

AFL-CIO YOUNG WORKER GROUPS RESEARCH PROJECT



Prepared by:

Monica Bielski Boris (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), **David Reynolds** (Wayne State University) and **Todd Dickey, Jeff Grabelsky** and **Ken Margolies** (Cornell University), under the auspices of **The Worker Institute at Cornell University**

Preface

At the quadrennial AFL-CIO Convention in 2009, AFL-CIO delegates committed to growing and strengthening the labor movement by passing Resolution 55, “In Support of the AFL-CIO Programs for Young Workers.” Out of that, the Next Up Young Worker Program was born, with the goals of engaging, empowering and mobilizing union members and nonunion workers under the age of 35.

Since then, the young worker program has hosted two national summits, established a Young Worker Advisory Council and helped launch dozens of young worker groups at the local level. In an effort to support this work, the AFL-CIO commissioned “The Young Worker Groups Research Project.” This study looked at eight different young worker groups—and their respective leadership—to better understand and support the development of young worker groups within state federations, area labor federations and central labor councils. By gleaning the best practices and looking at the challenges of existing young worker groups, this study can be used as a tool and as a resource for labor leaders who want to establish their own young worker programs.

Thanks to the work of a research team assembled by the new Worker Institute at Cornell that included labor educators from Cornell University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Wayne State University, we now have a useful tool for developing and supporting young workers. The nation’s university-based labor education centers offer many talents and resources to help you establish or strengthen young worker groups in your region.

This project could not have been undertaken without the input and insights of many veteran leaders and young activists who generously shared their experience and time with the research team.

I am pleased to share the enclosed research report with you and I look forward to working with you on this important initiative. Please don’t hesitate to contact me with any questions or suggestions. As always, thank you for your hard work and dedication, and more importantly, for your commitment to building a strong labor movement for our future.

Liz Shuler
AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer

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Executive Summary



BASED ON SITE VISITS, interviews with leaders and activists and reviews of all relevant documents, the research team analyzed the diverse activities and best practices of these eight young worker groups. The researchers were impressed by the young worker groups and inspired by the high level of energy and enthusiasm exhibited by the young activists.

Young worker groups represent an important new initiative in the contemporary labor movement that can and should play a significant role in engaging the next generation of union members, developing new and diverse leaders and revitalizing labor's fortunes.

This report:

- Provides a profile of each of the young worker groups in the study;
- Identifies three ways these groups deliver strategic value to the labor movement;

This is a report on young worker groups connected to the central labor councils in Baltimore, Boston, Denver, Rochester, San Francisco and San Jose, and the state federations of labor in Massachusetts and Oregon. A university-based research team worked closely with the AFL-CIO's Young Worker Outreach Program in conducting this study.

- Analyzes three strategic challenges facing young worker groups; and
- Offers three broad recommendations to meet the strategic challenges ahead.

Three Ways Young Worker Groups Deliver Value to the Labor Movement

1. Cultivating dynamic, diverse and effective leaders;
2. Experimenting with new ways to engage and mobilize union and nonunion workers; and
3. Building bridges between labor and potential allies in the broader community.

Three Strategic Challenges Facing Young Worker Groups

- 1.** Crafting a sustainable model with sufficient leadership, membership, resources and staff;
- 2.** Navigating complex relationships between and among various organizations and leaders; and
- 3.** Developing a more clearly defined strategic direction and vision.

Three Broad Recommendations to Meet the Challenges Ahead

- 1.** Provide guidelines, technical support, legitimacy, leadership and resources;
- 2.** Improve and deepen complex and dynamic relationships among leaders of young worker groups, central labor bodies and union affiliates; and
- 3.** Assist on strategic planning and organizational development.

Conclusion

The young worker groups in this study have built a solid foundation upon which the labor movement can construct a more ambitious program to engage young workers and develop the next generation of labor leaders. With a strategic investment of time, resources and leadership, the impressive but still modest work of the AFL-CIO's Young Worker Outreach Program can be expanded, strengthened and scaled up. Farsighted leaders of all generations working together to build trusting relationships can attract and involve younger workers and union members to help rebuild and revitalize the union movement.

Introduction and Overview



One of the greatest challenges facing the contemporary labor movement is how to engage young workers and develop the next generation of leaders. In September 2009, the AFL-CIO's national convention passed a resolution declaring the "strength and vitality of the labor movement depends heavily on the ability of younger union members to develop into strong and effective labor leaders."¹ Since then, several programs have been initiated to attract and involve youth in the labor movement.

THE AFL-CIO YOUNG WORKERS OUTREACH PROGRAM has conducted regional Futures Forums and two national Next Up summits, which have attracted several hundred activists and generated enormous excitement. In addition, a few union affiliates have launched their own young worker programs. All of these initiatives represent important and promising steps to more effectively engage young workers.

What can be learned from the experience of central labor councils, area labor federations and state federations of labor that have launched programs designed to connect with the next generation of American workers? This research project was designed to answer that question.

Last year, the AFL-CIO assembled a research team to identify and examine some of the richest

experiences and best practices among central labor bodies that have initiated young worker programs.² Eight groups were studied: Young Trade Unionists in Baltimore; the Colorado Young Worker Project based in Denver; the Futures Program at the Massachusetts AFL-CIO; the Futures Program at the Greater Boston Labor Council; Young Emerging Labor Leaders (YELL) at the Oregon AFL-CIO; Next Generation United in Rochester, N.Y.; Young Workers United in San

Francisco; and Next Generation Bay Area in San Jose, Calif.

A brief profile of each of these young worker groups appears in a separate section of this report.

The research team interviewed key central labor body leaders as well as young activists, reviewed relevant documents and conducted site visits. These efforts yielded important insights about the origins and evolution of these youth programs, their structures and strategies, their dynamics and activities and the relationships among leaders and activists of these youth groups, union affiliates and central labor bodies.

The young activists exhibit a high level of energy, dedication and seriousness. Their exuberance feels contagious. They express a clear commitment to building the larger labor movement and contribute to that enterprise in real and tangible ways.

We were impressed and inspired by all of the young worker groups we studied. The young activists exhibit a high level of energy, dedication and seriousness. Their exuberance feels contagious. They express a clear commitment to building the larger labor movement and contribute to that enterprise in real and tangible ways. They demonstrate respect for the leaders of their respective central labor bodies and, in turn, seem to enjoy strong moral and political support from veteran unionists.

The groups we studied engage in a wide range of activities, including education, leadership development, mobilizations to support union struggles, campaigns involving both labor and other progressive forces and social gatherings. Despite the modest nature of their current stage of development, they represent a bright and promising story in today's labor movement. At the same time, they face a number of strategic challenges that will have to be addressed if they are to become more sustainable.

The formal relationships between the young worker groups and the established central labor bodies differ from place to place. In six of the eight cases we studied, veteran leaders of the central labor councils, area labor federations or state federations of labor initiated the young worker organizations. Only in San Francisco and Rochester did young workers take the lead in launching these initiatives. These youth formations usually operate as either committees or constituency groups within their respective regional AFL-CIO bodies. The exception is in San Francisco, where Young Workers United and the San Francisco Labor Council are two independent organizations with a close working relationship. The young worker groups generally have non-voting representation on the central labor body's executive board. The labor council, federation and/or affiliates sometimes contribute a small amount of seed money. They also may offer facilities and supplies and pick up such expenses as travel to the AFL-CIO's Next Up conferences. Otherwise, the youth groups raise their own modest budgets.

The groups in this study function in different ways. While most have formal bylaws, their gatherings are decidedly less formal and more fluid than traditional union or central body meetings. Their structures also vary. They tend to be less hierarchical and rigid and more horizontally democratic than established labor organizations. They also are less cautious and more enthusiastic about engaging with progressive political and social forces outside the union movement, like immigrant rights groups or the Occupy Wall Street movement, than are many unions.

In all of the groups we studied, young leaders have strong working relationships with key AFL-CIO and affiliate leaders. In some cases, AFL-CIO and/or affiliate staff members directly participate or even help coordinate young worker groups. This may represent a deliberate, though modest, contribution of staff time to support the group. In some places, a labor council staff person is assigned to assist the group as a strategic priority. In others, a young dynamic staff person may "volunteer" his or her time when veteran labor

leaders initially launch or affirm support for a program. Regardless of staffing choices, each young worker group operates with a high degree of autonomy and largely governs its own activities. While the nature of their formal membership varies, these groups generally target workers—always union and sometimes nonunion—between the ages of 18 and 35.

Three Ways Young Worker Groups Deliver Value to the Labor Movement

The young worker groups in this study deliver strategic value to the labor movement in three distinct and important ways:

1. They create a space to cultivate dynamic, diverse and effective leaders.
2. They function as laboratories where aspiring leaders can experiment with new ways to engage and mobilize workers—union and nonunion alike—as the engine of a movement for social justice and economic fairness.
3. They help build bridges between established labor organizations and other social and political forces that are potential or actual allies of the union movement.

The ways these groups contribute to the labor movement are described in detail in Section 2 of this report.

Three Strategic Challenges Facing Young Worker Groups

If the impressive but still modest work of these young worker groups is to become sustainable, expansive and scalable, the labor movement will have to address three strategic challenges:

1. Crafting a sustainable model with sufficient leadership, membership, resources and staff to drive a coherent program;

2. Navigating complex relationships between and among various organizations and leaders; and
3. Developing greater clarity and consensus about their strategic direction and vision so effective models can be more quickly spread throughout the labor movement and more dramatically scaled up, thus amplifying their impact.

These strategic challenges are expounded upon in Section 4 of this report.

Three Broad Recommendations to Meet the Strategic Challenges Ahead

To build on the solid but still relatively small foundation that these young worker groups have laid, the research team offers three broad suggestions that are explained in Section 5 of this report. The recommendations address each of the strategic challenges noted above:



1. The labor movement should provide guidelines, technical support, legitimacy, venues to exchange information and adequate resources to construct a sustainable, adaptable model for young worker groups.
2. Leaders and activists will have to become even more adept at navigating complex and dynamic relationships among the leadership of young worker groups, leadership of central labor bodies and leadership of union affiliates to ensure young worker groups have supportive environments in which to grow and contribute to the vitality of the labor movement.
3. The national AFL-CIO and its affiliates should provide assistance in strategic planning and organizational development to young worker groups, without constraining their creative energy by imposing an overly structured process or template upon them.

Conclusion

The research team was heartened by what we observed and learned about the young worker groups we studied. These emerging organizations, along with parallel formations within union affiliates, represent a hopeful and potentially significant development. With more support and resources, additional guidance and leadership and greater strategic coherence, these and other young worker groups may be well positioned to contribute in meaningful ways to the revitalization of a more inclusive, dynamic and effective labor movement in the United States.

¹ See Resolution 55: www.aflcio.org/content/download/6865/74214/file/2009res_55amend.pdf (April 12, 2012).

² AFL-CIO staff included: Sandy Felder, Amanda Pacheco and Kurston Cook. University-based researchers and labor educators included: Monica Bielski Boris (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), David Reynolds (Wayne State University) and Todd Dickey, Jeff Grabelsky and Ken Margolies (Cornell University).

Three Ways Young Worker Groups Deliver Strategic Value to the Labor Movement



This next section describes activities of young worker organizations that are filled with energy, creativity and commitment. As we describe examples of these groups' value, it is helpful to keep in mind that their wide range of activities encompasses three categories: education and leadership development; events and mobilizations; and social engagements. All of the groups combine activities from each of the three categories in their own unique blend.

Young worker organizations help labor invest in three elements critical to its future: (1) developing diverse, dynamic and effective leaders; (2) experimenting with new ways to mobilize effectively; and (3) building stronger ties between labor and community as well as among affiliates.

1. Cultivating Diverse, Dynamic and Effective Leaders

All of the young worker organizations see themselves as developing a new generation of leaders, representing a diverse group that brings energy and skills to the labor movement. Furthermore, where the initiative for starting a youth group has come from veteran labor leaders, the explicit goal has been to cultivate young leaders. Indeed, Greater Boston Labor Council Secretary-Treasurer Rich Rogers and Metropolitan Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO Unions President Ernie Grecco had been involved as young workers in labor youth organizations and had experienced the value to the labor movement of a cadre of leaders who rise together through the ranks. One veteran union affiliate leader in Baltimore

expressed his support for Young Trade Unionists by saying, "I'd like to see some members of the group in [union] leadership positions in the next few years." This leader does not worry about the

rise of young leaders. “If you [a current union leader] are doing your job, you have nothing to worry about. You have appointed a member of your local to the Young Trade Unionist Board, and this person regularly reports back [to the local].” A local union leader in Rochester commented, “We say we want new blood, but actual [existing labor] structures and the way policies work really discourage that.”

While including elected positions, activists and leaders we interviewed thought of the term “leader” broadly. A leader is anyone who can organize people to help get things done. While some young worker activists have become elected leaders, many others have been hired as union and AFL-CIO staff, been appointed to positions, or simply become leaders without a formal title.

Since the youth groups operate with a high level of autonomy, leadership development occurs simply through the act of youth activists running their own organizations. All of the groups, however, have been deliberate about educating themselves and other young workers. As part of their founding, many of the young worker organizations have learned a great deal about their regional labor movements, the different affiliates, and the political and activist terrain of their areas. For example, in Oregon YELL, educating young workers about the labor movement and labor issues is a primary goal. To accomplish this goal YELL hosts an annual youth leadership conference that brings in young workers from across the state. Courses taught at the conference include labor history and political economy, as well as nuts-and-bolts organizing and mobilizing skills and a class on running for union office. The conference is held in conjunction with the Oregon AFL-CIO convention so young workers can experience this labor event. Next Generation Bay Area in San Jose offers a similar Organizing and Leadership Institute. In Baltimore, the Young Trade Unionists took a more informal approach to leadership education by inviting leaders of different affiliates to speak at their monthly meetings. Early guests also included state federation and labor council leaders, AFL-CIO field staff and the director of

the local Labor Studies Center. This continuing education process has expanded to include labor-affiliated elected leaders and various progressive organizations and causes.

When this formal and informal leadership development combines with the basic character of each youth organization, the result produces young labor leaders with a broad and distinct set of skills. Young worker groups can produce leaders characterized by the following:

Labor Union Knowledge: Because of their deliberate self-education and experiences meeting activists and leaders from across the labor movement, young worker group members develop a fairly sophisticated understanding of how unions work outside of their specific union, what particular concerns are distinct for certain kinds of unions and what issues unite all of organized labor into a movement. Through the youth groups’ affiliations with central labor bodies, young worker group participants come to understand organized labor’s strategic agenda and the political and economic terrain in which it operates.

Community Activism Ties: The young worker organizations serve as a bridge for unions to community groups. Having members of community activist groups as members of the young worker organizations allows the young unionists to develop an understanding of different parts of the activist community as well as personal contacts with important community leaders. Thus, these young leaders can provide the labor movement with a commodity that is typically in short supply: ‘the labor bridge builder’—someone who has experience in the labor movement and with other progressive movements, allowing for better communication between labor and these other movements.

Broad and Creative Skills: Young worker organization members bring skills back to their affiliate unions. Through their work with labor councils, area or state federations, the young worker leaders are exposed to the basic operations of organized labor, including but not limited to commonly used forms of parliamentary procedure.

At the same time, they are essentially running grassroots volunteer-driven organizations that require a different set of skills that are not always in sufficient supply within organized labor. The meetings of the youth organizations are considerably different from typical union meetings. The chair is often rotated among members, with more emphasis on everyone speaking. Agendas include speakers or education, and there are more opportunities for socializing and relationship building. Leaders who come out of such experiences develop skills around facilitating small group meetings, recruiting and motivating volunteers, building consensus, mobilizing turnout, and event planning.

Diverse Representation: Young worker groups have a diverse membership in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation and religion among other categories that reflects the diversity among workers in the United States who are the labor movement's future. They thus produce a cohort of leaders who look like the increasingly diverse workforce of this country. Through their own internal operations and through their contacts with a variety of progressive activists, youth groups cultivate leaders who can operate in a diverse environment comfortably and effectively.

Social Connection: All of the young worker groups invest in opportunities for activists and members to get to know one another as individuals. These efforts can be as simple as a social component to regular meetings. Next Generation United in Rochester has "Mandatory Bar Time" (which is not really mandatory) after the regular business meeting at the bar around the corner. Examples of more elaborate events organized by youth groups include a day at the zoo, a night at minor league baseball, trivia night, bowling and a bicycle event. Regardless of the form, such networking opportunities produce rising leaders whose personal connections can help mitigate against the stresses and strains confronting the labor movement.

The quality of leaders that young worker groups are capable of producing can be seen in the

career trajectory of some of the leaders who have already gone through such groups. For example, having graduated from the union's apprenticeship program in 2008, Cory McCray was working as an organizer for IBEW Local 24 when Ernie Grecco

Through their own internal operations and through their contacts with a variety of progressive activists, youth groups cultivate leaders who can operate in a diverse environment comfortably and effectively.

asked him to serve as the chair of the new Young Trade Unionists. Since then he became a Local 24 assistant business manager, then an elected officer, and now lead organizer for the IBEW's District 4. McCray credits his Young Trade Unionist experience with exposing him to many affiliate unions, elected officials and community leaders. Nick Gaitaud, current president of Oregon's YELL, has been appointed to the national AFL-CIO's Next Up Young Worker Advisory Council and has taken an active role in his local union, USW Local 7150. Gaitaud played an instrumental role in the formation of an employer-funded Institute for Career Development for USW members in his hometown of Albany, Ore., and has a promising future within the USW, according to his staff representative Ron Rodgers.

Internally, organized labor has debated how to put the "movement" back in the labor movement. Young worker groups help develop labor leaders prepared to support their home unions as well as the labor and progressive movements as a whole. These young workers are developing the diverse skills that allow them to be effective organizational and movement leaders.

2. Creating New Ways to Mobilize, Engage and Involve

We were impressed with the wide range of activities that young worker groups pursue. Indeed, they provide a laboratory for new ideas, new ways of doing things and new takes on traditional union work.

All of the groups have plugged into existing labor activism—be it a mobilization in solidarity with a local union struggle or volunteering at a phone bank or labor walk during election season. For example, during a major Mott’s strike, Rochester’s Next Generation United group not only turned out young workers to join the picket line, but also helped OPEIU organize a food drive. NGU also participated in every Rochester area labor walk in 2010. YELL in Oregon organized a number of well-attended phone banks during the 2010 elections. The Greater Boston Futures Committee rallied in support of the IBEW/CWA Verizon strike. The Baltimore group supported a hotel workers’ strike. Groups also have participated in Labor Day and other union events. Some have helped in revived May Day celebrations.

Youth groups can bring fresh energy and creativity to traditional labor activities. For example, Next Generation Bay Area joined labor’s protests against an anti-public service union ballot proposal by dressing up as zombies on Halloween to highlight the poor behavior of some elected officials on this issue. The Greater Boston Futures Committee organized a guerilla theater event in support of Occupy Boston where the committee’s chair, Allison Doherty-LaCasse, appeared as Wonder Woman taming two “fat cats” carrying huge bags of money.

In supporting labor’s traditional work, young worker organizations have had to grapple with issues that have confronted organized labor for years. For example, unions continually struggle with how to mobilize their members for electoral politics in a society where the political system consistently frustrates the population, leading to apathy. Young worker organizations have had to debate electoral involvement because some of their members do not want to participate in explicit electoral campaigning. These debates have spurred creativity. While some members prefer not to help with electoral campaigns, they may see the importance of registering voters in underrepresented and underserved communities. They also might be willing to jump on a bus to rally at the state capitol and meet with legislators

to discuss the issues important to them. Groups also have invited elected labor and progressive champions to their meetings—outside of election season—to offer a view of a different breed of politician.

While young worker groups can help bring fresh energy and ideas to labor’s traditional mobilizations, youth organizations should not be reduced to subsidiary groups that play a purely supportive role to established labor bodies. Doing so would sap their vitality and full ability to help rebuild the labor movement. Young workers need to feel they are running their own organizations and have the space to cultivate new ideas. Two areas of experimentation emerge with such autonomy.

First, the organizations generate creative ideas for strengthening the labor movement. For example, Boston’s Future’s Committee put a new spin on an old idea: the labor history event. Fifty workers—union and nonunion—attended a very successful “Live Labor History for Today” on the Colonial Meatpacking Co. strike of 1954. The grandson of the African American strike leader explained how the union built labor-community coalitions that allowed them to win the longest strike in the state’s history. Thus the event used history to grapple with today’s challenges. YELL in Oregon sponsored a labor education event for local Boy Scout troops that focused on the work of union members and the role of unions in society. In Baltimore, the Young Trade Unionists organized a well-attended career day for high school students that included the building trades apprenticeship programs, unions such as AFT, the National Association of Letter Carriers and the United Food and Commercial Workers, as well as union-related programs such as Union Plus, the National Labor College and American Income Life.

Second, the ways that young worker groups conduct themselves also provide many innovative methods from which the labor movement as a whole can learn. We already have mentioned their experimenting with small group, activist and consensus-building approaches for meetings and planning. We also have pointed to the creative

guerilla theater types of actions that help revitalize a labor activist culture. In addition, these groups have high levels of awareness about electronic media. Rochester's Next Generation United sponsored a "Labor Lyceum" on how to better utilize social media to connect with both younger and older workers. Baltimore's Young Trade Unionists uploads videos of events and meetings on their website, with short commentary from board members.

Both areas point toward greater involvement in the labor movement. The young worker organizations provide new opportunities for non-union workers and the general public to encounter organized labor. At the same time, they expand the pool of opportunities for union members to participate in the movement. Member apathy is a frequent complaint of union leaders and activists. Yet, apathy may not come from a lack of concerns, but from members not seeing what they consider viable options for being engaged. Supplementing the internal opportunities inside members' unions, the creative work of young worker groups adds additional and different opportunities for members to become involved in ways that can inspire activism back in their home unions.

This experimental character of young worker organizations underlines the importance of veteran labor leaders not just supporting these groups financially but also by learning about their operations, i.e., attending a youth organization's meeting. The young workers appreciate the knowledge and experience that veteran labor leaders bring, while such leaders can experience firsthand the young worker groups' different methods of promoting activism.

Through their own experimentation and connections to community activist groups, youth organizations can bring to labor an expanded toolbox in its fight for economic justice. As formal institutions with budgets, staff, institutionalized members and established relationships, unions bring much

to the progressive table. However, these elements also can place unions under legal and political constraints. Young worker groups have intimate and mutually supportive ties to labor councils, state federations and affiliate leaders. At the same time, the groups have much smaller budgets and less bureaucracy, lowering the risks of having connections to volunteer activist groups. This can allow them to "step outside the boundaries" in moments of need. We should keep in mind that while the fight back in Wisconsin began with huge labor rallies, it was students, including members of UW-Madison's Teaching Assistants' Association/AFT, leading the drive to physically occupy the state capitol building. As one senior labor leader commented on spending nights sleeping in the building: "Us older guys went in completely unprepared and ended sleeping on the hard floor. It was the students that knew to plan ahead with their sleeping bags, mats and other supplies."

3. Building Bridges between Labor Organizations and Community Activism

With its slogan "We are the 99%," Occupy Wall Street broke through the media silence last fall to draw national attention to our nation's shameful inequality and corporate greed. It was a message that organized labor had been trying to get out to the general public for years. By the end of the year, Occupy protests had happened in 951 cities in 82 countries. All of the young worker groups in this study supported the Occupy movement



in some way. Indeed, some served as the labor-affiliated body taking the lead in connecting labor with the movement. Oregon's YELL helped to sponsor the labor tent at the Occupy Portland site and organized YELL members and union activists for the large labor rally in support of Occupy. In Baltimore, the planning that Young Trade Unionists began for their own support of Occupy Baltimore was picked up by the council and affiliates and turned into a general labor support rally.

This bridge building between organized labor and community activism is a central characteristic of these young worker organizations. Youth organizations formed inside individual affiliate unions naturally focus on issues and concerns of their union. By contrast, because the groups in this study are affiliated with labor councils or federations, they look broadly at the challenges facing the labor movement and working people as a whole. The young worker organizations have consciously sought to learn what is happening in the political and organizing landscape of their area labor movement and with the broader progressive forces in their region. One consequence of this is that they are able to draw nonunion young workers, for the most part. For some groups this can be half the membership or participants at events. These workers are not a random sample of young workers, but tend to be young people already active in progressive causes.

Young worker groups provide a particularly useful way for the labor movement to connect with such activists for several reasons. The young worker organizations operate using the types of small group and consensus building methods with which other progressive activists are familiar. Thus, the danger of "culture shock" is reduced and young union activists can help nonunion participants understand organized labor's formal operations. Furthermore, grassroots activists—especially young people of color, those of recent immigrant background and women—may be sensitive to the traditional lack of diversity among organized labor's leadership. Yet, the young worker organizations show a more diverse side of the

labor movement, with leaders who look more like the young community activists. It is also clear that being involved with a young worker organization does transform the way community activists view the labor movement—dispelling myths and broadening their understanding of organized labor's principles and objectives.

These individual connections also can translate into deeper relationships and joint action with progressive groups and causes. For example, following the lead of the Denver Area Labor Federation, the Colorado Youth Project developed a relationship with 9to5 through an unsuccessful Denver ballot drive to establish mandatory paid sick days and with the Colorado Progressive Coalition through a week of action against Wells Fargo. The Project also connected to New Era, a group that organizes college students to be politically active. In San Jose, Next Generation Bay Area participated in immigrant rights/DREAM Act events. Oregon's YELL brought a labor presence to the Portland's annual "Worst Day of the Year Ride" (in February) that supports the Community Cycling Center. Connections between organized labor and progressive movements lead to coalition work around political, economic and social issues that helps to build power for working people.

The young worker organizations also strengthen the ties between affiliates because these youth groups exist as truly multiunion formations with members from the wide array of unions representing the private and public sectors, manufacturing and service work, and the building trades. The veteran union leaders and staff interviewed expressed an appreciation for the opportunities, education and networking afforded to their young members by the youth organizations. This becomes especially important for affiliates in areas without much density in particular regions, such as the USW in Oregon, or without many young members, like the NALC. As the future generation of leaders, the bonds forged between unions by these young activists can only serve as an asset for the labor movement.

Young Worker Group Profiles



YELL PLAYS PAINTBALL!

Baltimore Young Trade Unionists

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ernie Grecco, now president of the Metropolitan Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO Unions, had been part of a group called Young Trade Unionists. This network had helped not only Grecco's career, (which included time as political director for the Maryland State and D.C. AFL-CIO) but also a cadre of leaders including those who became political directors, Maryland state federation officers, and national AFT secretary-treasurer Lorretta Johnson. Grecco attended the AFL-CIO's 2009 Leadership Institute with Roderick Easter, head of the Baltimore Building and Construction Trades Council, and Michael Smith, president of the NALC Local 176 and council secretary-treasurer. In developing a strategic project to work on over the next six months, the team chose to revive

Throughout this report we provide many examples of young worker organization activities and experiences. Our purpose in the case summaries is not to repeat this material but to provide a sense of the narrative and distinct character of each experience. For each case we summarize the organization's birth, the essential way it operates, its balance of the three categories of activities (education and leadership development, events and mobilizations, and social opportunities), and any distinct characteristics that stand out about the group.

Young Trade Unionists. Grecco asked Cory McCray, then organizer for IBEW Local 24, to serve as board chairman. As with other committees within the labor council, the council president appoints the chair. Grecco also recruited the other five Young Trade Unionists officers for a term of one year, after which these positions were filled via elections. The new Young Trade Unionists first met formally in November 2009.

All interviewed credit Grecco for encouraging young unionists to plan and run their organization as they see fit while at the same time playing a key supporting role in opening doors and reaching out to affiliates. When interviewed, Grecco reported he wanted the group to tap into the knowledge of experienced leaders, but that he and others also wanted to learn from the young leaders. He and Cory McCray clearly had a mutually supportive relationship. Young Trade Unionists stands out for the high portion (even majority) of participants that come from the building and construction trades. Trade apprenticeship programs have proven an effective recruiting ground. Six of the 13 Young Trade Unionists board members are in the building trades.

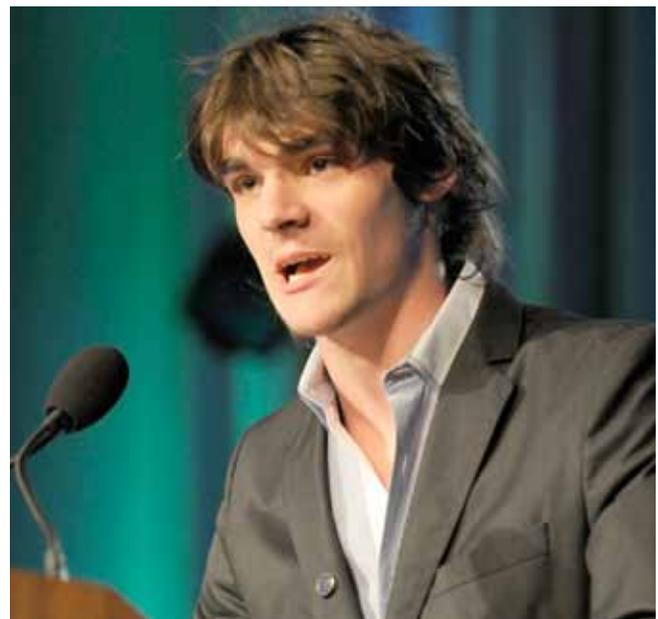
Young Trade Unionists devoted much of its early energies to learning about the labor movement and its broader environment by inviting affiliate leaders and other guests to its monthly meetings. In looking at who has attended in the last two years, the group clearly has gotten access to significant leaders: local presidents, the state federation president, community group leaders, labor educators, a radio host, state legislators, and members of Congress. Not only have these interactions proven informative, they also have built relationships between Young Trade Unionists and key leaders.

Over time the group's meetings evolved to integrate education with planning for events, mobilizations and socializing opportunities. The link between education and action is obvious from the group's activities. Last fall the group invited Occupy Baltimore activists to a general meeting that led Young Trade Unionists to organize a rally in support of the occupiers. Young Trade Unionists also has invited young and seasoned elected officials, which has provided an education that now informs discussions about the group's involvement with the 2012 election cycle. Young Trade Unionists' activities have included a high school career fair and a steward appreciation dinner. The group also has rallied in support of hotel workers, participated in the Maryland

AFL-CIO's annual rally and lobby day at the state capitol and marched in the Labor Day parade. As with all the young worker groups, Young Trade Unionists wrestles with increasing young worker involvement. Average general meeting attendance runs around two dozen, with 100-150 participants for special guests and events. In comparison with some other young worker groups, Young Trade Unionists have experienced very little friction with affiliate leaders. This can be attributed to the strong relationships between key veteran and young worker leaders. Clearly, as a respected and seasoned labor leader, Ernie Grecco has the trust of both his affiliates and Young Trade Unionists organizers. Grecco considers the rebirth of the group the most important thing he has done in his career.

Colorado Young Worker Project

The Colorado Young Worker Project grew out of AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler's listening tour, in which about 50 young workers attended a Denver-area meeting. With support from the Denver Area Labor Federation (DALF), this event produced an energized group that began by educating itself about the labor movement—its organizing, political and community work. This education process led the new Young Worker Project to the same three activity categories found with the other young worker groups.



While the Young Worker Project has wanted to avoid being reduced to a social group, it has sponsored a series of happy hours. Further education activities have included co-sponsoring a film about César Chávez put on by the Department of Labor. It also turned out about 25 young workers for a summer concert sponsored by the DALF that included affiliates, elected officials and community groups. The DALF has prioritized building relationships with community groups, and the Young Worker Project followed in this lead. In particular, it built a relationship with 9to5 through an unsuccessful city ballot campaign to establish paid sick days, and with New Era, which organizes college students to be politically active. It worked with the Colorado Progressive Coalition—contributing to a week of action against banks that included an attempt to “move into” a Wells Fargo bank (complete with moving truck and furniture) and getting people to close their accounts. The group also mobilized young workers to support Occupy Denver.

The Young Worker Project showed and continues to have a great deal of potential, especially in its work with community activism. Unfortunately, the group lost a fair amount of energy when two key organizers had to step back before the group had fully established a membership base and leadership team. As DALF political director, Sara Kuntzler’s time was swept up by the 2010 election cycle. The Jobs with Justice staff person, who also had been very active in the group, lost his position. The Young Worker Project went into semi-dormancy.

By early 2012, however, Kuntzler and a small core team had re-established a regular group. In February they sponsored a successful Organizing Our Future Conference attended by 40 young people. In March, the project hosted a well-attended happy hour and could celebrate a steering committee that included representatives of several unions, the Colorado AFL-CIO, the Denver Area Labor Federation, Working America, Colorado Wants to Work and New Era Colorado.

Massachusetts AFL-CIO and Greater Boston Labor Council Futures Committees

In its 2007–2008 Strategic Plan, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO proposed a “Youth Outreach” program designed to “educate young people about the Labor Movement and develop tomorrow’s Labor Leaders today.” Many of the labor leaders who advocated for a Futures Program had been young activists in the AFL-CIO’s 1980s Frontlash. On Feb. 8, 2008, the statewide labor movement held its inaugural “Futures Convention”—linked to the state federation’s annual conference—to launch its Futures program and begin a regular process of convening young activists and aspiring leaders from across different sections of the labor movement.

Jeremy McKeen from the Lynn Teachers Union was elected to the first one-year term as Futures Committee chair and to fill the Massachusetts AFL-CIO Executive Council seat allocated to the group. Because of a recent leadership transition at the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, its Futures Committee has been somewhat dormant. However, the state federation’s leadership is eager to revive the group’s activities.

The Greater Boston Labor Council Futures Committee grew out of the encouragement of state leaders for councils to establish such groups and the enthusiastic support of GBLC Executive Secretary-Treasurer Rich Rogers. In 2010, Allison Doherty-LaCasse, an energetic Boston Teachers Union activist and lead singer for a local rock band, was elected to fill the first three-year term as Futures Committee chair and to serve on the GBLC Executive Board. Rosa Blumenfeld, a young and talented staff organizer at the GBLC, coordinates the Futures program. Rather than focus on individual recruitment by current Futures Committee members, the new group decided to convene an “Organizing Our Future” conference in February 2011. More than 70 enthusiastic young union members attended the highly interactive conference, which included workshops on “Organizing 101” and “Re-Branding the Labor Movement.”

The GBLC Futures Committee organizes around four subcommittees: Organizing and Mobilizing, Political Action, Education, and Media and Message. The GBLC Futures Committee has pursued a fairly even mix of all three types of activities. It organized the innovative Live Labor History for Today event and the February 2012 Futures Conference. It has mobilized its growing membership for affiliate-organized political action events, for rallies in support of union struggles like the IBEW/CWA Verizon strike, for issues like affordable health care, for community services such as a fundraiser for the homeless, to testify at the Statehouse on key legislation, for a labor education fair and to support Occupy Boston. Social gatherings have included a “Futures Day” at a minor league Lowell Spinners baseball game, a trivia night, a Boston Teachers Union-sponsored party, and regular get-togethers at local pubs.

On Jan. 3, 2012, Jeff Grabelsky and Kurston Cook observed the Futures Committee regular “monthly” meeting that attracted more than 25 activists. Participants appreciated the opportunity to be part of a multiunion community of young unionists where they could share experiences, get support and contribute to the Futures Committee program. At the same time, many expressed a desire to participate in a cross-generational conversation about the labor movement, a conversation engaging both young activists and veteran leaders.

A key component to the young worker group’s success has been the staff support received from the GBLC. The labor council has sufficient resources to support a full-time organizer, Rosa Blumenfeld. Supporting the Futures Committee is not something Blumenfeld does after her regular work, but as part of her duties—alongside being the council’s liaison with the very active power-building Community Labor United. This staff time clearly has helped establish and maintain a young worker organization that is energetic, growing, and making a clear contribution to the area’s labor movement.

Oregon Young Emerging Labor Leaders

Motivated by the 2009 national AFL-CIO convention resolution calling on state federations and central labor councils to develop young worker programs, and sensing interest and support among its own affiliates, the Oregon AFL-CIO established Young Emerging Labor Leaders (YELL) to bring together young union members under the age of 35 in Oregon. The state federation leadership (President Tom Chamberlain and Secretary-Treasurer Barbara Byrd) and staff (most of the latter being younger than 35) developed a

YELL’s primary goal has been to provide leadership development because the members wanted opportunities for leadership and activism that are not always readily available to younger unionists.

plan to form the organization. Delegates at the 2009 Oregon AFL-CIO convention passed a resolution to establish YELL. On Aug. 28, 2010, the founding YELL conference was held, and approximately 45 young union members attended the event, participating in educational workshops and networking opportunities. After the conference a core group of activists began meeting to plan political, volunteer and social activities for YELL to sponsor.

YELL’s primary goal has been to provide leadership development because the members wanted opportunities for leadership and activism that are not always readily available to younger unionists. There are annual YELL conferences that bring together young workers from around the state. The conferences serve as an organizing and mobilizing tool for YELL. The 2011 conference was held in conjunction with the Oregon AFL-CIO convention to provide young unionists with an introduction to the state federation and to union conventions in general. YELL conference attendees

then are invited to the state convention's welcome reception, where they can meet and network with unionists from the various affiliates in Oregon. YELL also engages in other activities throughout the year as determined by the membership and leadership, providing an outlet for young unionists to network among themselves and share strategies for advancement in their unions and the larger labor movement.

YELL has maintained good relationships with a number of affiliates. The formation of YELL was motivated in part by the strong presence of AFSCME's Next Wave program for young members. This program started in Oregon with AFSCME Council 75 and has become a successful nationwide initiative. Next Wave and YELL share some of the same members and they often attend the same labor actions and events. There is some concern of programmatic overlap and possible burnout for activists involved with multiple young worker groups in addition to their unions and other labor organizations. YELL has smartly focused on educational opportunities and has been able to draw from many affiliates for their conferences because of this. For members from smaller affiliates such as the Theatrical Stage Employees, affiliates with lower union density in Oregon such as United Steelworkers, and those with fewer young members such as NALC, YELL serves an even more central role in providing networking, education and leadership opportunities.

Rochester Next Generation United

Next Generation United (NGU) is an active and growing young worker group founded in the spring of 2009 by young union activists and staff members affiliated with the Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation. NGU emerged organically when a group of younger union activists were socializing after an ALF dinner and decided to begin a group with the support of an ALF staff member, Aron Reina, and ALF President James Bertolone, who joined the conversation later that evening. Young delegates to the dinner lamented that there was limited space for younger members of the labor movement to meet and

work together outside of their home unions. For that reason, NGU was initially seen as a place for networking and a space for younger members of the labor movement to come together.

Immediately following this impromptu organizing meeting, President Bertolone designated Reina as the ALF staff member in charge of facilitating the new group's forward momentum. Reina, along with Rebecca Newberry, a part-time administrative organizer with the ALF at the time, put out an open call through area locals for the first official meeting of NGU. Newberry estimates there were 25-30 (all union members) in attendance at the first meeting, during which the group formulated needs and mission statements.

While union members in unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO and Change to Win were by far the largest percentage of NGU participants, another key category of membership in NGU is that of former union members. A former union member, Michelle Hundley, the current vice president of NGU, said NGU provided her with an opportunity to stay active in the labor movement after she was no longer working for a unionized employer. Independent unions were noted to have the potential to also serve as a small, yet promising, source of growth for NGU in future years. Many interviewees commented that NGU had been a key point of entry in recent years to the labor movement for nonunion young workers. Others mentioned the potential of NGU to serve as an even greater gateway to the labor movement for nonunion young workers and students. Nonunion participants in NGU consisted almost entirely of workers active in other progressive community groups.

NGU has been busy over the past year organizing social events for its members and planning educational events for the labor and larger Rochester communities, as well as mobilizing its members and supporters for labor and political causes and events.

Better use of NGU as a labor leadership training ground was frequently mentioned as an area

for improvement for the group. One local leader welcomed the advent of NGU and saw it as a group that is able to look forward and say the “way things have been run aren’t always going to be that way.” The same leader expressed a desire for leaders to grow in NGU, then become more active in their own unions. Many NGU members have done just this, taking on leadership roles both within NGU and their unions. One member commented that “I have become a leader like I never thought I could,” both in her local and in NGU. Another mentioned she recently ran for a leadership position in her local and beat two established candidates who had both been in leadership for 10 years. NGU, she stated, prepared her to run for local office as she “soaked up everything” after getting involved.

As one of the first young worker groups in the country, Rochester’s NGU has been active in the national AFL-CIO young worker program primarily through the Next Up conferences in Baltimore and Minneapolis. NGU members take pride in the fact they have a “sister” group: Next Generation Bay Area in San Jose, which they helped get off the ground through advice and consultation.

San Francisco Young Workers United

The San Francisco Labor Council and Young Workers United (YWU), a worker center, are two independent organizations with a close working relationship. Officers of the SFCLC and an affiliate union are on the advisory board of YWU. Former staff and activists of YWU work for the SFCLC and the California Labor Federation. An officer of the SFCLC described the relationship between the SFCLC and YWU by saying “YWU almost has the status of an official constituency group” within the SFCLC. A 2007 *San Francisco Chronicle* article about the relationship between YWU and the SFCLC stated, “*The Labor Council has worked with YWU on a number of campaigns, and though the YWU is not a member of the council, ‘they might as well be,’ according to the President of the SFCLC.*”¹³ In the summer of 2007 the SFCLC presented YWU with a Labor-Community Action Award for work on the paid sick leave ordinance.

YWU from its beginnings was most active in the restaurant industry and its founders had ties to UNITEHERE! Local 2 has provided rent-free space to YWU since its founding in 2002. YWU and the SFCLC and affiliate unions work together primarily



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on local political action in San Francisco around such issues as raising the minimum wage and legally mandating sick leave for all workers in the city. YWU regularly turns out its members to join picket lines and rallies called by unions.

YWU supports workers forming and participating in unions wherever there is a union to be part of, but YWU represents the young and immigrant workers in jobs that no union plans to organize in the foreseeable future. YWU publishes a guide to restaurants that treat their workers fairly and assists individual workers and groups of workers at specific restaurants to resolve work-based problems. YWU is funded by foundations and individual contributions. They charge no dues and say they have approximately 600 people involved in their work in one way or another.

There is little connection between YWU members, officers and staff with the younger members of unions affiliated with the SFLC. Most of the SFLC's work with younger workers is through YWU and there has not been any other SFLC-sponsored activity involving young union members. However, YWU "graduates" can be found working for SEIU Local 1021, UNITEHERE! Local 2, the SFLC and the California Faculty Association.

Stimulated by enthusiastic union members returning from the recent AFL-CIO Next Up Summit, the SFLC requested the California state federation put resources into building young worker groups. A staff person from the state federation spends some of her time working with central labor councils (CLCs) in Northern California. She reports that several CLCs are receptive to starting young worker groups but they have reservations. They are concerned young worker groups will want voting seats in CLCs and that the groups might engage in activities not coordinated with the CLCs.

San Jose Next Generation Bay Area

Next Generation Bay Area is an expanding group of young workers, students and union members fighting for social and economic justice while empowering emerging leaders with the skills and resources necessary to build a better future. Next Generation Bay Area can count on 15-30 people to attend its general meetings and 40-50 people at events. More than 200 people have come at least once to an event or meeting the group has sponsored.

Shortly after the first AFL-CIO Young Worker summit, the Labor Council of South Bay AFL-CIO adopted a resolution to promote outreach to young workers and encourage affiliates to do the same. As a result, Next Generation was formed with an official launch in January 2011. According to Cindy Chavez, executive officer of the CLC, forming such a group to work with young people was natural for the council because it has always had young leadership and been open to new ideas.

Next Generation Bay Area's Organizing Committee is 50 percent union and 50 percent nonunion, with a high percentage of members who are young workers unrepresented by a union. A key member of the Organizing Committee is Anna Schlotz, a Machinists member and lead organizer for the South Bay Labor Council. Next Generation does outreach on college campuses and to different communities around issues like a living wage, affordable education and immigration reform. The group describes its main tactics as education and member training, media and communications, and coalition building. Many in the community see Next Generation as the youth arm of the SFLC.

Next Generation Bay Area's structure is very consciously less traditional than union structures and its leaders work to create a diverse and welcoming space for creativity and democratic process. They conduct meetings with a rotating chair. Almost every part of the agenda is led by a different person and all decisions are made by voting. Next Generation members bring energy and creative actions like street theater to union

mobilizations, hold bowling events to build membership and join in actions organized by Occupy and community groups.

The use of new technology is important to Next Generation and the group has a website, an electronic newsletter, Google group and Facebook, Twitter and Flickr. There is a social aspect to much of what Next Generation does and it holds happy hours and coffee hours where members get to know each other and informally discuss ideas.

Next Generation activists are optimistic about the future as they seek to be recognized and thought of as the place for progressives in the South Bay

with an effective and positive culture. At the same time, they are sometimes frustrated and feel young people have to work harder than older generations to prove themselves within the labor movement. Some also feel they want to push labor to the left and wonder if as an “arm” of the AFL-CIO how possible it is to do that.

At a retreat in October 2011, Next Generation’s leaders worked with a facilitator to do strategic planning where they determined the issues they will address and discussed how to expand their membership. Of this, Cindy Chavez says, “We have to decide what the Next Gen group will become because resources are finite. Whatever it becomes must help build power for working families.”

³ See www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/10/21/CM2SS2SN9.DTL (Last visited April 12, 2012).

Three Strategic Challenges Young Worker Groups Face



If the impressive but still modest work of these young worker groups is to become sustainable, expansive and scalable, the labor movement will have to address three strategic challenges:

1. Crafting a sustainable model with sufficient leadership, membership, resources and staff to drive a coherent program;
2. Navigating complex relationships between and among various organizations and leaders; and,
3. Developing greater clarity and consensus about their strategic direction and vision so effective models can be spread more quickly throughout the labor movement and more dramatically scaled up, thus amplifying their impact.

1. Crafting a Sustainable Model

Young worker organizations are potentially vulnerable to the common difficulties that beset many grassroots, volunteer-dependent groups. Here we discuss three issues key to sustaining the young worker groups over time: dependence on key individuals, resource vulnerability and recruiting challenges.

Dependence on Key Individuals

Many of the young worker organizations we studied began with experienced labor leaders pulling together a team of capable young worker activists. The vibrancy of the groups is a testimony to these young leaders' skills. However, what happens when key leaders leave? Some groups already have had to struggle with the departure

or stepping back of important individuals. An Oregon YELL leader commented it often feels as though “every six months we have to start over.” As young worker organizations engage in leadership development, they need to include their own future in that effort.

Perhaps the most innovative approach we found was the creation of a “Membership Development Committee” by the Next Generation Bay Area group. The committee, and group as a whole, currently is starting a “leadership ladder” program designed for each member to get more involved, build skills and grow the movement. Through a buddy system, Next Generation Bay Area officers work with Organizing Committee members to develop their skills and prepare them for leadership. Organizing Committee members in turn buddy up with other group members. Using the Organizing Committee as an intermediate leadership opportunity, Next Generation Bay Area gives members the opportunity to test the waters in positions with more leadership responsibilities before running for executive office within the group.

Resource Vulnerability

While relying on volunteer energy, young worker organizations also draw on other resources. They operate with modest budgets (to pay for materials and event costs) that require ongoing fundraising. Young worker groups have drawn financial contributions on an as-needed basis. None has a regular line item in council or federation budgets, nor do supportive affiliates commit to regular ongoing contributions. AFL-CIO bodies and affiliates have given in-kind support in the form of offering meeting space, picking up specific costs and providing travel funds. All of this as-you-go support places a premium on young worker organizations maintaining the interest and good relations of unions and AFL-CIO bodies. It also makes groups vulnerable to leadership turnover in these organizations.

Of special concern is the role of union and AFL-CIO staff in young worker organizations. A significant portion of young worker leadership comes from labor movement staff. Such individuals often

are the young leaders most visible to veteran leaders as well as often the most readily interested in getting a group off the ground. These staff members come to the young worker organization either on their own initiative or as an additional assignment to their regular workload. In either

The dynamic of staff involvement in young worker groups provides an area where the AFL-CIO could make a welcome contribution. Indeed, several young worker staff interviewed raised the need for greater guidance. Such guidelines could address the best practices for a union or AFL-CIO body...and offer suggestions on how labor movement staff can best strategically manage their contributions to young worker activism.

case, they are essentially being active on their own time. Many staff interviewed raised the issue of serious burnout. Labor movement staff members also are vulnerable to having their “day jobs” suddenly occupy all of their energy and keep them away from young worker activism. As the Denver Area Labor Federation political director, for example, it was inevitable that Sara Kuntzler would have to step back from the young worker group during the height of the 2010 elections.

The vulnerability of labor movement staff underlines the importance of the example of the Greater Boston Labor Council allocation of Rosa Blumenfeld’s time supporting the Futures Committee as part of her regular duties. The dynamic of staff involvement in young worker groups provides an area where the AFL-CIO could make a welcome contribution. Indeed, several young worker staff interviewed raised the need for greater guidance. Such guidelines could address the best practices for a union or AFL-CIO body to allocate staff time and offer suggestions on how labor movement staff can best strategically manage their contributions to young worker activism.

Recruiting Challenges

Most of the young worker groups we examined enjoy healthy rates of participation. Attendance at the monthly meetings tends to run around 25-30 people and large turnout for special events can range around 100-200. Some groups actively and systematically seek to maintain such participation. For example, the Bay Area and Greater Boston groups use a monthly phone tree to notify members about upcoming meetings and engage in productive one-on-one organizing conversations.

Yet, all of the young worker organizations clearly are tapping only a small portion of the population of young union members in their areas. How to best recruit among affiliates continues to provide a challenge. Typically supportive affiliate leaders will help young worker groups contact their young members most visible to them. However, what about all of the young union members who do not have regular contact with their leadership? In many ways, young worker organizations share in the general challenge faced by many local unions of how to strengthen and maintain regular communication and engagement with their members.

2. Managing Complex Relationships

Except for San Francisco's Young Workers United, the youth organizations in this study operate as extensions of an AFL-CIO body. The leadership of these bodies either formally or informally has

determined, at least initially, who are the key leaders of the youth organizations. There does not appear to be any current situations where youth organizations have overstepped their bounds or where a council or federation has prevented youth organizations from taking any actions, but both young and veteran leaders are aware of the potential for such occurrences.

Potential Affiliate Concerns Regarding New Leaders

Interviewed affiliate leaders understood the need to involve young people in the labor movement. Some, however, had clear concerns about the form that involvement will take. Those interviewed knew peer leaders who oppose efforts to develop new young leadership because of fears these new leaders will replace them. This concern is not without substance, since in a number of cases union members active in youth organizations have run for election and replaced established union leaders. To what extent is such leadership development seen as a natural evolution or a direct threat? One seasoned leader explained his lack of worry about the rise of young leaders in the following terms: "If you [a current union leader] are doing your job, you have nothing to worry about. You have appointed a member of your local to the young worker group board and this person regularly reports back [to the local]."



Potential Affiliate Concerns over Independent Direction

Affiliate leaders can have other concerns about young worker groups that similarly grow out of such organizations' strengths. Young worker organizations help forge relationships with groups outside the labor movement and they may have substantial membership and leadership who are not union members, but community activists. While these connections can prove quite valuable, they can be seen as threatening. Some young workers—both union and nonunion—are active in young worker organizations because they want to move the labor movement to the left. Are affiliate leaders comfortable with such prospective cultural and activist changes? Additionally, affiliate leaders may not approve of leaders of young worker groups. For example, one affiliate with members in Rochester's Next Generation United abruptly stopped its members from participating in the group because the affiliate's leaders had a personal dispute with a member of NGU's leadership team.

A related flip side of young worker organizations' strengths lies in their autonomy. Some union leaders—especially where young worker groups have not yet been firmly established—have expressed concern that such organizations will take positions or engage in actions the union leaders oppose. The prospect of young worker groups making their own candidate endorsements

offers one example concern, although no youth groups have expressed interest in making electoral endorsements. Presently, the scope of young worker activity has been limited enough and the relationships between key veteran and youth leaders close enough that there have not been disputes over what the youth organizations do. However, interviews with some young worker leaders raise the possibility such conflicts could become possible.

Potential Young Worker Concerns of Not Being Taken Seriously

An “elephant in the room” for some young people involved in young worker organizations is whether they are taken seriously as contributors of ideas or viewed merely as the youth auxiliary of the labor movement limited to support work and carrying out decisions made by others. Some of those interviewed reported feeling that older union leaders and members conveyed a feeling that unless you have years of experience, you should not expect to have much say in decision making. Young people bring to the labor movement valuable qualities, including energy, new ideas, creativity, risk-taking and impatience. How can the labor movement best learn from young worker activists while at the same time young workers also learn from seasoned leaders? This need underlines the importance of close and mutually respectful relationships among key young and veteran leaders.



YOUNG WORKERS CAN LEARN MUCH FROM ESTABLISHED UNION ORGANIZATIONS--AND SUCH ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR LEADERS CAN TAKE AWAY VALUABLE LESSONS FROM YOUNG WORKERS' CREATIVITY, ENERGY AND NEW IDEAS.

Potential Generational Culture Differences

The young leaders and activists interviewed expressed a strong appreciation of and commitment to the labor movement. They also indicated their frustrations and concerns about certain elements of the culture of the labor movement. These elements include the tradition within the labor movement to “wait your turn” to move up to leadership, a perceived lack of transparency and diversity, and a reluctance to try new things.

Young leaders do not always understand and appreciate the wisdom and reasons supporting the methods, structures and practices developed by the labor movement over time.

Young workers not in unions as well as many young union members need to be convinced that unions offer a welcoming place and an effective vehicle to address their concerns. The young people interviewed explained that many of the nonunion young workers they engage with know little about the labor movement but have an image of it as being comprised of old, white men who care about and work only on behalf of their members. They think unless the labor movement better educates young workers as well as shows more flexibility and ability to change, it may not be able to successfully attract and involve the volume of young people necessary to meet the challenges of the future.

Potential Young Worker Concerns over Affiliate Apathy

The most common tension felt by the young worker side is simply apathy—or a lack of active engagement—from many affiliate leaders. Affiliate leaders may express support for young worker activism as a general concept, but not have the time or energy to invest in it. Typically the most active affiliates are those attempting to engage young workers within their own unions and/or industries. This dynamic raises a final potential difficulty: what happens when both an affiliate and the regional AFL-CIO body foster young worker groups? In terms of program, there appears little potential for conflict, as affiliate young worker

groups tend to work on issues internal to their unions while AFL-CIO young worker organizations focus on broader labor movement concerns and labor-community activism. However, what about dividing the time and energy of young workers involved in both types of groups? To stem potential competition for young worker time and energy offers another area in which the AFL-CIO can offer best practices and guidelines for how young worker organizations can best foster mutually energizing strategic relationships and avoid activist burnout.

3. Developing Greater Clarity about Strategic Direction and Vision

All of the young worker groups we studied exhibited an eagerness to help build the larger labor movement, but it was difficult to decipher a clear vision of where they were headed or how they would get there. It might be difficult to sustain the involvement of young activists or the commitment of veteran leaders unless these groups can articulate and achieve well-defined long-term goals. That would require greater strategic and programmatic coherence than these young worker groups—or their sponsoring central labor bodies—seem to currently have.

There is a palpable level of energy and enthusiasm among the young leaders and activists who participate in these groups. Their meetings appear to have a valued social component. Participants clearly enjoy one another’s company. Participants also seem to genuinely appreciate the opportunity to be part of a multiunion community of young unionists where they can share experiences, get support, and contribute to their groups’ programs. But, in the long run, energy and enthusiasm may not be enough. Given the increasingly hostile environment within which organized labor struggles to survive, activists—regardless of their age—ultimately may want to see tangible evidence their hard work is making a real difference in the face of an unrelenting corporate assault on workers’ fundamental right to organize and bargain collectively. That kind of success is unlikely to be achieved without a well-conceived and carefully executed strategy. And, without a vision

and experience of success, it is easy to imagine how young activists could become discouraged and sponsoring central labor body leaders could become disenchanted with these young worker groups.

Where is all of this young worker activity leading? How should young activists measure success? What are the best strategies to pursue their visions of success? What individual and organizational capacities are required to achieve success? These and other questions need to be answered in a dialogue between young and veteran leaders.

While these young worker groups may represent a bright chapter in labor's unfolding story, the longer-term narrative remains to be written. Such a narrative should be infused with strategic thinking about how these groups can accomplish two tasks that would enhance their value and increase their impact.

Establishing More Young Worker Organizations

First, there are too few of these young worker groups. There are a handful of groups connected to central labor councils, area labor federations, and state federations of labor, and fewer still based in national affiliates like AFSCME or the Painters and Allied Trades. The labor movement will need to develop, test and refine a replicable model

for organizing young worker groups that can be spread to many more cities across the country. This is the challenge of "going wide" in a relatively short period of time.

Scaling Up Young Worker Involvement

Second, even the best practices we observed in these eight cases involve relatively small numbers of young workers. Leaders need to explore ways to engage many more young activists within and beyond the formal labor movement if these new formations are to have significant impact. This is the challenge of "scaling up" to move beyond the impressive, but limited, reach of the young worker groups we studied.

In some cases, the young activists we observed and/or interviewed did not reveal a highly developed consciousness specifically as *young* workers, with particular experiences and perspectives that might differ in some important ways from the views of older, veteran leaders. These youth initiatives will be challenged in both "going wide" and "scaling up" unless they develop a clearer idea of what young workers want and need and how a 21st century labor movement can be reconfigured and reinvented to make it relevant and indispensable to the next generation. That is, perhaps, the greatest strategic challenge young worker groups face going forward.

Three Broad Recommendations



The initial success of the young worker groups studied also is due in large part to the efforts, encouragement and support of the leadership of the labor councils and federations.

Below we offer a series of recommendations for how to address the challenges identified in the previous section and further develop this meaningful work. These recommendations fall into three broad categories:

1. **The labor movement should provide guidelines, technical support, legitimacy, venues to exchange information and adequate resources to construct a sustainable, adaptable model for young worker groups.** This support will facilitate sharing of best practices and solutions to common challenges, expanding the official space for young worker groups to develop and

Our research on young worker groups connected to central labor bodies shows the AFL-CIO's efforts to reach out to young union members and workers are having the desired impact. The youth groups connected to the labor councils and federations have been encouraged, stimulated and energized by the two AFL-CIO Next Up Young Worker summits and their follow-up activities. In many cases these youth groups were created in response to the summits and AFL-CIO resolutions on youth and unions or after meeting with Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler on her listening tour.

grow. It also will lead to the integration of the work of young worker groups into the work of labor bodies and affiliates. In addition, it will take substantial resources and staff time for the continued development of young worker groups.

2. **Leaders and activists will have to become even more adept at navigating complex and**

dynamic relationships between the leadership of young worker groups, leadership of central labor bodies and leadership of union affiliates to ensure young worker groups have supportive environments in which to grow and contribute to the vitality of the labor movement. Veteran leaders at every level of the labor movement should unambiguously embrace and systematically model an open, respectful relationship, which demonstrates to young leaders they are taken seriously and their contributions of new ideas and methods of activating workers are welcome.

- 3. The national AFL-CIO and its affiliates should provide assistance in strategic planning and organizational development to young worker groups, without constraining their creative energy by imposing an overly structured process or template upon them.** To develop replicable models for these groups that can be expanded throughout the labor movement and scaled-up so they engage not merely hundreds or thousands, but tens and eventually hundreds of thousands of young workers, these efforts require much more clarity about a vision of success and more coherent strategies to achieve well-defined long-term goals.

1. The labor movement should provide guidelines, technical support, legitimacy, venues to exchange information and adequate resources to construct a sustainable, adaptable model for young worker groups.

Offer guidelines and technical support.

While young worker groups value autonomy, they also appreciate and need support that can help them think about organization, relationship, and activity questions.

Working with the Young Worker Advisory Council and others, the AFL-CIO can develop guidelines for establishing and building young workers groups. This can include sample bylaws and templates for communications as well as lessons

learned and best practices compiled from the more senior youth groups.

The national AFL-CIO and central labor bodies should maintain and expand the staff available to provide advice and assistance to young worker groups. Staff members need to be knowledgeable about young worker groups and have the access and ability to work with key labor leaders.

Affiliates need to support the assignment of AFL-CIO staff to help guide and develop young worker organizations.

Promote communication, sharing of best practices and facilitating problem solving between the leaders of young worker groups, labor bodies and affiliates.

The national AFL-CIO should continue to facilitate formal and informal ways for labor bodies and affiliates and their young worker groups to communicate including through written communications, websites, electronic bulletins and national and regional conferences so they share information on their activities and successes.

The national AFL-CIO should continue to bring young members and leaders together across unions and geographic boundaries in a national Young Worker Summit format as well as encourage labor bodies to organize regional and local youth conferences. Some of these gatherings should be working sessions where leaders of youth groups can meet with their peers to share experiences and work on solutions to their common challenges.

The national AFL-CIO, central labor bodies, young worker groups and affiliates should continue to formally and informally link those experienced in starting youth groups with those who are in the early stages of creating such groups. A good example is the mentoring relationship between NGU in Rochester and Next Generation South Bay. This should include connecting experienced leaders from the labor bodies and affiliates which have established young worker groups with their counterparts in other labor bodies and affiliates

that are contemplating or in the early stages of establishing them.

Continue to create official space for young worker groups.

Young worker organization activists and leaders consistently pointed to the value of the national AFL-CIO's efforts and those of labor bodies and affiliates that promote and encourage young worker groups. They appreciate the practical space provided by the AFL-CIO Young Worker summits and other gatherings in which they can learn from and dialogue with their peers and experienced leaders of the labor movement. Equally important is the AFL-CIO's strong advocacy of the need for the labor movement to involve young members and workers. This legitimizes the activism of young workers and paves the way for their acceptance and support from union leaders.

National, state and regional AFL-CIO leaders have an important role to play in convincing leaders of affiliates to see the value of young worker groups.

The national AFL-CIO, through publications, formal and informal communications and staff support, should continue to promote the importance of outreach to young members and workers and urge labor bodies and affiliates to pursue such outreach. An important part of the message from the AFL-CIO is that the labor movement cannot grow in numbers and strength without appealing to and including young people.

National, state and regional AFL-CIO leaders and staff as well as leaders and staff from affiliates should visit strategic young worker organization meetings and events to show their support, share ideas, and learn from young labor leaders.

National, state and regional AFL-CIO leaders have an important role to play in convincing leaders of affiliates to see the value of young worker groups. They also can address any apprehensions those

leaders may have by demonstrating how the young worker groups can help strengthen the affiliates.

Affiliates can support central labor body young worker groups by appointing young members as the local's representatives to the young worker organizations—in some cases, this has taken the form of membership on the youth organization's board. This representative educates the youth membership on the ideas and issues of the local while at the same time updating local union members on the activities of the youth organization by, for example, providing reports at membership meetings.

Affiliates also can expose new members to the existence and activities of young worker organizations as part of new member orientation or apprenticeship programs and publicize young worker groups' activities to their members through unions' various communication tools.

Value and integrate the work of young worker groups into the work of labor bodies and affiliates.

Affiliates and central labor bodies should view young worker groups as a resource to help develop new leaders who can help involve younger members and organize young workers. Labor body-based young worker groups provide young union members opportunities to develop themselves as leaders and experience and learn from union mobilizations and grassroots organizing.

Young leaders who develop through labor body-based young worker groups can help affiliates build or strengthen a bridge to community and activist groups that the local may not have the ability to develop otherwise.

In between contract fights, political action and other mobilizations, many local unions look for ways to keep members engaged. The events and creative tactics fostered by young worker groups can provide handy and attractive opportunities for rank-and-file members—older as well as younger—to participate in organized labor in ways that might spark greater involvement in their locals.

Develop stable resources for young worker groups.

Central labor bodies and affiliates should work with young worker groups to develop budgets that are funded on a stable and regular basis rather than through ad hoc contributions. Labor body staff who are assigned to work with young worker groups should be given adequate time to perform those duties as part of their regular work and not as an add-on or something they do after completing their other duties.

2. Leaders and activists will have to become even more adept at navigating complex and dynamic relationships between the leadership of young worker groups, leadership of central labor bodies and leadership of union affiliates to ensure young worker groups have supportive environments in which to grow and contribute to the vitality of the labor movement.

While we examined questions of organization and structure, the single most important factor to the level of success of young worker groups was the relationship between young and veteran leaders. Key leaders within the youth organization need to have a relationship with labor council, federation and key affiliates leaders based on mutual trust, respect and understanding. This way, young leaders learn from experience and get help in opening doors and minimizing obstacles. At the same time, veteran leaders learn from young workers. If such relationships do not develop, there is no structural fix for making groups successful.

Set examples of respectful relationships with young worker groups.

Key leaders from within local AFL-CIO bodies and their affiliates need to champion the young worker organizations and deliberately cultivate strong and mutually respectful relationships with key youth leaders. Fostering an effective young worker organization requires an ongoing investment of

time and energy by veteran labor leaders—at least until the youth organization is firmly established. These relationships then can be reflected in both young worker participation in labor movement programs and proceedings and veteran labor leader participation in the work of young worker groups.

The strong and visible relationships between respected veteran labor leaders and young worker group leaders is the most important way of keeping young activism and the rest of the labor movement in sync and in minimizing tensions with any area labor leaders suspicious of what youth organizations might do.

Ensure autonomy.

Young leaders and activists will lose interest in young worker groups if they cannot run their organizations with a reasonable amount of autonomy. If they feel too restrained or not trusted to make good decisions, they will lose their enthusiasm and perhaps look for opportunities to exert leadership outside the labor movement.

Educate experienced union leaders about the value of young worker groups.

Experienced labor leaders should be helped to appreciate the full value that active young worker groups can bring to their unions, AFL-CIO bodies, and the movement as a whole. The groups are more than simply a vehicle for turning out young workers to labor events, but a source of connections to community activism, a school for developing effective and creative leaders and laboratories for experimenting with and learning about new ways to run groups and new forms of activities.

Foster discussion between veteran and young leaders.

Such discussions conducted by the national AFL-CIO, central labor bodies and affiliates must be based on mutual respect and a frank and open exchange of ideas about the strategic importance and relationships of existing or possible young worker organizations in their areas.

One way this can be done is by examining existing programs and events that pull in labor leaders to

identify opportunities to have explicit dialogues between young workers and experienced leaders. The AFL-CIO Leadership Institute provides one such opportunity.

Find opportunities for national AFL-CIO, central labor body and affiliate leaders to participate in or become exposed to young worker meetings and events.

Young workers notice and greatly appreciate the presence of veteran labor leaders at their meetings or events. Modest efforts to reach out to young worker groups can deliver major benefits in terms of mutual understanding and identify ways of mutual support. Such exposure can involve such simple steps for veteran leaders as:

- Attending a youth organization meeting;
- Sitting down with members of your local who are involved in a cross-union young worker organization;
- Informally meeting with youth organization leadership; and
- Introducing yourself to young worker leaders at labor functions.



Look for opportunities to include young worker leaders in official labor programs, meetings and other events.

Doing so not only shows young leaders they are taken seriously by national AFL-CIO, central labor body, and affiliate leaders, it also gives them valuable experience and creates opportunities for young leaders to meet, have dialogue with and develop relationships with other leaders and activists of all generations.

Consider ways to foster direct one-on-one mentoring relationships between young and experienced leaders by the national AFL-CIO, central labor bodies and affiliates.

Experienced leaders often cite mentors, whether official or unofficial, as playing an extremely important role in their early development. Rather than leave the finding of mentors to chance, young worker groups and established labor bodies should create ways to more systematically match up young leaders with mentors.

3. The national AFL-CIO and its affiliates should provide assistance in strategic planning and organizational development to young worker groups, without constraining their creative energy by imposing an overly structured process or template upon them.

The diversity of young worker organization activities is a source of strength. However, if an organization pursues various activities without a longer-term plan and strategic initiative, it risks losing energy and focus over time. Many of the young worker groups would appreciate help with strategic planning. At the same time, young worker groups should see themselves and be seen by other labor leaders as an important part of a broader effort to rebuild the regional labor movement. This goal requires that the regional labor movement has long-term plans and has integrated youth leaders into developing and implementing these plans.

Promote strategic planning by labor bodies.

Planning encouraged by the national AFL-CIO should pay special attention to the role of young worker leaders and include labor-community relationships, leadership development, and experimentation with new initiatives.

Where the national and state AFL-CIO have active relationships with community groups, leaders should use these connections to strategically link local community activists with local young worker leaders. The connections the AFL-CIO and some affiliate unions have to United Students Against Sweatshops and similar economic justice campus activism offers an obvious example. Similar relationships with environmentalists, faith groups and civil rights activism—as well as active AFL-CIO constituency groups—provide other opportunities.

Offer planning support to young worker groups and labor bodies.

The guidelines and technical assistance from the national AFL-CIO available to young worker groups and labor bodies should include information on conducting strategic planning, providing facilitators trained in strategic planning and keeping young worker groups informed about planning efforts conducted by other young worker groups.

Where young worker groups exist inside local affiliate unions, strategic planning efforts should involve those groups and foster strategic thinking about effective divisions of labor and energy between these groups and central labor body-sponsored groups.

Conduct at least two strategic pilot programs in conjunction with selected labor bodies, one where a young worker group already has been established and another where a young worker group will be organized through the pilot.

With a number of selected labor bodies, the national AFL-CIO could devote resources to

conducting strategic planning and implementation of a plan to organize young worker groups on a pilot basis. This way, the strategy can be tested and refined before being employed on a larger scale.

Such pilot strategies should seriously consider including:

- How young worker groups can build the strength of the labor movement and power for working families;
- Using the connections young worker groups develop with nonunion young workers to organize them for collective bargaining;
- Incorporating changes and innovations developed by young worker groups into the established methods the labor movement has used successfully in the past;
- Adapting the culture of the labor movement to be welcoming to young people;
- Developing ways to greatly increase the size and impact of young worker groups;
- Finding the best ways to coordinate the work of labor body-based young worker groups with those of affiliates; and
- Coordinating the work of young worker groups with other AFL-CIO initiatives such as Working America at local and regional levels.

Use regional labor education centers to help start or strengthen young worker groups.

University-based labor education centers can serve as valuable resources that provide:

- Neutral spaces and context for convening activists and pulling people together;
- Assistance with the design and facilitation of meetings and conferences that are energized and highly interactive;
- Training on both skills and “big picture” perspectives for younger and older workers alike;
- Technical support; and
- Links to university industrial relations and labor studies programs.

SECTION 6

Conclusion

YOUNG WORKERS BRING ENERGY, VITALITY AND CREATIVITY TO THEIR EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF WORKERS.



The research team was heartened by what we observed and learned about the young worker groups we studied. These emerging organizations, along with parallel formations within union affiliates, represent a hopeful and potentially significant development. If these groups grow, evolve, and spread, they promise to make a significant contribution to rebuilding organized labor—especially as a powerful social movement of working people. Young worker organizations can produce a cadre of diverse labor leaders with extensive connections to community activism who are skilled in both old and new ways for mobilizing workers and running organizations.

The next few years will determine whether the initial and modest young worker groups of today grow into a significant and lasting part of the labor movement. Existing groups face challenges

in sustaining themselves and expanding their work over the long term. At the same time, the number of such groups needs to expand substantially if young worker groups are to make a greater impact. The labor movement must provide support to existing and new groups and to help develop the core relationships that are keys to their success. Most importantly, the labor movement needs a strategic plan that integrates young worker activism as a core part of the basic work to rebuild organized labor.

With more support and resources, additional guidance and leadership, and greater strategic coherence, these and other young worker groups may be well positioned to contribute in meaningful ways to the revitalization of a more inclusive, dynamic and effective labor movement in the United States.

APPENDIX

Interview List

Baltimore

- Ernie Grecco, president of the Metropolitan Baltimore Council of AFL-CIO Unions
- Jessica Ingerick, Young Trade Unionists board member; American Income Life/OPEIU Local 277
- Cory McCray, organizer, IBEW District 4; founding board chair, Young Trade Unionists
- Michael Smith, president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Local 176; council secretary-treasurer

Colorado

- Vicki Harris, internal organizer, SEIU Local 105; member, Colorado Youth Project
- Sara Kuntzler, political director, Denver Area Labor Federation; member, Colorado Youth Project
- Matt McAuliffe, NPMHU Local 321; member, Colorado Youth Project
- Zack Mischo, steward NPMHU Local 321; member, Colorado Youth Project

Massachusetts and Greater Boston Labor Council

- Richard Rogers, executive secretary-treasurer, Greater Boston Labor Council
- Rosa Blumenfeld, organizer, GBLC
- Jim Snow, regional director, AFL-CIO
- Allison Doherty-LaCasse, Boston Teachers Union; chair, GBLC Futures Committee
- Justin Desmond, IUPAT DC 35; chair, Futures Political Action Subcommittee
- Marlishia Aho, SEIU 1199 Massachusetts; chair, Futures Media and Messaging Subcommittee
- Mike Romani, Carmen's Union Local 589; chair, Futures Education Subcommittee
- David McConnell, IUOE Local 877; chair, Futures Organizing and Mobilizing Subcommittee
- Katie Belgard, SEIU 1199 Massachusetts; Futures Committee activist
- John Doherty, IUPAT DC 35; Futures Committee activist

- Patrick Reardon, LIUNA Local 22; Futures Committee activist
- David Minasian, Community Labor United; Futures Committee activist
- Nick Smith, SEIU Local 1100 Massachusetts; Futures Committee activist
- Jeremy Shenk, Community Labor United; Futures Committee activist
- Ben Kuss, SEIU Local 615; Futures Committee activist
- Hillary Kramer, IATSE Local 11; Futures Committee activist
- Al Vega, Mass COSH/USW Local 9358; Futures Committee activist
- Nancy Luc, Mass COSH/USW Local 9358; Futures Committee activist
- Eric Adbon, IBEW Local 103; Futures Committee activist
- Dave Commorford, IBEW Local 103; Futures Committee activist
- Tyrek Lee, SEIU 1199 Massachusetts; Futures Committee activist
- Shaunequa Davis, SEIU 1199 Massachusetts; Futures Committee activist
- Safanya Seakcu, SEIU Local 615; Futures Committee activist

Massachusetts AFL-CIO

- Steve Tolman, president, Massachusetts AFL-CIO
- Chris Niles, chief of staff, Massachusetts AFL-CIO
- Tim Sullivan, legislative and communications director, Massachusetts AFL-CIO
- Allison Doherty-LaCasse, Boston Teachers Union; former chair, Massachusetts AFL-CIO Futures Committee
- Matt Marfione, UWUA Local 369; Local Union Young Workers adviser and Futures Committee activist
- Paul Feeney, IBEW Local 2222; Futures Committee activist
- Dan Manning, AFSCME Local 1242; Futures Committee activist

Oregon

- Barbara Byrd, Oregon AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer
- Tom Chamberlain, Oregon AFL-CIO president
- Roger Gayton, IATSE Local 28 vice president
- Chris Hewitt, Oregon AFL-CIO organizer
- Leah Okin, YELL activist; IATSE Local 28 executive board
- Stephanie Patrico, YELL vice chair; United Farm Workers organizer
- Ron Rodgers, USW staff representative District 12
- Amanda Schroeder, YELL activist; AFGE National Women's advisory coordinator District 11; AFGE 2nd vice president, Local 2157
- Jaimie Sorenson, YELL activist; AFSCME Council 75 staff representative
- Graham Trainor, Oregon AFL-CIO political director

Rochester

- Tim Barbetto, delegate, Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation (Teamsters)
- Jim Bertolone, president, Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation (APWU)
- Christopher Brancato, recording secretary, UAW Local 1097
- Zola Brown, SEIU
- Peg Capuano, local president, Social Workers/CWA
- Sean D'Angelo, shop chair, UAW Local 1097
- Linda Donahue, senior extension associate, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations
- Gretchen Freudenvoll, member, Rochester NGU
- Julie Garrett, member, Social Workers/CWA; member and organizing committee chair, Rochester NGU
- Lynn Giglio, member, UAW Local 1097; president, Rochester NGU

- Tom Gillet, treasurer, Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation (NYSUT NEA/AFT)
- Michelle Hundley, vice president, Rochester NGU
- TJ Irons, member, SEIU; activist, Rochester NGU
- Rebecca Newberry, former Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation staffer and initial facilitator of NGU
- Colin O'Malley, organizing director, Rochester Metro Justice
- Aron Reina, lead field organizer, Rochester-Genesee Valley Area Labor Federation
- Shirley Sobczak, organizer, Rochester Regional Joint Board, Workers United/SEIU
- Bill Young, member IBEW; member, Rochester NGU

San Francisco

- Conny Ford, OPEIU Local 3; board member Young Workers United
- Ramneek Saini, San Francisco Labor Council
- Sonia Bustamante, California Federation of Labor
- Sonya Mehta, co-founder, Young Workers United
- Tim Paulson, San Francisco Labor Council

San Jose

- Cindy Chavez, executive officer, South Bay Labor Council
- Elaine Harris, executive assistant to Cindy Chavez
- Derecka Mehrens, organizing director, South Bay Labor Council
- Anna Schlotz, lead organizer, South Bay Labor Council; president, Next Generation Bay Area
- Jamie Chen, organizer, South Bay Labor Council; board member, Next Generation Bay Area

AFL-CIO

RICHARD L. TRUMKA
President

ELIZABETH H. SHULER
Secretary-Treasurer

ARLENE HOLT BAKER
Executive Vice President

815 16th St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
202-637-5000
www.aflcio.org