



High Participation Local Scenario Guide

Campaign Coaches will use the scenarios in this guide to enhance their coaching skills and better support campaign leads.



Scenario 1: River Valley Education Association at a Crossroads

The River Valley Education Association (RVEA) represents approximately 4,200 education employees across a large suburban and rural school district. The membership includes teachers, paraeducators, transportation staff, food service workers, clerical employees, custodians, and substitutes. For years, RVEA relied heavily on a small group of officers and staff representatives to handle grievances, negotiations, communications, and member issues. Members generally viewed the union as a service organization. If someone had a problem, they called the union office.

Three years ago, district leaders began proposing significant budget cuts. In response, RVEA's executive board launched a strategic effort guided by a 3-Year Strategic Plan to build a more organizing-focused union. The local divided the district into organizing regions and assigned officers and staff to conduct worksite assessments. Today, every worksite has at least one identified point person, and 70% have functioning Contract Action Teams (CATs). Several larger schools have developed building councils that include representatives from different job classifications.

The local recently expanded its bargaining team from 18 members to nearly 75 members, running an open bargaining campaign with representative members across all classifications, including paraeducators and custodians. Off-contract 'valley' periods are now intentionally leveraged for mobile, site-level contract enforcement training and needs assessments.

To evaluate engagement, RVEA uses Action Builder organizing software to maintain digital wall-charts. Last spring, the local conducted a district-wide petition campaign around staffing shortages as a quantitative structure test to measure supermajority readiness before escalating tactics. Participation reached nearly 80% overall.

The staff role has shifted significantly: staff spend less time handling individual servicing and more time functioning as strategic coaches, training members to resolve Level 1 grievances locally. The local has intentionally recruited leaders from underrepresented job classifications. When a right-wing group attempted to intimidate immigrant families in the district, RVEA rapidly deployed its site-level 1:10 CAT communication trees to partner with community groups for rapid-response defense. However, some members still resist direct conflict with management, clinging to 'respectability politics' and quiet closed-door meetings.

Discussion Questions for Scenario 1

- 1. Dimension Scoring:** What score (1–4) would you assign RVEA across each of the 11 categories of the High Participation Assessment Tool?
- 2. Site Leaders & Staff Role (Dimensions 1 & 2):** What evidence demonstrates that staff are transitioning into strategic coaches and member leaders are taking ownership of Level 1 issues?
- 3. Structure Tests & Data (Dimensions 6 & 11):** How effectively did RVEA use the petition drive as a quantitative structure test, and how are digital wall-charts being used across worksites?
- 4. Valley Work & Strategic Planning (Dimensions 3 & 10):** How is RVEA maintaining momentum during non-bargaining lulls and guarding its strategic plan?
- 5. Conflict & Defense (Dimensions 8 & 9):** Where does RVEA show strengths or growth areas in overcoming respectability politics and building rapid-response community defense infrastructure?

6. Action Planning: What specific coaching recommendations would you offer to help RVEA reach Level 4 ('High Participation Local') across all 11 dimensions?

Scenario 2: The Higher Education Workers Alliance

The Higher Education Workers Alliance (HEWA) represents approximately 1,100 classified staff employees across three public colleges. Historically, HEWA operated on a traditional service model. Membership density hovered around 70 percent, and many members only interacted with the union when facing a contract dispute.

Five years ago, a proposed workforce modernization plan prompted activists to build a statewide campaign focused on compensation equity and job security. Today, membership density exceeds 90 percent. The local created member-led standing committees for research, communications, political engagement, and data analysis. Committee leaders track participation data, charting worksite engagement to evaluate campaign readiness. Staff act as capacity builders and strategic coaches rather than primary problem-solvers.

During non-bargaining 'valley' periods, HEWA maintains active momentum by conducting non-transactional community-labor alliances around economic and social justice. Bargaining is treated as an active, transparent campaign involving open bargaining committees. The local routinely uses escalating structure tests—moving from signed platform pledges to wear-red days and sticker actions—to evaluate member readiness before taking major steps.

Despite these successes, engagement remains uneven. Night-shift custodians and employees at the smallest rural campus participate at lower rates. While the local has begun rejecting respectability politics by organizing collective site actions, some leaders still hesitate to embrace visible conflict with college administrations. Furthermore, while the president has delegated operational tasks, the board struggles to strictly align all activities with a long-term strategic plan.

Discussion Questions for Scenario 2

- 1. Dimension Scoring:** Score HEWA on all 11 dimensions of the assessment tool.
- 2. Bargaining & Structure Tests (Dimensions 4 & 11):** How effectively does HEWA use open bargaining structures and methodical, quantitative structure tests to gauge leverage?
- 3. Valley Work & Community Power (Dimensions 3 & 9):** How does HEWA's non-bargaining work build permanent community-labor alliances and rapid defense capacity?
- 4. Data Systems & Charting (Dimension 6):** In what ways are digital or physical wall-charts and data tracking driving organizing decisions?
- 5. President's Role & Strategic Coherence (Dimensions 5 & 10):** Is HEWA's leadership actively guarding a democratized strategic plan, or are they still caught in operational firefighting?
- 6. Equity & Barriers:** What steps must HEWA take to eliminate participation gaps among night-shift workers and rural campus staff to achieve true majoritarian power?

Scenario 3: Building a Union Beyond Bargaining

The Capital Community College Educators Association (CCCEA) represents approximately 900 faculty, professional staff, and adjunct instructors. Nearly 85% of members are adjunct or part-time employees. For years, knowledge and decision-making were concentrated in a tiny core of officers, and general membership meetings drew fewer than 20 people.

Recognizing that the local was stuck in reactive firefighting, the leadership co-created a clear Strategic Roadmap. They shifted away from passive committees and embraced a 1:1 relationship-based organizing model. This strategy successfully rebuilt the steward network, recruiting and training 8 new site leaders capable of building 1:10 communication networks and managing Level 1 issues locally.

The local operates multi-tiered training programs ('Skills to Win') during non-bargaining 'valley' periods, focusing on 1:1 conversations, mapping, and contract enforcement. Staff have begun stepping back to allow member stewards to take ownership of site organizing.

However, major gaps remain. CCCEA has struggled to implement quantitative structure tests (such as petition threshold gates or sticker days) to systematically test member readiness. Its data management is largely administrative, lacking active digital wall-charts or site mapping. While the local has engaged in mutual aid and coalition building, its rapid-response mechanisms for broader community/anti-authoritarian defense are in their infancy. Leaders also struggle with 'respectability politics,' often preferring quiet administrative dialogue over direct, collective workplace actions.

Discussion Questions for Scenario 3

- 1. Dimension Scoring:** Assign a score (1–4) for CCCEA across each of the 11 dimensions.
- 2. Site Leadership & Training (Dimensions 1 & 7):** How successful has CCCEA been in building a 1:10 CAT/steward structure and establishing multi-tiered training pipelines?
- 3. Overcoming Respectability Politics (Dimension 8):** What holds CCCEA back from moving beyond polite labor-management meetings into direct collective action?
- 4. Data & Structure Tests (Dimensions 6 & 11):** Why is the lack of digital wall-charting and quantitative structure tests limiting CCCEA's bargaining power?
- 5. Strategic Plan & Valley Work (Dimensions 3 & 10):** How effectively is the local utilizing non-bargaining periods to execute its Strategic Roadmap?
- 6. Structural Barriers:** How can CCCEA adapt its organizing and meeting structures to better engage its 85% adjunct workforce?

Scenario 4: Building Visibility, Trust, and Collective Action in Challenging Times

The Lakeshore Education Association (LEA) represents 1,800 educators and support professionals. While historically strong during contract fights, engagement outside bargaining cycles has been inconsistent.

Faced with severe community polarization, hostile social media attacks against staff, and anti-inclusive political pressure, a group of activists began organizing around student wellness, inclusion, and safety. The local used this crisis to build an anti-authoritarian, rapid-response network, partnering with youth, civil rights, and social justice organizations to protect vulnerable students and staff.

LEA upgraded its communication infrastructure and began offering mobile, on-site trainings to build member confidence. To overcome the fear of conflict and 'respectability politics,' site leaders organized collective visibility actions (such as wearing red and displaying classroom solidarity signs) to demonstrate protected unity in the face of public hostility.

Despite these advances, LEA's organizing foundation remains incomplete. The local does not use digital wall-charts or systematic data tracking; leaders rely on anecdotal guesswork rather than mapped worksites. Escalating structure tests with strict mathematical thresholds (e.g., 70–80%+ sign-ons) are not utilized before taking public stances. The local president continues to absorb administrative and crisis-management tasks rather than fully delegating turf organizing. Furthermore, bargaining remains relatively traditional rather than open and mass-representative.

Discussion Questions for Scenario 4

- 1. Dimension Scoring:** Evaluate LEA and assign a score (1–4) for each of the 11 categories.
- 2. Defensive Organizing & Respectability Politics (Dimensions 8 & 9):** How has LEA overcome fear and respectability traps to build rapid-response protection against external political threats?
- 3. Data Systems & Structure Tests (Dimensions 6 & 11):** How does the absence of active wall-charting and quantitative structure tests put LEA's campaigns at risk?
- 4. President's Role & Staff Role (Dimensions 2 & 5):** Is the local president operating under a 'choir model' of shared leadership, and are staff functioning as strategic coaches?
- 5. Valley Work & Bargaining (Dimensions 3 & 4):** How can LEA connect its non-bargaining community-defense work directly to its upcoming contract campaign?
- 6. Equity Practices:** What specific structural changes are needed to engage newer educators and low-income building staff who remain underrepresented in leadership?

Scenario 5: Vision to Action? Assessing the River City Educators Association

The River City Educators Association (RCEA) represents 5,500 educators in a large urban district. The local has a long history of traditional mobilization during contract fights. Two years ago, RCEA launched a major initiative, 'The Schools Our Students Deserve,' to transition from reactive firefighting to a proactive, community-centered vision.

The executive board co-created a democratized Strategic Plan centered on ten core goals, guiding budget allocations and aligning public campaigns. RCEA forged deep, permanent alliances with parent groups, civil rights organizations, and labor partners, bringing 'common good' demands directly into its collective bargaining strategy. Off-contract 'valley' periods are used to run continuous workshops and community forums.

RCEA's president actively delegates turf organizing and guards the strategic roadmap. The local has rejected respectability politics, using collective site actions and public demonstrations to advance its bold demands. Staff operate primarily as strategic coaches and capacity builders.

However, internal execution across worksites is highly uneven. While some schools maintain active 1:10 CATs and digital wall-charts (Action Builder), many rely on a single building rep who acts as an isolated information relay. The local rarely executes methodical, quantitative structure tests (e.g., strict 80% platform pledge gates) before launching actions, leading to inconsistent turnout. Training programs remain centralized rather than utilizing a decentralized 'gradual release' model across all sites.

Discussion Questions for Scenario 5

- 1. Dimension Scoring:** Assign a score (1–4) across all 11 dimensions for RCEA.
- 2. Strategic Plan & President's Role (Dimensions 5 & 10):** How effectively does RCEA's leadership guard the strategic roadmap and prevent reactive firefighting?
- 3. Collective Bargaining & Valley Work (Dimensions 3 & 4):** In what ways does RCEA model high-participation bargaining and permanent non-transactional community alliances?
- 4. Site Leadership & Structure Tests (Dimensions 1 & 11):** Why is the lack of site-level CATs and mathematical structure tests causing uneven participation across schools?
- 5. Training & Data (Dimensions 6 & 7):** How can RCEA upgrade its training pipeline and wall-charting systems to build true rank-and-file capacity?
- 6. Organizational Capacity:** What concrete steps should the newly formed Organizing and Advocacy Committee take to turn RCEA's high-level vision into uniform site-level power?

Level 4 Benchmarks from the High Participation Assessment Tool

Dim #	Category Name	Level 4 Benchmark (High Participation Local)
1	Site Leaders & CATs	Active 1:10 CATs/Organizing Squads; Level 1 issues handled locally; equity embedded in rank-and-file recruitment.
2	Union Staff Role	Staff function primarily as strategic coaches and capacity builders; clear separation of servicing from organizing.
3	Valley Work (Lulls)	Off-contract lulls intentionally leveraged for site enforcement, mobile training, and permanent community-labor alliances.
4	Collective Bargaining	Open, massive, representative bargaining teams; radical transparency; community-centered 'common good' demands.
5	Local President's Role	Focuses on strategic coordination, delegation, and budget reallocation; guards plan; uses 'choir model' pacing.
6	Data Systems & Power	Decentralized, active digital wall-charts (Action Builder/OrgDB) used to evaluate supermajority campaign readiness.
7	Member Training	Active, multi-tiered pipelines ('Skills to Win') using a gradual release model with mobile/on-site workshops.
8	Overcoming Respectability	Rejects respectability traps/quiet meetings; 1:10 CAT networks turn isolated fear into protected collective leverage.
9	Defensive Organizing	Repurposes strike/CAT infrastructure for rapid-response community defense (ICE defense, LGBTQ+ youth, civil rights).

10	Strategic Plan & Coherence	Co-created roadmap drives all operations; strict alignment between annual launches, budget, and worksite visits.
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11	Methodical Structure Tests	Deploying escalating quantitative tests (70–80%+ gates) to mathematically confirm supermajority readiness before escalating.
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