

ORGANIZING OUR COLLEAGUES

One conversation at a time

WHAT IS ORGANIZING?

Organizing is the process of empowering individuals through collective action. It is a 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, which take place during an office visit, should take no longer than 10 minutes, unless your colleague is the one who is engaging and making the conversation last longer.

Tip: You're welcome to try to make appointments or to try to meet with colleagues off campus if they're untenured and in a hostile department. However, what matters most is that you speak with your colleagues in the *assigned window of time*.

Don't be shy about visiting their office hours: 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 the union 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 IDEAR

INTRODUCTION

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.

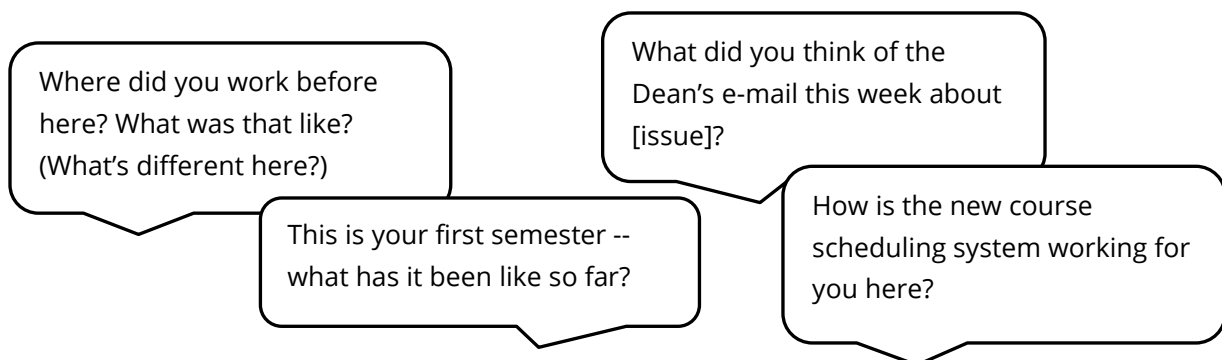
For example,

"I know you must be busy, but could I talk to you 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.

DISCOVERY

Start by asking open-ended questions, and attempt to uncover the issues that you colleague cares about. Listen very carefully, and guide your questioning in a direction that enables them to remember how they feel about an issue. 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*.

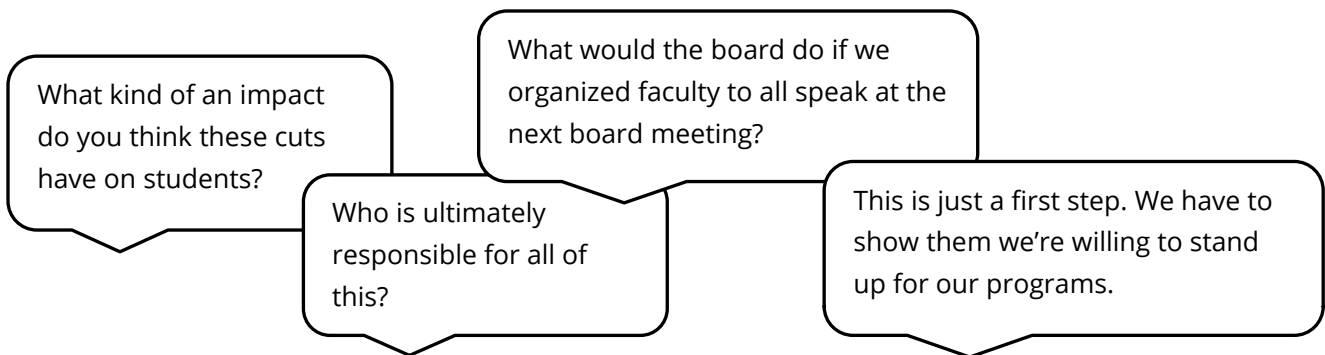


LISTEN FIRST. Ask open-ended questions and listen to what your colleagues have to say. What was their path to arriving at the University? What do they teach, and how many students do they have? What is their typical workload like in a given week? What kinds of university service to they perform? Do they 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 at the University?

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 'corrupt unions', 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 bargaining team, and makes it easier for them to secure a fair contract for faculty.

POLITELY ADDRESS SPECIFIC ASSERTIONS THAT YOU BELIEVE ARE INCORRECT. Deal with objections using "feel, felt, found"

FEEL, FELT, FOUND

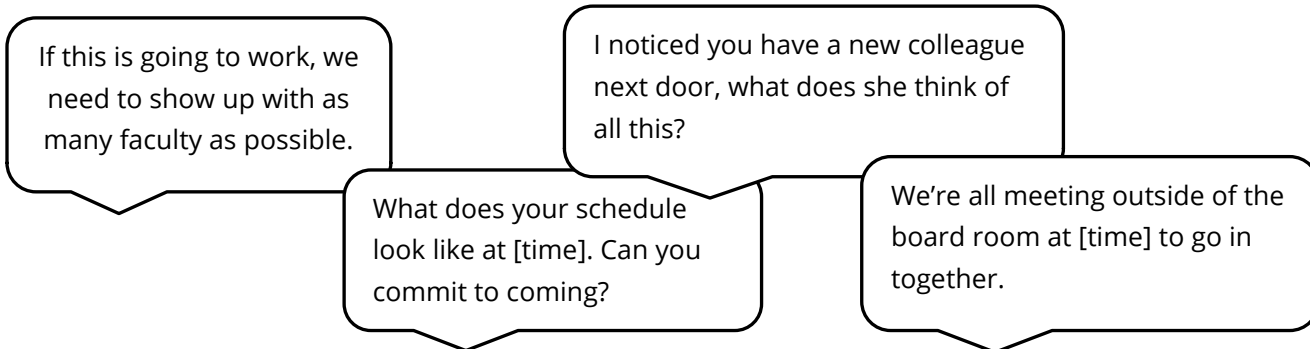
Example: I would like to become a member, but the dues are too expensive.

- **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.

BRING IT BACK TO DEMOCRATIC, 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 union change what happens? Explore these issues and relate them back to the importance and effectiveness of collective action.

ASK

Perhaps the most important part of an organizing conversation: 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.

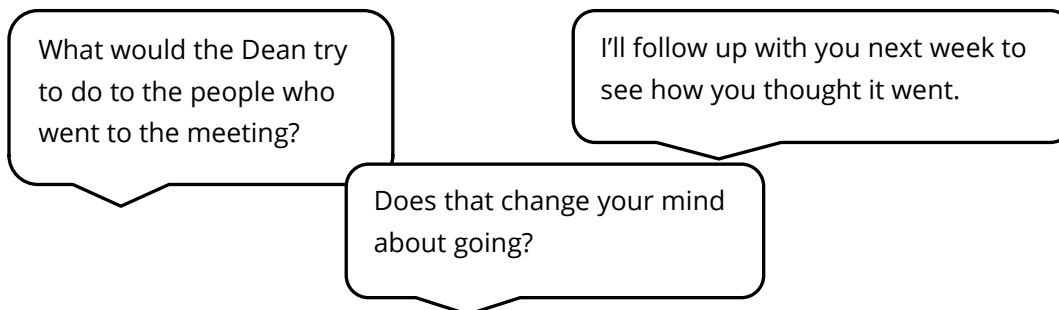


FIND OUT WHERE THEY STAND. If you don't feel like you have a sense of their support for the union, ask them what they think. Don't be afraid to be direct.

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. Then, review what she agreed to do and **make a plan for follow-up.**

MAKE AN ASSESSMENT. Assessments 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 the union?”

USE THE ASSESSMENT SCALE

Just like letter grades, points on the assessment scale represent a threshold that someone must cross. Different chapters use different kinds of assessment scales. Pick one that works for you, make sure everyone understands it, and stick with it consistently.

1	Active, Supportive
2	Clear Supportive
3	Undecided
4	Clear Opposed
5	Active, Opposed

0	Active, Supportive
1	Active, Supportive
2	Clear Supportive
3	Undecided
4	Clear opposed

CLOSE THE CONVERSATION

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. Can you think of any information that might help you make up your mind? I’ll check back with you later to see if you have any further questions.

2: If you assess 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.

COMPLETE ASSESSMENT FORM AND REPORT YOUR RATING TO THE ORGANIZER. Email or hand in your assessment within 72 hours of the office visit.



ON ASSESSMENTS

1. **It's better to err on the conservative side when assessing 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 union is doing, and I will become a member."
2. **Assessments are about more than just the overall score:** taking detailed notes can help whomever speaks to your colleague next prepare to have an efficient conversation that addresses their concerns.
3. **Going forward, assessments 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 union 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 assessment forms on to the organizer within 72 hours.** In order to efficiently assess your colleagues, we need to promptly and accurately record the outcomes of your conversations. We want to respect your time and your colleagues' time: clear records help us do that.

RESPONDING TO COMMON OBJECTIONS

FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING (UNION) CHAPTERS

Why should I join the union when I'll get exactly the same wages and benefits without joining?

Becoming a member means having a voice in our working conditions at [College/University]. It means that you believe that we can make change when we all work together. It also means that we can have a voice and a vote on our contract, and in our workplace democracy.

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

The reason that we've been able to make so much progress is *because* of the gains we've made in membership. Our contract is only as strong as the members who are standing behind it. Becoming a member means you have a voice in that process, and that you stand behind our contract.

I'd like to join the union, but not if that means supporting a strike.

We don't want to have to strike, either, which is why we're talking to people about membership. In fact, having more members is the best way to avoid the possibility of a strike. Having more members gives us strength at the bargaining table, which makes it easier for us to get a fair contract.

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

Note: There are many ways to respond to this objection. It is your job to decide if someone's objection is genuinely held, or if it is just one of a long list of reasons why someone won't join.

- 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 union, 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. In fact, the raise that we were able to negotiate last time more than makes up for the cost of becoming a member.

- I initially thought it was expensive, too, but 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.

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.

The union is for faculty who don't want to work hard or overvalue their research at the expense of teaching students.

Clear, consistent, and fair workload policies benefit faculty and students alike. Faculty can better plan and implement their work, including carving out time for advising students, refreshing their classes with new research, building in ways for students to engage in research, etc. Students benefit from all of these things.

The union complicates the relationship with the administrators and creates conflict.

Our collective bargaining agreement actually *simplifies* relationships between faculty and administrators and *resolves* conflict by clarifying our obligations to each other. We want to ensure that there is a fair set of rules that everyone agrees with, and a clear process to handle conflict.

We already have shared governance and a faculty assembly: why should I join the union?

Unlike our faculty assembly and the university senate, a collective bargaining agreement is a legally enforceable contract: it can only change if both parties mutually agree. In fact, a collective bargaining agreement can *strengthen* shared governance: many AAUP contracts have standard articles that protect the faculty's role in shared governance and the faculty's control over academic issues. We can bargain for such language in our contract.

A faculty union 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 union can advocate for spending priorities in line with our educational mission.

- Being affiliated with our state and national union 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.

I don't believe in unions. If I were unhappy here, I'd just leave.

Even if we disagree, I respect your views. Thank you for your time.

[If someone is firmly ideologically opposed to unions, it's probably better to move on to the next conversation. Eventually, we may come back to them, but for the time being, move on.]

FOR NON-COLLECTIVE BARGAINING (ADVOCACY) CHAPTERS

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 unions are 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, why should I pay extra to become a member?

The reason that we've been able to make so much progress is *because* of the gains we've made in membership. 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 assembly: why should I join the AAUP?

We started our chapter because faculty felt like our system of shared governance is broken. Joining the AAUP means being part of an organization that has stood up for real shared governance for over 100 years. And, the AAUP chapter is completely independent of the administration in a way these other bodies are not.

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'T'S

✓ DO'S	✗ DON'T'S
Listen twice as much as you talk	Start formulating your response before they've finished talking
Emphasize the the chapter is only as strong as its members	Be afraid to ask your colleague to join, volunteer, come to an event, or participate in an action.
Say "I don't know" if you don't have an answer	Get into heated arguments
Stick to the purpose of the visit, don't get sidetracked	Gossip or deal in personalities – stick to principles and issues
Point out that criticisms are a reason for them to get personally involved	Be afraid to ask them to become a member
Ask questions designed to involve the listener in thinking about and discussing the chapter	
Let them know you'll be back in a week or two to talk further	