

STRONG **On AND Beyond** **THE** **PICKET LINE**

**ORGANIZING AN EFFECTIVE
STRIKE AND LOCKOUT ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM**

AFL-CIO
COMMUNITY SERVICES

NO ONE WANTS A STRIKE OR LOCKOUT.

But...when the struggle for workplace justice forces workers to vote to strike, or to be locked out by management, a local union needs to see that the personal and family needs of our brothers and sisters are met. Additionally, a local union strike and lockout assistance program will strengthen your union and build solidarity.

No two strikes or lockouts are the same. Strikes and lockouts vary in duration and the number of workers and unions involved. No strike or lockout assistance manual can possibly cover all the local factors that may have bearing on the situation.

However, while the details of individual strikes and lockouts may differ, the preparation is essentially the same.

This toolkit is a useful guide for state federations, central labor councils and local unions to assess preparedness for a strike or lockout. It's set up in four sections: 1) a simple checklist to get you started; 2) before the strike or lockout; 3) when the strike or lockout happens; and 4) activities during a strike or lockout. How well you handle your time off the job depends on your level of preparedness.

A local union strike and lockout assistance program will:

- Help members plan to conserve personal resources;
- Make wise use of the union's strike and lockout assistance funds;
- Provide access to government and community assistance;
- Help provide food for members and their families; and
- Help keep members on the right side of the picket line.

In addition to this toolkit, we also encourage you to use the AFL-CIO manual *When the Paycheck Stops*, which is a guide for anyone who is unemployed. It is an important resource for your strike and lockout assistance committee and counselors. It provides resources your members can use to deal with personal, financial and family difficulties in the event of a strike or lockout, as well as descriptions of assistance programs and other resources that may be available in your area.

A directory of AFL-CIO Community Services liaisons, [The People Who Help](#), is available on the AFL-CIO website or by contacting the national AFL-CIO. Copies of these and other materials are available from the AFL-CIO Campaigns Department at 202-637-5233 or wfischer@aficio.org.

In solidarity,

Will Fischer
AFL-CIO Community Services Coordinator
May 2012

Sooner Than Later: Before Your Contract Expires

It's impossible to know how long a strike or lockout will last. That's why it's important to take action well before the contract expires. Regardless of the number of workers involved, all effective strike and lockout assistance programs are based on sound planning and organizing.

The right to strike is a right of free men and women. It is the last resort in the collective bargaining process. In many cases, after all attempts at negotiations fail, it is a strike that enables the workers to win economic benefits, better working conditions, a new dignity and a renewed sense of solidarity.

Maintaining solidarity during a strike or lockout is paramount to the success of the workers. Meeting health and welfare needs adequately and expeditiously helps maintain solidarity on the line.

Knowing what programs are available and how to apply for them will be of great help to members on the line. You may live in a community with several hundred private social agencies or only one or two voluntary social services. Among your first steps is finding your local United Way. United Ways provide various types of assistance and service.

The policies and practices of assistance services on one hand, and the influence of labor on the other, will determine how and when agencies can be used most effectively.

Some AFL-CIO international and national unions have a strike and lockout defense or relief fund set up for members. The use of these funds is determined solely by the union and, therefore, no attempt will be made to generalize on this form of assistance. Specific information on union strike and lockout funds is obtainable from the regional or district office as well as the headquarters of a particular international or national union.



PHOTO: BERNARD POLLACK

The union with a functioning Community Services Committee with a year-round program is best equipped to fulfill the union's responsibility to its members and to utilize community resources to meet members' health and human service needs. Local AFL-CIO Community Services Liaisons have the knowledge and experience to provide the assistance you need.

Checklist for an Effective Strike and Lockout Assistance Program

Before the strike or lockout:

- 1. Appoint, activate, mobilize and train your strike or lockout assistance committee;
- 2. Contact your local AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison;
- 3. Determine the number of people affected and the demographics;
- 4. Determine what resources will be available through your local or international union;
- 5. Identify government and community social services resources;
- 6. Reach out to community allies;
- 7. Train strike or lockout counselors;
- 8. Prepare your membership; and
- 9. Recruit volunteers.

When the strike or lockout begins:

- 1. Open and staff a strike or lockout assistance center;
- 2. Publicize availability of confidential community services assistance;
- 3. Provide food for your members;
- 4. Prepare and distribute informational packets;
- 5. Find temporary jobs; and
- 6. Maintain the website and Facebook page.

Activities during a strike or lockout:

- 1. Assess members' ongoing needs and respond.



PHOTO: UNITY@VERIZON

Before the Strike or Lockout

1. APPOINT, ACTIVATE, MOBILIZE AND TRAIN YOUR STRIKE OR LOCKOUT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE

This committee coordinates a community services assistance program for members. This is a full-time job. Strike or lockout assistance should be the committee's only responsibility, in lieu of picket line duty. If your local union has a community services committee, it can fill this role.

Your strike or lockout assistance committee serves to:

- Connect members to services and assistance they need;
- Prepare your members for financial hardship;
- Be an advocate for striking and locked-out workers; and
- Oversee the emergency hardship fund.

Your strike or lockout assistance committee coordinates volunteers to:

- Find temporary jobs for members who need them;
- Provide food for members and their families;
- Maintain the strike and lockout assistance section of the website and/or Facebook page; and
- Prepare informational packets for members.

Tips for selecting committee members:

To be effective, your committee members should:

- Represent all members—all departments and shifts;
- Maintain confidentiality;
- Have good judgment;
- Be respected by fellow workers;
- Get along well with others;
- Take criticism well; and
- Work hard and not be easily discouraged.

Trained UCAN (Union Community Activist Network) volunteers and retirees are valuable to have on the committee.



PHOTO: JON BRIER

2. CONTACT THE AFL-CIO

Before the contract deadline, the committee should meet with an AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison or contact AFL-CIO Community Services Coordinator [Will Fischer](#) to plan and organize the strike or lockout assistance program to:

- Link you to the AFL-CIO Community Services regional director;
- Maintain contact with the affiliated unions;
- Recruit volunteers;
- Identify resources;
- Train strike or lockout counselors;
- Identify areas where you may need additional assistance; and
- Link to Union Plus for credit card and mortgage assistance for striking workers.

3. DETERMINE THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE AFFECTED AND THE DEMOGRAPHICS

- Count how many members will be on strike or locked out.
- Estimate how many will need help.
- Identify what counties people live in and how many people per county.
- Try to identify the number of newer hires and workers in lower-paid job classifications.

4. DETERMINE WHAT RESOURCES WILL BE AVAILABLE THROUGH YOUR LOCAL OR INTERNATIONAL UNION

- Contact your union for strike information.
- Ask for help with set-up if you don't have a website or Facebook page.

5. IDENTIFY GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES RESOURCES

Get the Facts

All communities have a network of social service agencies. Public agencies are supported by tax dollars. Nonprofit, community-based agencies are funded by charitable donations from individuals, foundations and organizations including United Way. Call 2-1-1 or your local United Way for a list of agencies in your area.

Your strike or lockout assistance committee will set up a meeting of key social service agencies to create a fact sheet or directory to give to each counselor. It should list the following information for each agency:

- The agency name, address and phone number;
- Agency contact person;
- The kinds of available services;
- Any costs;
- Agency location;

- Office hours;
- Eligibility requirements, if any;
- What is needed to apply; and
- Available online resources.

Your AFL-CIO Central Labor Council Community Services Committee can help arrange this meeting. Along with an AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison, representatives from local agencies providing these services should be included in your meeting:

- Key, labor-supported local elected officials;
- Community information and referral;
- Child care resources;
- Consumer credit counseling;
- Emergency assistance;
- Employment office;
- Family counseling;
- Food;
- Health and dental care;
- Legal Services;
- Religious-based charities;
- Salvation Army;
- Transportation services;
- United Way;
- Utility providers;
- Workers' rights organizations; and
- Credit union affiliated with the union, if applicable.



PHOTO: BERNARD POLLACK

6. REACH OUT TO COMMUNITY ALLIES

- Call the AFL-CIO central labor council and ask for help. An AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison and Community Services Committee are valuable resources.
- Notify worker-friendly elected officials of the strike or lockout and ask for their support.
- Inform your allies in the community. Many political, religious and community leaders will understand your struggle and the difficulties your members and their families will face—educate those who do not.
- Notify government and community agencies so they can prepare to serve your members and their families.
- Gain a working knowledge of your federal, state, county and city assistance laws and regulations. Unless a program is governed completely by federal requirements, you may expect differences in eligibility standards and the degree of assistance provided in each state.
- Cultivate relationships with the press.

7. TRAIN STRIKE OR LOCKOUT COUNSELORS

Strike or lockout counselors need initial training, interviewing and listening skills training, and referral and confidentiality training. Representatives of the most important local social service agencies should be speakers at your training sessions. They can describe the services available to members on strike or locked out, and bring materials on their programs and eligibility requirements. A community or United Way information and referral specialist can provide information about social services in the community.

Initial training includes:

- Knowing the office—how to use the phone and computer set-up.
- Approachability. Counselors should be cheerful, friendly and sympathetic. It is not easy for most people to admit that certain problems have overwhelmed them and that they need help. Make the way easy.
- Counselors must not be influenced by their own personal prejudices. They must not be anxious to help people they like and be indifferent to those they dislike.
- Counselors must recognize the rights of workers to make their own decisions. Counselors can offer a possible course of action, and a person or agency to approach, but if the worker decides not to accept the advice, that is their right and decision.
- Counselors need to understand that for some members, the strike is not the beginning of a financial train wreck—it may just be the icing on the cake.
- Each counselor should review the AFL-CIO manual *When the Paycheck Stops*, available online in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

Interviewing and listening skills training includes:

- How to conduct an interview of a member seeking help.
- How to record information on the interview form or database.
- How to be a good listener and give full attention to people seeking help. Often, people find considerable help in simply talking about their problem.
- How to identify unsaid issues, such as domestic violence and substance abuse.
- Counselors must be honest. You should not say you understand if you do not. You must not offer false assurances or make promises you cannot fulfill.
- Counselors must remember they are not psychiatrists. **It is not their job to solve the workers' problems alone. It is their job to guide the worker to the right person or agency.** Often, the problem presented by the worker is only a symptom of the real problem, and only a well-trained person will be able to discover the real problem.

Referral and confidentiality training includes:

- Information on services available in the community and how to apply.
- How to access online resources.
- Knowing how to complete a referral form and record information in the database.
- How to follow up with members to make sure they received the service needed.
- How to keep **confidential** files on members requesting assistance.

A NOTE ON CONFIDENTIALITY: As a strike or lockout counselor, it is imperative that confidentiality is maintained at all times. Workers must have faith their problems will not be told to others. Asking for help is difficult for many of our brothers and sisters. If they can't be assured that what they discuss with a strike or lockout counselor remains in confidence, then they'll likely not ask and solidarity on the picket line will be damaged.

Counselors will need a desk, phone, computer access and a **private** location to perform their duties. An AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison and/or the AFL-CIO Community Services Network should be used to help your strike or lockout counselors throughout your strike or lockout assistance program.

8. PREPARE YOUR MEMBERSHIP

The better prepared your members are for the possibility of a strike or lockout, the better they can deal with a temporary reduction in income—and the longer they can participate in an effective strike or lockout.

Members should be encouraged to:

- Keep bills current; creditors are more likely to work with your members when they're on strike or locked out if they've paid their bills on time in the past.
- Avoid credit purchases. Prior to and during the strike or lockout, don't live on your credit cards.
- Stock up on food and medicine—and consider household pets' needs.
- Know eligibility requirements and prepare to apply for public and community assistance.
- Save and conserve. The rent/mortgage always should be paid first, then utilities, food, etc.
- Develop a standard letter for creditors from the union that can be used by members.
- Let family and friends know what is going on so they can support and help.

By organizing an effective strike or lockout assistance program, you can provide the help your members need to get prepared and stay strong and healthy. Also, this preparation will enable them to better handle personal or family issues and the stress that comes with being unemployed. This, in turn, helps the union remain strong on the picket line.

9. RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

There are many jobs for volunteers in a strike or lockout. For example:

- Provide publicity;
- Assist with food program;
- Collate and stuff informational packets;
- Seek temporary jobs for posting; and
- Maintain website and Facebook page.

Activities for these volunteers are described in detail in Section 3.

When the Strike or Lockout Begins

1. OPEN AND STAFF A STRIKE OR LOCKOUT ASSISTANCE CENTER

A striking or locked-out member who faces financial, personal or family difficulties needs to know the union is ready to help.

Your strike or lockout assistance center should be:

Visible

- Open your center the first day the strike or lockout begins (central location, accessible by public transportation).
- Notify your members of the location, telephone number and hours of operation.
- Add union signage or banners with committee's name: Strike or Lockout Center of (name of union).

Comfortable

- Select a location that's convenient for your members.
- Have private areas where members can have uninterrupted conversations with strike or lockout counselors.
- Schedule appointments so members don't have to wait in line.

Informative

- Trained union counselors will have information to help your members.
- Have brochures, fliers and Internet access to a variety of agencies and issues that will benefit your members.



2. PUBLICIZE AVAILABILITY OF CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNITY SERVICES ASSISTANCE

Make the activities of the committee known by:

- Posting names and phone numbers of members to contact;
- Doing a press release; and
- Spreading the word through Facebook and other new media.

3. PROVIDE FOOD FOR YOUR MEMBERS

Your strike or lockout assistance committee should plan to provide food to your members, working with community food agencies first. See whether they will accept your members as participants in their regular food distribution programs. Community agencies may have other food distribution programs available for a minimal administrative fee or in return for volunteers.

Raising Money for Food

Here are a few suggestions for raising money for a food program:

- Get the help and endorsement of the national or international union, the AFL-CIO central labor council and state federation.
- Recruit and train volunteers to speak at meetings of local unions and organizations.
- Ask for contributions and suggest an adopt-a-local program by giving a small amount (\$1 per member or less) per month for the duration of the strike or lockout.
- Work with or establish a community garden or food co-op.
- Place “Food for Solidarity” stickers on three-quart #10 cans. Pass the cans at union meetings and use them at plant gates, rallies, conventions, conferences and other events.
- Raffle off a union cap, jacket or some other small prize with chances sold for 50 cents to \$1 each.
- Have a donation section on your union’s website and/or Facebook page.
- Organize a fundraising event, such as a benefit dance, casino night, bake sale, or yard or garage sale.
- Keep accurate records on the source of all contributions and the use of funds.
- Acknowledge all contributions you receive.

Setting Up a Food Pantry

If local food agencies are inadequate to feed large numbers of people affected by a strike, lockout or plant closing, a labor food pantry should be established.

Tips for setting up a food pantry:

- Ask the AFL-CIO state federation or central labor council to help with finding a location and stocking it.
- Find a building large enough to store bulky boxes. Try to get one with a loading area and ramp.
- Be aware of fire codes and zoning regulations, licenses and permits. Be aware of pest control.
- Install shelves and countertop space for distribution.

- If you haven't already, apply for IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status (or make arrangements with an established agency with one) so you can buy bulk food.
- Solicit donations from food stores, wholesalers, processors, farmers, restaurant supply houses, food co-ops and/or community gardens.
- Organize food drives with unions, churches, colleges and other groups for food items and money donations.
- Don't be particular about types of food, as long as they're nutritious. Nonperishables (canned and dry goods) will last, but produce will move quickly with a large crowd. (If possible, be sensitive to members' needs and cultural eating habits.)
- Recruit volunteers to pick up, sort, shelve, bag and distribute the food.

Distributing Food Vouchers

A food voucher program helps supplement other food programs. Members can purchase meats, vegetables and other perishables that may not be available at food pantries.

Steps for setting up a food voucher program:

- Contact a local food store to redeem vouchers issued by the strike or lockout assistance committee (food stores usually will accept a discount when reimbursed by the committee in return for the increased business in the store).
- Talk to unions representing members at the stores; they may be able to secure discounts on food certificates.
- Talk to the AFL-CIO central labor council and local food agencies for help in setting guidelines for the program.

Setting Up a Strike or Lockout Kitchen

A strike or lockout kitchen usually provides food to members on the picket line. It also can be used to feed all members on strike or locked out, helping them to stretch their food budget and fostering solidarity.

Steps for setting up a strike or lockout kitchen:

- Find a location convenient to the picket line.
- Start with coffee urns and sandwiches.
- Equip your kitchen with large sinks, a large stove, food preparation area, plenty of hot water, large pots for soup and stews and, if possible, refrigerated storage.
- Keep your kitchen clean! Use bleach or a disinfectant when washing, rinse utensils thoroughly with very hot water and air dry.
- Employ proper pest control.

4. PREPARE AND DISTRIBUTE INFORMATIONAL PACKETS

This includes all the brochures and fliers provided by local agencies, United Way and government resources and a list of helpful websites.

This is an activity volunteers can assemble and have available for distribution.

5. FIND TEMPORARY JOBS

Volunteers can reach out to find, and post on the website and Facebook, temporary jobs to help families keep their heads above water. Get the word out to everyone you know—friends, family, allies—and ask them to post their requests for part-time workers on your Facebook page. Seasonal employers are also a good resource for temporary work—garden centers, ski resorts, the IRS and state tax departments.

6. MAINTAIN THE WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

Use Technology and Your Union's Website

Today so much of the way we distribute communications and receive information is through computers and technology, such as a strike or lockout page or section on your union's website and/or Facebook page. This should include:

- Information on resources and programs;
- Tools such as a family budget worksheet and sample letters to landlords, creditors and mortgage companies;
- Tips on saving money and conserving resources;
- Temporary jobs;
- Fundraising and donation information;
- Calls for volunteers; and
- Tracking volunteers in a database for follow up.

Technology also can be used to educate the public and influence public opinion.

Activities During a Strike or Lockout

During the strike or lockout, the committee should meet at least once a week to:

- Schedule activities;
- Resolve individual members' cases;
- Find temporary jobs for members who need them;
- Manage caseloads;
- Handle problems with agencies; and
- Update strategy.

Committee reports at union meetings and rallies will keep members informed and boost morale.

1. ASSESS MEMBERS' ONGOING NEEDS AND RESPOND

Coordinate additional workshops and services with your AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison as needed and include spouses, family members and friends. Topics could include:

- Credit counseling;
- Predatory lending;
- No-cost/low-cost family activities;
- Food distributions; and
- Stress management.



PHOTO: UNITY@VERIZON

Three Final Thoughts

Too Many Promises

In moments of enthusiasm, some union officials may promise members on the verge of a strike or lockout almost unlimited financial assistance. This is bad. Union members know that a strike or lockout means sacrifice, that a bread-and-butter program is better than a pie-in-the-sky promise. It is important to avoid promises that cannot be fulfilled.

Too Little Time

Some unions may be on strike or locked out one week or more before they think of calling their central labor councils' community services coordinator or AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison. The result of this too-late policy is a too-little program. Community Services should be contacted at least two weeks before a strike or lockout—or earlier if possible.

Too Many Needs

In the case of a protracted strike or lockout or when there are limited resources, the union may want to establish a Family Assistance Fund and raise money through an Adopt-a-Striking/Locked-Out Family campaign to help with hardship cases. This step should not be taken lightly or without consultation with your international unions, state federation and central body. Help is available through your local and regional AFL-CIO Community Services Liaison and the entire AFL-CIO Community Services Network.

Strike or Lockout Counselor Referral Form

UNION/LOCAL #: _____

APPOINTMENT DATE: _____ DATE: _____

TO: _____
NAME OF AGENCY

ADDRESS OF AGENCY

NAME AND TITLE OF AGENCY CONTACT

THIS WILL INTRODUCE: _____

REASON FOR REFERRAL: _____

SIGNATURE OF STRIKE COUNSELOR

ADDRESS

E-MAIL ADDRESS PHONE NUMBER

COMMENTS

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Dozens of unions organize rally to support locked-out sugar workers



Becki Jacobsen (left), a union “sugar beet ambassador,” and fellow American Crystal worker Deb Kostrzewski (inset), active in the union’s food drive, speak at a Dec. 3 meeting with Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton in Moorhead. “Nobody can tell us what we can say or do,” Kostrzewski said. “We are not going to shut up—we are going to keep fighting.”

Above: Militant/Diana Newberry; Inset: Scott Ripplinger

BY NATALIE MORRISON

SOUTH ST. PAUL, Minn.—Some 120 people turned out for a spirited rally and fundraiser Nov. 29 in solidarity with 1,300 locked-out sugar workers in the Upper Midwest.

The event was held at the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1189 hall. “The locked-out sugar workers are always welcome,” said Jennifer Christensen, secretary-treasurer of Local 1189, as she opened the meeting. More than 30 area unions, the Minneapolis and St. Paul Regional Labor Federations and the Minnesota Farmers Union endorsed the rally.

“Take a shift at the picket line. Stand with them as union brothers and sisters,” Jim Meyer, political organizer of Education Minnesota and the chair of the event, told rally participants. “This is what we do in our union. We go down to the picket line in Chaska every Wednesday.” Five of the 19 locked-out workers at the Chaska plant attended the event.

American Crystal has workers at five plants in northern Minnesota and North Dakota, and at two smaller plants in Chaska, Minn., and Mason City, Iowa. Workers are represented by the Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers union. They were locked out Aug. 1 after rejecting the company’s concession contract by 96 percent. On Nov. 1 they rejected a slightly different contract by 90 percent.

The company, which has been running its seven facilities with nearly 1,000 contract scabs, has begun hiring replacement workers from the local community as part of its determined drive against the union.

Ken Lamberson, a worker at the East Grand Forks plant for 16 years, thanked members of Teamsters Local 120 who had delivered a semitrailer of supplies to the locked-out workers. The Teamsters, along with several other unions, provided some 50,000 pounds of food before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Several members of the National Association of Letter Carriers Branch 9 in Golden Valley attended the rally. They reported that Becki Jacobsen, a locked-out sugar worker in Moorhead and a “sugar beet ambassador,” spoke Nov. 22 at their general membership meeting. Jacobsen is one of the leaders of a traveling outreach program organized by the union to speak to other workers and unionists about their struggle.

“The sugar beet ambassador program is a good tool to make unions aware of what is going on and what can happen to them,” Jacobsen told the *Militant*.

Custodians and bus drivers, members of SEIU Local 284, spoke about a union-busting move by the Robbinsdale school board to contract out their jobs.

“We are proud to stand with the sugar workers and plan to stay with you until you win,” said Jean Woznak, a bus driver for 16 years and union steward for SEIU Local 284.

Workers, unionists, their families and supporters shared a dinner, discussing the fight and other workers’ struggles. A total of \$24,789 was raised from donations, according to Meyer.

On Dec. 3 some 400 locked-out workers came to a union-organized meeting with Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton at the Moorhead State University Student Union.

Dayton spoke briefly. “In the next few days, we need to go to the bargaining table and stay until a contract is agreed on,” he said. “We have to compromise and agree with things we don’t agree with.” Dayton compared it to the “resolution” following the state government’s shutdown that laid off thousands of workers.

Speakers included local politicians, union officials, several locked-out workers and their family members and a couple of professors. Sugar workers talked about their hardships and their struggles and asked Dayton to press American Crystal to end its lockout.

To invite one of the BCTGM “sugar ambassadors” to speak at your union, contact [name, number, e-mail].

Donations to the sugar workers can be sent to [address]. Write checks to [name of strike fund] or give online at [link for online giving].

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