

Unifor's Community Chapters

A handbook for potential members



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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Letter from the President

Dear friend,

Unifor, our new union, was formed to be a fighting force on behalf of all working people. To be this force, we will address and campaign on issues important to people in the workplace, to communities and to the broader public. That is why we have launched a new form of union membership that adapts traditional organizing models to the new realities of work in Canada.

Precarious workers, contract workers, part time workers, many of them young people, can come together as a Unifor community chapter. They can pool their resources to work on a project that affects their reality: whether ensuring respect of their rights in the workplace, health and safety issues, or economic justice for members of their community.

With this unique and important project, more people can benefit from the protection and strength of a labour union. Community chapters are a new tool for building our communities, our union and our power as working people.

Community chapters are an exciting new initiative and will be built over time, starting with pilot projects and eventually welcoming many new chapters and members. We hope that you will join us for this exciting project, and that together we can build power for all working people.

In solidarity,

Jerry Dias, National President

“We have launched a new form of union membership that adapts traditional organizing models to the new realities of work in Canada.”



How to use this handbook

Reading this handbook is the first step to forming a community chapter with Unifor. It will give you an overview of how community chapters work, what is required to form one and what it means for you and your community.

Workers who are self-employed, freelance, contract or have various precarious working conditions can now work together to form a community chapter.



Community chapters are based on one important principle: we're stronger when we work together. Forming a chapter is more than just signing up, as an individual, to join the union. It means that you are ready to find people who are in a situation similar to yours and to work with them to achieve your goals. So first things first: you need a team.

Community chapters aim to reach out to workers in non-traditionally organized workplaces and sectors. For instance, workers who are self-employed, freelance, contract or have various precarious working conditions can now work together to form a community chapter. To form a chapter, these workers must have something in common: working conditions, a social-economic situation, the need to be recognized by their employer, basic rights concerns, etc.

Once you have a team and a common issue, then you are ready to start the process of forming a new chapter. If you already have contact with a Unifor local union that might be interested in hosting your chapter, that's great. If you don't, we can help you to find one.

Our goal is to allow as many people as possible to be members of our union. In some cases, community chapters will be one strategic step in the process of forming a new bargaining unit and securing a collective agreement. In other cases, the community chapter may be an end-goal in itself by giving a collective voice to workers who did not have one before.

In all cases, community chapters will allow members to work together to achieve their goals, and to build power by doing it.

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 aims to reach out to groups of workers that are generally excluded from union membership.

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.

You may be interested in forming a community chapter if:

- You want to improve the working conditions in your workplace
- You are a precarious, contract, freelance or self-employed worker or any other kind of worker that is traditionally excluded from collective bargaining

Today, many working people do not have access to union representation and benefits.



Your members must share a common interest or situation, based in a workplace, a community or an interest.

- You are unemployed and know other people in the same situation who want to improve their conditions of work and life
- You want to help redefine how people see and understand unions
- You think unions should work to defend the rights of all working people
- You think we're stronger when we work together

Requirements

Starting a Community chapter will provide your group with a new structure to advance your fight for economic and social justice in your workplace and community. The basic requirements are:

Commonality: Your members must share a common interest or situation that creates the potential for sustained shared activity. This commonality can be based in a workplace, a community or an interest.

Critical mass: Your community chapter must show the commitment of a sufficient number of dedicated and active members. Critical mass is evaluated according to the number of potential members in your group.

Plan of action: Your community chapter must put together a plan to outline the actions that you will take together to improve your work or life conditions.

Union principles: Your community chapter members must support the founding principles of Unifor and adhere to the Unifor Constitution.

Forming a community chapter

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

Inquire

If you are reading this manual, it is likely that you have already accomplished this first step, which is to let us know that you are interested. You can call or email the contact information found at the end of this handbook, or you can also contact an existing Unifor local union. Once we hear from you, we will get in touch and send you a copy of this handbook for your reference, if necessary.

Establish contact

After the initial contact is made, the national union will arrange a session to discuss the goals of your project. If the project initially corresponds to the requirements and criteria for community chapters, we will assist you with the next steps.

Define the scope of your membership

Every community chapter must unite people who have something in common and want to work on similar goals. Defining who can be members of your community chapter will help determine how you go about forming your chapter. Don't worry, if you are not sure where to start, we can help!

Draft a plan of action

As a community chapter, it is required that your group submit a strategy for how you will use the collective power of the union to win victories from employers, governments, or other campaign targets. Your plan must include a preliminary list of members, goals, strategies, timelines and a draft budget. We can provide a template for your plan and can assist in drafting it.

Tell us how you will use the collective power of the union to win victories from employers, governments, or other targets.



Get recognized

In order to operate, your Unifor community chapter must be officially recognized. In the case of a chapter hosted by a local union, this requires the local union to amend its bylaws to include membership in your community chapter as part of its own membership. In the case of national chapters, the National Executive Board must review and approve the chapter and then grant a national charter.

Adopt bylaws and elect an executive

Once your chapter is operational, you will need to adopt your own chapter bylaws (we can provide a sample!) and to elect the members of your executive. Among other elected positions, you will need to elect a financial officer to oversee the financial activities of the chapter.

Remit dues

To start collecting dues from your members, the national union will require your official list of members. In addition, you will need to indicate how much each member will be paying for their dues, as per your chapter's bylaws. The national union will require certain financial information from members to begin quarterly dues payments following your chapter's approval.

Take action!

With all this done, you will now be ready to move into the action phase and work to implement your plan of action. The national union and the local union will work to connect the work of your members to the activities of the union, and vice-versa.

Working together to affect change

Working through a community chapter will allow your group to build collective strength and to work towards affecting change within your workplace and community. To have maximum effect, your plan of action must be detailed and realistic. Part of your work will be to continue to outreach to bring members of your group together and to connect them to Unifor members through your host local union.

Once you have received your approval and are ready to get working on your collective plan of action, make sure you take the following steps:

- Ensure the general functioning of the chapter and ensure that its operations are in line with the adopted plan of action
- Establish how you will set short, medium and long-term goals and work towards them
- Provide regular updates to the organizing department

The national union will provide you with guidance in the development of your plan of action and work to connect the activities of your chapter to the activities of the union. As such, we will make sure that major union campaigns, actions or events are communicated to members in community chapters. We will also, when possible, establish education and training opportunities for members in community chapters. In addition, your members will be encouraged to attend, support and engage in union activities in their region or sector.

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



The national union will provide you with guidance in the development of your plan of action.

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



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.

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 the 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 it wants.

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 its plan of action.

In the case of community chapters associated with an existing local union, the national union will arrange to collect dues from members. 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.

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 making 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.



Community chapters are based on one important principle: we're stronger when we work together.

Precarious work in Canada

- Approximately **1/3** of all Canadians are considered “precariously” employed
- **20%** of jobs today are considered part-time (that number was closer to 12% in 1976)
- Contract jobs have increased by **80%** since 1997 – triple the rate of growth for permanent jobs
- Precarious work has increased by **50%** in the Greater Toronto/Hamilton Area over the past 20 years, and less than half of workers hold a permanent, full-time job with benefits
- Laid-off manufacturing workers face a **20%** wage cut job, and feel less secure in their jobs according to a 2012 union study
- Women make up **70-80%** of those workers classified as permanent part-time, temporary part-time and self-employed
- **87%** of surveyed immigrant workers, terminated following the closure of a Toronto-area auto parts plant in 2008, reported using a temporary agency to help find work – a trend that is increasing across the country

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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