

VI: STEWARD COMMITTEES

Many AFSCME locals have a Steward Committee that meets regularly (once a month is ideal). Often, either the Vice President or the Chief Steward chairs the Steward Committee. By providing a place where stewards can work together on grievances, problems and workplace issues, this committee can help develop a strong team of stewards, build the confidence of new stewards, and sharpen the skills stewards need to represent members and build stronger local unions.

You can use your committee meetings to discuss current and potential grievances, learn what's happening at different worksites in the local, report on potential problems, and develop problem-solving strategies and action plans.

Eight Great Ideas for Steward Committee Meetings

1. The Steward's Job

Pose a question such as "What is the biggest problem a steward faces?" This can generate discussion of the various steward roles.

2. Review Current Grievances

Stewards can examine grievances, discuss different approaches, strategize on how to present a case, etc. In addition, stewards can discuss alternative problem-solving methods that a) may be more effective in solving the problem; and b) involve more members (the source of the union's strength) in addressing the problem.

3. Contract Interpretation

Spend some time at each meeting reviewing, interpreting and discussing a specific section of the contract.

4. Grievance Writing

Provide a sample grievance situation and discuss the contract violation and write up a grievance. Discuss various approaches.

5. Grievance Presentation

Provide a sample grievance situation and prepare your arguments. Role-play the presentation. Follow the role play with general discussion of what went well and what could have been done differently.

6. Signing Up New Members

Conduct a meeting on ways to sign up new members. Activities can include establishing an organizing goal for a specific time period (e.g., sign up 20 new members in the next 60 days), mapping a particular

workplace assigning specific stewards to talk to specific workers or role-playing a one-on-one meeting between a steward and a non-member.

7. Preparing for Contract Negotiations

Draw on your experience and discuss areas in the agreement that need changes or improvements. In addition to reviewing the contract, examine the grievance file and define particular problem areas. Pass the information on to the local's bargaining committee. (Stewards can also help the bargaining committee administer surveys on what the members would like to see in the next contract.)

8. After Contract Ratification

As soon as a new contract has been ratified, have the bargaining committee review any changes and provide stewards the opportunity to ask any questions you may have about new contract language.



Bright Ideas

The Role of the Steward Committee in Mobilizing Members

Steward committees can be used in a number of ways to carry out the steward's primary role — activating the source of the union's power, the membership, to solve workplace problems and build a stronger local.

- Discuss and analyze current workplace issues and problems to determine if any would make a good “organizing issue” — one where the steward can involve members to take action (see Pages 10-11 for some guidelines on what makes a good issue).
- Develop strategies and an action plan that involve all affected employees (see Appendix E, Page 62).
- Develop Member Action Teams (see Pages 37-38) that can be used to communicate with employees and encourage their participation.