

GROWING YOUR UNION:

ENGAGING PROFESSIONALS THROUGH NEW HIRE ORIENTATION



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Growing Your Union: Engaging Professionals through New Hire Orientation is based upon the Jobs With Justice Education Fund publication, *Making the Case for Union Membership: The Strategic Value of New Hire Orientations*, and the American Federation of Government Employees' publication, *AFGE Leader's Guide to New Employee Orientation*.

About DPE

The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO is a coalition of 23 national unions representing professional and technical employees. DPE affiliates represent millions of professionals in:

- » Education and healthcare;
- » Science, engineering, and technology;
- » Legal, business, and management;
- » Media, entertainment, and the arts; and
- » Public administration.

Professionals are essential to the future of the labor movement. DPE organizing materials, research, programs, and presentations help its affiliate unions organize more professional and technical employees and effectively represent current members.

DPE Mission

The DPE mission is to assist its affiliated unions in achieving their objectives. DPE does this by:

- » Providing a forum for its affiliates to collaborate, connect, and act;
- » Assisting affiliates in their efforts to organize, represent, and bargain on behalf of professional and technical employees;
- » Communicating the value of union membership to professional and technical employees and the public;
- » Advancing the interests of professional and technical employees through public policy and legislative advocacy;
- » Building alliances with professional associations and societies to promote the interests of professional and technical employees; and
- » Encouraging diversity in the professional and technical workforce.

DPE is an AFL-CIO trade department and as such is independent from the AFL-CIO allowing DPE to focus solely on advancing the interests of its affiliated unions.

Contact DPE

815 16th St., NW, 7th Floor
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: 202-638-0320
Email: info@dpeaflcio.org
Web: www.dpeaflcio.org



Introduction

Welcoming newly hired professionals during their first days at work is the most effective way to establish a positive relationship with potential members. The first hours on the job are when new employees develop lasting impressions about their new employer, colleagues, and the union that will represent them. Taking a moment to explain how union membership will personally benefit them helps ensure that new hires have a good impression of your union and are more willing to become active members.

The most effective way your union can make a positive first impression is through a new hire orientation program that includes both a formal, group introduction to your union and informal follow-up with individual new hires. A high-quality new hire orientation program can help ensure your union consistently makes a positive first impression on newly hired professionals. When done well, new hire orientations have proven to increase sign ups among new hires and enhance their commitment to the union.

Growing Your Union: Engaging Professionals through New Hire Orientation offers a practical way for your union's leaders and staff to develop and enhance their orientations for new hires and potential members, tailored specifically to professional employees.

The best practices presented in this guide were derived from interviews with union leaders and staff responsible for their unions' orientation programs, observation of existing orientation programs, content analysis of union welcome packets, relevant social science research, and data from an October 2016 DPE-commissioned attitudinal survey by Hart Research Associates of 1,004 non-union professional and technical employees.

First, this guide provides an overview of new hire orientations. Second, the six steps that are necessary to launch a new hire orientation are discussed. Third, after your union has conducted its first orientation, suggestions for enhancing your orientation program are offered. Finally, advice is provided for continually improving your new hire orientation program.

New Hire Orientation Programs: An Overview

The aim of a new hire orientation program is to turn new hires into union members by giving them a positive first impression of the union. New hire orientations both informally and formally introduce new hires to the union. This section of the guide provides an overview of what an effective new hire program looks like. Each of the orientation program components will be explained in detail in the next section, “Creating Your New Hire Orientation Program.”

Formal Orientation

Ideally, the formal new hire orientation will take place on a new hire’s first day or at some point during the new hire’s first week. The formal orientation presentation is carried out by the “orientation facilitator.”

Your union’s formal orientation program should be professional, informative, and convincing. Research indicates that the amount of information new hires acquire during a union’s formal orientation and the overall quality of the program influences their perception of the union.

The formal orientation is an appropriate time to provide new hires with materials containing information about union membership. These should include new hire-focused handouts, an orientation packet, and free union-branded items (“freebies”).

A multimedia presentation is the best way to convey the orientation information to a new hire or group of new hires. Specifically, consider a PowerPoint presentation. If you do not have access to a projection system during the orientation, you can print out the PowerPoint slides and walk new hires through the presentation. Your union’s presentation to new hires should be tailored to fit your union’s unique circumstances.

In general, the presentation should include: 1) an introduction to the union; 2) an explanation of the collective bargaining agreement; 3) a discussion of what the union does beyond the workplace; 4) a description of how new members can get involved; and 5) a convincing case for union membership.

Follow-ups with New Hires

Your union’s orientation program should also include an “informal” follow-up, where union representatives and your designated union member volunteers, “follow-up ambassadors,” interact with new hires in their first days and weeks on the job.