




A Guide to Organizing UNION COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEES

AFL-CIO

**UNIONS
HELPING
PEOPLE** 

What Does a Committee Do?

Here are just a few of the important activities of a Community Services Committee:

- Help union members with problems.
- Coordinate assistance to strikers and unemployed workers.
- Organize strategic community services projects.
- Coordinate activities with retirees and constituency groups.
- Organize working family advocacy events.
- Support Union Community Activist Network (UCAN) training.
- Build coalitions with community groups, such as Jobs with Justice and Interfaith Worker Justice.
- Organize support for the Letter Carriers Food Drive each May.
- Raise funds for the United Way and other community organizations.
- Lobby for workers' rights and social service legislation.
- Recruit union volunteers.
- Sponsor CPR, first aid and disaster training.

Helping each other is one of the oldest traditions of the American labor movement.

Being union members means joining together and having a voice at work. When problems occur, union representatives and co-workers are ready to help.

But working families face problems away from work as well:

- Mortgage foreclosure
- Disability
- No insurance, medical bills
- High utility costs
- High housing costs
- Financial difficulties
- Personal or family crisis
- Child care

A Community Services Committee can help working families cope with problems through Community Services—helping meet the need—while at the same time helping to mobilize union members around organizing and social justice issues that are the root causes of need.

A Community Services Committee can help your members and help make your community a better place to live.

Who needs a Community Services Committee? AFL-CIO state federations, central labor councils and local unions that want to build member participation.

Within Your Community

Unions and their members work to improve the economic conditions in the communities where they live and work. They build bridges to community allies and power for workers.

Within Your Community Services Committees

To be effective, community outreach requires participation, organization and collective action. This means organizing Community Services Committees in local unions.

The local union Community Services Committee helps members with problems, supports the labor council's legislative agenda, works to make the community more responsive to the needs of workers and builds union strength by reaching out to others committed to helping people.



As a result, Community Services Committees empower and mobilize union members, enhance labor's image in the community and create strategic relationships in the community that can help working families.

Helping our members and building our communities is a big job. Community Services Committees get the job done. Local union Community Services Committees involve union members in a range of social action activities.

Support of the Local Leadership

For any local union committee to succeed, it must have strong support from union leadership and report regularly at union meetings and to the central labor council. With that support, the committee then must earn the support of the membership. An important first step is for a local union officer to announce at a local union meeting the creation of a Community Services Committee. Union officers should talk about the importance of the committee and recruit volunteers to join. Recognition of volunteers is vital to maintaining active volunteer participation.

Selecting a Chair

To be successful, an active Community Services Committee needs a good leader. The chair (who is appointed) should be a committed, energetic, knowledgeable and respected member of the union and the community. The chair should be skilled at working with people, delegating responsibilities and involving the whole committee in activities. Organizing skills and the ability to mobilize also are important.

Recruiting Members

The Community Services Committee should reflect the demographic diversity of the union, with both women and men and all ethnic groups represented. The committee also should include members from each division of the workplace. Members of an effective Community Services Committee should understand the strategic role of Community Services to the union, and the importance of humanitarian service to the union and the community. They should be "doers," active and dedicated trade unionists, willing to attend meetings, mobilize workers and work with coalitions.

Training the Committee

A Community Services Committee can arrange to receive training on the function of the committee through the AFL-CIO state federation or central labor council and through the AFL-CIO Community Services liaison or labor agency. Members should attend UCAN training. Many state federations sponsor annual Community Services conferences that provide valuable information for committee members.

For more information, call 202-637-5309 or e-mail jparkins@aflcio.org.
Find information online at www.aflcio.org/aboutus/allies/csn.cfm.

To be effective, the Community Services Committee must meet, plan and implement action.

Here are some suggestions for making committee meetings successful.

Preparing for the Meeting

Productive meetings require advance work by the chair. Committee leadership should meet to:

- Plan the time, place and purpose of the meeting;
- Prepare the meeting agenda; and
- Recruit resource people, if needed, to lead discussion on agenda items.

Tips for Holding Productive Meetings

- Meet regularly, at least once a month, to plan activities.
- Agree on a time limit for the meeting (an hour is sufficient).
- Present a proposal for action—focus only on one major issue per meeting.
- Discuss at least one minor issue or follow up previous projects.
- Allow some time for open discussion.
- Socialize before or after the meeting to help develop team spirit.

To help your committee get started and to coordinate your activities with other unions in your area, contact your local central labor council or AFL-CIO Community Services liaison.

MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM THE AFL-CIO

- *Union Community Activist Network* training guide
- *When the Paycheck Stops*, an AFL-CIO unemployment survival manual and brochure
- *Helping Each Other*, an information and referral manual for unions
- *Street Heat Mobilization Manual 2.0*
- Strike Assistance Kit

The Heart of the Meeting: The Three D's

1. **Discuss** the proposal for action;
2. **Decide** on the action; and
3. **Divide** the work for the action.

Sample Division of Labor for Mobilization Activity

Action	Person Responsible	Date
Activate phone tree	Mary	2/17
Recruit volunteers	José	2/20
Leaflet plant gates	Sam	2/24
Distribute press releases	Ying	3/1

Model Agenda

- Call to order
- Approve agenda
- Minutes of previous meeting
- Major activity (a proposal for action)
 - Discuss
 - Decide
 - Divide the work
- Minor issue (report, discuss)
- Open time (free discussion, brainstorming)
- Summary (chair)
- Review the division of labor (jobs assigned)