



Reframing Membership

Online UniServ and
Organizer
Support Series

2:30-4:00 PM ET



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Pre-Attendance Assignments

The resources compiled here are short, relevant and intended to help you shift from the day to day cognitive load of work to the thinking you will use as a learning in our session.

Reflect: (Please Do Before Arriving)

What are the current, common practices for recruiting members in your organization?

Are they successful? How do you know?

Who invited you to join your union? Was this the best person to do that? Why?

Resources You Need to Bring:

Please have this Resource Guide Available During our Zoom Meeting.

Articles for Thinking: (Optional Food for Thought)

The rest of the resources in this guide are primarily designed to help frame “why” we are offering this session. We may reference them in our work together. They may cause you to generate questions that you will want to explore while we are together. Consider these options to read prior to attending.

Community Agreements for Our Online Time

Awareness and Self-Knowledge

Good online discussion requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge allows you to see what causes you pain and conflict and enables you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things about yourself that you are not happy with. In turn, self-knowledge helps to prevent you from projecting your negative aspects onto other people. Bringing your best self also requires that you have a positive attitude, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others. In the online setting this means staying present, listening fully, being intentional with the words you speak and type. It means being sensitive to the amount of time you are taking and making space for those that have not yet contributed.

Listening for Understanding

Be an active listener in our online space. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, looking him or her in the eye, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives and sharing your own. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears and/or concerns. In the online space, the use of the camera will really help with this. It allows others to see your reactions and attention to their words. Online discussions can often have time limits, make sure that you are making space for everyone to be able to share so you can listen to understand.

Being Gracious

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives, as well as the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for others in the online space with you, wanting the best for them and recognizing in them the same wants, needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better with others, to be more self-compassionate and to be a positive force in other people's lives. We are gracious when we accept and genuinely work to use the pronouns that others ask us to use. Being gracious includes helping others with tech issues and understanding when it doesn't always go the way that was planned.

Staying Engaged

Staying engaged requires you to be morally, emotionally, intellectually and socially involved in the online conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted. This means a commitment to keeping your OTHER electronic communications (phone, Email, texting) to a minimum with folks not present in this learning community. This also means being present for all portions of the learning agenda.

Being Open and Suspending Judgment

Listening with an open mind includes being receptive to the influence of others in this online community. You can suspend judgment by becoming aware of preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before jumping to conclusions. Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not just to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong. This means that we recognize each of us will make mistakes and that we have the capacity to grow. We should expect imperfections.

Saying "I" - tell your truth

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours requires a willingness to take risks in the online space. It means that you will be absolutely honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences and opinions and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the "first person" and use "I" statements.

Seeking Discomfort

Leaning in to discomfort will require you to let go of understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding onto in order to move forward in this online space. Leaning in means that you will avoid pre-judgment and be open to the kernel

of wisdom in each individual's experiences. Leaning in to discomfort will require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, and/or fear.

Reaching Empathy

Empathy and compassion allow you to understand the other person's point of view in our online community. When you are empathetic, you are more understanding, patient and kind. Expanding your capacity to feel empathy will also allow others to enter your circle of human concern. Sharing, using, and respecting pronouns is a very simple form of empathy.

Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure

Expect and accept that there may not be closure in this online discussion. It is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person's racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about race or other issues with another person, the more you learn and the more they will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours are continuous and always evolving. This means that sometimes we will have unfinished, unexplored, and shortened conversations about some concepts.

**Adapted from "Embracing equity and inclusion", Annie E. Casey Foundation*

<https://www.npr.org/2022/04/02/1090353185/amazon-union-chris-smalls-organizer-staten-island>

He was fired by Amazon 2 years ago. Now he's the force behind the company's 1st union

April 2, 2022 7:56 AM ET Heard on [Weekend Edition Saturday](#)

Chris Smalls, president of the Amazon Labor Union, takes an interview at the Amazon distribution center in the Staten borough of New York on Oct. 25, 2021, after earlier delivering "Authorization of Representation" forms to the National Labor Relations Board in New York.

Craig Ruttle/AP

"He's not smart, or articulate."

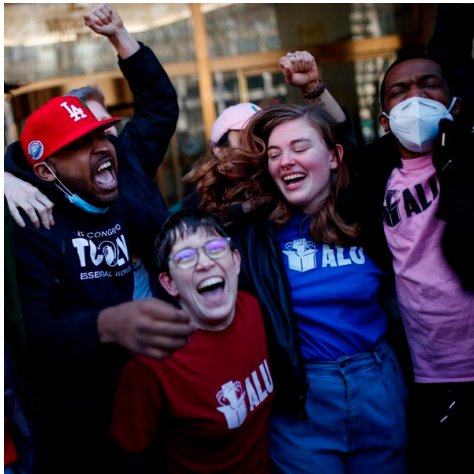
Those were the words used by a top Amazon lawyer to describe former warehouse worker Chris Smalls.



part in
Island

Smalls had led a [walkout](#) at the start of the pandemic in 2020 to protest working conditions at the Staten Island, N.Y., warehouse where he worked. He [was fired](#) the same day.

The [memo that contained those biting words was leaked](#) just a few days later. But the words would stay with Smalls. They became the fuel that would drive him to lead one of the most dramatic and successful grassroots union drives in recent history.



In a stunning victory, Amazon workers on Staten Island vote for a union

"When I read that memo, that motivated me to start an organization," said Smalls, celebrating [the historic victory](#) of the Amazon Labor Union on Friday, making the warehouse Amazon's first unionized workplace in the U.S. Friday's triumph would come almost two years to the day of his firing.

At the time, Amazon said Smalls had violated quarantine and safety measures. But Smalls said he was fired in retaliation for his activism. The New York attorney general followed with an [investigation and sued](#) Amazon for the incident and even sought to get Smalls his job back. Smalls didn't sit still after being fired, and formed the Amazon Labor Union soon after.

Meetings at a bus stop, barbecue and funding through GoFundMe

Smalls had zero union background, nor did he rely on any established labor groups for funding and organizing power. Instead he raised money for the operation through GoFundMe. Smalls and his co-founder Derrick Palmer — who's still working at the warehouse — reached out to their coworkers.

The bus stop used by workers became their gathering place. They'd wait there to talk to workers who were heading home from their shifts. They'd have a bonfire going, with s'mores, and get people talking. They invited workers to cookouts.

"We had over 20 some barbecues, giving out food every single week, every single day, whether it was pizza, chicken, pasta," Smalls said. He even brought home-cooked food from his aunt to some of these gatherings.



Chris Smalls (center), president of the Amazon Labor Union, joins supporters as they march and chant at the Amazon distribution center in Staten Island on Oct. 25, 2021.

Craig Ruttle/AP

They talked to workers about fighting for their rights, about the grueling toll of the job, how you're on your feet, doing very repetitive, very physically demanding work, for hours. About the breaks that are few and too short.

No one expected this scrappy grassroots campaign to emerge victorious against the behemoth company.

Indeed, [a first attempt failed](#). But Smalls persevered, eventually meeting the 30% threshold necessary to hold a vote.

Amazon got Smalls arrested for

trespassing

Amazon, meanwhile, spent millions of dollars on labor consultants to fight the union campaigns. The company held mandatory meetings with workers in the warehouse, urging them to vote No.

BUSINESS

Why a mailbox continues to loom over Amazon union vote at Alabama warehouse

Amazon even had Smalls and a couple other organizers arrested for trespassing while they were delivering food and union materials to the warehouse parking lot earlier this year. Amazon's argument to workers is that it is already a great place to work, without a union. It offers competitive pay, and generous benefits like health care coverage for full time employees and full tuition for college.

But Smalls' efforts clearly bore fruit.

Almost 5,000 workers cast their ballots and the votes to form a union were won by a significant margin — more than 500 votes. Amazon had wanted to belittle the union drive two years ago, when as part of its PR strategy the company said it would make Smalls "the face of the entire union/organizing movement."

And that's exactly what happened. Except today, Smalls has become the face of one of the most successful union drives in recent history.

And Amazon has suffered an embarrassing defeat.

"Amazon doesn't become Amazon without the people," Smalls said. "And we make Amazon what it is."

FEATURE LABOR

These Are The Workers Who Took on Amazon, and Won

Against all odds, Amazon workers in New York organized a successful union against one of the biggest companies in the world. Here's how.

LUIS FELIZ LEON

MAY 23, 2022



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

“

Hey, Jeff Bezos, I'm going to let you know something today: We are just getting started,” Chris Smalls declared at an August 2020 protest in Washington, D.C. August 2020 was the month Amazon founder Jeff Bezos became the richest person in recorded history.

Outside of his \$23 million, 27,000-square-foot pied-à-terre, a group of Staten Island Amazon workers and a crowd of supporters erected a mock guillotine.

“Give a good reason why we don't deserve a \$30 minimum wage when this man makes \$4,000 a second,” Smalls went on.

After leading a walkout over Covid-19 safety at Amazon's mammoth JFK8 warehouse in March 2020, the first month of the pandemic, Smalls and his coorganizers took their rebellion on the road that summer. Outside Bezos' mansions—a \$165 million Beverly Hills home, a waterfront estate outside Seattle and a Fifth Avenue Manhattan penthouse—the group staged demonstrations denouncing income inequality and demanding wage hikes and protections for workers given the pandemic designation of “essential.”

At each stop, they quietly grew the ranks of supporters who also sensed that the scrappy movement was the start of something big.

Those early supporters included Cassio Mendoza, then 21, who decided to show up to the October 2020 protest in Beverly Hills after connecting with Smalls on Instagram.

“Wow, this is really different,” Mendoza remembers thinking at the protest.

“Talking about billionaires, ‘They gotta go.’ Damn! This is really radical.”

Mendoza would soon move across the country to take a job at JFK8 and ultimately help win the first-ever union at any of Amazon's U.S. warehouses.

Since the Amazon Labor Union's stunning win in April, much of the media analysis around the victory has been centered on Smalls. Just as important, however, is the collective story of the workers who charted their own path against one of the world's biggest companies.

What became the Amazon Labor Union (ALU) brought together an organic group of leaders demanding safety and dignity at Amazon—some with prior union experience—and a diverse, roving band of

socialists in their 20s seeking to join a righteous labor fight. After setting their sights on a union election at the JFK8 warehouse, the group was joined by veteran warehouse workers who brought a deep bench of experience and relationships to the campaign. All of them were essential to the ALU's upset win to represent more than 8,000 warehouse workers.

In May, Amazon's union-busting efforts dealt the ALU a defeat in its second union election, this time at LDJ5, a smaller sort center across the street from JFK8. Out of roughly 1,633 employees eligible to vote in the election, nearly 1,000 cast ballots, with 380 workers voting in favor of the union and 618 against.

The outcome is disappointing but not entirely surprising for ALU leaders, who say they faced even steeper odds at LDJ5, a newer facility comprised largely of part-time workers. After the union's first win sent shockwaves through the U.S. labor movement, the ALU says that hundreds of Amazon workers nationwide have reached out for support in their own organizing efforts. There's every reason to think that the ALU is still just getting started.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

ESSENTIALLY DISRESPECTED

It's fitting that the last day of voting at JFK8 fell on March 30, marking the two-year anniversary of the walkout that jumpstarted the organizing effort there.

Staten Island's first case of Covid-19 case was confirmed March 9, 2020. Things escalated quickly in the following weeks.

While infections rose, "They weren't giving us masks," says Gerald Bryson, a warehouse picker in his 50s who had been a union member at previous jobs.

Instead of responding to the pandemic, Amazon organized what Derrick Palmer, 33, describes as a "mini-carnival" to recruit workers to racial and ethnic affinity groups, crowding employees into a small room and handing out plates of food while people milled about maskless.

"They totally disregarded Covid," Palmer remembers. Worker Jordan Flowers, then 21, has lupus and was awaiting a kidney transplant, which put him at high risk for Covid complications. As Flowers saw stories of people dying across the country that March, he grew increasingly concerned about the lack of personal protective equipment at work.



Cassio Mendoza

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

“I’m my mom’s only child,” Flowers says. “I wasn’t gonna risk my life to work for this company.” Amazon had already fired him once anyway, when he took short-term disability in 2019, but the company reinstated his employment shortly after he challenged the termination.

Chris Smalls' job as a process assistant at the warehouse, a training role adjacent to management, gave him responsibility for approximately 60 people. Alarmed that managers weren't properly notifying employees when someone they'd worked with tested positive for Covid, Smalls took it upon himself to warn workers of their possible exposure.

Jason Anthony, 36, was one of the workers under Smalls. "Our relationship evolved from a worker-supervisor thing to a brotherhood, a bond that will never be broken," Anthony says. "We call each other brother and sister. We care about each other. That's something that Amazon doesn't even do—care about their own people."

In the afternoon of March 30, 2020, workers filed out of the New York warehouse, led by Bryson, Palmer, Flowers and Smalls. They demand Amazon close the facility for cleaning and offer employees paid time off in the meantime.

"Alexa, please shut down and sanitize the building," one of their protest signs read.

Amazon fired Smalls that day, claiming he violated the company's quarantine rules. Amazon fired Bryson the next month, though an administrative law judge ordered the company reinstate him two years later in April 2022. Amazon gave Palmer a "final warning" and put Flowers on medical suspension.

According to a leaked memo, Amazon's chief counsel denigrated Smalls soon after, calling him "not smart, or articulate" and suggesting a press narrative of "us versus him." Amazon did not respond to a request for comment.

This narrow focus on Smalls ultimately backfired on Amazon, elevating Smalls to the status of a martyr while underestimating the depth of worker anger. The more that Amazon singled out Smalls, the more organizers could focus on talking to their coworkers and bringing new people into the union campaign.

Meanwhile, Smalls' story reached workers far and wide. Brett Daniels, 29, got in touch with Smalls via social media after the walkout. At the time, Daniels was working at a dine-in movie theater in a suburb of Phoenix. When he was laid off due to pandemic-related closures, he picked up a job as a seasonal hire at an Amazon facility in Arizona with the hope of organizing among fellow workers. The child of a union firefighter and flight attendant, Daniels hoped to organize a union after years of community organizing experience, including the Fight for \$15 in Tucson, Ariz.



Chris Smalls

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Inspired by the pandemic walkout, Daniels moved to Staten Island in November 2021 and was rehired at Amazon. “Almost all—if not all—of the organizers here were inspired by Chris, Derrick, Gerald and Jordan leading that walkout,” Daniels says.

Connor Spence, 26, also relocated from New Jersey to take a job at JFK8 in May 2021, shelving his aviation training to become an organizer instead of a pilot.

Smalls’ story “was emblematic of everything that’s wrong with Amazon—everything that’s wrong with society at the time,” Spence says.

Instead of backing down after his firing, “Chris was motivated to take the momentum and use it to fix the things he saw that were wrong with Amazon,” Spence says. “That was inevitably going to attract other people who wanted to actually step up, take action and change things.”

A UNION IS BORN

On May 1, 2020—International Workers’ Day—Smalls, Bryson, Flowers and Palmer launched the Congress of Essential Workers, a predecessor to what would become the Amazon Labor Union. The group’s original goal was to unite frontline workers across industries in the fight for better conditions and pay. Jason Anthony joined up after he was fired from Amazon in July 2020.

The group envisioned a broad working class struggle against billionaires profiting from the pandemic—and they didn’t mince words.

“The capitalist economy of the U.S. is built off the backs of a class of underpaid people who are degraded to wage laborers and valued only for what they produce, not for their intrinsic value as humans,” reads the Congress of Essential Workers’ [website](#).

As they traveled the country to protest at Bezos’ mansions, the group forged stronger bonds with each other while welcoming newcomers, an approach Smalls describes as “all-inclusive” with a caveat.

“It is Black-led, and we’re gonna keep it that way,” Smalls says he would explain as people joined. “Once we have that understanding, we let them in. And they’ve been with us ever since. There’s loyalty, and there is trust. They’re family members.”

In summer 2020, Spence traveled from his home in New Jersey to the Manhattan protest outside Bezos’ penthouse. “We really only talked for about two minutes,” Spence says of his first time meeting Smalls. Nonetheless, Spence was quickly added to an organizer chat group. He is now the ALU’s vice president of membership.

“One of the signs of a good organizer is believing fundamentally that working-class people are smart and capable,” Spence says. “So building an organization where you tried to make everybody have a part in the democratic process, let everybody have a role in it—that’s going to be a successful organization of working-class people.”

That’s the same ethos that drew in Cassio Mendoza at the October 2020 rally outside of Bezos’ Beverly Hills home.

A committed socialist and the son of a videographer with Unite Here Local 11, Mendoza was skeptical of staff-led organizing. He saw in Bryson and Palmer genuine rank-and-file leadership and was especially impressed that Palmer had flown to Los Angeles after finishing up a shift at Amazon. The Congress of Essential Workers “didn’t seem manufactured in any way,” Mendoza says.

A Los Angeles native, Mendoza typically wears a blue L.A. Dodgers hat, loose black T-shirts and beige khakis—wardrobe choices that match his understated personality. Despite his attempts to fade into the background, Mendoza became a pivotal campaign organizer. By June 2021, he had packed up and moved to New York. He began working at Amazon a month later, with the intention of helping the organizing effort.

But at that point, the labor fight was still solely about garnering more respect for workers, and the group mostly wanted to convene Amazon workers across the country for a national conference. “They didn’t even say the word ‘union,’” Mendoza remembers of those early conversations.

“The idea was to have us all come together under one banner,” Spence says.



Connor Spence

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

As members of the Congress of Essential Workers began reaching out to other worker groups through social media, they learned that most didn't have a real organizing presence inside Amazon. One exception was Amazonians United, a loose network of worker committees in the United States and Canada. That group's organizing model is based on "solidarity unionism," in which workers begin acting like a union without any official, government recognition.

The organizers on Staten Island opted for a different approach when they formed the Amazon Labor Union, although members of Amazonians United have lent support to the union drive at LDJ5.

Bryson had been a member of multiple New York City unions, including the Service Employees International Union Locals 32BJ and 1199, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees District Council 37. And Smalls had once been a Teamster before working at Amazon, leaving what he describes as "a bad contract."

While the Congress of Essential Workers at first resisted the idea of a formal union, that changed after the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) lost its campaign to unionize an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Ala., in April 2021. (As of press time, the outcome of the second election in Bessemer is still pending.) Put off by RWDSU's approach, which leaned on politicians and celebrities to gin up support among Amazon employees, Smalls and the other organizers thought they could do better.

"We know the ins and outs of the company," Smalls explains. "Derrick is a six-year vet. I worked there for almost five years. Who better to lead the fight than us?"

As they discussed the idea of a new, independent union to keep workers in the driver's seat, they looked for examples of other militant unions. Mendoza was especially inspired by William Z. Foster, a Communist organizer in the steel industry in the 1930s. Spence turned to *Labor Law for the Rank & Filer* from Daniel Gross and Staughton Lynd, and he distilled lessons from labor studies and copious online research into presentations for the organizing committee—including how to take on union-busting consultants on the shop floor. For language on inclusion, the group referenced Unite Here's national constitution. For union democracy structures—including how union officers' salaries should be pegged to the average wages of the union membership—they looked at the United Electrical Workers.



Jordan Flowers

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

All of these ideas would be reflected in ALU's constitution.

“Let’s combine the union model with the rank-and-file committee model,” Spence recalls discussing with Smalls. “Each building has a worker committee that is the main decision-making body of the union.”

Ultimately, the group eschewed abstract theories and rigid methods and looked to workers to act.

“Screw it,” Spence recalls saying. “Let’s just go to JFK8, Chris’s old building, and organize workers there. It’s probably the best building to start a union campaign.”

THE DRIVING FORCE

It’s hard to overstate the odds stacked against an independent union taking on Amazon.

It’s not just that Amazon has a storied union-busting record. The company’s size and ubiquity make it an unavoidable part of modern American life, compunctions of conscience about the welfare of its workers aside. Amazon’s sprawling warehouse and logistics network delivers billions of boxes of stuff annually to its 153 million Amazon Prime members, with 40% of all online purchases in the country originating through Amazon, compared with just 7% at Walmart. More than 1.1 million people now work at Amazon’s more than 800 U.S. warehouses, and Amazon is projected to employ 1% of all U.S. workers in the next few years.

What’s more, employee turnover inside Amazon facilities is constant. Amazon’s annual churn rate—representing the number of employees leaving the company each year compared to their total number—is about 150%, which Bezos has said is by design to prevent what he called a “march to mediocrity.”

That high turnover made Amazon warehouse veterans, like Michelle Valentin Nieves (who’s been there three years), invaluable organizers. Inside the JFK8 warehouse at the height of the pandemic, Valentin Nieves was growing increasingly frustrated. Managers would reprimand her on the shop floor while she was risking a Covid infection.



Gerald Bryson

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

In the first months of the pandemic, Valentin Nieves watched CNN for live updates on infections, hearing false reassurances from former President Donald Trump. “Then, come to find out, there were

people actually coming up with Covid-19 already in the facility. And they were trying to keep it a secret.”

As Valentin Nieves waited to get vaccinated in 2021, “I was just losing my mind,” she says. “I’m like, ‘I’m gonna get it. I’m gonna bring it back to the house. I’m gonna give it to my family.’”

When Palmer approached Valentin Nieves to sign a union card in 2021, she didn’t skip a beat. Valentin Nieves would go on to read Martin Jay Levitt’s *Confessions of a Union Buster* and become a fierce worker organizer, connecting especially with Latino workers for whom she was a familiar face.

Valentin Nieves, who is from Puerto Rico, says good organizing entails good listening, so she would take her time to hear workers’ grievances and provide feedback. During one of these chats, she talked with a worker who had foot spurs from standing for prolonged hours at Amazon. Eventually, Valentin Nieves helped the worker file multiple requests for medical accommodations until they finally got approved.

Brima Sylla, 55, a widely respected immigrant worker from Liberia with a doctorate in public policy, started working at Amazon in January 2022 and joined the union campaign in March. He had come to Amazon after 10 years of teaching at a small private school on Staten Island, which laid him off during the pandemic. He quickly grew tired of the ambulances blaring to the warehouse entrance to ferry an injured worker to the hospital. Nationwide, workers at Amazon suffered 27,700 injuries in 2020 and 38,300 in 2021. The company accounts for nearly half of all injuries in the warehouse industry— a rate of 6.8 per 100 workers.

Sylla says he organized to build the union to make Amazon a dignified workplace, because “the company just wants money, money, money. They forgot about the human side of the workers. The job is damn hard.”

Pasquale “Uncle Pat” Cioffi, a former longshore worker with the International Longshoremen’s Association for about nine years, had been reticent about supporting the union when he was first approached. He scolded organizers for making promises about wage hikes before even securing a contract.

But when he saw cops arrest Smalls, Daniels and Anthony for trespassing as they delivered food to workers in February, Cioffi changed his mind.

“At the end of the day, they were dropping off food,” Cioffi says.

Cioffi occasionally wears Nike tracksuits and a yellow Amazon vest adorned with pins and the words “Italian G.O.A.T.” emblazoned on the back. Like Smalls, he is a process assistant. When he speaks, he

jabs his fingers at your upper body to punctuate a point, evincing a self-confidence that enraptures listeners. Workers say he personally flipped hundreds to support the union.

“People tend to go with people that they trust,” Cioffi explains. “Everybody knows me from day shift, any shift, any department. They know who I am because I’m always making that extra effort to help them out in whatever the situation is.”

“Amazon didn’t make this about the ALU,” Cioffi adds. “They made it about Chris Smalls. But this wasn’t really about Chris Smalls. This was about the people.”

Karen Ponce, 26, is one of those people. She had started working at an Amazon delivery station in 2020, intending to save up money for a master’s degree in social work. After a layoff without warning, Ponce was rehired at JFK8.



Michelle Valentin Nieves

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

Though she had been active in immigrant rights causes in college, Ponce says she didn't understand unions and initially bought into Amazon's anti-union propaganda. "I was brainwashed, even scared," Ponce says.

Her thinking began to shift after reaching out to her college sociology professor, who encouraged her to talk to the organizers. Connor Spence answered Ponce's list of questions about dues and the union election, and they talked about working conditions.

"They understood the toxic work environment because they were workers themselves," Ponce says.

As Ponce learned that some of her coworkers were living in their cars and homeless shelters, she began to connect the organizing drive to her social work calling. She began studying labor history and read Jane McAlevey's *A Collective Bargain*. Not only did Ponce eventually join the union effort, she became the ALU's secretary in December 2021.

Arlene Kingston, meanwhile, supported the union effort from the get-go. She grew up talking politics and had strong municipal unions in her native Trinidad and Tobago.

Kingston and another coworker aided the union effort by offering free food in the break room, cooking peas and rice, chicken and macaroni pie to give out. "And if we have to do it again, we're gonna do it again over and over," Kingston says.

She relishes how "a little person that you underestimated" defeated Amazon. "And that is just the beginning."

SOLIDARITY & INDEPENDENCE

The Amazon Labor Union had no time to waste after the victory at JFK8. As messages of support poured in from Amazon workers nationwide, the priority quickly shifted to the vote at the next warehouse, LDJ5, where roughly 1,500 workers sort packages for delivery to the New York City metro area.

Less than a month after voting wrapped up at the first facility, workers at the second facility began casting ballots. In a May 2 vote count conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the union came up short.

Compared to the first warehouse, relatively few of the ALU's key organizers work at LDJ5. That posed a tougher challenge for those who do, including Julian Mitchell-Israel, 22, who first sent Smalls his resume after reading an article about the ALU in the socialist magazine *Jacobin*.

Mitchell-Israel had been involved in electoral politics, including Independent Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential bid, but says he learned a crucial lesson about organizing over the course of a high-stakes campaign at LDJ5.

“When you’re up against misinformation, when you’re up against people that are violently anti-union, you have the instinct to sort of get on the defensive, to go— ‘Screw you, you don’t understand you’re being brainwashed, whatever,’ ” Mitchell-Israel says. “When it comes to organizing, you have to be vigilantly kind. And it takes discipline. And it takes a sort of militancy and love. People need to have unlimited chances here.”



Julian Mitchell-Israel

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

Madeline Wesley, another LDJ5 employee, arrived from Florida in August 2021. Wesley, 23, had been a student activist at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. It was there that Wesley met ALU's pro bono lawyer, Seth Goldstein, who was representing the university's physical plant workers and clerical workers. After stints working for Unite Here union locals in Boston and Miami, Wesley joined the Amazon campaign on Goldstein's urging and soon became ALU's treasurer.

After the upset victory at JFK8, "some of us thought that LDJ5 would be an easy win," said Wesley before the vote. "And what we realized was that we were absolutely wrong. Amazon is really angry at us for winning JFK8, they weren't expecting it at all. And now they're giving us everything they've got here at LDJ5."

Wesley says she and her fellow workers at LDJ5 faced a bruising campaign in which Amazon doubled down on its union-busting tactics. The company is also seeking to overturn the election results at JFK8 through an appeal to the NLRB.

On April 24, the day before voting began at LDJ5, national labor leaders rallied at Amazon's Staten Island campus in a bid to boost support.

The mood at the "Solidarity Sunday" rally was jubilant. Surrounded by Amazon workers and hundreds of their supporters, Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) also delivered fiery speeches.

Many union leaders pledged their full support of the ALU—including Mark Dimondstein, president of the 200,000-member American Postal Workers Union; Sara Nelson, president of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA; and Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers. Earlier in April, Sean O'Brien, new president of the Teamsters, met with Smalls and Derrick Palmer, ALU vice president of organizing, in Washington, D.C.



Madeline Wesley

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ANNEE SCHWANK

“We work in the same industry as all of you—and we’re either going to rise together or we’re gonna fall together,” Dimondstein said at the rally.

Smalls welcomes the support but remains unequivocal about the union’s independence. “Everybody knows that we’re gonna remain independent,” Smalls said at the rally. “And these bigger unions know—every time I meet with one of their presidents, I let it be known—there ain’t no strings attached.”

With hopes of unionizing a second facility postponed for now, the ALU still has another momentous task before it: winning its first collective bargaining agreement with Amazon. If the new union can channel its broad national support and deep connections inside JFK8 into improved conditions at that warehouse, it will make a clear case to Amazon workers elsewhere that they should join up.

“There’s no way we’re going to stop or let this bring us down,” said ALU’s co-founder Derrick Palmer at an impromptu press conference following the May 2 loss. “It’s going to do the complete opposite. We’re going to go 10 times harder.”

LUIS FELIZ LEON is a staff writer and organizer at *Labor Notes*.

Have thoughts or reactions to this or any other piece that you'd like to share? [Send us a note with the Letter to the Editor form.](#)

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2022/11/26/union-workers-south-rare-changing/10751564002/>

The South's racist past is harming workers today. Unions can help us build a new future.

Only 6% of workers in the South are members of a union. In my home state of North Carolina, that number is just 2.6%. We're changing that.

Cookie Bradley



I was just 22 years old when I was faced with an impossible situation: Work two jobs or become homeless.

I was a young mom living in North Carolina, and I knew I had no other choice but to work to provide for my son. Waffle House paid me just \$3.75 an hour, so after my full day shift at the restaurant, I worked late nights as a home care

worker just to survive. I never qualified for food stamps or other government assistance because I was told “I made too much money.” But after 40 years holding down two jobs, I can say without a doubt that it’s never been enough.

I’ve met too many workers in home care, nursing homes, fast food and warehouses across the South who share my struggle – the wear and tear injuries on the job, the low pay, the lack of benefits, the time lost with family.

As a nursing home worker, I’ve been stretched so thin that at times I’ve had to care for 20 patients by myself, all for a job that never gave me benefits. As a fast-food worker, my manager once told me to finish my shift despite seriously injuring my back after slipping on a sheet of ice in the freezer.

No matter the job, our stories are the same. And for Black workers like me, we feel like no matter how hard we work, the system is always stacked against us.

That’s why today, hundreds of workers of every race across the South are coming together to form the Union of Southern Service Workers. We’re launching our union to

fight back against systems of historic oppression and subjugation in the South and advance racial and economic justice within our communities.

Service workers:How you treat a server says more about you than anything else, especially these days

Southern workers face an uphill battle for unions

For too long, Black and brown workers across the South have been systematically excluded from labor protections, minimum wage protections and union rights by racist politicians who built and enforced Jim Crow.

As a result, the South today is the region with the lowest wages, the fewest worker protections and the lowest rate of union density throughout the United States. Only 6% of workers in the South are members of a union. In my home state of North Carolina, that number is just 2.6%.

We are stuck in a system dominated by racist preemption laws and attacks on voting rights that protect corporations at all costs. Throughout the South, corporations like McDonald's, Starbucks and Dollar General exploit workers and our communities with low wages and too often with unsafe working conditions, while raking in record profits and retaliating against workers who dare to speak out.

Reality check on the American workforce:Time to invest in people with disabilities

Nursing shortages:Nurses are stressed out and burned out – putting your health at risk

I've been a member of Raise Up, the Southern branch of the Fight for \$15 and a union for eight years. We've won victories by joining together, speaking out and taking militant action on the job against low pay, dangerous work conditions, sexual harassment and more. Yet despite these significant victories, working people in the South have not enjoyed the same gains as many other workers in other areas of the country.

For most of us, it has been almost impossible or completely impossible to form a union through the existing rules. We are building our union despite the fact that the rules are rigged against us as Southern workers because we know that there is no solution other than collective action by workers.

Southern workers 'have to make a little noise'



Growing up in the South during the 1960s, I saw my granddaddy fight for his civil rights, housing, health care, respect and dignity – and today, workers of all races are continuing that fight. Working people across the country have shown us there is strength in numbers, and now the Union of Southern Service Workers is bringing that power to the South.

We have to define what a union is for ourselves, not let those in power do it for us. We must build the kind of union that reflects our everyday reality and our needs, even if big corporations and politicians don't want to acknowledge it at first. And if the rules that govern union organizing don't work for millions of workers, we must demand a new set of rules.

The reality for service workers in the South is that we are concentrated in high turnover industries and move from job to job and industry to industry. For nearly 40 years, I've gone from fast food to home care to nursing homes. Countless companies across the South employ the same low-wage, high-turnover model.

The problems that we face aren't isolated to one employer so we can't just focus on one employer. We need a union that reflects that reality. We are building an organization that includes all low-wage service workers in industries like fast food, care and retail. We are building a union along these lines because this is the most effective way to express our power.

United with the Union of Southern Service Workers, workers will become what anti-democratic politicians and union-busting corporations fear most: a multiracial, cross-sector movement committed to fighting for living wages, fair working conditions and a

voice on the job through a union. We won't let politicians or corporations tell us any longer that we can't have a voice on the job, because our voices have never been louder.

We'll take our marching orders from the late Rep. John Lewis, who joined a Fight for \$15 strike line in Atlanta in 2013, grabbed the bullhorn and told workers to "use your marching feet."

"Sometimes you have to make a little noise," he said. "Sometimes you have to find a way to make a way out of no way. Sometimes you have to find a way to get in the way."

Cookie Bradley, 63, works in fast food and home care in Durham, North Carolina, and is a founding member of the Union of Southern Service Workers.

The Intersection of Our Core Values and Union Values

Core values are the fundamental beliefs of a person or an organization. These guiding principles dictate behavior and can help people understand the difference between right and wrong. These can often be expressed in one or two words. We are taking a moment to consider our core values because they can provide a basis for solidarity in the midst of struggles.

What are some of your core values expressed in one or two words?

<i>Your Personal Core Values</i>

Where do your core values intersect with some of the Union Core Values listed below?

<i>Union Core Values</i>
Fairness, honesty/integrity, responsibility, compassion/empathy, safety, health, generosity, hard work/responsibility, community, freedom, democracy, binding contracts, equality, opportunity, respect, stability/security, unity, quality work, justice, collective action, dignity/respect, charity/community service, and due process.
<i>Ideally:</i> Unions advance the welfare of all workers. They are based on the idea of justice, progress, and betterment of self and of society. They embody the universal ideal of human rights and the need to aspire to become more complete human beings. By becoming an active participant in the labor movement, members become part of something larger than themselves.

Ladder of Engagement

Hahrie Han wrote that the Ladder of Engagement is “the difference between organizing events and organizing organizers” (2015).

When we’re bringing people into our unions we want to think about how we can constantly scale up our engagement from making them aware all the way up the ladder to planning the work of the union. Each step of the ladder allows more and more engagement and loyalty in the shared values and campaigns. It is this increased engagement that allows people to build their capacity to lead in more and more ways.

The most trusted and credible of union leaders are found at the top of the ladder. They are responsible for the continual recruitment of people to the ladder and the work of moving people up the ladder. Divvying up the important responsibility of recruitment and engagement building across leaders AND making it clear that their work is needed they’ll respond with their commitment to the Union. Ultimately, the Ladder of Engagement is about building leaders.

What are the kinds of invitations that are used at the various levels?

Planning	
Coaching	
Partnering	
Included	
Hooked	
Activated	
Intrigued	
Interested	
Aware	
Unaware	

How We Talk About the Union Matters

Semantics Exercise (Adapted from Jane McAlevey, Strategic Campaign Training)

For this exercise, work as a group to redo these sentences (common phrases).

You can't use the following words: The union (or union at all), we, us, our, or I.

1. **Bad** = "Thank you."

Better =

2. **Bad** = "Union membership is like insurance; don't you want someone to protect you in case something bad happens?"

Better =

3. **Bad** = "Let me explain what the union does for you."

Better =

4. **Bad** = "The union usually gets us more in pay raises and benefits than we pay in dues so if you do the math it's definitely a good investment!"

Better =

5. **Bad** = "We need all the members to call state elected representatives to oppose this legislation."

Better =

6. **Bad** = "You say you have a good principal now, but sometimes principals change, you never know. What if you end up with a bad boss tomorrow and need the union to stand up for you?"

Better =

7. **Bad** = "That's not actually a grievance so there's nothing we can do for you."

Better =

8. **Bad** = "The union leadership is working hard to make it so you don't have to strike because strikes are really hard and disruptive."

Better =



Don't third-party THE union... make OUR UNION stronger

 thestand.org/2014/04/dont-third-party-the-union-make-our-union-stronger/

David Groves

April 17, 2014

(April 17, 2014) — When was the last time you heard someone ask, “What does the union do for me?”

Pretty recently, I would bet and, if you're like me, it's not a question that makes you feel good about being a union supporter. If that question rubs you the wrong way, there's a good reason for it. Think about what that question assumes:



- 1) The role of a union is to *do things for members*.
- 2) Members judge their union based on what it does for them *as individuals*.
- 3) **Most importantly!** THE union is an outside organization. It isn't the employer, but isn't the workers either. It's a third party in the employment relationship.

This is called “third-partying the union” and it's something that employers love to do. Especially when workers are trying to form a new union, employers will talk about how THE union will make it impossible for workers and employers to speak to each other directly; how THE union just wants to take dues money from workers but can't really help them; and how THE union is really just made up of a bunch of self-interested fat cats who want to support their lavish life styles. Sound familiar?

Here's the rub. When we let *union members* talk about THE union, we're going along with how employers see unions. We're letting union members “third party” their own unions!

And what gets ignored? How about the fact that unions are democratic organizations where being a member means having a voice? How about the fact that unions are the only organizations that give workers equality with the employer in negotiation and enforcement of terms and conditions of employment? How about the fact that unions are often helping organizations that put on food drives and build wheelchair ramps? There are so many ways

in which unions are supporting the quality of working people's lives in some obvious, and some more subtle ways, but you'd never know it when you start hearing people talking about THE union.

So how do we get out of the trap of "third partying" THE union?

Well, first of all, let's talk about replacing the article with a pronoun. It's not THE union — it's OUR UNION. This simple shift in language shrinks the distance between the people and the organization. The members are their unions and we should use language that reflects that.

Second, let's think about analogies. One of the worst analogies for a union is the insurance company. What image does that conjure up? It's a for-profit business that's taking people's money, whether there's a problem or not, and might or might not be there to help if something goes wrong. Who trusts an insurance company? In the relationship between you and your doctor, who gets to decide whether the care that you and your doctor both believe you need is going to get paid for? The insurance company! When you get in to an auto accident, who gets to decide whether you will come through it OK, or end up in bankruptcy without a car? The insurance company!

Why would we want our unions to be thought about in this way? Union contracts are not insurance policies and union dues are not insurance premiums. If you let people think this way, why shouldn't they ask you, "What has THE union done for me lately?" (That's a question I'd like to ask about every insurance company!)

Then what happens when you ask them to step up and be active in support of their union? I bet a reply you would recognize goes, "Isn't that what I pay my dues for, so someone else will do this for me?" And why shouldn't they ask that if they are looking at union representatives and staff as insurance agents? That's no way to build a strong, worker-led, democratic organization.

Here's an alternative analogy for you — the gym membership. You can pay your gym membership month-in and month-out, but if you don't work out, it's not going to do a damn thing for you.

We need active union members who are building powerful collective bodies and minds. We need workers who claim their unions as positive and influential organizations in their lives and their communities — and commit to fixing them when they don't work the way they should.

We don't need THE union — THAT corrupt, ineffectual, politically motivated, out-of-touch organization that just takes our money. We need OUR UNIONS — healthy, strong, and ready to win!

Sarah Laslett is Director of the Washington State Labor Education and Research Center at South Seattle College. Her column — "A Working Education" — is a regular feature of The Stand. Learn more about the Labor Center here.



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Dear Association Leader,

*Whether you are a building representative, committee chair, or local officer, you bring the power of the union to life with our current members and our potential members. We've been listening to you and our members and we know that you want the tools and messages to build a relationship with each member to strengthen our union so that we can win for our members and our students. **This Spring, we conducted extensive polling in states where fair share fees will no longer be collected, and we learned which key aspects of our collective work as a union resonate with our existing members and strengthen their relationship with, and commitment to, the union.** We offer these message points and suggestions to assist you in the work you do at the worksite level. As you review this document, remember that listening to your colleagues, who are members or potential members, is just as important as the message you deliver. Thank you for the work you do as an association leader. The recommendations here are not only based on that most recent research but also on four years of research with our members across the country – both right to work and formerly agency fees states – including interviews, surveys and focus groups looking at membership growth and strength – so we know that every state will benefit from this information today.*

Member Retention Research Findings

Our research consistently finds that a member's bond with the association (how connected a member feels to his/her local) is the best predictor of a member's intention to remain in the union when given the opportunity to drop. Members who rate their connectedness at 10 are significantly more likely to remain in the union than those who rate their level of connection at 7, 8, or even 9. Merely connecting with our members is not enough. Instead, we must build—and maintain— *strong relationships and deep connections* with our members.

How do we build an enduring bond with members? Through our research, here is what we have learned.

- 1. Face-to-face communication:** The more frequently and the more recently we have communicated with members, the more likely they are to want to remain in the union. While online and paper outreach can supplement in-person contact, they are not good replacements. In fact, members who were asked in person to join the union are more likely to have favorable

views of the union than those who received a card in the mail asking them to join. Even years later, this contact continues to impact how connected they feel to their union. ***There is simply no replacement for face-to-face communication.***

2. **Small group and one-on-one contact:** Robust and committed membership is built through small group and one-on-one conversations. Although large group meetings are often necessary, big meetings do not build connectedness. Gathering small groups of members together or having informal and authentic face-to-face conversations are imperative to making sure members feel a bond with their union.
3. **Listening and connecting > asking and telling:** When we are trying to connect with members, we should be listening, not telling. We often ask a member to do x or y for the union or tell a member that the union does x or y. Instead, forging a strong connection means being in listening mode—listening to a member’s concerns, gripes, successes, and achievements. At every level, members must feel heard. This can be as simple as informally asking a member how her day is going, or as substantive as asking what improvements she would like to see, or what changes would make her job easier, better, or more fulfilling. We cannot purport to be our members’ collective voice unless we are willing to listen to what they have to say.
4. **Support is key:** The strongest predictor of our members’ job satisfaction is whether they feel supported. Support means a range of things to members, but most fundamentally it means that someone hears them and has their backs. Support could be the presence of close friendships in the workplace, colleagues with whom to share lesson plans and tips, informal mentors, or people who will speak up when there are challenges at work. Our members are the best sources of support for one another and connections to the union encourage them to care about, support, and nurture their colleagues.
5. **Keep the relationship going:** All relationships require ongoing attention and maintenance; taking members for granted is a sure way of signaling that they don’t matter and weakening the bond they feel with their union. If we want members’ connection to remain intact—and even grow in intensity over time—we must reach out to them both continually and continuously. This not only builds lasting ties; it also helps build member advocacy and activism.

Key Message Points on Member Retention

Salary/Benefits

- Your membership allows the union to effectively negotiate with your district to secure and improve your salary, benefits, and working conditions. When more members choose to be a part of the union, we can achieve stronger contracts.
- Just look at #RedForEd: union members stood together to improve their salaries and benefits and make sure educators had a voice in their state legislatures.
- Like the saying goes, We all do better when we all do better. We can accomplish much more and get a lot more done by staying in our union and working together to achieve our goals.

Protecting Members

- Our union has our backs. Whether it's advocating for better salaries or making sure we are protected in the workplace, the union is there to make sure we are not alone.
- As educators, we need to make sure we are protected if we are ever falsely accused. The union gives us that protection and has our backs when we need it most.
- Together, we have the protection that comes from being part of a union that shares our values and advocates for the things we believe in—like support for our professions and resources for our students.

Educator Voice

- Decisions about schools and what's best for students should be made by the educators who work with our kids every day. But time after time, mandates are put in place with zero input from educators. Our union empowers us by offering a seat at the table and a more prominent voice in decision-making that affects our students and our jobs.
- It is easy for us as individuals to feel isolated, but as members of our union, we are never alone. Someone always has our back, and we can reach out for support from each other in challenging times.
- Sticking with the union gives us a louder voice and more leverage to change things for the better when we work with our school board or legislature.

Collective Voice

- Being a member of our union means having a channel for sharing your frustrations as well as your hopes, and having the power and collective voice to advocate for yourself and your students. So tell me: What are you concerned about, and what would you like to see change?
- Just look at #RedForEd and the role union members played in shining a light on what students and educators need for success. That shows the power we have collectively, and the way to keep it going strong is through our union.
- By sticking with our union, we can lean on each other, come together to meet our challenges, and advocate for the things that help our students—and us—succeed.

Building Relationships

Key Concepts

- The **1:1 meeting** is a key tool for establishing and maintaining relationships; there are three types of 1:1s – recruitment, maintenance, and escalation.
- A **“hard ask”** is an effective way to ask for a commitment to establish a relationship.
- **Recruitment and retention best practices** can significantly increase the rate at which new people join and stay on your team.

Why Build Relationships?

Again, we define organizing as leadership that enables people to turn the resources they have into the power they need to make the change they want. Power comes from our **commitment** to work together to achieve common purpose, and commitment is developed through relationships.

“Organizing is a fancy word for relationship-building.”

– Mary Beth Rogers

Building Intentional Relationships

Relationships are rooted in shared values. We can identify values that we share by learning each other’s stories, especially “choice points” in our life journeys. The key is asking each other “why?”

Relationships are long term. Organizing relationships are not simply transactional. We’re not simply looking for someone to meet our ask at the end of a 1:1 meeting (read on for what this means) or house meeting. We’re looking for people to join with us in sustained, long-term growth and action.

Relationships are created by mutual commitment. An exchange becomes a relationship only when each party commits a portion of their most valuable resource to it: time. Because we can all grow and change, the purposes that led us to form the relationship may change as well, offering possibilities for deeper relationships or more enriched exchange. The relationship itself becomes a valued resource.

Relationships involve consistent attention and work. When nurtured over time, relationships sustain motivation and inspiration and become an important source of continual learning and development for the individuals and communities that make up your organizing campaigns.

The 1:1 Meeting

The 1:1 meeting is a tool to establish, maintain, and grow relationships in organizing. Each 1:1 meeting has four key pieces:

Purpose – Be up front in establishing why you are meeting in order to make sure you are both on the same page. If you plan to ask the person you're meeting with to make a commitment at the end of your 1:1, it is appropriate to let them know when you set up the meeting and remind them at the beginning of your meeting, so that they aren't caught off guard.

Exploration – Most of the 1:1 is devoted to exploration by asking probing questions. If you are meeting a person for the first time, ask questions that help you understand their story, values, and resources that may be relevant to your shared purpose (e.g. knowledge or skills they may have). If you already have a relationship, ask questions that help you understand what's going on in their life, or the challenges or success they are experiencing in their organizing.

Exchange – We exchange resources in the meeting such as information, support, and insight; you may connect your stories or provide coaching on a challenge. This creates the foundation for future exchanges.

Commitment – A successful 1:1 meeting ends with a commitment to start working together or continue working together.

Three Types of 1:1 Meetings

There are three types of 1:1s that you will use or engage in in your organizing relationships.

1. Recruitment 1:1

These meetings happen at the start of a relationship to connect you and a new organizer and establish a connection based on shared goals and values. The goals of the recruitment 1:1 are to make a personal connection, use your personal story to identify and gauge potential and interests, probe for a shared experience and connect on values, and lastly, pivot to engagement – that is, move the volunteer to action based on what you've discussed. Think about the volunteer's aptitude, skills, and connections when considering how to best engage them.

See page 18 later in this section for a sample recruitment 1:1 meeting agenda.

2. Maintenance 1:1

These meetings should occur regularly between you and each of your organizers (assuming that you are in a leadership role in your team or snowflake). This is an opportunity to catch up on a personal level, debrief recent actions taken by the organizer and their team, and offer coaching. Maintenance 1:1s should be scheduled regularly and proactively: do not wait for a problem to occur to schedule one. A good guideline is to schedule a maintenance 1:1 every two weeks.

3. Escalation 1:1

These meetings are for organizers who are ready to take the next step on the "ladder of engagement" in assuming more responsibility and taking on ownership of goals (see the Structuring Teams section for more information on the "ladder of engagement"). First, recognize the accomplishments the organizer has already made, then propose the idea of taking on this new leadership role. If all goes as planned and the organizer accepts, take the time to clearly lay out the responsibilities and expectations for this new role.

Because every organizer has a limited amount of time, and maintenance 1:1s need to happen regularly, each organizer has a limit to how many relationships they can maintain. See the Structuring Teams section for information on "sustainable relationship ratios."

Maintenance 1:1s are the primary opportunity to coach an organizer. See the Coaching section for more information on how to approach coaching.

Hard Asks

When you ask someone to make a commitment – for instance, attend an event or take on a new role – it's important to make an effective ask, or what we call a "hard ask." A hard ask is an ask that results in a commitment to a specific action. Here are some best practices for a hard ask:

- Ask in **concise, plain, and specific language**.
 - » Example of an effective hard ask:
"Can you come to our team meeting next Wednesday at 6pm at Alisha's house?"
 - » Example of an ineffective ask:
"Would you be interested in coming to a meeting at some point to meet the team and talk about how you might want to get involved?"
- Never apologize for asking: organizing is an opportunity, not a favour. Sometimes we feel badly for asking someone to take action because we feel it is an inconvenience, when really, we're providing the person we're asking with an **opportunity** to take action.
- Don't ask them to commit to something general; instead, **have a specific event or role in mind**. If it's an event (e.g. a canvassing event or house meeting), include the date, time, and location in your ask.
- **Convey urgency**: Describe an urgent problem and how the person you are asking is the solution to the problem.

Three Types of No

When securing commitment, it's inevitable that our hard asks will sometimes be met with "no." In organizing, there are **three types of "nos"** that you will encounter – "**not now**," "**not that**," and "**not ever**" – and being attuned to the difference will dictate how you proceed with the person you're asking.

If someone says "no" they might mean "not that time," so try offering another time or date. For example:

"Can you come to our next team meeting on Monday at 5PM?"

"No, I have to work then."

"No problem, we have another meeting next Sunday at 1PM, can you come to that?"

If someone says "No, I don't want to do that," it probably means "not that." Try asking them to commit to something else. For example:

"Can you come door-to-door canvassing with us on Tuesday at 5PM?"

"I don't know if I feel comfortable going door-to-door, I've tried it before and found it really intimidating."

"That's okay! We are also planning an event to recruit new volunteers for the end of the month. Will you come to the planning meeting for that on Sunday at 1PM?"

If someone says definitively “No, I’m not interested in doing more” or “No, I don’t want to join the team,” then don’t worry about it! Thank them and move on. For example:

“Can you come door-to-door canvassing with us on Tuesday at 5pm?”

“No, I am too busy right now to take on anything else, I’m sorry!”

“That’s okay, thanks for taking some time to talk with me. Have a great day!”

Sample Recruitment 1:1 Agenda

The following is a sample recruitment 1:1 meeting agenda. Reminder here that this is a framework you can follow, not an exact formula for what you must do in a 1:1.

Purpose (2 minutes) – Be up front about your purpose for the meeting (e.g. “Our team needs a new canvass lead.”), but that first, you’d like to take a few moments to get acquainted.

Exploration, Connection, and Exchange (20 minutes) – Most of the 1:1 is devoted to exploration by asking probing questions to learn about the other person’s values and interests, as well as resources they might hold. In response, it’s up to you to share enough about your own values, interests, and resources so that it can be a reciprocal exchange. Start by asking questions like:

“Why is this issue important enough for you to act?”

“Can you remember the first time you stood up for something you believed in?”

“Did you always feel strongly about this issue? Why / why not and what changed that?”

Once you have an understanding of their story and motivations, share yours. Wherever you find similarities between their story and yours, make a connection.

Commitment: A Hard Ask (10 minutes) – A successful 1:1 meeting ends with a commitment to work together. This commitment is best secured through a hard ask:

- Stress the urgency of the commitment you are asking for:
“We need another canvass lead to enable our team to meet our target.”
- Emphasize the values you have in common:
“To achieve the change we want we need to meet our targets.”
- Frame it so that it seems the person you’re asking is the solution to the problem:
“Will you take on the role of canvass lead?”
- Be specific, make sure they understand what it is you are asking them. Provide time and space for them to ask questions until they’re clear.
- End the meeting with an understanding of next steps – that is, they should leave knowing the next time you will meet or how and when they will hear from you.

In this portion of the 1:1, you are trying to get them to share their Story of Self with you, and then to share your story to build a Story of Us. See the Telling Stories section for what this means.

Best Practices for a 1:1

Do	Don't
Schedule a time to have this conversation (usually 30-60 minutes)	Be unclear about purpose and length of conversation
Plan to listen and ask questions	Try to persuade rather than listen and ask questions
Have a plan for your meeting – give context or purpose, connect with one another, and secure commitment	Chit chat about your interests
Share experiences and motivations	Skip stories to 'get to the point'
Illustrate a vision that articulates a shared set of interests for change	Miss the opportunity to share ideas about how things can change
Be clear about your next steps together	End the conversation without a clear plan for next steps
Split the bill if you meet in a coffee shop or restaurant	Pay for the whole bill (note: it can make the relationship feel transactional and can get expensive in the long run!)
Meet in public unless you know them well (e.g. a coffee shop or public park)	

Recruitment & Retention Best Practices

Employing best practices can significantly increase the rate at which new people join and stay on your team. Here are some key best practices to keep in mind when building and maintaining relationships:

- Don't be apologetic: organizing is an opportunity, not a favour. When asking for commitment, be enthusiastic.
- Always Follow-Up: When someone offers to get more involved, ask for their contact information and give them yours. Follow up with them as soon as possible, ideally within 48 hours.
- Always schedule for the next time: don't let anyone leave without asking when they'll be coming back.
- Confirm commitment: use a hard ask and make sure your people understand that you are counting on them.
- Plan for no-shows: assume that half of your people will turn up. For example, if you need four people for a successful event, plan on scheduling eight.
- Design actions that are empowering to participate in.

Designing actions so that they are inherently motivational is a key way to keep people engaged. See the Acting: Targets & Timelines section for information on "motivational engagement."

In organizing, it's up to us to create welcoming, organized spaces and engage volunteers so that they keep coming back. The following is a list of top reasons why volunteers don't return:

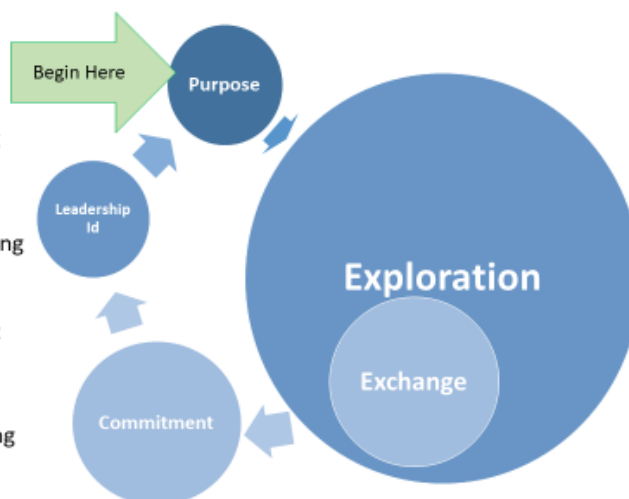
- They don't feel it is worth their time
- Atmosphere is disorganized and they don't feel they're receiving attention or direction
- No one explained why the work they are doing is important
- They are uncomfortable doing what they have been asked to do
- They feel overwhelmed by tasks and goals
- The volunteer environment is unwelcoming
- No one recognizes their contribution
- No one asked them

To summarize, building strong, resilient relationships is critical for effective community organizing. Our power stems from our commitment to one another and to taking action together, and the hard ask, the 1:1 meeting, and best practices for recruitment and retention are key ways we can secure commitment in our work.

Developing Your Script for One on One Conversations

Conversation Wheel

- Purpose
 - Let them know why you are meeting even before you get there.
- Exploration and Exchange
 - Most of the 1 on 1 is devoted to asking probing questions
 - So that we can exchange resources, stories, information, support, insight
- Commitment
 - We end with a commitment to start working together or continue working together.
- Leadership ID
 - Who here is trusted and respected



Example of a Relationship Building Script (Based on 25 Minutes)

Purpose VERY BRIEF 1 minutes:

Hello my name is _____. I am with the _____. I am excited that we could meet today to talk about _____. We scheduled (amount of time) so I want to jump right in. (In your Script think about 2 or 3 BRIEF sentences about you that allow you to be more relatable – for example what are your values related to this conversation, purpose for your work, who you are working with.)

Exploration and Exchange 80% OF THE CONVERSATION 20 Minutes:

Exploration -Ask probing questions to learn about the other person's values and interests, as well as resources they might hold. In response, it's up to you to share enough about your own values, interests, and resources so that it can be a reciprocal exchange – relatable. But remember the focus is on them.

Start by asking questions like:

- "Why is this issue important enough for you to act?"
- "Can you remember the first time you stood up for something you believed in?"
- "Did you always feel strongly about this issue? Why / why not and what changed that?"

Exchange -once you have an understanding of their story and motivations, briefly share yours. Wherever you find similarities between their story and yours, make a connection.

Commitment 3 Minutes:

A good one on one meeting ends with a commitment to work together. This commitment is best secured through a direct ask:

- Stress the urgency of the commitment you are asking for:
"Your colleagues need more people like you to join them in making this school a better place to work"
- Emphasize the values you have in common:
"To achieve a better place to work we both know it is going to take hard work and standing together."
- Frame it so that it seems the person you're asking is the solution to the problem:
"Would you join the union today to help your colleagues make this a better place to work?"
- Be specific, make sure they understand what it is you are asking them. Provide time and space for them to ask questions until they're clear.
- End the meeting with an understanding of next steps – that is, they should leave knowing the next time you will meet or how and when they will hear from you

Leadership Identification 1 Minute: Who here is trusted and respected?