

AFT Leader's Handbook for Success

*A guide
to building
an
effective
union*



A Union of Professionals

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Chapter 1

Getting started

In this chapter:

- Strategic planning
- Learning from our research
- Membership recruitment at a glance

The *AFT Leader's Handbook for Success* offers practical advice and ideas for improving your union's structure, governance, communications program and organizing and political action efforts. These suggestions can help you build a stronger, more powerful union. But before beginning this process, it's crucial to establish some objectives and develop a strategic plan. Please read this chapter first! Good planning will help identify your priorities and target resources.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning should be undertaken every few years by every local union. It should bring together your local leaders and activists to engage in a process to:

- Analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats confronting the union and its members;
- Identify priorities;
- Assess the current union program to determine if your local can meet challenges and identify areas that need improvement;
- Develop a plan with specific, measurable goals; and
- Develop a union budget that allocates both financial and human resources to achieve your objectives.

Check with your state federation, which may be able to offer assistance, before beginning the strategic planning process. If possible, include the state federation in the process to ensure that your goals will work in tandem with those set by the state federation.

Step 1

Analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats confronting the union and its members

Your local union leadership should have a discussion to identify the challenges and threats it is likely to face in the coming months and years. Do you anticipate tough contract negotiations? A voucher scheme in the state legislature? Budget cuts? Challenges from cheap dues organizations? Rising health insurance costs? This could be a long list.

The leadership also should discuss the obstacles and opportunities the union faces in addressing these issues.

Does your union have a weak image among members? In the community? What is your relationship with management? Do you lack the resources needed to put together an effective program? Do you have trouble getting members excited and involved in the union? This, too, could be a long list.

Step 2

Identify priorities

No union has the resources needed to tackle all problems at once. You need to prioritize. Identify the two or three biggest challenges or threats and the two or three biggest obstacles you are likely to face in addressing these issues.

Step 3

Assess the current union program to determine if your local can meet challenges and identify areas that need improvement

Are you fully prepared to tackle your problems, overcome your obstacles and take advantage of opportunities that might present themselves? If not, take a critical look at your union. The following are the key ingredients of an effective union that should be the basis of a discussion among your leadership:

Governance and administration. Do you manage finances and resources efficiently and economically? Is the local governed democratically and are all stakeholders involved in decision making? Does your budget reflect your priorities? If you have staff, are they well-managed?

Political action. Do you work with your state federation to educate your members on issues? Do you have a Committee on Political Education (COPE) program? Do you have a network of volunteer political activists? Do you support pro-union candidates and issues?

Legislative and other public policy representation. Are you effectively represented at school board meetings, in the legislature and with other policymaking groups? Do you work with your state federation on lobbying and political action efforts and do you have a grass-roots membership network to support the state federation's lobbying program? Have you formed coalitions with other groups that share your political agenda? Does the public perceive your union as standing for something more than self-interest?

Organizing. Do you have an internal organizing plan that goes beyond simply "signing up" people—a plan that creates activities to involve both members and potential members in all aspects of union work? Do members and potential members see the union as an organization that fights for the issues and concerns they care about? Do members feel part of a movement rather than just purchasers of a service?

Services and benefits. Do you have an effective grievance structure? A member benefits program? Do your members know who to turn to for help?

Leadership development. Do you have a plan to identify and nurture new leaders in your local? Do you provide ample opportunities for members to become activists? What training opportunities do you provide for new leaders?

Professional development. Do you offer professional development for members or work with the employer to ensure that it's available and relevant? Do you know what your state federation is doing in professional development?

Communications and technology. Is your newsletter/newspaper published regularly and on time? Is it centered on issues members care about

and on what the union is doing on their behalf? Do you have a mechanism for two-way communications to ensure that concerns of members are brought to the attention of leadership? How effective is your public relations effort? Do you keep accurate lists of members, as well as potential members? Is this information regularly shared with the AFT's national office? Do you have the technology needed to achieve your goals?

Step 4

Develop a plan with specific, measurable objectives

How will you meet the challenges and overcome the obstacles? With a plan!

Working with your leadership, develop a plan that focuses on the union's priorities. The plan should include measurable objectives, such as:

- Increase membership by __ percent
- Increase COPE contributions by __ percent
- Improve union communications
- Get __ percent more members to attend union meetings or to turn out for other public events.

Your plan should provide a road map for achieving your goals, as well as a way to measure progress. It should include detailed information on who will do what and by when.

When developing your plan, look to your state federation and the national AFT for resources and assistance.

Step 5

Develop a union budget that allocates both financial and human resources to achieve your objectives

Most union budgets evolve over time, with little thought given to the union's overall goals. Yet, if your local goes through a strategic planning process, you can use the plan to guide how the union allocates its resources. For example, if you determine that organ-

izing is a priority for your union but find that very little money is allocated for membership recruitment, this could indicate that your union needs to rethink how it allocates resources.

Learning from our research

The union's power is built on a foundation of an active and involved membership. But recruiting members and turning them into activists is not easy! In early 2002, AFT initiated a program called Membership Consolidation/Internal Organizing (MC/IO). This program targets local affiliates that have achieved collective bargaining rights in states where there are no provisions for agency fee. The goal of the program is to identify why nonmembers do not join the union and to explore how locals might attract these potential members. While your local may not be in a similar situation, much of what has been learned from this program can be useful in developing your union's strategic plan.

Key findings from the polls and focus groups

MC/IO has conducted 13 polls and 17 focus groups among nonmembers in three states. This research has helped identify:

- Who are the potential members
- Why they aren't joining
- What they want from unions
- What issues work best in organizing nonmembers
- Who most influences them, and how
- How the union must change to organize successfully

Key findings from this research are included below.

Organize a movement, not a client. Nonmembers tend to view the union as they would an insurance company: you pay a fee, and the union provides a service. They do not see the union as a movement—colleagues brought together who fight for solutions to common concerns. In many cases, locals have reinforced this notion by pitching membership as “transactional”—providing individual services and benefits in exchange for dues. A far better approach is to make organizing “transformational,” emphasizing member involvement, personal relationships and the union's role as an advocate for members' concerns. Make joining the union something a member does to support a cause rather than to buy a service.

Establish clear goals and a plan to communicate with and involve both members and nonmembers. Most nonmembers have little idea of what the union stands for or is fighting to achieve, suggesting that unions need to do a much better job of communicating with nonmembers. Your strategic plan should identify several key issues that the union will focus on, the goals you've set for each issue and how the union will conduct ongoing, issues-based communication with both members and nonmembers. Also include ideas to involve members and nonmembers in union activities that help build their understanding and approval of the union. When it comes to lobbying, political action and other union activities, locals should not rely exclusively on members for volunteer help. Remember, successful involvement leads to more memberships!

Overcome the dues objection. When asked why they have not joined their local union, nonmembers most frequently cite the cost of dues. The dues barrier is more complicated than you might think, however. Our research shows that nonmembers'

objections have less to do with the actual cost of dues than with their perception of value. Whether dues are \$200 a year or \$600 a year, nonmembers who do not have a clear idea of what the union stands for or view it as a service organization (rather than a movement) will object to dues. When developing a strategic plan, ask some key questions:

- How does this plan help build a sense of value among members and potential members?
- Are we focusing on their issues?
- Are we communicating with them effectively?
- Are we involving them in union activities?
- Does our structure foster long-term, personal relationships with the union?

Devote extraordinary effort to connecting with younger employees. Our research found that, if asked, younger employees generally are most receptive to joining the union.

Unfortunately, they are the least likely to know much about the union or to have any meaningful contact with union representatives. These younger employees are also the most likely to need help and advice from their colleagues and co-workers—a role the union can fill. Extraordinary efforts should be made to reach out to these younger workers, to involve them in union activities and to educate them about the union's goals.

Support work-site representatives. Successful worksite representatives build solid, trusting relationships with their colleagues through regular, personal contact. These representatives put a face on the union. They keep their colleagues informed, help with problems and create a bond between the union and the employee. They are mentors, friends and problem solvers. Developing these kinds of work-site representatives requires

more than the occasional training program; the union needs to nurture them—to set goals, establish expectations, develop incentives and rewards and provide them with the tools to do a good job

Find an issue—and run with it.

There is no shortage of challenges facing your members. Select a few of these top concerns and make them a high-profile focus of union activities. Create events to involve members and nonmembers. Educate your work-site representatives, and use them to carry the message to their colleagues. Look for ways to solicit opinions and ideas of both nonmembers and members. Focus communications on your "plan of action" to highlight and respond to issue or issues. Celebrate your successes, and use those successes as evidence that your union can tackle the tough problems as long as it has the active involvement of members.

Membership recruitment at a glance

Membership recruitment **should not** be...

- About how many people join (raw numbers of new members)
- About "signing people up" (transactional)
- An event or season
- A one-time proposition
- About talking, selling
- About using one approach for everybody
- A random set of occurrences
- An end

Membership recruitment **should** be...

- About a percentage of membership (density, retention)
- About creating a "culture of membership" (transformational)
- An ongoing activity
- A series of contacts, experiences
- About listening, connecting
- About adaptation, customization for a particular target audience
- A campaign, a planned approach
- A means

More information about the MC/IO program is available from Rick Kuplinski at rkuplins@aft.org.

Chapter 2

Governance and administration

In this chapter:

- Your union constitution
- AFT constitutional mandates
- Election of officers
- Membership/representative assemblies
- Duties of officers
- Establishing union committees
- Conducting meetings
- Establishing an office/keeping records
- Setting dues
- Developing a budget

Governance is a system of rights, responsibility and authority for establishing the policies of the union. It rests upon a contract between the membership and the leadership that is codified in the union's constitution and bylaws. In essence, governance is how the union decides to set goals, objectives and policies.

Administration is a system of procedures for implementing the policies of the union. It has three major components—finance, personnel and operations. The essence of administration is “doing things right.”

Like nations, the way unions govern and administer themselves reflects their philosophy. Your union has the responsibility to establish and carry out policies that will benefit the entire membership and that will be consistent with the highest standards we advocate for our professions.

This section on governance and administration covers many topics, including many things that your local either must do—or should do—to be organizationally sound and in compliance with the AFT constitution. For example, your local union must:

- File a copy of its constitution with the AFT secretary-treasurer;
- Conduct union elections in accordance with the Landrum-Griffin Act.
- Pay payroll taxes, deduct withholdings and report expense stipends to the Internal Revenue Service.
- Keep per-capita payments to the AFT and your state federation up to date and ensure that both have an accurate list of your membership.
- Have your financial records audited or reviewed at least once every two years by an outside auditor or audit committee and make the review/audit available to the membership and the national office.
- Include a dues pass-through provision in your local's constitution.

In addition, your local union should have fire, casualty and theft insurance if the local has an office and office equipment, whether owned or rented, and ensure that any officers or staff who handle union funds are bonded.

Your union constitution

Your local is required to have a constitution and to file it with the AFT secretary-treasurer. The constitution establishes the framework for electing union leaders and making union policy. If your local does not have a constitution, consult with other locals, your state federation or the AFT for help and advice in developing one. If your local already has a constitution, review it on a regular basis to ensure that the union is abiding by its constitution and that it meets the current needs of the union.

Your constitution should spell out your local's governance structure (i.e., through a general membership meeting or a delegate assembly); the titles and duties of officers; the titles and responsibilities of standing committees; the terms of officers and the rules governing their election; the criteria for membership and, if there is more than one type of membership, the rights that flow from that membership; the frequency of executive board, general membership and/or delegate assembly meetings; the rules governing meetings if different from *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*; and the procedures for amending the constitution.

Consider which rules you want in the constitution, where a two-thirds vote and advance notice is normally needed for amendment, and those you want in the bylaws, which normally require only a majority vote to amend. Most locals put meeting rules and dues provisions in the bylaws. The constitution and bylaws must be approved by the membership.

Elements of the constitution

In writing a constitution, your goal should be to create workable, fair and efficient procedures that promote good communication between the union and its members and allow members to participate smoothly and effectively in policymaking.

The following is a framework to guide the development of your constitution, if you don't already have one, or to help you evaluate your current constitution.

ARTICLE I—NAME

This article provides the official name of the organization and local number. If your local is a bargaining local, does your official name correspond with the name on the bargaining agent certification and the name in the recognition clause of your contract?

ARTICLE II—OBJECTIVES

This lists the purposes, goals and objectives of the local union. This could include:

- To bring members together for mutual assistance and cooperation;
- To promote the welfare of the membership;
- To promote improvement in the standards of the profession;
- To promote the welfare of the community served by the membership; and
- To promote a close relationship and mutual cooperation with the labor community.

ARTICLE III—MEMBERSHIP

This provides the criteria for membership in the union and also states which categories of employees are excluded from membership. It may:

- List those employees who are eligible for membership;
- List supervisory or management

personnel who are ineligible for membership;

- Provide a statement of nondiscrimination toward members and applicants; and
- Provide for removal of members after due process.

NOTE: If the union is the collective bargaining agent, removal of an employee category from membership should only be done after legal consultation.

ARTICLE IV—OFFICERS

This usually provides a listing of the officers of the union and any criteria for holding office.

ARTICLE V—OFFICERS' DUTIES

This outlines the duties and responsibilities of the officers.

For example, the president should:

- Preside at all membership meetings and executive board meetings;
- Serve as an ex-officio member of all standing committees, except the audit committee and elections committee;
- Serve as a co-signatory with the treasurer on all financial investments and accounts controlled by the union; and
- Make reports to the membership on the status of the union.

The vice president should:

- Perform the duties of the president in the absence of that officer; and
- Serve as the chair for certain standing committees.

The treasurer should:

- Keep all financial records of the organization and make a periodic report of such records to the membership and the executive board;
- Chair the budget committee;
- Be responsible for the proper receipt and disbursement of union funds, as authorized by the adopted budget; and
- Keep all membership records.

The secretary should:

- Keep minutes at all official meetings;
- Issue all notices and handle correspondence at the direction of the president;
- Be custodian of the seal and charter of the union;
- Record the minutes of membership and executive board meetings; and
- Keep all non-financial records of the organization.

ARTICLE VI—ELECTIONS

This outlines the specific nomination and election procedures of the union. It should include:

- Notification of nomination and election to all members;
- Secret ballot election of all officers and executive board members;
- Criteria for determining the margin necessary to win an election;
- The date that winning candidates take office;
- Special elections to fill vacancies or language stating that vacancies will be filled by the president or executive board;
- Recall or impeachment procedures;
- Notification of membership and affiliates when there is a change in officers; and
- Terms of office that are no more than three years (four years maximum by law), or less if required by applicable state or federal law.

ARTICLE VII—COMMITTEES

This lists the standing committees of the union and provides for the creation of special ad hoc committees. In addition, this article should explain how committee members are selected (appointed? elected? by whom?); state that the treasurer shall chair the budget committee; and state that no officers shall serve on the audit or election committees.

ARTICLE VIII—THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This deals with the power and duties of the executive board of the union. The executive board may also be known as the executive council or the executive committee. If your union is governed through a representative assembly, include guidelines for that as well. This article should include:

- The composition of the executive board;
- The role of the executive board in administering the policies of the union;
- Emergency power to act where policy cannot be set by the membership;
- The setting of executive board meetings;
- The power to make contracts and incur liabilities appropriate to the accomplishment of its purposes; and
- A reporting of executive board activities to the membership.

ARTICLE IX—AFFILIATIONS

This provides a statement of affiliation with the state and national AFT and with the local and state AFL-CIO. This article should also include provisions for selecting and sending delegates to each affiliate convention and/or meeting in accordance with the constitutions of these organizations. These delegates should be members in good standing, and there should be requirements for their reporting to the executive board.

ARTICLE X—MEETINGS

This outlines the frequency of membership meetings, who can call such meetings and the criteria for a quorum (the minimum number of members that must be present for the meeting to be an official proceeding).

ARTICLE XI—FINANCE

This sets the dues for the union and deals with any other financial affairs. Financial affairs that are likely to change frequently may be included in

the bylaws, which are normally easier to change. This article should establish a “pass-through” dues structure as required by the AFT constitution (a provision that local dues are automatically increased as the local’s per-capita payments to the AFT and the AFT state federation are increased), as well as procedures for changing the dues.

ARTICLE XII—RULES OF ORDER

Most constitutions establish that *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall govern in all cases not covered by the constitution or the bylaws of the local union.

ARTICLE XIII—AMENDMENT

This establishes the procedure for amending the constitution, including which union body votes on amendments and whether a simple majority or a two-thirds vote is necessary

ARTICLE XIV—AVAILABILITY OF CONSTITUTION

This outlines who shall receive copies and amendments of the constitution and bylaws. Usually copies are made available to membership and to affiliated organizations. Under the AFT constitution, the local is required to keep a current copy of its constitution and bylaws on file with the AFT secretary-treasurer.

Bylaws

The bylaws of the local union are rules that usually are easier to change than provisions of the constitution. Modification or amendment of the bylaws normally is accomplished by a majority vote rather than the two-thirds or three-quarters that may be necessary to amend the constitution.

Articles and sections of the bylaws may be set up in the same fashion as the constitution. The bylaws can outline additional procedures, duties or methods of operation, but anything provided for in the constitution should not be repeated in the bylaws.

In a contested election, candidates must be allowed to station observers at the polling sites.

Representatives of the competing candidates should be allowed to observe, but not actually participate in, the counting of ballots.

Documents related to the election should be safely stored for one year in case there is a challenge to the election. This includes the used, unused and challenged ballots, plus the envelopes used to return ballots, as well as the membership list.

No union funds or resources may be used to support any candidate.

The union should comply with reasonable requests to distribute campaign literature at the candidate's expense.

Candidates have the right to inspect, not copy, the membership list once within 30 days prior to the election. No candidate can have preferential access to the list.

Elections for officers of the local union must be held at least every three years. (Elections for officers of the state federation must be held at least every four years.)

There must not be any campaigning within a polling place.

Nomination procedures. In preparing for your internal elections, be sure members know the eligibility and timeliness requirements for candidates and the procedures for nominating officers. Although candidates are often nominated by a nominating committee, nominations from the floor are usually in order. During the campaign period, scrupulously ensure that no candidates are able to use union facilities or union staff for partisan purposes.

Membership/ representative assemblies

The membership is the ultimate authority in all unions. A vehicle must be available to allow members to communicate with the union leadership and to assert that authority. The AFT constitution requires that the constitution and bylaws of each affiliated local provide for regular meetings of an executive body and regular meetings of the general membership or a representative body thereof. Some locals (usually small ones) use a regular general membership meeting for this purpose. Others (usually large ones) use a representative assembly (sometimes known as a delegate assembly). In addition, most constitutions allow the president to call special meetings when needed.

Governance by representative assembly

In the representative assembly structure, the representatives (or delegates) are elected by the work-site membership through a proportional formula similar to the U.S House of Representatives (i.e., one delegate for 25 or 50 members in a building). A rep may also serve as the steward at his or her job site.

There are several advantages of the representative assembly structure. Work-site representatives are vested with more authority and prestige, which encourages stewards/ reps to take their work more seriously. Also, the structure achieves greater representative democracy. In many large locals, for example, most members won't attend regular meetings, leaving the meeting—and the union—vulnera-

ble to manipulation by a minority. The delegate assembly better assures that union decisions will represent the desires of the broad membership.

Governance by membership meeting

On the other hand, a regular membership meeting guarantees that every member can bring his or her concerns to the union. In a small local, a membership meeting can assure direct contact between members and officers.

Some unions have successfully combined the two approaches: Members elect delegates who meet at regular representative assembly meetings; in addition, however, two or three general membership meetings are held each year.

Whether you hold general membership meetings or representative assembly meetings, schedule the meetings on a regular date at a regular time. Hold the meetings at a place and time that is convenient for your members/delegates.

Attendance and attitudes will be better if you do the following:

- Send an agenda and timely notice of the meeting;
- Start the meeting on time;
- End it at a reasonable hour;
- Keep it as short as possible;
- Whenever possible, have officers and committees prepare written reports;
- Always expedite procedural matters;
- Structure your meetings so as to encourage debate and discussion at appropriate times;
- Use your strategic plan as a guide in developing the agenda for your meeting;
- Make any accommodations that are reasonable to facilitate attendance and comfortable participation. (Examples: free parking, meals or refreshments,

child care, adequate lighting and sound equipment, adequate copies of all print materials to be used during the meeting); and

- Structure the meetings to achieve active participation and a democratic exchange of ideas.

If your local is small, a membership meeting may be the appropriate way to go. However, make every effort to ensure that sufficient members turn out.

Duties of officers

Your local should have elected officers to oversee the union day-to-day activities and to establish long-term goals. Most locals include the positions of president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. Many locals include several vice president positions carrying specific responsibilities.

President's duties

Most constitutions designate the president as the chief executive and charge him or her with carrying out the policies established by the membership. The president may delegate authority but not the responsibility of the office. The president's responsibilities include overseeing the following:

- A broad program of union activities that will help the union maintain the loyalty and confidence of its members, especially based on their support for the union in matters affecting the quality of professional practice and the well-being of the institutions in which they work;
- The negotiation and enforcement of the collective bargaining contract;
- Accurate membership recordkeeping;
- An effective membership recruitment program;

- An effective internal and external communications program;
- An effective political action program; and
- An organizational structure that allows you to effectively deliver services and carry out union policies to ensure the efficient, honest use of all union funds.

Specific responsibilities of the president include presiding at membership meetings, delegate assemblies and special meetings (most unions designate the first vice president to conduct the meeting in the president's absence); purchasing insurance for members and the local; establishing effective office procedures to track grievances and contract timetables, correspondence, membership records and other information and records; monitoring the decision-making bodies of employing institutions; supervising staff; and participating actively in the local AFL-CIO council.

In meeting these responsibilities, the president must always act within the confines of the constitution and the policies established by the membership/representative assembly and the executive board (which may have authority to act for the membership between meetings). If it's not possible to call a meeting, the president may be able to poll the executive board. If that is not possible, the president may act on his or her own and report these actions as soon as possible to the executive board and/or general membership/representative assembly.

The president also is responsible for ensuring that the union vigorously defends any member whose civil or job rights are threatened. If the union incurs legal expenses while defending a member's rights, it may be eligible for financial assistance from the AFT's Defense Fund. If the union is forced to strike, it may be eligible for assistance from the AFT's Militancy Fund.

Purchasing insurance for members and the local. If your local purchases professional occupational liability or accidental death and dismemberment insurance through the AFT, make sure that the membership list you have on file at the AFT is accurate and that your per-capita payments are up to date. Otherwise your members may not be covered! If your local's membership is a constituency other than teachers, check the coverage carefully to ensure that it meets the needs of your members.

Also, the AFT provides liability insurance for affiliate officers. This policy covers negligence, slander and libel, as well as "duty-of-fair-representation" lawsuits. Locals should make sure, however, that any officer who handles funds is bonded (see information below). If the local owns or rents an office and/or owns or rents office equipment, it should have fire, casualty and theft insurance coverage.

Overseeing the treasury and budget. Although the union will have an office of treasurer, the president still is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the union has sufficient resources to carry out its mission; that union funds are handled in an honest and efficient way (the president should act as a co-signer, with the treasurer, on all financial instruments); that dues are properly collected; that the union's budget is properly prepared; and that proper accounting procedures and internal financial controls are used.

Make sure that any person who handles union funds is bonded. For information about purchasing a bond through AFT contact the AFT accounting department or send an e-mail to billinginquiry@aft.org. If you represent private sector employees, your bond must conform to Labor Department specifications.

Monitoring the decision-making bodies of employing institu-

tions. The president should monitor all decision-making bodies related to the institution(s) in which members are employed. This includes school boards, boards of trustees, state agencies, city and county councils, commissions and, of course, the state legislature.

When these bodies meet, there is no substitute for the president's personal attendance, since no other union officer commands the same authority. Through regular attendance, the president makes the union presence felt and has the opportunity to participate in the policymaking decisions of management. At these meetings, always speak with civility and decorum, but don't hesitate to disagree if necessary. Also be helpful and supportive when appropriate.

Supervising staff. At some point

you may determine that you need to hire staff. You have many options, including:

■ **Release time.** Some union contracts allow members to be "released" from their regular duties to work part- or full-time for the union. The union then reimburses the member at his or her regular rate of pay. An officer might go on release time status, for example, to handle membership grievances.

■ **Temporary stipend for an officer.** Ask a particularly competent executive board member or the chair of a major committee to work for the union on a temporary, as-needed basis. The membership chairman could be hired for a short time to plan and execute a membership campaign, for example, or the treasurer could be hired temporarily to prepare the budget and financial records for a major membership meeting.

■ **Expenses for regular activists.** Some larger locals pay their building reps a monthly stipend, contingent on their attendance at monthly building rep meetings and/or their performance of defined duties. This may tug at the volunteer ethic, but it often works. You may want to pay the members of your negotiating team and your area coordinators a small stipend to defray their expenses and to compensate for the long hours spent preparing for and participating in negotiations.

■ **Part-time jobs.** Many unions will hire one or more members on a part-time basis to monitor phone calls and act as problem solvers. These part-time staff often work afternoons, after their normal work hours. The AFT's organization and field services department offers a formal Membership Service Specialist assistance program. It has been highly successful, particularly with PSRP locals. Other possibilities for part-time jobs might include

Online training for treasurers

The AFT financial services department offers two Web-based resources for local financial officers. The first is the special interactive course, **Keeping the Records Straight**. Treasurers and financial officers can sign up for online classes on a variety of topics, ranging from filling out per-capita forms to preparing a local budget. Along with required reading, participants are asked to complete exercises and meet in a chat room to discuss that week's assignment with the AFT instructor and their classmates.

The reading and exercises are not time-consuming, and the chat sessions are arranged around the participants' schedules. Registration is done online; participants also can access the Keeping the Records Straight manual from the site. Registrants must sign up for a minimum of two classes. Online training can be accessed through the AFT's LeaderNet site at <http://leadernet.aft.org>. (First-time users must register at <http://leadernet.org/register/>.)

Our other online resource is the **Job Aid**, a companion resource to Keeping the Records Straight, which serves as a quick reference guide. The site contains "how to" sections on IRS Form 990, accounting for COPE funds and processing new members. Treasurers can use the links on the site to download IRS forms and a variety of other forms. The site also includes samples of completed forms. The Job Aid site is also accessible through the AFT LeaderNet.

grievance chair, professional development coordinator or editor of the local union's newsletter.

■ **Full-time staff.** At some point, you may need to hire full-time staff. If your local can only afford one staff person, it is probably wise to hire the president. In some cases, however, a local may prefer to hire an executive director, an organizer or a grievance handler as its single staff person.

As you consider your options, keep in mind that the strength of your local is in the commitment and involvement of your members. Don't dampen the volunteer ethic in your union. Staff should supplement volunteer efforts, not replace them, and any money paid to volunteers should be regarded as a stipend or expenses, not as wages.

Also, making a staff structure work requires that the president (or someone else with this designated authority) supervise them well and provide them with the training and education they need to perform effectively.

If you pay salaries to staff or stipends to officers, you must pay payroll taxes, deduct the appropriate withholdings and report all stipends to the Internal Revenue Service. Get advice from a qualified accountant regarding your recordkeeping and reporting responsibilities.

Finally, when the union acts as employer, it must abide by all laws regulating employment practices and maintain a work environment that is free of discrimination or bias. Seek out training and counsel in the myriad considerations in personnel management, including those related to hiring, evaluation and discipline.

Treasurer's duties

The treasurer administers the finances of the union. He or she has direct, fiduciary responsibility for collecting and expending the members' dues honestly and competently. This is probably

the position of greatest trust within the union, requiring a person with integrity and honesty and who is willing to take on a serious responsibility.

Members entrust the union with their money; it's the treasurer's job to ensure that this trust is not violated. He or she must keep scrupulously accurate financial records—both to ensure the integrity of the union accounts and to facilitate the union's budgetmaking process. The duties of the treasurer include:

- Filing the necessary reports with the IRS, including a Form 990 if the local is above a certain size;
- Filing LM-1 and LM-2 reports if necessary (the Labor Department requires all locals with members in the private sector that are represented for purposes of bargaining and grievances, as well as any state federation that has at least one such local, to file annual LM reports. Larger locals with more than \$250,000 in annual revenues are required to file the LM-2 report. Smaller locals must file the shorter LM-3. Contact AFT's legal department if you are not sure if your union needs to file LM reports);
- Paying per-capita dues to the AFT, the state federation, the state AFL-CIO and your central labor council;
- Making a regular report at representative assemblies/membership meetings and making an annual financial report available to the membership;
- Serving as a co-signatory with the president on all financial instruments and checks for the local;
- Preparing a budget and working to make sure that the union lives within the budget; and
- Ensuring that financial records are audited at least every two years by an outside auditor or an audit committee and providing a copy of the audit to the AFT (in compliance with the AFT constitution).

Establishing a budget. The treasurer should work with the president and other officers to establish a budget and work to ensure that the union lives within the budget. In developing a budget proposal, the treasurer should first look at the union's strategic plan and make recommendations for expenditures based on the resources needed to achieve the plan's goals. Review financial records from previous years to determine the amounts spent for budget line items in the past. Once adopted by the appropriate union body, the budget is the union's guide for future spending. Any major changes in budget projections should be reviewed and cleared with the appropriate union body.

The secretary's duties

The secretary takes careful minutes that accurately record all actions of membership/rep meetings and at executive board meetings. At meetings, the secretary should distribute the minutes from the previous meeting and report on any official correspondence the union has received.

The executive board/committee/council

The constitution outlines the composition and responsibilities of the executive board (sometimes known as an executive council or executive committee). The executive board usually includes the president, secretary, treasurer (in some locals the latter two positions are combined) and a number of vice presidents or at-large members. The vice presidents may be elected by the membership at large; by each constituency group (i.e., paraprofessionals, high school teachers, a certain state agency); or by region. Sometimes vice presidents have mandated responsibilities; the first vice president may be responsible for membership,

for example, and the second vice president for political action.

In most locals, the executive board meets more frequently (usually once or twice a month) and is empowered to act on behalf of members between the regular membership or delegate meetings. Some constitutions allow the executive board to act on anything except constitutional amendments. Other constitutions may reserve certain matters for the membership.

Most often, the executive board will conduct the most substantive discussions of union policies and plans. Following these discussions, the executive board will normally make policy, program and budget recommendations to the membership. Being able to work well with your executive board is key to running an effective, productive local.

Responsibilities of the executive board. No matter how the executive board is composed and its responsibilities defined, don't place too much emphasis on the "executive" part of being a member of this body. A member of the executive board is more a super member than executive. It is important for executive board members to be team players who collectively adopt a "can-do" attitude and are willing to pitch in to get the union's work done.

Individual executive board members should pledge to:

- Participate actively in meetings and board activities and serve willingly on committees when appointed;
- Keep informed on issues affecting the membership and the work they perform;
- Raise issues of concern to their constituents;
- Consider their role as that of a "trustee" to ensure the union's long-term growth, success, security and fiscal integrity;

- Recognize that the designated officers should direct the day-to-day operation of the union—such as directing staff and overseeing finances—subject to the direction and approval of the board when it is meeting in a legally called session;
- Respect and support the majority decisions of the board;
- Declare when conflicts of interest occur and abstain from voting in those circumstances; and
- Refrain from criticizing fellow board members, discussing confidential proceedings outside of board meetings or interfering in the duties of the officers.

Establishing union committees

The union constitution may set up standing committees (permanent committees with ongoing responsibilities) to carry out a variety of functions. The constitution may mandate who chairs these committees or the president may appoint a chair. In most cases, the president, the committee chair or both will choose the committee's members. Temporary, ad hoc committees can be set up at any time by motion of the executive board or initiative of the president to address specific problems, tasks or issues.

Committee chairs should be directly responsible for their committee's work, but the president remains ultimately responsible. The president may participate "ex-officio" on any committee and should always keep abreast of committee work. At times, the president's influence is needed to correct a committee's course, provide guidance or ensure that union goals are met.

Like members of the executive board, members of committees need

to share a strong work ethic and sense of responsibility for the success of the union. Specifically, they should pledge to:

- Attend all meetings and arrive on time.
- Make an effort to come to meetings prepared to perform the work of the committee.
- Participate in the committee deliberations without monopolizing the debate.
- Remain flexible and practice the art of compromise when it can be done without sacrificing the interests of constituents.

More information on union committees is included in Chapter 3, "Organizational structure."

Conducting meetings

Whether your local conducts general membership meetings or representative assemblies, the purpose is the same: two-way communication between the leadership and the membership. The presiding officer must conduct the meeting fairly and do what is necessary to expedite the meeting's business. If you want to enter the discussion, you must relinquish the chair. Your procedural decisions (known as "decisions of the chair") are subject to challenge and can be overturned by a majority vote. To expedite the meeting's business, most constitutions specify that *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* (or another set of generally accepted rules) should be used. You are then bound to run the meeting by those rules unless there are specific exceptions in the constitution and bylaws. The rules are designed to facilitate a smooth, democratic meeting; they

should not be misused to stifle debate or promote a particular point of view. Some locals designate a parliamentarian for meetings to point out if rules are being violated and to resolve procedural disputes.

Be wary of relaxing the rules to allow informal discussion; it may be difficult to revert to the rules if a controversial issue is raised or if the discussion gets out of hand. At any meeting where legally binding votes are taken, be sure the secretary takes accurate minutes. These minutes may have legal significance if a dispute arises.

It is important to develop a plan for soliciting member attendance. Notify members of the meeting schedule (several times) and convey the importance of the meeting and what will be discussed. Many locals provide child care during the meeting to make it easier for members to attend. Some locals even provide food.

■ **The meeting agenda.** The general requirements for a meeting agenda are listed below. You also should consider bringing in an interesting speaker or holding a training program that addresses a workplace concern; these can increase attendance at a meeting.

Membership records: AFT's free software solutions

AFT offers two free software solutions for membership record-keeping:

Membership Lite is an easy-to-use Internet-based membership recordkeeping system specifically designed for locals with fewer than 250 members. It includes built-in reports for mailing labels and other needs and is modeled after the AFT membership roster form.

Membership Suite is a robust Internet database solution for locals that want to track detailed information on their members and potential members, including political activity, job-related information, dues categories and much more.

For information on either solution, call the AFT information technology department at 800/238-1133, ext., 4567.

It also is important to have a social aspect to some meetings. Members should be notified of meetings well in advance of the date.

■ **The secretary's report.** The minutes of the previous meeting should be distributed. After additions or corrections are made from the floor, the minutes as a whole are approved by a vote. If there is a disagreement about the accuracy of the minutes, the issue may be decided by majority vote.

■ **The treasurer's report.** The treasurer accounts for the expenditure of all union money during the previous period and should be prepared to answer any questions regarding specific expenditures.

■ **The president's report.** This is the time and place for the president to report on the union's programs and activities and to inform members/delegates of important issues at the local, state and national levels. Normally, no votes are taken at this point on the agenda.

■ **Officers' reports.** Other officers can make reports if appropriate.

■ **Committee reports.** Committees can report on their progress and plans.

■ **Old business.** A previous discussion can be continued or specific old business can be taken up. For example, a previously tabled motion can be reconsidered, or a motion or amendment that requires two successful passages can be considered.

■ **New business.** In some cases, the executive committee or the president may be authorized to place specific issues at the top of the new business agenda. Otherwise, any motion that receives a second is in order. This is where you should bring up new issues that require a membership vote.

■ **Good and welfare.** Under good and welfare, members may inform the chair and their colleagues of any issue they deem relevant.

Establishing an office/keeping records

Any union with more than a handful of members, especially one that acts as the bargaining agent, needs an office. An office is a mark of stability and permanence. It allows the union to establish a presence, and it gives members a place to bring their concerns and questions without having to intrude on an officer's personal time and space.

The office need not be elaborate; rented space or space shared with another union or a compatible business or organization can be sufficient. Some unions have purchased a building. If you plan to do this, obtain legal advice regarding the proper form of ownership and make sure that you protect your investment with competent, regular maintenance.

The union office certainly will need basic equipment—telephone, telephone answering machine, desk, file cabinet, computer, printer, fax machine, copier, etc. Once again, the quantity and sophistication of your office needs will vary with the size of your local union, its resources and the demands placed upon it. Whatever your needs, consider all of the options available before you buy or lease equipment or space.

If your union does not need an office, consider establishing a post office box where union mail can be sent. If you conduct union business out of someone's home, either install a separate phone line paid for by the union or have the union reimburse union-related telephone expenses billed to a personal phone. You may want to purchase a telephone answering machine.

Office or no office, every union needs recordkeeping systems to save untold hours of frustration. It's essential that your local union keep accurate and up-to-date membership information. AFT requests that locals use Membership Suite or Membership Lite (see box, page 22). Keeping accurate records on dues collection and payment of per-capita dues is also essential. You also need an effective internal mailing system and a grievance tracking system that monitors contractual timelines and allows you to retrieve substantive grievance information.

Setting dues

Members are willing to pay their fair share of union expenses if they feel the union is representing their interests. Dues must be high enough to fund a quality union program. Union leaders often invite difficulty by setting dues too low; they then have to cut corners and are unable to meet membership needs. This results in frustrated members who register their displeasure by voting down needed dues increases or even dropping their union membership.

On the other hand, if you have an effective program or show a willingness to establish one, and if you can clearly defend the cost of the program, your members will support you. They understand that the costs of obtaining legal counsel, conducting arbitrations, renting and equipping the office and providing staff and other services to help members are necessary for a union to function properly.

Union dues and the procedures for changing them are usually established in the constitution or bylaws. Depending on your constitution, dues changes may be enacted by a membership meeting, a representative assembly or through a referendum. In some cases, they are established by a two-

thirds vote of those voting. In other cases, dues may be set by a simple majority on a second passage (i.e., the motion to raise dues is made at one meeting and passed at the subsequent meeting).

Most constitutions require that members receive advance notice of any proposed dues increase. Locals with private sector members must conduct votes on dues by secret ballot; most public sector locals follow this practice also. Whatever the procedure for setting dues, the process should be reasonable and open, with plenty of advance notice and opportunity for discussion.

Establishing a dues index

Like everything else, the cost of running a union increases. An inadequate or inflexible dues structure will leave your local under-funded and problem-ridden. Because of this, many unions have indexed their local dues to a percentage of employee salary—thus, as salaries increase, so do dues.

Ideally, dues should be pegged at a percentage of the employee's actual total salary (including all stipends and overtime pay) so that employees who earn more pay more in dues. In practice, however, it may be impossible to calculate the appropriate dues payment for every employee. Therefore, many locals peg dues to a percentage of the previous year's median or average salary or to the current year's starting salary and charge all employees the same rate. If you decide to index dues, consult with other locals, your state federation or the AFT to ensure that your proposed index is high enough to fund a healthy union program.

The AFT constitution provides that for members whose income falls below a certain level, AFT dues are set at one-

half or one-quarter per capita (see Article III, Section 6 of the AFT constitution for guidelines). Locals that represent contingent employees, such as adjunct instructors making less than \$10,000 per year, may apply for a reduction in the dues below the one-quarter rate in circumstances where it can be demonstrated that the one-quarter rate would be a hardship for the employees and the local. Many state federations follow this format in their per-capita assessment.

When calculating how much to charge for members who fall in these categories, plan to keep the *same dues amount locally* for all members and simply pass on the discount to the lower-paid members that you receive from the national and/or state federation. If you discount local dues for these employees, you may find yourself in a financial bind, since the cost of servicing these members is usually the same as servicing everyone else.

The dues 'pass-through'

The AFT constitution mandates a "pass-through" of all required per-capita payments to the AFT and your state federation or, in a few cases, your regional council; thus when per-capita payments increase, your local dues must automatically increase by the same amount. This ensures that your local treasury won't be eroded as per-capita payments rise and that you won't continually be faced with cutting programs or going back to the membership for a dues increase.

This sample language includes both the pass-through and the automatic index:

The dues of this federation shall be equal to __% of the individual's actual [average/starting/median] salary on the salary schedule currently in effect plus mandated increases in required affiliation fees and insurance premiums.

Ideally, the pass-through provision

should include per-capita payments to the state AFL-CIO and the local central labor council and those insurance premiums that are required to be paid with per capita—but the AFT constitution only requires a pass-through of per-capita increases to the AFT and the state federation.

Developing a budget

Your union's budget should be determined by its program. Local leaders should work with their members to set goals and objectives for the union, then develop a budget that can support achieving these goals (see Chapter 1, "Getting started").

Once this process is under way, someone has to figure out the numbers. Most constitutions say who is responsible for preparing the budget and which body (executive board or general membership) has the authority to adopt and amend the budget. The constitution may also define the fiscal year.

The fiscal year is the accounting year for the local. If the fiscal year is not defined in the constitution, you may choose any 12-month period unless you have previously filed Form 990 with the Internal Revenue Service. If you have previously filed Form 990, you must continue to use the fiscal year under which you filed that report until you receive written permission from the IRS to change your fiscal year. To change the fiscal year, apply to the IRS using Form 1128. (Information on completing these forms, including sample forms, are posted in the **Keeping the Records Straight Job Aid**, an interactive online resource for AFT treasurers available through the LeaderNet under online training).

Most constitutions assign the duty of preparing the budget to the treasurer

or to a budget committee chaired by the treasurer. If the budget is the sole responsibility of the treasurer, consider appointing a budget committee to work with him or her. Doing so may bring some fresh ideas to the budgeting process for your local. It will also involve more people in the activities of the local, and people who are involved tend to be more enthusiastic about the union. However the budget is prepared, make sure that those involved understand the union's strategic plan and have budgeted accordingly.

The constitution usually specifies whether the budget is to be approved by the executive board or the general membership. If your constitution is silent on the approval of the budget, your local will have to decide which of those two bodies has that power. While the size of the local is a factor, executive board approval generally provides for a more streamlined operation.

Regardless of who approves the budget, it should be clear that the local officers have the authority to spend money within the parameters of that budget. Officers should not have to bring every expenditure to the approving body for authorization.

Expenditures that cannot be made within the budget must, however, be

Good governance checklist

- ✓ Does your local engage in an ongoing planning process?
Does the plan establish the budget priorities for the local?
Does the dues structure provide adequate resources for implementing the plan?
- ✓ Is the number of officers consistent with the local's size? Is it representative of your union's constituency composition?
- ✓ Does your union have a sound relationship with the state federation? Does it support the agenda of the state federation? Do you make adequate use of the resources available from the state federation?
- ✓ In observing your board, do you find a good balance between the making of decisions and the implementation of decisions?

approved by the body that adopts the budget.

The treasurer should prepare comparative financial statements each time that he or she is required to make a report. These reports should show the budgeted amount for each category, the amount spent to date in each category and the budget balance in each category. Throughout the year, based upon these reports, the body that approves the budget initially has the authority to make changes in the budget as needed.

Preparing the budget

Having a budget merely to satisfy a constitutional requirement is of no benefit. In preparing the budget, you should strive toward assembling useful, accurate information. If this is your first attempt at preparing a budget, you may find that some of your underlying assumptions were invalid and that you will be frequently revising the budget throughout the year. As you gain experience in budgeting and have prior years' records to guide you, your expectations will be more on target.

As you prepare your budget, keep a record of all of your calculations showing how you arrived at your budget figures. Save this worksheet so that you can answer questions about your figures. The worksheet, as well as those that you create when amending your budget during the year, will also be useful when preparing next year's budget.

After you have completed the budget worksheet and are satisfied with the budget figures, prepare a formal copy of the proposed budget to present to those who are responsible for adopting the budget.

Predicting income

The bulk of income is derived from membership dues and may be difficult to predict. Some local unions are in

periods of fast growth, some locals are fairly stable and others are faced with declining membership. Consider using the "worst possible scenario" in making membership predictions. If events turn out better than conservative predictions, you can revise the budget later to accommodate the increased revenues. It's an easier, more pleasant task than having to make cuts in expenditures because revenues are lower than projected.

Include other income from all sources that can be identified: fundraising activities, interest on savings and investments, newspaper or newsletter advertising revenue, etc. Do not include income that cannot be accurately predicted, and certainly do not include unrealistic income for the sole purpose of balancing the budget.

Planning expenditures

The most accurate way to plan expenditures is to first decide which services and activities you want to provide and then determine how much each of those will cost. Do this initially without regard to how much income is available to support your activities. In determining the costs of your activities, don't just "guesstimate." Instead, break the activity into component parts and assign costs for each of these as accurately as possible. If appropriate, seek assistance or advice from providers of related products and services.

Basically, you will encounter four different types of expenditures:

- Those that are required by law, such as taxes;
- Those that are required by local constitution, such as affiliation fees;
- Those that are required by contracts, such as leases, equipment rentals and employment contracts; and
- Those that are associated with the local program.

All of these expenditures are, at some point, determined by the local. Some of them are fixed, and there is little that you can do to control them, although it does make it easier to budget for them.

After determining the cost of each individual program, list them together and come up with a total cost. This amount is then compared to your total income.

At this point, you will have one of three possible outcomes: A surplus of income over expenditures, a balanced budget or a deficit. If you have a surplus, you can decide to bank it for future use or to expand your local's programs. If you have a deficit, you must decide which activities must be reduced or eliminated or you must determine where the additional funds will come from to support your programs.

It is primarily those items in the last bullet—those associated with the local

program—that should concern you now, because those are the costs over which you have the most control.

Because you engaged in detailed calculations earlier (rather than “guesstimates”), you are prepared to make informed decisions about where to make budget cuts. For instance, because you know the cost of your newsletter in each of its alternative formats, you can decide to reduce the size of each issue, reduce the number of issues or eliminate it entirely, depending upon the amount of money that you need to eliminate from the budget.

Preparing the budget involves a great deal of work (another reason for having a budget committee to share the burden). The experience that you gain in preparing your budget will make each budget easier in the following years. The work that you put into planning a budget can also eliminate later operating problems

Chapter 3

Organizational structure

In this chapter:

- The role of work-site representatives
- Building a work-site team
- Selecting work-site representatives
- Area coordinators
- Work-site representative training
- Recognition of work-site representatives
- Union committees
- Training leadership
- Union affiliations
- Organizing a retirees chapter

Organizational structure is how officers, staff and volunteers are set up to carry out the local's policies, conduct organizing campaigns, provide two-way communication between the leadership and the membership and involve members in the program of the union. In brief, organizational structure is “who gets things done.” The foundation of a local union's structure is its system of work-site representatives, the people who have the most direct, day-to-day contact with members.

A local's effectiveness depends on the strength of its organizational structure. A strong structure that extends to the work-site level will enable the union to transmit its message to the grass roots, as well as get important feedback from members and potential members. A good structure also allows the union leader to delegate tasks to a large number of people, confident that those tasks will be carried out effectively. This section covers many tasks related to building and maintaining an effective organizational structure. These include:

- Defining the role of the work-site representative;
- Establishing a work-site representative or a team of “reps” at every work site;
- Selecting work-site representatives;
- Communicating with and training work-site representatives to help them perform their roles effectively;
- Creating a system for giving work-site representatives feedback and recognition;
- Establishing a workable committee structure that allows for adequate delegation, balanced with accountability through regular meetings and reporting procedures; and
- Participating in affiliated groups.

The role of work-site representatives

Work-site representatives are known by different names among AFT local unions, including steward, building representative, department representative or chapter chair. What is common to all is that “reps” are central to an effective union, since they fulfill many roles. These include:

■ **Work-site leader.** Work-site representatives are closer, and often more important, to the average member than the union president. Accordingly, most local unions expect reps to be a visible and outspoken representative of the union; hold regular work-site meetings; welcome new employees and orient them to the union; discuss important issues with members at every available opportunity; and represent members at delegate assemblies or a steward’s council, if a local has one.

■ **Communicator.** Work-site representatives are the eyes, ears and voice of the union. They distribute union literature, maintain union bulletin boards, conduct surveys and collect literature from management or competing organizations. They educate members on the union’s political and policy positions, as well as on current threats to members of the institutions in which they work. They convey member opinions and viewpoints to union leadership, answer union-related questions and use communication systems, such as a telephone tree or e-mail list, to contact members quickly when needed.

■ **Union builder.** Work-site representatives are organizers. They develop a work-site union committee or leadership team; recruit members; welcome

new employees and orient them to the union; collect political action money, especially by signing members up for continuing payroll deduction of COPE contributions; recruit volunteers for union committees and activities, especially those related to negotiations and political and legislative action; and involve members in social and charitable activities.

■ **Problem solver.** With effective work-site representatives, many problems and contractual disputes can be solved—or prevented altogether—and never have to reach the union office, a union officer or a staff member. Although it is up to your local union to determine what degree of problem-solving responsibility should be carried by the reps, this could include monitoring and reporting contract violations and identifying problems at the work site and seeking solutions before they become grievances. Work-site reps also handle grievances, most commonly at the informal and Level I stages, and intervene in member-to-member disputes.

■ **Representative assembly members.** Some unions, particularly large locals, use a representative assembly structure as part of their governance system (see Chapter 2). In this type of structure, building representatives take on the role of delegates who represent the interests of their members at meetings.

■ **Work-site representatives as leaders for quality.** A union should stand both for the well-being of its members and the well-being of the institutions in which they work. As the union involves itself more in initiatives to improve the quality of work and service to clients, the role of work-site representatives, logically, is central. Reps have the closest relationship with those who actually deliver the services—members and administrators.

They have the greatest potential to exert the union's influence on these initiatives to ensure that the improvement process serves its intended goals.

Work-site representatives among AFT's teacher membership, for example, act as monitors and facilitators of school change. They convey information about how reform programs and policies should be implemented at the school level and transmit information to union leaders about what is actually happening, both good and bad. They are active in school-based committees or teams formed around the improvement process. They enforce the contract while looking for new opportunities in the negotiation process to create an environment most conducive to effective instruction.

Preparing reps for this demanding role requires local unions to redouble their efforts to provide them with training and support.

Building a work-site team

Among all AFT constituencies, the growth in participatory management and quality initiatives have greatly broadened the scope of issues—and challenges—the union faces. This, in turn, has increased the workload of work-site representatives so much that their duties are almost more than one person can handle. To better manage this, many AFT local unions are using teams—led by a lead or chief steward—at the workplace level. Teams can be structured loosely around the needs of any given day, or team members can take on distinct duties, such as recruiter, problem solver, communicator, political action coordinator, professional issues chair or health and safety liaison. The advantages of a team system are:

- The union's base of volunteer support expands dramatically;
- There is a lower ratio of members to reps, thus facilitating more communication and better service to members;
- The work is broken into more manageable chunks, which improves recruitment and retention;
- Team members can choose tasks for which they feel most competent and confident in performing; and
- The union can better target training and support to further develop team members' expertise or talents.

There are challenges to this system, however. They include:

- Difficulty recruiting an adequate number of volunteers;
- Managing the complexities of the system, including maintaining and updating a database of reps, communicating with them, providing specialized training and making sure that teams actually work well together; and
- "Overspecialization" among team members, which can isolate them from each other and inhibit their ability to understand and promote the "big picture" of the union's program.

Selecting work-site representatives

Logically, a local union needs at least one work-site representative per work site, but sometimes this is not enough. A work site may have too many members and/or potential members for one person to represent adequately. The work-related duties or physical location may limit the ability of a representative to have contact with everyone at the work site. A single work-site representative also may not have enough in common with all employee

classifications or departments at a given location to be fully effective.

Many locals thus establish other ways to allocate work-site representative slots. Some establish a ratio, such as one work-site representative per 10 to 20 members and/or potential members. Others “map” the work site to best allocate reps among distinct subgroups of workers, such as by location, job classification or department. Statewide locals may also need regional or agency-wide reps to provide service to members who work alone or on the road.

After determining how many work-site representatives are needed, the next step is to decide on a method of selection.

If the union is governed through a general membership meeting, the representative is elected by the members at the work site. The election procedures for work-site elections may or may not be set forth in the constitution, but the procedures should be the same for every site. The local should also have a procedure for removing someone who is not performing adequately.

If your union is governed through a delegate assembly (a decision-making body of work-site representatives, often used in lieu of a general membership meeting), your constitution may require that the representative be elected by the members at the work site. In that case, the rep would serve a dual function—carrying out the traditional tasks of the position, as well as representing work-site members at delegate assembly meetings, where union policy is established.

Competition for available work-site representative positions, debate among the candidates and high voter turnout are all positive signs of a healthy union. It shows that the role of the rep is understood and taken seriously.

By contrast, a union leader should heed the signs of trouble if few people are willing to run, voter turnout is low or rep slots go vacant at some work sites. Although there is no simple fix to these problems, begin by taking a critical look at the value the union places on the role of work-site representatives as measured by the training and support it provides to its reps.

Additional work-site representatives. More AFT locals are adopting a structure to accommodate several work-site representatives, each with clear areas of responsibility. This could include work-site legislative coordinators to keep members informed about political and legislative issues or professional issues coordinators to help bring meaningful professional development to members. The advantage is that there are more people within a work site to help advance the work of the union; it also creates more ways for members to get involved. Remember that members who would never volunteer to be a building representative may gladly volunteer to get involved in politics or professional issues.

Area coordinators

AFT recommends that larger locals appoint area coordinators to serve as liaisons between the central union and the work-site representatives to ensure good communication and efficient delivery of services. With an area coordinator structure, divide the bargaining unit and the reps into geographic regions and then designate a coordinator for each region. Regions should be small enough so that area coordinators can handle the responsibilities.

The area coordinators should make sure that information from the central union gets out to the reps and then out

to employees on time and that the reps are well-trained and effective in their work.

Area coordinators can also spearhead and monitor the progress of membership recruitment drives and other activities. Area reps also can be helpful when the union needs to “get bodies out” for work parties, rallies, phone banks, etc.

As with building representatives, area coordinators need continuous support and reinforcement.

Work-site representative training

Since the work-site representatives are so important to the union, invest time and resources in their training and give them the respect and recognition that their work deserves.

Make training regular, meaningful and specific. Many locals offer a one-day training workshop once a year (usually in connection with the opening of school, the installation of new officers and reps or the launching of a major membership drive). Others hold intensive training at an annual retreat. In reality, neither approach is probably enough. Consider some kind of regularly scheduled training, perhaps every other month.

Training must be meaningful and geared to the skill level of each rep. Assess the various levels of expertise of your building stewards/ reps. At the very least, your training programs should provide both a basic training program for newly appointed stewards/ reps and a more sophisticated program for experienced stewards/ reps.

Whatever form the training takes, it should cover the full range of tasks for

which the steward/rep is responsible:

- How to listen;
- How to recruit;
- How to answer the questions most commonly asked by members and nonmembers;
- How to recognize and handle a contract violation;
- How to solve work-site problems informally (i.e., without resorting to the formal grievance process);
- How to handle grievances (if applicable);
- How to run a meeting; and
- How to build union commitment at the work-site level.

Also, reps should be fully informed of all union programs and their role in those programs (what the COPE program is and how they can promote COPE check-off, for example), as well as union structure, policy and political endorsements.

Clarify expectations with a written job description. Before training work-site representatives, everyone needs to be clear about the expectations of the job. This should be included in a formal written job description that is shared with your reps.

Many locals fail to take this important step. Concerned that volunteers will be discouraged by the demands of a job, locals often leave expectations vague or intentionally downplay the time and hard work involved. The consequence, of course, is that those who do volunteer often only live up to these vague or downplayed expectations, leaving the union with an inadequate work-site representation structure. It's better to be clear up front that the rep's job is a big one and then provide the training and support that will ensure success. A typical job description could include:

- **Job title.** What will you call your work-site representatives? Pick a title

that most closely matches their specific job or conveys a desired image of their role. Examples: steward; chapter chair; chapter leader; pro rep; building rep; union liaison.

■ **Purpose.** Use a few sentences to describe the essence of the job. Provide just a general picture here, since specific duties will be described later. Here's an example: *In addition to recruiting members and helping the union carry out its responsibilities related to the duty of fair representation under collective bargaining (or in non-bargaining situations: under applicable laws and employer policies and procedures), the work-site representative shall educate constituents on the wide range of issues facing the union at local, state and national levels; organize constituent support for union activities directed at these issues, particularly political and legislative action; and lead efforts related to professional development and workplace improvement. Also, the work-site representative will work to connect constituents to the larger organization by reaching out to new members, encouraging two-way communication between membership and leadership, exercising good listening skills, converting members to activists and developing the talents of aspiring union leaders.*

■ **Organization.** Who will reps report to? Who will answer reps' questions, organize their work and provide them with the support they need? This could include area coordinators, the chief steward, a vice president or staff with designated responsibility for the rep structure.

■ **Duties.** List the specific tasks that you expect reps to perform, preferably in order of importance or frequency. Be specific, and include how often and how well you expect tasks to be performed. Examples: Hold monthly

work-site meetings. Personally ask all nonmembers to join at least two times per year. Maintain a union bulletin board and update it at least once a month. Represent member viewpoints on site-based quality teams. Attend monthly steward meetings. Orient new employees to the union within their first month on the job.

■ **Knowledge, skills, abilities.** List minimum requirements for the job. This could include being a union member in good standing, having good communication and listening skills and an ability to organize and conduct meetings. It could also include having a demonstrated knowledge of union and work-site issues and attendance at union-provided rep training.

■ **Time commitment.** What is the term of the rep's service? How many estimated hours per week will the job require? What are the time requirements outside the work day, such as attendance at evening meetings and union functions?

■ **Benefits.** List any perks or incentives that come with the job. This can be as simple as the training you provide and the "insider status" that comes with the job. Some locals, however, provide significant benefits to their reps, such as attendance at state federation and AFT conferences, reduced dues, some funding for work-site social events organized by reps, or even modest stipends. (Be careful: Once the union begins paying any of its volunteers, the spirit of volunteerism can be compromised. Also, most unions cannot afford to pay reps what their service is truly worth!) Other locals have successfully negotiated special contractual benefits for reps, such as release time for union duties, super seniority and even preferred parking spaces.

Recognition of work-site representatives

Special recognition can take a variety of forms. AFT can provide special “steward/rep pins” that serve both as a form of identification and as recognition. Consider honoring a “steward/rep of the month” in the newsletter. Plan special social events for stewards, provide them with tickets to political dinners or arrange for them to have a special meeting with their legislators or congressional representatives. Above all, try to spend time with them individually, give them feedback on their work and let them know how important they are to the union’s success.

Union committees

An effective committee structure should be a key part of your union’s strategic plan. A good communication structure will enable you to delegate whole programs and issue areas to other officers and activists, freeing you up to expand the union program and participate in other activities. It will also increase involvement and commitment to the union.

There are two kinds of committees: standing committees and ad hoc committees. A standing committee’s tasks and responsibilities are ongoing; although the membership of the committee might change from year to year, the committee itself continues. An ad hoc committee is created to carry out a particular task and is then disbanded.

Standing committees

In some cases, the constitution may mandate certain standing committees;

it may also stipulate that a particular elected executive board member must serve as the committee chair. The first vice president may be designated as the chair of the membership committee, for example. These are among the standing committees you will want to consider establishing:

■ **Legislation.** To monitor and lobby on legislation that pertains to your members; to prepare voting records; to keep the union’s membership and leadership informed about the progress of legislation; to work in conjunction with the AFT and AFL-CIO on legislative campaigns of mutual interest; to organize grass-roots lobbying campaigns on behalf of important legislation; to keep in touch with elected officials; and to keep them apprised of union policies and priorities.

■ **Professional issues.** To develop a professional issues program for the union, including workshops, conferences and publications (see “Focusing on professional issues” in Chapter 4) and to keep the union’s membership and leadership informed on these issues.

■ **Committee on Political Education (COPE).** To promote COPE check-off and COPE collections; to review voting records and recommend political endorsements; and to run voter registration, education and get-out-the-vote drives among members.

■ **Membership and organization.** To plan and implement membership recruitment campaigns and to develop membership benefit packages for members.

■ **Elections.** To plan and administer elections for union officers.

■ **Finance.** To help develop the union’s budget and assist the treasurer in his or her duties.

■ **Communications.** To help set the union’s overall communication goals,

including message, media strategies and internal communications.

■ **Public outreach.** To plan and implement community outreach projects and to maintain a liaison with community groups.

Smaller locals may want to combine two or more of these committees (for example, COPE and legislation) into a single committee; larger locals may want to subdivide them even further.

Ad hoc committees

In addition to standing committees, many unions create “ad hoc” committees to handle specific, one-time assignments. An ad hoc committee could be appointed to develop and implement a program to improve student discipline in the middle schools, for example, to locate a new site for the union office or to arrange union participation in a county fair. Ad hoc committees disband when their work is completed.

Keeping committees accountable and on track can be a difficult task, but doing so will enable you to delegate the work and build strong secondary leadership.

Building a sound committee structure

- Define the committee’s task. Know exactly what the committee’s goals are and articulate them clearly to the chair.
- Select your chairs carefully. Consider their talent and competence, the amount of time they can offer, their interest and their ability to work with other people.
- Outline the chair’s responsibilities and spell out the committee’s purpose, budget and what specific activities, if any, it’s responsible for. If the chair is expected to hold regular meetings, develop project plans or recruit additional members to the committee, make this clear.
- Outline the chair’s authority. The chair should know, for example, that all expenditures and any “official” statements of the union must be approved in advance.
- Meet with the chair regularly and ask for updates on the progress and plans of the committee.

Also, consider creating “a committee of committee chairpersons,” chaired by the president or vice president. This group should meet monthly at a regularly scheduled time, and every chairperson should report on his or her committee’s current activities and plans for the future. Through a chairpersons committee, a local president can reduce the amount of individual time needed with the chairs; plus, the regular meetings can help eliminate duplication of effort and may get two or more committees working together on a large project. The peer pressure may also spur inactive chairs to action.

Special training sessions—such as mini-workshops on parliamentary procedure or working with volunteers—could also be tied in with your monthly chairpersons meeting.

Training leadership

The ability to recruit new members, organize agendas, write news releases, develop political action plans or perform any of the 101 responsibilities that we have as union leaders does not come naturally. It takes training, hard work and experience.

Many union-sponsored learning opportunities are available to AFT members and leaders from the national union, state affiliates and other labor organizations. In addition to new leaders, training can also be offered to experienced activists who could use a shot of adrenalin, as well as inactive members who might be inspired to get involved in the union through a training program. In considering a training program for leaders and activists, remember formal training is not all that counts; informal discussion and exchange of ideas at conventions and after more formal training sessions can

be a great educational experience and a tremendous morale boost. Here are some of the available opportunities:

■ **AFT convention.** AFT's biennial convention is where union policy is made. Members who attend will be a part of making that policy; they also will have an opportunity to exchange ideas on professional and union issues and to attend training workshops. Convention speakers include some of the most prestigious leaders from various professional and political fields.

■ **AFT conferences.** AFT regularly sponsors conferences and training workshops geared to various union constituencies and issues. Watch for announcements of these events in your communications from AFT.

■ **AFT Union Leadership Institute.** The AFT's Union Leadership Institute offers a variety of workshops for local union leaders. Topics include governance and organizational structure; membership recruitment; planning a local program; school finance and budget analysis; collective bargaining; basic training for stewards/ reps and leadership skills. The ULI can arrange for trained workshop leaders to present these workshops to your local leaders. The ULI can also develop custom programs to meet the specific needs of a local. Contact the AFT's Union Leadership Institute for a list of available programs.

■ **AFT state federations.** Many AFT state federations sponsor leadership training conferences or more general conferences and convention workshops that offer education and training opportunities to new leaders. The conferences often include informal social gatherings where leaders from different parts of the state have an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas.

■ **George Meany Center for Labor Studies.** The George Meany Center for

Labor Studies in Silver Spring, Md., is the AFL-CIO's education and training center. It offers classes throughout the year in all areas of union leadership. Workshop topics include negotiations, arbitration, collective bargaining and communications. Most seminars last one week, and the registration fees include lodging at the center and three meals per day in the center's cafeteria. Contact the AFT's Union Leadership Institute for a seminar schedule.

■ **AFL-CIO.** The AFL-CIO sponsors state and regional labor schools specifically to train and educate union leaders. A variety of labor and public policy issues are usually discussed, and training in union management is often offered. The AFL-CIO and the Coalition of Labor Union Women also sponsor regular programs for union women that focus on women's issues and train women for leadership roles in their unions.

■ **Other training opportunities.** Many universities offer labor study programs. In addition, be on the lookout for other organizations that can provide training and education. The League of Women Voters and state and local political parties offer training in political organizing, time management, leadership techniques and other areas of interest to union leaders. The American Arbitration Association and the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service offer training in arbitration, and many colleges and universities have labor centers that provide training for union leaders.

Union affiliations

The greater our numbers, the stronger our voice. This is the basic premise of a union. In keeping with this philosophy, your local is affiliated with the AFT at

the state and national level (unless the state has no federation) and with the AFL-CIO at the local, state and national levels.

American Federation of Teachers

Founded in 1916, the AFT represents 1.3 million teachers, school-related personnel, healthcare professionals, higher education faculty and staff and local, state and federal employees. It helps elect candidates who support our issues. It lobbies in Washington, D.C., for important legislation and provides assistance in organizing, legal defense and leadership training. The AFT helps locals that are in crisis, works to strengthen state federations, provides membership benefits and disseminates helpful information on a variety of professional and union issues through workshops and conferences, newspapers, magazines, brochures, manuals and electronic media. The AFT is consistently in the forefront of national discussions about many professional issues.

Locals participate in the governance of AFT by electing delegates to a biennial convention. Between conventions, the AFT is governed by the AFT executive council, which is elected by delegates to the convention. Information about AFT conventions and delegate selection is disseminated in the mail and through electronic communications. For more information, contact the AFT secretary-treasurer's office.

AFT state federations

In most states, AFT locals have joined together in a state federation. State federations are usually responsible for representing member interests in the state legislature and assist locals with political action, public relations, leadership training, professional development, negotiations and membership

services. Most state affiliates hold annual conventions attended by local delegates. State per-capita dues are usually determined at the convention. Policy and the range of programs and services is usually determined in part at the convention and in part at more frequent executive council meetings.

AFL-CIO

Since the Working Men's Party called for free public schools in its platform of 1828, organized labor has been the most outspoken advocate of public education and social welfare in the country.

The AFL-CIO is not a union but an organization of unions. It has no authority to set policy for its affiliates; instead, it serves as a resource for its affiliates. The AFL-CIO focuses on lobbying, political action, organizing support and research—areas where combined effort can pay off handsomely. Through the Union Privilege program, the AFL-CIO also provides affiliates with a variety of member benefits and discount packages that are offered to union members across the country.

Through the AFL-CIO, national unions join to influence Congress and state legislatures on issues that affect all working people. Collective bargaining rights, child labor, healthcare and pension rights and funding for public services are just a few issues that the AFL-CIO has championed over the years.

The AFL-CIO state federation:

Each state has an AFL-CIO state federation that helps coordinate the activities of all labor unions in their state. Generally, the state AFL-CIO concentrates on legislative, regulatory and political issues as well as media and community outreach. The state federation often may also offer leadership training for union activists in the state.

The AFL-CIO central body: Often known as a central labor council or central labor union, this is a voluntary federation of all the labor unions in a particular region. It is an arm of the AFL-CIO and is usually most concerned with politics and community services and with offering assistance and support to locals in need.

The AFT constitution requires that all AFT locals affiliate with the AFL-CIO central body in their region as well as with their state AFL-CIO. Affiliation with the AFL-CIO is not just a matter of paying per-capita dues, however; participation is extremely important. A local president should ensure that the union is well-represented in meetings of the central labor council and conventions of the state federation. Consider running for office in these bodies and help other unions when they need it. If your local is to have influence on AFL-CIO policy or be able to count on the AFL-CIO in times of need, begin building relationships now with the leaders of the unions that make up your region's AFL-CIO.

Organizing a retirees chapter

One of the greatest untapped resources of the union is its retired members. Retired employees often want to keep up with the people and issues with whom they have spent their working lives. Retirees can contact businesses to provide economic benefits for members (see Chapter 4), share their expertise with newer employees, serve as foster grandparents and participate in other union community service programs.

Perhaps most importantly, retirees can help with your political action program; they can staff phone banks, can-

vass door-to-door and help in other ways. The retirees chapter can also help develop a legislative program for the union on issues like pension improvements, healthcare and affordable transportation and housing for the elderly. The chapter should also organize social activities like day trips, card games and hobby clubs. AFT retirees automatically remain members of the national union; chapters may choose to charge chapter dues. For assistance or to order a special pamphlet on organizing retirees, contact the AFT Retirees program.

A checklist on structure

- ✓ Produce a handbook for your stewards/ reps.
- ✓ Sponsor an annual stewards/ reps workshop or retreat (most education locals will want to conduct this at the beginning of the school year).
- ✓ Give recognition to stewards/ reps.
- ✓ Have stewards/ reps organize a union committee at each work site.
- ✓ Establish an effective system of two-way communication with stewards/ reps.
- ✓ If your local is large enough, select and train area coordinators.
- ✓ Establish a workable committee structure that allows for adequate delegation and accountability.
- ✓ Train committee chairpersons.
- ✓ Establish a retirees chapter.
- ✓ Maintain accountability of chairpersons through regular meetings and reporting procedures.
- ✓ Develop a leadership training plan for your building representatives, executive council, area coordinators and staff.
- ✓ Participate and have other local leaders participate in training sessions offered through the AFT state federations, the AFL-CIO and other organizations.
- ✓ Participate in your local and state AFL-CIO council.
- ✓ Develop a 12-month calendar of activities based on your union's strategic plan.
- ✓ Get input from executive council, stewards and membership in planning the calendar.
- ✓ Delegate calendar activities to appropriate committees.
- ✓ Base your budget on your strategic plan.

Chapter 4

The union program

In this chapter:

- Planning your program
- AFT resources
- The Union Leadership Institute
- Member benefits

The union's main job is to represent members to the best of its ability. That means working to secure higher wages and better benefits, as well as to help make members' careers more interesting and rewarding. It takes a strong union to successfully advance this agenda—a union that has real power at the bargaining table and with local, state and national lawmakers; a union that has the support of community groups as well as the press and the public. Where does that power come from? First and foremost, it comes from members.

Planning your program

Your union should have a program and activities aimed at turning potential members into members, turning members into activists and turning activists into leaders. Membership strength is the key to long-term suc-

Focusing on professional issues

Professional issues are sometimes as important to members as “bread-and-butter” issues like wages and benefits. Every AFT local should have a professional issues committee that reviews AFT resolutions and policy briefs. This information can be shared with members in fliers, newsletters or position papers. Some tips for committees:

- Survey members about their needs and initiate a special publication or regular newsletter feature on professional development opportunities, relevant research, legislation and regulations that affect members’ work. Ensure that the union newsletter gives sufficient coverage to professional concerns.
- Monitor members’ professional concerns and develop workable solutions. After your executive board has approved a proposed solution, bring it to the administration, legislature or school board. Be sure to address professional issues in your contract negotiations.
- If an issue affects the community at large, circulate a position paper to the press and community leaders. If it’s a very big issue, hold a press conference.
- Work with your local’s legislative committee to monitor state legislation and state regulations and to keep members abreast of changes that will affect them.
- Establish a “lending library” of research papers, pamphlets and books on professional issues. Include materials from your state federation and the AFT on current topics. Often a single copy of a report or brochure is available free of charge; bulk copies often can be ordered at a reduced rate.
- Offer workshops to members on such issues as student discipline, classroom management, ergonomics, safe administration of dangerous drugs, pensions, civil service reform, contracting out and stress management.
- Conduct a professional issues conference and invite local and national speakers to discuss relevant professional topics. Include workshop sessions that allow members to exchange ideas among themselves.

cess. It is the foundation of the union’s power.

First, understand that people join unions and become active when they see the union as something that is of value to them. This perception of value is achieved over time by creating programs of action around issues that are important to members and potential members and by ensuring that they understand what the union is doing on their behalf.

Connect with your members

How can you find out what issues members think are most important? The short answer: Ask them! People need to know that their union hears their concerns and is acting upon them. A healthy union goes out of its way to provide many opportunities for member input. Here are some tools to help achieve this:

- **Use your work-site representative structure.** A good building representative structure works not only to bring the message of the union to members but also to bring the concerns of members to elected union leaders. This two-way communication provides the most valuable way for unions to get input from rank-and-file members and potential members.
- **Survey your members.** Unions commonly survey members through paper surveys distributed either by mail or building representatives. Return rates can vary greatly, but even those members who don’t complete the survey get the message that the union wants to hear from them. Another method is an electronic survey using a Web site on the Internet. Your local union can use the survey creation tool available at the AFT LeaderNet site to create an online survey that can be linked to your Web site, if you have one, or simply e-mailed to

your members and monitored through the LeaderNet. Neither paper nor electronic surveys are scientific, but they are excellent vehicles for giving members and potential members the opportunity to share their concerns.

■ **Provide opportunities for members to bring up new ideas at membership meetings.** Your membership meetings should provide opportunities for members to raise new issues and concerns for discussion. Members want and need the ability to have input in shaping the union's agenda.

■ **Get out into the work sites!** If your local can provide release time for leaders or can hire staff, make a point of having a union representative visit each work site several times a year. If you do not have release time, schedule meetings at work sites at the close of the business day (or shift). There is no substitute for personal contact.

■ **Answer and return phone calls.** For many members, the quickest way to reach the union is by phone. But if the union is hard to reach (no one ever answers the phone) or unresponsive (no one returns calls), members will give up and have a negative impression of their union. The union also will lose one of its key means of keeping on top of what's going on at the work sites.

What issues are usually raised by members? Generally speaking, member concerns will fall into one of three categories:

■ **Bread-and-butter concerns.** The most important function of the union is to improve members' livelihoods. Not surprisingly, then, members turn to their union to address wages, benefits, working conditions and job security. These battles usually take place in the political or negotiations arenas and, more often than not, involve extensive community outreach and

public relations (see chapters on effective communications, political and legislative mobilization and collective bargaining and contract administration for more information).

■ **Professional concerns.** Wages and benefits are not always the top issues for members. Increasingly, professional issues are paramount, particularly among younger, newer employees. Career advancement, employee evaluations, workloads and the need to acquire new skills are just some of the many professional concerns members expect their union to address. More AFT locals are establishing standing committees on professional issues to help guide their unions in this area (see sidebar, page 42). These committees help identify issues, educate members and evaluate potential solutions.

■ **Threats to quality.** Most employees want to do the best job they possibly can, but this becomes difficult in the face of budget cuts and misguided policies. Members expect the union to be a strong voice in the fight for quality in the services they provide. At the national level, the AFT is one of the nation's leading voices for education reform ideas that work, and the AFT Healthcare and AFT Public Employees divisions each sponsor national quality programs. Some of the most important work to protect the quality of public services is done at the state level, however. Locals should play an active role in their state federations by helping set goals and objectives at the state level and by supporting state efforts with grass-roots lobbying campaigns.

Build a program around members' top issues

No union can respond to every issue raised by every member. That is why a

union must engage in strategic planning (see Chapter 1). This process will help your union prioritize issues and develop a plan to address the top two or three that are of the greatest concern to the most members.

Your plan will need a clearly defined goal and a detailed list of the activities that will help achieve the goal. In developing this plan, consider some key questions:

- In what arenas can the issue be most appropriately addressed? Collective bargaining negotiations? State legislature? Labor/management committees? State cabinet/agency? School board? Court of public opinion?
- Who will the union need to influence the most to advance the union's agenda? What tactics can you use to move the agenda?
- What activities can your union undertake as part of its action plan? Who will be responsible for coordinating these activities? What is the timeline?
- What resources are needed, and how can you get them?
- How can you activate members and potential members and get them involved? What community groups will support the union in its efforts?

The power of repetition

How can you ensure that your communications are received, grab attention, are understood, believed, remembered and acted upon?

The short answer is to repeat your message as often as possible and in as many ways as possible. Educate and arm your work-site representatives with the facts they will need to engage in conversations with colleagues, but back up this communication with newsletter stories and fliers. Cover the topic thoroughly at membership meetings and in work-site visits.

If appropriate, look for free media opportunities like radio and TV shows. Consider special mailings. Don't forget to use the union bulletin boards in the work sites. Think of six different ways to communicate the same message.

■ How are you going to communicate your efforts both externally and internally? How will you measure your success?

The union does not have to win on every issue to be valued by members. Taking on the tough fights and doing your best is often more than enough to demonstrate to members and potential members that the union is on their side and understands their concerns.

Get members and potential members involved

The more people available to help execute a plan, the more likely the success. You will need a strategy to get your members involved. This must include:

■ **Member education.** Educate your work-site representatives about your top issues, then arm them with the facts so they can discuss the issues with their colleagues at the work site. Support these efforts with literature that is either handed out at the work site or mailed to members' homes. Provide ample opportunities for people to meet to voice their concerns or raise questions.

■ **Opportunities for involvement.** People are more likely to volunteer when they understand how an issue directly affects them. Create a variety of ways that all members and potential members can get involved, regardless of the availability of their time. A member who may not have time to serve as a legislative liaison or to help with a phone bank may be willing to display a lawn sign or hand out buttons at a work site. Remember that small commitments can lead to bigger commitments; the volunteer who wears a button one week may be willing to work a phone bank the next time. Also, get potential members

involved. When potential members participate in a union activity that addresses a specific challenge or concern, they are being educated on the value of the union.

■ **Training.** Building representatives and other volunteers who are willing to take on significant tasks will want to know what is expected of them, how their efforts fit into an overall program, what resources are available, when tasks need to be completed, where they can go for help or if they have questions and, most importantly, why the union is engaged in a particular activity.

Communicate your program

Make sure that members and potential members know what's going on. Do your members really understand what the union is doing on their behalf? If not, how can you expect them to value the union and think of it as a powerful force that's on their side? That's why building an effective communications program (see Chapter 6) and incorporating this into your strategic plan is essential to building a strong union.

Union leaders commonly make the mistake of assuming that if an issue is covered in the newsletter, they have effectively communicated with their members. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is an adage that you have to tell members something six times before they will really remember what you've told them—and it's true! Remember that effective communications must:

■ **Be received by the intended audience.** Do you have correct addresses on all members and potential members? If not, some people are not getting your newsletter and other direct mail communications. Do all your buildings have trained union representatives who carry the union's

message to the members? If not, you are missing a real opportunity to communicate.

■ **Grab the audience's attention.**

Design your literature/fliers to grab the audience's attention and, with the exception of newsletters, the copy should be short enough to be read between the mailbox and the trash can.

■ **Be understood by the audience.**

Even if you understand the intricacies of an issue, don't assume that everyone else does. If your members are confused by union publications, they will stop reading them. If your building representatives don't understand an issue, they will not discuss it with their colleagues.

■ **Be believed.** Is your message believable? You can promise members a 50 percent pay increase, but most members won't believe it. If they stop believing the union, they stop listening as well. On the other hand, the best evidence in assuring members that you can solve a problem is your past success in solving other problems. Your communications should remind people of those past successes.

■ **Be remembered.** Communicating with members and potential members is ineffective if they forget what you had to say. Ensure that members and nonmembers remember your message by repeating it as often as possible and by keeping it simple.

■ **Be acted upon.** When communicating with members, constantly ask yourself: What can I ask members and potential members to do? Maybe it's to take an action, such as attending a rally or meeting or contacting a local lawmaker. At the very least, they should understand the issue addressed in the communication and come away with a positive image of the union.

AFT resources

AFT's five divisions each offer assistance with professional development and quality-of-services issues. Listed below are brief descriptions of some of these programs. Contact the division for more information.

AFT Teachers

Contact: Joan Baratz-Snowden

No Child Left Behind Act. The AFT educational issues department provides information about NCLB (the reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act) and technical assistance with its implementation.

Online professional development courses. The division is developing several online courses. These include courses on classroom management and foundations of effective teaching.

Educational Research and Dissemination program. AFT's ER&D program helps local affiliates and state federations deliver high-quality, research-based professional development to their preK-12 teachers and PSRP members.

Redesigning Schools To Raise Achievement. This project helps AFT leaders assume a leading role in turning around low-performing schools. It also works to create the national, state and local policy environment to support this effort.

The Reading Initiative. This can help state and local affiliates provide important research-based information to members on how to improve student achievement in reading.

Special education. The division provides a variety of services, training and publications on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Teacher quality. The division provides a variety of publications and other resources aimed at improving teacher quality.

QuEST: The AFT's Quality Education Standards in Teaching (QuEST) conference is the union's premiere professional development event for educators. The biennial conference, which attracts up to 3,000 participants, offers general sessions and workshops on the latest research in school improvement, hot education topics, mini-institutes and special programs tailored for AFT leaders.

PSRP Division

Contact: Tish Olshefski

The PSRP Resource Manual. A comprehensive guide for local affiliates in establishing a professional development program for support staff.

The PSRP Union Development Program. A three-day program based on the Resource Manual.

Keeping Your Ear to the Ground. A two-hour session for local leaders and staff who want to survey members on professional development needs.

The Paraprofessional and Teacher Collaboration Lesson Plan. This provides all materials and "scripts" needed for a local to conduct a workshop to help paraprofessionals and teachers work together more effectively in the classroom.

Dealing with Conflict and Improving Communications in the Workplace. A package of materials and lesson plans for a short workshop on building a conflict-free work site.

Managing Anti-Social Behavior. Materials and lesson plans for a workshop on understanding the root cause of anti-social behavior and how to manage such behavior.

Collaboration—Improving Working Relationships. Based on the teacher/para collaboration workshop, this provides lesson plans and

materials for a session on how to work with colleagues and supervisors.

Train-the-trainer programs. In conjunction with AFT's health and safety program, the PSRP division offers train-the-trainer programs on blood-borne pathogens and universal precautions; diesel fumes; ergonomics for bus drivers; ergonomics for office employees; chemical hazard awareness; and food service.

PSRP conference. This annual meeting for PSRP leaders and members includes professional issues sessions to improve workplace skills and knowledge as well as sessions on improving union programs and services.

AFT Healthcare

Contact: Mary Lehman MacDonald

Accredited courses. AFT Healthcare is accredited by the American Nursing Credentialing Center as a provider of continuing education. As such, AFT Healthcare can work with locals to design programs and course offerings that meet the continuing education requirements for licensing renewals in many states.

AFT Healthcare professional issues conference. This annual meeting offers a variety of general sessions on healthcare issues, as well as professional development workshops.

Workshops. AFT Healthcare regularly provides workshops to affiliates on quality certification, safe needle standards and other issues.

Safe staffing campaign. This is a nationwide campaign to focus public and political attention on problems of staffing levels for healthcare professionals. The campaign, "Set Limits, Save Lives," seeks to address these problems through federal and state legislation, as well as contract language.

AFT Higher Education

Contact: Larry Gold

AFT national higher education issues conference. This draws 300 higher education leaders from around the country for plenary sessions and workshops. Sessions include contract information exchanges; seminars on fighting corporatization on campus; intellectual property rights; using educational technology and bargaining technology issues; and academic freedom and tenure, among others.

Special leadership conference. Each year, 40 new and upcoming leaders of the higher education locals are invited to attend an intergenerational exchange with experienced leaders on union leadership and management. Sessions include attracting new members; building activism; negotiations; the academic personnel crisis; political/legislative action; bargaining technology; and intellectual property issues.

Graduate employees conference. In April 2003 the AFT held the first-ever professional issues conference for graduate employees and teaching assistants. The conference focused on the role of teaching assistants in undergraduate education.

Publications and communication. The division offers a variety of publications on confronting the academic personnel crisis, including *The Vanishing Professor*, *Marching Towards Equity* and *Standards of Good Practice in the Employment of Part-time/Adjunct Faculty*. Other publications address tenure and academic freedom and educational technology (including distance education). The AFT Higher Education Web site includes continuing interactive materials on a variety of issues, and the Higher Education Contract Analysis System offers data from more than 500 contracts on pro-

fessional, academic and job-related issues.

AFT Public Employees

Contact: Steve Porter

The AFT Public Employees national conference. This conference is held every other year when there is no AFT convention and brings together leaders and activists from public employee local unions representing federal, state and local government employees. Speakers and presenters at the conference deal with current issues affecting government employees and the delivery of quality government services. In some years when the event is held in Washington, D.C., the conference serves as a vehicle to mobilize support in Congress for public employee issues.

Quality Services from Quality People. The division launched its quality campaign several years ago to highlight the outstanding services provided by government employees. As a

result of this effort, the contributions of federal, state and local government employees have been the focus of broadcast media features, as well as internal union publications. Examples of materials from the campaign are available from the AFT Public Employees department.

State Employee Compensation Survey. Using a representative sample of some 44 state employee job titles, the division each year prepares a comparison of salaries for these jobs across 46 different states. The survey is the most comprehensive source on salary information for state employee professionals in the country. Data collected in the survey has been used to demonstrate that state employees with union representation are far better off than those without representation.

The Union Leadership Institute

The AFT Union Leadership Institute (ULI) is the leadership development and training arm of the AFT's organization and field services department. Its primary mission is to expand AFT affiliates' ability to develop leaders, train activists and educate members about the union and its activities. ULI seeks to help affiliates advance both the interests of members and the well-being of the institutions in which they work; stimulate maximum membership commitment and participation; and withstand internal setbacks (such as leadership turnover) and external attacks (such as efforts to dismantle employee and union rights.) To do this, ULI provides a number of services:

■ Consultation with AFT state federation and locals on leadership development and training. ULI works with

LeaderNet: A Web source for activists

AFT has launched a secure, registration-based Web site for AFT leaders, local and state federation staff and authorized volunteers. This new site, LeaderNet, serves as a common gateway to AFT resources and tools. Over time, this site will be expanded to include tools and resources posted by state federations. Resources now available on LeaderNet include:

- Online survey creation—Affiliates can create electronic surveys to be e-mailed to members. Local leaders will have the option of either creating surveys from scratch or adapting one of the survey templates offered on the site.
- Newsletter templates—Participating state federations can post newsletter templates, complete with suggested graphics and articles for the local affiliates to download, edit and then save for reproduction. Blank templates are also available.
- AFT PLUS Member Benefits resources and graphics.
- Literature and flier creation, AFT Store, collective bargaining, AFT divisional pages, media tips for leaders and more.

How can you register?

Visit <http://leadernet.aft.org/register>.

affiliates to assess leadership development and training needs and to craft programs to advance organizational objectives, such as membership growth, improving the work-site representation structure or winning collective bargaining rights.

■ Program development and dissemination. Affiliates may request a wide range of training manuals and materials that focus on building and sustaining effective union organizations. ULI also will provide customized programs to meet special needs and circumstances of AFT affiliates.

■ Special training and leadership development. ULI coordinates schools for newly elected affiliate leadership and newly hired affiliate staff; summer residential schools in AFT's Western, Southern and Great Lakes regions; and other periodic programs.

■ Consultation on organizational development. ULI provides a variety of planning and facilitation services to affiliates on such topics as strategic planning, internal dispute resolution and identifying and activating leadership among younger members.

To contact ULI, call 202/879-4497, or write AFT Union Leadership Institute, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington DC 20001.

Member benefits

The AFT PLUS Member Benefits program is committed to providing reliable services and financial protection to AFT members and their families. In places where there is no union security provision and the union must compete for members, the ability to offer an extensive package of "members-only" benefits is a big advantage for the union. Member benefits are easy to explain and concrete. Because they are

available to members only, they provide a real incentive to join—and stay in—the union.

As in all union programs, diversity is the key to success. The needs and interests of your members vary widely, and the union's package of benefits should be sufficiently broad to provide something for everyone.

Building a benefits package

Your benefits package should incorporate the AFT PLUS Member Benefits that come automatically with AFT membership: options for group insurance plans; no-annual-fee credit cards;

The local connection

Almost any independently owned small business may be interested in participating in your local member benefits program.

Here's a list of possible merchants:

Computer stores
Clothing stores
Restaurants and coffee shops
Portrait studies or photo processing stores
Auto repair and tire shops
Dry cleaners
Hairdressers/barber shops
Office supply stores
Bookstores
Physicians
Family and individual counselors
Optometrists
Estate planners
Attorneys (for non-job-related issues)
Sporting goods stores
Movie theaters
Car washes
Bakeries
Florists
Pharmacies
Gift shops
Shoe stores
Furniture stores
Miniature golf parks
Amusement parks

computer purchase programs; discounts on prescriptions, magazine subscriptions, hotels, car rentals and group travel packages; and many AFT publications, pamphlets and workshops. In addition, it should include discounts from local merchants (auto repair shops, tire shops, office supply stores, restaurants, clothing stores, etc.) and from area professionals (dentists, optometrists, counselors, lawyers, estate planners, etc.).

The task of putting together a member benefits package should be delegated to a volunteer or to the chairperson of your local's economic services/member benefits committee. Whoever develops the package should allow plenty of lead time.

Approaching merchants

Initially, contact merchants by letter asking them to participate in the union's new economic services program. The letter should explain how the merchant would benefit if he or she offers discounts to members: the business could receive a free promotion in union publications; members would seek out the merchant's discounted products; and member dollars would stay in the community. Your letter should also explain how those entitled to discounts would identify themselves (i.e., by showing a union membership card, a special economic services card or a special coupon).

To make your discount more attractive to potential members, consider negotiating "reciprocal exclusivity" with the merchant; that is, you would

agree not to list discounts from the merchant's competitors and he or she would agree not to offer discounts through other organizations.

Along with the cover letter, detail the agreement: stipulate the amount of the discount, the time frame during which it is valid and who will be eligible for the discount. Follow up your letter with a personal contact.

Prepare a brochure or flier listing the available discounts and circulate it to members and potential members. Members and potential members' fliers should be different. Potential members should not have access to special discount codes or AFT PLUS Member Benefits merchant phone numbers.

Tools to assist leaders to educate the members and potential members about benefits include:

- **New Member Kit**—free to locals;
- **Leaders' Guide to Benefits**—question-and-answer format for the local leader or building rep;
- **Editors' Kit**—Camera-ready ads for your newsletter (the AFT reimburses your local treasury for a printed ad or a banner on your Web site); and
- **Organizing flier**—This is for potential members. The AFT has a national version (no charge) or we can design a flier tailored to your local.

For help with local or national member benefits/discounts, contact AFT PLUS Member Benefits, tel. 800/238-1133, ext. 8643, or go to the AFT LeaderNet at <http://leadernet.aft.org>. (First-time users must register at <http://leadernet.aft.org/register/>.)

Chapter 5

Collective bargaining and contract administration

In this chapter:

- Preparing for bargaining
- Conducting negotiations
- Ratifying the contract
- Administering the contract

The process of collective bargaining and implementing the contract achieved in that bargaining is a key responsibility of our union and one of its top priorities. As an organization we are committed to these priorities:

- Representing membership in dealing with management;
- Fostering a culture of organizing;
- Providing voice for the political views and concerns of our members; and
- Building the capacity of our union to serve members' needs.

The process of bargaining enables us to advance a number of principles. These include:

■ **A sense of community** as working people stand together. In bargaining for a contract, members must come together in strength and be united in purpose.

■ **A sense of humanitarianism** as we support the service mission of our members and promote the well-being of all in our nation. The dignity of labor and respect for the rights of individuals are embedded in the articles of the contracts we bargain.

■ **Promotion of democracy** through the exchange of ideas and views of those who come together to ratify the contract. The conditions under which all will work, as well as the protections against unfair treatment, are adopted by the majority vote of the members.

■ **An understanding that freedom and democracy** depend upon free public education and democratic institutions that implement the laws of our land. In bargaining for the terms and conditions of labor in these and other institutions, people learn to value the exchange of ideas and the diversity that is reflected in the final document.

When your local is the bargaining agent, it properly will devote substantial resources to negotiating and implementing a collective bargaining agreement. This is only natural, since making good the promise of collective bargaining is the central mission of any union. The local's officers have a responsibility to ensure that members enjoy the best possible economic, material and professional conditions. The contract provides the structure to help achieve these goals.

While the collective bargaining process is a collective endeavor that requires division of labor, the local leader's role is pivotal to success. The leader sets the tone and direction for the bargaining team, may well serve as a member of the bargaining committee and ultimately will serve as the first forum in which the proposed agreement is considered by the members.

Keep in mind that success at the bargaining table comes in part from having the power to move your agenda. The foundation for that power is an active union membership. Your union's strategic plan should focus on organizing—not just getting new members, but also activating those you already have through their involvement in the bargaining process.

Preparing for bargaining

Once elected by the bargaining unit, the union takes on the obligation of a duty to bargain. This means that the parties must prepare their demands, meet in a timely fashion to consider the proposals presented and proceed to bargain in good faith on the issues until agreement is reached or impasse occurs. The outcome of their efforts first must be put in writing and presented to the members and to management for ratification and adoption. It then becomes a legally binding obligation of the parties on the terms and conditions of work.

In negotiations, both sides may pursue whatever strategy and tactics seem appropriate as long as they meet the test of bargaining in good faith. When the process works well, the talks lead to an agreement at the point of best mutual advantage. When the process malfunctions or positions become hardened, the parties may declare an impasse. Various forms of impasse resolution may include mediation, fact-finding, arbitration or, sometimes, a strike when legally permitted. Unions generally must provide notice of their intentions during impasse and follow the notice with efforts to educate and inform the employer and the public about their positions and concerns.

The focus for the union should be both on representing members as well as preserving the institutions in which those members work. When bargaining is difficult and agreement elusive, the parties should keep in mind that at some point bargaining will end and the union and management must have an adequate working relationship to ensure that the contract can be administered. They must come back together as managers and union members to offer the services that their institution

provides and the public expects. The art of finding a fair settlement without placing your members' institution at risk is for any union leader a difficult but thoroughly rewarding task.

Know your state law

State bargaining laws vary widely, and they greatly affect your rights and obligations in bargaining. Before you enter negotiations, understand your state law and be certain your leadership team complies with its terms. Insist that your rights under that law are met as well and that management also complies with the law.

Some states prohibit public-sector bargaining; some allow public employees to bargain, but prohibit them from striking; some grant public employees all the rights granted to private-sector employees; and some states have no bargaining law at all but allow local school districts to adopt bargaining at the discretion of the community. Some states have "meet-and-confer" laws that require management to "consult" with the union but don't require (or don't permit) formal negotiations. In recent years, governors in several states have signed executive orders granting limited collective bargaining rights to state employees and other public workers. These executive orders vary greatly in terms of the rights granted affected workers.

States that authorize bargaining typically stipulate general timelines and procedures for bargaining and for resolving impasses. Knowing the details of the impasse procedures mandated by the state is an important part of your bargaining strategy.

In some states, public employee unions can negotiate on any issue they deem important; in other states the "scope of bargaining" is legally defined and unions may be prohibited from negotiating about professional issues and other matters not strictly related

to “wages, hours and terms and conditions of employment.” Many locals negotiate on professional issues and other matters even if their state law limits the scope due to concerns for statutory lines of authority, academic judgment concerns or other reasons. If your state has no law and is contemplating one, lobby for a law with the broadest scope of bargaining that covers the full range of wages, hours and terms and conditions of employment, as well as professional interests.

For those states without a law, remember that having no law at all may be better than having a bad law passed that is punitive or ineffective. Before taking a position on a state bargaining law, study it carefully and consult with knowledgeable state federation and AFT staff. The AFT’s organization and field services department, as well as the legislative and research departments, are all good sources of information on bargaining laws. Good laws allow for and prescribe how a community of interested workers petition for recognition, select a representative, enter into negotiations and achieve an agreement or settle disputes in a fair and efficient manner.

If your state has no bargaining law, you still may be able to negotiate—and you should certainly try to. In several states without laws, AFT affiliates have secured bargaining rights through a combination of political pressure and persistent displays of collective strength. In states where only “consultation” is permitted, AFT affiliates have stretched the limits of consultation and have been able to negotiate contracts.

Your state federation or the AFT’s national office can help interpret your state’s bargaining law or otherwise assist in your effort to bargain. Questions on representation rights and election are often directed to the union’s department of organization

and field services. Those with bargaining language questions can find resources in the research and information services department. The AFT legal department can help with interpretations of statutes, and our legislative department helps with drafting statutes and amendments, as well as providing advice on the legislative process to achieve a bargaining law.

Select a team that works well together

Negotiating teams may be designated by your constitution; they may be elected or appointed by the president; or the function may be performed by the executive committee itself. Many contract negotiations are led by state and local staff members trained in bargaining. In some instances a national representative or national staff person is invited to help and provides specialized services to affiliates.

If the local leader is able to select the team, choose people who can work effectively together and can articulate the varying interests of your members. Choose well-respected union members who possess self-control and who will understand the need to maintain discipline and orderly procedures when confronting the other side; negotiations are not the place for the hot-headed.

Team members must recognize that their role is to represent members’ interests, not personal feelings or personal issues. Participants need to understand that the process cannot work unless discussions are conducted in a civil and unemotional environment and that the criteria used to make decisions are rational, objective and fair. The team cannot be effective unless it understands the need for internal discipline.

The role of the local leadership. The leadership may choose the presi-

dent to be chief spokesperson in negotiations or may recommend that a staff person or team member perform that function. Either way, the leadership has to assume the important roles of umpire (making sure the rules are followed) and of referee (seeing that all points of view are heard and considered); do whatever is necessary to ensure a fair, reasonable and effective process; and ensure that decisions are based on fair criteria. Throughout the process, maintain the union's credibility and integrity with all interested parties and make sure the varied interests of all of your members have been carefully considered.

Do your homework

Regardless of who is chief negotiator, develop monthly figures on the cost of living, broken down on a regional and metropolitan basis. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) is a good place to start. BLS prepares statistics on the Employment Cost Index of wages and benefits trends, consumer prices and area wages and publishes other special studies useful to bargainers. Nearly all the major statistical surveys of the BLS are summarized in the Monthly Labor Review, a BLS publication that is available online or for a small subscription charge. It is also available in most libraries. An abundance of information is available online at <http://www.bls.gov>, including news releases, reports and historical data series.

The AFT publishes information on salaries for its five divisions, including education, healthcare and public employee salaries at the union's Web site at <http://www.aft.org>. In addition, other compensation information is available from the BLS (see the BLS Web site address above) and look at the Employment Cost Index for cost trends in both wages and benefits. At <http://www/bls.gov/cpi/home.htm> you will find information on the

Consumer Price Index. This index has been used to justify wage increases to keep up with inflation, but in recent years the ECI has grown more popular due to its direct relationship to compensation. Inflation can rise and people make consumption adjustments to accommodate the changes, which weakens the arguments tied to the CPI alone. A combination of data may provide the best opportunity to highlight the needs of members in relative wages and increases to offset elements of the CPI such as healthcare or energy costs. Additional information on wages is posted at <http://www.acinet.org>, America's Career Infonet.

Comparable salary data for teachers, paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, state employees and healthcare employees in your state and around the country are available from your state federation or the AFT. In many cases, AFT or the state federation can also provide information on fringe benefits and important working conditions. Sometimes state school board associations, state departments of education, hospital associations and state employer associations also compile data. If the employer's data makes the same point as your own, include it along with your own credible sources for a complete view of the facts.

It is a good idea to enlist a technically and/or mathematically inclined member to assist you with the calculations and spreadsheets to cost out your proposals. Someone needs to make these preparations as part of your duty to bargain. You cannot go to the table without knowing the cost of your proposals; going unprepared is a recipe for disaster.

If your proposals will have an impact on education, healthcare or public services, you are obligated to review the professional literature in that area and become familiar not only with the evidence in your favor but

also the contrary evidence. Anticipate management's rebuttals and prepare answers using your team as a sounding board. Further hone your arguments by role-playing the negotiations with other team members, with state federation staff or with colleagues from nearby locals. It helps to hear how your argument sounds and to have your team hear the proposals before they get to the bargaining table.

When discussing local issues, be certain of your facts. Know when, where and how often a certain problem has occurred and if necessary be prepared to provide documentation from your union records on grievances or reports about the issue.

Analyze the employer's fiscal condition

Try to time your negotiations strategically so that they conclude before the employer finalizes its annual budget. Your ability to time negotiations will vary according to statute and tradition—but working toward this goal should be an important part of your strategy.

In any case, thoroughly analyze the employer's fiscal situation before entering negotiations. Management has always used the "closed budget" argument or some variation of the empty-pocket routine to rebuff the union's economic demands. Recruit a mathematical volunteer (for example, a member who is a business education teacher, an accountant or a treasurer of a community organization) to research and verify the budgetary facts.

In dealing with a public employer, all of the important information should be contained in public documents. At the very least review the audits for recent years, the budget, any reports filed with the state and all estimates of revenue. Ask about benefits

such as health insurance, find out when changes take effect, what cost increases have been communicated by the underwriters or carriers, and what if any effect these are expected to have for you in the coming year.

In the private sector, it may be possible to learn something about a not-for-profit employer's budget by reviewing the employer's IRS Form 990 or publicly available Medicare documents. Web sites such as **Guidestar.com** provide access to the 990 forms filed by not-for-profit groups such as hospitals and foundations that are affiliated with our hospitals and universities. AFT's research and information services department and AFT Healthcare provide access to hospital data based on Medicare documents but summarized by a private company. If the private-sector employer claims an inability to pay, the National Labor Relations Act guarantees the union access to additional financial documents such as audits and other ledgers or account data. The AFT can help on how to organize and understand the data from these documents, or local accountants or attorneys can provide assistance for a fee.

The key to analyzing the fiscal conditions is organization and analysis. You will not find bushel baskets of cash sitting around, but by reviewing patterns of estimating revenues and expenditures over a period of time, you will get a sense of the employer's fiscal capacity to meet your demands. Look at several years of revenues and expenditures from the audit. Obtain budgets and use them when you can get actual, not just estimated, data for recent years. From state reports filed by the employer you can obtain information that is reviewed by the state for accuracy, but look at what is included in the categories you are comparing. Sometimes special definitions exclude items that are incorporated in the

budget. The result is fiscal “apples and oranges” that, while useful for a fruit salad, won’t help at the bargaining table to bolster your demands.

When organizing data, ideally on electronic spreadsheets to minimize errors and maximize efficiency, you can determine the variance in the estimates used for revenues and expenditures. If a variance—the difference between budget and actual—recurs over years, it can provide a point of leverage in negotiations. Look at each program area and item, highlighting those that rise to a level of importance based on a size or percentage error too large to dismiss as chance. If trends occur, claim the positive advantage for your demands and insist that finances are not the reason for management’s refusal to reach agreement. Share your information with management, be prepared to defend the work and seek agreement on the numbers and methods used to get there. If you can use the analysis to eliminate mistrust on how much is available, then you have created an environment for building a settlement.

If you are in the public sector, you also need a clear grasp of the community’s tax structure and its ability to raise revenue. Careful study of revenue sources will help you avoid being trapped by the “inability to pay” response.

Call your state federation or the AFT for training and assistance in budget analysis. At the national union, the AFT research and information services department provides information and assistance on fringe benefit surveys; contract language; budget analysis; revenue and taxation analysis; and statistical databases for state and local governments. Also, the AFT Union Leadership Institute can provide training in budget analysis, contract research and negotiations.

Prepare a public relations strategy

While good public relations are always valuable, it is essential during negotiations, especially in the public sector. You cannot generate public support with a last-minute offensive—an overnight PR campaign will appear self-serving and rarely will work. The message must go to the public and to your members to be effective. Don’t eliminate either in your campaign to get your version of the word out.

Start early—long before bargaining begins—to develop and maintain a positive public image. Year in, year out, your union should be conscious of its public image. Publicize those union activities that benefit the community or your members’ service projects.

Guidelines for negotiations

- Appoint one person as the chief spokesperson and invest him or her with the authority to initial tentative agreements.
- Other team members who have questions or suggestions should write a note to the chief spokesperson and request a caucus. Instruct the team that the agreed-upon spokesperson is the sole communicator at the table unless the chief negotiator defers to a team member.
- Appoint one person to keep careful dated records of the negotiations and accurate dated notes of the other side’s responses.
- Establish a common policy of initialing or otherwise acknowledging those issues that have been tentatively agreed on, pending settlement on a complete package. Keep detailed notes and review before the next session.
- If an informal agreement has been made between the parties, reduce it to writing and then sign off. The sign-off can occur during the bargaining session or at a later negotiations session.
- Work from language that you have developed yourself.
- Negotiate the clearest, most precise and imperative language possible (“shall” and “will,” not “may” and “should”). If you can’t negotiate the most precise and desirable language, carefully scrutinize the compromise language.

As negotiations approach, identify union bargaining proposals that will strike a positive chord among the public. These could include proposals on student discipline, inservice training, healthcare cost containment, the high cost of contracting out, patient load and client load. Don't hesitate to get the message out on the need for adequate wages that attract and retain workers and provide dignity in labor.

Send speakers to address community meetings about these issues, prepare guest editorials for the local paper and appear on radio and television talk shows. At times, you may even want to take out paid ads.

For more information, see Chapter 6, "Effective communications."

Conducting negotiations

Although a few states have "sunshine laws" that require bargaining to be conducted in public, most states let the parties establish their own ground rules for bargaining. The parties almost always choose closed bargaining sessions because these are more conducive to focused, unemotional and objective discussions.

In some cases, the parties determine that each side will have only one spokesperson and that all discussions will be directed through that spokesperson. (Regardless of ground rules, you should appoint a single person on your side as spokesperson and invest that person with the right to initial tentative agreements.) The parties usually agree on a format for exchanging proposals and on an order for discussing economic and noneconomic items; usually noneconomic items are addressed first. Frequently, they will also agree on a common press policy. Know your facts, know your strategy,

follow these guidelines and you should do well.

Impasse

An impasse occurs when the parties can make no further progress toward an agreement. Sometimes a cooling-off period of two or three weeks away from bargaining can clear the air and constructive bargaining can resume.

But if your contract expiration date is fast approaching and a timely settlement seems unlikely, prepare for impasse intervention—a process that is usually mandated when negotiations stall. Formal impasse intervention can include mediation, fact-finding, arbitration and/or interest arbitration.

Mediation

Mediation is one form of intervention that gives both sides a say in shaping the eventual settlement. Be cautious, as the goal of the mediator you invite in to your bargaining is to reach an agreement, to get a deal. There are times when a "deal" is not what you want or what your members need, especially on key issues.

Mediation works best when the mediator is experienced and knowledgeable and when the parties themselves are interested in setting aside emotions and reaching a settlement. It also helps if you limit the number of issues that you submit; don't expect the mediator to work through a laundry list. If you have too many items on the table, you may find that the important ones slip away and the preponderance of those remaining that mean little are packaged up and handed back to you as your share of an intolerably bad deal. Clear out the items that don't matter, package up the rest and let the mediator work to get your package accepted.

In working with a mediator, remember that his or her goal is to get you

and management to reach an agreement. Try to convince the mediator that your position is more worthy and substantial than management's and that your team and those you represent are less likely to be moved; this may help the mediator conclude that the road to settlement lies mostly in working with the other side. Well-substantiated proposals supported by data are valuable in arguing your positions in front of the mediator.

Tune into the mediator's leanings. Be cordial, frank, honest and helpful; disagree firmly when necessary, but try not to be disagreeable. Don't be taken in by an overly friendly mediator, however, and remember that in mediation, as in negotiations, suppleness rather than hardheadedness, and a sense of timing rather than drift, are the most important assets.

As in negotiations, your side should have one spokesperson, and team members should adhere to team discipline.

Arbitration and fact-finding

If mediation fails, many states prescribe fact-finding or, if both union and management agree, binding interest arbitration. In a very few states, binding interest arbitration may be compulsory. The arbitrator's report is actually a decision, and it is final, binding and enforceable in court.

Fact-finding and arbitration are very similar, but they have one big difference: The fact-finder's report is advisory and has only moral authority. The parties are free to choose which pieces of the report they will accept and which they will reject.

In some states, fact-finding exists under the guise of "advisory arbitration;" in other states, mediators are empowered to make a public report if the mediation ends with no settle-

ment. Both situations are similar to fact-finding.

Selecting an arbitrator/fact-finder

The parties usually have the chance to choose a mutually acceptable arbitrator or fact-finder. In some cases a panel will be prescribed in which the parties select their choices and the chosen members select a third neutral. You may find an arbitrator/fact-finder through the American Arbitration Association or the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service. Some states offer mediators, arbitrators and fact-finders through their appropriate state agency or you may ask a state official—the commissioner of labor or education—to appoint one. If two parties can't agree, most states prescribe a method of appointment.

If you have a choice, select carefully. A good arbitrator is neutral and detached from the issues and personalities involved; knowledgeable and capable of understanding the thorny issues; resourceful enough to craft a solution while maintaining the respect of the parties and the general public. Before selecting an arbitrator or fact-finder, get recommendations and check references with the state federation and other unions. Don't make assumptions that are not founded on factual information. Read previous decisions the neutrals have written, find out from their resumes where they have worked and check with the parties who have seen them in action. One indicator of an arbitrator's qualifications is whether he or she is a member of the National Academy of Arbitrators. Due diligence is required here as much as any place in the business of the union.

Preparing for fact-finding/arbitration

As with a mediator, the union must be forthright and honest with the arbitrator or fact-finder. But in these more formal processes, your factual preparation must be more substantial. Most states have guidelines and standards that arbitrators and fact-finders must follow in their decision-making. These may include such criteria as management's ability to pay; comparable salaries, fringes, and conditions in similar or neighboring communities; cost of living; and the effect a proposal might have on delivery of services. These guidelines provide the framework for your case. In preparing your case, use the most specific and valid evidence possible. Know all the facts, and carefully use those that support your case. Arbitrators and fact-finders should be moved by the quality, not the quantity, of your evidence. Don't forget, however, that they may also be moved by political pressure.

The two sides will present their cases to the arbitrator or fact-finder in a quasi-judicial hearing similar to a grievance arbitration hearing. Both sides will be able to present documentary and sworn testimonial evidence and will usually have the opportunity to question the other side. Expert witnesses may appear and can be used by both parties to make a point. A list of witnesses and documents is often known in advance, so preparation may proceed in reviewing what may be presented by the other party. After the arbitrator or fact-finder has reviewed the material, he or she will issue a decision. In cases where the arbitration is binding, the decision will be final and not subject to legal challenge, except on the narrowest grounds (i.e., if fraud, corruption or abuse is discovered or if the arbitrator exceeded his authority).

An emerging variation of compulsory binding arbitration is "last best offer" arbitration. In this case, the arbitrator is required to consider and choose between the final positions of the two parties. In some cases, state law requires the choice be made between entire packages of outstanding issues; in others, the choice between the two sides is made item by item. In this type of arbitration, carefully consider your final proposal. You don't want to ask for so much that you risk losing everything; on the other hand, there's no point in winning if you have already given everything away.

Ratifying the contract

Once a tentative agreement has been reached with management, your members need to approve (or reject) it. Union constitutions often spell out policies and procedures for ratification; if not, fair, workable ratification practices must be established and must be clearly understood by the membership and those nonmembers who will be covered by the terms of the agreement, even if they do not get to vote as nonmembers.

There are different routes to ratification. What is important is that the members fully understand the contract issues and that they have ample opportunity to voice their opinions. Most locals hold a single meeting where the proposed settlement is both discussed and voted on. Other unions hold a general informational meeting and then conduct secret-ballot votes at each work site. Advance notice of the terms of the agreement typically is released shortly after the tentative agreement is reached so that questions can be identified and addressed at the ratification meeting.

Be prepared for the meeting. It is helpful to figure out the settlement dollar amount as well as percentage over the life of the agreement. Let people know about step increases, if included. Highlight the issues you faced at the table, as well as goals you sought. Be direct about what was achieved and what was left for another time. Pay and benefits and time and assignment are visceral issues, so be certain you have highlighted changes and address the scope and need for those affected. Anticipate issues that may be raised during the meeting and be fully prepared. Your building representative, negotiations committee and executive board can alert you to challenges that may arise and the way they feel it should be addressed.

Who gets to ratify?

Check your state law. Some states allow unions to permit only members to vote in contract ratifications. Others require the union to open participation to all members of the bargaining unit whether or not they join the union.

If you have a choice, carefully consider the consequences of who is allowed to vote. Some nonmembers may owe their allegiance to a competing organization, for example, and may be disruptive. On the other hand, if you exclude nonmembers, you may fuel a divisive, counterproductive debate. Most importantly, consider the strength of your union and consider the effect your decision will have on that strength.

The ratification meeting

Presiding fairly and calmly over a sometimes stormy discussion of a newly negotiated contract can be the supreme test of your leadership skills. It is not easy to remain passive as the

handiwork of your team is criticized, but members do have the right to question and to disagree. Don't stifle debate or ram the settlement through (such a strategy would almost certainly be counterproductive anyway). On the other hand, you shouldn't be neutral in the debate. Presumably, the negotiating team believes that the tentative agreement is the best possible settlement. Explain to the membership how the team arrived at its decision and why it is recommending ratification. Members of the negotiating team should be on hand to speak in support of ratification.

To expedite a fair, smooth meeting, establish ground rules at the beginning and have the membership approve them. Consider limiting each speaker to a certain number of minutes or the entire debate to a certain number of hours. Also, establish that no speaker can speak twice until everyone has had a chance to speak once. Some require speakers on both sides of the issue be heard, or at least that the opportunity

Ratification checklist

- ✓ Over-organize and make sure that there are as few mechanical glitches as possible.
- ✓ If possible, have written copies of the proposed settlement in the voters' hands before the meeting. Otherwise, have copies available at the beginning of the meeting.
- ✓ Hold the meeting in a room large enough to accommodate more people than you expect. Ratification meetings tend to draw large crowds.
- ✓ Facilitate check-in procedures: Have check-in lists ready, perhaps arranged alphabetically or by work site or department, and have enough check-in stations.
- ✓ Alert voters in advance if they will need identification to vote.
- ✓ If the meeting is large, make sure you have enough microphones on the floor and ensure that they are all working.
- ✓ Appoint sergeants-at-arms to handle seating, distribute materials and generally keep order.

is offered. Explain how the vote will be taken, what the procedure will be if the chair is not clear, and be prepared for every step of ratification, up to and including sergeants-at-arms to assist with a division of the house or ballots and observers if a written vote is needed at the meeting.

The bring-back gamble

At a critical point in negotiations, some negotiators will “bring back” management’s last offer, hoping that the membership will resoundingly reject it. The obvious gamble should be understood and carefully considered. You may end up with an unintended “ratification,” and sometimes even a close vote can weaken your position and credibility when you return to the bargaining table. Before going out on a limb, seek advice from those who have had experience.

Administering the contract

While contract negotiations may be more stimulating, the more prosaic work of contract implementation is every bit as important—it affects members every day. Members will judge the union’s effectiveness as much by how well it implements the agreement and defends their rights as by how well it bargains.

Grievances

To settle contract disputes, use the grievance mechanism stipulated in your contract. Most contracts call for grievances to be processed at one or two administrative steps, then at the highest management level (the school board, for example), and if no mutually acceptable resolution is found, the grievance can be resolved by binding arbitration. In some cases, there are

specified written forms for filing grievances, and there are almost always contractually stipulated time limits for filing at the various levels and for receiving management’s response.

Close attention should be paid to procedural matters. An otherwise good case can be lost if a deadline is missed or a procedural obligation is not met.

Members file grievances; unions assure their procedural rights are protected. Some unions encourage all grievances to proceed to the highest steps, but more commonly, only those that meet specific standards proceed to levels that require the union to expend resources to process the grievance. This would include arbitrations or appeals that require legal counsel or other expenditures. Generally, these issues can set precedents that will affect the future interpretation of the contract, so the union must consider the facts and the opportunity to help all members, as well as to see that justice is done for the aggrieved member.

While it is probably better to err on the side of filing grievances, the process will degenerate if members grieve just to harass or disrupt management. If the union turns down grievances or is faced with many cases where the interests of members conflict, develop an internal appeals procedure. This can be done on an ad hoc basis or through constitutionally outlined procedures. Usually a committee of union members or the local’s executive board hears the appeal.

However, unions have an obligation to represent members and in some cases nonmembers who are part of the bargaining unit. Under the “duty of fair representation,” unions are obligated to fairly represent members of the bargaining unit. If the union decides not to take a grievance forward, it must document in detail the reasons for not pursuing the grievance (see also sec-

tion below). Criteria that can be helpful in making a decision about pursuing a grievance to the last step or to arbitration include: the impact of the issue on other members of the unit; the harm or injury to the grievant; the

likelihood of success; and the cost to the union in advancing the grievance.

It is in the best interest of everyone that a grievance should be settled at the lowest level and as informally as possible. Sometimes a short note, a

Bargaining overview

Preparing for negotiations

- Know your state's bargaining laws.
- In the private sector, know the National Labor Relations Act.
- Research your grievance files for possible negotiating issues.
- Review the employer's personnel handbook to identify possible proposals.
- Research your salary, fringe benefit and working condition proposals by reading federal labor and education publications and by consulting with AFT and your state federation.
- Analyze your employer's budget.
- Be PR-conscious before and during negotiations.

Setting up the team

- Select bargaining team members who represent various interests within the union and who can adhere to the discipline necessary in a bargaining situation.
- Appoint one person, yourself or someone else, as the spokesperson for the union team.

Getting input

- Survey members about their contract priorities.
- Discuss contract priorities with executive committee members and union stewards/building representatives.
- Have stewards and representatives discuss contract priorities with members at their work sites.
- Hold special work-site or regional meetings to discuss the contract directly with members.
- Consult with state and local union leaders about their recent negotiating experiences.

Attending to details

- Keep carefully dated records and accurate dated notes during negotiations.
- Be prepared for impasse procedures, including critical timelines.
- Carefully prepare and organize the logistics of your ratification meeting.

Enforcing the contract

- Provide for grievance arbitration in your contract.
- Establish a system for tracking and monitoring grievance timelines.
- Adequately train whoever is responsible for handling grievances.
- Develop clear standards for accepting and rejecting taking grievances to a higher level.
- Hold a hearing/meeting with the affected individuals before processing any grievance that will hurt a bargaining unit member.
- Establish a procedure that allows the union to determine if a grievance is going to proceed to arbitration or to face costs as a result of proceeding further. Be certain that a member has a process to appeal when the union decides not to proceed with a grievance or not to arbitrate it.

telephone conversation or a brief visit with the administrator may resolve the issue and preclude the need to file a formal grievance. The grievance representative may find it necessary to compromise to settle a grievance, but the compromise should be appropriate and consistent with the written contract. Before finalizing any settlement, consult with the grievant(s).

While processing a grievance, keep public statements to a minimum; confidential discussions are more likely to lead to a settlement. Plus, no one wants to read about his personal grievance in the local newspaper. Once the grievance has been settled, publicize the relevant points—without using names.

Who should handle grievances?

A local has several options. It might appoint the president or another officer, a full-time staff member(s) or members of a grievance committee. Some unions ask their work-site representatives to handle grievances at the first level. The stewards/ reps must be carefully trained and screened for this work, and they should clearly understand the scope of their authority and responsibility. They should also understand the importance of being fair and objective in their work. If a work-site representative accompanies a member to a meeting where the member might face disciplinary action, the steward/ rep must be carefully instructed about his or her role and about the union leadership's expectations. The importance of giving responsible advice should be emphasized.

In choosing who to handle the local's grievances, consider that the grievance handler needs many of the same qualities as the negotiator. He or she must be objective, discreet and artful in resolving problems through

accommodation, if necessary. Regardless of who directly handles grievances, the president is still responsible for overseeing the process and ensuring that it works properly.

Duty of fair representation

In recent years, members have periodically taken their unions to court and charged them with a failure to fairly represent them. There are three types of fair representation cases:

A member claims that the union refused to process a grievance or that in processing the grievance it acted incompetently or arbitrarily. Most such grievances involve discipline issues. Courts generally have held that a union may refuse to process a grievance in a dismissal or discipline case if it has thoroughly reviewed the facts and has made its decision in a detached, objective and nondiscriminatory manner. On the issue of handling a grievance competently, the courts have generally held union representatives to common standards of diligence and reasonableness, which means that the union may be vulnerable if it fails to meet deadlines or other procedural obligations.

An arbitrary decision is one that appears unnatural. For example, a union should handle similar grievances in the same way unless it explains why it is deviating from its usual practices. Protect yourself and your union by establishing a system to track and meet deadlines and by keeping careful records, communicating all decisions in writing and filing copies. Setting up a grievance committee to hear appeals of denials to take grievances to arbitration is a good way to protect the local against a claim that it failed to meet the duty of fair representation.

The union is involved in a griev-

ance where the interests of two or more members conflict. These cases often involve transfers, schedules, promotions and general seniority issues. The courts generally allow a union to process a grievance on behalf of one member to the detriment of another if the union acts reasonably and objectively and has considered the claims of those who may be adversely affected. To establish that both sides have been considered, hold an informal hearing or discussion with the affected members before making a decision. An ad hoc committee or a subcommittee can be appointed to conduct the hearing. The union's decision should be communicated in writing to the individuals involved.

Nonmembers claim that the union has not processed their grievances. Except for those few state laws that exempt unions from processing grievances for nonmembers in the bargaining unit, nonmembers have a legal claim to equal protection under the contract. Before making a decision not to represent nonmembers in grievances and arbitrations, the union should contact local legal counsel and seek advice.

In many cases, it is better for the union to file grievances in the earlier stages, making sure to comply with the timelines laid out in the contract. The decision on whether to proceed to higher levels of the grievance procedure can be then be made when the union has collected enough facts to make an informed decision. Delaying the formal filing of a grievance because the union lacks adequate information is not a legitimate reason for missing the crucial deadlines required by the contract.

Grievance arbitration

Some grievances will still be unresolved after being heard at the highest level. Most contracts then provide for

final, binding arbitration as the last step of the grievance procedure. (An arbitration provision is generally negotiated as the quid pro quo for a union's commitment not to strike during the life of the contract.) Arbitration is expensive. Most locals will only take to arbitration those grievances they feel they can win, and usually the executive board or its grievance committee must vote to go to arbitration.

The method of selecting an arbitrator usually is specified in the contract. Otherwise, the parties might mutually agree on an individual arbitrator (such as a respected judge or clergyman) or may request help from the American Arbitration Association (AAA) or the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS). Both organizations maintain panels of professional arbitrators and have procedures to ensure a fair and objective selection process.

In the hearing, the arbitrator will attempt to establish the precise issue that separates the parties; hear the factual evidence in support of the respective positions; and consider the merit

Grievance forms

In preparing a grievance investigation form, be sure to include blanks for:

- Who is involved? Include the grievant (employee, employees, the union); responsible management person or persons; and witnesses.
- When did it happen? Include the time and date of event.
- When must the grievance be filed? Be sure to include the informal step and first formal step.
- Where did it happen?
- What happened? What did a management representative do or fail to do that gives rise to the complaint?
- Why is it grievable? Specifically, what is wrong with the "what happened"? Cite article, section, paragraph, page number, etc. of the contract language or policy that was violated.
- What must be done to make the grievant whole? List corrective action requested and what we would settle for.

of both arguments. The arbitrator's decision is final and binding and may be enforced by the courts. A judicial appeal is usually allowed only on the narrowest grounds.

While arbitration is a semi-judicial process, it does not rely on the strict rules of evidence and the standards of a courtroom. A lawyer is usually not necessary; union representatives generally can do an effective job provided they are carefully prepared and know the rudiments of the process.

Many union leaders have learned the art of preparing arbitration cases through a process much like an apprenticeship. They first prepare and

argue cases with legal counsel or with experienced union leaders. After observing, assisting and participating for a time, they feel confident to take on cases themselves and eventually develop the capacity to handle complicated cases. Carefully select and prepare your first few cases.

Your state federation, the AFT Union Leadership Institute, the AFL-CIO's George Meany Center for Labor Studies, the American Arbitration Association and many university college labor education centers offer training in contract administration, including arbitration.

Chapter 6

Effective communications

In this chapter:

- Building an internal communications program
- Communicating with the general public

Communications is a vital function of the local union. It should be a core, ongoing function, not something done only when there is a crisis. Effective internal communications will help members and potential members understand the union's positions and help convey the message that the union is working for them. Effective external communications ensure that the union's point of view will be conveyed to the public, decision-makers and the media.

The union's voice must be heard by members, potential members and others in the community. Generally, the best way to reach members within your local is through regular newsletters, a Web site that is regularly updated, e-mail and good old-fashioned face-to-face contact. To reach people outside (and within) your local (i.e., lawmakers, school board officials, hospital officials, the labor community, religious leaders and other community activists), the best way is through the media—radio, television and newspapers.

Communication doesn't just happen. You have to be pro-active. Initiate contact with local reporters so that they know who you are and that you have expertise on education, healthcare or public employee issues. Become a vital information source for them. This will serve two purposes: They will call you to react to something and will accept your call when you initiate the communication.

A good communications program means that the union leadership is visible and accessible. Union leaders should meet regularly with members—through informal chats in teachers' lounges, hospital cafeterias or a park near members' office buildings—and through more formal membership meetings. Personal contact pays off—with members and with the media.

Building an internal communications program

People join unions and get actively involved when they understand the value of the union. To build that sense of value, the union must develop and execute a communications program designed to explain the union's goals, trumpet its successes and ensure that members and potential members understand what the union is doing on their behalf.

Creating an effective internal communication program requires several important steps:

- Analyze your union's image;
- Define a message that helps create a positive image of your union in the minds of your members and potential members;
- Select issues that help reinforce the message;
- Choose the right communication vehicles to carry the message; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your program.

Who should get the newsletter?

A long-standing debate within many AFT locals is whether or not it's worth sending the newsletter to potential members. Some feel the newsletter is a service that should be only for dues-paying members. Others believe the newsletter should go to everyone in the unit. Who is right? If your union can afford it, send your newsletter to both members and potential members. Research has shown that potential members are more likely to join if they understand the union's goals, what the union is doing to achieve those goals and how the union's work affects them. One of the best ways to communicate this is through the newsletter.

Analyze your union's image

What do members and potential members think of the union? Do they see the union as effective? Responsive? As a leader in the fight for quality? Do they credit your union with specific successes? Do they understand the union's goals and objectives? Do they believe that you are working on the issues they care most about?

A communications program should begin with efforts to find out what members and potential members actually think of the union—as opposed to the image you would like them to have! The distance between the two will give you a good idea of the communication challenge facing your union.

One of the best ways to assess the image your members have of the union is to survey them. Some local affiliates have done this by hiring professional polling firms to conduct scientific phone surveys. This is a terrific way to proceed if your local is large enough to absorb the expense of such a survey. However, most AFT locals do not have the budget for this, so many produce their own surveys, which are handed out and collected by building representatives. This method is effective but requires a lot of effort to get a response rate that is significant enough to draw any meaningful conclusions. Another approach, used by many small locals, is to conduct assessments of the image of their union by simply meeting with and talking to as many members and potential members as possible.

Whatever approach you use, try to get answers to some key questions:

- What do members and potential members think of the union?
- Do they think the union is effective in negotiations? Political action?

Lobbying? Grievance representation? Professional development? Representing members before the school board?

- Do they view the union as open and democratic?
- Can they name any recent successes of the union?
- What are their biggest concerns on the job, and do they think the union is fighting for them on these issues?
- What do they think of the union's current leadership?
- Do they think that they are better off with union representation?

You may be pleasantly surprised by the answers. But don't count on it. In reality, most locals that go through this process are alarmed by how little members know about the union and the work it does. An effective communications program can turn this around.

Define your message

How do you create a positive image of your union with members and potential members? By developing a clear, concise message and reinforcing it in all the work your union does. If members view the union as being too weak in dealing with the employer, choose a message that reinforces how tough and strong the union is. On the other hand, if members view the union as being too confrontational, consider reinforcing the professional approach your union takes in dealing with the employer. If your members are content with wages and benefits but more dissatisfied with working conditions, focus on a message that emphasizes your leadership role in fighting for quality education or other public services. Back this up with a real program of action (see Chapter 4, "The union program") that deals with the concerns of members and that helps reinforce your message.

A message is more than a slogan. A

Manage your data!

The foundation for all communications is effective data management. Do you know who your members and potential members are? Do you have addresses on everyone? Phone numbers? Personal e-mail addresses? The more information you have, the better you can target your communications. AFT offers the Membership Suite and Membership Lite programs that can help you get your data in order. For information on these programs, call the AFT information technology department at 800/238-1133, ext., 4567.

good message should serve as a yardstick against which you can measure the effectiveness of your communication. If your message is that your union is tough and effective in dealing with the employer, then every vehicle for communicating with members—from newsletters to meetings to building representatives—should reinforce this core message. Articles in the newsletter should be reviewed prior to publication, for example, to determine if they are reinforcing the message and if not, how they can be changed to do so. The agenda for membership meetings and building rep training should also be similarly evaluated.

Select issues that reinforce a message

Once you have defined your message, build programs of action around them to reinforce that message. To convey a message that your union is tough and effective in dealing with the employer, for example, select issues you can take on—the conditions of work sites, respect on the job or other concerns—that will help you demonstrate this (see Chapter 4 for more ideas). If you are trying to convey a more professional image, your union might want to take the lead in creating professional development opportunities.

Tips for effective surveys

Surveys can be mailed to homes, sent through interoffice mail, e-mailed, posted on your Web site or distributed by hand through work-site representatives. Representatives should be ready to engage members in conversation and explain to members why the union is taking the survey.

Here are some tips:

- Tell members why the union wants the information. This can be done in a cover letter or, if it's an online survey, in the introductory paragraph.
- Keep the questionnaire focused and to the point. Long, involved surveys may be ignored unless the issues are critical and the survey questions especially interesting.
- Make the survey instructions clear and provide simple responses, such as checking boxes, filling in blanks or circling answers. Include a date by which all surveys must be returned.
- Limit the number of open-ended questions; while they may provide valuable information, they can be difficult to categorize and tabulate.
- Be sure the questionnaire is easy to read. Use a simple typeface in a large enough font, underline key words and leave enough space between questions.
- Publicize your survey internally. Let members know you are conducting a survey and stress the importance of their cooperation.
- Follow up the survey with bulletin board notices, e-mails and letters reminding employees to complete and return their surveys.
- If you are conducting a paper survey, make it easy to return by providing a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Better yet, involve stewards/building reps in the collection and return of the surveys. This gives them an opportunity to keep in touch with the members they represent.
- Report the results and your analysis of the results to the membership in a timely fashion.
- If the results are to the union's advantage, publicize them to the general press, to management and in your meetings with community groups.
- Most importantly, do something with the results. Respond to the wishes and needs of the membership.

Remember to repeat your message as often and in as many ways as possible. Arm your work-site representatives with the facts (and literature) they need to engage their colleagues on important issues facing the union, but back this up with newsletter articles and other communications. Cover the topic thoroughly at membership meetings and in work-site visits. If appropriate, look for free media opportunities like radio and TV shows. Consider special mailings. Don't forget to use the union bulletin boards in the work sites. Think of six different ways to communicate the same message.

Choose your communication vehicles

What is the most effective vehicle your union has for communicating with members and potential members? Your newsletter? Fliers? Paid advertisements? Work-site bulletin boards? All of these are good vehicles, but they are *not the most effective*.

The most effective way to communicate to members is through your **work-site representative structure**. The importance of your building representatives can not be understated. Remember that:

- Members pay far more attention to what a colleague has to say than to any publication sent out by the union.
- Building representatives provide a mechanism for two-way communication (from the union to members and from members to the union leadership) and a way to directly address the concerns and questions of individual members.
- On an important or urgent issue, building representatives are in the best position to get the word out quickly throughout a work site and to mobilize people to take action.

Effective communications starts with having a strong building representative structure. This begins by making sure you have a representative in every work site (or for every 15 to 20 employees), but this alone is not enough. Building representatives must internalize the union's core message. They must understand the issues the union is fighting for and, most importantly, regularly receive the latest information on union activities and how they affect the membership. Many successful local unions have special building representative newsletters—often distributed via e-mail—for just this purpose.

Another important communication vehicle is union officers. If your local is large enough to afford release-time officers, a significant portion of these officers' time should be spent at the work sites meeting with members and potential members. Even without release time, the union should hold regular meetings in which members can raise their concerns and the union can report on issues and activities—and reinforce its overall message.

These forms of one-on-one contact are the most effective in communicating with members and potential members. Other methods are listed below.

The union newsletter. The union should produce a newsletter that is published at least once a month. This does not need to be a big production; the best newsletters are those that contain short articles on how the union is addressing the issues and concerns of members and potential members (written in a style that reinforces the core message of the union). Some locals use newsletters to convey the highlights of union activities while directing members to their Web site for more detailed information.

E-mail. Electronic mail is an effective (and inexpensive) way to communicate to members and nonmembers. Communicate to members at their personal e-mail addresses (check your membership card to ensure you ask for this information). If you use work e-mail addresses, make sure you have an agreement with the employer or are on solid legal grounds for your state. Keep in mind that you should not overuse e-mail. E-mail that does not have substance will quickly be viewed as junk e-mail. You do not want to end up in a position where the majority of members and potential members are deleting e-mails from the union before even opening them.

Web sites. Web sites are very effective but can also require a lot of work.

Content needs to be updated regularly. Old content needs to be removed. As mentioned above, one of the best uses for a Web site is to include stories with more detail and related resources than what is covered in the newsletter.

Bulletin boards. Work-site bulletin boards require that the union regularly send out materials to be posted. A bulletin board that has not changed content in several months will soon be ignored by members and potential members.

Fliers. From time to time, you will need to produce fliers on special programs and activities. As a general rule, these fliers should be short enough to be read “between the mailbox and the trash can.” Although fliers can be distributed through the mail, the most effective means is the work-site representative structure. Many unions use work-site representatives to place fliers and other literature in members' workplace mailboxes. However, stuffing mailboxes does not allow for two-way conversations between work-site representatives and colleagues. Encourage representatives to personally hand out fliers; they are more likely to engage their colleagues in discussions on union issues if they have a piece of literature to hand out supporting and explaining the union's position.

Position papers. Periodically, prepare position papers that articulate the union's position on professional issues, pending legislation or collective bargaining matters. The papers can be targeted to membership, the general community, government officials, the administration, the press or any combination of the above. The AFT's public affairs, research and educational issues departments can provide prepared materials or background information on many issues.

Surveys. Many locals use surveys to assess members' attitudes on professional issues, collective bargaining

'I communicate, but they don't listen.'

A common complaint among union leaders is that they communicate to their members, but members don't appear to be listening or to have gotten the message. These union leaders are right—up to a point. If you write an article for your newsletter on a union activity and mail it out, you have communicated, right? Not necessarily.

As we noted in Chapter 4, effective communications is a six-stage process. It bears repeating here. To communicate effectively, your message has to:

- **Be received by the intended audience.** Do you have correct addresses on all members and potential members? If not, some people are not getting your newsletter and other direct-mail communications. Do all your buildings have trained union representatives who carry the union's message to the members? If not, you are missing a real opportunity to communicate.
- **Grab the audience's attention.** Design your literature/fliers to grab the audience's attention and, with the exception of newsletters, the copy should be short enough to be read between the mailbox and the trash can.
- **Be understood by the audience.** Even if you understand the intricacies of a particular issue, don't assume that everyone else does. If your members are confused by union publications, they will stop reading them. If your building representatives don't understand an issue, they will not discuss it with their colleagues.
- **Be believed.** Is your message believable? You can promise members a 50 percent pay increase, but most members won't believe it. If they stop believing the union, they stop listening as well. On the other hand, the best evidence of the union's credibility is your past success in solving other problems. Your communications should remind people of those past successes.
- **Be remembered.** Communicating with members and potential members is ineffective if they forget what you had to say. Ensure that members and nonmembers remember your message by keeping it simple and by repeating it as often as possible.
- **Be acted upon.** When communicating with members, constantly ask yourself: What can I ask members and potential members to do? Maybe it's to take an action, such as attending a rally or meeting or contacting a local lawmaker. At the very least, they should understand the issue addressed in the communication and come away with a positive image of the union.

If any one of these steps is not achieved, then you have failed to effectively communicate.

concerns and the union's performance. A survey reminds members that the union cares about what they think; it also helps the union shape positions on key issues and build a program that meets the needs of the members. If the survey results work to the union's advantage—that is, the results demonstrate that the union's position is responsive to and reflects employee opinion—get press coverage of your findings.

Communicating with the general public

Make external communications/public relations/media relations—whatever you want to call it—a priority. There will be times when you have to reach out to the media at a moment's notice if something comes up. At other times, you can plan out a long-term program. Either way, the same ingredients are required: A strong yet simple message and an easy-to-understand solution to the problem. Here is what every communications program needs:

- **A regularly updated media list.** This should include the names, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail addresses for all reporters, TV assignment editors, radio reporters or news directors who would cover your union and its issues. List as many people as possible, including reporters from daily, weekly and minority-oriented newspapers, regular and cable TV stations, and news/talk and other radio stations that your members or the community listen to. Keep the list in a form that allows you to quickly send out faxes or e-mails.
- **Familiarity with your local media.** Don't wait for a crisis to make your first contact with reporters. Get to

know reporters, even on an informal basis, by meeting with them just to chat about general issues. The more a reporter feels comfortable with you and understands the issues that confront your members, the more likely you will get coverage.

■ **A decision on who speaks for the union.** The president is the most likely union spokesperson. While he or she oversees the union's message and will usually be the person speaking with reporters, it can't be a one-person operation. Organize a public relations committee to help choose and coordinate media events, write letters to the editor, etc. It is critically important that the union speaks to the public with one voice. Anyone speaking on behalf of the union should be "on message." Moreover, assigning just one person to be the spokesperson for the union gives that person the opportunity to develop long-term relationships with reporters.

Develop a message, and stick with it

Once you have decided to speak publicly about an issue, craft a message that is short, succinct, user-friendly, devoid of jargon and quotable. Keep it short and sweet. You have to get everyone's attention quickly, whether it's a reporter conducting an interview, legislators at a hearing or people at a rally.

■ Think of three main points you want to make—and stick with them. Stay on message. Don't veer off, even if a questioner tries to get you to say something you don't want to say. You may have to respond to a "curve-ball" question by saying something like, "Here's how I see it" or "Let me put it this way." Then launch into your pre-determined points.

■ Be quotable. Consider using an analogy or a metaphor to get your point across. But keep everything you say

short and succinct. Don't ramble on and on; you could end up saying something you'll regret later.

■ Practice, practice, practice. The only way to remember what to say and to be eloquent is to practice. Try out and practice your messages in advance with colleagues and or family members. Make sure that someone who is not in your area of expertise can understand what you're talking about. Would your neighbor understand and "get it?"

Getting media coverage

Sometimes events occur that require immediate press coverage without time for advance work. The governor has just announced a new voucher initiative; a nurse is fired for union activity; graduate employees will march at the university president's residence tomorrow. What do you do?

You can hold a news conference—but only if it is genuinely newsworthy enough for reporters to show up. Reporters are busy and don't want to attend a news conference that won't yield much news. Consider having a couple of members join you to explain the issue or problem to provide a "view from the frontlines." Also, it's often helpful to hear nonlabor voices that support you. This requires building a coalition of allies whom you can count on for support.

If you hold a news conference or are holding some other event, send out a media advisory a day or two in advance. An advisory is fairly short and tells reporters and assignment editors what is going to happen, where, when, and who will be speaking. Include a paragraph describing what you will talk about and perhaps include a quote from you, in case an advance story is being written. After the advisory is faxed or e-mailed, call the reporters the day of the event (or the day before) to remind them to attend.

Also, consider issuing a statement or news release. A statement is a one- or two-paragraph quote about a particular issue. A news release is a longer version, thoroughly discussing the issue. Remember: always fight something with something. If you're criticizing a policy or something else, recommend an appropriate solution.

You may decide to conduct a multi-month or year-long campaign around a particular issue, such as vouchers, charter schools, discipline issues, safe staffing levels, distance learning or state budget cuts. The campaign could begin just before school starts in the fall, at the start of a legislative session or during a week recognizing workers in your union, such as National Nurses Week. The campaign could involve media, legislative and community activities. This takes a lot of planning and requires a comprehensive strategy that starts with a calendar. Plan events for every month. Your union will become known for this issue, and there is a very good chance you will achieve your goal.

Additional ways to get your message out include:

■ **Letters to the editor.** These should be short responses (just a few paragraphs) to a newspaper article. Send your letter by fax or e-mail the day the original article appears—or the next day at the latest—for the best chance of getting it published. Ask members and their families or friends to write letters as well if the original article was particularly egregious.

■ **Op-ed articles.** An op-ed (also

called an opinion piece or guest column) is a longer article, about 400 words, that thoroughly explains an important issue facing your members and/or the people they serve.

Newspapers generally will only take one or two from a union leader a year, so make sure that the op-ed is important and timely.

■ **Radio talk shows.** While many radio talk shows are conservative, their listeners should be hearing the “voice of reason”—your point of view. Call the producer and suggest a show on a hot issue you're dealing with, such as vouchers, nurse staffing levels, distance learning, effects of state budget cuts, etc. Don't forget public radio stations—their programs are usually objective and more thorough and thoughtful.

■ **Paid advertising.** In extraordinary circumstances, you may consider spending money on newspaper ads, radio commercials or billboard advertisements. While a newspaper article or piece on the radio or TV news is “free,” it is written and edited by someone else and usually includes the opinion of others. If you pay for an ad, you have sole control over its content. Radio is one of the best values for your dollar, since radio reaches thousands of people at one time. In most cities, you can arrange to air your radio ad frequently on several stations for the cost of one large print ad.

For assistance with building a communications program, contact your state federation or AFT's public affairs department at 202/879-4458.

Chapter 7

Political and legislative mobilization

Every day, decisions are made at the state and federal levels that have a tremendous impact on our members—from state funding to retirement benefit protections to worker rights on the job. That’s why AFT locals should put as much effort into developing an effective political and legislative program as they do into organizing, contract negotiations and contract enforcement.

In fact, our members expect it. Polling data indicates a high correlation between a member’s satisfaction with his or her union and the union’s involvement in politics. Our members show a great deal of support for the union’s involvement in political action as long as it is based on policy, not partisanship, and focuses on the issues most relevant to them, such as funding, wages and benefits and working conditions.

What are the elements of an effective political action program? Local affiliates should engage in a number of activities to build an effective political action and legislative program, including fundraising; lobbying; mobilizing members; endorsing candidates; and building coalitions.

Fundraising

Each year, corporations raise hundreds of millions of dollars to contribute to political candidates. Labor unions will never be able to match these funding levels, but we cannot neglect this important area of political action. To effectively represent our members, locals need to contribute financially to help elect candidates who support our issues. One of the best ways to do this is to establish a political action committee, or COPE (Committee on Political Education). One purpose of this committee is to raise voluntary contributions from members to support candidates who are committed to supporting our issues.

The AFT and your state federation can help your local set up a COPE committee by providing expertise in federal and state laws; creating appropriate dues check-off cards; identifying issues and themes that will attract contributions; and developing an overall fundraising plan

Your local should also participate in AFT's Partners in Political Education (PIPE) program. PIPE is a vehicle that allows local unions to increase the amount of money they have for local races (school board, college trustees, state legislature, etc.) while also increasing the amount of voluntary money that AFT can use on federal

races. For more information in PIPE, contact the AFT political and legislative mobilization department.

Lobbying

Lawmakers need to know where your members stand on the important issues and to know that union members are paying attention to how they vote. That is the foundation of an effective lobbying program. How do you get there?

Work with your state federation.

Your state federation will likely take the lead in efforts to lobby state lawmakers. Work closely with the state federation, however, to ensure that the needs and concerns of your members are reflected in its lobbying goals. Also find out how your local and members can best support the state federation's lobbying efforts.

Develop relationships with your local representatives. Initiate ongoing relationships with legislators from your area. This should include:

- Regular meetings with legislators to let them know about your members' interests and concerns;
- Invitations to work sites where they can view problems (and successes) first hand; and
- Opportunities for the union and lawmakers to work together on media activities.

Communicate with members.

The local's lobbying efforts should also involve member education and communication. Don't assume that members understand how a piece of legislation will affect them and their families, and don't assume they understand the work the union is doing on their behalf in the state capital. Take on the role of educating members; if you don't tell them about your successes, who will? (See Chapter 6, "Effective communications," for more ideas).

AFT Solidarity Fund

The 2002 AFT convention established the AFT Solidarity Fund program, a fund to boost political action across the states. Through this program, state affiliates establish a state Solidarity Fund to fight anti-union, anti-worker ballot initiatives and other referenda, legislative battles or other urgent political challenges. These funds must be used for political and legislative activities and cannot be used for state general operating expenses, but otherwise state affiliates have broad discretion in the use of the affiliate Solidarity Fund. Local union leaders should contact their state affiliate for details regarding operation of their state's Solidarity Fund.

Get members involved. Demonstrate the value of the union to members and potential members by getting them involved in political activities. Your lobbying plan should constantly be looking for ways to get members and nonmembers involved (see next section).

Mobilizing members

Mobilize members in support of the union's political objectives. This might include getting members to vote and attend rallies and meetings, encouraging them to contact legislators or participating in fundraising. Mobilizing members to take specific action is not always easy, but it is at the core of what makes a union powerful. Below are some tips that can help.

Maintain accurate lists. One of the most important keys to membership mobilization is to maintain accurate membership (and potential membership) lists. Accurate lists will enable you to know which members are registered to vote, how often they vote, many demographic characteristics and the legislative districts where they live. If possible, your lists should also include work-site information on all members and potential members, as well as home e-mail addresses.

Use your work-site structure. The best way to educate members on union issues and to get them involved in union events is to use your building representatives or legislative liaisons. (See Chapter 3, "Organizational structure," for more details.)

Identify a message that is relevant to members' wages, benefits, quality of service and working conditions. Members will be more likely to become involved if they can see that an election, campaign or legislative issue affects them directly.

Communicate the message. Make sure members are educated on the issues. Look for a variety of ways to

communicate with them, including one-on-one work-site visits from building representatives, work-site fliers, telephone calls, letters from local or state federation presidents or leaders, newsletter articles, bulletin board postings, e-mails and Web sites (see Chapter 6, "Effective communications").

A case study in political action

In early 2003, the New Mexico Legislature was considering a bill to grant collective bargaining rights to public employees. In just a few weeks, AFT's state federation was able to collect the e-mail addresses of half its members and to use electronic communications to educate members and to ask them to contact their state lawmakers to support the bill. In less than a month, 4,000 local AFT members generated more than 20,000 e-mails and faxes to the governor and state legislators. The state federation not only won passage of collective bargaining, it also secured substantial pay raises for teachers, paraprofessionals and classified employees.

Why was the state federation so successful?

Support from local affiliates. Throughout the state, local affiliates recruited work-site legislative liaisons who helped educate members on the issues and collected e-mail addresses from members and potential members who wanted to receive a weekly legislative update. Local affiliates also sent teams of members to meet with their lawmakers on the pending legislation.

Membership education. The state federation sent three statewide mailings to members. These communications focused on issues members cared about (collective bargaining and pay raises) and emphasized how members could get involved. Local affiliates also trained building representatives to carry the union's message to members.

Membership mobilization. The state federation worked with local affiliates to turn their membership into a network of grass-roots lobbyists who used the Internet to communicate with their lawmakers.

Effective use of technology. The state federation and its local affiliates used an online e-mail/legislative advocacy program called "GetActive" (see "Resources for affiliates," page 78) to both reach out to members and to provide a way for members to easily contact their lawmakers.

Focus on the issues. The state federation also kept the focus of its efforts on the issues that mattered most to members.

Set up a structure for quickly mobilizing members. This may include phone trees, e-mail lists or internal distribution systems at the work site. A rapid response system is useful not only to mobilize for a legislative hearing, political rally or voter registration drive, but also supports all union organizing activities.

Resources for affiliates

A number of AFT departments offer assistance in political action. Call toll free, **800/238-1133**; department extensions are listed below.

- Federal politics/COPE—ext. 4436
- Legislation—ext. 4452
- Political and legislative mobilization—ext. 4454
- Human rights and community relations—ext. 4434
- Research and information services—ext. 4428
- AFT political action extranet—<http://resource.aft.org/political/>. This site is password protected. Contact the AFT political and legislative mobilization department to sign up
- AFT state legislative issues—<http://resource.aft.org/legislation>. This site is password protected. Contact Ed Muir in the AFT research and information services department to sign up.
- In addition, the AFL-CIO and other organizations offer a number of resources:
 - AFL-CIO state issues Web site
<http://resources.aflcio.org/stateaction>.
 - AFL-CO Working Families Toolkit Web site offers fliers and other materials that can be adapted for your needs. The site can be accessed through the AFT LeaderNet at <http://leadernet.aft.org> (first-time users should go to <http://leadernet.aft.org/register>).
- Through the AFL-CIO, AFT affiliates can now access a broadcast e-mail system with built-in legislative contact features called GetActive. For more information on this free program, visit <http://leadernet.aft.org> (first-time users should go to <http://leadernet.aft.org/register>) or contact Frank Stella at AFT headquarters, fstella@aft.org.
- For more information on ballot initiatives, go to the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, <http://www.ballot.org>.

Endorsing candidates

Key components of your political program should be candidate endorsements, membership education and voter turnout.

Establish guidelines for endorsing candidates. Your state federation should be able to help you develop these guidelines. (Remember: the guidelines should be focused on issues, not candidates or political parties.)

Review candidate records, develop questionnaires and/or host candidate forums. Your endorsements should be based on the voting records and positions of the candidates based on the issues that matter most to your members.

Educate your members about the issues and the endorsements. Your local will need a plan for communicating to members who the union endorsed and the basis for the endorsements. (See Chapter 6 for more information on communications.)

Assess voters and turn them out to the polls. Candidate endorsements are meaningless unless they translate into votes for the endorsed candidates. Your political plans should include a system for assessing members' support for candidates, for educating undecided voters on the union's endorsed candidates and for making sure that members who support endorsed candidates go to the polls and vote.

Building coalitions

Participating in effective coalitions can be a significant boost to the union's political and legislative COPE programs. Coalitions can be used in many activities of political and legislative action program, including: voter registration, organizing candidate forums, get-out-the-vote efforts and lobbying.

Partnerships make the division of labor easier and increase your political strength, volunteer pool and financial resources. Coalition partners may include AFL-CIO affiliates, other unions, professional associations, political parties, employers, nonprofit organizations/community groups, students, parents and patients.

Be aware that coalition partners will change as issues change. Sometimes an opponent on one issue may be an ally on another issue. The key to effective coalition building is to recognize how your membership and the community are affected by an issue and then reach out to those with common concerns to form a stronger political force.

Political action committees and legislative liaisons

Putting together an effective political and legislative operation can be a lot of work. But it is easier to accomplish all that needs to be done through the creation of a political action committee (COPE) and legislative liaison program.

Political action committee. The AFT's traditional political action committee, known as COPE (Committee on Political Education), is a permanent subcommittee of the executive board. The committee oversees the union's political efforts, including candidate endorsement procedures; membership education and mobilization efforts; fundraising programs and lobbying efforts with the state federation. A political action committee is a must for every local. Many decisions affecting members are made in the political arena, and AFT polls show that 78 percent of our members understand that political action is an important activity for the AFT to be engaged in.

Legislative liaisons. Legislative liaisons are work-site representatives who help advance the union's political agenda. They fill an important role when the building representative is overburdened with other duties or does not enjoy political work. Establishing a legislative liaison network can help with member education and mobilization in the work site and can give more members an opportunity to get involved in union activities



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