

Empowering ESPs for a Stronger Future



Forming a New Union

Introduction

Welcome to the Education Support Professionals Unionization Toolkit. This comprehensive guide is designed to empower individuals who are passionate about creating positive change within the education system by forming unions for education support professionals (ESPs). As integral members of the education workforce, ESPs play a crucial role in nurturing the learning environment, supporting educators, and ensuring the overall success of students.

This toolkit serves as a roadmap for organizers who are dedicated to advocating for the rights, fair treatment, and professional growth of ESPs. By following the step-by-step guide and utilizing effective strategies, you'll be equipped to lead a successful unionization effort that can uplift ESPs, strengthen their collective voice, and contribute to the enhancement of your school district.

Together, we can create lasting change and contribute to a brighter future for education support professionals and the students they serve.

Step-by-Step Guide For Organizers

A strong game plan for creating a new union will help you approach, recruit, and follow up with each potential new member. **Remember, you are never alone! Maine Education Association staff will be with you every step of the way.**

Some basic ingredients to consider on your journey to create a union are:

1) Connect with the Maine Education Association (MEA)

Your initial team should consult with the Maine Education Association UniServ Director in your area to do preliminary planning for your unionization efforts.

Some initial considerations may be whether your group will be creating a brand new local union with the MEA or if you will be forming a new “bargaining unit” within a larger already existing MEA affiliated union. It is important to note that different jobs may have different contracts as separate bargaining units, but still be part of one ‘wall to wall’ local association/union.

The MEA UniServ Director can also explain the structure of the MEA and the “unified membership” of the Local Association, The Maine Education Association, and the National Education Association (NEA).

2) Form an Organizing Committee

The organizing committee may start as a small group of dedicated leaders interested in forming a union. The committee's first task should be to expand the organizing committee by recruiting a group of positive, upbeat and diverse group of organizers in terms of race, gender, age, and job category who understand and know how to talk about the value of union membership. These may be educators who have been union members with other employers, those who have family members who are engaged union members or simply educators who have a strong connection to social justice. Potential members need to hear from people who believe in union values and understand the importance of forming a new unit. Consider inviting multiple or diverse presenters from other local associations to join in the conversation.

If your new union will be part of a larger already established local union consider having team members from all represented groups.

3) Craft a Solid Unionization Strategy

Working closely with Maine Education Association Staff create a comprehensive plan to achieve your goal. The plan will define clear goals and objectives for the unionization effort and develop a comprehensive program that outlines the steps, timelines, and responsibilities. Determine the key messages to communicate to ESPs, the public, and stakeholders.

Any plan will include:

- **Training for organizers**
- **Data collection and tracking-** Who are the potential union members? Where are they? What contact information can we collect (the more the better)? What did they say when we spoke to them? Do they seem pro-union? Did they sign an authorization card? If not, why not?
- **Strategies for employee contacts and methods for outreach-** One on one conversations, surveys, phone banks etc.
- **Messages** to communicate to employees, the public and other potential stakeholders
- **Strategies to overcome opposition-** Be prepared for resistance or opposition from certain individuals or groups and develop strategies to address concerns and counter misinformation. Be prepared for the employer to resist unionizing by spreading inaccurate information about the union. The employer will likely tell staff that the union will ruin the good relationship that exists because the union is an outsider (which is not true, YOU are the union!) Always maintain a positive and respectful tone throughout the process.
- **How will we distribute and collect "Union Authorization" cards.**

4) Employee Outreach

As the “gold standard”, strive to conduct a **one on one conversation** with each employee eligible to join the union.

The goal is to understand their wants, needs, and issues. Understanding how a union can help those who are potential members is the best way to help show the value of forming a union. Conversations can also help to identify those opposed to a union and why.

In addition to direct conversations, the organizing committee can utilize **phone banks, surveys and even group information sessions** (sample step-by-step and agenda of how to hold this meeting is below).

The goal of the employee outreach efforts, in whatever form they take, is to educate employees about unionization and address common misconceptions and explain the benefits of union membership.

5) Union Authorization Card Collection

The ultimate goal of all your hard work is to get every eligible employee to sign a Union Authorization Card and membership form!

Your plan will include methods and strategies for card collection drives at work locations, emphasizing confidentiality and privacy. You will need to collect as many cards as possible. Ultimately, to be successful, more than 50% of eligible employees must affirm they want a union.

6) Formal filing and Election Process

The final step in establishing your new union is to gain legal recognition via the Maine Labor Relations Board (MLRB) through a formal filing and election process.

MEA Staff will be instrumental in helping your team navigate the labor board process when the time comes. The MEA field staff person (commonly known as the UniServ Director) will help your team know when and how to file with the MLRB.

How to Host a “Learn About the Union” Meeting

1) Introduce your union and its mission

- Use “we” and “our union” to emphasize that we’re all in this together. Share how forming a union will be a solutions-based group that meets the needs of the district’s students and Support Staff.
- Provide context for potential union members to understand their relationship to the local, state and national Associations.

2) Talk about the power of collective action

- Explain key pieces of a collective bargaining agreement: salary schedule, leaves (including medical, personal), health and retirement benefits, workday, safe working conditions, etc. Be sure to emphasize that they have a say in their contract and will vote to accept or reject the negotiated agreement.
- Talk about how to deal with issues at work, i.e. when the Union can help and get involved in issues

3) Highlight opportunities for professional growth through the Union

4) Ask for “membership”--“I am here today to ask you to agree to form a union and sign authorization cards

5) Allow time for questions in small groups at tables

6) Breakfast/Lunch hosted by the Maine Education Association

Follow Up

What are the next steps?

Follow Up To-Dos:

Ask every potential new union member to sign an authorization card within time frame designated by the lead organizers

Provide organizers New Ed card information to support their one-on-one conversations. Found at maineea.org/membershiptoolkit

Additional flyers and supporting documents to help promote membership can be found at maineea.org/membershiptoolkit

Plan to visit worksites to hold follow up conversations to engage those who have not yet signed cards

Keep lines of communication open and inform the potential members of the process

MEA OFFICES CONTACT INFORMATION

WEBSITE: maineea.org

MEA Headquarters Office

35 Community Drive, Augusta ME 04330
Tel. 207-622-5866 or 1-800-452-8709

Bangor

1349 Broadway, Bangor ME 04401
Tel. 207-942-0052 or 1-888-942-2907

Caribou

7 Hatch Drive Suite #220
Mail: PO Box 310, Caribou ME 04736
Tel. 207-888-3856 or 1-800-281-3191

South Portland

29 Christopher Toppi Drive, South Portland ME 04106
Tel. 207-774-6133 or 1-800-750-8801

Member Organizer Quick Answer Guide



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Member Organizers do not have to have all the answers to questions from members and potential members, but can use this guide to help prepare for transformational organizing conversations and typical questions.

It's All Right Here!

🏠 Local association group/who will be represented by the new union?

🏠 Dues information (per paycheck)?

🏠 Benefits and bargaining advantages to forming a union?

🏠 Resources available when you're a union member (worksites level, local level, state level, national level)?

🏠 Union successes to show value?

🏠 Surrounding local association successes to show benefit of forming a new union?

AHUY Planning Guide

Ask

What open-ended questions will you ask to get to know your member/potential member and understand their issues and how a new union can help?

HOPE

Share your understanding on how a union can help with those issues.

URGENCY

What will you say to communicate that NOW is the time to form a union?

YOUR CALL TO ACTION

Can we count on you to sign a union authorization card?

B.R.A.G.

BENEFITS



What are the advantages of being a union member?

e.g.: collective voice

RESOURCES



How can/does the union support me in my work and professional life?

ACHIEVEMENTS



What have other local unions and the Maine Education Association achieved that makes a difference in my professional life and the lives of the students I work with?

GOALS



What are we/should we be working to accomplish that will make a difference in my professional life and the lives of the students I work with?

How can a new union help accomplish those goals?

AUTHORIZATION

Name:

Address:

Personal Email:

Cell Phone*:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

I hereby designate and authorize the Maine Education Association, its affiliates, agents or representatives, to act for me as my exclusive agent and representative for the purpose of collective bargaining for terms and conditions of employment, the negotiation of collective agreements, and any question arising thereunder, and I hereby revoke every other designation or authorization, if any, previously made by me for such purposes.



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