

How Do We Form a Union?

With the passage of higher education collective bargaining legislation by the Wisconsin State Legislature, a number of academic staff and faculty have had questions on the procedure for forming a union. What follows is a brief explanation of the process needed to successfully organize a union on your campus.

- The first step to successfully organizing a union on your campus is to start talking with other faculty and academic staff about the union. You should use these conversations to identify colleagues who are interested in participating in an organizing committee on your campus. This committee should be composed of people dedicated to the creation of a union on that campus. The organizing committee is essential because it will be tasked with guiding the organizing process on that campus in collaboration with AFT-Wisconsin organizing staff.
- After organizing conversations with academic staff and faculty colleagues, the union organizing committee will need to determine if we are moving ahead with a combined academic staff and faculty bargaining unit or separate bargaining units for the faculty and academic staff. Under the new legislation, the decision to unionize together or separately is one that is left to the members.
- Once the organizing committee, working with the AFT-Wisconsin organizing staff, has gauged that there is substantial support for a union on campus, they will distribute union authorization cards to eligible academic staff and faculty. These cards will indicate that members of the campus bargaining unit want the union to represent them in collective bargaining. Authorization cards will be distributed, collected, and securely stored by the union. Management will not have access to these cards or know that you have even signed a card.
- Under the new law, once the union has collected authorization cards from 30% of the members of each bargaining unit, it can submit those cards to the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission (WERC) and petition for a union election. In order to ensure solid support for a unionization effort on campus, AFT-Wisconsin will not file cards with the WERC until a much higher percentage of faculty and academic staff bargaining unit members have signed cards.
- The WERC will review the petition for election from the union and, in consultation with the union and UW administration, determine the appropriate composition of the bargaining unit. Supervisory, managerial, or confidential employees will not be included in the bargaining unit.
- When the appropriate bargaining unit is set, the WERC will schedule an election for union representation and notify all bargaining unit members of the date, time, and place for the election. A simple majority of people voting in the election will determine whether or not collective bargaining becomes a reality at that campus.
- After the union wins the election, preparation for bargaining a contract will begin immediately. The union will survey faculty and academic staff about what issues they would most like to see included in a first contract. The union and the institution will sit down and negotiate over salaries, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment. Once a tentative contract agreement is reached between the institution and union, the union membership will vote on contract ratification and the Joint Committee on Employment Relations (JCOER) and the Wisconsin State Legislature will vote on accepting the agreement.
- Want to know more? Contact AFT-Wisconsin's organizing department at 608-662-1444.