

- Talk one-on-one to the women in your local, or survey them. What are the issues that concern them? How do they feel about their work? Their wages? Do they have trouble making ends meet? Do they want to get to know the other women in their local better and work with them to improve their wages and their rights?
- Be inclusive and representative of the diversity in your local. Reach out to Aboriginal women, women of colour, women with disabilities, lesbians, and older and younger women. Find out what's important to them. How does inequality affect them differently from other women in the local?
- Don't forget to also include women who work different shifts or do different jobs from the majority of the women in your local.
- Don't write women off who seem hesitant or opposed to what you're doing. It might take a little longer to bring them along, but it's worth the effort. Listen to them. Find out why they're hesitant and see if you can deal with their concerns. For example, a woman might initially say she's not interested. But after some probing, you might discover that child care is the main obstacle to her involvement. Talk to reluctant women about the importance of having a way to bring women activists along so that the whole union can be stronger, and so that you can build support for women's issues in the local.
- Try to recruit your CUPE sisters to come to an initial, informal gathering of women in the local. Send out an invitation. It doesn't matter if the turnout is small – it's a start. Make it part social (so that women can build relationships) and part "business" (to discuss what kind of women's committee will work best in your local). Be organized about what you would like

to accomplish during the more formal part of the gathering:

- Draw up a short list of topics you want to cover.
- Find someone to take on the responsibility of guiding the discussion and keeping it on track. Someone else should record all decisions.
- Decide on a time frame for the business part of the meeting – perhaps one hour – and stick to it.
- Make sure there's a clear end to the business part of the meeting, so that those who have to leave early will know that other decisions won't be made in their absence.
- If you decide you want a formal, permanent women's committee so that it is integrated into the local's structure:
 - Write up a motion to take to a membership meeting so that the committee gets written into the local's by-laws.
 - Make sure you organize support for the motion ahead of time.
 - Develop terms of reference. What will the committee's mandate be? Its size? Frequency of meetings? Budget?

Making it work

- Focus on the issues that are important to the women in your local. Develop a plan of action with realistic goals. That might mean having just one goal for the time being – and that's fine.

- Find ways for the committee to accommodate the reality of women's lives as workers, family and community members, and union activists. Meetings aren't the only way for women to participate. Ask your sisters on the committee to help organize an event, work on a newsletter or leaflet, or on part of a project that interests them.
- When you need to hold meetings, hold them at convenient times and in convenient locations. If meetings are after work, make them children-friendly, and order pizza. If your committee has a budget, offer to pay child care expenses so that attending a meeting doesn't mean an extra expense.
- If the women on your committee use the Internet, consider holding "virtual" meetings. Email provides an easy way to discuss issues without having to arrange to meet face-to-face every time. It is also a good way to circulate and work on documents together (for example, drafts of letters).
- If your committee is brand new and inexperienced, consider "buddying up" with an existing women's committee from another local for support and advice. (Contact your provincial CUPE women's committee for the names of the local union women's committees in your province.)
- Find ways to build knowledge and leadership skills. Invite guest speakers, show videos, or set up mini-educational on equality issues, and skills such as effective speaking and bargaining. Encourage members of your committee to attend CUPE educational and women's conferences.
- Spread the knowledge, work and power around so that more women are involved, and one or two people don't get burned out. Shared power gives your committee a stronger base and develops skills.
- Contact your national women's committee representative and your division's women's committee. Let them know about your committee, and ask them to keep you informed about the work their committees are doing. This is especially

important and helpful if your women's committee is new.

- CUPE's Equality Branch has resources (publications and flyers) on equality issues. For more information, contact your regional equality branch representative (if your region has one), your servicing representative, or the Equality Branch at national office (613-237-1590, or cupe.ca).
- **Don't isolate yourselves in the local!** Campaign to elect women on other local union committees. Work with other committees in your local to promote equality issues and to fight for other priorities identified by the union. Make regular reports to membership and executive committee meetings.
- Reach out to women's committees in other CUPE locals and unions, and women's groups in your community.

The committee and the local union executive



- Try to build support on the local union executive for your committee. No matter how the executive members feel about what your committee is doing, make sure to keep the lines of communication open. Inform them about your activities to avoid unnecessary conflict, prevent isolation and promote trust.
- Seek out allies on the executive. Look for someone who knows the ropes and might be willing to give your committee a hand, especially when problems occur.
- If your local has women on its executive, make sure that they are plugged into the women's committee. They are an important link and can speak in favour of your committee's requests and recommendations at executive meetings.