

# Local Union Organizing



## You Can Help

# Local Union Organizing You Can Help

## Handout

Local Union members can help organize by:

Participating in a market area survey

Identifying potential organizing targets, including:

- ✓ Contractors
- ✓ Projects

Identifying unorganized electricians

Communicating with unorganized workers through:

- ✓ Engage in worksite organizing activities
- ✓ Housecalls
- ✓ Phonebanks
- ✓ Handbills

Promoting the union's organizing mission to other local union members as well as perspective members by speaking out at:

- ✓ Mixed union/nonunion jobsites
- ✓ Supply houses
- ✓ Social settings

Promoting a positive union message and image by:

- ✓ Active community volunteering
- ✓ Keeping informed of union activities
- ✓ Informing others of worthy union projects; i.e., the news media, family members, friends

---

# **Local Organizing**

## **A Guide for Membership Involvement**

---

The IBEW Construction Organizing Program includes membership education. One of the goals of the updated *Construction Organizing Membership Education Training (COMET)* is to make our rank-and-file members aware of the socioeconomic problems caused by nonunion employers and unorganized workers. The natural outgrowth of this rank-and-file training has been the question, "What can members do?" This publication identifies a number of areas where the local union membership can be of assistance to the business manager and/or organizer.

One of the first things the business manager should explain to the members is the need for their assistance. The members go to the electrical wholesale houses and drive through the cities in their service trucks. They play in softball leagues and bowling leagues. They are Boy Scout Troop Leaders, belong to Isaac Walton, Bass Masters, and Ducks Unlimited. Every day hundreds of our local union members will run into unorganized electricians.

It is not just the full-time personnel employed by the union (i.e., business manager, assistant business manager, organizer, etc.) who have a duty to organize; it is the duty of all members to assist. Our greatest resource is our membership, without its support and assistance we face a never-ending task.

### Participate in a Market Area Survey

When the Construction Organizing Program was initially started, Phase I and Phase II, Goal Setting, included information concerning the Market Area Survey. This survey is of great importance. It enables the local union to analyze its jurisdiction and formulate a plan of action. There are numerous tools at the local union's disposal to help give insight into Market Share. By themselves none will give a clear picture of the Market Area, but used in conjunction with as many others as possible, a reasonable, accurate picture of the area can be formulated.

## Phone Book

Business is generated through advertisement. Legitimate electrical contractors, union and nonunion, advertise. The most frequent place they advertise is in the Yellow Pages of the phone book. Since the local union will have a list of signatory union contractors, it will be easy to determine which contractors are nonunion.

## Licensing

Different conditions exist in different areas, but very often some form of licensing is required for electricians and electrical contractors. There are state, county, and municipal licensing laws in effect. If licensing on any level applies to your jurisdiction, the names and addresses of the license holders are usually available through the agency responsible for issuing the license.

If you are fortunate enough to have local (i.e., county or municipal) licensing, this may give you the most precise count of nonunion journeymen in your area. This will also give you an accurate count of people holding contractor licenses.

## Permits

Most areas require contractors to have an electrical permit to perform work. Some sort of inspection system is usually always in place to insure public safety.

Permits may be divided into type of work or dollar volume of work. Residential, Commercial, Industrial, and Industrial Maintenance are common categories. The dollar volume fee for permits often will break at "up to \$25,000, \$25,001 to 50,000, to \$50,001 to \$100,000, over \$100,000."

Whatever system of permits is used, it will also help you derive information from this system. In your survey, finding out the total number of permits issued and subtracting the union permits from the total will then leave you the nonunion permits. You may be able to come up with a figure of union versus nonunion, both by the number of permits, but also by the dollar volume of work.

## (State) Employment Security Commission

The state employment office will usually list the number of individuals employed as electricians. The employment offices serve a defined area. Sometimes the area may be a county or part of a county, but the statistics from the various offices are available. To obtain the information pertinent to your jurisdiction may involve getting information from more than one office, but in most cases this information is available from one office. Because of shared data, your local office will probably have the statistics of the other offices available.

## Economic Development

Many cities now have Economic Development Committees. The purpose of these committees is to attract new industry. Often these committees may have compiled much of the information necessary to do your survey.

These committees usually do an in-depth study of area demographics. Some of this information may be very helpful to you. It is a source that should not be overlooked.

**The success of any survey is predicated on the accuracy of the information compiled.** The more sources that are used to compile your statistics the more accurate your survey will be. The survey is the first step in understanding the demographics of your local union area.

## Identify and Communicate with Unorganized Electricians

Identifying and communicating with unorganized electricians is crucial to the success of your organizing program. Identifying the unorganized workers may be the hardest part of the total organizing program. On an individual basis identifying unorganized workers is an almost insurmountable task without member participation. Also, the resources of the local union must be utilized to the fullest – the most important resource we have at our disposal are the members of the local union.

Unorganized workers have the same wants, needs, and concerns as the organized workers. Unorganized workers do not exist in a vacuum. The unorganized workers are involved in church, social, and political functions. They are sports fans and have hobbies. Our members and their families know unorganized workers. The members in the Central Labor Council know unorganized workers. The countermen at the wholesale house know

unorganized workers. All of these sources should be used to obtain names of unorganized workers. After a core list of unorganized workers has been obtained, this identified group can be used to identify other workers.

## Worksite Organizing

Worksite organizing nonunion jobs is the most effective method of both identifying and communicating with the unorganized workers. Worksite organizing gives the unorganized worker a firsthand exposure to the union worker. A worksite organizer works side by side with the unorganized worker. They will be sharing work tasks. They will also be sharing information. Information that will give an insight into the individuals and also into the company they are employed by.

Every local union should have a worksite organizing program. Worksite organizing may be the single most important tool in any organizing program. It is the most accurate source for obtaining information; it gives us information about job conditions and work rules of the companies we are targeting.

Worksite organizing is also an effective educational tool—educational for those members who work as worksite organizers. The members who work as worksite organizers learn firsthand that it is not the nonunion worker who is the enemy, but the nonunion employer who exploits his workers. There are more similarities between the workers, union and nonunion, than we want to acknowledge. We find out that the concerns of the nonunion worker are the same concerns the union worker has.

## Housecalls

Housecalling can be greatly expedited with the assistance of local union members. The importance of housecalling by union members cannot be underestimated. The success rate in any organizing drive is directly influenced by the number of people who have been housecalled. An individual who is housecalled by one or more local union member will often feel more secure and trusting of the local union. Employers make good use of the comment, "he/she is paid to call on you" in referring to organizers. Rapport is more easily established with someone who has the same community of interest (i.e., working electrician) than people who are full-time union employees.

From a mathematical standpoint, membership involvement cannot be undervalued. With 500 nonunion electricians in an area, the business manager and organizer would take approximately five months to housecall them. With a

housecall committee of 25 people, all of the nonunion electricians could be housecalled in seven days.

## Phonebanks and Handbills

This issue of numbers and how many people are assisting you, is a recurrent problem. The operation of phonebanks and handbilling of facilities will usually be most effective when the optimum number of people are used.

The number of people doing phonebanking will be dictated by various physical limitations, number of phones and phone lines available, and privacy of phoning area.

Handbilling will usually be dictated by the minimum number of people needed to cover all the various sites and their entrances and exits.

## Promote Your Union

Promote the union's organizing mission to other local union members. The statistics show that approximately 13 percent of the membership attends union meetings. Since this number shows that the majority of the membership does not attend the monthly membership meeting, it emphasizes the importance of verbal communication. Sharing your thoughts on organizing with other union members can have a very positive impact. After your attendance at the COMET, you should be better equipped to explain the necessity of organizing our industry. Support of all local union members will determine the success of our organizing efforts.

## Speak Out

Promote unionized construction by speaking out at:

- ✓ Mixed union/nonunion jobsites
- ✓ Supply houses
- ✓ Social settings

## Promote a Positive Union Message and Image

All too often we forget to tell people we are union electricians. Why is this important? Most people have formed their opinion of unions by information received from the news media. Since negative media is more marketable, strikes, walk-offs and corruption are often the words the average person associates with unions. Unions very often are faceless. The image we convey is going to have a direct effect on how the public perceives us.

When union members do volunteer work for your local YMCA or Boy Scouts, make sure that the local media has pictures, names, and other pertinent information. We can promote our local union by giving press releases when we man phonebanks for charity, fund raising, or give monetary donations. If your press secretary thinks some information he sends to the *IBEW Journal* "Local Lines" is important enough to print, maybe that same information or a more concise version of it would be important enough for your local newspaper to print. Cultivate a relationship with a reporter. Give him/her short, clear union information on a regular basis, whether he/she uses it or not. Reporters are always looking for ready-made stories.

We have many opportunities to convey our message and promote a positive image; we should take advantage of them. Teachers are always looking for people to address civics and economics classes. Another opportunity is "Career Day." Volunteering to speak at schools is our chance to start creating a positive union image in our youth.

Make sure when city, county, or state boards and commissions are formed that members of your local union are appointed to them.