ORGANIZING OUR COLLEAGUES
One conversation at a time

WHAT IS ORGANIZING?

Organizing is the process of empowering individuals through collective action. It is an intentional and continuous process of relationship-building with your colleagues. The basic building block of organizing our colleagues is through ongoing face-to-face discussions called organizing conversations.

THE ORGANIZING CONVERSATION

The organizing conversation is the basic building block of a membership campaign. Organizing conversations, should take no longer than 10 minutes, unless your colleague is the one who is engaging and making the conversation last longer.

What matters most is that you speak with your colleagues in an agreed-upon assigned window of time. That could be through office visits during their office hours. It could be over the phone or through video communication if they teach remotely. Or the talk can happen at a coffee shop or other off campus location. If you are doing office visits, it is ideal to have a conversation in the moment, but if people feel uncomfortable and fearful talking in their department or around their colleagues, it is better to set up a time and place where they can speak freely.

Don’t be shy about visiting or calling without a prior appointment: what you want to speak to them about is important and you should trust your colleagues to tell you if they cannot speak to you at that moment. Remember: you aren’t bothering anyone; you are asking them to contribute their voice in the future of the institution.

LISTENING MATTERS.

When you listen well, you send the message that your chapter is an organization that will be driven by faculty concerns and run by faculty members.

If you don’t listen, you won’t know how to best respond to their concerns. Good organizing begins by meeting people where they are. You’ll only discover that information if you pay attention.

Listen twice as much as you talk.

THE BASIC ORGANIZING CONVERSATION: THE BIG I.D.E.A.R.

INTRODUCTION
ORGANIZING 101

INTRODUCE YOURSELF Say who you are, and why you are there. If you already know the person you are visiting, let them know why you want to speak with them.

For example,

“Hi, my name is [blank] and I’m here on behalf of our AAUP chapter. Could we talk for 10 minutes about [College/University]’s future?” [Most people will say yes; if they say no, ask if there’s a better time to come back.]

It helps for some people to think of a good way to open a conversation, to try it out, and then to practice it. Don’t apologize or present excuses not to talk to you in your introduction. If your colleague is busy or otherwise occupied or disinterested, they will let you know.

DISCOVERY

Discovery is the part of the organizing conversation where you learn about your colleague and their issues. Start by asking open-ended questions, and attempt to uncover the issues that your colleague cares about. Listen very carefully and guide your questioning in a direction that enables them to remember how they feel about an issue they care about. If there is a specific issue that you know you want to ask them about, or follow up on, don’t lead by asking them to immediately take an action. Instead, find out how the issue is affecting them.

Additionally, don’t “fish” for issues—make sure not to assume their issues beforehand. For example, the top issue for your colleague with a young child might be facilities, not parental leave. Remember that you’re having a conversation with your colleague, not interrogating them.

LISTEN FIRST. Ask open-ended questions and listen to what your colleagues have to say. What was their path to arriving at your institution? What do they teach, and how many students do they have? What is their typical workload like in a given week? What kinds of university service do they perform? Do they serve on any departmental or institutional advisory committees? What kinds of issues have come up for them in their roles? What would help them achieve their professional goals?
ACKNOWLEDGE CONCERNS. Let them know you’ve heard what they said by mirroring it back, “Yes, I’ve also wondered how bargaining could help if the University is in financial difficulty.” Or “At first, I was concerned about retaliation by the administration, too.”

EXPLORATION

AGITATE. Once you’ve uncovered important issues, it’s time to explore them through agitation. Agitation is a multi-step process that both allows the person to express their frustration (in the right direction) and gives them hope that something can be accomplished through collective action.

RESPOND TO CONCERNS, CLEAR UP MISCONCEPTIONS. Give practical, concrete reasons why becoming a member or taking an action is good for everyone.

   Becoming a member means having strength in numbers. When the University sees that we are united, it makes it more difficult for them to divide us against ourselves. Having that kind of unity supports our organizing team, and makes it easier for them to secure a fair shared governance process for faculty.

POLITELY ADDRESS SPECIFIC ASSERTIONS THAT YOU BELIEVE ARE INCORRECT. Your goal should not be to win an argument with them, but instead to introduce them to an alternative way of thinking about that topic. When your colleagues express a concern or decline to act on their issues, using feel, felt, found can be a way to both acknowledge their concern and segue the conversation back to why taking action is important. Deal with objections using “feel, felt, found”:

   BRING IT BACK TO COLLECTIVE ACTION. What kind of change could we have on campus with more members? Who decides why things are the way they are now, and how can having a strong chapter change what happens?

FEEL, FELT, FOUND

Example: I would like to become a member, but the dues are too expensive.

   • Feel: I understand how you feel. I initially thought it was expensive, too
   • Felt: But I felt that I wanted to be a member, and that it was the right thing to do.
   • Found: I found that when I looked into it, I found out it was only _____ more per month. It worked out that the raise we earned last year more than made up for the difference.
Explore these issues and relate them back to the importance and effectiveness of collective action.

**ASK**

The most important part of an organizing conversation is asking your colleague to commit to taking part in an action. Before you go to talk to someone, you should have a clear idea of what kinds of actions you need people to take. One way of helping people to take action is to use the issues you uncovered during the discovery phase of the organizing conversation: “For us to make progress on [your top issues], you and your colleagues will need to [insert action here].”

**FIND OUT WHERE THEY STAND.** If you don’t feel like you have a sense of their support for the chapter, ask them what they think. Don’t be afraid to be direct.

**ASK THEM TO TAKE ACTION.** If you think that this person is likely to be an activist in their department, invite them to the next meeting or event. If you suspect they are a supporter, ask them who they think you should make sure to talk to in their department.

**REVIEW**

**INOCULATE.** It may seem counterintuitive, but it’s important to inoculate the organizee with weak arguments against your position, or against taking action. That will bolster her “immune system” against stronger attacks from admin or anti-chapter colleagues.

**REVIEW.** Make sure to review with your colleague what they’ve agreed to do during the Ask phase of the organizing conversation and make a plan to follow-up with them at a specific time and date.
CLOSING THE CONVERSATION

The way you close the conversation will depend on your colleagues’ response to your ask, and your review of your colleague.

4: Although we may disagree, I respect your opinion. Thank you very much for your time.

3: I don’t want to take up too much of your time. What would you need to know to help you make up your mind? I’ll check back with you later to see if you have any further questions.

2: If you review a colleague as a 2, think about their level of enthusiasm. Was it grudgingly muttered or confidently proclaimed? If it was closer to the latter, invite them to the next organizing committee meeting and pass on their name to the organizer.

REVIEW SCORE

MAKE AN Judgement Call. Review scores are a judgment call that you, the organizer, makes after having a conversation. Ask yourself this question:

“Based on what your colleague said, how likely is it that he/she will join your chapter?”

USE THE REVIEW SCALE

Just like letter grades, points on the assessment scale represent a threshold that someone must cross. Different chapters use different kinds of review scales. Pick one that works for you, make sure everyone understands it, and stick with it consistently. Review scores are not a moral judgment, but a way to quickly understand where your colleague stands on an issue.

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<th>Active, Supportive</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Clear Supportive</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Active, Opposed</td>
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REVIEWS FAQ:
1. It’s better to err on the conservative side when reviewing your colleagues. Even if you are convinced they can eventually be persuaded or are merely shy about declaring their support, don’t mark them as a 2 until they affirm their support in unequivocal terms like, “I support what the chapter is doing, and I will become a member.”

2. Reviews are about more than just the overall score: taking detailed notes can help whoever speaks to your colleague next prepare to have an effective, focused conversation that addresses their concerns.

3. Going forward, reviews need to remain between you, your colleague, and the organizer. An important part of organizing campaigns is building trust between colleagues. Part of building that trust is keeping what your colleagues say in confidence unless they specifically give you permission to repeat it. (If your colleague has a good story that illustrates why having a strong chapter is important, you may certainly ask if you can repeat the story or if we can incorporate it into literature.)

4. Record your impressions after you’ve left the conversation, but not too long after. You want your impressions to be fresh, but you also don’t want to upset your colleague by taking notes about them in their presence.

5. Pass your completed notes and review forms on to the organizer within 72 hours. To efficiently input data from our organizing conversations, we need to record the outcomes promptly and accurately. We want to respect your time and your colleagues’ time: clear records help us do that.
RESPONDING TO COMMON OBJECTIONS

Are you trying to organize a union? That might have worked a long time ago, but those days are gone.

Right now, we’re just trying to achieve this specific goal. I disagree that collective action is a thing of the past—just compare the pay and benefits of faculty who get to bargain as a union and those who don’t—but let’s stay focused on what we’re trying to achieve right now.

If we start complaining, we’re going to get fired.

There is safety in numbers. Our employer will have a hard time singling out any one person if we act together. We need to be smart about it—we won’t take any action until enough people are involved that management can’t fire everyone, and we’ll keep this private until we have enough support.

Finally, this is our right—most workers in America have a legally protected right to organize together and advocate for workplace changes.

Our boss will never listen to us. We can’t win. OR, We should all just quit.

We will only know if we can change things here if we try. The conditions we have right now exist because nothing is happening to improve them. If we organize, we can change that, and win something better.

I think the chapter is doing good work, but why should I pay extra to become a member?

The reason that we’ve been able to make so much progress is because the gains we’ve made in membership have increased our leverage. Our chapter is only as strong as the members we have. Becoming a member means you have a voice in our chapter, and that you stand behind our mission.

I would like to become a member, but the dues are too expensive.

- I understand, it’s tough to consider joining when our salaries are so low. But, when I think of all the things we’ve been able to accomplish as a chapter, the only reason we were able to achieve them is because members stood up for what was right.

- Becoming a member means that we have a better chance to raise compensation for everyone. We think the gains we’ve made recently have been because of our work on the issues of compensation and workload, which more than makes up for the cost of membership.

- I initially thought it was expensive, too, but when I looked into it, I found out it was only _______ per month. Looking back at everything we’ve been able to accomplish [this/last] year, it’s been more than worth it.

With the way things are going here, it feels like nothing will ever change. Right now, I think I just need to keep my head down.
One thing is for sure: our situation will get worse if we choose to do nothing. But if we decide to stand together, we have a shot at changing things, and making things better.

We already have shared governance and a faculty senate: why should I join the AAUP?

We started our chapter because faculty felt like our system of shared governance is broken; we’re organizing to improve it. Joining the AAUP means being part of an organization that has stood up for real shared governance for over 100 years. Faculty senates are an important venue for faculty to have a voice, but they are not independent bodies, and their scope is limited. An advocacy chapter can support and improve shared governance through its organizing.

Our chapter won’t be able to accomplish anything given how little money the state spends on higher education.

State appropriations for higher education everywhere are dwindling but, somehow, our university is finding money to hire new administrators and construct non-academic buildings at an accelerating rate. Our chapter can advocate for spending priorities in line with our educational mission.

Being affiliated with the state and national AAUP means being able to advocate for better funding for higher education. It also means shining a light on spending priorities at universities all over the state.
## DO’S AND DON’TS

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<td>Listen twice as much as you talk.</td>
<td>Start formulating your response before they’ve finished talking.</td>
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<td>Emphasize the chapter is only as strong as its members.</td>
<td>Be afraid to ask your colleague to join, volunteer, come to an event, or participate in an action.</td>
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<td>Say “I don’t know” if you don’t have an answer.</td>
<td>Get into heated arguments.</td>
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<td>Stick to the purpose of the visit, don’t get sidetracked.</td>
<td>Gossip or deal in personalities—stick to principles and issues.</td>
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<td>Point out that criticisms are a reason for them to get personally involved.</td>
<td>Be afraid to ask them to become a member.</td>
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<td>Ask questions designed to involve the listener in thinking about and discussing the chapter.</td>
<td>Ask leading questions or assume their issues.</td>
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<td>Let them know you’ll be back in a week or two to talk further.</td>
<td>Be afraid to say “I don’t know” if you don’t have an answer. You can follow up later for a second conversation!</td>
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