



Womens Committee Handbook

A guide by the IA SMART Women's Committee



Table of Content



1

Introduction----- Page 1-2

- Importance of Women in Unions
- Unions' Need for Women

2

Starting a Women's Committee- Page 3-5

- Gaining Leadership Support
- Initial Steps
- Committee Structure

3

Goals and Activities----- Page 6-9

- Advocacy and Support
- Training and Development
- Community Involvement
- SMART Army

4

Effective Meeting Strategies----- Page 10-12

- Planning and Execution
- Making Meetings Engaging

5

Project Ideas for the Women's-- Page 13-14 **Committee**

6

Conclusion----- Page 15-16

- Summary of Key Points
- Call to Action

Women In Unions

Women's union involvement has significantly reshaped their effectiveness, inclusivity, and approach to addressing workplace issues in the United States and Canada. Women's active participation and leadership have been key to advocating for equal rights, fair pay, and safe working conditions, thereby enhancing the strength and reach of unions.



Advantages for Women in Unions- Women in unions enjoy notable benefits such as higher wages and better job security. Unionized women earn significantly more than their nonunion counterparts, with a smaller gender wage gap compared to the national average. This advantage is particularly pronounced for Hispanic women, who see the largest earnings difference when represented by unions. Additionally, women in unions have access to better health insurance coverage and are instrumental in pushing for policies that benefit all workers, including issues critical to women and families, like equal pay and parental leave.

Efforts Towards Gender Equity- Unions are increasingly focusing on gender equity, ensuring promotional opportunities for all. Sectoral bargaining has emerged as an effective tool in reducing the gender pay gap across industries by covering a larger group of workers under collective agreements.

Representation in Canada- In Canada, the perception of a typical union member has shifted. Despite this, women remain underrepresented in union leadership roles, highlighting a persistent glass ceiling that mirrors wider societal challenges in gender equality. However, public sector unions have been pioneers in electing women to significant leadership positions, showcasing the potential for change within the labour movement.



Women In Unions

Historical Context and Progress- The historical contributions of women to the labour movement are profound, from the early days of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union to the formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) in the 1970s. These movements fought for workers' rights and played a crucial role in advocating for gender equality within the labour movement itself.

Wider Benefits and Challenges- Unions have been shown to raise wages for all workers, particularly benefiting women, black, and Hispanic workers by promoting pay transparency and equitable salary structures. Despite the historical challenges of sexism and racism within unions, there has been significant progress in increasing female representation and ensuring equitable access for all workers.

The ongoing struggle for gender equality and representation in unions highlights both the achievements and challenges faced by women in the labour movement. As unions continue to evolve, the active involvement of women remains crucial to their ability to advocate for workers' rights and social justice effectively.

“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.”

MAYA ANGELOU

Starting a **Women's Committee**



Gaining Leadership Support

Establishing a women's committee that makes a real difference is crucial to have the backing of your union's leadership. Craft a proposal that clearly showcases how the committee will benefit the local, focusing on addressing specific needs and seizing opportunities for growth and improvement within the local community and beyond. Highlight examples of successful women's committees in other locals and unions to illustrate the potential positive impact. Leadership support goes beyond approval. It's about securing an ally for impactful actions and advocacy efforts within the local union structure.



Initial Steps and Committee Structure

Start by rallying a group of members who are passionate about gender equality, enhancing and increasing the roles of women in the union. A small, committed team can spark significant changes, so focus on quality over quantity. Ask your local leadership for assistance in making contact with your sisters to gauge interest in forming a committee.

Starting a **Women's Committee**

Committee Structure



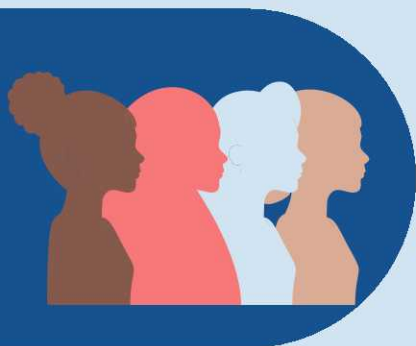
Vision and Mission Statements

Define what the committee aims to achieve (vision) and how it plans to do so (mission). These statements will guide your activities and decisions. It is always good for a committee to have goals and a plan .



Chairperson Appointment

Choose a leader who is not only passionate about the cause but also has the skills to manage meetings, mediate discussions, and represent the committee within and outside the union.



Subcommittees

If the committee is large enough, feel free to establish smaller groups focused on specific areas like advocacy, education, pension/benefits, parental resources, and community engagement. This division allows for specialized attention to various aspects of the committee's work, making overall goals more attainable.

Starting a **Women's Committee**

Committee Structure



Meetings

Regular meetings are recommended to ensure that momentum is sustained and members stay engaged. These sessions serve as a platform for updating on advancements, brainstorming new initiatives, and reinforcing the group's goals. Meetings can be held in person, online, or through a hybrid approach, adapting to what best suits the local's needs. This flexibility allows for inclusive participation, accommodating those who may not always be available to meet in person.

These gatherings are more than just administrative checkpoints; they foster a sense of community and solidarity among women who might feel isolated in their workplaces. By providing a supportive environment, the committee works towards achieving its objectives and strengthens the bonds among its members, enhancing camaraderie.

Big or small a local women's committee can solidify its role within the union as a dynamic advocate for change, support for women in the workplace, help women joining SMART feel welcomed and a contributor to the broader well-being of our Union.



Goals and Activities

Key Areas of Focus

Advocacy: Advocacy within the committee can focus on fostering a positive and respectful workplace environment for all members.

Additionally, the committee can take a proactive role in assessing and addressing the broader needs of the workforce, including healthcare access and achieving a healthy work-life balance. The committee can gather insights into the diverse needs of union members, forming a basis for advocating improvements in these areas during collective bargaining negotiations. This approach ensures that the advocacy efforts are inclusive and comprehensive and contribute to building a stronger, more united workforce.

Education and Training: Organizing workshops on leadership, rights awareness, and skill development can empower women in the union. Mentorship programs pairing experienced union members with newcomers can also foster leadership and provide guidance.

Community Engagement: Collaborating with local labour councils and women's organizations enhances the union's reach and impact. Participating in campaigns for human rights and supporting community initiatives for childcare and poverty alleviation strengthen community ties.



Goals and Activities

Sub Committee Topics



Professional Development

The Professional Development sub-committee can play a pivotal role in empowering women within the union. Assisting women to develop essential leadership skills such as effective communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and educating members on the union and collective agreement. These valuable resources build confidence and prepare women to take on leadership roles within the union and in their workplaces, fostering a more inclusive and diverse leadership landscape.



Health and Welfare

The Health and Welfare Sub-Committee can focus on identifying and addressing the unique health concerns faced by women in the workforce. Developing and promoting wellness programs that cater specifically to women's health needs and mental health support. By leveraging existing health resources, this sub-committee can work to ensure that women have access to comprehensive healthcare resources, health education, and preventive care programs designed to support their well-being in and out of the workplace.

Goals and Activities



Sub Committee Topics



Networking/Mentoring Sub-Committee

The Networking/Mentoring Sub-Committee can foster a supportive community within the union by creating platforms for women to share their experiences, offer advice, and support one another. This initiative should empower women in the union through mentorship opportunities, networking events, and workshops that enhance professional and personal development. By matching experienced Sisters with those newer to the field, this sub-committee can encourage the exchange of knowledge and skills, facilitate career advancement and strengthen solidarity among women within the Local. The activities organized by this sub-committee not only enhance the professional capabilities of its members but also build a strong, interconnected community that supports each member's growth and success.

Many more sub-committees could be established. Each local women's committee will have its own unique members and needs. Sub-committees should reflect the needs of the committee and the local.

Goals and Activities

SMART Army

SMART Army events are designed to showcase the union's commitment to the community through service and advocacy. These events range from environmental cleanups and renovation projects for those in need to advocacy and educational campaigns supporting workers' rights and community welfare.



SMART Army & Your Committee

Event Planning and Coordination: The women's committee can take a leading role in organizing SMART Army events, working closely with the local union to identify community needs and opportunities for engagement. This could involve planning logistical details, recruiting volunteers, and coordinating with community partners.

Community Service Projects: Women's committees can identify projects that resonate with their goals, such as initiatives supporting women and children in the community. These projects can then be integrated into the SMART Army's schedule of events, leveraging the skills and workpower of the broader union membership.

Advocacy and Awareness Campaigns: Collaborating on campaigns that raise awareness about issues affecting women in the workplace and the broader community, such as equal pay, healthcare access, and safe workplace initiatives. Not only is it a great opportunity for SMART sisters to organize their Women's Committee for a great cause, but these campaigns can also benefit from the SMART organization and the initiatives our members and membership offer.

Fundraising for Community Causes: Organizing fundraising events that support local charities can help to build strong community ties and demonstrate the union's commitment to supporting vulnerable populations.

Effective Meeting Strategies



Planning and Execution

Set Clear Agendas

Before each meeting, distribute an agenda that outlines the topics to be discussed, the objectives of each item, and any preparation required from members. This helps attendees come prepared and contributes to a more focused discussion.

Define Meeting Roles

Assign roles such as recording secretary, timekeeper or moderator for each meeting as your committee sees fit. These roles help keep the meeting organized and ensure that all necessary tasks are handled efficiently.

Incorporate members feedback

Regularly gather feedback from members on the meeting format, content, and schedule. This ensures that the meetings continue to meet the needs and preferences of all members.



Effective Meeting Strategies

Making meetings engaging

Diverse Formats: Rotate meeting formats between information sharing, brainstorming sessions, and problem-solving discussions. Changing the format can keep meetings fresh and engaging for participants.

Interactive Elements: Use interactive elements like information related to recent union activities or relevant laws to keep the members engaged and informed. Keep your committee up to date with all events and news within SMART and your Local.

Guest Speakers and Workshops: Invite experts or inspirational speakers to share their knowledge or experiences related to the committee's goals. Workshops can be organized on skills development, such as public speaking, mental health first aid, or leadership, adding valuable learning opportunities to meetings.

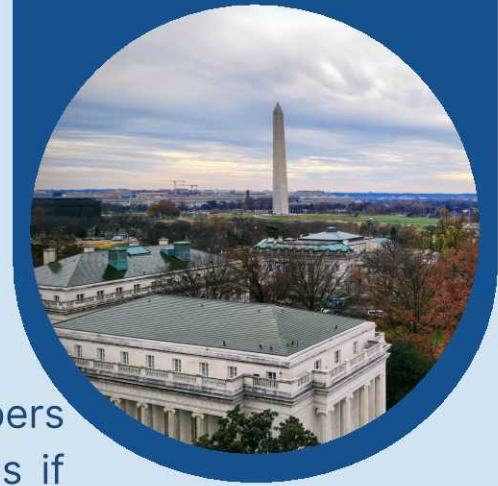


Showcase Success Stories: Regularly feature stories of what the committee or members have achieved. Highlighting success not only motivates members but also helps them see the tangible impact of their involvement.

Mentorship: Implement a buddy system where new members are paired with more experienced sisters. This helps new members feel more welcome and provides them with a go-to person for any questions or guidance they may need.



Effective Meeting Strategies



Making meetings engaging

Accessibility Considerations: Ensure that all members can participate fully by considering hybrid meetings if your membership is far spread across a large area, making the meetings more accessible will increase participation.

By adopting the above strategies, meetings can become more productive and engaging, fostering a sense of community and purpose among members. These approaches encourage active participation, making meetings valuable for everyone involved. As the number of women in trades rises and the success of SMART women’s committees rises, we all play an important role in retaining women in SMART.

TABLE 1. WOMEN WORKING IN CONSTRUCTION, 2017 TO 2022

Construction & Extraction Occupations, Apprentices, and Industry	2017 Women		2022** Women		Change 2017-2022
	Numbers	(%)	Numbers	(%)	(%)
Construction and Extraction occupations, including	240,930	3.0%	353,934	4.2%	46.9%
Construction Laborers	64,218	3.3%	109,123	4.9%	69.9%
Painters and paperhangers*	35,640	6.6%	67,620	10.5%	89.7%
Carpenters	29,722	2.2%	44,870	3.5%	51.0%
Electricians	21,425	2.5%	20,196	2.2%	-5.7%
Pipelayers, plumbers, pipefitters*	n/a		6,710	1.1%	n/a
Construction and building inspectors	9,078	10.2%	13,334	11.8%	46.9%
First-line supervisors	19,170	3.0%	28,423	4.3%	48.3%
Women apprentices (active)	5,245	3.1%	8,649	4.3%	64.9%
Construction managers	79,994	7.4%	89,845	8.5%	12.3%
Construction Jobs on Payroll (incl. office/admin) (May**)	876,000	12.6%	1,120,000	14.1%	27.9%
Construction Industry All Workers (incl. office/admin)	971,000	9.1%	1,284,000	10.9%	32.2%

Notes: Data that allow analysis by race/ethnicity and gender are not published. *In 2020, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics amended the definitions of some occupations; this means that 2017 and 2022 data are not fully comparable. **Annual averages are not released for Current Employment Statistics; data are for May 2017 and May 2023. Sources: IWPR calculations based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey Annual Averages, Table 11 and Table 14, <https://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm>; Current Employment Statistics Series CES2000000010 and CES2000000001; and Apprenticeship USA (2003) 'Data and Statistics' <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/data-and-statistics>.



Project Ideas For the Committee

Women's committees can engage in various projects that support their local union and promote gender equality, education, and community involvement. Here are some project ideas that range from simple to more involved initiatives

Creating Educational Pamphlets: Design pamphlets or flyers highlighting SMART career roles, achievements and the broader labour movement. These can be distributed at trade shows, community events, or within the workplace to raise awareness and inspire participation.

Workshops and Seminars: Organize workshops on topics relevant to women in the workforce, such as negotiation skills, leadership, work-life balance and health and safety concerns. These events can serve both educational and networking purposes.

Mentorship Programs: Establish a mentorship program to pair up experienced SMART sisters with newer members. This can help share knowledge, offer support, and foster leadership skills among union women.

SMART Army Events: Engage in community service projects that support causes important to women, such as volunteering at women's shelters, organizing drives for schools or daycare centers, and participating in community clean-up days.

Health and Wellness Campaigns: Host meetings focused on women's health issues, offering informational sessions and discussing health screenings, benefits and local resources. Topics could include stress management, reproductive health, and preventive care measures.



Project Ideas For the Committee

Social Media Campaigns: Use social media platforms to highlight SMART sisters at work, share stories of successful SMART leaders, and promote upcoming events and initiatives for your committee.

Support for Working Mothers: Develop resources and support networks for working mothers, including information on childcare options, flexible work arrangements, and parenting tips for balancing work and family life.

Gender Equality Advocacy: Advocate for policies and practices that promote gender equality within the workplace and fair representation in leadership roles.

Cultural and Educational Excursions: Organize visits to museums, art exhibits, or lectures focusing on women's history, labour history, or other relevant topics. This can be a great way for members to learn and bond outside of the workplace.



Womens Committee Handbook

In Conclusion

This guide serves as a foundational blueprint, drawing inspiration from the experiences and practices of SMART women and their local women's committees. It's designed to offer insights and strategies for those interested in fostering a vibrant, impactful women's committee within their union.

The support from Local leadership is where each committee begins, a cornerstone that ensures the committee's initiatives align with the broader goals of the union and can receive the necessary resources and recognition to thrive.

Equally important is the commitment to consistency and dedication within the committee itself. The committee's size is unimportant; a small group of dedicated members can drive significant change, provide camaraderie and thrive as a committee.

The journey of each women's committee is unique, shaped by the specific challenges and opportunities within its Local and industry niche. This guide offers a starting point, but the most effective strategies and projects will be those tailored to its members' needs and aspirations. The key to success lies in building a supportive, engaged community that champions the contributions and rights of SMART sisters and beyond.

As you embark on or continue this journey, let the experiences of those who have walked this path inspire you. The stories of SMART women and their committees show us the power of collective action and the impact space for our sisters has had on retention.



Womens Committee Handbook

Stay involved with the IA Women's Committee!

www.smart-union.org/smart-women

You can check out the SMART sister stories on our website, stay informed on all our upcoming events and look at the resources available.

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Stay in touch!



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