

Unifor's Community Chapters

A guide for staff and local unions



Unifor has a new way
to help working people
improve their lives
through collective
action.



unifor
Community Chapters

Unifor's 
Community
Chapters

are a new tool
for building
our communities,
our union and
our power as
working people.

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Introduction

Unifor has a new tool to help working people build power and improve their economic and social conditions through collective action: community chapters.

Community chapters are a form of union membership that reaches out to workers who are generally excluded from the benefits of belonging to a union. Potential groups include people in workplaces where organizing campaigns have not yet succeeded in forming a bargaining unit, workers in precarious jobs, unemployed workers, working students and any other group of workers hoping to improve their economic and social conditions.

In order open this form of membership to potential members, the national union will:

- Engage with groups who show an interest in starting a community chapter
- Establish a simple dues collection process to allow community chapters to pool their resources
- Connect members in community chapters to the general campaign, advocacy and education activities of the union
- Develop group benefits and services offered to members of community chapters

As staff and local union leadership, you may have to answer questions and assist groups of workers who want to join the union as part of this new project. You will find many answers in this guide, and your role will be to assist these groups to organize their chapter and be connected with your local union. You should notify the national organizing department when a new project gets underway.

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Community chapters goals

- Allow more workers to enjoy the benefits of full union membership and continue supporting workers attempting to organize their workplaces
- Show to all workers in Canada that Unifor is working to advance the collective interest of the entire working class, not just members in existing bargaining units
- Find new ways of organizing and gaining positive change while facing increasingly precarious and unstable working conditions
- Open up new opportunities for union membership and activism to workers who traditionally do not have access to the benefits of a union
- Build collective power for workers in the union and in communities across Canada



Community chapters: a new way to build collective power

While the Canadian economy is growing, working people are not gaining the benefits of economic progress we deserve. More and more Canadians are falling behind. Wages are stagnant, personal debt is on the rise, unemployment is not going away and more and more working people are left with precarious and unstable jobs - especially young people.

Historically, working people have worked together to improve their workplace and standards of living through union membership. But today, many working people do not have access to union representation and benefits, even if they want them. This is due to smaller workplaces, hostile labour laws, powerful employer resistance and the tendency to give more importance to profit over people.

Unifor's community chapters are a new form of union membership that reaches out to groups of workers that are generally excluded from union membership.

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The community chapter model is a good way to create a formal alliance between people to build solidarity and strength.

Why start a community chapter

Starting a chapter can be a way to kick start a strategy to lead to a traditional organizing drive with the goal of securing a collective agreement for a group of workers. For groups in which members have different workplaces, the community chapter model is a good way to create a formal alliance between people to build solidarity and strength.

Local unions may be interested in hosting a community chapter because:

- You want to extend membership in your local to a group of workers in the same workplace or sector, but are not members of a union
- You know a group of contractors who could benefit from being associated with your local
- You have the ability to reach out to a group of non-unionized workers in your sector
- You want to diversify and expand your membership
- You want to help redefine how people see and understand unions
- You want to strengthen ties with groups in your community

Forming a community chapter

This section provides you with an overview of the steps required to form a community chapter.

Establishing contact

If a local union is interested in reaching out to potential groups who could form a community chapter, the first step is to establish contact with the national union's organizing department to discuss details and a way forward.

Consulting your membership

A local union should plan to discuss the possibility of forming a community chapter at a membership meeting, and encourage members to share ideas on potential groups of members who might have an interest in being organized in a chapter.

Reaching out to potential groups

A local union should identify groups of people who represent a natural extension of their own membership. They could be workers in a connected workplace who are not organized, support staff who work in contract or part-time positions, temporary workers or workers in the broader community who are engaged in a common campaign. The local will need to establish contact with this group, and discuss the possibilities of forming a community chapter.

Draft a plan of action

All community chapters must draft a strategy for how they plan to use the collective power of the union to win victories from employers, governments, or other campaign targets. A local union's role is to assist members in the community chapter and work with the national organizing department to draft this plan. The plan must include a preliminary list of members, goals, strategies, timelines and a draft budget.

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Formalizing the chapter

In order to operate, a Unifor community chapter must be officially recognized. In the case of a chapter hosted by a local union, this requires a local union to amend its bylaws to include membership in a community chapter as part of your own membership. Template language can be found at the end of this guide. It is up to the discretion of a local union whether members in community chapters can have a seat on the local's executive. In the case of chapters that are national in scope, the National Executive Board must review and approve the chapter and then grant a national charter. The chapter must also adopt bylaws and elect an executive.

Remitting Dues

To start collecting dues from members in a community chapter, the national union will require the official list of members. The chapter will need to indicate how much each member will be paying in dues, as per the chapter's bylaws. The national union will require financial information from members, such as credit card or bank account information, to begin quarterly dues payments following a chapter's approval. The national union will remit the totality of the chapter's dues to the local union. The local union's role will be to assist the chapter with administering its funds and ensuring that they go towards the implementation of the plan of action.

Taking action!

With all this done, your local union will now be ready to move into the action phase and assist the chapter to implement its plan of action. Your role will be to connect the work of your members in community chapters to the activities of your local union and to the union more generally, and vice-versa.

What is required from a local union

As a local union hosting a community chapter, you will be expected to support the chapter in the following ways:

- To assist the community chapter with administering its dues towards the implementation of its action plan
- To welcome the community chapter as members of your local, and to involve it in the activities of your local
- To support the work of the community chapter by offering support, participation in its events and guidance in achieving its goals
- To welcome members in community chapters as part of your delegation to the national convention, Canadian Council and industry council meetings
- To find ways to keep members in the community chapter involved in the activities of the local union and to connect them to the activities of the national union
- To update the national organizing department about ongoing work and needs for members in the community chapter



Find ways to keep members in the community chapter involved in the activities of the local union.

Services

The services offered to community chapters are currently in development. They will fall into three categories of services and benefits:

Information and Resources

The national union will work to develop an information tool providing a province-by-province overview of rights in the workplace. This will include comparisons of minimum wages across the country, what you can and can't do when organizing your workplace, etc. The national union is developing quick reference guides on labour rights, advocacy, organizing and campaigns of interest to members in community chapters.



Benefits will include an opt-in package for chapter members, financial services and group discounts.

Package of union benefits

The national union will secure an accessible benefits package allowing members in community chapters to opt-in to a coverage plan. Details will be available at Unifor.org/CommunityChapters. The national union will also seek out discounted credit cards, financial services and other discount opportunities.

Networking and Training

The national union will work to connect members in community chapters with education opportunities when available. The national union will also attempt to develop an education program and to connect the work of the chapter to the general work and activities of the union.

Dues

In forming a chapter, members will have committed to membership for at least one full calendar year. As such, they will pay dues to the union on a quarterly basis. The full amount of your collective dues will be made available for the activities of your community chapter and your plan of action. The administrative cost of ensuring dues collection and distribution will be assumed by the national union.

Minimum dues

Each community chapter will establish its own dues, which will return to the chapter for the advancement of its action plan. The minimum dues are set at \$5 per month for non-waged members and \$10 per month for waged members. A chapter could decide to set its dues higher than the minimum if they want.

Collecting and remitting dues

In the case of community chapters that are national in scope, the national union will collect dues from members. The national union will then make those dues available to the community chapter for the implementation of their plan of action.

In the case of community chapters that are associated with an existing local union, the national union will arrange to collect dues from members, after receiving a list from the chapter. The national union will then remit those dues to the local union on a quarterly basis. The local union will assist the chapter with its financial activities and will ensure that the dues are used for the implementation of its plan of action.



The full amount of your collective dues will be made available for the activities of your community chapter and its plan of action.

Automatic collection

The national union will set up automatic dues collection with each member in a community chapter. Here's how:

- Each member will provide bank account information or credit card information for automatic transfers to be collected.
- The National union will then proceed with automatic transfers on a set date every three months.

Alternative payment arrangements can be made in individual cases where regular automatic collection is not an option.

Membership database

An official list of members will be established when:

- An approved community chapter has remitted an official list of dues-paying members and all their appropriate financial information. This list will include the dues amount set by the chapter members.
- The National office has processed a first dues payment with each member.

At that point, the list of members will be entered into the regular membership database with all the appropriate information and each member will remain tagged as community chapter members.

Other resources

- Article 5 (Membership), Unifor Constitution
- “Broadening Union Citizenship: Unifor’s Members in Community Chapters” Policy
- “New Union Organizing Policy”
- Template for a community chapter Plan Of Action
- Visit www.Unifor.org/CommunityChapters

Contact us

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