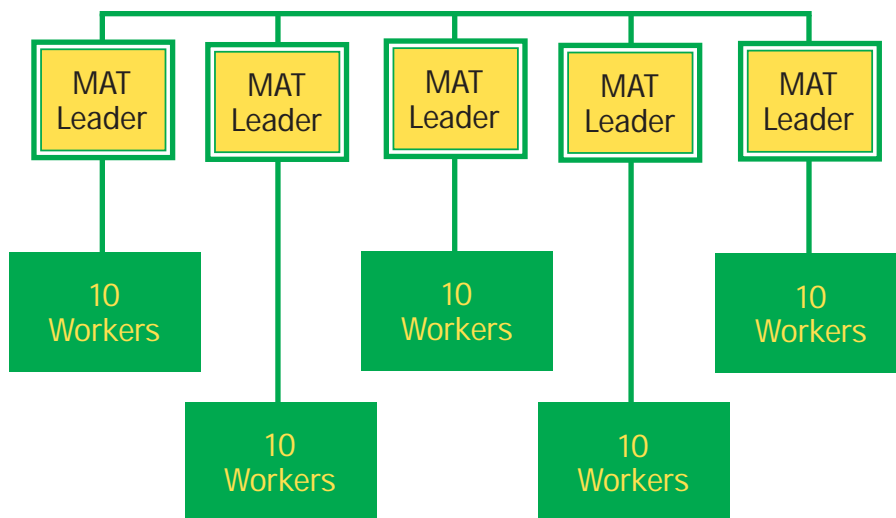


VII: MEMBER ACTION TEAMS, A STEWARD SYSTEM, AND THE CHIEF STEWARD

Member Action Teams

More and more AFSCME locals are developing Member Action Teams (MATs) in the workplaces they represent. Simply put, a MAT is a tool that locals can use to communicate with workers and mobilize workers into action around issues they care about. Each MAT consists of a MAT leader who is responsible for communicating and working with approximately 10 workers on a regular basis.

MAT Structure



In the diagram above, one or two of the MAT Leaders would also be stewards and be responsible for handling grievances. As locals develop their Member Action Teams, they can also develop MAT captains who coordinate the activities of MAT leaders and their teams.

Responsibilities of a MAT Leader

- Work with approximately 10 co-workers in his/her department (less or more depending on the size of the department or worksite).
- Sign up and involve members in union activities in their department, especially their immediate workplace.
- Work together with local officers and MAT captains on tasks that help build a stronger union.
- Have regular one-on-one conversations with co-workers and listen to their concerns and issues.
- Explain to co-workers why the union needs everyone involved and working together to solve problems.
- Help mobilize members when action is needed on an issue or workplace problem.
- Distribute union newsletters, flyers, surveys and other information.
- Support union goals, values and principles.

When locals implement this type of structure, one basic guideline to follow is this: MAT leaders don't necessarily have to be stewards. But all stewards should be MAT leaders.

Steward System

It is important to have a steward system in your local, one that ensures that all bargaining unit members are represented by a steward — and that all members know who their steward is.

While there is no one right way to set up a steward system, a general guideline is that stewards can represent anywhere from 25-50 workers and do an excellent job. Once the ratio becomes much higher than one steward for every 50 employees, the job becomes more difficult in your local.

The structure will depend on several factors — the number of workers in the bargaining unit; geography (is the local concentrated in one building or spread out across a city or county?); working hours (does your workplace operate five days a week with regular eight-hour days, or do you work in an institution that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week?), and so on.

A steward structure can be set up by floor, by department, by shift or by any reasonable combination of these.

Chief Steward

The chief steward is usually a member who has been active as a steward for a number of years. He or she has experience handling grievances and resolving workplace problems and issues. The chief steward is thoroughly familiar with the contract, work rules, and management policies and procedures. The chief steward also knows the players — the various managers and supervisors that stewards will be dealing with.

Some locals have the chief steward handle grievances once they reach a particular step in the grievance procedure. Some local union constitutions call for the vice president to be the chief steward as well. Larger locals may have more than one chief steward, each of whom is responsible for a number of stewards in a particular institution, agency or large department.





Bright Ideas ***Chief Steward Duties***

- Being a resource for other stewards, lending his/her experience, knowledge and expertise to resolving grievances and problems.
- Being an educator and mentor of new stewards in such areas as interpreting contract language or passing on grievance-handling skills — all the while helping them learn the ropes and gain confidence as stewards.
- Maintaining the grievance files for the local so that information is kept available in one central location.
- Chairing the regular meetings of the steward committee (see Section VI, Page 35).