



# Women's Committees In Worker Organizations

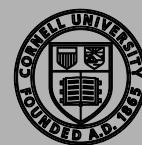
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## Separate Programs for Women Unionists?

In the early history of unionization in the United States, women were organized in separate unions because they were excluded from male controlled unions and/or because they worked in separate occupations and industries. Today's unions are open to men and women. The question persists: why have separate outreach for women – women's departments, women's conferences, women's committees?

Male unionists have traditionally opposed such programs as divisive of labor unity and/or wasting resources needed for essential services to all members and many women unionists oppose separate treatment as patronizing, tokenistic or marginalizing (Kirton and Healy, 2013).

Scholars who have studied women in unions generally support the need for and positive contribution of separate outreach.

- Women need independent space in order to identify and create their own culture where they can articulate grievances and strategize how to engage and change the dominant culture (Needleman, 1996);
- Women only groups create opportunities for women to gain support from one another, share ideas, tactics and strategies and for “senior women to mentor the less experienced without the opportunity for men to take center stage as is so frequently the case in the union environment.” Separate training and education prepare women to take leadership roles by improving their self-esteem, developing assertiveness and learning union procedures. (Kirton and Healy, 2013);

- Separate organizing empowers women, as a group, to mount effective challenges to male domination of the power structure” (Briskin, 1993);
- Women's committees can play a role in politicizing women to become a successful constituency in unions (Healy and Kirton, 2006).

Among the questions raised by these conclusions are: Do they apply to all types of unions? How about the non-traditional worker organization movement? Is there a relationship between the kind of work or industry, the demographics of the membership, or the culture of the workforce or the union that makes these formations more or less significant and successful? What is the potential and what are the challenges that women's increased activism and participation in their unions might offer the US labor movement as a whole?

Women may have a somewhat different vision, set of priorities and way of decision-making that meets or generates resistance in a male-dominated context. At a time when the U.S. labor movement is struggling to reverse a decline in both numbers and relevance, is there a way to study the effect of women's separate formations, in both traditional and non-traditional worker's organizations, that might provide creative insights into how to stem that decline?

This study is an effort to collect the descriptive data necessary to start posing some of these deeper questions and to make some preliminary observations about the past and potential of women's structures to make a substantive contribution to building a stronger workers' movement in the US.

Authors of this report set out to collect case studies of women's committees, women's departments and other union sponsored separate organizing for further insights on their value to unions and to their women members. This report summarizes findings from interviews and data collection on six programs sponsored by national unions and case studies for six local unions and two non-traditional workers organizations.

Questions examined with respect to each program include:

- How did the program originate? What was the articulated purpose?
- How does the program function? Is it carried on by paid staff or volunteers? What resources are available?
- What types of services or activities are provided?
- What barriers or limitations have been encountered and how were these overcome?
- Is there evidence of the impact on the participants, leadership recognition of women members, or changes in organizational policies?
- Based on the experience of this program, what advice can we give on effective strategies for women's programs?

## Lessons from History

The results of early efforts to organize separate programs for women in unions may be instructive for today.

Dorothy Sue Cobble details the rise and fall of women's committees in the culinary locals of New York City in the 1920s and 1930s (*Dishing It Out*, 1997). Although these committees defined their first task as promoting female leadership, they made little headway toward that goal. Male leadership saw the principal function of women's committees as attracting women to building the general union organization while the most effective way of involving women was by appealing to women's own interests. Since these interests were often at odds with the priorities of male leadership, Cobble reports that the committees "were stifled at precisely the point at which they developed a strong following among the members." For example, in one local, women campaigned for equal pay, access to the best jobs and "important positions" in the union, demands which attracted enthusiastic response from women members but caused the male dominated Executive Board to withdraw its support. In other locals which avoided such "divisive" issues, committees died for lack of support from the women members. Cobble concluded that: "The impact of women's committees in culinary locals was episodic and ephemeral."

When World War II brought an influx of women into factory work to replace male workers drafted into the armed services, women in the United Automobile Workers organized to assert their rights (Gabin, 1999). In its formative years in the 1930s, UAW attention focused on male members with women encouraged to join women's auxiliaries which were support groups for union strikes and organizing. However, in the 1940s, women made up a greater percentage of the UAW membership and began to protest their inferior treatment, i.e., less pay for the same work and separate seniority lists governing transfer, layoffs and recall rights. At National UAW Women's Conferences held in 1942 and 1943, delegates demanded representation on decision making

committees and national staff appointments for women. UAW debates about the merits of a National Women's Department conveyed positions similar to those which continue to be expressed today. Most women generally favored the idea but some feared that a separate structure might result in increased segregation. Male officers argued that the separation of women would lead to fragmentation into separate racial and ethnic blocks. Nonetheless, in 1944, the UAW Executive Board acceded to women's demands by establishing a National Women's Bureau. Increasing women's participation in union activities by organizing Women's Committees in every local union was the initial focus but women members continued to press for and give priority to equality on the job and in the union. When the Executive Board voted to eliminate gendered job classifications, implementation was undermined not only by management but by resistance from male local officers. Unequal pay was finally abolished in 1945 by the War Labor Board.

The next push for women's committees came in the 1970s, with the rise of feminine consciousness sweeping the United States and the advent of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). CLUW was formed in 1974 by women who had come up through the ranks of their own unions in alliance with younger women activists who had brought the energy and militancy of the '60s (feminist, civil rights, anti-war) into their trade union work. CLUW was a result of some of the earlier work that had been done through women's committees, and it encouraged new formations and activism in the affiliated unions of women who got involved.

In 1976, women members of the United Steelworkers (USA), organized a women's caucus and called

for establishment of a National Women's Department, national conferences and women's committees at the district and local levels. Their aim, like their earlier counterparts in the UAW, was affirmative action to achieve equality of treatment on the job and in the union (Kirton and Healy, 2013).

Around the same time, other unions were responding to growing pressure from women members. The Communications Workers of America (CWA) established a "female structure committee" with a mandate to identify ways of increasing women's involvement in the union (Needleman, 1991). The CWA President issued orders to track the number of women and minorities in leadership and staff positions with a goal of achieving leadership representative of the demography of the membership (Interview with Dina Beaumont, 1989).

In the Postal Workers Union (APWU), African-American women, who were among the founders, formed a women's caucus, open to all women and set up their own leadership training programs with the equivalent of a women's committee – POWER (Post Office Women for Equal Rights in the American Postal Workers Union) (Needleman, 1991). The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) established a national Women's Department in 1981, which sponsored national and regional conferences and pursued legislative and court actions to achieve equal pay and job rights for women (Interview with Cathy Collette, 1990).

In 1994, when John Sweeney was elected President of the AFL-CIO in a highly contested election, he pledged to involve women and minorities and recruited Karen Nussbaum, founder of 9 to 5, a much publicized organization of women office workers, to



direct a Working Women's Department for the Federation. Among its first activities was a survey, "Ask a Working Woman" and a national conference in which women union members were encouraged to articulate their concerns. These included equal pay along with discrimination and sexual harassment at work. The Department instituted legislative campaigns to achieve these goals and assisted affiliated unions in organizing campaigns with outreach to women workers ([Sex of Class, 1991](#)). In 2002, in a move of cost cutting, the AFL-CIO eliminated both the Working Women's Department and the women's conferences.

The historical record indicates that Women's Departments and Women's Committees mostly grew out of assertive action by women union members. Their appeal to male dominated union executive boards was a natural desire to activate female members in organizing the unorganized and political action around union legislative goals. Friction developed over the extent of women's demands for advancement at work and in the union.

## **Women's Departments and Other Special Programs Sponsored by National Unions**

A survey of websites supplemented by telephone inquiries and personal interviews indicated that seventeen national unions have ongoing structures and programs addressing women's issues and involvement (Listed in Appendix I). Their structures for delivering women's programs range from formally designated departments to networks, caucuses and advisory committees. The services which they provide include conferences, reports and training programs.

Union differences in structures, traditions and functions are reflected in the variety of unions offering

special programs for women. Women's programs are offered by unions representing industrial (USW, UAW, CWA) and craft (IBC, IBEW), public (AFSCME, APWU, AFGE) and private sector (IAM, UFCW); professional (SAG-AFTRA, AFT, NEA) and manual labor (LIUNA and IBT). Sponsors encompass unions with a majority female membership, mixed, and predominantly male.

In almost all of the national unions (with or without women's programs), women are underrepresented in leadership relative to their percentage of the membership. An exception is the AFT in which over half of the members are women as are all three national officers and more than half of the Executive Board. According to union self reports (no statistics are available), American unions are adding women to national staff and more are being elected to regional and local leadership positions.

From the list of seventeen sponsors, six were selected for more detailed study. Their origins, structure, programs and goals are described here.

### **Origin**

The impetus to developing special outreach programs for women generally originated with women staff members and/or local activists who demanded separate space to discuss their issues and ways to achieve recognition. At union conventions and in other forums, women called attention to inequality of treatment on the job, including disparity in pay and promotion opportunities, sexual harassment, bullying and need for work-family benefits. Officers in these organizations, mostly male, sometimes resisted separate programs but eventually saw benefits to union growth and political power in involving and motivat-

ing their female members. Progressive political orientation on the part of officers facilitated acceptance and support.

### **Structures and Programs**

National unions have a variety of structures for delivering services to women members. The UAW, which has the oldest continuing program (dating back to 1948), supports both a National Women's Department and regional coordinators of women's activities. Its constitution mandates establishment of Women's Committees in all of its affiliated local unions. Women's Department staff consists of two full time professionals and Director, who is one of the top officers of the International Union. Women's conferences are scheduled every year. AFSCME, which no longer supports a separate Women's Department, continues to provide national staffing by two professionals to service a variety of programs for women and has launched a Leadership Training Academy, which is designed to move women into higher levels of responsibility and recognition. The CWA has combined its Woman's Department with other functions related to diversity but continues to assign a full-time staff to women's programs, including national conferences. CWA, AFSCME and AFT have longstanding National Women's Advisory Committees, made up of elected local activists, which serve in an advisory capacity on women's interests and issues to top union leadership. Advocacy by these committees influences union policies in collective bargaining and political actions.

The UFCW Women's Network feeds into and also coordinates interchange between Women's Committees at the local level. Women's programs, sponsored by UFCW, IBEW and IBT, consist mainly of conferences and networking serviced by part-time

staff assigned to this function. A recent development in IBT is a Women's Facebook page organized by members who attended conferences and wanted to keep in touch on a regular basis.

### **Program Objectives and Content**

Articulated objectives for women's programs are:

- Stimulus to women's involvement in and support for union goals and activities
- Encouragement to become active in politics
- Response to women's issues on the job
- Training for leadership roles
- Initiate union and public policies relating to issues of concern to women
- Community outreach
- Networking
- Support for charitable causes

Reflecting these objectives, the content of conferences and training sessions offered by national unions include both exposure to union and political issues and training in skills needed to be an active member or leader (e.g., public speaking and conducting meetings). The AFSCME Academy aims for a broader and more advanced curriculum in anticipation that women will take on decision making roles at higher levels in the organization.

### **Barriers Encountered**

While separate programs for women have encountered some resistance, those which have survived have achieved acceptance and support from top lead-

ership. There are reports of some foot dragging by local officers reluctant to finance women's trips to national conferences. And political infighting and changes in the leadership sometimes derail planned accomplishments. According to the program directors, the current financial state of national unions is the major barrier to achieving desired goals.

### **Trends in National Women's Programs**

As unions decline in membership and confront shrinking resources, women's programs are being cut back in staffing and budgets. Separate outreach to women was eliminated by the AFL-CIO and several national unions with longstanding programs and services for women have eliminated or reduced services. On the other hand an increasing number of unions, including those representing workers in non-traditional occupations, have been initiating special outreach programs for women workers.

Ongoing programs emphasize political and community involvement. National conferences are the most frequently reported activity.

### **Accomplishments**

There is little or no data about the impact of national programs for women unionists. Sponsors report positive results in terms of greater involvement in union activities. While women continue to be scarce as national elected leaders (only two major national unions have a woman President), unions report that a growing number of women are achieving leadership roles at regional and local levels. The role and importance of women as union activists is increasingly recognized by union leadership at all levels.

The Women's Programs of six national unions are described below.

## **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)**

The IBEW has a membership of 733,000 including skilled workers in the construction industry and skilled and semi-skilled in electrical, manufacturing and other industries. Females constitute a minority percentage of the membership.

Women are not represented among the officers and members of the International Executive Board.

### **Women's Activities**

The first National Women's conference, sponsored by IBEW, was held in 1997 and promoted by the IBEW Department of Human Services. Several conferences were held over the years leading up to the establishment of the current Department of Civic and Community Engagement, which encompasses Women's Rights along with Civil Rights and Outreach to Young Workers.

National conferences are scheduled every other year. Carolyn Williams, the Department Director, also assists local unions (e.g., Local 3 in NYC) in planning and running conferences for women members. The national conference program usually includes a general session featuring prominent political leaders and national officers of the IBEW. When held in D.C., participants engage in lobbying Congress on union supported issues.

Topics of workshops include: leadership training, rights as a union member, discrimination, sexual harassment, running for union and public office.



The IBEW sponsors women's conferences to encourage union involvement of women members, leadership skills development and solidarity among members through outreach to male members about issues of concern to women. Priority goals expressed by participants in IBEW conferences include: (1) Equality of treatment on the job, for example women's access to apprenticeships in construction, (2) Protection from sexual harassment in male dominated worksites and (3) Opportunities for women to move into union leadership positions.

Limitations on the effectiveness of these programs are primarily financial, based on scarce resources.

### **Accomplishments**

While there are no women in national offices, a few women have been elected local Business Managers and an increasing number have been appointed to staff. Women's conferences have contributed to male acceptance of women in leadership and understanding of their issues. Younger female members are reported to show greater confidence and more involvement in union activities.

### **International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)**

The 1.4 million membership base encompasses a wide range of industries and occupations, including transportation, warehousing, public sector and airlines. Twenty eight percent of the members are female.

Two of the national officers are women – the At-Large Vice President and Vice President for the Midwest Region.

### **Women's Activities**

Since 1986, the IBT has held national conferences for women members (in 2002 this event became annual). Conferences are organized by the Training and Development Department under the leadership of Cindy Impala, with help from a committee of headquarters staff and the cooperation of local union officers in the city where the conference is held. Conference topics are suggested by a planning committee representing locals throughout the geographic regions of the union and IBT staff.

The Conferences are scheduled for 2 ½ days with general sessions and workshops. General sessions feature rank and file members, union officials and political leaders and focus on union economic and political goals and ways to activate the membership. Workshops cover a variety of topics, including training for business agents and office managers, shop stewards and organizers and tips on how to develop local women's committees. Sexual harassment and work family issues are among the subjects covered in past conferences. Participation is open to members who are sent by their local unions or pay their own expenses. Attendance ranges from 800 to 1000.

The goal of the IBT in organizing these conferences is to build unity and support for union goals, educate members and communicate union policies. Each conference includes a local action event, e.g., support for a strike or organizing drive.

The IBT has a Human Rights Commission which deals with civil rights, including women's issues. Also, there are several caucuses organized by the members, including a Woman's Caucus. While local union women's committees are not required by the

IBT constitution, many exist and are active. Recently, Teamsters women organized a Facebook network to keep in touch with one another.

There has been no reported resistance to separate programming for women in IBT, at least at the national level. President James Hoffa is very supportive, usually keynoting the conference.

### **Accomplishments**

Conferences are reported to receive enthusiastic responses from delegates resulting in increased activism on the part of women members.

## **United Food and Commercial Workers Union**

United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) has 1.4 million members, including workers in supermarkets, packinghouses, food processing plants, retail stores, manufacturing, factories and service establishments. The current organization is the product of a merger which brought together workers in packinghouses and retail wholesale and department store workers with food store workers.

More than half of the members are female. The national leadership, including elected officers and Executive Board, is male. Women serve in high level appointed positions in national headquarters and staff.

### **Women's Network**

Women attending UFCW international conventions expressed the desire to motivate and increase the number of women in the UFCW and their efforts culminated in the formation of the UFCW Interna-

tional Women's Network in 1988. Rhonda Nelson is the International Chair. The founding Convention decided to focus on education and networking.

### **Structure**

The Women's Network is made up of an international chair, an eight member executive committee and one or two regional coordinators for each of the UFCW's seven regions. Each region's regional coordinators are responsible for setting up activities and events within their own region. They discuss issues and plan events during those meetings. Nelson explained that this structure allows regional coordinators to tailor their activities to their specific regions so that they "may look to something happening in their particular local, where there's a strike or rally." The network tries to be present to assist various locals within regions. Many plan education programs, for example, using Cornell University to run "Preventing Sexual Harassment" workshops.

Every two years a Women's Network international convention is held. The most recent convention, held in Florida in 2012, focused on the role of women in the economic and political landscape. Speakers included a National Organization of Women representative, a female State Senator from Ohio and a representative from Emerge America, a group that seeks to politically mobilize democratic women. The convention also highlighted women within the UFCW who were potential future leaders. Workshops at the event dealt with the role of communications in winning campaigns, the role women can play in organizing campaigns and how to manage and attract females in today's job market.

## **Purpose**

The Women's Network was founded "to unify UFCW women through an international network" as women represent "a powerful resource for the union." According to the Network, active participation of women members in the UFCW "enhances our union's strength at the bargaining table, in organizing campaigns and in the political arena with the intent to motivate and encourage women to become active in their local union so they can contribute toward building and strengthening the UFCW."

Rhonda Nelson explained that the Women's Network is all about "finding women activists and encouraging them to get more involved in the union, training and mentoring and educating them into leadership positions," so that women can be a resource for the union and help to strengthen the union at the bargaining table and through political action.

## **Activities**

The Women's Network focuses on pay discrimination, workplace violence prevention, sexual harassment education and prevention, education on workers' rights and contraceptive equity. The Network assesses women's common problems and concerns, develops programs to address them and seeks to motivate and educate UFCW women to increase their participation in UFCW activities and programs. This encourages the hiring and promotion of qualified women to leadership and policy-making positions at all levels within the UFCW local unions, the International Union and the labor movement and supports the formation of women's committees and caucuses at local union and regional levels. Two issues of particular focus for the Women's Network are domestic violence and breast cancer awareness.

## **Barriers Faced**

According to Rhonda Nelson, the main challenge for the Women's Network is getting young women actively involved.

## **Accomplishments**

The UFCW Women's Network has mobilized female members to attend rallies and engage in other types of political activity. Also, the establishment of a national UFCW Women's Network was significant for the organization because it encouraged the creation of women's committees on the local level. The women's conferences also contribute to the education of women and fosters the showcasing of women's issues at the local level. The Women's Network, as a national structure, thus serves a dual purpose by encouraging attention to women's priorities and stimulating political activity. The network has played a significant role in the campaign to organize Walmart workers.

## **Communication Workers of America (CWA)**

The Communications Workers of America, initially organized in the telecommunications industry, merged with unions in media, airlines, electrical manufacturing and public sector to reach its current membership of 700,000.

A woman holds one of the two highest positions in the union (Secretary Treasurer). Women constitute approximately half the CWA membership and five women serve on the Executive Board (out of 20).

## **Women's Activities**

The CWA has a long standing tradition of national programs for women, sponsoring a National Women's Committee along with Women's Conferences. Currently, the staff providing service for these programs report to the Human Rights Department. One full-time staff professional is assigned to this function. The National Women's Committee consists of representatives from the geographic regions of the union and constituent groups. The Committee meets twice a year and prepares and circulates an annual report. Every second year, there is a National Women's Conference and the alternate year, regional women's conferences. Local unions are encouraged to have women's committees but the record is spotty.

## **Activities**

The content of conferences, reports and committee meetings includes work, union and political issues. Current emphasis is placed on encouraging women to become active in politics and engage in the political process.

The CWA monitors all of its programs, including those for women, to evaluate the results of the activities in terms of goals. Metrics are collected, e.g., number of members involved.

## **Accomplishments**

Yvette Herrera, based on her experience directing these activities for CWA, believes that women unionists continue to have a "confidence gap" and need "safe space" for meetings, developing skills, networking and mentoring. Women also need role models, which they have in CWA where women hold top office at the national, regional and local level. She

believes that women's activities in the CWA contribute to the goal of building confidence and recognition, which in turn, encourages women to be active and compete for elected office. Women are also encouraged to run for political office and to support the CWA's legislative and political agenda.

## **Advice to Other Organizations**

Yvette Herrera, based on experience in CWA, concludes that women's programs need dedicated staff support. They should have "roots in the field" not only in headquarters. There must be a "buy-in" from leadership at all levels. Results should be monitored.

## **United Automobile Workers (UAW)**

The UAW was the first union to establish a National Women's Department (1944) and incorporated in its constitution a directive that every Region have a Women's Council and every local, a women's committee.

The UAW, at its peak, represented 1.5 million members employed in manufacture of automobiles, aircraft and agricultural implements and component parts. Over the past forty years, membership shrunk to its present level of 385,000 with the loss of employment in core industries. Its membership was originally, and continues to be, predominantly male. Demographics changed to enlist a larger female percentage when the union undertook organizing of professional and clerical employees.

At the national level, two women serve on the Executive Board, both elected (Regional Director and Vice President) and several women serve as Department Heads in the national headquarters. In an in-

creasing number of UAW locals, women are elected to top office.

### **Women's Activities**

When Bob King was elected President of UAW in 2010, there was a debate among leadership about continuation of a separate Women's Department and the possibility of merging this function with the Civil and Human Rights Department, reflecting shrinking resources for servicing these activities. A decision was made to keep the Women's Department (influenced by tradition and constitutional provisions) with a smaller staff. Cindy Estrada, elected Vice President in 2010, was given the responsibility of directing the Women's Department, along with other functions. Georgi-Ann Bargamian administers the Department along with one other professional staff member (The Women's Department in earlier years had four full time professional staff members).

Cindy Estrada, as Director and the International's only female officer, emphasizes women taking a leadership role in their union and community with the support of intergenerational mentors and self-development opportunities. These themes are stressed in department conferences and trainings conducted throughout the country. Experience has also shown the need for the Department to address general issues resulting from societal structural sexism. The creation of a "War Against Women" program by the Department and the AFL-CIO which was introduced at the UAW's 2013 women's conference at Black Lake, Michigan, the UAW education center, was prompted by stories of UAW women continuing to face various forms of sexual harassment in predominantly male UAW-represented worksites. Women (and men) related the existence of male disrespect to female co-workers through cat-

calls and propositions, as well as the questioning of women presenting workplace grievances for their veracity and relevance to the bargaining unit. The fact that women continue to be underrepresented in leadership at all levels of the union along with reports of controversy, pointed to the need for deeper and more widespread women's leadership development programming. The Department is working with the AFL-CIO, the Women's Advisory Council and the International Executive Board to take the "War Against Women" program into the field and allow men and women in the UAW's regions and locals to acknowledge and address structural sexism and opportunities for action and change.

How to accomplish all of these goals (community outreach, protection of women's rights at work and leadership training – along with education of male leaders and members about the value of collaboration) is a dilemma for the UAW Women's Department with its current limited resources. Resources include the Regional Women's Coordinators, i.e., international staff assigned to work with the Regional Women's Councils and local union committees in some (not all) regions. Joint Training Programs funded by Auto Big Three Companies constitute a potential funding source for expanded training opportunities for women.

Currently, the UAW Women's Department gives major attention to its Annual Women's Conference which includes plenary sessions, featuring national leadership and workshops on a range of topics from political issues viewed from a women's perspective to on the job problems and skills training. Women who are regional representatives meet at Black Lake, Michigan, the UAW education center, for confer-



ences to discuss issues and techniques for achieving the goals of the Department.

Women's committees, although mandated by the UAW constitution, do not exist in every local. For locals with an all-male workforce, the Constitution allows for an exception and many locals with a predominantly female membership do not see a current need for separate committees dealing with women's concerns.

Functions performed by local women's committees range from educational and charitable (e.g., celebrating International Women's Day and raising money for breast cancer research), to active support of union political action and organizing. Issues of special concern to women workers, e.g., equality of treatment on the job and work-family benefits continues to be the focus of many local committees. A successful example of Vice President Cindy Estrada's emphasis on the Union Women–Community Outreach, is to be found in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where the UAW local Women's Committee partners with community groups on immigration policy, literacy training, public school issues, and racial justice.

### **Barriers**

Opposition or indifference on the part of male local leaders and members is a barrier to action in some parts of the union. In regions with no female staff to serve as liaisons with Regional Women's Councils and local committees, the time input and support may be less. Internal political power struggles sometimes stand in the way of action in sections of the union where there are intense rivalries for power. Overall, as in other national unions, lack of resources

is the major barrier to expanding and upgrading women's activities.

### **Accomplishments**

Despite limited resources, the UAW Women's Department program is moving forward. Enthusiastic response to participation in national women's conferences has resulted in more activism at the local level with an increasing number of women vying to take on leadership responsibilities in their unions and communities. The Kalamazoo example shows the potential for expanding union-community partnerships to other localities.

Reports from local and regional training progress indicate that separate structures and activities have been valuable in building self-confidence and leadership skills for women members. Networking with other women has encouraged women to be more active and take on roles of leadership responsibility. Women's committees and councils also continue to raise questions and proposals relating to women's rights at work and work-family issues which benefit all members.

### **American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)**

AFSCME has a membership of 1.6 million, mostly employed in city, state and county government in a wide variety of occupations ranging from manual labor to highly educated professionals. Fifty-Six percent (56%) of the members are women. In 2012, AFSCME elected its first woman to top office: Laura Reyes, Secretary-Treasurer. Women head several of the District Councils, including those in New York, Florida, New Jersey and California, serve on the International Executive Board, and direct key departments in national headquarters.

## Women's Activities

AFSCME's longstanding Women's Department was established in the 1970s with a national advisory committee and regional conferences. In the 1980's, AFSCME led national political and legal campaigns for equal pay for work of equal value and prevention of sexual harassment at work.

In 2007, as a result of long-term strategic planning, involving Convention delegates, the International Union was restructured. Functions of the Women's Department were reassigned to other departments – legislative issues to the Legislative Department and Women's Leadership Development to the Education Department, directed by Elissa McBride. Carol Anderson provides leadership for women's programs. National staff efforts are supplemented by field staff in the Regional offices.

A National Women's Advisory Committee (made up of elected officers from locals and District Councils) advises the President on issues which affect women, serves as a link to local action, informs women members on key programs of AFSCME (e.g. organizing campaigns) and encourages formation of committees at the local level. Members of this committee update each other on current developments and receive briefings from the Legislative Department.

National Women's Conferences are held every other year, attracting 900 activists in 2013. Conference programs deal with major issues of the day and feature a variety of speakers, panels and workshops designed to build skills and/or inform on topics related to the interests of union women.

AFSCME has a longstanding program of providing training in public speaking to women in local unions (staffed by the Education Department and by local union women who complete their train-the-trainers program).

The Education Department also conducts webinars for women members. For example, a recent webinar featured Bridget O'Farrell's research on Eleanor Roosevelt's relationships with labor unions.

At the 2010 AFSCME Convention, staff conducted discussion groups to elicit ideas from women delegates about what women's leadership is or should be. In 2012, the Department distributed "Sisters Stepping Up" designed as a one-on-one interview tool, which provided data on where women were in their journey to leadership and what they needed to move up to higher positions in the unions. Over 300 women participated in this massive research project.

The results of this self assessment prepared the way for development of a resolution introduced at the 2012 AFSCME Convention calling for establishment of the Women's Leadership Academy, a six months program designed to prepare women to move up into higher levels of leadership. Up to twenty-five participants are nominated by their locals and councils and selected by a panel, which includes university staff from outside the union (to avoid politicization of admissions decisions). Curriculum includes classroom training and field work projects. This pioneering program for women's leadership development began in June of this year and will be conducted again in June of 2014.

## Accomplishments

The longstanding involvement of women in AFSCME has resulted in the election of women to top positions in the national union, District Councils and local unions. Women's issues, e.g., family leave, and pay equity, are at the fore of the union's legislative agenda.

The establishment of an AFSCME Academy for training women to move into top positions of responsibility is a first and precedent setting step for an American union.

## New York Area Women's Committees in Unions and Worker Centers

The New York Metropolitan Area is the most highly unionized location in the United States. In recent years, traditional labor unions have been joined by non-traditional worker centers. Response to a questionnaire distributed to New York area unions indicates that one out of four local unions sponsors special outreach programs for women members. The authors examined the experience of local women's committees from six local unions and two worker centers in New York. The organizations studied involve varying membership composition by gender and industry, with members employed in both traditional and non-traditional women's occupations.

Of the local union organizations included in this study, the District Council of Carpenters and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) Local 1 have the smallest representation of women in their ranks and leadership, with women less than five percent of their memberships. On the other end of the spectrum are the Professional Staff

Congress (PSC), the Organization of Staff Analysts (OSA) and United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1500, each with over 50 percent women membership. Transport Workers Union (TWU) Local 100 is in the middle range, with 22 percent, along with the two worker centers with about 30 to 40 percent female representation.

Analysis of these case studies focuses on the reasons for the committee's formation, their missions, structures and accomplishments. Success factors are identified and key lessons are drawn for other women's committees and for organizations considering the formation of women's groups.

## History and Goals

A driving factor for the creation of these women's committees has been the need to focus on issues that are specific to women and that would not receive adequate attention were it not for the existence of a safe space for women to share their experiences, assist each other with advice and formulate strategies to advance their issues in the union or worker center. This is a common theme in all the cases studied, ranging from committees in unions with the smallest representation of women in their ranks to those with majority female membership.

In some cases, the drive to form a union committee originated from the members; in others, the leadership of the local or national union. It is worthy of note that committees in the two unions with the fewest women in their ranks (DC of Carpenters and IATSE Local 1) were initiated by women activists from the grassroots. In both cases, the activists starting the committee had participated in union sponsored educational programs. In the case of the Car-

penters, the seven women activists who started the committee had gone to a women's conference organized by the national union that included an emphasis on developing women's committees at the local level. In the case of IATSE Local 1, the activist who started the committee attended the United Association of Labor Educators (UALE) Summer School for union women. For both committees, key goals are to create a network that would provide women with tools and assistance to succeed in both their unions and in their jobs. For this reason, these committees place an emphasis on education about the union structure and job placement processes in their industries.

In the case of TWU 100, which represents workers in a non-traditional employment sector for women but has a substantial number of women members, the impetus for the formation of the committee originated in the national union, which added a clause to its constitution requiring the formation of a women's committee at every local union. Key goals for TWU Local 100's women's committee are issues of equity (i.e. wage parity), as well as sexual harassment and hostile work environments. In the case of UFCW Local 1500, the impetus for starting the committee also came from the national union, with the main goals of increasing women's voice and engagement in union affairs.

The cases of OSA and PSC are of note because both unions have at least 50 percent female membership and PSC has a female majority leadership; raising the question of why a women's committee is needed. In the case of OSA, the impetus came from the grassroots, as a group of women activists started the committee with the goal of advancing issues specific to women, such as educational opportunities, wage parity, health care and childcare. In the case of PSC,

a union with a reputation for support of progressive issues, the leadership introduced the idea of a women's committee. The goals are to advance the status of women on the faculty and staff of CUNY, with a particular focus on new and more vulnerable union members and strive for social justice in terms of women in general and society at large.

In both worker centers studied, UNITY at the Workplace Project and Restaurant Opportunities Center (ROC)-NY, the committee organizing effort was initiated by the leadership as a response to the women members' expressed concerns. Fuerza Laboral Femenina, which evolved into UNITY, was started to provide women with a safe space to develop leadership skills. A community survey then revealed that labor issues specific to women warranted the formation of an organization that would focus on domestic workers. In the case of ROC-NY, a campaign for workplace fairness at restaurants and subsequent field research revealed the women's need for a separate structure that would address their specific issues, sexual harassment and job segregation along race and gender at the workplace. The experience of these committees is consistent with findings by other researchers about the origins of women committees at worker centers. Such findings indicate that for worker centers in all industries (regardless of their gender composition) and similarly for unions, the need emerges to create safe spaces for women to focus on their specific issues and develop leadership skills (Fine 2006).

### **Structure and Activities**

The structure of the committees largely depends on where they fit in the overall structure of the union or worker center, their relationship with the union leadership and the resources available to them.

Generally, union women's committees have steering committees that meet monthly and hold membership meetings quarterly. Their level and nature of activity depend largely on the financial backing and/or other type of support they receive from the unions, since most do not have a separate budget and depend on volunteer work. Committees studied provide opportunities for leadership development for women at membership meetings and several obtain financial support for women to participate in conferences and the UALE Union Women Summer School. Many committees also place emphasis on skills training and education about their industries to facilitate advancement and retention of women in the workforce (DC Carpenters, IATSE Local 1, ROC-NY, OSA, PSC, and TWU 100). Other key educational and training efforts involve focus on sexual harassment as well as safety and health (DC Carpenters, ROC-NY, and TWU 100).

### **Accomplishments and Successful Strategies**

The committees studied are developing leadership skills for women but not all have advanced women to union leadership positions. A key accomplishment for all of them has been to increase the visibility of women in their unions. Thus, women's issues receive attention (e.g. required sexual harassment prevention training at the DC Carpenters) and women are increasingly viewed as a mobilizing force for contract campaigns and political action (TWU 100, IATSE Local 1). For organizations in which women are highly represented in leadership (PSC, OSA, ROC-NY, UNITY), a key impact of the committees has been the enhancement of skills and recognition for their members in the union and the workplace.

A key success factor women leaders indicate, is the financial and other types of support that committees

receive from the leadership of their organizations. Hence the importance women leaders attribute to building relationships with the union leadership. The limitation that this approach imposes for the sustainability of the committees is that they become vulnerable to leadership changes. The case of TWU 100 illustrates this vulnerability, while the case of UNITY confirms that financial self-reliance ensures sustainability and shields the committee from the impact of leadership changes or political turmoil.

Successful strategies, which women's committees have implemented include: focusing on issues that are important to women, opening access to leadership and professional development opportunities and providing opportunities to network and build cohesion and solidarity among women. The following section includes the eight case studies, providing details about the experience of the committees.

(See Appending II for Summary Table comparing Local Women's Committees)

### **NYC District Council of Carpenters'**

The District Council of Carpenters represents skilled carpenters, dockbuilders, timbermen, cabinetmakers, floorcoverers and millwrights in the New York City area. A council affiliated to the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC), the DCC represents about 17,000 active members, including a small percentage of women. It was an all-male union until 1935, when the first woman was inducted, which helps to explain the culture of the union and the reason women felt forming a women's committee was necessary. Women are still a very small component of the union, constituting 16% of apprentices but a successful and well organized women's committee has led to an in-



crease in female leaders' presence in the union hierarchy.

## History

The inspiration for starting a Carpenter's Women's Committee came from a women's conference organized by the International Union (UOC) in 2002. The NYC District's leadership paid for seven women members from the Council to attend. The conference included an emphasis on developing women's committees on the local level. However, the initiative for starting a women's committee in New York was membership-driven. Elly Spicer, who had attended the women's conference, asked the leadership of the District Council upon her return if they would support starting a women's committee. Spicer argued that the committee would serve several purposes: it would improve the recruitment of women who would stay in the trade and the union, develop leadership so that women could rise within the union and educate the male members that women were in the union to stay and wanted to be part of the leadership. The leadership of the local agreed and the women's committee has been in existence for more than 10 years.

## Goals

According to the women's committee website, their mission is "to create a network of active sisters that will provide avenues for women: to address issues, promote strength, unity and retention in order to increase and diversify the female workforce in the NYCDCC-UBC. Our aim is to become involved in activities and leadership within our union, thereby making the union a stronger labor organization for all its members."

## Structure

Eleven women are on the Steering Committee, which meets monthly. Twenty-five to fifty women attend general meetings, which are held quarterly. Attendance at general meetings fluctuates based on the speaker's subject matter—for example information about contract updates could bring in up to 65 members.

The union not only allowed the formation of the women's committee but was also extremely supportive, providing mailing lists and other needed data. The union leadership at the time also paid for the costs of the women's committee, encouraging them to have food at their meetings and hold them at the union hall. Spicer's time, as a full-time staff member, was another contribution by the union.

The committee does not have a budget but Spicer says she prefers it that way — managing the money would take a lot of time and effort. The backing of the supportive union leadership means the committee has access to space at the union hall, the facilities there and the union mailing list. The leaders also lend their time, appearing at women's committee meetings when asked and support Spicer and other union staff who spend time on women's committee business. Although men wanted to attend meetings, the committee decided not to let men attend meetings. The committee wanted to preserve a space for women to come together and talk about issues of concern and address problems autonomously.

## Activities

The women's committee focuses on educating the women about the industry and the structure of the union and operates as a resource for the women in

the union. Committee meetings often feature guest speakers, including the female head of a construction company, representatives from Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) and Legal Momentum and from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). The committee has also had and continues to have guest speakers from different parts of the union. Spicer said “it’s a big organization; we want to map it out for the women so they are a really informed resource.” One speaker addressed women’s health, while another speaker — a staff member at the District Council who manages the out-of-work list — explained how the list works. These educational efforts have extended to topics like how to engage in political action, explaining what is going on when the union is negotiating a new contract or what it means when a new delegate body is being elected. When the biggest local in the District Council was having elections, Council Representative Tamara Rivera organized a question and answer session where the sisters asked the candidates questions about their positions. The women were able to demonstrate their understanding of how the union and the industry work and impress upon the candidates that they were a varied constituency with different ideas and viewpoints on the issues.

The success of the women’s committee’s educational efforts can be seen in the demand for the services it was providing, to the extent that men wanted to attend the meetings because they were such a good source of information.

This educational mission has extended to issues facing women in the workplace, particularly sexual harassment. Apprentices, shop stewards and business agents are required to take sexual harassment classes. The women’s committee also serves as a net-

work for female carpenters to reach out to when dealing with a hostile work environment.

Leadership skills are facilitated among Steering Committee members, who take turns running both general and Steering Committee meetings (which are used to plan the general meeting, from who’s in charge of mailings to what the leaflet advertising the meeting says). Leading a meeting teaches members to be comfortable speaking in front of a group of people, how to effectively organize items to discuss at meetings and how to delegate tasks to members. This kind of hands-on leadership experience and a chance to prove oneself would be difficult for these women to accrue within the union in other avenues outside the women’s committee. Committee leaders emphasize how critical having a network of women can be in the construction trade, saying that without a network it’s not possible for women to survive in the trade.

For a time, the women’s committee was able to run a formal mentoring program because the District Council paid a full-time staff person to both run the program and the committee itself. Spicer credits that “solid financial backing” by the union with accomplishments, like the mentoring program, she said she was “sure other women’s committees would like to do — but when you’re all working and it’s all volunteer, it just doesn’t get done.” Both men and women served as mentors, including business agents, the president of one of the locals and a woman who was on the executive board of a local. Spicer said the mentoring program was effective in helping apprentices within their first three or four years of entering the program. But after losing the staff person the program was unsustainable. As Director of the Labor Technical College, Spicer is now working on estab-

lishing an apprenticeship-wide mentoring program, for men and women and she said women will be strongly encouraged to be a part of it.

According to Spicer, the committee is most effective for apprentice women who are new to the trade and struggling to both understand how the job and the union work. She says for these women the committee serves to “demystify the organization as a whole, creating camaraderie, sisterhood and a level of support.”

Despite the implementation of mandatory sexual harassment classes for apprentices, shop stewards and business agents in the District Council, conditions on the job can still be uncomfortable for women. Committee leaders affirm that conditions have vastly improved but there’s still a long way to go in terms of changing male behavior on the job.

One particular setback facing the women’s committee was one afflicting the industry and its workers in general: an economic downturn, which led to a shortage of construction jobs. Spicer said a lot of women couldn’t survive the unemployment, so they sought out different careers. In most cases, the women’s committee didn’t know about the difficulties these women were facing until after they dropped out. “Instead of reaching out to us so we could try to see if we could help in some way, or say ‘go shape this job sister, it’s federally funded, which means they need women,’ just some hope, they make their own decisions,” Rivera said. The women’s committee is clearly a valuable resource for women in this type of union.

## Accomplishments

Since the establishment of the women’s committee, a number of female members have risen up in the union ranks. Although the formation of any women’s group can often be credited with raising consciousness about women’s issues, the ideas promoted by the women’s committee can be seen to have effectively permeated a traditionally male union up even to the higher ranks. After the women’s committee had been running for a number of years, the leader of a local asked Spicer to run as a delegate. He said that it had become clear that women were organized and an important part of the union membership and he felt that she should represent their concerns at delegate meetings. Spicer ran, was elected and became the first woman delegate at the District Council. Another member of the women’s committee was also elected as a delegate for a different local. The District Council’s first female business agent was hired, along with a woman instructor at the Carpenters’ Labor Technical College, a female trustee and female captains leading political action. These women, working in the District Council offices, have access to speakers that could provide information about the structure of the union, because they work down the hall from the man who manages the out-of-work list and other key officers and resources.

The creation of a women’s committee also increases the visibility and accessibility of female role models to rank and file female members. Women in the union are given the opportunity to network with other people, both male and female, who are willing to share their time and information. Informal mentoring plays a key role.

The advocacy of female union members at high levels in the organization can also be crucial with issues of sexual harassment. Women often come to Spicer

for advice on how to deal with issues at work and when the situation results in a grievance, Spicer will follow up with the business agent to make sure it is dealt with. Both Spicer's 28 years in the union and prestigious position as director of the Labor Technical College, which trains apprentice carpenters for the trade, make her a trusted figure.

While it might seem counterintuitive that by separating out women the women's committee has enabled them to become more integrated into the union, this in fact seems to have occurred. "We're sort of more a part of the grain of it, so without making an issue of it they suddenly knew they had to start saying brothers and sisters at all of their meetings," Spicer said. "There's a consciousness that when you're running a political ticket, you have to have a woman on it. You better figure out who, because don't run an all-male ticket, it won't sell."

Although Spicer was the founder of the women's committee and was heavily involved as the leader of the Steering Committee, she left the committee last year. She says she was seen as the person setting the agenda and says "I didn't set it up structurally to be that way. This isn't to be organized around a personality; it's supposed to be organized around an issue and an organization so it is fluid. And I felt like I was actually stopping that from happening." She emphasizes the importance of constantly bringing new people into the committee.

This women's committee has been successful through education and promotion of the leadership skills of its members. Demands in the collective bargaining process have not been the committee's emphasis. Looking to the future, Spicer points to the

possibility of raising the issue of women's bathrooms in the collective bargaining process.

### **Workplace Project – UNITY Housecleaners Cooperative**

UNITY Housecleaners is a workers' cooperative founded in 1998 by members of the Workplace Project of Long Island, New York. UNITY originated from the Workplace Project's Women's Committee, Fuerza Laboral Femenina, which was established in 1994 to promote the participation of women members, who in those years, were much less likely to speak up in meetings than men. The committee served as a safe space for women to meet and share life experiences, discuss workplace issues and strategize. (Fine 2006) One of the first major projects of Fuerza Laboral was to survey members and women in the community to identify the most pressing issues facing them. The survey revealed that private, for-profit placement agencies were charging excessive fees, not guaranteeing a minimum wage or a contract with the employers. The Workplace Project then ran a public pressure campaign against the agencies and was able to get a statement of principles signed by a number of agencies. However, as enforcement of such statement became extremely onerous for the worker center, the decision was made to create a worker's cooperative. (Juarez interview) Since UNITY's founding in 1998, the membership of the cooperative has grown from 13 women to more than 160.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The UNITY cooperative kept the primary goals of the original women's committee to create a space for women workers to focus on their specific issues and develop the confidence and leadership abilities to

address such issues and achieve gender equality in the workplace and society. To these goals, the cooperative added a focus on economic autonomy for domestic workers. Key objectives of the cooperative include consciousness raising among women and the community about gender specific issues and possible solutions, leadership skills development, maintaining the economic viability of the cooperative and political and legislative activities to promote labor rights of domestic workers.

### **Structure**

UNITY is a self-governing entity but is housed within the Workplace Project and the two organizations are linked through shared membership (cooperative members are also members of the worker center). Additionally, the coordinator of UNITY is on the staff of the Workplace Project as an organizer. UNITY has its own board with seven members or directors, who have equal say and make decisions based on consensus. Board directors include the president, vice-president and the secretary, who are elected by the entire membership. The other four members of the board are in charge of four separate committees (finance, education, publicity and rules) and are elected by the members of the committee. The committee heads are elected to serve for a one-year term, while the president, vice-president and secretary serve for 2-year terms.

Members are required to complete a four-week course on how to run a successful cooperative, as well as a training class on housecleaning skills. All members are required to serve at least in one of the above mentioned committees. Funding for the operations of the cooperative come from required members' contributions, which amount to 10 percent of their individual earnings.

UNITY is a member organization of the National Domestic Workers Alliance (NDWA) and as such, has participated in several state and nationwide campaigns to achieve legal protections for domestic workers.

### **Activities**

UNITY's activities include skills and safety training, leadership development, marketing and political and legislative action. The cooperative offers classes on housecleaning skills (including use of alternative safer cleaning products), health and safety training and education on the cooperative's administration. Leadership development workshops continue as a priority to promote members self-confidence and knowledge about their industry as well as education in other areas of interest to women such as domestic violence, breast cancer, nutrition, cooking classes, ESL, writing and how to start a business. Marketing activities involve flyer distribution, community outreach and other publicity (e.g. newspaper ads).

### **Accomplishments**

After waging a prolonged campaign in Nassau County (Long Island), UNITY obtained the support of county legislators to pass a Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in 2006. The law requires domestic worker placement agencies in Nassau County to inform about minimum wage, overtime and other basic rights. As members of the NDWA, UNITY participated in the statewide campaign that resulted in the New York Domestic Worker Bill of Rights in 2010, making New York the first state in the nation to have such a law.

For more than 15 years, UNITY has operated as a successful and self-sustaining cooperative, with a



growing membership. For UNITY's coordinator Lilliam Juarez, one of the most valuable accomplishments of the organization has been the personal growth and leadership development of women, who as new immigrants were not aware of their rights and leadership potential when they just joined the cooperative.

### **Successful Strategies**

According to Juarez, a key success factor for UNITY has been the emphasis on education, particularly in the areas of consciousness raising about worker and women issues, leadership development and knowledge about cooperativism. Another key factor, Juarez adds, has been the emphasis on building a sense of cohesion and solidarity among the members of the organization.

### **Restaurant Opportunities Center New York (ROC-NY)**

ROC-NY is a worker center that was founded to help restaurant workers whose workplace was destroyed in the September 11, 2001 tragedy at the World Trade Center. With approximately 5,000 members, ROC-NY has since both spawned a national organization — the Restaurant Opportunities Center United, with 8,000 members in locations across the country — and enlarged its mission. The organization uses workplace justice campaigns to expose poor working conditions and force restaurant owners to improve them. It also conducts research, trains members for all types of restaurant positions and encourages “High Road” practices that treat workers justly without inhibiting a restaurant's profitability.

### **History**

The ROC women's committee arose in a grassroots style, with the labor organization's leaders being responsive to member concerns. According to the women's committee organizer, Daisy Chung, the women's committee arose in 2007 after a workplace justice campaign that ROC-NY conducted, which found that one of the major grievances of female workers at that particular restaurant group was sexual harassment. This, along with research about gender and race discrimination in the industry, revealed that female restaurant workers needed a space within the ROC-NY organization where they could address specific issues for female food service workers. Focus groups conducted with women suggested that there was an interest in joining a women's committee. This membership-facilitated approach to initiatives is a distinguishing feature of ROC-NY's non-traditional approach to organizing.

### **Structure**

The structure of ROC-NY's women's committee accordingly differs from the model seen with the women's committees of other New York City based worker organizations. The women's committee is one of four formal committees within ROC-NY and is the only committee focusing on a distinct subdivision of membership. As with the organization's other committees, the women's committee has a full-time staff member assigned to handle day-to-day planning. Male workers are the majority in the restaurant industry, comprising about 60 or 70% of the workforce. The ROC-NY Board of Directors, which consists entirely of restaurant workers, reflects that make-up, seating four women and six men.

Tatiana Bejar, the current organizer of the women's committee, sends out regular updates by email to a

listserv of about 70 members and she says that list is growing. The committee meets every two weeks. The staff member dedicated to the committee takes charge of the day-to-day business, runs meetings and meets with female members to discuss their concerns. ROC also provides space for women's committee meetings. Although there is no specific budget allocated to the committee, the organization received grants to fund projects like the sexual harassment training and the "Waiting on Equality" report. The organization does use its unrestricted funds to support women's committee activities. For instance members who go through sexual harassment workshops get compensated for the 25 hours of training they undergo.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The principal goal of the women's committee is to raise awareness about gender discrimination in the restaurant industry and develop strategies to address this issue. The biggest complaints that organizers hear from women about their workplaces concern is sexual harassment and how to respond to it.

### **Activities**

The women's committee developed a Peer Education Sexual Harassment training program, a three-day, 25 hour course that takes place at the ROC-NY headquarters during which participants discuss gender oppression in the workplace and how to deal with it. After participating in the workshop members create their own workshop and conduct it with other members.

The women's committee is also responsible for a career development program called Career Ladders for Women, where women in the job training classes

offered by ROC-NY can talk about the challenges that they face in the industry. The goal of Career Ladders for Women is to get female workers the access to living wage jobs in the restaurant industry that they have been so far denied.

The committee released a report in July of 2010 called "Waiting on Equality: the role and impact of gender in the New York City restaurant industry," which built upon previous research done by ROC-NY to make significant conclusions about the way women, in particular women of color, are treated in the restaurant industry. According to "Waiting on Equality," women are underrepresented in the highest-paying restaurant jobs and often face a glass ceiling preventing them from accessing those desirable jobs. The report says women "are often confronted by blunt image-consciousness, sexism and stereotypes," with attractiveness used as a qualifier for women to attain certain positions.

Under New York State law, the minimum wage a tipped food service worker must receive is \$5.00 an hour — a rate significantly higher than the federal minimum wage for tipped workers (\$2.13 an hour) but still lagging behind the minimum wage for other New York State workers or \$7.25 an hour. ROC-NY says that most workers in the restaurant industry do not receive enough in tips to compensate for their low wages, unless they work in fine dining establishments in highly visible, front of the house positions like waiter or maître-d. "Waiting on Equality" found that women of color are disproportionately found working in quick service, where they receive low wages and that even women who manage to get jobs in fine-dining are often shut out from the best positions with the highest tips (like manager, maître-d, and sommelier). Women are often hired and put into

jobs that are considered more traditionally female, like pastry chef or cocktail waitress.

The women's committee is in the beginning of a process to expand the scope of their work to include issues that affect LGBT members. They plan to reshape the mission statement of the committee to reflect this and do outreach to LGBT organizations in order to partner with them. The committee also plans to issue a report about the need for childcare programs in the industry and has two members working on gathering survey data. The committee is gathering stories about what daily life is like for female food service workers to highlight the issues they face. These stories, along with those of LGBT workers, will be featured on the ROC-NY blog.

### **Accomplishments**

The Peer Education Sexual Harassment training program was an initiative brainstormed, designed and executed by the women's committee. They worked with other women's groups (the ACLU women's project and CONNECT New York) as well as ROC-NY's membership to create a training curriculum. Over the lifespan of the sexual harassment training program, the way in which members enroll has varied in the past, the workshops have been held as part of committee and membership meetings; currently they are integrated into the job training curriculum, as a component of their political education classes.

The committee has also done really thorough research assessing the issues facing women in the restaurant industry, seen in the "Waiting on Equality" report mentioned earlier. The Career Ladders for Women also tries to address those issues in the context of women advancing in the industry. These re-

ports will inform strategies for the worker center to address the issues examined.

Although the way ROC-NY is organized seems to work well for the women's committee, allowing it greater autonomy than in a union, the nontraditional structure can also be restrictive. ROC-NY uses methods very different than traditional unions to achieve their goals but without the power of collective bargaining they rely heavily on alliances with other organizations. Coordinating between two or more different organizations can be time-consuming and difficult, although it may yield great results like the Peer Education Sexual Harassment training.

### **Successful Strategies – Lessons Learned**

The flexibility that characterizes the operations of ROC-NY seems to transcend other barriers women's committees in unions face. Unlike the issues of other women's committees, getting women's committee priorities onto the ROC-NY agenda is not a struggle.

According to Chung, the ROC-NY organization as a whole undertakes a lot of issues that "might not seem like women's issues but really are at the heart"—like paid sick days, which would be extremely beneficial for female members, or their Workplace Justice Campaigns, which often highlight gender discrimination. The way in which the women's committee is enmeshed into the structural fabric of ROC-NY becomes clear to members from the first day they join the organization — Bejar says that in orientation and other meetings members learn about women facing discrimination in the industry. "I think in the daily language, with our members, we are always talking about gender issues."

## Transport Workers Union Local 100

Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union represents workers employed by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in subways and buses and several private bus lines in New York City. The membership is predominantly male; 6,000 workers out of a total of 40,000 and men predominate in the skilled and higher paying jobs. Women have become increasingly active and are represented in lower rungs of the leadership. Women currently hold 20 positions as elected officers and five women serve on the Executive Board of this Local.

Local 100 has a turbulent political history. The elected leadership of the local union has changed three times in the past decade.

### History

Over the past twenty five years, there have been several organizational attempts to target outreach to women members. The first Women's Committee, formed in the 1980's, was spearheaded by a male officer, with the objective of providing family assistance. This effort did not receive funding from the Local and faded out. In 2001, a female executive local member tried again to form a women's group with little success and in 2004, the newly elected President, Roger Toussant, organized a Women's Caucus.

The current TWU Local 100 Women's Committee was mandated by the National Transport Workers Union in a clause added to their constitution, calling for a working Women's Committee in every local union. Anita Clinton, one of the transit system's first female rail mechanics, was persuaded to return from retirement to head this committee, a position she held until John Samuelson was elected President in

2010 and appointed Benita Johnson, the elected Recording Secretary of the Local to chair the Women's Committee. A succession of changes took place in the intervening two years until Liz Wilson, a long-time member of the committee and elected official of the Local, was appointed Chair in 2013.

### Goals and Objectives

The language in the TWU constitution regarding the formation of a Working Women's Committee at the national level and women's committees on the local level states that the purpose is "to ensure equal pay for equal work, to empower women to have the confidence to seek leadership positions within their unions as well as in their workplace, to help women further the cause of all workers, male and female, to elevate the awareness of working women's needs, both inside and outside of the workplace, to bring union members to a greater awareness of the need for better physical and mental health; to a greater understanding of financial issues, including investments and retirement planning, and to motivate women to get involved in their communities so that all women can gain more knowledge of how to obtain affordable housing or to own an affordable home, and to educate, encourage and mentor women of all ages to become future leaders."

### Structure

The Women's Committee has maintained the same basic structure since it was officially established in 2004. The Chair is appointed by the President along with two Co-Chairs, representing different sections of the membership. Participation is offered to members. Meetings are held monthly. There have been periods when finding meeting space was a problem. No regular budget is allocated but the local union has funded a variety of activities, including sending

women to the Northeast Union Women's Summer School and other conferences.

### **Activities**

Throughout its history, the Committee has played an important role in mobilizing women for union demonstrations (including strike activity) and union supported candidates for political office (e.g. canvassing and phone banking). Its meetings feature speakers on topics of current interest and the Committee sponsors training in prevention of sexual harassment and bullying. Currently, the emphasis is on health education for women (e.g. cancer awareness). When Liz Wilson was appointed Chair, she distributed a questionnaire to women members to elicit their priority recommendations for the next round of contract negotiations. Responses gave priority to 1) maternity leave, 2) domestic and workplace violence prevention and 3) equal opportunity for women who complete apprenticeship programs for skilled, high paying jobs in the transit system but face long delays in securing their licenses. Facilities and changing rooms are a continuing concern. These priorities were reported to the union's Collective Bargaining Committee. One to three day conferences have been held providing opportunities for leadership development. Under current consideration is a Women's Leadership Academy. The Women's Committee also sponsors charitable and social activities and provides linkages to other labor and committee organizations.

### **Barriers**

The most important challenge facing the Women's Committee is dealing with a work environment in which women face unequal treatment on the job and constitute a minority in the union membership.

Also challenging has been the turbulent political climate of Local 100. Changes in leadership between the Toussant and Samuelson administrations resulted not only in a turnover in leadership and membership in the Women's Committee but termination of programs, for example, a Domestic Violence Workplace Response Program, which MTA management agreed to fund, was dropped with the change in union administration. Turnover in leadership of the Committee slows progress in tackling the inequality issues, which the Committee aims to ameliorate. Political opposition has engaged in attacks on the work of the Women's Committee through leaflets and harassment in committee meetings.

### **Accomplishments**

Despite barriers, the TWU Local 100 Women's Committee has a record of accomplishment. When the Committee was first established, the union contract achieved gains of importance to its union members, including a child care clause, which provided subsidies for childcare for eligible parents and training programs designed to help unskilled and entry level workers (a majority of whom are women) to move up the skill ladder. The Local established a Widows and Orphans Fund, which offers financial support for scholarships for children and spouses of members killed on the job. The Local's current Bargaining Committee has agreed to pursue the priority bargaining goals recommended by the Committee's survey of women members and the Chair of the Women's Committee has been added to the Bargaining Committee.

In addition, the Committee has activated women members to support union goals and trained women for leadership roles.



## Successful Strategies and Lessons Learned for Other Organizations

The complicated history of the TWU Local 100 Women's Committee exemplifies the reality that a woman's committee in a labor organization is political and its fate is tied to changes in the local's politics. With this in mind, it is important for leaders of the women's committee to have a cooperative relationship with leaders of the union. There must be an open channel of communication with the power structure for the women's committee to remain integrated into the union as a whole, so the committee is in the best position to accomplish its goals.

In Local 100, a key success factor has been its emphasis on leadership development and the opportunities provided for members to attend Union Women Summer Schools.

## Stagehands Local 1 (IATSE)

The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts (IATSE) is a national labor union representing technicians, artisans and craftspeople in the entertainment industry, which includes live theatre, motion picture and television production, and trade shows. Jobs include building and installing scenery for shows, programming and operating lighting consoles, building and handling of props and mixing the sound for television programs, plays, conferences and Broadway musicals. With the high degree of skills involved, union sponsored training and education of the members is ongoing. The Local One chapter, founded in 1883, represents 3,100 stagehands in the entertainment industry, including 160 female members. Local One was historically a male union, with union membership traditionally being passed from father to son. In 1950, membership opened up to white men that weren't related by

blood and in the 1970s, to people of color and women. The rate of female stagehands joining the union started to pick up about 15 years ago and the largest number of female members have joined in the last decade. Women constitute a very small minority in the union, about 5%, and none of the fourteen officers (including the president, vice president, and various secretaries) is female.

“Part of the culture of being a stagehand is you show up on time, you keep your mouth shut, you do your work. You blend in. Of course, when you're the only girl on the crew that simply isn't possible. You can't hide in the shadows. So, you have to do a really excellent job and when you do, you get called back,” says Eileen McDonald, a founding member of the Local One Sisters Committee.

## History

The impetus for forming a women's committee in Local One came from active member, Eileen McDonald, who attended two Northeast Summer Schools for Union Women. Inspired by her experience, she spent a year surveying the membership, through small dinner meetings and word of mouth, and found that there was a strong desire to form a women's stagehand group. She returned to Summer School the following year and quizzed her teachers and fellow students and engaged in online research to find the best methods of launching something that had never been done before in her Union. With these ideas in hand, she approached the Executive Board with the idea of forming an approved group to mentor and connect the sisters of the Local. The underlying purpose was to help overcome the isolation women feel on the job. After several presentations on bringing women into the Union hall for their gatherings and a great deal of discussion, the Execu-

tive Board finally approved the idea and the President, James J. Claffey Jr., appointed McDonald Co-Chair of Local One Sisters Committee. (President Claffey himself is Co-Chair to all standing committees as mandated by the Constitution).

Once approval was obtained, the next step was to communicate the idea to the rest of the membership. With the Recording Secretary Robert Score's help, McDonald was able to reach out to the majority of female members of Local One through emails, phone calls and by mailing out brochures for recruitment. Schedules were checked, the board room was booked and in August of 2011, the very first meeting, a meet and greet, was held at the Union Hall. There were older members, new members and a few apprentices. Workers are scattered at venues all over the city and many have never even met one another so they found it exciting to be in the same room together. Although there has been some push back from the old guard, there are many brothers in the Union that support their female coworkers and truly support the idea of this committee, according to McDonald.

### **Structure**

The Local One Sisters Committee has a formal meeting every other month. An alternate month, the committee schedules social events (for example, an exhibit at Lincoln Center on women in theater). Minutes are kept at each meeting and reported to monthly general membership meetings. The committee has continuous access to the President and male members are invited to attend committee meetings as well as Executive Board members. The fact that officers actually attend some of the meetings has helped the committee to integrate in the larger community of the union.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The Local One Sisters Committee's first objective was to decide collectively what they wanted to accomplish and to write a Mission Statement. "The mission of the IATSE Local One Sisters Committee is to encourage union involvement at all levels, educate our members on the labor movement, and promote harmony and prosperity within our community of Local One Stagehands. In the spirit of collective well-being, we will honor our diversity, provide support for workplace performance through networking and mentoring, and facilitate leadership training which will inspire and empower all of our members."

### **Activities**

The Sisters Committee focuses mainly on union education, ranging from labor history to information about how unions work. The speakers range from a female Broadway executive producer who discussed the process of developing a show and how it was produced, to the jobs stagehands perform. Captain Brenda Berkman, who sued New York City so that women could become firefighters, spoke on women in non-traditional jobs.

According to McDonald, "the focus is really just on creating networks and mentoring each other and learning about exactly what it means to be in a Union." The meetings create an intimate environment where sisters can share similar problems they face in their profession, and work together to find solutions. McDonald reports that even outside of formal committee meetings, members share information about developments within the profession, job opportunities, and different types of equipment. "For example, many women are petite and have difficulty with safety equipment designed to be worn by men.

Therefore, one long discussion dealt with finding a small enough harness that women can wear and be safe.” The Sisters Committee celebrated its second anniversary during the summer of 2013 at a brunch. All of their former speakers were invited, providing yet another opportunity to network with knowledgeable women in New York City.

### **Accomplishments**

Despite its youth, the committee has been able to educate female stagehands, increase member involvement in the union, and form a cohesive female stagehand community. As a direct result of becoming better educated and more involved, the committee leader was appointed (the only woman) to the Negotiating Committee that brought forth the Local’s current contract with Broadway theaters.

More women attend the general membership meeting than ever before because Sisters Committee members go together and are therefore less intimidated by their minority status. They also respond to union calls to help. For example, when a producer on Broadway hired non-union workers, the committee sent out emails and posted on social media to encourage members to join this picket line, which was successful in achieving a signed contract with the producer.

“The culture of being a stagehand does not encourage asserting yourself or your rights, making it difficult for women to speak up about lack of representation in leadership. There’s only ever been one woman officer in Local One and that was in the 80’s and never since. There’s a gap, and now some women workers are finally comfortable enough to want to participate in the governance process and two women were on the ballot for our last election. They lost but they were there!” says McDonald. Battling the

dominant culture will be a continuous struggle for the women of Local One, albeit lessened by the presence of the women’s committee. The culture of the workplace is changing as employers have begun to recognize the value of female leadership and have promoted women as House Heads of Department. (Each theater or studio is divided into three departments, Carpentry, Props and Electrics). The House Heads do the hiring for the load ins and outs and set the running crews for the shows. About five percent of House Heads now are women which is a significant advance.

As seen with the Carpenters Union, the structure of the occupation can contribute to discrimination against women. Although being a member of the union ensures that men and women performing the same job get paid the same, McDonald explains that “if you’re on the call with six guys, you’re going to be paid the same money as them. What is different may be the opportunity to get on those calls.” McDonald does say that male attitudes in the industry have evolved since she began working thirty years ago— she says that initially “they just couldn’t believe that I could pick up a speaker or push a box or climb a ladder...those issues are really less right now. Because they all get it, that we can do the work.” Although there were some objections to the formation of the women’s committee (‘why are women separating themselves out from the membership to have their own committee?’) McDonald says that “the reality is it’s been a way for us to get our foot in the door into the union office and be more active in the union.”

### **Success factors and Lessons Learned**

When forming a women’s committee, a concern can often be that by separating from the general member-

ship the women seem to be identifying more by their gender than by their union ties. By seeming to put their community — the female community — first, the committee and its members may appear to be serving themselves over the larger membership. In this way forming a women's committee could backfire to make female members more separate and thus less effective on the whole. Calling the committee the “Sisters Committee,” may serve to combat that problem, emphasizing in one name both gender and union ties. This idea is evident when McDonald says that “since we've started this committee [the male members] look at us more as sisters and less as competitors. I think it's really given us a place in their familial arena.”

The Sisters Committee also has a Facebook page to reach out to women members. McDonald says that it is a great tool to get information out about upcoming meetings and to get the word out about work that might be available.

This case study also highlights the motivational role played by outside institutions and programs in helping women move into leadership positions. McDonald credits the Union Women's Summer School with giving her the confidence she needed to step into a leadership position, and with giving her the contacts and tools to set the committee up (a summer school teacher helped her set up the Facebook page). Leadership programs can be invaluable resources for women's committees, with the teachers at those programs even serving as speakers at women's committee meetings.

### **Organization of Staff Analysts (OSA)**

The Organization of Staff Analysts (OSA) is a public sector union representing employees that work for

agencies of the City of New York, ranging from the Police Department to the Department of Transportation and the Sanitation Department. OSA has 6,000 members, of which over half are women. In 2010, female members of the OSA's executive board founded the women's committee. Kimberly Vann, who is one of those board members (in charge of grievances) and is now also the chair of the women's committee, says they felt that female members of the local faced specific issues that needed to be addressed. She said that the OSA was also motivated by the fact that other, more established unions had women's committees (she pointed to DC 37 and CWA). According to Vann, although currently there are five women on the executive board, representing half of the total, the board had been all male until only a decade ago. In 2010 an ad hoc committee was formed to consider the issue, and it proposed the idea of a women's committee to the executive board, which voted to approve the formation of the committee. Education and empowerment are the primary goals.

### **Structure**

Women's committee meetings are held on a quarterly basis with attendance hovering around 60 members and fluctuating depending on the topic addressed at the meetings. The executive board of the women's committee meets every month and has ten members. Men are invited to the committee's quarterly event, but they cannot join the board of the women's committee. A telephone message service that gives members union news on a weekly basis includes a blurb from the women's committee.

The committee had no dedicated budget but it occasionally gets help from the local's staff. It is, for the most part, run by volunteers.

The only standing committee of the OSA (outside the Executive Board), the women's committee has the power to recommend measures to be taken by the union's board. Backing up this power to make policy recommendations is that several of the general executive board members are part of the women's committee – three of the ten committee board members are on the OSA board as well — but Vann says the significant number of women that make up the OSA's membership also gives the women's committee influence. “We explain to the main body that the overwhelming majority of members have an interest in passing the items and moving the agenda and have a lot of voting power and remind them that at the next election the board may not look the same.”

### **Goals and Objectives**

The OSA women's committee was formed to represent the specific needs of women inside OSA. Vann said research done by the union indicated specific issues for women were educational opportunities, wage parity, healthcare and childcare. Another purpose behind the committee's formation was to build a community for women to provide them with networking opportunities and a place to make themselves heard.

### **Activities**

OSA, as an organization full of analysts, has a unique research pool at its disposal – its members. Vann says when the committee was formed, they used the union's female members to gather information about giving women's issues a voice. They found that pay discrimination was an issue and that there was a need for educational opportunities for women, improved healthcare and childcare. According to Vann, because it has only been in existence for a couple of years, the committee's focus has so

far been mostly on raising consciousness about women's issues and empowering female members.

In order to fulfill the educational goals, the committee meetings feature speakers who present on topics like health, childcare and financial empowerment. These presentations are followed by roundtables so that members can discuss the topics. For example, the OSA's assistant general counsel was a speaker focusing on labor and employment law and how those legal issues affect members. The committee has also in the past screened labor-oriented movies, which were followed by breakout discussions.

### **Accomplishments**

The OSA's women's committee has been in existence for only two years but has been able to form a working committee in that time that addressed the issues and concerns of female members. Meetings, which have educational themes, attract a significant number of members. This committee and its meetings give women a forum to voice opinions and needs.

Vann also says that she's seen female members, since getting involved in the committee, push for more female representation within their own agencies and feeling empowered to stand up and take on more responsibilities.

A women's committee political affairs unit has been established to develop relationships with female political leaders. By diversifying the committee's sphere of influence it is hoped that female members will gain greater power.



Although many women's committees become assets to their unions by utilizing female members to support job actions or other union activities, mobilization is a more difficult proposition for the OSA because their membership is so spread out across the city with 6,000 members employed in 80 agencies.

Female members' childcare responsibilities can inhibit involvement in the women's committee as well as in the union as a whole. Although women's committee meetings are a family-friendly environment where women can bring their children, women with young children still struggle to pick them up from school and make it to the meetings in a timely fashion. Childcare is an even larger impediment to mobilizing women in the OSA. Union meetings are held in Manhattan but members work in the outer boroughs, so picking up children and then getting to the meeting poses difficulty.

Pushbacks still remain evident because some male Executive Board members consider the existence of a women's committee divisive and unnecessary. A dedicated budget has yet to be realized.

### **Success Factors and Lessons Learned**

The OSA women's committee demonstrates the success such organizations can achieve when they have significant political capital, which they can leverage to make programs a reality. The overlap between the OSA executive board and the women's committee executive board is no doubt a contributing factor to that political capital, along with the fact that women make up over half of the OSA's membership.

This case begs consideration of when a union no longer needs a women's committee. The purpose of

a women's committee is typically to increase the influence of women within a union and to get women's concerns on the union's agenda. In the OSA, women appear to have significant influence – women make up half of the OSA's executive board, where they exert considerable decision-making power. Women's issues also seem to take priority in the union – for example, when Vann requested closer attention be paid to women's issues in the OSA, the proposal of a women's committee emerged and was subsequently started without the difficulties or roadblocks seen in other unions. However, the high interest the women's committee generated among women in the union (as shown by the high attendance at committee meetings) suggests that the need exists for a space for women within OSA. Even if women are represented in the union's leadership in equal parts to their membership in the union, the women's committee can still serve an essential function in educating women, honing their leadership abilities and creating a social network for them.

### **UFCW Local 1500**

Local 1500 of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW) has approximately 23,000 members, of which 50 to 60 percent are women. Occupations represented by the local include cashiers, bookkeepers, and front-end managers. All top positions at the union are held by men, except for the Trustee position, which is held by a woman who was also the main driver for the formation of the women's committee at the local. The international union, UFCW, has a Women's Network and Local 1500's Trustee, Rhonda Nelson, is the National Chair for the network. Terry Quiñonez, a field director for Local 1500, is the chair of the local's women's committee. The impetus for establishing the Local's women's committee came from the international union's

Women's Network. Members of the women's committee include individuals who work at different companies throughout the retail industry in New York City.

### **Goals**

The purpose of the committee is to provide a voice to women in the local union to bring attention to issues that are of particular concern to women. The committee's goal is also to educate women about the union and increase their involvement in union affairs and events.

### **Structure and Activities**

The committee has approximately 60 active members currently. In addition to the chairwoman, three other women from the local's staff organize and coordinate the committee's activities. The committee meets quarterly and throughout the year it offers workshops on personal finances, political action, elder care, child care, health and fitness. The committee offers a scholarship program for daycare that is part of a national program of the UFCW. A breast cancer walk is held annually, in addition to toy drives.

### **Accomplishments**

The committee has succeeded in providing a space for women to talk about issues of concern to women and working families in general. It has also provided a sense among the women that the union is paying attention to their specific needs.

### **Successful strategies**

The committee has been an effective vehicle for communicating union issues to the women and get-

ting them mobilized. It has also been effective in providing a safe space and educational opportunities for women.

### **Professional Staff Congress**

The Professional Staff Congress (PSC) represents faculty members and administrative staff of the City University of New York (CUNY). PSC is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers. Currently its president, secretary-treasurer and executive director are female along with several key staff and executive board members.

In 1995, the PSC appointed a Women's History Month Committee with the purpose of organizing one event a year. At that time there was a male president and few women in leadership, although several held key staff positions. In 2000, the New Caucus won the elections on a slate dominated by women. Additional women were hired on staff and elected to leadership in the Executive Council and local chapters. This trend has continued. The new leadership encouraged committees on a variety of themes. In 2000, the PSC Women's Committee began meeting monthly.

### **Goals**

The committee's overarching goal is to advance "the status of women on the faculty and staff of CUNY" by ensuring that women's specific concerns are addressed by the union in collective bargaining as well as in other union affairs. Other important goals include the creation of "an atmosphere within the union and CUNY that fosters women's full participation" and their promotion to leadership positions, as well as solidarity among constituencies. The committee also has broader social justice goals, including

to reach out “to women across borders and economic boundaries,” build labor-community coalitions and “promote equal access to quality education for all women.”

### Structure and Activities

The women's committee is a formal committee of the PSC's executive council. It usually holds monthly meetings. Among the programs and activities recently sponsored by the Women's Committee were the following:

- Sponsorship with the City College Center for Worker Education of an annual conference on Women and Work,
- Efforts to get access to CUNY for students on welfare
- Special events on issues of interest to women, e.g. parental leave, financial planning, international
- Meetings to discuss the biography of Frances Perkins and women who founded CUNY.

PSC also sponsored participants in the Union Women's Summer Schools of the UALE-AFL-CIO.

### Successful Strategies and Lessons Learned

Committee leaders agree that it is key to reach out to younger and less secure members (in the case of PSC, new faculty and adjunct part-time faculty) and survey the members' needs so that programs can be geared to their concerns. It also important to utilize resources available to the organization; in the CUNY case, university women's committees and women's study programs.

### Implications for Union Policies

The experience of the national and local worker organizations we examined shows that:

- Targeted programs for women are particularly helpful in organizations where women constitute a small minority of the membership and have to struggle for recognition on the job and in the unions.
- In unions where women have reached a balance in share of membership but continue to be under represented in leadership roles, the opportunity for networking and leadership development, which separate programs offer, plays an important role in motivating women to participate and express their viewpoints.
- Even in unions where women constitute a majority of the membership and have achieved leadership recognition, women's committees are valued as a voice for their concerns.
- Rather than dividing the membership, women's committees contribute to integration of women in the mainstream of union activities.
- Non-traditional worker organizations are developing new models in which women are taking leadership.
- Case studies examined in our study demonstrate that separate outreach plays an important role in involving women and tapping their potential for leadership in worker organizations—an outcome which is essential to the future growth and power of workers' organizations.

## Strategies for Effective Implementation of Women's Programs

In order to achieve the goals of involving and activating women, it is essential to find and address their concerns. Grassroots initiation is characteristic of most programs; grassroots buy-in is essential to their success. Also necessary is the approval and organizational support of top officers. The key challenge is how to achieve both. Examples of win—win strategies from our case studies include:

- Advisory Committees, which recommend action to the national executive board.
- Involvement of union officers in programs sponsored by women's departments of national unions and women's committees at the local level.
- Union supported training programs, which focus on the skills and knowledge women need to achieve their objectives, e.g. leadership training, sexual harassment and bullying, career development.

National programs are successful to the degree that they spark local activism. A direct linkage between regional and local structures tends to strengthen program impact.

## Recommendations for Further Research

There is a serious shortage of reliable information about the actual impact of women's programs or their participation and their organizations. Even the women directly involved have difficulty articulating their value beyond a general feeling of empowerment or seeing more women become active. The evidence from our case studies strongly suggests the potential for these programs.

Vital to evaluating the impact of Women's Departments and Committees is the collection of statistics, (not currently available) which would document women's leadership at all levels of unions and work-

er organizations. This would involve detailed examination of reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor under the Labor Management Reporting Act and/or a national survey of national, state and local labor organizations.

Also needed is a comprehensive look at national and local programs for women in worker organizations. Canadian researchers (Linda Briskin, Meg McPhail and Marion Pallada) surveyed all women's committees in 2012 and reported on their present status as well as their challenges. A similar national survey in the United States would provide the data about the programs and facilitate an analysis of their contribution to gender equality and organizational success.

## Conclusion

To the question "Is there a continuing need for separate structures for women's voice and leadership development in American unions?" the answer from our finding is an emphatic "Yes!" Most unions continue to have a predominantly male leadership. Evidence of inequality in pay and working conditions and sexual harassment on the job continues to be reported even in the unions with longstanding programs for achieving gender equality and integration.

From the earliest recorded history of gendered relationships within the American labor movement, women have had to struggle for inclusion and recognition. In the evolution of women's departments and committees reported here, there has been a continuing tension between the organizational imperatives pursued by mostly male officials to build the union and secure support of the members (including women) and the women's drive to gain attention for their agenda of equality and recognition. This has been a mainly transactional process in which women demonstrate their support for union goals and activities, e.g. participate in organizing drives and political campaigns; and the organizations gives women

space to network, considers their bargaining proposals and recognizes their contributions, providing upward mobility to leadership roles.

Looking ahead, attention should be given to the transformational aspects of this process, which may challenge the way organizations have operated and contribute to the future vitality of the labor movement. For example:

- What differences do the cultural sensibilities and leadership styles bring to internal operations of unions?
- What happens when women push for organizational change and form opposition caucuses with different agendas?
- What lessons emerge from workers organizations, organizations more recently formed and less bound by tradition in which women have already emerged as leaders? Can these be applied to unions?



## Methodology

Lois Gray and Maria Figueroa applied for and received a grant from the Berger-Marks Foundation to study *The Impact of Women’s Committees on Women’s Participation and Recognition in Unions*. Their interest in this theme stems from their earlier studies of women in unions, including factors which impede or facilitate participation and recognition in union leadership and their experience as planners and teachers for the Northeast Union Women’s Summer School. Their study builds on findings from previous research, related to women in unions, funded by Berger Marks Foundation, e.g., “I Know I Can Do This Work: Seven Strategies that Promote Women’s Activism and Leadership in Unions;” “Is There a Woman’s Way of Organizing?;” “Women Organizing Women: How Do We Rock the Boat Without Getting Thrown Overboard?;” “Stepping Up, Stepping Back: Women Activists Talk Across Generations” and “The Next Generation: A Handbook for Mentoring Future Union Leaders.” Other published sources are listed on the next page.

During the past year the authors, assisted by Emma Court, an ILR student research fellow,

- Reviewed the literature about women in unions
- Sent out an email survey to unions in the Metropolitan New York area to ascertain how many have women’s committees or other special outreach programs for women members
- Searched the websites of national unions and interviewed women leaders to find out how many have women’s departments, committees or other ongoing programs for their women members
- Interviewed officials of selected local unions and non-traditional worker organizations about their experience with women’s committees and wrote case studies describing the origins, activities, challenges and accomplishments of each
- Interviewed Directors of women’s activities in six national unions and wrote summaries of their current activities, problems and reported results.

In writing this report, the authors are grateful for insights from Sally Alvarez and editorial assistance from Christine Long, colleagues in Cornell’s Worker Institute.

Interviewees include: Carol Anderson, AFSCME; Georgi-Ann Bergamian, UAW; Debra Bergen, PSC; Tatiana Bejar, ROC-NY; Nora Chase, PSC; Daisy Chung, ROC-NY; Anita Clinton, TWU Local 100; Lorraine Cohen, PSC; Connie Cordoirla, AFT; Yvette Herrera, CWA; Cindy Impala, IBT; Benita Johnson, TWU Local 100; Lillian Juarez, UNITY Housecleaners, Workplace Project; Eileen McDonald, IATSE Local 1; Rhonda Nelson, UFCW; Marcia Newfield, PSC; Terry Quinoñez, UFCW Local 1500; Donna Ricotte, UAW; Tamara Rivera, NYC District Council of Carpenters; Vanessa Salazar, NYC District Council of Carpenters; Elly Spicer, NYC District Council of Carpenters; Ida Torres, UFCW Retired Local 3 President; Kimberly Vann, Organization of Staff Analysts; Caroline Williams, IBEW; Cathy Collette, AFSCME, and Gina Beaumont, CWA.

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## Appendix I – National Unions with Special Outreach Programs for Women

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Amalgamated Transit Workers (ATW)	Women's Caucus and Human Rights Department
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)	Women and Fair Practices Department
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)	Women's Leadership Development and Women's Advisory Committee
American Federation of Teachers	Women's Committee
American Postal Workers Union (APWU)	National Women's Program (POWER)
Communications Workers of America (CWA)	Women's Committee and Women's Conferences
International Association of Machinists (IAM)	Women and Human Rights Department
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)	Women's Conferences
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)	Women's Caucus and Women's Conferences
Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA)	Women's Caucus
National Education Association (NEA)	Committee on Women's Issues
Screen Actors Guild / American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA)	Diversity Committee
Transport Workers Union (TWU)	Committee on Women's Issues
United Auto Workers Union (UAW)	Women's Department, Regional Coordinators, Local Committees
United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC)	Women's Committees in District Councils
United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)	Women's Network
United Steel Workers (USW)	Women of Steel – National, Local and Regional Committees

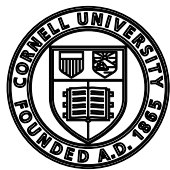
## Appendix II – Summary Grid of NYC Area Committees

Organization	Gender	Origin of the Initiative	Goals/Mission	Structure	Activities	Accomplishments	Success factors/Strategies
NYC District Council of Carpenters	-Predominantly male	-Union activists inspired by international union women's conference	-Increase diversity, recruitment and retention of women; advancement in leadership	-Steering committee -Monthly meetings -Union financial backing	-Education about the union and the industry -Employment mentoring -Leadership development -Sexual harassment training	- Increased visibility of women -Representation in leadership -Support network for women in non-traditional jobs -Outreach to apprentices	-Linkage to union officers and structure -Involvement of young members
Transport Workers' Union Local 100	-Predominantly male	-International union mandate carried out by local activists	-Achieve gender equality on the job and in the union	-Monthly meetings -Union financial support for activities	-Education on health issues -Sexual harassment training -Formulate bargaining demands -Leadership development	-Representation of women in leadership -Increased support for bargaining demands relating to equity and safety at work	-Survival in face of leadership changes -Focus on issues of expressed concern to women
Local 1, Stagehands IATSE	-Predominantly male	-Activist who attended the Union Women's Summer School	-Achieve recognition for women	-Standing committee co-chaired by Union President	-Education on union and industry -Networking support for women in non-traditional jobs	-Increased women's involvement in union -Proved value to the union by mobilizing members to support union job action	-Involving women through participation in education and social networking -Building support of union officers -Use of social media
Local 1500, United Food and Commercial Workers	-Women over half of membership	-International union	-Provide a voice for women -Increase women's involvement in union activities	-Quarterly meetings coordinated by full time staff	-Education on sexual harassment -Charitable activity -Support for union organizing efforts	-Increased participation of women in union activities -Provides networking space	-Sponsor educational opportunities and skill training of interest to women -Raise their participation in union action
Organization of Staff Analysts	-50% women	-Women activists on executive board	-Address issues specific to women, e.g. educational opportunities, wage parity, health care, child care -Meet networking needs	-Quarterly meetings	-Education -Speaker series -Research and support for women's issues	-Increased leadership skills and recognition for women on the Executive Board -Empowerment of women workers on the job	-Increase visibility and leadership recognition for women and their concerns
Professional Staff Congress, AFT	-Mixed	-Women activists	-Advance status of women in faculty and staff at CUNY and in the union -Support broad social goals	-Women's Committee is a formal component of the executive council -Monthly meetings	-Educational programs on women's issues	-Increased representation in union leadership -Raised awareness of women's' issues	-Reach out to young members who need help -Use of union and university resources
Unity/Workplace Project	-Workplace Project is mixed -Unity is 100% women	-Leaders and activists	-Focus on women's issues to achieve equality & fairness. -Leadership development -Economic viability of the cooperative -Political action	-Connected to the Workplace Project, but self-governing with its own finances, board and committees	-Work related skill training -Leadership development	-Helped to achieve bill of rights for domestic workers in New York State -Leadership development -Trained members for job market	-Educational activities and member education – Building cohesion and solidarity among members
Restaurant Opportunities Center-NY	-30 to 40% women	-Leadership response to member grievances, notably, sexual harassment on the job	-Raise awareness of and combat gender discrimination	-One of four formal committees of ROC -Meets every two weeks	-Peer education on sexual harassment -Career development -Research and publication on gender issues -Outreach to LGBT workers	-Sexual harassment training integrated into job training -Career ladders and training for jobs in the restaurant industry	-Gender issues and goals have been integrated into the structure and programs of ROC



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