



BUILDING STRATEGIC POWER

Report of the CEP National Organizing Task Force

The Resolution on Strategic Organizing (G-11) adopted at the 2006 CEP National Convention mandated that *“the National Executive Board establish a task force to prepare a report and proposals on strategic approaches to organizing; new models for organizing; and the development of a culture of organizing within CEP as well as the resources required to carry out this organizing plan...”* and that *“the report propose to convention 2008 an increase in the 7% per capita organizing allocation to a significantly higher percentage of revenues.”*

1. Why Organize?

Unions organize first and foremost to provide workers a voice at work. With union organization, representation and collective bargaining unorganized workers have the opportunity to improve and protect their working conditions and living standards like other CEP members.

At the same time, organizing builds our unions. But, it's not just about numbers, it's about our vitality and strength. New members create new enthusiasm and increasing union membership and density increases our power and influence in our companies and sectors and enhances our voice and power in the broader political arena. In other words, organizing builds our strategic union power.

2. Rising to the Challenge of Organizing

One of the major challenges facing the CEP in the years ahead will be organizing the unorganized.

In spite of some notable successes, CEP has struggled in recent years to organize significant numbers of new members. Between 2004 and 2006, CEP organized fewer than 2,000 new workers while losing more than ten thousand members through workplace closures and layoffs. In addition, in many sectors the non-union segment has grown in size and importance. As this situation is likely to continue CEP must make a renewed

commitment to organizing or face the risk of a precipitous decline in membership and a subsequent loss of bargaining power and political influence.

To maintain our current membership levels CEP will need to organize tens of thousands of new workers in the next few years. This will require a major new commitment to organizing and the development of new approaches and new strategies.

3. Strengthening CEP through Mergers

In recent years, CEP has continued to build our union and offset membership losses through mergers with other unions. While mergers are an efficient and cost-effective way to increase membership and consolidate density in key sectors, this does not negate the need to organize unorganized workers.

Nevertheless, CEP must be more aggressive, strategic and creative in pursuing mergers with other unions.

4. Raising CEP's Profile

Our success in organizing will depend, in part, on CEP's reputation – how well we do in representing our members in collective bargaining, in our communities and in the broader political arena.

Although CEP is a young union, comprised of many different sectors and traditions, we have all come together to build a strong, democratic and effective union – a union we can all be proud of.

We stand up for our members, providing them a voice at work and our collective agreements are second to none. Our commitment to servicing our members and building our union around their concerns is one of our core strengths and one the reasons the CEP has such a solid reputation and is the choice for many Canadian workers.

We have also mobilized our members and built a strong profile in our communities. We have played a prominent role in giving a voice to workers and a providing a progressive influence on public issues, policies and programs. Although a young union, our public profile has steadily increased as we have become more socially and politically active.

At the same time, CEP should seek to raise our public profile and name recognition. This involves an increased emphasis in public and media communications in everything we do.

5. The Legislative Framework – What Right to Organize?

Union organizing in Canada is tough at the best of times.

Although the majority of Canadian workers know they would benefit from joining a union, many of those attempting to organize do not succeed in gaining union representation and a union contract. The reason is simple – fear!

Employers have become more aggressive in opposing union organizing – hiring union-busting lawyers and consultants and engaging in US-style anti-union campaigns. Workers attempting to organize routinely face the threat of illegal firings and plant closures. This climate of fear has been exacerbated in recent years by increased corporate concentration and capital mobility.

Although the right to organize is a basic right recognized by international law, Canadian labour legislation is weak and poorly enforced. Moreover, in recent years, governments have amended labour laws to make organizing harder. For example, most provinces now require a vote, rather than a simple membership card count, even after a majority of workers have joined a union, which subjects workers to a second, and more intense, anti-union campaign by their employer. Also, the absence of first contract arbitration in most jurisdictions permits employers to continue their anti-union battle at the bargaining table.

Labour legislation must be changed to provide a simple and fair process and to protect workers' rights, especially to restrict employer interference and provide for automatic card-check certification and first contract arbitration.

6. Changing to Organize

Meanwhile, like other unions, CEP sees no sense in blaming our opposition and must engage in an aggressive effort to significantly improve our organizing capacity and success. We must take a more proactive and strategic approach to organizing that will require:

- **Organizing culture** – creating an organizing culture where CEP leaders, local unions and members throughout our union support and participate in organizing and corporate campaigns;
- **Sectoral priorities** - establishing sectoral organizing priorities and targets based on the potential to build density and bargaining power;
- **National campaigns** – developing national, multi-site organizing campaigns to take on the larger corporations;
- **Organizing Campaign Strategies** – developing and implementing more effective organizing campaign strategies and tactics;

- **Neutrality agreements and corporate campaigns** – stopping employer interference in organizing campaigns by demanding organizing neutrality agreements and backing up those demands with corporate campaigns;
- **Capacity** – increasing organizing capacity and committing sufficient staff and financial resources to organizing, especially strategic campaigns.

Each of these matters is addressed in more detail below.

7. Creating an Organizing Culture

Increasing organizing capacity is one thing, but an organizing union needs a new organizing culture.

Achieving our objectives will require a major commitment. It means moving organizing up on our priorities. We need to develop a new focus on organizing throughout the union – from the national to the local union level – integrating organizing into everything we do. Organizing has to become part of our conferences, meetings and education programs. It means more local unions taking on the organizing challenge. It means developing member organizers.

And, as organizing becomes a priority at all levels of our union, it will shape our culture. We will become an organizing union.

This will have implications for the servicing model of unionism we currently practice. Our commitment to servicing our local unions and members is one of our core strengths and will provide a solid foundation for our renewed commitment to organizing. While maintaining our commitment to servicing our local unions, we should encourage and assist in building larger, more self-reliant, empowered local unions – actively engaged in organizing.

An effective force for cultural change in our union is membership and leadership education. The CEP Education and Mentorship programs can play an important role in empowering local unions by providing local leaders and activists with the knowledge, skills, confidence and recognition to play an enhanced leadership role in their workplaces and local unions.

In addition, members will play an important role in our new organizing model and our local unions will be strengthened by their involvement in organizing. The more members we involve in organizing the more activists we will develop. The more activists we develop the stronger our union.

8. Establishing Sectoral Priorities

Building density – increasing the level of unionization – in core industries and sectors is directly related to our ability to bargain effectively, to maintain and develop national bargaining objectives, strategies and agreements and, ultimately, to maintain and improve the working conditions and living standards of our members.

Our approach to organizing needs to be more proactive and strategic, focussing on core and emerging sectors where CEP has the potential to increase density and consolidate and build bargaining power.

In most of our key sectors, CEP is the dominant union in Canada and already has significant density. There are, however, hundreds of thousands of unorganized workers in these sectors.

A more proactive, strategic organizing approach would build on our existing strength by building density in our core sectors and, in turn, increase our bargaining power and influence in those sectors.

In addition, CEP should look to emerging sectors such as information and communications technology (wireless and cable, computer and electronic manufacturing, software and computer services, etc.) which have very low rates of unionization and where there is potential for organizing and building density.

Finally, CEP should also seek to build on its existing high density in communities where the CEP is a prominent union, such as in our northern communities.

9. National Organizing Campaigns

Canadian industries and markets are increasingly dominated by large, globally connected corporations with extremely mobile capital structures, which make it more difficult to organize and negotiate collective agreements and contribute to the increased climate of fear amongst workers attempting to organize.

To overcome this threat and successfully organize these corporations, CEP must develop the capacity for large, coordinated multi-site organizing campaigns. Such campaigns will require a major commitment and participation of the union at all level – national, regional and local.

10. Effective Organizing Campaign Strategies

CEP must run more innovative, effective and successful organizing campaigns. We must adopt better strategies and tactics. In this regard, recent experience in other unions (documented in academic studies) show that organizing success depends on using a multifaceted strategy – including a broad range of union-building tactics, including:

- **Strategic research** – Our decisions about organizing priorities and targets should be informed by strategic research and analysis about where we can build leverage, such as building on existing sectoral or company bargaining relationships, community based organizing or corporate campaign strategies.
- **Personal communications** – Organizing works best when it is face-to-face, personal and direct. Successful organizing campaigns emphasize grassroots, person-to-person outreach and leadership development among the workers being organized. This means house calls and small group meetings should be the primary communication methods, as opposed to the traditional methods of leaflets and mass meetings. Traditional leaflets, telephone calls, etc. should only be used to supplement personal communications.
- **Member organizers** – Workers make the best organizers. People are more likely to organize when they can easily relate to and identify with the organizers. Workers’ talking to workers enhances union organizing effectiveness, especially if they are from the same company, community, gender or ethno-cultural heritage. Using member organizers will also increase CEP organizing capacity and develop an internal organizing culture and support for organizing.
- **Inside organizing committees** – A large and representative inside organizing committee (10 to 15%) visibly and actively leading an organizing campaign is essential to organizing success. These committees should play a lead role not only in signing members up but, more importantly, they are crucial to confronting their employer’s inevitable anti-union campaign.
- **Justice issues** – Organizing campaigns should focus on issues that resonate with the workers being organized. We should focus on their issues and how they can achieve more together than they can alone. In addition, organizing campaigns focussed on “justice and dignity” issues are more successful than those that focus on “bread and butter” issues.
- **Fast campaigns** – Momentum is critically important to winning organizing campaigns, thus we must be able to move campaigns fast, to create and exploit momentum. This means we must have the capacity to mobilize quickly, including the rapid deployment of member organizing teams.
- **Building the union** – Organizing is about building the union. Organizing campaigns must be owned by the workers and, from the beginning, the organizing campaign should develop internal leadership. It is also important to build for the first contract during the organizing campaign, focussing on the worker’s issues and what they can achieve together in their workplace.
- **Building a campaign** – Organizing is not just about signing cards. It’s a campaign. The union must develop, with the workers, a winning strategy to build a strong majority, around clear issues and a unifying message. Engaging in escalating workplace and community strategies fosters commitment among the

workers and helps deter employer opposition. Build from the bottom up by expanding participation.

There is no silver bullet – no simple formula. But, the more comprehensive, aggressive and multifaceted the union strategy and the more union-building strategies used – the more likely the union is to win.

11. Neutrality Agreements & Corporate Campaigns

Employer neutrality agreements are an effective method of addressing the fear caused by employer interference in organizing.

The CEP should seek to prevent employer interference in organizing by demanding organizing neutrality agreements, especially from companies employing CEP members. These companies cannot expect to have a good working relationship with our union in one location and wage aggressive, fear-based, anti-union campaigns in another.

Our demands for neutrality should be backed by collective bargaining, membership mobilization and corporate campaigns to achieve these demands, i.e. for employers who actively oppose organizing campaigns we will develop tactics to pressure them to change their behaviour by targeting their customers, shareholders, suppliers, community leaders and other stakeholders.

12. Increasing Organizing Capacity

At the same time as CEP takes a more strategic approach to organizing we must also substantially increase our capacity to organize, at all levels of the union – national, regional and local. We need to launch more organizing campaigns and we need more of them to be successful. We need to organize at an unprecedented rate and scale. In order to build capacity CEP will need to:

- **Resources** – devote greater financial and human resources to organizing, at every level of the union;
- **Member organizers** – develop and train a large and diverse pool of member organizers in all sectors and regions to assist in organizing. In recruiting member organizers, we should recognize the need for diversity and strive to reach into our ranks to recruit young workers, women and members of equity seeking groups;
- **Member mobilization** – mobilize members, leaders and activists to support and participate in organizing campaigns and ancillary corporate campaigns;
- **Training** – develop a comprehensive, multi-level organizing training program, which includes participation in active organizing campaigns;

- **Assisting Locals** – encourage and assist local unions to prioritize organizing and build local organizing capacity.

13. Implementation and Recommendations

To give effect to this Report, the Task Force recommends:

1. The CEP will strengthen our commitment to organizing and will develop an organizing culture where CEP leaders, local unions and members support organizing, by:
 - a. Integrating organizing into our meetings, conferences and education programs;
 - b. Involving members in organizing and corporate campaigns; and
 - c. Encouraging and assisting local unions to organize.
2. The CEP will increase our organizing capacity by:
 - a. Devoting more financial and human resources to organizing;
 - b. Developing member organizer and mobilization programs; and
 - c. Developing training and assistance programs for local unions.
3. The CEP will develop strategic national organizing campaigns, including:
 - a. Developing the capacity for large, coordinated multi-site organizing campaigns to take on large corporations;
 - b. Developing, in consultation with the sectors, national sectoral organizing priorities and targets, based on the potential to build density and bargaining power;
 - c. Developing mechanisms for coordinating organizing campaigns nationally and linking them regionally and locally; and
 - d. Implement membership mobilization and corporate campaigns in support of organizing campaigns.
4. The CEP will enhance our organizing success by running more innovative, effective and successful organizing campaigns, by:
 - a. Adopting an organizing model based on effective campaign strategies;
 - b. Developing a manual and training programs based on this organizing model and principals;
 - c. Establishing appropriate benchmarks to determine the potential viability of organizing campaigns; and
 - d. Allocating resources to organizing campaigns that are well planned and run according to this organizing model and principals;
5. The CEP will develop a member organizer program , including:
 - a. A comprehensive, multi-level organizing training program which includes participation in active organizing campaigns;

- b. Recruiting members from all sectors and regions, recognizing the need for diversity and the inclusion of young workers, women and members of equity seeking groups;
 - c. Establishing criteria for using member organizers (when, how many, in what capacity, compensation, etcetera); and
 - d. Developing a “rapid deployment team” of member organizers who can be called upon on short notice for hot campaigns.
6. The CEP will develop a plan to enhance our public and media communications with a view to raising our public profile and name recognition and enhancing our ability to organize.
7. The CEP will strengthen our efforts to ensure that workers’ rights to organize is respected, by:
- a. Stopping employer interference in organizing campaigns by demanding organizing neutrality agreements and backing up those demands with corporate campaigns; and
 - b. Seeking changes to unjust labour laws to provide for a simple and fair process and to protect workers’ rights, especially to restrict employer interference and provide for automatic card-check certifications and first contract arbitration.
8. To enable the CEP to better shape our future and to reinforce our strategic power, the National Executive Board will establish a Merger Advisory Committee.

14. Resources

The Task Force recommends an additional 1% funding to the Organizing Budget at the 2008 National Convention, to be reviewed at the 2010 National Convention with the possibility of an additional 1%.