



1201 16th St, N.W. | Washington, DC 20036 | Phone: (202) 833-4000

Lily Eskelsen Garcia
President

Rebecca S. Pringle
Vice President

Princess R. Moss
Secretary-Treasurer

John C. Stocks
Executive Director

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.