

Engaging Young Workers

A GUIDE FOR LOCALS | DEVELOPED BY CUPE'S NATIONAL YOUNG WORKER COMMITTEE

According to a survey conducted by CUPE's Young Worker Committee in August-September 2022, only **25% of young workers believe their local is promoting youth engagement** in their union.

Young workers aren't just the future of our union, they are the present – and they **make up 18% of CUPE's membership nationwide**.

How can locals do a **better job engaging and empowering young CUPE members**? Here are a few ideas on how to bridge the gaps.

Gaps

What's keeping young workers out? Young workers face many barriers, both inside and outside the union environment, that prevent them from taking a more active role in their union.

External factors

- **Job security.** They are far more likely to be affected by precarious work and two-tier contracts.
- **Cost-of-living.** They are often trying to manage crippling amounts of student debt amid record inflation and the skyrocketing cost of living.
- **Mental health.** They may be struggling with a growing mental health crisis.
- **Child care.** Young workers are often also young parents, and parents everywhere are struggling to afford or even find child care.

All these factors may prevent young workers from getting more involved in their union. Local leaders should be conscious of these factors and find ways they can support young workers and work towards reducing these barriers.

Internal factors

- **Poor communication.** Young workers report lacking clear communication from their union about what their union can do for them, including more information on workers' rights and benefits.
- **Accessibility.** Young workers may work multiple jobs and struggle to find time to attend union meetings and events.
- **Negative stereotypes.** Unfair stereotypes about young workers being disengaged or disinterested aren't just untrue, they're also damaging.
- **Employer intimidation.** Employers regularly intimidate young workers against becoming involved in the union.
- **Lack of opportunity.** There isn't enough mentorship and support for young workers who want to take a more active role in their union. It's especially difficult for young workers to find openings in leadership positions.

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Bridges

What can bring young workers in?

Here's a checklist of ways local leaders can bridge the engagement gap with young workers:

- ✓ **Offer a warm welcome.** Creating and updating a welcome package from the local can help engage young workers from the very start. One-on-one conversations with executive members can also help with the onboarding process.
- ✓ **Make meetings more accessible.** Consider the timing of your union events to ensure members with outside obligations like a second job can still participate, and consider offering child care so that parents of young children can take part too.
- ✓ **Make meetings and events less intimidating.** Not every union event needs to follow rules of order. Creating informal spaces for union meetings can help bring young workers into the union family without some of the parliamentary formalities of a typical union meeting that might drive away new members.
- ✓ **Increase opportunities within the local.** Young workers want to take a more active role in their local, but often the space isn't there. Consider increasing roles and opportunities within your local to get more young workers engaged.
- ✓ **Social justice beyond the workplace.** Young workers want their local to take on social justice issues beyond the workplace and the bargaining table, into their communities.
- ✓ **Foster better communication.** Union communications should always aim to meet the members where they are. Locals can better engage young workers through regular communications that speak to the issues young workers are facing, using the communications platforms they use.
- ✓ **Offer more networking opportunities.** Offering more opportunities to network with other young workers and union activists – at the local, regional, and national levels – will greatly increase the likelihood of a young worker staying engaged in their union for the long haul.
- ✓ **Mentoring, education and training.** Young workers are looking for ways to sharpen their skills and build capacity. But young workers know learning is a two-way street. Young workers need support to grow – not simply to be told what to do.
- ✓ **Accessible leadership.** Young workers want to talk face-to-face with their leaders. These opportunities help demystify union hierarchies and build connections between young workers and their leadership.
- ✓ **Show the union is working for them.** Young workers need to see their union has their back. Young workers want to see their local rejecting two-tier proposals that are deeply harmful to young workers, and negotiating contracts that help them overcome the cost-of-living crisis.