



# Organising to Win

## UNISON Organising to Win Fundamentals 2025. (v2)

### A check list of organising best practice and lessons learned to date.

UNISON services, benefits, and individual representation are vital functions of the union. But the biggest collective issues cannot be addressed individually.

Organising is a craft, applying skills within a methodology to shift the balance of power to workers. Reaching beyond our existing base to build member confidence, participation, activism and leadership through activity.

UNISON **Base Organising** is the routine development and maintenance of a strong and functional union at workplace and branch level.

UNISON **Strategic Organising** builds member participation and power within an escalating plan to win a specific material change (big or small).

Both are of equal value and importance in building and maintaining a strong and powerful UNISON.

Organising resource is precious and finite and should be aligned to UNISON priorities. Not squandered on activities proven to deliver poor outcomes.

### Successful organising requires:

- **Alignment with Bargaining.** With member engagement and leadership of both providing the direct link between participation and meaningful material wins.
- **A Plan to Win.** Workers understand the balance of power in their workplace. A credible plan is necessary to build motivation and confidence to participate.
- **Focused resource.** Activists and organisers unencumbered by competing priorities to lead and deliver organising activity.
- **Consistent best practice.** Application of proven UNISON organising methodology, systems and skills.
- **Listening.** Start where the workers are at, with active listening to identify their deeply felt collective issues.
- **Agitation.** Anger – Hope – Action conversations to find the emotional core of the issue. Highlight the injustice, reinforce their self-worth, raise expectations and “frame the choice” to move workers towards a collective UNISON solution.
- **Workplace leaders.** Identified by workers, able to move others into UNISON activity, and with a sense of responsibility and accountability to colleagues.
- **Momentum.** Importance, urgency, energy, and commitment. Activists and organisers must have conviction in the plan to win and in each worker's self-



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interest to join and participate, providing clear purpose and objective for every interaction and activity.

- **Reflection.** Ongoing evaluation, critical thinking, collaboration and peer support for continuous improvement.

Branches are the building blocks of the union. Building sustainable strength and power requires Branch support and ownership.

An ongoing program of member recruitment and retention activity is vital to build powerful majorities of engaged members.

Accessible tasks in pursuit of meaningful goals builds members' confidence and skills to participate and provides pathways into formal activist roles.

Equality, diversity, and proportionality are pre-requisites of a high density, high participation union. Organising must redress, not reinforce inequalities.

Launching a campaign is not a neutral act. Campaigns are won and lost. Winning increases confidence and participation. Losing has the exact opposite effect.

Workers do not join a union because of a workplace issue. They join where there is a union solution that is dependent on their membership and get active where the solution is dependent on their participation.

Apathy is defined as “a lack of interest or concern”. Workers are not apathetic. But organising must instill hope and belief that change can be won to build engagement.

A credible Plan to Win must escalate incrementally, bringing multiple pressures to bear to create a crisis for the decision maker that exceeds the cost of settling the dispute. The scale of the crisis required is proportionate to the cost of the goal. Incremental escalation provides notice and opportunity to negotiate settlement.

Effective organising leadership requires goals, objectives, timeline of escalating activity, responsibilities, resources, metrics, structure tests and evaluation.

Training and development are most effective when delivered within a campaign. A lack of support and community leaves activists and organisers isolated and demoralised.

Language is important. Presenting “the union” as a 3rd party to members and their workplace undermines organising. Member voice and agency must be at the forefront.

Employers do not like to concede power and may respond to effective organising with hostility and aggression. This is particularly challenging in areas of precarious employment, requiring a skilled response. Workers must be inoculated and prepared.

Winning is contagious. Examples of success build and maintain others' motivation and confidence to participate.