

» A guide for building
healthier unions



Foreword

- This guide is not a questionnaire that you have to answer systematically. It is more of a discussion tool to help the executive committee review and analyse the state of local union life with a view to setting objectives and developing a work plan. The purpose of the process is to foster greater activism and to make the union an even more effective collective tool for serving its members.
- We suggest that the executive committee begin by reading through the discussion guide as a whole and then identify priority topics to be discussed on the basis of the union's needs and realities.
- We also suggest that the executive committee devote an entire meeting to this review and discussion, with the participation of the FSSS staff representative.
- The practical outcome of the executive committee's thinking and discussion should be the drafting of a work plan.
- The executive committee should write up a report on its review and discussion for the union council and the general meeting, with the goal of having the work plan adopted.

The executive committee

Are there unfilled positions on the executive committee?

Is the executive committee representative of the membership, job classes, institutional sites and sections? Are some groups under-represented on the executive: men, women, young workers, cultural communities, different job statuses and services or departments?

Does the executive committee meet often enough?

Are the mandates of each position on the executive committee well defined, understood and adhered to?

Is there a good distribution of work among members of the executive committee?

Practical aspects

With a view to facilitating exchanges and discussions among the various union representatives and the members, are we satisfied with our communications tools: phone, voice mail, pager, fax, e-mail, web site?

Can members at all sites and in all sections reach the union easily?

Does the union keep an up-to-date list of addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses for all its members?

Do union members know who the members of the executive committee are and what they do?

The union's constitution and by-laws

Are the union's constitution and by-laws used and adhered to?

Do the constitution and by-laws correspond to current realities (e.g., job classes, sites, sections, etc.)?

The union council

Is the union council representative of the membership (e.g., job classes, sites, sections, etc.)?

Do union council members understand their role and play it properly?

Is the union council an effective network for developing ideas, circulating information and carrying out the union's action plans?

Should the role of the union council be reviewed?

Union committees

In our union or sections, is there:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1- a labour relations committee? | 6- a communications committee? |
| 2- a grievance committee? | 7- a union life committee? |
| 3- a health and safety committee? | 8- an audit or financial review committee? |
| 4- a status of women committee? | 9- other committees? |
| 5- an insurance and pensions committee? | |

Do the committees work well?

If a committee does not exist, does it need to be created?

Is one of the executive committee officers responsible for each committee or area of work?

Do we need to create other committees?

General membership meetings

Are general meetings of the union and of job classes or sections held often enough?

Do you always have a quorum?

Does the notice of meeting catch people's attention? How well is it circulated?

Are the place, day of the week, starting time and length of the meeting appropriate?

Does the way general meetings are held take into consideration shifts, sites and sections?

Do the agenda, conduct and chairing of the meeting help keep the interest of the members who attend?

Are members informed afterwards about the topics discussed and the decisions made at a general meeting?

Union communications

Union bulletin board

Are the union bulletin boards eye-catching? Are they updated regularly?

Is there someone at each site or in each section who is in charge of keeping the union bulletin board up to date?

Do the bulletin boards contain a variety of information: union announcements, posters, articles of interest, cartoons?

Information bulletins

Does the union distribute information bulletins to all sites and in all sections on specific topics, such as local negotiations, questionable management decisions, health and safety issues, the grievance process, invitations to upcoming activities or demonstrations?

Would it be a good idea to make more use of this method?

The union newsletter

Does the union publish a newsletter dealing with a variety of topics? Are we satisfied with the content and frequency of publication?

Does the newsletter do a good enough job of reflecting the realities of sites, job classes or sections?

Are the activists who produce the union's communications materials encouraged? Are they given ideas, texts, training and electronic or other resources?

Circulating information

Should our methods of circulating information to the members be improved?

Should certain techniques be improved: display stands, distribution in person, the use of e-mail?

Should our distribution network be improved? For example, by putting someone in charge of the distribution network and recruiting distribution officers on all shifts and in all sites and sections?

Internet service and e-mail address

Would it be a good idea for the union office to have an Internet connection and for the union to have an e-mail address, which would, for example, allow it to receive information directly from the federation and the FSSS regional office?

Do we make enough use of e-mail for communicating with members?

Should the union develop its own web site?

Media relations

Does the union communicate easily with regional media?

When there are situations that should be publicly exposed and denounced, do you think of calling the federation, the federation's regional office or the central council to prepare news releases or a news conference?

Union education

Have the training needs of union officers (executive committee, grievance officers, union council, health and safety, status of women, section stewards, committee heads) been identified?

Should the union set training priorities?

The next generation

Do we observe that younger members are under-represented and less active in the union structure than they should be?

What would be the best ways of encouraging younger members to get involved in their union?

Intake of new members

Is someone in charge of meeting with new members and giving them an introduction to the union?

Are new members informed about the union's history?

Does the union systematically ensure that new members sign membership cards?

Are new members informed about the union's history?

Does the union have an information backgrounder to give to new members?

Does each member receive a copy of the collective agreement?

Relations with management and grievances

Are we satisfied with our preparation for and the effectiveness of our meetings and work with management on labour relations?

Are we satisfied with how we investigate and file grievances, prepare for arbitration and use the summary procedure?

Is there a regular procedure for settling disputes and grievances with the employer?

Does the union make enough use of mobilization to settle grievances and disputes?

Does the union inform members of the results of its work – for example, the agreements it negotiates, the grievances settled, disagreements with the employer, etc.?

Does management distribute information to your members on labour relations topics? If so, does the union provide clarifications or give its side of the story?

Health and safety

Is there a health and safety officer for each site or section?

Does the health and safety committee or officer have enough information to take charge of problems related to mental health, stress, harassment, violence, air quality or protection against infections?

Does prevention work have a sufficiently important place in health and safety activities?

Do we need to develop an occupational health and safety work plan?

Status of women

Does the status of women committee or officer have enough information and training to deal with problems of harassment and violence against women?

Are International Women's Day (March 8), pay equity, employment equity, parental rights and family-work-studies balance among the topics addressed by the status of women committee or officer?

Organization of work

Does the union demand that management consult it on changes that are made in the organization of work?

Does the union give thought to and consult its members about aspects of the organization of work in job classes, sites or sections that should be improved?

Has the union approached the employer about training needs?

Local management and the board of directors

In the private sector, are the seats set aside for employees on the board of directors occupied by union members? Does information circulate well between representatives on the board of directors and the union executive committee?

Is the union well informed about management's plans for the organization of services, the institution's budget and the financial statements?

Do union representatives attend meetings of the board of directors?

Does the union make known its reactions, criticisms and proposals for alternatives to management's plans?

Participation in FSSS meetings

Does the union participate systematically in FSSS federal councils, sectoral federal councils and regional assemblies?

Do the union's delegates to FSSS meetings feel sufficiently prepared to take part in debates?

When they come back from FSSS meetings, do the delegates report to the union council or the general meeting on debates and decisions?

Budget

Are union dues sufficient to meet the union's needs?

Has the union set budget priorities based on the work plan it establishes (e.g.: training, health and safety, arbitration costs, participation in decision-making meetings, etc.)?

Does the union prepare a budget?

Does the union have its budget and budget projections approved by the general meeting?

Do the members of the financial audit committee have a good understanding of their role and do they play it properly?

Union work plan

We suggest that the executive committee put someone in charge of the work plan. This executive committee member will monitor follow-up on the work plan in general and provide assistance as needed to the people who agree to do the follow-up.

NAME OF THE PERSON IN CHARGE OF UNION LIFE:

UNION:

PRIORITY:

Objectives	Methods <i>(actions)</i>	Person in charge

Schedule	Comments	Resources <i>(tools needed)</i>

