

## AFL-CIO Convention Resolution Means More Organizing

By Howard M. Bloom and Patrick L. Egan

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At the recent AFL-CIO Convention, delegates passed Resolution 1, which emphasizes three “building blocks” to successful union organizing:

- Devoting at least 30 percent of every union’s budget to organizing.
- Using more of the unions’ existing influence, such as using current collective bargaining agreements to secure organizing rights at other facilities of the same employer.
- Changing the environment for organizing by increasing outreach efforts to community, civil rights and religious allies in demanding that employers obey labor laws.

These “building blocks” mean increased aggressive organizing is on the horizon, so do some building of your own today – build positive employee relations.

### AFL-CIO Convention Continues Organizing Focus

At its annual meeting, the AFL-CIO reaffirmed that its primary focus remains organizing new members. The Executive Council adopted a national organizing plan to further the federation’s goal of adding one million new members a year. The plan enlists member unions in “partnership agreements”. Features of the plan include federation assistance to affiliated unions:

- to help them reach a goal of using 30% of their resources on organizing
- with “capacity assessment and capacity building”, including training and recruiting organizers through the AFL-CIO’s Organizing Institute and its Union Summer Program which involves college students in organizing, and facilitating the use of current members as volunteer member-organizers
- to identify organizing opportunities in industries and sectors
- to develop strategic research, campaign communications, community participation and political support in organizing efforts

The thrust of the AFL-CIO’s strategy is to “organize smarter”. The federation will help member unions to focus their resources in areas where they may stand the greater chance of success, and to leverage and build upon existing collective bargaining or community relationships.

The federation is leading by example: it currently spends 22 - 24% of its budget on organizing as it moves towards its own 30% goal. In 2001, 440,000 new members joined AFL-CIO affiliated unions, although about the same number of members were lost through layoffs during the recent recession. The federation also trained 25 new full-time organizers in the last two months alone.

Joint organizing strategies continue to be an element of the AFL-CIO’s drive for new members. Four unions—the Laborers, the Operating Engineers, the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters and the Teamsters—are working with the federation to organize the natural gas pipeline construction industry. These cooperative efforts provide coordinated attacks on employers and lessen the use of union resources on internecine warfare.

Connections between politics and organizing remain an essential part of the organizing movement. Politicians will continue to be enlisted to speak in behalf of specific union organizing campaigns.

The AFL-CIO will continue its push to gain representation of employees through means other than the processes of the National Labor Relations Board and the National Mediation Board which the federation considers “burdensome and unfair”. The “burdensome and unfair” procedure at the NLRB, for example, requires that the petitioning union demonstrate by signed authorization cards that 30% of the employees support representation and secure the votes of the majority of employees that vote in an NLRB election.

The AFL-CIO reported that 14 unions saw membership growth in 2001, including American Federation

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of Teachers (68,542), the Service Employees (30,600), the Fire Fighters (26,250), the Laborers (17,683), the Teamsters (15,444), the United Transport Workers (15,083), the Electrical Workers (12, 771), and the Office and Professional Employees (11,061). Industrial unions lead those organizations that lost members last year, including the Steelworkers (25,266), the Auto Workers (23,270), the Graphics Communications Union (21,966), the Machinists (12,979), the Food and Commercial Workers (10,278), the Mine Workers (10,250) and the Musicians (10,200).

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