

Report of the CWA Next Generation Committee to the 73rd Convention

CWA

COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA
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2011 Next Generation Committee Report

CWA'S 2009 Convention passed a resolution establishing a Next Generation Committee. We started our work in March, 2010, and at the 2010 CWA convention in Washington, D.C., we presented our preliminary report. The convention adopted this report, and the delegates challenged us to "be bold," and to "take risks to radically change CWA's way forward." We were asked to "disturb the present" and provide "specific ideas and plans for the future." Since then, we have met in-person several times and engaged in numerous conference calls. We also commissioned a survey of 692 CWA workers, age 18-35. Some of the results were consistent with our beliefs, but some surprised us and will likely surprise you.

Organizing younger workers and mentoring the next generation of leadership is essential to increasing CWA's membership and power. Unionization rates in the United States have sunk to their lowest in history, at only 11.9% overall and 6.9% in the private sector. Youth unionization rates are two and a half times lower than those of workers aged 40-65. If we don't start making changes as a movement, the future is bleak. On top of this, the workforce is changing: according to the federal Government Accounting Office nearly one third of the U.S. workforce is made up of temps, freelancers, independent contractors, and other contingent workers. Who will inherit the work of rebuilding the labor movement?

The Next Generation Committee has taken these challenges seriously, and has focused on four interrelated areas of concern:

- First, how do we develop the young leaders who are already a part of our union and give them opportunities to grow?
- Second, how do we take advantage of new technologies for communication including social media, and do our old tools still work?
- Third, how do we organize the growing population of young workers who are not in a traditional employment relationship?
- And finally, how do we create local, grassroots groups of young workers that further ground CWA locals and districts into our communities and the labor movement?

The future of CWA and our labor movement needs the participation of young workers, not just as additions to our membership base, but to bring new energy and ideas. As CWA delegates pointed out in 2010, we need forward-looking solutions to address the many challenges our union is facing today and will experience in the future.

Leadership and Participation

In our 2010 report, the Next Generation committee stressed the importance of new and expanded opportunities for training and mentoring. We asked that CWA start thinking about scholarships to accommodate a broader scope of our young membership. In our survey of young CWA members, age 35 and under, we learned that:

- Only 8% of respondents said that they were currently “very active” in their local union,
- 58% were not too active or not active at all.
- Only 36% of survey respondents had ever been asked to be involved in their local union.
- 60% said they wanted to be involved.
- Substantial portions of the young workers surveyed were interested in legislative and political action, workplace health and safety, and coalition work with organizations like Sierra Club and Common Cause.
- Almost 60% of those surveyed said they were interested in being active on human rights issues.
- Importantly for the growth of our union, 43% of those surveyed are interested in organizing new workers into CWA.

THE MESSAGE HERE IS CLEAR: THE NEXT GENERATION OF UNION ACTIVISTS IS ALREADY HERE — THEY JUST NEED TO BE ASKED!

In addressing the question as to whether or not young workers might be interested in union activism, a commonly heard response includes the idea that "investing in someone who might not be around for long" is not worth it. Despite the prevalence of beliefs that young workers aren't in it for the long haul, 96% of young workers surveyed said that a future career at their current workplace is important, and 73% said they planned to stay at their current workplace five years or more. A quarter of young workers mentioned career potential as the most important element of their job—more important than wages or benefits.

Young workers are dedicated to career growth, have a desire to participate in legislative and political action, are conscious of workplace health and safety, organizing, coalition-building and are participating more fully in their union. This speaks to the need for a progressive training agenda for this segment of our membership. These concepts are suggested components for the creation of a “Next Generation Young Workers Activist training program that will:”

- Address non-traditional organizing.
- Focus on the emergence of new workplace models.

- Provide guidance for facilitating meetings and conference calls to increase participation.
- Organize in the context of increasing working people's power as opposed to just obtaining a contract.
- Organize within existing locals to increase density and participation.
- Teach the next generation union activism (how to plan an action).
- Establish a mentoring process.
- Utilize social networking.
- Impart a succinct labor/union movement history. (Our survey results indicated that 88% of the young workers surveyed have never been a member of a union before and only 35% of them have family members who have been or are members of a union.)
- Devise a strategy to address oppression: racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and the "divide and conquer" of workers that is still exploited in the workplace today.

And while we believe these topics are especially appropriate for assisting young worker activists, we think they can also be relevant and important to include in trainings and educational opportunities that CWA already provides such as Leadership Schools and Organizing Institutes.

BE IT RESOLVED that Next Generation Young Workers Activist Training be coordinated and implemented in conjunction with a Young Workers Summit, and CWA host a Young Workers Summit to take place in 2012, a weekend conference for young members and activists to learn organizing and networking skills and strategies to empower young members through leadership development, mentoring, and education. We understand, as was outlined in the CWA Ready for the Future Report that meetings are expensive and that we should look for ways to consolidate meetings and potentially eliminate meetings that don't provide value in building the union. Therefore, we ensure that those principles and guidelines will be adhered to when planning the Young Workers Summit in 2012.

A full 50% of young members surveyed want to participate in the training programs that CWA already provides, including Leadership Schools, New Officer Training, and the Organizing Institute (OI). We assessed the process by which members are entitled to take part in these programs and spoke with CWA staff from the Organizing and Education Departments in evaluating the curriculums. We concluded that the accessibility of these trainings was a concern as were the opportunities for participants to utilize the skills that they learned beyond the classroom.

The exclusivity and limited accessibility to CWA's existing training programs are a roadblock to the education and development of all but a handful of our union's young leaders. Their opportunities after training should cultivate further interest and commitment through involvement in CWA legislative, political, and organizing campaign fieldwork.

The benefit of activists participating in actual organizing campaigns, post Organizing Institutes, was discussed. It is the Committee's belief that young workers would gain additional benefits by participating in existing CWA organizing campaigns as a way to broaden their exposure beyond classroom training.

BE IT RESOLVED that Leadership School Scholarships for 2012-2013 be established for candidates thirty-five (35) years of age or younger so that they can participate in CWA's Leadership Schools and, subsequently, work on CWA elections, organizing, or labor legislation campaigns. Two (2), members per district or sector will be eligible for attendance at CWA's Leadership Schools in districts and sectors where they take place. In districts and sectors where Leadership Schools do not currently occur, we strongly encourage either starting a program or partnering with another district to do so. Where this is not possible, candidates will be assigned to a Leadership School outside their home district or sector. Leadership School completion will be followed by significant campaign work within 6 months of training with experienced CWA leaders. (We recognize the need to be flexible and negotiate exceptions for members and bargaining units without access to lost time.)

BE IT RESOLVED that Organizing Institutes, as they occur, have additional slots designated for candidates thirty-five (35) years of age or younger and that these candidates subsequently work on an existing CWA organizing campaign. Candidates should come from a broad range of districts and sectors. Organizing Institute completion will be followed by significant campaign work within 6 months of training with experienced CWA leaders. (We recognize the need to be flexible and negotiate exceptions for members and bargaining units without access to lost time.)

The absence of a mentoring curriculum in CWA's training programs is a concern. The Next Generation Committee implemented a "Train the Trainer" Mentoring Program for Next Generation Committee members to facilitate a mentoring workshop at CWA's District 7 Conference. Participants engaged with the trainers and realized that feedback from Next Generation Committee members was equally as valuable as the mentoring curriculum and provided a context for utilizing the training in their CWA home locals. Feedback provided by participants indicated that mentoring requires a more concerted effort and a broader range of tools to reach younger members than they had realized. It takes a more formalized effort to accomplish, and this training gave them the skills to do this.

Additionally, a mentoring workshop was held June 22, 2011, at CWA Local 4900 for its 18-member executive board. The makeup of the board was diverse; ethnically, and by gender, sexual orientation, and work background. The design of the class was to open one up to mentoring the next generation of CWA leaders. The design was not to force one to mentor, but rather to show how it could be done if the mentor was willing to allow such mentoring to take place. The most positive feedback was from the two youngest class members and one of the most senior. Most existing leaders are somewhere between.

Tim Strong, Local 4900 President, stated, “I believe the mentoring curriculum will frighten some existing leaders because of its blunt message that existing leaders must mentor those new leaders, or stay in place to lead a world that has changed around them.” Such “fear” must drive action. The adoption of the mentoring curriculum is vital, as a tool to use in leadership training, organizing institutes, and new officer training. Who will lead if we do not begin to open ourselves to mentoring the next generation now?

BE IT RESOLVED that two (2) candidates, thirty-five (35) years of age or younger, from each eligible District and Sector participate in the “Train the Trainer” Mentoring Program. Local union workshops can use the trainers as a resource within their Districts and Sectors.

Alternative Models for Organizing New Kinds of Workers

At the 2010 CWA Convention, the Next Generation Committee presented a report that demonstrated the increasing casualization of the North American workforce. Young workers at the bottom of seniority lists are often the first to be let go in a downsizing, and while looking for a more permanent job, many of them turn to freelance or temporary work to survive while looking for a more permanent job.

Freelancers and other independent contractors often make up the cheaper labor which our employers rely on after a layoff to shore up the permanent workforce at reduced cost. This means that, in some cases, members who have been laid off from permanent, full-time, union jobs are hired back as non-unionized freelancers or “self-employed” independent contractors who are expected to do the same work at lower rates and without the benefit of a collective bargaining agreement.

While self-employed workers may not be able to exercise collective bargaining rights, they can improve their work lives by:

- working together, through establishing a group benefits plan,
- exercising social and political pressure,
- sharing information,
- pooling other resources and,
- engaging in more traditional forms of union activism like work stoppages.

As CWA locals within Right-to-Work states have shown, including the Texas State Employees Union and Tennessee's United Campus Workers, a group of workers does not need collective bargaining rights in order to exercise collective power. Another example, the Guild Freelancers local within the Pacific Media Guild, is currently engaged in an electronic work stoppage campaign at *The Huffington Post* that has garnered substantial media attention, and, as

of the writing of this report, they appear to be approaching success in achieving real bargaining power.

Self-employed workers are by far the most vulnerable workers in the industries we represent. Through organizing self-employed workers, we will be able to act in solidarity with all types of workers in our fields, and, consequently, prevent employers from pitting groups of workers against each other. Freelance and independent worker units should be seen as strategic outposts in our fields. Through these units, we further establish our presence in the industries and attract younger workers.

We saw firsthand in Wisconsin how important it is to **ALL WORKERS** (and future workers) that we stand in solidarity and support each other both as individual groups of workers and collectively – that is part of building a movement. In Wisconsin, it wasn't just workers; it was students and other progressive organizations that stood shoulder to shoulder with those workers who were directly impacted. This is what movement building is and we need to replicate it and build on it in order to protect workers now and into the future.

One of the laws of trade unionism is that the more mobilized a membership it is, the more powerful it is. In many traditional bargaining units, after the initial organizing drive has been won, mobilizing tends to happen when there's a contract fight or another sort of campaign going on. In units of self-employed workers, however, there is no moment when the drive is won and bargaining begins. In our research into non-traditional, voluntary-association structures, we learned that the most important thing that attracts people to this sort of unit is the feeling of being part of a growing, powerful movement that has, or is building, the capacity to enact real change.

Building power and staying relevant is a constant process of organizing new members and mobilizing existing ones. This gives locals with freelance units a training ground for activists where they can learn organizing skills, how to do effective outreach, and how to create the leverage to make change without relying on contractual or legal rights. It also enhances the public image of CWA and educates new types of workers about the value of unionization, potentially providing seeds as independent members move into permanent jobs in unorganized workplaces. The nature of these units as continual organizing drives also means that independent, freelance, and self-employed units need a constant supply of energy. In related projects, when the activist or activists most invested in the project left CWA, the units faltered and membership and collective power was lost.

Young workers find themselves in increasingly precarious temporary, freelance, or independent contractor work; and media freelancers, self-employed cable installers and other independent contractors and self-employed workers are the most vulnerable workers in our industries and we can only gain by acting in solidarity with each other. Freelance unions can effectively demand better working conditions by organizing workers, pooling resources, and taking job action.

BE IT RESOLVED that CWA create and expand the programs to serve workers who are not connected to traditional bargaining units. CWA shall develop an independent membership with a group 401(k), networking opportunities, benefits where possible, and access to resources such as retraining and other education through the CWA/NETT Academy, research on rates of pay, legal advice, and template agreements for the types of labor our freelance and other contingent members currently do; and

BE IT RESOLVED that CWA assign a staff organizer to proactively support current units of contingent workers and the organizing of new groups of independent members. This organizer would report to the National Organizing Director.

Grassroots Next Generation Groups

While the international CWA Next Generation Committee has been meeting, local and district Next Generation committees have been formed. These groups have taken a variety of forms. Some groups, such as Next Generation Bay Area, are a partnership between CWA members, members of other unions, and community members. Others are completely internal to the CWA or a local of it. In each instance, young activists have organized and developed them locally.

These groups have successfully created new ways to be active in local unions, have broken the isolation often experienced by young workers, raised awareness of the importance of unions in the workplace, and connected young workers to the broader labor movement and other social justice movements. Successful groups have included both social and political elements. Such groups have been welcoming places for young workers of color, LGBT workers, young women workers, and workers with disabilities to connect with each other and build a voice in their union. Next Generation groups have also built bridges with other labor unions, labor councils, and community activist groups. In addition to providing a place where members can have conversations about issues specific to workers at the beginning of their careers, Next Generation and Young Workers groups provide a training ground for new activists within the union to build skills, knowledge, and political power.

Local Next Generation groups provide a space for young union members to become young union activists by putting the leadership and responsibility in young members' hands and by giving them the opportunity to succeed on their own. Next Generation projects can also be a path to create a diverse, empowered, mobilized membership that is engaged in our union, in the community, and politically – both for today and for the future.

BE IT RESOLVED that CWA locals empower young elected officers and activists to mobilize Next Generation groups within their locals, within groups of locals, and/or between CWA locals and other unions. These groups should continue to build our movement and partner with other progressive allies and community groups. Such encouragement could include Next

Generation representation on executive boards, time booked off, staff and/or financial support for Next Generation groups. These Next Generation groups, where possible, should plug into efforts to engage young workers being made by various levels of the AFL-CIO in the U.S. and the CLC and provincial and local labor councils in Canada.

Communication and Technology

The use of technology and the tools of the internet have opened new paths of communication available to CWA and our members. In our 2010 report, we addressed new mobilizing and organizing opportunities for CWA presented via social media technologies. Our Young Worker survey showed the following:

- 32% of young workers surveyed were interested in more Facebook activity from CWA.
- 21% were interested in more You Tube activity, and
- 11% were interested in more blog posting activity from their union.
- In addition to getting their information from their union Stewards, 64% of workers surveyed said they get their information from the CWA website.
- 65% said they get their information from local union meetings.
- 63% said they get their information from local union websites.
- 52% said they get their information from CWA's electronic newsletter.
- 51% said they get their information from the CWA News.
- 38% said they get their information from CWA's Facebook page.

In light of this information, the Next Generation committee has established a webpage that includes a Toolkit detailing links for locals in establishing Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages. The Toolkit will also incorporate information regarding scholarships, mentoring, progressive legal information, education opportunities, mobilization and coalition building strategies. It also contains the young worker survey results. In addition, a CWA Next Generation Facebook page has been established for ongoing information and discussions among Next Generation leaders. You can find it by searching for "CWA Next Generation" in Facebook , and we encourage you to join in the discussion.

BE IT RESOLVED that CWA retain, update and keep current the CWA Next Generation webpage and Facebook page that includes the Toolkit and materials relevant to young member activists and leaders.

While technology is an important tool for CWA, a full 65% of young workers surveyed responded that their CWA Steward was the best source for getting information about their union. Furthermore, when comparing CWA website alerts, phone calls, text messages, Facebook messages, video messages and Twitter, the highest percentage of respondents – 37% -- preferred to receive CWA information via a personal visit from their Steward. Nothing beats the availability of a CWA Steward – their presence is powerful to our young membership. This was another surprise, as some of us assume that younger workers want all of their information via email or the use of social media.

Resources for Next Generation Proposal

We know three things for sure within our union. If programs are to be successful, first, they need people; second, they also need the appropriate financial resources; and third; participants have to be willing to honestly evaluate the outcome of their programs and be prepared to make changes if necessary.

We are fortunate to have adopted in CWA a Strategic Industry Fund to help build collective power within our union and for working Americans. Nothing is more important or strategic than mentoring and giving experience to our Next Generation of Future Leaders.

Our recommendations require both people resources and financial assistance, and it is in CWA's best interest to support the building of the Next Generation of CWA union leaders.

BE IT RESOLVED that within 90 days of the adoption of this resolution a two-year Strategic Industry Fund (SIF) Proposal will be prepared and presented to the CWA Locals and the Executive Board for review and approval. The SIF Proposal will cover the components outlined in the proposal, including the identification of a Next Generation Organizer who will oversee the program. In addition, the CWA Executive Board and the Locals will receive a written report no later than October 1, 2012, and a follow-up report will be presented to the 2013 CWA Convention.

Conclusion

It will take a lot to light a fire under labor! Even though we are dissolving ourselves as a National Committee, we must continue the work we have started. In order to accomplish the many goals we have laid out throughout the life of the National CWA Next Generation committee, our union, CWA, in order to grow, must have constant support and resources that will continue to move us forward.

In summary, we propose the following actions, and respectfully ask support from the CWA delegates attending the 2011 CWA Convention to take the following steps:

Identify a Next Generation Organizer who will assist locals, districts and sectors in establishing committees, coordinate them into a National Next Generation Network, and oversee the following functions:

- Organize a Young Workers Summit.
- Develop a Next Generation Activist Training to be implemented at the Young Workers Summit.
- Be a liaison to the staff organizer assigned to support independent workers.
- Assist Leadership Schools and Organizing Institutes in providing hand-on opportunities for utilizing skills learned beyond the classroom.
- Implement a mentoring program, identify young activists, and then plug into the life of the union.
- Assist with building community and coalitions of young workers.
- Update Next Generation resources; webpage and toolkits.
- Assist in developing and using social media.
- Prepare an interim report no later than October 2012 and a follow-up report including future recommendations to the 2013 Convention.

Respectfully submitted, Next Generation Committee Members:

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