

Iowa Unions: Neighbors Standing Together

Mission

“Iowa Unions: Neighbors Standing Together” is a coalition of Iowa labor unions dedicated to organizing for workers’ rights, good jobs, and quality public services for all Iowans.

We seek an Iowa in which all residents have certain basic rights:

- The right to equal economic opportunity
- The right to fair treatment in their workplaces
- The right to living wages
- The right to decent health care
- The right to retirement security
- The right to a quality education

We work to build a diverse movement of working Iowans and local labor unions that is coordinated on a statewide basis to fight for these rights for all Iowans.

Plan Goals & Structure

The Iowa Unions: Neighbors Standing Together strategic plan is designed to promote coordinated action and clear, consistent communications about the Iowa labor movement’s vision, values, and issues.

Our joint actions aim to unify all Iowans around shared values and goals at the local, regional, and state levels and to transcend sectoral, organizational, party, and union/non-union divisions.

Our shared messages for members and the media are developed to articulate the coalition’s values and vision for the future, to highlight the roles working Iowans play in Iowa workplaces and communities, and to transcend political party or union/non-union divisions.

Our goals are to:

- Mobilize Iowans to take action on priority Iowa labor issues.

- Improve public knowledge and public image of Iowa's labor unions and the work Iowa union members do in and for their workplaces and communities.
- Engage in proactive campaigns to implement priority labor policies on the local and state level.
- Lay the groundwork for electing majorities of worker-friendly candidates to office at local and state levels.

To sustain and guide the coalition, we will create a Steering Committee to coordinate joint activities and develop shared materials and messages. Representation on the Steering Committee is open to all Iowa unions. The Steering Committee will be convened and chaired by the Iowa Federation of Labor president. The Steering Committee will oversee:

- Planning and coordination of joint actions and events
- Development of member communication tools and messages to be made available for use by Iowa unions
- Development and dissemination of media stories on key issues
- Development of fact sheets, fliers, and other literature on key issues to be made available for use by Iowa unions
- Development of joint statements on key issues
- Development and joint sponsorship of education and training opportunities for leaders, activists and spokespeople
- Consideration of additional joint projects

The Steering Committee may elect to designate a smaller Executive Committee to take on day-to-day tasks and limited decision-making responsibilities.

Timeline [to be expanded by Steering Committee]

2011

June: Finalization of plan and steering committee; creation of shared events calendar and site for document sharing; materials preparation

July: Test pilot member education materials and plan first joint activities

August 10: State Fair parade (first joint visibility activity)

August-October: Member education and activist sign-up at pre-scheduled meetings/events within each organization; list building and maintenance within each organization

September 5: Labor Day events (first coordinated regional actions)

October-December: Joint regional activities and media events; training of activists and spokespeople; planning for joint activities during legislative session; capitalize on the media attention around the Iowa Caucuses.

2012

January-April: Joint activities during legislative session

May-October: Joint activities throughout election season as proscribed by law

November: Assessment and extension of plan

Message Frame

Iowa Unions: Neighbors Standing Together

As Iowans concerned with the future of our state, we stand together for a democratic Iowa where all residents have certain basic rights:

- The right to equal economic opportunity
- The right to fair treatment in their workplaces
- The right to living wages
- The right to decent health care
- The right to retirement security
- The right to a quality education

In recent decades, Iowans have faced widening economic inequality, stagnating incomes, declining standards of living, and eroding commitments to education and other essential public services. Thousands of good jobs have left our state, while lower-paying less secure jobs have taken their place. To make matters worse, in recent months Iowans have witnessed intense new attacks on the basic rights of workers in Iowa and across the Midwest.

Iowa unions have come together in the midst of this crisis to defend workers' rights, to fight for good jobs, and to create a unified plan to restore core Iowa values of fairness

and equality. We know that when Iowa neighbors come together to improve our workplaces and communities, we make lasting differences in people's lives. Iowa union members demonstrate this each day by working collectively to improve the quality, safety, and effectiveness of the public and private institutions at the core of our communities – our schools, libraries, post offices, roads, fire stations, factories, hospitals, phone companies, utilities, and construction sites.

Priority worker stories

- Front-line public service workers and teachers speaking about students, clients, patients, public and why they are dedicated to their work
- First-hand worker stories of a specific way in which their union made a difference in their life at work (solved a problem, righted a wrong, etc.)
- First-hand worker stories of how their union advocated for and won a specific workplace improvement (health and safety, family-friendly leave, better work process or procedure, etc.)
- First-hand worker stories of how a good union job pulled their family out of poverty, changed family's economic and educational opportunities, etc.
- First-hand stories of non-union workers who can attest to the effectiveness of unions.

Shared Values: To emphasize in all communication

- Rights – for all workers
- Fairness
- Dignity
- Democracy
- Community, strong communities
- Equality
- Diversity
- Justice
- Quality of life
- A better future, better tomorrow
- Good [Iowa] jobs

Issue-Specific Messages [to be developed for each issue]

The steering committee will oversee message development on specific issues. Ideal issue messages will:

- 1) Draw on elements of “Message Frame” above in order to consistently articulate the shared values and vision of Iowa’s labor movement.
- 2) Follow outline below (problem, solution, action) to encourage message discipline and clear calls for action on each issue.

Problem:

Solution:

Action:

Spokespeople

Carefully crafted messages, motivated local-level leaders, mobilized members, and well-trained, disciplined and moving spokespeople will carry the campaign. Given the opposition’s power, we will need to mobilize large numbers of members to deliver effective messages with passion. Our strength lies in the stories of workers and Iowans in communities across the state.

Spokespeople may include (in order of priority):

- Front-line workers
- Local union leaders
- State-level union leaders and staff
- Iowans
- Elected officials

Spokespeople will be recruited/selected from each organization’s internal member education sessions and will be expected to commit to attending training and disseminating messages developed by the coalition.

Shared Materials

The Steering Committee will oversee development of basic on-line tools (using free available software platforms) for sharing calendars, materials, and information. These tools will be available to all Iowa unions and will be housed on a central site maintained by the Iowa Federation of Labor.

- Shared calendar of Iowa labor events
- Document-sharing site
- Central database of (non-union) supporter contact information

Shared materials will be developed on an as-needed basis in conjunction with specific events, actions, or issues. Any materials developed by the coalition will be available for flexible use within individual unions. The Steering Committee will communicate the availability of new materials to all participating unions, and materials will be available for download from the document-sharing site or via e-mail or mail upon request from the Iowa Federation of Labor. Examples of possible shared materials include:

- Member education presentation
- Messages for use in state and local newsletters
- Preformatted fliers or newsletter pages
- Short member messages suitable for text message or social network posts
- Sample phone scripts
- Tools for collection/update of member contact information
 - Sign-in sheet template
 - Flyer with tear-off for contact information
 - Pledge card for activists
 - “Best practices” guide to collecting and managing contact information
- Press release templates
- Talking points on specific issues
- Event flyers (e.g., Labor Day)
- Worksite issue flyers with accompanying one-on-one script
- Post cards
- Sample letters to editor

Events and Actions [Joint activities to be planned on ongoing basis]

The Steering Committee will be responsible for planning joint activities and communicating action plans to all participating unions. Participation in individual actions will be encouraged, but optional. Events below are those proposed by planning participants to date.

State Fair parade, August 10, 2011

Goals: Hold visibility event to launch coalition, bring union members together, and gain positive public attention.

- Entry registered and details planned (float, t-shirts, materials, etc.) in June
- Invitation to all unions and member turnout competition in July

Member communication/education, Aug.-Oct. 2011

Goals: Communicate coalition goals to all Iowa union members, distribute shared materials/messages to members, prepare members for action, and solicit activist commitments.

- Joint member education program materials developed and piloted in June-July
- All organizations invited to deliver 15-20 minute member education program at pre-scheduled local meetings or other events (conferences, conventions, etc.)
- Materials available to all unions starting in August; use will be encouraged but optional

Labor Day, Sept. 5, 2011

Goals: Coordinate Labor Day actions across the state to raise visibility, send a unified, amplified message about what Iowa unions stand for, encourage local labor outreach to community allies, and gain positive media coverage.

- List of local project/action ideas that can be added to existing Labor Day celebration structures (with instruction sheet) developed in June-July
- Communication with CLC and local leaders starting in July
- Joint materials (unified statement, talking points, press release, flyers, etc.) distributed to all participating organizations in August

Targeted regional activities, Nov.-Dec., 2011

Goals: Bring members of multiple unions together on the local/regional level for joint actions that build regional power and develop stronger local labor movement structures.

Joint activities may build on a variety of pre-existing regional structures in selected areas of state:

- Unions opening existing regional meetings/actions to other unions
- Central labor councils hosting activities open to other unions and community allies
- WIN committees sponsoring activities open to all unions
- Formation of new "Neighbors standing together" structure in communities where other structures are absent

Forms of activity may vary according to region. Examples of possible joint activities:

- Joint canvassing or letter writing
- Joint work on specific city, school, or county elections
- Jointly sponsored "activist academies" for developing union member stories and spokespeople
- Joint sponsorship of town hall forums on specific issues

Joint Media Strategy

The Steering Committee will consider joint media strategies on an ongoing basis, which may include:

- Issuing joint statements on key issues.
- Creating shared press release templates for distribution among unions.
- Coordinating talking points and messages on key issues.
- Recruiting and training key spokespeople from multiple unions in communities across the state.
- Compiling/updating press contact lists for each region of the state and making these available to all unions.

The Steering Committee will make an effort to track statewide media coverage of Iowa labor unions and to assess trends in coverage at least every three months.