

A Guide to Amalgamated Local Unions





**315,000 members from
coast to coast to coast**



Introduction

Locals are at the core of our Union. When Unifor was formed in 2013, we made strengthening our local unions a priority. A necessary step to develop a strong, dynamic, and democratic Union. A necessary step to win the social, political, and economic changes we want to see in our workplaces and communities.

To accomplish this task, Unifor established the Local Union Task Force (LUTF) – a unionwide initiative that aimed to engage local unions, assess members’ needs and develop recommendations on how to increase member participation, develop grassroots activists, and strengthen local unions across the country.

To support the work of the LUTF, Unifor launched an online survey, and held 49 town hall meetings across the country. Detailed information was gathered about the needs and challenges facing our local unions. In addition, local union participants shared their successes and best practice strategies. Nearly 2,000 members from 350 locals across Canada participated in these town hall discussions.

The Task Force compiled and analyzed the information gathered over a 10-month period and produced a report entitled “Building Stronger Local Unions Together” ([available at unifor.org/lutf](http://unifor.org/lutf)).

The report contained 28 recommendations and an action plan focused on building stronger local unions. The report was presented and adopted at the 2016 Unifor Convention.

During our consultations, we heard about the challenges facing our locals, in particular small single unit local unions. In response, many local union leaders and members highlighted the need for enhanced resource sharing and collaboration among local unions. Members spoke and the task force listened.

This document will focus one of the three key areas identified by the LUTF. There are more resources available to support local unions, please visit unifor.org/resources to find more reference tools.

With this document, our intent is to provide the knowledge and tools necessary for local unions to better collaborate and share resources. Where this objective is best achieved through mergers, we encourage local unions to do so.

Amalgamated Locals

Unifor consists of over 680 local unions spread out across the country and across a range of economic and industrial sectors. The size of our locals are diverse, ranging from as small as four members to as large as 10,000.

All Unifor locals can be broadly divided into two main types:

- **Single-unit local unions; and**
- **Amalgamated local unions**

What is an amalgamated local?

Simply put, it is a local comprised of two or more bargaining units. Currently, only about 40 per cent of local unions are structured as amalgamated locals. However, these locals represent about 80 per cent of Unifor's total membership.

Unifor's Constitution (unifor.org/constitution) provides guidelines on how locals can initiate a merger, as well as provisions specifically applicable to amalgamated locals, such as participating in conventions and regional councils or organizing members' meetings. More on mergers can be found in section III of this guide.

Strengthening our amalgamated locals

For those already in amalgamated local unions or locals that may have recently merged, we want to highlight a few key areas where work can be done to increase your local membership's overall strength and internal/external engagement. These areas include: databases and communications; national office resources; equitable representation and community engagement.

Membership database and communications

A key element towards fostering dynamic and engaged amalgamated local unions is communications.

Maintaining a consolidated and up to date local union membership database is an important tool to ensure that all local members are kept up to date on important

collective bargaining news, national union affairs, upcoming meetings and events, educational opportunities, and community actions. It is encouraged that a point person(s) is designated and responsible for collecting all members' pertinent contact information, including: name, address, telephone number and email address.

We encourage locals to use our online Local Administration System (LAS) to help track and upload their membership information to the national office. The LAS system also has useful accounting tools to keep track of local finances and can be used to order Unifor material directly online. **Please contact lassupport@unifor.org for more information and to access the LAS user manual.**

Holding regular membership meetings are not only required, but provide an invaluable opportunity to keep members up to date, informed, and engaged in union affairs. It is important to note that amalgamated locals commonly hold both regular unit meetings and general membership meetings.

An amalgamated local's biggest strength is its diverse membership, allowing for a broad range of perspectives and insights. As such, members should feel like their voices and opinions are being heard and acknowledged. This will help to empower members who feel like their feedback is valued and the contributions are recognized, which will foster increased member engagement.

Best Practices for Amalgamated Locals: Communications and membership database

- ☐ **Maintain an up to date database** of member contact information
- ☐ **Make use of the online Local Administration System** (LAS) to upload membership info to the national office
- ☐ **Gather feedback from members** as to the format they prefer to receive communications (e.g., electronic or print)
- ☐ **Ensure advance notice is given** about upcoming events and in accessible formats
- ☐ **Provide members with training** on social media platforms
- ☐ **Membership meetings** that allow for greater opportunities for members to have their voices heard can boost engagement
- ☐ **Have local member volunteers help with any translation or interpretation** to assist those who may have difficulty communicating in English

Choosing the right method to communicate information is also important, and it is critical to know what local union members want and in what format. If local members request materials be provided in print-format, then locals should find ways to facilitate this format as much as possible.

With amalgamated locals sharing resources, costs of providing printed materials can be greatly reduced. We also encourage the use of technology to communicate with members (e.g., email, texting, Facebook, Twitter), as setting up single or joint local accounts for online communications/social media platforms can often be more cost-effective, faster, and reach a wider audience.

While not all members may be comfortable with digital communications, we encourage locals to provide members with training on these platforms so everyone has a basic knowledge and understanding of how they work.

Again, in matters of communications and database support, our national union's Communications Department is always there to provide your local with assistance and training on how to effectively communicate with members.

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Relationship to national union

Amalgamated local unions have access to a variety of national Unifor resources to assist and support their operations. This could include: National Representatives that service bargaining units; in-house legal support (with prior approval from the National President's Assistants); pension and benefits experts; industry and sector specialists and directors; researchers and economists; communications, political action and government relations teams; adult education trainers and union educators; human rights and health and safety experts; specialists in women's rights and child care initiatives, and more. Area and Regional Directors, along with National staff representatives, are a critical resource and liaison with the national office in order to get the full support your local requires.

**Learn more about the union's structure
at unifor.org/yourunion**

Equitable representation

Ensuring equal representation by sector, industry, and geography on the local executive is a good starting point to making certain one bargaining unit does not dominate the local. However, equity is just as important to take into consideration, to ensure that equity-seeking groups, such as: women, workers of colour, new immigrants, Aboriginal workers, LGBTQ, young workers, or workers with disabilities, also have opportunities to hold executive and officer positions, and reflect the diverse nature of our locals and our union.

Gaining greater knowledge of a local union's membership demographics will assist the local to ensure that all equity-seeking groups are fully included in local affairs and help facilitate the removal of barriers to participation for specific groups. An effective way to collect this data is during contract negotiations and with the distribution of bargaining surveys with member demographic questions included for easy collection. Local unions should also consider implementing a formalized mentorship program to build better stronger links between members.

Visit unifor.org/mentorship to learn more.

Another structure under the Constitution that provides for equitable representation for bargaining units in amalgamated local unions are joint councils. Joint councils allow for proportional representation based on bargaining unit size with a minimum of two representatives from each bargaining unit.

Please refer to 'Article 15, Section J' of Unifor's Constitution (unifor.org/constitution) for additional information on joint councils.

Amalgamated local unions will have an increased ability to develop full Local Union Standing Committees, as is recommended by Unifor's Constitution. This is often a struggle for smaller local unions, yet a considerable strength for amalgamated locals. Examples of Local Union Standing Committees include: Human Rights, Health and Safety, Workers with Disabilities, Women's, LGBTQ, and Aboriginal and Workers' of Colour Committees. Ensuring equitable representation on all 13 Local Union Standing Committees (listed in Article 15, Section D of Unifor's Constitution), is also important and gives amalgamated locals an advantage of fully utilizing member skills and knowledge to effectively manage the local's day-to-day business, and to promote the local in their respective communities and workplaces.

Local member and community engagement

Building Unifor's connections within the community is the key to our strength as a movement and a core foundation of social unionism. Amalgamated local unions will find greater opportunities to become involved in campaigns at the community-level and providing ways for members to become more engaged in local issues while developing their capacities as trade union activists.

Many of Unifor's local unions already participate in community initiatives in a variety of ways, including participating

in labour councils, non-profit community organizations (e.g. food banks and shelters), community fundraising initiatives (e.g. local United Way fundraising campaigns, toy drives), political campaigns (e.g. municipal, provincial and federal elections), and celebratory events (e.g. Labour Day and International Women's Day).

This type of work not only helps to develop strong bonds between the community and locals and individual members, but also raises the profile of our union in our communities, by highlighting the good and important work that we do.

While strengthening community connections is important, so too is building up an amalgamated local's own internal connection and solidarity as well. This is especially important for new amalgamated local unions that are incorporating new bargaining unit members. Finding opportunities to bring members together requires identifying barriers to participation that may impede member participation and finding innovative ways around them.



"We couldn't get many people to participate at the meetings, and there were lots of workplace locations, so we tried a Skype meeting and got 20 new people to join in."

- Local Union Task Force Participant

This can include:

- Using technology to allow members who are geographically spread out to participate in meetings (such as Skype);
- Developing an amalgamated local website, newsletter, or smart phone app to share news and updates;
- Providing orientation to new members who may not be familiar with how local unions operate;
- Offering interpretation for members who have difficulties with English; offering child care;
- Finding more opportunities to create social and family-oriented activities, such as regional BBQs, picnics, or sporting activities.

"Our local travelled to workplaces across the region with a BBQ. It allowed a space for members to interact with us and each other – to have conversation and ask questions about upcoming and current negotiations."

- Local Union Task Force Participant

"We offer funds for child/elder care in order for members to attend meetings in hopes of removing this obstacle."

- Local Union Task Force Participant

Best Practices for Amalgamated Locals: Local and community relations

- ❑ Building strong connections in the community is a core foundation of social unionism
- ❑ Find local community organizations that members can volunteer with; participate in local labour councils; get members engaged in local political campaigns and special community events such as Labour Day
- ❑ Promote the good work you are doing in the community to raise the union and local's profile
- ❑ Identify barriers to participation for members and find effective solutions to increase engagement, such as child care or interpretation
- ❑ Organize fun and family-oriented activities such as BBQs, picnics, and sports



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