Report of the Equity Advisory Panel

Action items for building a more equitable union

2018
Roles and Responsibilities of the Equity Advisory Panel

The Equity Advisory Panel will act as an accountability body for the equity audit recommendations for the national union. The panel will oversee the implementation of the recommendations, develop new recommendations and request research as necessary.

In addition, panel members commit to taking on the additional role of implementing recommendations and championing additional actions directly as required. Decisions on direction, resources and process for implementation will be made in cooperation with the Regional Directors, Québec Director, Human Rights Director and Assistant to the National President.

The Equity Advisory Panel will meet twice a year by phone or in person.

The Equity Advisory Panel is composed of:
- Five National Executive Board members: Western Regional Director, Ontario Regional Director, Québec Director, Atlantic Regional Director and the Aboriginal and Workers of Colour Representative
- Six equity standing committee representatives as elected by the equity standing committees

The Equity Advisory Panel is supported by:
- Assistant to the National President responsible for the Human Rights department
- Director of the Human Rights Department

The action items identified below are the result of the first meeting of the Panel, and their speedy implementation will support the continuous advancement of Unifor’s equity-related goals.

Principles and Recommendations for Taking Unifor’s Equity Work to the Next Level

Guiding Principles and Continuous Activities

- Continue to provide national union resources to human rights related departments to ensure the work of the equity audit continues into the next phase. Make a commitment to meaningful discussion around requests for funding or other resources to ensure the greatest chance of success for this initiative.

- Continue to highlight equity pages on national and local union websites. Continue to ensure pages are kept up to date.

- Continue to open events with Indigenous land acknowledgement and welcome

- Continue to be a politically active union and maintain a strong record of ally ship with members and their communities.

Develop the tools and the training to change the culture of the national union to improve equity and inclusion, recognizing that this will require resources and new ideas.
Local Union Efforts

The Human Rights Department will work with local unions to implement the processes below.

- Employ bargaining surveys prior to opening collective bargaining. Include questions on demographics and bargaining priorities; the national union will facilitate the development of this tool.

- Facilitate understanding of local union and bargaining unit materials for our members who do not speak English or French fluently. Bargain employer responsibility to pay for translation services on these items and speak directly with members to find out what language would be most beneficial.

- Local unions work in solidarity with communities and each other to create a culture of sharing resources.

The Role of Collective Bargaining

- Develop model union leave language that is strong, enforceable, and ensures activists from equity seeking groups are not systematically barred from attaining that leave.

- Treat meeting new members as an obligation and negotiate time to meet with, welcome, learn about and inform new Unifor members as they are hired into the workplace.

- Bargain employment equity language and develop tools to remove barriers in order to enable local unions to discuss employment equity with employers and hold employers accountable to develop more equitable hiring practices and create workplaces that are more diverse.

- Bargain Community Benefit Agreements to partner directly with community groups in order to increase equity representation in hiring, to reflect the diverse communities that Unifor members live and work in.

Celebrating Unifor Members’ Diversity

- Be conscious of who we are, who Unifor members are and organize events accordingly, including food and cultural representation.

- Conduct an internal awareness campaign to highlight and profile workers and activists who represent diverse contingencies within the union.

- Develop a system to identify activists and develop networks in order to connect with locals, national staff and regional councils, gather data and provide tools to increase diversity in representation at the local level. Review the system after one year to improve upon structure and ensure continuous advancement towards Unifor’s equity related goals.
Union Structure

- Adjust and strengthen local equity standing committee structures by expanding committees to the area level when there is not enough interest or membership at a specific local union.

- Clarify the role of equity standing committees at local, area, Regional/Québec council levels to ensure standing committee representatives are more engaged in the activities of their region and work closely with the regional and Québec leadership to provide input into decision making.

- National Executive Board develop a system, including a formula outlining who is responsible for funding, to ensure the participation of standing committee members and regional council meetings, Canada council and conventions.

- Provide a space for all five equity committees to meet together every three years after elections to:
  - Discuss the intersectional nature of the issues that are advocated for by each group to build solidarity in advocating for issues and policy change affecting specific groups as well;
  - Develop action plans and goals; and
  - Coordinate campaigns and advocacy work.

Government Regulation and Legislation

- Advocate that provincial and territorial governments institute employment equity legislation. Ensure that legislation is enforceable and not voluntary.

- Empower national staff and local unions representing units in federally regulated sectors to work with employers to access and analyse employment equity data. Unifor staff, locals and workplace representatives will be active in engaging in all steps of the employment equity process, including enforcement of employer obligations. Develop training module or information seminar to facilitate this process.

- Develop and implement a system to ensure regional equity standing committees and equity caucuses should be provided opportunity to bring an equity lens to review all equity related workplace legislation that impacts representation and inclusivity.

- Develop a policy position on Community Benefit Agreements in infrastructure and other large government projects to ensure government spending works for workers. Empower advocates and activists to use this policy framework.
Building on the Local Union Task Force

- Mentorship Program: reinforce efforts to build a focus on diversity of participants, the mentors and mentees, in the union’s mentorship program.
- New Member Kit: Build on current efforts to include diversity and equity related materials in the new member kit by:
  - Highlighting the importance of diversity to our union; and
  - Reinforcing intentional, informal mentorship because mentoring and investing in activists builds the future of our union; and
  - Prioritizing diversity in successors who receive mentorship from the very beginning of their union life.

Find the Unifor New Member Kit online at unifor.org/yourunion

National Union Efforts

- Develop and implement an employment equity and welcoming workplace framework that will require the national union to:
  - Engage in proactive practices to increase representation of six specific equity seeking groups on staff;
    - Report annually to the equity advisory panel on the diversity of new hires and the overall diversity of national staff; and
    - Eventual dissemination of framework to local unions for implementation at the local level.
- Further remove barriers to diverse representation at conventions, councils and meetings at the national and regional levels by engaging in a serious discussion about funding for opportunities to attend by people from equity seeking groups.
- Organize a president’s summit to discuss the importance of equity and diversity in our union and the methods for proactively becoming a more representative local union.
- Develop a tool to assist local unions in collecting and recording membership demographics.
- Ensure local union leaders and workplace representatives attend the mandatory human rights training coordinated by the Education Department. This training should strive to be more easily accessible and less time and resource intensive. The union must also develop an accountability mechanism to monitor local union participation in human rights training.
- Engage in discussion around the importance of translation including:
Employer responsibility to ensure workers understand the collective agreement, including translation;

Translation of national union materials related to the importance of equity and inclusion as a start; and

Consider language, vision impairment and auditory impairment where applicable

- Develop training module for national staff to:
  - Focus on raising awareness of equity related issues and solutions, including equity-related bargaining language; and
  - ensure they understand their role in ensuring local unions are abiding by Unifor’s constitution, including attending mandatory human rights training.

- The national union should source best practices related to building equity and diversity from jurisdictions around the world.

- Work to dismantle barriers to participation for people with disabilities by appointing an accessibility coordinator for councils and conventions well in advance of the meeting dates. Develop a job description and process for appointment of an accessibility coordinator.

- Conduct an equity audit of the union’s collective agreements focusing on specific equity related items such as parental leave top-up, human rights language and anti-harassment language.

- Develop a process to address harassment between one member or staff person and another within the union.

Other Items for Consideration

Overall, the clear message coming from the Equity Advisory Panel was it’s time to take equity work and a commitment from Unifor to the next stage by embedding that work at every level of the union. There was a recognition that many members are interested in realizing the union’s equity goals, but felt that the necessary tools or resources are lacking.

There were concerns from the Panel about the union’s informal mentorship structures, and how continually choosing people who are not from equity-seeking groups for leadership development further creates barriers.

There was also a recognition of the progress that Unifor has made to date. The union has built structures and systems such as the equity standing committees, local equity representatives, and campaigns that have begun the work of improving equity within Unifor.

Building on those structures, the recommendations from the Equity Advisory Panel and the sustained work of the panel, the union will move closer to the goals that members have set.

The Panel recognized that, moving forward, efforts and out-of-the-box ideas must come from members, local union, staff and all activists in order to ensure success and progressive change.
Sample Equity Survey Sheet
Include members in all applicable categories.

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<th>Transgender or gender non-binary</th>
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A union for everyone.