

CHAPTER 3: BUILDING A STRIKE OR WALK-OUT CAMPAIGN

Strikes can be a tactic used during a campaign with a lot of careful preparation. Strikes are never the goal, even though our opposition may try to build a narrative asserting the strike was pre-conceived and forced upon members. Strikes are the reaction to the employer or state pushing members to a point of no alternative option other than to withhold their labor and take a stand. Strikes are also a major compression point in an escalation campaign full of smart tactical planning that incentivizes settlement or resolution well before the strike occurs. Any strike buildup should include multiple opportunities for the targets to do the right thing. If they do not respond, then we escalate and move towards a strike.

Our political climate is often unpredictable and thus advice and resources in this chapter are best used with an eye towards flexibility and creativity. Modern communication moves quickly and is far less predictable and controllable than the early strikes of the 1970s and 1980s. This chapter will help you understand what elements help build a successful strike, knowing that in times of urgency, we can also prioritize parts of this chapter to simply do the best we can to achieve a positive outcome for members.

When is a local union ready to take on a strike? An assessment can help staff, local leaders and members better understand the current state of the union, help bolster areas that need to be strengthened, and create a realistic strategy. However, it is important to note that there is no perfect strike scenario. An assessment also allows staff to understand what additional resources may be needed, what pressure points to use with the opposition and what issues to elevate within messaging. Most members rarely face a strike in their career and the prospect of walking off the job may be challenging — this may appear in an early assessment. **A good campaign strategy builds member confidence, resolve, and courage to take more significant action over the course of a campaign, so do not underestimate members' willingness to act early on.**



Internal Operations

Build a Local Crisis Committee

If a committee formed early for campaign preparation, modify the committee's charge to a strike build. It is ideal to begin the final strike preparation work at least two-months ahead of any potential strike date. The crisis committee should work closely with state and sometimes national affiliate staff to build the strike strategy. High-level decision-making such as settlement goals or official union responses to employer tactics should be made by governance. The committee, working with member input, should be empowered to draft a tactical plan, set a timeline, and decide basic pieces necessary to build the plan (e.g. color of t-shirts, button slogans). It can also provide input to governance and the bargaining team, but ultimately on the crisis committee's charge is to design and implement the crisis plan.¹



TIP:

In a smaller union, Area Coordinators are not necessary and crisis committee members from each worksite would be sufficient and may hold another liaison role as well.

In some cases, the committee will rely heavily on staff to help advise and build the campaign. In other places, members may want to take on even more of the responsibilities. In either scenario, work to encourage cohesion between the committee, staff and local governance and then work to define roles and responsibilities. In regional or statewide¹ campaigns, staff, leader and committee cohesion becomes even more paramount to the campaign's success. All successful campaigns require smart, strategic cohesion within the union. Any disunity or division will harm the campaign and the long-term health of the union.

Build the crisis committee² to include:

- ➔ **Representatives.** from every worksite and be intentional to identify underrepresented groups such as new or early career educators and members of color, etc.
- ➔ **Chair.** A crisis chair that is well-respected and confident. The Chair also serves as the liaison with state or regional governance to keep them informed of real time developments in the campaign and coordinate approval of necessary next steps. The Chair may also serve as the bargaining liaison.
- ➔ **Members Per Worksite (small to moderate sized unions) or Area (Zone) Coordinators (large union).** Well-respected members because the committee will often These people can also serve as picket captains mentioned below. They should be included when planning and discussing strategies to build a tactical escalation plan.
- ➔ **Community Outreach Liaison(s) Coordinator(s).** (Members who connect with the community and parents and focus solely on activities which bolster their engagement with the campaign.
- Optional:**
 - Community Member Liaison(s).** Members of the community who are strong allies and can provide direct support and coordination with their networks and community organizations.
 - Solidarity Liaison(s).** Members who connect and coordinate with other bargaining unit members, other unions and unorganized employees in the district or university.
- ➔ **Communications Liaison(s).** Members charged with message development (internal to members and external to the public/media), including the official spokesperson (President or designee) and social media strategy and postings. This team of member should also include a rumor control person who is dedicated to fielding and responding to rumors that emerge.

¹ See Arizona case study in Organizing Success Stories section.

² See the Summary of Strike Organization Roles for Staff and Leaders.doc (with more detailed job descriptions for each role listed below) in the resource section.

Hierarchy of Choices for Campaign Planning



Governance and Staff: Roles and Responsibilities

Local Leaders		Staff		
Responsible	Involved		Responsible	Involved
X		Governance		X
	X	Administration	X	
X		Decides What		X
	X	Decides How	X	
X		Makes Policy		X
	X	Carries Out Policy	X	
X		Sets Strategic Goals		X
	X	Plans Strategic Goals	X	
X		Reviews Strategic Goals		X
	X	Implements Tactical Plans (leaders in action)	X	
X	X	Monitors Progress	X	X

Source: Jefferson County Education Association

Sample Tactics⁵ — To be used by a local union or a regional or statewide campaign with localized actions.

Basic	Moderate	Advanced
➤ Coordinated buttons in the worksite or armbands (cheaper option) ➤ Hand out information at school events ➤ Sign employee petitions ➤ Coordinated visibility (clothing, union shirts, signs in cars or classrooms, etc.) ➤ Basic education with members on bargaining process and unsettled issues via 10 minute meetings, smart and concise written communications, short videos, etc. ➤ #RedforEd Days to repeat coordinated actions and use the color of red – national solidarity color for educators ➤ Regular worksite meetings that are well publicized ➤ Request financial information from employer or state on budget, management salaries and benefits, outside lawyers, etc. ➤ Membership drive to build member density ➤ One on one campaigns to assess member readiness and educate/agitate members to take action ➤ Small member delegations to board meetings or legislative committees to speak to the outstanding issues ➤ Phone bank members and other bargaining unit members to address questions and educate/agitate for solidarity ➤ Power map board members or key regional or state leaders and community to understand their interests and pressure points ➤ Coordinate member postcards or letters to targets (publish their contact information) ➤ Use the #RedForEd hashtag ➤ Encourage members to share photos of actions on their social media platforms	➤ Solidarity buttons in the community ➤ Create songs about our issue ➤ Informational picketing as large groups in public or at specific events with the employer such as bargaining or board meetings, including a “gauntlet” style layout where the employer must walk past members ➤ Votes of no confidence in the employer/decision-maker ➤ Votes of confidence in the union bargaining team ➤ Phone bank and letters to community members and parents to educate/agitate around the issues ➤ Phone bank and letters to fellow NEA members in area who do not work for the employer, other unions and ally organizations. ➤ Flood board members home mailboxes with postcards – one per member with a unified message ➤ Encourage community members to write messages to board members ➤ ArtBuild ➤ Picket sign creation ➤ Hold more frequent press conferences and press worthy events (highly visible activities) ➤ Create a community e-newsletter to send updates ➤ Organize coffee klatches ➤ Post lawn signs in the community ➤ Place ads in the school athletic programs and parent newsletters ➤ Keep track of the employer’s spending on anti-union activities, outside lawyers, etc. and make it public. ➤ Go door to door with leaflets in the community ➤ Consider a boycott of key businesses owned by board members or supporting management. ➤ Larger delegations of members at board meetings ➤ Organize building-based solidarity events such as walk-ins before work begins ➤ Create a community petition and/or pledge cards ➤ Create community flyers and share them at supportive businesses (on counter) or leaflet popular community events such as farmers’ markets, recycling centers, etc. ➤ Launch social media channels and post regularly to update the community ➤ Put floats in local parades sponsored by the union ➤ Hold press conferences ➤ Create shareable social media graphics ➤ Leaflet large school events like athletic games ➤ Set up informational booths at local events such as fairs, farmers markets, etc. (“truth booths”) ➤ Launch a landing page website ➤ Meet with community organizations with an interest in students ➤ Encourage other unions in the area to picket and act in solidarity ➤ Consider work-to-rule tactics that impact management, but not students. These tactics include leaving or arriving at work when the day begins, resigning from voluntary committees, passive participation in faculty/staff meetings, etc.	➤ Large community or regional or state rallies ➤ Organize and participate in parades ➤ Organize a speakers’ bureau to go to community events ➤ Marches on the employer/decision makers ➤ Occupying a decision-maker meeting ➤ Member and community delegations to speak at board meetings ➤ Show collective resistance at staff meetings through passive participation ➤ Pack up personal property from classrooms and offices ➤ Picket board members’ houses/work ➤ Organize coordinated walk-ins on the same day across a region ➤ Banner drops ➤ Civil disobedience (be sure to consult with your union’s legal counsel) ➤ Take over board meetings ➤ Hold “sleep ins” during bargaining sessions ➤ Hold large membership rally prior to school board meeting, then pack the room ➤ Attend critical bargaining meetings such as mediation or fact finding hearings and make sure board members see/hear us ➤ Find and open a strike HQ ➤ Hold a strike informational meeting for potential striking unit and other employees potentially impacted by a strike ➤ Train picket captains ➤ Ask athletic coaches to suspend games and work if there is a strike ➤ Reach out to area colleges to ask student teachers not to come to work if there is a strike ➤ Phonebank area substitutes to ask them not to take work at the school in the event of a strike ➤ Hold a strike authorization vote ➤ Hold community forums in-person or virtual town halls ➤ Hold neighborhood based meetings with parents and concerned community members ➤ Translate community outreach materials and go to communities with translators to meet with non-English speaking communities ➤ Work with community organizations to develop proactive plans to support vulnerable students in the event of a strike ➤ Consider a Facebook live to update the community on actions.

⁵ See Tactics Manual WEAC.doc in resource section.

When planning more complicated or involved tactics, make sure to do our homework and get enough members involved to handle the logistics. Staff can help, but it creates more member ownership over the larger campaign when members can take a central planning role. Here are some **helpful tips**:

- ➔ **Rallies and Parades⁶.** Research location options (outdoor and indoor), rental costs, speaker systems, etc. well in advance. What are the local ordinances for marches and picketing (permits), contact information for police, best locations for high visibility? For larger scaled efforts, do we need shuttles, a parking plan, logistical support for bathrooms, water, food?
- ➔ **Target's Homes and Places of Work.** For actions at decision-makers' houses or places of employment, what type of tactic fits? What are your members' comfort levels? Consider the size and place of the location. How many members would be effective?
- ➔ **Pickets or High Visibility Events.** Make sure we use the schools and university as a strategic location, to make sure people know this is an education-based issue and then expand out. This includes early informational pickets before a strike date, meeting locations (when possible), and pickets and actions during the strike. For higher education strikes, a campus can have multiple entrances and buildings so determine the best central location possible on campus for any pickets or public events.
- ➔ **Low Turnout.** Be ready to modify our plan if member turn out appears to lower than expected or larger than expected. Do we need a different location? A different approach?
- ➔ **Weather.** Be ready for all types of weather. Generally, weather should not change our plans unless it is an emergency or unsafe. Marching in the rain or snow, standing on informational picket lines, and showing up no matter what builds a stronger message on how committed members are to the issues.
- ➔ **Social Media and Documentation.** Use social media to document our tactics and promote key events and build followers. Document our actions by taking high quality photos and video to make our own media and help build for the next action in the plan.
- ➔ **Dud Tactics.** Don't expect every tactic and action to be successful, especially if this is the first organizing campaign. We learn and adapt to fight another day.
- ➔ **Coordination and Approvals.** Make sure the crisis committee, local or state leaders and staff approve and are on board with every major tactic and action before it takes place. Stay coordinated and work towards consensus on what tactics to try.

To pull together tactical planning, timelines and committee assignments, consider using the Gantt Chart⁷ used by Michigan Education Association for big picture campaign planning. This high-level planning tool gives committees an overview of major parts of a timeline, large tasks and assignments. To track more detailed weekly and daily planning use a calendar or weekly design layout.

The Gantt Chart is a cross between a bar graph and a timeline. It is an invaluable tool for organizing the timeline. It displays when certain activities start and end, and which committee is responsible for each. The chart uses color to give the committee an instant snapshot of this most important *who/what/when* of crisis efforts. It allows the committee chair to monitor progress, keep track of what others are doing, and to make sure that everything is moving according to the plan. The Gantt Chart is set up by simply: a) assigning each activity to a sub-committee, b) deciding where and when it fits into the plan and c) putting the activity on the chart. Please remember that this chart is a living timeline that can be changed by the committee to add or delete activities, or to adjust timelines. However, it should be noted that only the committee has this authority in coordination with local governance and staff to amend it.

⁶ See the Rally Logistics Checklist.docx.

⁷ See a complete Gantt Chart Example MEA.docx in the resource section.

Here's a sample **strike timeline** designed within a 6–8 week build up to the strike:

TIMELINE	TACTIC	ROLE/ASSIGNMENT
PRE-ASSESSMENT	➤ Conduct a pre-assessment of the local union well before a crisis committee is formed. ➤ Form an organizing committee before the strike build up to allow internal capacity building. ➤ Identify available staff to support strike build up.	➤ Staff ➤ Local President/Staff ➤ Staff/Field Manager
WEEK 1	➤ School Board (or University Board of Trustees) Meeting with small member delegation to explain impact of core issues on educators. ➤ Crisis committee forms crisis build up plan, populates it with critical dates in the calendar.	➤ Crisis Committee ➤ Crisis Committee
WEEK 2	➤ Train communications team and refine the message; prep spokesperson. ➤ Launch social media (ongoing) and plan press releases and conferences in line with key actions on timeline. ➤ Organize consistent weekly 10-minute meeting structure for duration of build up with concise information and “asks” for members. ➤ Launch a visibility effort — buttons or t-shirts.	➤ Communications Staff and Crisis Team ➤ Communications Liaisons ➤ Communications Liaisons ➤ Crisis Committee
WEEK 3	➤ Train community outreach team. ➤ Identify potential community allies and begin outreach and meetings (small and large meetings).	➤ Staff Organizer ➤ Crisis Community Outreach Liaison and Staff
WEEK 4	➤ School Board Meeting with full membership in attendance. ➤ Train strike HQ coordinator and relevant staff. ➤ Create picket signs or ArtBuild. ➤ Continue to hold community meetings and go to neighborhoods to engage parents. ➤ Phone bank parents and hold one-on-one conversations.	➤ Crisis Committee ➤ Staff Organizer ➤ Crisis Committee ➤ Crisis Community Outreach Liaisons ➤ Crisis Committee and Community Outreach Liaisons
WEEK 5	➤ Issuance of fact-finding report (if relevant) and member action at fact-finding hearing. ➤ Strike Informational Meeting (with teacher striking unit and ESP for solidarity purposes). ➤ Hold informational pickets . ➤ Continue to hold community meetings and go to neighborhoods to engage parents. Begin to organize contingency plans for vulnerable families and students in the event of a strike. ➤ Reach out to area unions and ask for solidarity actions.	➤ UniServ Director, Bargaining Team and Crisis Committee ➤ Crisis Committee, Staff, Attorney ➤ Crisis Committee ➤ Crisis Committee and Community Outreach Liaisons ➤ Solidarity Liaisons
WEEK 6	➤ Open Strike HQ. ➤ Set up “instant” internal communication tools for peer-to-peer texting and alerts (ex: Hustle). ➤ Train Picket Captains & General(s). ➤ Hold virtual town hall meeting with parents and/or in-person community event(s). ➤ Meet with athletic and extracurricular staff to ask for solidarity. ➤ Hold informational pickets. ➤ Do door-to-door leafleting in community.	➤ Strike HQ Manager and Staff ➤ Communications Liaisons ➤ Staff Organizer ➤ Crisis Committee ➤ Crisis Committee ➤ President/Crisis Chair ➤ Crisis Committee and Communications Liaisons
WEEK 7	➤ Strike authorization membership meeting. ➤ Call Substitutes and notify student teacher programs in area. ➤ Strike loan application office hours (if applicable).	➤ President, Crisis Committee, Staff ➤ Crisis Committee ➤ Crisis Committee Staff
WEEK 8	➤ School Board (or University Board of Trustees) Meeting with full membership and community members in attendance. ➤ Day Before—clear classroom, turn in keys ➤ First Day of Strike.	➤ Crisis Committee and Community Liaisons ➤ Crisis committee ➤ EVERYONE