



**Growing
stronger:**
A plan to build
our union

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Growing stronger: A plan to build our union

Workers need unions, and the collective power that comes with them. As individuals, workers can rarely succeed in improving their wages, benefits, working conditions or job security. Only with collective action, and the representation and rights that come with belonging to a union, will workers build their power and influence in the workplace.

Organizing goes to the very heart and purpose of our union. It is our responsibility and our obligation to bring the strength of unions to benefit and protect unorganized workers and their families.

Of course, organizing builds our strength as a union, too. Membership growth is crucial to improving our power and influence – in our workplaces and in society.

Increasing our membership and density, across communities and sectors, gives us strength. It raises the floor for wages and working conditions, which in turn raises our collective economic prosperity. It allows workers to speak with one voice in defense of public services and workplace rights. It allows us to exercise political influence in support of a fair and just society.

Growing our union is also key to improving the resources and programs that support our members. Faced with declining membership, other unions have been forced to cut the services they provide.

Organizing is increasingly difficult. Most large, public sector workplaces are already organized. Employers increasingly fight organizing drives with legal action. Other unions in Canada devote increasingly large budgets to organizing, and think nothing of expanding into sectors in which they have never before represented workers. And the changing world of work makes it more difficult to identify and communicate with workers.

In the face of these challenges, we must actively promote CUPE. To be successful, we must be strategic, assertive, and responsive.

In our 54-year history, we have organized far more members than any other union in Canada. But in recent years our membership growth has slowed, and it is time for us to reassess and recommit to organizing in the face of government austerity agendas and the alarming increase in precarious work.

Our organizing history

When CUPE was formed in 1963, a result of a merger of two national public sector unions, our membership was only 57,000. In his address to our founding convention, National President Stan Little suggested a membership of 100,000 by 1965 was not only within reach, it was a “conservative target”. By the time Brother Little retired in 1975, CUPE was 210,000 members strong.

And we have continued to grow, a result of strategic organizing efforts targeting unorganized workers, but also because we have brought members of associations and independent unions into our fold.

In the past decade, growth has slowed. And yet we have still organized 43,000 new members since 2007. There are now 650,000 CUPE members across the country. We are far and away the largest union in Canada

Organizing has been the subject of much discussion at our national conventions over the years. Our early conventions adopted resolutions calling on CUPE to organize by sector, including “clerical and professional workers” (1965), “hospital” (1973) and “care home” (1981) workers, and “childcare workers” (1991).

Resolutions and policy statements have also spoken to the need to organize “low income workers” (1977), in “workplaces where the majority of workers are female” (1989), and to “expand and intensify our organizing of part-time workers” (1985). In 1979, convention committed to “devote all efforts, material and human resources to gather all public service employees within CUPE.” In 2003,

Strategic Directions committed us to organizing “employees of contracted out services.”

But the last time our convention debated and adopted organizing in a comprehensive way was in 1993, with a policy statement entitled “Organizing: a renewed commitment.”

Laying the groundwork

Since our last national convention, CUPE has dedicated new resources to our organizing program.

We have conducted comprehensive mapping in order to inform our regional organizing strategies and prioritize organizing opportunities. This mapping includes geographic and demographic information for targeted workforces, sector-specific information including the number of employers, which workplaces are organized and unorganized, and information such as pending legislation, government mandates, sector policies, and employer restructuring initiatives. This mapping also included assessing and enforcing our existing certifications.

In 2017, we provided training for more than 400 member organizers. These members were recruited to reflect the diversity of our union and the sectors that will be the focus of our organizing drives. We also provided training to members facing representation votes.

We have explored, as a pilot project, a team approach to organizing, with legal, research, and communications staff assigned to work together with our organizers at every step of the organizing process, from mapping to certification. This has ensured that all aspects of an organizing drive are considered and allowed us to develop the best possible strategy from the start. It has proven to be

a more efficient, and more responsive approach to organizing.

We are pursuing an organizing project in the home care sector in Ontario, where precarious employment, irregular hours of work, and the lack of a common work site pose unique challenges to traditional organizing methods. This organizing drive provides an opportunity for a pilot project on the use of community-based organizing.

Beyond mapping unorganized workplaces for this project, we are also mapping our existing members in the community. This will allow us to identify, among our current membership, those who participate in specific faith, cultural and ethnic communities, and bring them into our organizing team as a resource and, where appropriate, as member organizers. Campaign materials, advertising, and personal outreach will be available in the worker's preferred language.

Our strong record of taking on issues of importance to home care workers gives us a head start, and will be used in the organizing campaign. We will also forge alliances with clients and advocacy groups. CUPE will begin building a broad-based coalition to secure necessary funding and legislative changes in the sector.

And we are also exploring a pilot project focused on post-organizing support that allows newly-certified groups to more easily transition to function independently, whether they form a new local union or join an existing local as a new unit. This includes staff support, facilitated discussions, and strategic planning with the new members as they work to establish an executive, budget, and bylaws, and prepare for collective bargaining.

Acknowledging the obstacles

A number of roadblocks stand in the way of realizing our full organizing potential.

Workers question the need for unions in an environment where so many workplace standards are legislated. They often buy into employer propaganda that unions are just in it to collect the dues.

Employer intimidation is still rampant in non-union workplaces, and employers are fending off unionization with increasingly sophisticated tactics. Because of this, workers are often reluctant to seek union representation.

In several provinces, legislation is an impediment to successful certification drives. For example, in British Columbia, certifications for new members must be under existing locals. It can be challenging to find locals willing to take on a new bargaining unit.

Many of our own members, in workplaces where only some workers are unionized, feel threatened by expanding the scope of their bargaining unit to include their co-workers – especially those who work part-time or casual.

How we organize

Our organizing efforts over the years have fallen into five categories:

- **Unorganized workers in workplaces where we do not currently have a presence**

These drives are often initiated by the workers themselves, although more recently they are as a result of proactive outreach from CUPE following intensive research and mapping.

- **Expanding our reach in existing workplaces**

Many of our certifications do not give us “wall-to-wall” representation, and there are sometimes worksites, specific classifications, or whole classes of employees who are unorganized. We have been very successful in expanding our representation in workplaces where we already have a presence.

- **Following our work**

Too often we lose members when work is privatized and contracted out. While we work with our locals to resist privatization, we are often too late or have little ability to influence the decision. The Hospital Employees’ Union have been particularly successful at re-organizing members when their work has been outsourced or contracts are flipped.

- **Representation votes**

These votes are usually government mandated and pit unions against each other for representation of all members in a workplace or employer group. They are resource-intensive campaigns that require us to engage and protect our existing members, while we also entice members of other unions to join CUPE.

- **Mergers and affiliations**

Although not as common in recent years, bringing existing unions or employee associations into the CUPE family has historically given us some of our greatest growth as a union.

Our commitment to growth

CUPE will build a culture of organizing across our union

Our leaders, activists, and staff are naturally best-placed to promote CUPE. We will succeed in organizing when all staff, members, and chartered bodies of CUPE make organizing new members a top priority, and core to the work of our union.

While we will continue to rely on the specialized knowledge and expertise of our organizing staff, we know that workers organize workers. We will reach out to our members, and foster more direct member participation in our campaigns. And all staff will have a role in organizing.

Organizing will permeate our conferences, meetings, and education programs. We will examine every organizing opportunity that presents itself. We will all be organizers.

CUPE will organize from a position of strength

We will organize strategically, in teams, with a focus on communities and sectors where we have a high profile, strong leadership, and good opportunities.

Where we are the natural and leading union in a sector or occupation, or the strongest union in a community, we will use that strength to organize new bargaining units. In doing so, we will expand our reach, our scope and our bargaining power.

We will keep our mapping research current, and shift our priorities as the landscape changes and new information becomes available.

CUPE will accelerate our organizer training

We will build on our successful member organizer training to date, and continue to recruit members who reflect the workers we seek to organize. Training will be targeted to the specific organizing techniques to be used in upcoming drives in each region, and will be adapted to the challenges of specific sectors and communities.

CUPE will improve our organizing materials

Our organizing material will showcase both the strength of CUPE and the advantage to workers of union membership. It will reflect our diversity as a union, and the diversity of the workers we seek to organize. It will be available in a variety of languages, and across a variety of communications platforms.

CUPE will embrace data and digital tools

Better use of technology will help us overcome some of the obstacles to organizing in today's workplace. We will explore new data tools and digital organizing techniques to supplement our in-person organizing efforts, and ensure these are incorporated into our campaign plans.

CUPE will refine our organizing methods

We will explore new methods of outreach and organizing, including community-based organizing. We will learn more about our existing members and activists, including community alliances and affiliations, and engage them in our efforts. We will learn from these activists how best to motivate workers in their communities, and improve our organizing efforts in the process.

CUPE will protect our existing members

We will not grow as a union if, in seeking to organize new members, we lose our existing bargaining units. Threats to our membership include raiding by illegitimate "unions", decertification drives, and representation votes. We will continue to prioritize the protection of our bargaining units, in all circumstances.

CUPE will follow our work

We will continue to place emphasis on bringing our work back in-house, and resisting contracting out and privatization of our work. But where our jobs are privatized, and where contracts are flipped, we will aggressively follow our work and re-organize those workers.

CUPE will pursue wall-to-wall organizing

We will review and enforce our existing certifications. And where there are unorganized workers in our workplaces, we will seek to organize them. Where we meet resistance from our existing members, we will provide information and education about the short- and long-term benefits of wall-to-wall unionization.

CUPE will explore service contracts and mergers

Where there are smaller unions and employee associations that represent workers in CUPE's sectors, we will approach these organizations and explore mergers or service contracts, provided there is a commitment to affiliate to CUPE within two years.

CUPE will push for better legislation

Regions will develop and implement legal strategies and political campaigns to address labour laws that are an impediment to successful certification drives.

CUPE will protect and defend our inside organizers

Our inside organizers often risk their jobs when they take a leadership role in an organizing drive. We will provide the resources necessary to protect and defend their continued employment, up to and including action at the labour board.

CUPE will show leadership on issues that matter to workers

We will attract new members by being at the forefront of campaigns that speak to the concerns of workers and their families. At all levels of our union, we will promote and participate in campaigns that focus on good and secure jobs, decent wages and working conditions, safe and healthy workplaces, and fairness and social justice for all Canadians.

CUPE will support our new members

We must make sure our new units and locals have every opportunity to succeed.

We will ensure that the energy, commitment, enthusiasm, and involvement required to organize is maintained and expanded after winning the certification vote. We will provide new members and locals with the training, guidance, and assistance they need to build a strong union based on membership communication, volunteer involvement, and the willingness to take collective action.

There will be a smooth and timely transition from certification to first collective agreement,

and new units will be properly supported and resourced. Regional solutions will be found to address the problems associated with negotiating first contracts, based on their specific legislative and bargaining environment. Locals will be encouraged to pursue coordinated bargaining where appropriate.

CUPE's divisions and councils will play a strong role in providing support to new locals.

CUPE will learn from our successes and mistakes, and from others

As we expand the strategies, tools, and techniques we use in our organizing, we will make mistakes. And we will also have great breakthroughs.

We will evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of our campaigns, and adjust and adapt as we go. We will test and incorporate new methods. We will gather information about successful organizing innovations from across the country and across the globe.

The lessons learned will be incorporated into regular reports on organizing activities and into our training, so that all levels of CUPE will benefit from that knowledge.

CUPE has the history, the democratic tradition, the servicing expertise, the leadership, and the public profile to attract new members.

The breadth of our membership – with hundreds of occupations across every aspect of public sector work and in the private sector as well – gives us the knowledge and experience to understand and address the needs of unorganized workers in many different settings. No other union has this breadth of know-how and experience.

Our membership is also diverse, and reflects Canadian society. Diverse workers from all regions of the country have found a home within CUPE. Our diversity gives us strength and drive, and the commitment to fight discrimination and promote tolerance throughout our union and society.

As Canada's largest and most sophisticated public sector union, CUPE has been at the forefront of every major public sector fightback in the country.

As governments continue to cut funding and privatize public services, and as precarious employment rises, unorganized workers will look for a solution to their worsening world of work. And they will find a home in our great union.



