

**New Member Orientation:
Guidelines for
Public Employee Local Unions**

Laborers' International Union of North America

LIUNA!

Feel the Power

New Member Orientation:

Guidelines for Public Employee Local Unions

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Why Your Local Union Needs a *New Member Orientation Program*

Orientation builds **Commitment** that leads to **Activism**, which creates a **Stronger Union**.

- **There is a recognized need to get members more involved and engaged in the labor movement.**
 - Member orientation leads to *member activism*.
 - Sets groundwork for member-to-member *support in organizing efforts*.
 - Members are key to *politics*, community action, meetings, rallies, etc.
 - Member Orientation provides basis for informing members about opportunities for involvement.
- **It's proven that to get members to act we must first build their *commitment*.**
 - Cannot expect members to participate in union activities if they do not feel a union connection; need to be motivated/see value in getting involved.
 - Members of any organization are more willing to act if they feel like they are part of that organization; see its value.
 - Orientations are vehicle to instill union values and provide important information.
 - Make members feel part of a team or unique operation; not just anyone can belong.
- **It's proven that the best time to build commitment to any organization is at the earliest possible stages of joining.**
 - Same holds true for unions.
 - First impressions (good or bad) have lasting impact.
 - First interaction with the union should be a welcome and sharing of its services and values vs. seeking union dues.
 - Wait too long and members learn *informally* on the job from others, not necessarily the right information or the right impressions.
 - Wait too long and members realize they can function without ever coming to a meeting or participating in a union function.
 - Welcoming ceremonies and formal orientation play a part in other structured organization systems: colleges, military, business. They should be part of the union system as well.

Constructing a *New Member Orientation Program*

When planning a New Member Orientation Program, these are the issues to consider. Each Program should be designed to suit the needs of the Local Union.

- **Formal and well organized in advance**
 - Plan all the content and logistics ahead of time.
 - Demonstrates whether this is something to be taken seriously or not.
 - Highlights quality /caliber of the union.
- **Structured agenda**
 - Planned content and realistic amount of time devoted to each topic.
 - What will be covered and who will cover it?
 - Allow time for questions; plan membership engagement.
 - Stay on schedule but do not rush through.
- **Content: relevant to *new members***
 - Prioritize topics.
 - Consider time constraints and audience.
 - Some topics may be best suited for later sessions or different settings.
 - What is most important for *this* audience?
 - What would a *new member* care most about/need to know?
- **Presenters**
 - Varied depending on topic/issue.
 - Union staff and officers at least present/introduced in program.
 - Knowledgeable and credible source for each topic addressed.
 - Able to respond to questions.
 - Good presentation skills.
 - Include participation of stewards & other rank-and-file members they can relate to.
 - Facilitator to welcome and keep flow.
 - A good “master of ceremony”.
 - Welcoming; trouble shoots, fills in gaps as needed.
 - Introduces speakers; keeps things running smoothly.
 - Keeps on schedule and on point.
- **Handouts: clear and high quality**
 - Use LiUNA! branding.
 - Consider impression of materials: appearance and packaging.
 - Put in folders for easy distribution.
 - Do not overwhelm with handouts; too many or too complicated.
 - Detailed enough to be informative.

- **Scheduling: when, what time, how long**

- One to two hours.
 - Two hours *optimal*.
 - If the union’s orientation program is held in conjunction with the employer’s, it is generally done in a shorter time frame.
 - No less than one hour.
 - Cannot fully engage members or cover important issues in less time.
- During lunchtime, Saturday morning or an evening session.

- **Location**

- Union hall/office/job site are optimal locations.
- Creates exclusive atmosphere; “their hall” or “their office,” like a club.
- Make sure clean, something to be proud of.
- Consider AV needs.
- Other union facilities as suitable alternatives: District Council, Central Labor Council, etc.
- Neutral non-union location only if optimally convenient for attendees.
 - Balance convenience against a union atmosphere.

- **Enrollment/Attendance**

- “Mandatory” for new members.
- Create expectation that attendance is routine part of membership.
 - Creating an expectation of participation will increase likelihood of attendance.
- Direct personal contact and follow up in addition to formal letter.
- Provide sufficient notice and alternative dates; run more than once in a year, depending on how often new members are initiated.
 - Part of planning in advance; schedule at beginning of the year.
 - Include on Local Union calendar/website.
- Identify as the location where they fill out important paperwork, forms, pick up union cards, etc.
- Ensure that all paperwork requests complete contact information so members can be reached by mail, phone call, mobile text message and email.

- **Giveaways**

- Ensure they go home with something.
- Important to include follow up information, contacts, etc.
- Opportunity to give them more detailed materials for further review.
- Include LIUNA! orange: hats, buttons, stickers, etc.
 - Consistently using LIUNA branding encourages unity and makes us recognizable.

- **Follow up**

- Frequent, continuing communications is key – use the *7 Tools*: automated calls, email, publications, text messaging, web sites, news media, and unity through branding.
- Follow up with attendees.
 - Phone call, email, letter or direct contact.
- Invitation to next union meeting, training session or event.
- Consider an activist mentoring program.
- Identify who may be a likely candidate to talk to next year's new members.

- **Other**

- Another venue to plan Member Orientation is within steward training.
 - However, need to connect as much as possible to the *Local Union*.
 - May involve multiple Local Unions.
 - Need to ensure sufficient coverage and emphasis on topics so that the Local Union's message is delivered.

New Member Orientation Program Topics

Below is a list of suggested topics for a New Member Orientation Program. Time allotments are very constrained guidelines. Your Local Union should modify based on its priorities and time limitations.

- **General Welcome and Introductions (15 minutes)**

Objective: Break the ice and make them feel welcome and at ease.

- Welcome to program as well as to membership.
- Review intent of the program and general review of what will be covered.
- ***In longer and smaller sessions, worthwhile to have each person say a few words of introduction, why they became a member.***

- **Labor History (30 minutes)**

Objective: Appreciate that what the union offers came with great struggle and sacrifice from workers acting collectively.

- Brief recap of the labor movement struggles in general.
- Overview of LIUNA's history, including history of LIUNA's public employees.
- ***Bonus: the history of your particular Local Union.***

- **Union Structure (general) (15 minutes)**

Objective: Understand they are a part of a bigger operation. Explain how the public and construction sectors mutually benefit each other.

- Local xyz is one of 400 + Locals in LIUNA.
- Local xyz is one of XXX Locals in the District Council that covers XXX territory.

- **Local Union Governance: How the Union Operates (30 minutes)**

Objective: How decisions are made and their role in the process.

- Executive Board: people, title and functions.
- Union meetings: where when and what is done at them.
- Constitution: introduce as our primary governing tool.

- **Union Operations (30 minutes)**

Objective: Review the basic functioning of the office. Hours of operation.

- Staff: Who they are and what they do.
- Communications: phone, website, email, newsletter, texts.

- **Union Services (30 minutes)**

Objective: What the union does for them; how to make it work.

- Collective bargaining agreements (general review of).
- Representation (agents, stewards role).

- **Dues Structure (15 minutes)**

Objective: Importance of dues to run the organization and importance of them being on time. (Can do separately or include with the Local Union Governance section.)

- How dues are determined.
- When they are due and consequences of paying late.
- Break down: pie chart of how money is spent.

- **Union Benefits (45 minutes)**

*Objective: Summarize the benefits and identify points of contact for each **as applicable**.*

- Health plan (contacts, summary).
- Pension plan.
- Union Plus Benefits Program.
- Other, as applicable to the Local Union (e.g. dental plan).
- Connect benefits back to the collective bargaining relationship.

- **Union Activities (30 minutes)**

Objective: Make them aware of the additional activities the unions (and they) are involved in. Encourage participation.

- Join the LIUNA Action Network.
- Political mobilization.
- Community/volunteer programs.
- Member social programs: Picnics, parties, etc.
- Committees.
- O.P.E.N (Organizing Public Employees Now) classes.

- **Member Expectations (30 minutes)**

Objective: Members are not without responsibilities. We hold ourselves to a high standard.

- Individual member behavior reflects on the entire membership.
- Importance of work ethic.
- Keep up skills (i.e. certification, licenses, etc.)
- Important they promote the Union to others.
- Organizing (internal).
 - Communicating information from your worksite to the Union.

- **Conclusions (15 minutes)**

*Objective: The Union is not an outside party; **they** are the Union.*

- Union is not just the officers, the union is the membership.
- Power in numbers; we achieve more together than alone.
- Union is only as good and active as its members; keep our standards high.
- Encouragement/expectation of participation.
- Encourage continued communications/questions etc.

New Member Welcome Packet: Suggested Materials

Local Unions should customize what they mail or hand out to members by selecting from the following types of materials.

Select those that apply to your Local Union. Some of these can be created by someone at the Local Union with little effort.

Package this information to either supplement a formal Member Orientation Program or to be mailed as a stand-alone set of materials to each new member's home.

- **Welcome letter**
 - LiUNA! branded letterhead, preferably from the Business Manager and/or the Executive Board.
 - Should be short and to the point.
 - Encourage the new member that the Local Union really is interested in his or her involvement.
 - Include Business Manager's card with the folder.
- **Key contacts**
 - List of the Local Union's stewards and Executive Board members.
 - Include contact information; web site, phone numbers and/or emails.
 - If the Local Union does not have agents, consider a list of stewards and the units where they operate.
- **Events and Union Functions**
 - Key information pertaining to the Local Union's key events and functions.
 - Include time and location of membership meetings.
 - If there are regular annual events that would be of interest to the members include that list as well.
- **Bargaining agreements**
 - Summary or copy, including a link to your contract on your Union website.
- **Public Employee Department information**
 - How to enroll.
 - Current schedule of classes.
- **Local Union (or Council-specific) benefits**
 - Scholarship awards.
 - Legal services.
 - Other "award" opportunities.

- **Committees and volunteer opportunities**
 - Standard union committees.
 - Charities.
 - Fun activities (teams, annual picnics etc).
- **Political action issues**
 - Voter registration information.
 - Types of initiatives the local supports.
 - How local endorses candidates.
 - LPL cards.
 - LIUNA Action Network cards.
- **Communications**
 - Collect complete member contact information: email, phone, mobile, mailing address.
 - Local Union newsletter.
 - Website reference.
 - E-Activist cards.
- **Local Union history**
 - Fact sheet or summary.
- **Union Privilege materials and benefits**
- **Local Union trinkets**
 - Bumper stickers and other small LiUNA! branding materials.

Informal Member Orientation

In addition to Formal Orientation, the Local Union should not overlook opportunities for “informal” orientation. This is going on all the time all around our members. Even though not structured, the Local Union has opportunities to influence the extent to which members are exposed to, and form impressions about, the union.

• Informal Member Orientation

- Description: Non-structured, short experiences that influence a member as to information about and expectations regarding the union.
- Most common: workplace discussions with friends and co-workers.
- More frequent and common than formal orientation but not in-depth exposure; many small “hits” of union influence.
- Can be positive (“*The union is the best thing that happened for us.*”) or negative (“*This union stinks.*”; “*You never see a steward around here.*”).
- Might also be nonexistent: No discussion about the union as though the union does not even exist; has no role on the job. Better than a bad experience but missing an opportunity for exposure.

• Stewards are the front lines of the union

- Most logical first and ongoing contact with the members.
- Stewards are the “face” of the union. For many, their interaction with (or lack of) the membership will shape the members’ attitudes about the union in a positive or negative way.
- Make sure they are visible and that every Laborer on the job knows who they are and what their role is.
- Stewards can distribute information about union issues on the job.
- Stewards can encourage members to come to meetings to learn more.
- Important that stewards are trained in their role as ambassadors for the union.
 - Do not have to be all knowing; need to be positive about the union, helpful and provide useful information.

• Steward contact with members on job visits

- Members who see their union agents in action, whether they know why they are there or are not, are less likely to say their union does not do anything for them.
- Be seen on the job as being “there” for the union.
- Be known to the members and what his/her role is.
- Be visible: Union jackets, colors, etc.
- Take time to meet with (and be seen by members doing so) the employer and the steward.

- Need to do so in a way that does not impede the job or interfere with work rules (or look phony).
- Leave literature and information.
- Needs to be imbedded into the job/role of the Business Agent/Rep and incorporated within staff development.
 - Most effective when a requirement of the Business Manager.
- **The role of Local Union office workers**
 - Create friendly servicing.
 - Get to know the members on a more personal level (family, etc.).
 - Office workers need to see themselves as part of the team and part of the solution to our current challenges.
 - Often the front line for many who do not see stewards or agents but need to interact with the Union.
- **Communications counts**
 - Members that receive frequent communication are 50% more likely to get involved in their union's political and organizing effort.
 - Use the *7 Tools* (automated calls, web sites, email, text messaging, publications, news media, and unity through branding) to keep members informed and engaged.
 - Use automated calls for meeting and event invitations.
 - Use newsletters to keep members informed.
 - Use email and text messaging for less formal, more frequent updates.
 - Give out LiUNA! orange gear at events.
 - Create a web site that members can use to find information.
 - Use news media to share positive news about the Local.
- **Membership meetings**
 - May be attracting fewer and fewer people but still a place to reach members.
 - Consider what general buzz there is during or after meetings that would have a positive or negative influence on a member.
 - Who, if anyone, is looking out for the new person in the room and making him/her feel welcome?
 - Conversely, do our meetings look like a club or are they so strictly run that an outsider feels the union is only for the old timers or friends of the Business Manager?