals, themes and campaign messages.
- ⇒ Mobilize member support.
- ⇒ Build solidarity.

"You and Your Union" is designed to stimulate member participation in the local. It provides face-to-face interaction with the local's leadership, as well as information on:

- ⇒ Union structure and history.
- ⇒ The value of union services.
- ⇒ Connections between union issues, collective bargaining and politics.
- ⇒ Union dues and finances and the valuable uses they're put to.

Locals that have taken advantage of these courses have become far more active and have proved more successful in bargaining. Therefore, to ensure maximum educational outreach of these courses, our Union will:

- ⇒ Create standardized materials for teaching these courses.
- ⇒ Train local leadership as well as International staff to utilize these courses for mobilizing member activism and increasing collective strength at the bargaining table.
- ⇒ Initiate a train-the-trainer program in all districts to expand the number of Steelworkers capable of teaching the courses.

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Building on Rapid Response and SCAN

In the United States, many local unions have found that the structure of Rapid Response provides a model for educating and mobilizing their members in other areas. In Canada, the Steelworkers Communication and Action Network (SCAN) has been used to build support for Steelworker legislative and corporate campaigns and has involved our members in broader campaigns to improve health care and to fight for fair trade.

While there are differences in how Rapid Response and SCAN can be used for direct partisan political activities, both programs send our members one of the most important messages they need to motivate their activism — that knowledge and concerted action empowers them. And whether directly (SCAN) or indirectly (Rapid Response), both programs have proven that an effective communication and mobilization structure is vital for:

- ⇒ Providing members with information and analysis on the economy, jobs and trade — information not usually available in the corporate-controlled media.
- ⇒ Comparing where political parties stand on Steelworker issues.
- ⇒ Mobilizing support in preparation for bargaining and building solidarity in disputes.
- ⇒ Building international solidarity when bargaining with multinational corporations.
- ⇒ Strengthening the Union's internal organizing efforts, especially in right-to-work states.

While Rapid Response should not be used for partisan, political activities, its structure was designed first and foremost to educate and mobilize our members. Therefore, it is essential that the program continues to provide our members with the information and analysis they need to make informed decisions.

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Improving Communications

Over the years, our Union has achieved success using various media to win public support and mobilize our members. In today's media environment, this requires more than expanding technical capabilities.

In addition to increasing the number of local union newsletters and expanding United Steelworkers Press Association (USPA) membership, we must establish an integrated network that utilizes our creative and technical abilities to build more bargaining power.

To achieve this goal, we must build an array of communications and marketing capabilities that use new technology effectively.

Developing Union Programming

Local access cable stations provide an excellent medium for us to communicate our messages. We can take advantage of this medium by:

- ⇒ Creating a network to distribute Steelworkers' programming for broadcast on local access cable stations.
- ⇒ Training United Steelworkers Press Association (USPA) members to market our programming to local cable stations.
- ⇒ Educating local activists within districts throughout North America to produce programming, using models already established in some districts.
- ⇒ Producing and distributing Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that deliver our Union's message(s), raise our name recognition and improve our image.
- ⇒ Training staff to produce videos tailored for use in organizing, political and legislative campaigns.

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Mobilizing Union Activists

Cutting-edge technologies can and should be used to educate and mobilize a new generation of Steelworker activists. We should:

- ⇒ Use new technologies, including web site instruction, interactive CD-Roms, and interactive DVDs, to provide practical and effective training.
- ⇒ Develop motivational videos to promote bargaining goals, to forge solidarity among members and their families, and to enhance the Union's image and name recognition.
- ⇒ Establish a presence and influence in news and talk radio that brings to these earned media the success we have enjoyed in using paid media to promote events, gain community support, and publicly confront irresponsible companies.

Bolstering Web-based Communications

In addition to these steps, we need to build on the web presence we have established both with the redesign of our web sites in the United States (www.uswa.org) and Canada (www.uswa.ca), and with the development of new District web sites. In order to move into the next phase in its utilization, we must incorporate these web sites into our strategic communications. Such actions should include:

- ⇒ Increasing e-mail participation and list development through Rapid Response, SCAN, legislative initiatives, Associate Member recruitment, and public involvement in our issues.
- ⇒ Expanding our web sites in the United States and Canada to provide for participation by local unions and members.
- ⇒ Creating additional sections on the web for communicating to the full range of our diverse membership in all industries and services.



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Developing Interactive Participation

Expanding our ability to communicate and educate via the web will strengthen our message(s) by empowering our members with information valuable to them in bargaining, as well as in mobilizing for issue, legislative or electoral activism.

We can achieve these goals by:

- ⇒ Incorporating streaming video messages and news into our web communications.
- ⇒ Developing web-based interactive educational seminars.
- ⇒ Providing interactive education modules that can be completed by members on an individual basis.

Member-to-Member Communication

While new technologies may serve useful purposes, they are no substitute for the most effective tool in developing local union activists — direct member-to-member communication. Members often initially become interested in the union in reaction to something they think is wrong, and can be urged to become active in correcting it. This can and should occur through active members in the workplace or at a local union meeting inviting them to get involved. There is no substitute for face-to-face, activist-to-member communication.

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