

WORKING AMERICA

In the last eight years, Working America has been able to reach out to people who do not have a union on the job, provide them with useful issue information and give them an opportunity to voice their concerns.

With 3 million members, Working America is expanding the AFL-CIO and building a new source of worker power. We fight for issues such as protecting workers' rights, attacks against health care for all, good jobs, education and retirement security, and we work to hold corporate and political leaders accountable.

One measure of our effectiveness can be seen in the recent elections. Our members voted overwhelmingly for labor-endorsed candidates, 71 percent to 29 percent in the U.S. House and 70 percent to 30 percent in the U.S. Senate, in 2010.

There is growing interest among State Federation and Central Labor Council leaders in having Working America programs in their areas. While the resources are not available to have a full recruitment canvass everywhere there is an interest, there are many ways to develop a program, as outlined below. Please contact Maggie Priebe, program director of Working America, at mpriebe@workingamerica.org or 202-639-6211 for more information.

For information about Working America, visit www.workingamerica.org.

Long-Term Field Canvass

Working America provides experienced field directors who hire canvass staff locally to recruit members and inform working people who do not have a union on the job.

Canvassers mobilize support on issues by collecting handwritten letters, postcards and petitions to elected officials from members. They can also identify the industry in which a member works and identify potential volunteers. A typical canvass recruits between 2,000 and 3,000 members a week.

Short-Term Field Canvass

We can operate a canvass for a period of a few months. For example, several affiliates were interested in building a base of community support and identifying the occupations of workers in the Jackson, Mississippi, area.

In three months, we recruited 20,000 members and identified the occupations or industries in which 80 percent of them work. We also conducted more in-depth surveys among selected members.

Phone Canvass

We can recruit members by phone in any given area. While the interaction is not as rich as with the field canvass, this is a less expensive means of outreach, and our testing has found that the ongoing communication with members recruited by phone is nevertheless effective.

While the phone canvass is a very flexible means of recruitment, it is limited by the number of people who screen calls or do not answer.

Field Canvass with Union Members

The Colorado AFL-CIO and the Denver Area Labor Federation created a new canvass model in 2006 by training lost-time staff to be a Working America canvass team.

With assistance from Working America, the canvass recruited 7,500 Working America members in summer 2006, while also qualifying a minimum wage initiative for the ballot. This pilot canvass was enormously successful and can be replicated at any time.

Community Outreach

Several local labor movements have taken advantage of opportunities such as job creation and pro-worker events to recruit new Working America members. Local union members and staff can sign up members at community events such as rallies and meetings; through Labor in the Pulpit; at shopping malls; and through outreach to community organizations.

Community outreach may be especially effective in reaching out to young workers, the unemployed, immigrant communities and other communities of color.

In 2011, the North Shore Labor Council of Lynn, Massachusetts, reached out to Working America to build community power with progressive allies within the city of Lynn to educate working families, get them mobilized around worker issues in the community and activate them around the elections.

Teaming up as partners, Working America sent an experienced field director to work with the leaders and organizers of the North Shore Labor Council and trained them on how to talk about Working America in the neighborhoods, how to get non-union people to become Working America members, how to deliver issue messages, how to get people to take action, how to manage logistics and train other activists on how to canvass, and how to work with the Working America team in Washington, DC, to communicate with new members in Lynn all year long.

Friends and Family

Local unions can enlist union activists to sign up non-union friends and relatives. If five unions each had 10 activists sign up 10 friends, the CLC and State Federation would have 500 new members.

Ballot Initiative Campaigns

In many states, ballot measures are one of the most important ways policies are made that can help—or hurt—workers. Whether it's raising the minimum wage or imposing "Right to Work for Less" policies, local union movements face well-funded anti-worker forces. Working America's field canvass can combat them, from collecting signatures to the final GOTV effort.

In 2008, Working America helped the Oregon AFL-CIO and the Colorado AFL-CIO defeat anti-worker ballot initiatives. In 2010, we again helped the Oregon AFL-CIO, this time in passing landmark tax increases on corporations and the wealthiest individuals.

Seeking Support from Outside the Union Movement

The Working America Education Fund was created in 2005 as the 501(c)(3) partner of Working America. The Education Fund researches and develops educational materials about conditions facing working people, and policy issues affecting their working lives and their rights. These materials are distributed through the door-to-door canvass and online communications programs of Working America.

The Working America Education Fund can accept tax-deductible contributions. Local allies can support our work by contributing to this partner organization.

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COMMUNITY AFFILIATE OF THE AFL-CIO