



AFL-CIO:

A More Effective and Unified Force

Recognizing the urgency of the challenge facing our movement, a group of union Presidents have met recently and achieved consensus for a number of changes that will make the AFL-CIO a more effective and unified force.

The challenge to Organized Labor is a challenge to American democracy, because a better future depends on a Labor movement strong enough to yield a rising standard of living for our members, and influential enough to make progress possible on the national agenda for the common good and for justice for all.

In the wake of the November election, those goals seem remote. New statistics of union membership remind us how difficult it has become for workers who wish to join our movement (a majority, we believe) to avail themselves of the right to organize. Yet we are convinced we can reach those goals, but we must change our programs, priorities, structures and ways of doing our work, united for strength and effectiveness.

Core Functions of the AFL-CIO

We agreed that the first step toward change is to identify the core functions of the Federation, recognizing that at this critical time we must focus all its resources on them. The top priority is political action and legislation; the goal is to build our ability to win crucial elections, which we recognize can only be done by building strength from the bottom up. Political action is our greatest opportunity to impact health care, trade, or the right to organize. In fact, organizing and political action are inextricably linked. Today, the battle to preserve collective bargaining rights is a political battle, fought out at the NLRB, in Missouri, and in Indiana. And expanding collective bargaining in “red” states depends on successful political action, which should be part of the overall plan.

- In order to assure a year-round program, permanent earmarked funding should be provided, at a level dramatically greater than for the last cycle. The need for voluntary assessments should be a thing of the past; the Federation’s per capita tax should not increase.
- In order to assure effectiveness on the state and local as well as the federal level, reform of the State Fed/Central Labor Council system must be effectuated, with the emphasis on creating political capacity.
- The reform should change the funding stream for these bodies to the national AFL-CIO per capita tax.
- A shared vision for the political program must be articulated, through an inclusive process by which it is “owned” by the movement as a whole; the affiliates’ involvement in formulating the political action plan — at the front end and as it takes shape state by state — will win our buy-in and collaboration on meeting its objectives.
- The program must have clear goals, and standards of activity necessary to reach them, so that accountability really takes place, and obstacles are identified and overcome.
- The Federation’s departmental structure will have to change, so that resources are completely focused. And appropriate staffing assignments must follow because success will not be achieved without capable personnel in critical positions.

- State plans, reflecting coordination of the state and local bodies and the national strategy and priorities, will be the work plans. Full funding from all unions, implies integration with and responsiveness to the national effort; therefore, each state’s political director should be selected jointly by the state federation and national officers.

Organizing

- The Federation should be the leader in the fight for collective bargaining rights.
- The Federation should not be doing organizing itself, with its own staff.
- Its organizing department has a valid role in giving guidance to affiliates seeking to expand or improve their own organizing programs.
- The Organizing Institute’s recruitment and training programs are worthy of expansion.
- Organizing campaigns and political/legislative campaigns can and should reinforce each other.
- To encourage multi-union and strategic organizing campaigns, the Strategic Registration program should be enhanced with a process for unions to assign organizing responsibility by mutual agreement, and gain pre-clearance for their campaigns. The appropriate role for the Federation in this process should be defined.
- The Organizing Responsibility Procedure (Article XXI) should be modified so that instead of the union that starts first always being awarded jurisdiction, preference would be given to the union or unions that are already predominant in the employer’s workforce or geographic area, allowing due consideration to another union with an occupational affinity with a segment of its workers and a reasonable ability to bargain a collective bargaining agreement.

Communications

- Through the Public Relations Committee, a review of how we make the case for our movement (the case for trade unions, and Labor’s broader agenda) should be undertaken.
- We should carry out a feasibility study for Labor to launch a cable television network, or to employ other new communications technologies to enhance the message mechanisms under our own control.
- AFL-CIO communications need to emphasize values, issues and policies that unite, rather than divide, working people in the pursuit of social and economic justice, full employment, dignified work and dignified retirement, democracy, human and civil rights at home and abroad, and national security. Labor’s message must allow all workers – from every sector of the workforce and a diverse range of political perspectives – to feel welcome in the House of Labor.

Governance

The following proposals are meant to more effectively empower the affiliate Presidents to carry out their responsibilities in the governance of the Federation.

- Reports and powerpoint presentations to the Council and committees should be distributed in advance, leaving more time for substantive debate.

- The number of committees to which each Council member is assigned should be reduced, either by merging committees, or by assigning union leaders other than those on the Council to committee membership.
- The Council and General Board should become a single entity, and it should meet twice a year.
- The Executive Committee, composed of the Presidents of the largest affiliates, should meet four times a year.
- Duties and authority should be allocated appropriately to the two bodies.
- Mechanisms need to be established for promoting greater financial and operations transparency and early and ongoing affiliate involvement in policy determination.

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