

Museums & Unions: Q&A

Maro Elliott, MASS MoCA

Chelsea Farrell, UAW Local 2110

Daniel Morse, AFSCME Council 93

Rachel Quimby, EcoTarium



Organizing Power is a project providing arts and nonprofit workers with accessible tools for union organizing.

Volume 1 text written and compiled by Jessalyn Aaland and Ana Fox-Hodess with support from Nat Naylor

What is a union?

A union is a **group of workers** who have organized themselves for **mutual aid and collective action**.

It is a tool developed by and for working people, to provide them with a **collective voice** in their workplace and in broader society.

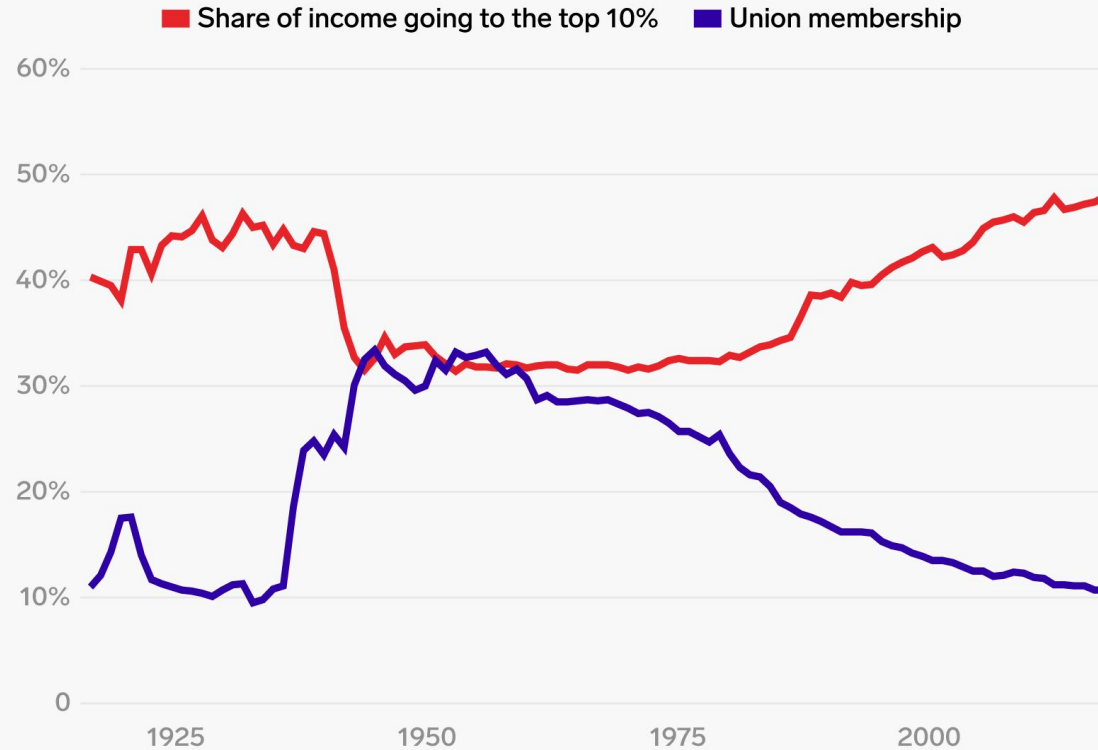
What are some of the benefits of forming a union?

The reason why workers need unions boils down to this: **employers have far more power than workers do**, especially if workers have to negotiate with them over wages and working conditions as individuals.

As a group, workers can negotiate with their employers with **greater chance of success** than they can as individuals.

Used properly, a union provides workers with a means to improve their lives in many ways.

As union membership declines, income inequality increases



Source: Reproduced from Figure A in Heidi Shierholz, *Working People Have Been Thwarted in Their Efforts to Bargain for Better Wages by Attacks on Unions*, Economic Policy Institute, August 2019.

Steps to forming a union

- First: Talk to your co-workers
- Second: Contact a union organizer
- Third: Form an organizing committee
- Fourth: Create your campaign
- Fifth: Build majority support
- Sixth: Sign-up majority on union cards
- Seventh: Win the election
- Eighth: Negotiate a contract

Who is *ineligible*

- **Confidential Employees** who assist and act in a confidential capacity to the management personnel making and implementing labor relations policies.
- **Supervisors** who use independent judgment to make or recommend hiring decisions, including hiring, promoting, transferring, rewarding and terminating employees.
- **Managers** who make, execute and exercise independent judgment about management policies.
- **Independent contractors** are also excluded from the bargaining unit.

First: Talk to your co-workers

- **Find co-workers you trust.**
- Talk to them about what changes you would like to see made and why you think you might need help from a union.
- **Determine your top issues.**
- Familiarize yourself with general information about unions and union history (including some popular myths about unions).

Second: Contact a union organizer

- Contacting a union organizer is legally protected.
- Figure out which union is right for you. (Examples on next slide.)

Examples of unions representing nonprofit workers

United Auto Workers (UAW)

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Office & Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)

Third: Form an organizing committee (1/2)

- After determining that support for a union exists around key workplace issues, **build a committee of coworkers that is representative of your workplace.**
- Your co-workers from the first step will likely form the core of an organizing committee.
- Ideally, the workers on your committee should comprise at **least 10 percent of the workforce, represent all major departments, and reflect the greatest possible diversity in the workforce** (consider race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, ability/disability, job levels, length of employment, etc.).

Third: Form an organizing committee (2/2)

- Compile basic information about the workplace.
- **Workplace structure:** departments, work areas, jobs, shifts
- **Employee information:** name, address, phone, personal (non-work) email, typical work hours, job title, and department for each eligible worker (employee list)

Fourth: Create your campaign

- **Research** wages, benefits, and other workplace issues.
- Develop a **program of union demands** (improvements) and a strategy for the union election campaign.
- Create **systems for communicating** with workers.
- Make sure that tasks are being divided up reasonably between members of the organizing committee.

Fifth: Build majority support

- Through **one-on-one discussions** with your colleagues, evaluate the support that exists for a union around your key issues.
 - Consider restricting your discussions to breaks in non-working locations.
- Most employers will launch their campaigns against your union at this stage, if they are not tipped off earlier.
 - Your union organizer can help you get ready to deal with attacks and make sure you are legally protected.

Sixth: Sign up majority on union cards

- Your co-workers are asked to join the union and support the union program by **signing membership cards**, and a majority will need to sign.
 - This "card campaign" should proceed quickly once begun.

Seventh: Win the election

- If a majority of your co-workers sign cards supporting the union, your employer may voluntarily recognize the workers' demands to organize without an election.
- However, they may require an election to take place.
- If this is the case, **the signed cards are used to petition the state or federal labor board** to hold an election.
- **If the union wins, the employer must recognize and bargain with the union.**

Eighth: Negotiate a contract

- The goal of the campaign is a union contract (the document the union and the employer negotiate and sign, covering everything from wages to how disputes will be handled).
- Workers must be mobilized to support the union's contract demands (decided by you and your co-workers) and pressure the employer to meet them.
- After the contract is ratified (voted to be accepted by the majority of union members), management will not be able to change the terms of the contract without negotiating first.

Recommendations for management

- Voluntarily recognize your workers' desire to form a union, as did Printed Matter and Anthology Film Archive.
- Don't waste time and money on union busting and hiring anti-union legal teams.

MFA Boston Strike (November 17, 2021)



A tuba emblazoned with “MFA UNION” was spotted on the picket line at today’s demonstration at MFA Boston (all images by and courtesy Rosemary Taylor) via *Hyperallergic*

Q&A

Arts and culture unions to follow and support

@afaunion

@aic_wu

@art_workers_union

@bamunion

@bfsunion

@bkmuseumunion

@blueschoolunion

@bmaunion

@cmaunion

@flcunion

@guggenheimmuseumunion_2110

@hcpunion

@iammam_union

@maf_union

@mainepmaunion

@massmocaunion

@mfaunion

@moca_union

@momalocal2110

@ncmunion

@newmuseumunion

@newyorkerunion

@pennmuseumworkersunited

@pma_union

@printedmatterunion

@ps1union

@sfmomaunion

@siasunion

@stowecenterunion

@tenementmuseum_union

@umwpgh

@unionizecba

@walkerworkerunion

@whitneymuseumunion

Resources

[ORGANIZING POWER VOLUME 2 RESOURCES](#) (includes PDFs of Volumes 1 & 2)

[Unionization & Worker Compensation in Museums](#), YouTube, July 2020

[We Still Can't Eat Prestige](#), YouTube, November 2021

[Museum Workers Speak](#): A collective of activist museum workers interrogating the relationship between museums' stated commitments to social value and their internal labor practices

[Cultural Workers Education Center](#): Culture Workers Education Center is a platform for people to gather, learn, and organize to address urgent issues such as living wages, labor rights, industry policy, and equity in the cultural workplace.

[Labor Education Action Resource Network](#) (LEARN) - Rutgers University

Contact information

Maro Elliott, MASS MoCA, maro.elliott@gmail.com

Chelsea Farrell, UAW Local 2110, chelseafarrell@2110uaw.org

Daniel Morse, AFSCME Council 93, dmorse@afscme93.org

Rachel Quimby, EcoTarium, rbquimby@gmail.com