

### **Don't complain, organize!**

Incumbents have built-in advantages in elections. These advantages might seem unfair: they have a high profile in union publications, they chair the union meetings, they may even appoint the election committee. But those advantages are usually not illegal, with some important exceptions. Officers can't have their staff campaign for them on union time, for instance, unless it's incidental to regular union business.

Don't let yourself get distracted. Complaining doesn't win votes—campaigning does. And remember: Being a challenger comes with its own advantages. You are free to criticize the incumbents and to put forward new ideas for the union—and you don't bear the burden of justifying contract givebacks or other issues you can lay at the feet of those currently in office.

## **Chapter 4**

# BUILDING A CAMPAIGN TEAM

### **In this chapter:**

- Involving members in your campaign
- Your core team
- Active supporters
- Voters

**A**s the election approaches, you're going to have a lot of work to do.

Texting and phone banking.

Campaigning.

Getting all the last-minute details right.

**Do you want to be doing all that work alone?**

You can't run a campaign by yourself, any more than you can run a local by yourself. Strong unions involve rank-and-file members. So do strong campaigns.

When most people think about their campaign team, they think, “Who can I get to run on my slate?”

**You can’t run a campaign by yourself, any more than you can run a local by yourself.**

That’s obviously important.

But you should go broader than that. The more members doing something the better, even if most only do a little.

You have to get comfortable asking for help, says Teamsters Local 135 organizer Vance Smith.

“That four-letter word can do wonders for your campaign. If you can’t ask for help, you’re not going to win.”

“You can’t do it by yourself, both logistically and emotionally,” says Rami Bridge, president of the Somerville Education Association in Massachusetts. “If you don’t have a group, find that group first. Find people that want to see a change and are willing to do something about it.

“You need other people supporting you, because it’s a lot of pressure and stress and time,” says Bridge. “If you’re trying to build a democratic, transparent, member-driven union, you cannot do that by yourself—you need to be doing it with other people.”

### **The Problem with Traditional Campaign Models**

Many union reformers’ default model is a hard-working slate that does everything. They rent a van and criss-cross the local during election season and turn out the vote.

But if you want to win—and build a better union—you have to get a lot more members involved, not just the people on the slate. Here’s why:

- Incumbent union officials can count on a ready-made network of stewards and other workplace supporters who have a relationship with voters and can turn out votes. You need to build your own network, and you can’t do it in the few weeks surrounding the election.
- When you campaign, you will meet many people who want to help out. The traditional model does not put their support to good use. Plus, people who take active roles in the campaign will be primed to keep playing active roles in the union when you win.
- Many locals are big, with numerous workplaces or units. You need to spend time meeting people and building support throughout the local. This requires more person-power than your slate alone can muster, and you’ll have the best success in any worksite when respected people from that worksite are helping to campaign for you.

## BIG AND SMALL COMMITMENTS

If you're running for office, you probably know what a big commitment the union can be: all the meetings, the early mornings, the late-night phone calls.

Most members aren't willing to be as committed as you are. They won't give up their weekends for the union. They won't wake up early to go hand out flyers. They might not even come to meetings.

That's OK. Even though most members won't commit as much time as you do, many members are willing to do something.

Your job is to bring together the people who are willing to do a lot, and work with them to organize and mobilize the members who are willing to do a little.

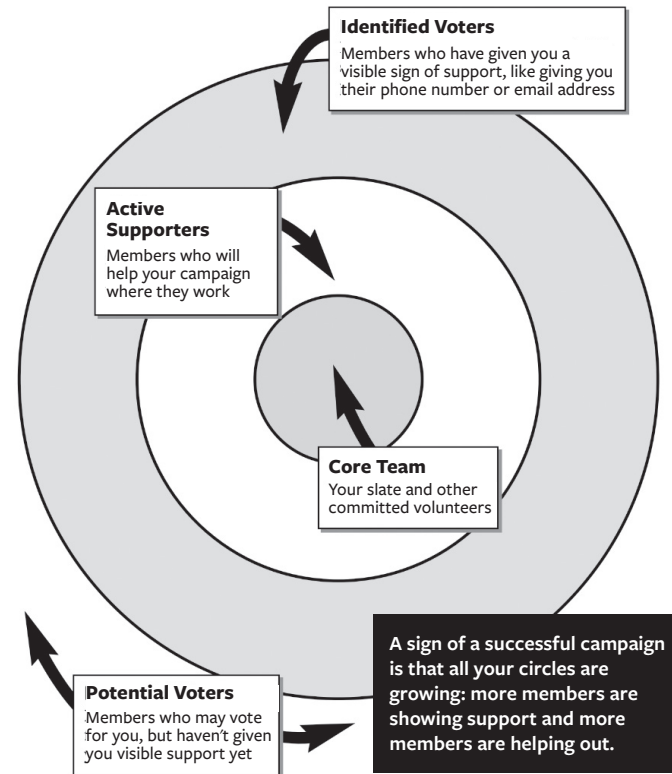
## YOUR CORE TEAM

Your core team is made up of the people who will:

- Pass out campaign leaflets, shirts, and stickers
- Collect email addresses and phone numbers
- Endorse your slate and recruit other endorsers
- Talk to members and organize them to build support for the campaign
- Come to key campaign meetings and discuss strategy
- Build campaign events
- Sell raffle tickets
- Text and phone bank to get out the vote

Ideally, your core team is bigger than your slate. Without this inner circle, you'll end up doing most of the campaign work yourself and your campaign will suffer.

## THE BULLSEYE CAMPAIGN MODEL



Credit: TDU

## ACTIVE SUPPORTERS

Many members won't come to a lot of meetings, but they will help out where they work.

From the get-go, you want to recruit active supporters in key buildings and locations where you need votes.

Here are some of the things you can ask them to do:



- Identify issues where they work
- Confirm shift information and best times to campaign
- Tell you who supports you in their shop
- Pass out flyers
- Wear campaign buttons and shirts
- Identify leaders and influential people in their workplace
- Stand with you and introduce you to members when you campaign at their job
- Introduce you to members at their employer
- Have their picture and a quote endorsing you in campaign literature
- Help with translation, if they speak another language

“When people decided to support us, we gave them tasks: talk to your co-workers and tell them what’s going on; get endorsement pictures and quotes for mailers and leaflets,” said Dwayne Johnson of Teamsters Local 322 in Richmond, Virginia. “A lot more people were leafletting and talking to members than were on the slate. If you can get people who aren’t running involved and out there campaigning for your slate, that shows that you’re creating a movement.”

When the ballots are out, your active supporters can help you get out the vote across your local.

“We knew that to win our first election, it was going to take 1,200 votes. That meant we had to have at least 1,200 face-to-face conversations,” said Paul Santos, president of Rhode Island Teamsters Local 251. “Do the math. There’s two ways you can do that. You can have six people have 200 conversations each, or 40 volunteers can have 30 conversations.”

You may be working on a smaller scale than Local 251, which has 6,000 members. But the same principle applies. “You’ve got to go out and have those face-to-face conversations, and you have to ask your core supporters to do one-on-ones with the people they work with,” Santos said.

“The biggest mistake you can make is to lie to yourself and overestimate your support. You’re only going to find out where people really stand by having those conversations.”

**Your active supporters can help you get out the vote across your local.**

## WILL THEY VOTE FOR YOU?

As you campaign, you'll meet lots of people who say they're going to vote for you. Some of them will, but not all of them.

Why? Some people are well-meaning but forget to vote. Others are voting for the other team, but don't want to hurt your feelings.

A smile and a handshake is not enough. If you get a potential voter to support you publicly, you're much more likely to get them to vote for you. Public support can be as simple as wearing a campaign button or shirt.

Alano De La Rosa, now the president of Teamsters Local 90 in Des Moines, Iowa, said his campaign made sure to constantly be outside the gates to meet members. "When people see you three, four times at their shop, they really get to know you and respect you.

"You need that one-on-one contact to get phone numbers and commitments. If a person won't give you their phone number, they're probably not going to vote for you."



BMORE

Baltimore teachers ousted an eight-term incumbent in 2019. They ran on a platform of opening the union up to members and joining with parents to fight for fully funded public schools.

## Gauging Your Support

"We stress one-on-one, because that's how you build commitment," says Ken Paff, longtime national organizer with Teamsters for a Democratic Union. "I always hear about the organizer who goes to the plant gate and hands out leaflets and all the people say, 'We're with you.' And when she comes back she says, 'That shop is 100 percent behind us.'"

"Oh yeah? How many names and phone numbers did she get so we can call them to turn out the vote? How many are wearing a campaign button? How many have a campaign sticker on their lunch cooler? How many have put up a hand-written leaflet on the bulletin board supporting the rank-and-file slate? How many are collecting money for you? How many are openly campaigning for you in the shop? These are some of the ways we judge how well we are doing."

## TIPS FOR INVOLVING MEMBERS IN YOUR CAMPAIGN

- 💡 **Hold regular meetings for your core group.** Keep the meetings business-like. Make room for discussion, but also make specific plans and assignments. Revisit your decisions, goals, and action plans at subsequent meetings to measure progress, adjust strategy, and hold the group accountable.
- 💡 **Don't confuse meetings with activity.** Meetings aren't campaign activity. They are to plan campaign activity.
- 💡 **Make member-to-member contact the heart of your campaign.** Talking to members one on one is the most powerful organizing tool there is. Petitions, social media, websites, and flyers are tools for getting people to talk member to member. They're no substitute.
- 💡 **Map your local.** Identify the key shops and potential leaders (if you know some). Then make a plan for getting those potential leaders more involved. If you don't know potential leaders in key workplaces, then make a plan for getting to know more members in those locations by leafleting, asking supporters if they have contacts there, or by being on the lookout at union meetings.

- 💡 **Ask supporters who can't come to meetings to help.** More people will help you where they work than will come to your meetings. Ask them to get involved.
- 💡 **Start small.** Don't overwhelm someone, especially when you are first trying to get them involved.
- 💡 **Be specific about how they can help.** Specific requests with a definite beginning and end are less intimidating. "Can you meet with me from 7:30 to 9 a.m. to pass out leaflets next Wednesday?" is much better than, "We need people who will help us out reach out to other members."
- 💡 **Ask people to do things they do well—especially at first.** For some people this might be talking to their co-workers, while for others it might be designing a logo or cooking food for a fundraiser. As their confidence grows, so will their participation. Explain why you are asking them to help. "You're respected by the members in your building, that's why I'm asking you to..."
- 💡 **Tell each person how their job fits in with the rest.** "Our goal is to reach members in every building with this leaflet in the next week. We have members covering A, B, and C locations. Can you cover D location sometime next week? I'll check in with you next Friday to see how it went."



**Respect members' abilities and boundaries.**

Try to get people to get more involved and take on more responsibility—but also respect and appreciate what they are willing to do. Not everyone will participate the same amount or in the same way.



**Remember to say thank you.**



**Don't give up on people.** If you think someone is a potential asset to your campaign, keep talking to them and asking them to get involved. But don't badger or guilt trip them. One "no" doesn't mean "never."

## Chapter 5 THE SLATE

**In this chapter:**

- The right stuff
- Alliances
- Vetting slate members
- Naming your slate
- Should I run a partial slate?
- Disagreements and egos

**W**ho's on your slate will be one of the most important decisions you make. Don't rush into it.

Build your campaign team first. Give yourself a chance to work with different people in your local, meet new members, and find out who has the right stuff to lead your union.