
Organizing requires measuring participation: How to implement structure tests in the university setting

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Abstract

In a workplace context, structure tests are strategic actions that measure the participation levels of rank-and-file members and test whether they are ready to take job action. This article reflects on the lessons the Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa (APUO) learned in adapting the organizing model in the context of a large, research-intensive university in Canada, and in particular the importance of measuring participation in structure tests. It identifies several key challenges: how to marshal the requisite resources, which tools to use to measure member participation, and how to share information in a manner that keeps workplace leaders engaged and organizers accountable but respects privacy.

Keywords structure tests, union organizing, measuring participation

L'organisation nécessite de mesurer la participation : comment mettre en place des tests de structure en milieu universitaire

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Résumé

Dans un milieu de travail, les tests de structure sont des actions stratégiques qui permettent d'évaluer le niveau de participation des membres de la base et de vérifier s'ils sont prêts à entreprendre des moyens de pression. Cet article examine les enseignements tirés par l'Association des professeur.e.s de l'Université d'Ottawa (APUO) lors de l'adaptation du modèle d'organisation au contexte d'une grande université canadienne axée sur la recherche, et en particulier l'importance de mesurer la participation au moyen de tests de structure. Il identifie plusieurs défis majeurs : comment mobiliser les ressources nécessaires, quels outils utiliser pour mesurer la participation des membres, et comment partager l'information de manière à maintenir la mobilisation des responsables syndicaux en milieu de travail et l'obligation de rendre compte des organisateurs, tout en respectant la vie privée.

Mots-clés tests de structure, organisation syndicale, mesurer la participation

Introduction

In the 2024-2026 round of bargaining, the Association of Professors of the University of Ottawa (APUO) achieved historic gains for our union and for the university sector in Canada. We would not have achieved these gains without organizing.

First, we secured language in the agreement guaranteeing a minimum staffing level in the agreement, otherwise known as ‘complement,’ which is fundamental to address questions related to the quality of education and workload since our members’ working conditions are our students’ learning conditions. Second, we achieved workload parity across faculties, which required a reduction in the baseline teaching workload from five courses to four for the faculties of Education, Arts, and Management. Third, we established a new pathway that allows fixed-term replacement professors to request a conversion to a teaching-intensive position after seven consecutive years of service.

None of this would have been possible without structure tests, and in particular the strong strike vote. In mid-November 2024, 80% of APUO members voted 81% in favour of a strike. While 81% support is not the highest strike mandate in the sector, this result was still impressive for at least two reasons. First, the University of Ottawa is a large comprehensive university with professional schools, which means that our working conditions vary more across faculties compared to some smaller universities where it is generally easier to achieve high participation and stronger strike mandates. Second, and most importantly, compared to the APUO’s 2013 strike vote — when 59% of our members turned up in person to vote 81% in favour — the employer had not tabled any major concessions this round, meaning that the APUO was setting the bargaining agenda.

In this article, I describe the steps we at the APUO took to plan and implement structure tests in this recent round of bargaining, with a focus on explaining how and why we measured the data on member participation using charts and a database. I also offer some critical reflections on how some of the lessons we learned from Jane McAlevey’s Organizing for Power (O4P) training and how tactics described in the training can be adapted to the university setting. The lessons herein are intended mostly for activists in academic staff unions with large memberships (500+ members), although some will apply to smaller workplaces as well.

At the time of writing, the APUO is the certified bargaining agent for 1,335 members in 10 different faculties spread across three campuses located in Ottawa, Ontario. During the lead-up to ratification of the 2024-2026 collective agreement, I led the organizing strategy as co-chair of the Contract Action Team (CAT) in my capacity as Past President (2022-2024).¹ This article is based on that experience.

This article is structured as follows. First, I describe what McAlevey means by structure tests and distinguish between the service and organizing models of trade unionism. Second, I provide a brief history of the APUO. Third, I describe the steps we took to implement structure tests in the bargaining round that resulted in the 2024-2026 agreement, including the lessons we learned, followed by a brief conclusion.

Structure tests and the organizing model

Jane McAlevey (2020) stresses the value of structure tests as a methodical way to gauge and enhance the power and democracy within a union or organizing campaign. Structure tests are strategic actions that measure both the strength of union democracy and the participation levels of the rank and file. These tests assess the readiness and capacity of members to act collectively, building up support step-by-step through an escalation of tactics dubbed the “ladder of participation” in Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) training materials.

A structure test is a way to understand how strong the membership is before making a major move, like a strike. Structure tests help organizers identify where levels of power and commitment exist and where they remain to be built. Examples of structure tests suitable for the university setting include surveys of members (see Rutherford et al., this volume), poster campaigns, petitions, marches or rallies, and organizing days where every member wears the same colour or a button at work.

Structure tests are a key tactic that differentiates between “structure-based organizing,” which involves engaging everyone in the relevant population with rigorous outreach to build majorities and supermajorities, versus “self-selection” or mobilizing strategies where only already committed or active members participate. This distinction helps avoid overestimating support and ensures broad, democratic engagement.

Conducting multiple structure tests over time allows organizers to identify weaknesses, improve strategies, build trust, and tighten leadership networks by

focusing on organic leaders who influence their peers, including those who might initially be disengaged, skeptical, undecided, or who haven't yet seen their interests reflected in the union's work. The process is about building an inclusive and resilient structure rather than mobilizing from a narrow base.

The strike is the ultimate structure test, and McAlevy calls it the highest form of collective action that tests and confirms the strength and unity that have been built through previous structure tests. Winning depends on having systematically built that base of power through repeated, escalating tests. Overall, McAlevy's structure tests are rigorous, continuous, research-driven practices designed to reveal real power levels, build majority support democratically, and prepare for decisive collective actions, contrasting with more superficial or sporadic forms of activism.

Structure tests are key activities that put the "organizing model" of trade unionism into action. The organizing model is best understood in contrast with the service model of unionism, as described in Table 1.

Table 1: Organizing vs. service model

	Organizing model	Service model
Attitude toward employer	Defending members is most important.	Good relationship with management is most important.
Attitude toward members	Inclusive. Tries to reflect workforce in composition of union leadership.	Exclusive. Little turnover in leadership. Suspicious of newcomers.
Bargaining	Large bargaining committee, constant flow of information to members.	Small committee, negotiations often kept secret until a settlement is reached.
Strategy and tactics	Encourage initiative and creativity of members.	Reluctant to involve members in bringing pressure on employer.
Members' view of the union	Take personal responsibility for success or failure of the union.	An insurance policy or a "third party" to call on when they have a problem.

Source: Adapted from the Massachusetts Nurses Association (n.d.).

It is important to emphasize that these two models are not strict dichotomies but rather a continuum. For example, when a member calls the union with an issue they have at the workplace, the union should answer that call. Under the organizing model, however, the union should not act like a business such as an insurance company that simply “fixes” problems on demand but instead works proactively to build collective power and address issues together. This approach reinforces that unions are democratic organizations that depend on members’ active engagement.

Most academic staff unions, like the APUO, find that they are somewhere in between these two models. Since building power at the bargaining table depends on building member power, however, unions inspired by the organizing model are better positioned to win gains even in the context of mounting austerity. Drawing on this approach, they can also advance more ambitious and expansive agendas, including forms of “bargaining for the common good,” in which unions table proposals that benefit the wider community (Savage, 2022).

The context for the 2024-2026 round of bargaining

The APUO has been a certified union since 1975. Our first collective agreement took force on May 1, 1976. For the first 35+ years of our existence, like most academic staff associations, the APUO operated strictly on the service model. We slowly began to change as working conditions in our sector deteriorated with declining public funding and the contracting out of our work to swelling numbers of precarious staff (Heron, 2015). For years, APUO leadership seldom uttered the word ‘strike’ and even threatened to withdraw from the CAUT Defence Fund on the grounds that the union would never take job action because of the then-leadership’s interpretation of a clause in the APUO collective agreement that reads as follows: “The Parties agree that there shall be no strike or lockout on the grounds of any dispute on a matter dealing with compensation or benefits” (Article 4.3.2).

New leadership elected in the early 2010s that had a more political orientation and experience with electoral campaigns started to change the culture of the union. In the round of bargaining leading up to the historic 2012-2016 collective agreement, the executive at the time restructured the staff and hired an external, labour-side law firm to clarify that we could strike as long as we also had ‘non-monetary’ issues on the table, which include questions related to workload, governance, equity, and so on. To prepare for this round of bargaining, the APUO took the unprecedented and important step of presenting the bargaining mandate to the General Assembly,

subjecting to a vote the principles that shaped the bargaining proposals, and sending regular updates to the membership about what was happening at the table.

The bargaining round leading to the 2012-2016 agreement turned out to be much more difficult than anticipated. Late into the bargaining process, when we exchanged monetary proposals, the employer tabled a proposal to claw back our pension. In the middle of the summer, the APUO organized our first-ever strike vote on July 31, 2013. As previously noted, just 59% of members turned out in person to vote, with 81% in favour of a strike. In the provincially mandated conciliation session, the employer backed down on its pension proposal. As part of that deal, we signed a Letter of Understanding that guaranteed a minimum complement and made important gains for precarious members in the teaching-intensive stream.

In subsequent years, the APUO took further steps to implement the organizing model. In 2017, the APUO endorsed the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association's (OCUFA) "Countdown to Strong" as an approach, but we lacked the tools to know how to organize effectively. Members of the executive learned about new tactics and strategies from training sessions with CAUT and Organizing for Power, a free, multilingual, global training program that popularized some of the lessons and tactics described by Jane McAlevey. However, in these initial sessions, only one to three people from the APUO executive and staff attended any given training.

We began to prepare for the 2024-2026 round of bargaining in the Fall 2022 semester, about a year and a half before the expiry of our collective agreement on April 30, 2024. We entered this round of bargaining fully aware that the bargaining context we faced was difficult due to the continual deterioration of the provincial funding environment but also sensing that we had an opportunity. Many of our members were very angry at the central administration because of a recently imposed hiring freeze, the implementation of a disastrous human resources management software called Workday, and the growing resentment against a university president who was several years into his term and presiding over a weak administration wracked by scandal.

We sensed we had an opportunity but knew that implementing the organizing model meant investing more resources in organizing and trying new tactics.

First, in the summer of 2023, a key organizer with the Brock University Faculty Association (BUFA) shared the draft of their organizing guide that broke down the

steps for organizing in a large university (Savage et al., 2023). The guide's step-by-step breakdown of the organizing process helped boost our confidence that these tactics would work and answered many of our questions.

Second, the APUO decided to hire a staff organizer. Although it might seem counter-intuitive to hire staff to support the organizing model, we thought carefully about which tasks would be assigned to the organizer and which responsibilities needed to remain with members. In a member-driven union, a staff person's role is not to do the work for the members but enable members' participation and collective action. The staff organizer's duties included research, data entry, list management to measure member-participation and identify less engaged units, preparing materials for 'training the trainers' on skills such as how to have one-on-one conversations and picket captain training, organizing meetings, assisting leaders in engaging with colleagues on the importance of member participation, and keeping elected leaders and members on track. The staff organizer did not make decisions for or alongside members in committee meetings but rather helped inform decision-making when asked or necessary. Additionally, rather than facilitating trainings, the staff organizer acted as a resource person instead of the primary facilitator. It is important for elected leaders and members to take on these member-facing roles such as making decisions and facilitating trainings of colleagues. As noted by Savage et al. (2023), the work of the staff organizer could also be done by a member who is compensated adequately with course releases provided they have the requisite skills.

Third, and as noted above, large numbers of the executive, staff, and a handful of general members attended the O4P training in May 2024, including the new staff organizer. As Past President, I was able to recruit a large number of people to attend the training since I had taken an O4P training and I could describe its contents and convince others of the potential benefit to our organization. In addition, it helped that OCUFA and CAUT have been promoting O4P in addition to their own training and amplifying the message that the 'organizing model' is necessary to protect and defend our sector. This collective experience gave us many new ideas and helped change our conversations around strategy and tactics. It also helped to develop a new culture and collective identity amongst the leadership of our union. In debriefing sessions, APUO executive members and staff reported that they found the semantics exercise particularly powerful. This exercise challenges participants to rewrite a series of sentences that describe issues confronting workers, avoiding the words "we" and "the union," and instead using the language to emphasize worker ownership and agency. Working through such an

exercise helped many of us realize how we inadvertently teach members to treat the union as a 'third party' (e.g. by thanking them) rather than as a collective they are responsible for.

How we won

In this section, I describe the steps that we took to enable us to execute, measure, and report on structure tests that won us key demands at the bargaining table:

1) how we tested workplace leaders and built an ever-expanding communications network we called a "team," 2) the database, and 3) the wall charts.

Contract Action Team

With our collective agreement expiring on April 30, 2024, we at APUO started recruiting for our Contract Action Team more than a year in advance. The executive and board of directors approved the terms of reference in late 2022 and early 2023, and I extended the first invitations to members to join the CAT in February 2023. We held our first meeting in May 2023. Borrowing language from the organizing guide developed by BUFA activists, the terms of reference for the CAT state that its role is to:

- Map the workplace and keep this information updated
- Build and test the APUO's informal communications network
- Broaden the base of bargaining by organizing and mobilizing members through structure tests and other activities

The APUO has a board of directors (BOD) (also known as a "steward's council" in other unions) composed of representatives elected by peers at the department and faculty level. In the 2024-2026 bargaining round, the CAT began as a formal committee composed of eight members that drew from the 50 or so members of the BOD as well as the general membership. But as we added more workplace leaders to the team, it branched out to become an informal communications network. Inspired by the spoke model described by Savage et al. (2023), we aimed to create a ratio of one 'workplace leader' to every 10 workers. As I describe in more detail below, we were able to continually expand this communications structure by organizing small group meetings (i.e. no more than 10 people at a time) with members of the CAT, BOD and as well other members willing to do the work of spreading the news about a structure test in their department or faculty. By the time of our final structure test (the strike vote), we estimate that we recruited

around 80 workplace leaders, which is shy of the ideal ratio but provides a solid base upon which we hope to build in future rounds.

The database

The APUO Administrative Director set up a password-protected database that included all active members of the APUO. This database had members' full names and what department and/or faculty they are a part of, as well as their basic contact information, university emails, and, later in the bargaining process, workplace leaders from the CAT helped to collect personal emails and mobile phone numbers provided by members.² The database also included columns for each structure test, starting with a lunch that we organized in December 2022 to start conversations to help set the bargaining mandate. Access to the database was strictly controlled. Since this was the first time that the APUO was measuring information and sharing it back with workplace leaders, this approach provided a level of security that assured naysayers who were nervous about protecting privacy.

The wall charts

Structure tests are actions that involve all members of a given 'structure,' whether that be a union in a workplace, tenants of a building, or members of a faith group. Structure tests are essential to the organizing model since they can be measured and charted, which is the only way to know if our organizing is effective. Charts are visible tools that help leaders share information, report on progress, create accountability and build momentum in a bargaining campaign.

Drawing from examples provided at the O4P training, our staff organizer took the initiative in June 2024 to create large wall charts organized by academic units (e.g. departments and faculties) that he pinned to the walls of his office. He wrote the names of over 1,200 members *by hand*. Although doing this work took several hours, it was worth it. In the process of writing, he learned our members' names, key knowledge for an organizer! We used different coloured dots for each mobilizing activity and structure test to measure participation.

The wall charts provided a visual tool to help us quickly see where we were strong and where we still had work to do. For example, after a couple of weeks of rolling out one of our structure tests (a petition) we still had gaps. We invited members of the executive team to the office to identify individuals they might know across the university who could help continue building the CAT and circulating the petition.

We already had a database, but having a visual cue like a wall chart, especially for a large membership like ours where the information would be spread across several Excel sheets, creates an impressive visual cue that helped to inspire activists, build power, and keep the organizing team accountable. It was a lot of work to update the database and the charts, but it was worth it to do both, especially since we had staff support. Here digital tools facilitated our organizing work. The staff organizer would mostly use the database when rolling out a structure test and update the chart once finished. To inform a workplace leader about their unit's level of participation, the staff organizer would send a photograph of the section of the chart that measured participation.

Challenges implementing structure tests in the university setting

Implementing the organizing model takes resources. Adapting the tactics we learned in the O4P training also required creative thinking. The O4P training draws many of its examples from workplaces where members work in person and on shifts. In this section, I discuss the lessons that we learned about structure tests in a large university setting and discuss three of the challenges that activists and leaders may face: how to organize in a fragmented workplace, how to muster the resources necessary, and how to share information in a way that protects privacy but does not impede our progress.

Fragmented workplace

Geography and the labour process significantly affect strategies for organizing workers. Geographic factors, including the concentration or dispersion of workers, affect our capacity to connect and cultivate a collective identity. Historically, dense, localized communities of workers fostered enhanced class consciousness and union organization through daily interactions and shared social environments (Blanc, 2025; Ross & Savage, 2021). Conversely, dispersed workforces across wider geographic areas require new organizing strategies that are more spread out, digitally enabled, and able to create solidarity across fragmented spaces.

Common to most academic staff, APUO members tend to work more than 35 hours a week, but the part of our work that brings us into contact with each other (e.g., teaching and administrative work) represents a minority fraction. Some of us might see each other once a week, once a month, once a semester, or never. In addition, in any given year, we can expect that about 1/7 of our colleagues are on academic

leave. At the University of Ottawa, we face some additional challenges. APUO members do not live in the same neighbourhoods; we do not even live in the same province. Around 65% of APUO members live in Ontario; 35% live in Quebec. Some units are fragmented by linguistic divides.

Given the fragmented nature of our labour processes, workplaces, and communities, we learned to adapt the lessons from O4P to our context. Organizing processes in the university setting tend to be slower than in an industrial setting like a factory or a hospital where workers have shifts or a school where teachers show up for work in person every day.

Academic staff unions should consider designing structure tests that take place over a few weeks and can be adapted to remote work settings. While the O4P training stresses that face-to-face forms of organizing might lead to better outcomes, this objective is impossible to achieve when work moves online and members live in different locations (see Rutherford et al., this volume).

In sum, a strong structure test in a large university meets the following criteria:

- Every member has the opportunity and ability to participate
- Participation is easily measurable
- It unfolds over a number of weeks

Ideally, towards the end of the bargaining process, as the union is gaining strength, a structure test should also meet a fourth criterion:

- The result is visible to the employer

Since our members have conflicting schedules in our fragmented workplaces (both in terms of scheduling and location of work, including different campuses and remote work), we found that structure tests that could be effectively executed through email, such as a petition, a letter-writing campaign, or a strike mandate vote, will be structure tests in which we expected a higher participation rate compared to a poster campaign, a BBQ, a rally, or even a meeting. All these activities may be important (e.g., union meetings where key decisions are made are crucial), but it is important to evaluate how much impact any given activity will have versus how much time and effort is required to organize it.

Investing in organizing

One of the most formidable challenges facing members of academic staff unions embarking on the organizing model is the question of resources, especially time, since most academic staff are overworked.

The only way to scale up organizing in a large university setting is to build the Contract Action Team and get activists and workplace leaders involved in planning and executing structure tests. As noted, structure tests are activities that are used to gauge the readiness of members to participate in a collective action, but they are also ways to test how effectively and efficiently a worker identified as an organic leader can move a majority of the colleagues in their unit to do a public, and therefore higher-risk, action by increasingly challenging tests (Savage et al., 2023).

To plan and refine our structure tests, our staff organizer and team would set up a series of 30-minute Zoom meetings at different times during the week. We organized three or four of these before launching each structure test. Around three to six members would show up at each session; we capped registration at 10 to allow for small group discussion. The staff organizer would also follow up with any workplace leader who couldn't attend any of these small meetings. As noted above, we used this method to build the CAT communications network.

We found this method a very time-efficient way to communicate with a subset of engaged activists and workplace leaders and increase the likelihood that they would follow through with the test. These meetings created spaces where members could help each other solve problems and craft their messaging. We also used these meetings to enhance the two-way communication flow between the workplace leaders and the executive.

It is important to test your workplace leaders. For one of our early structure tests — the petition — we made a conscious decision not to send the information to our members via our usual communication channel, the electronic newsletter. Rather, we mounted the petition on an electronic platform and linked to it on our website, but we introduced the idea at a meeting of the board of directors, shared it with workplace leaders beyond the board during these short meetings, and sent it via personal emails to the members of the BOD and the CAT using the mail merge function to personalize the message.

We set internal deadlines, and over the course of a few weeks, the staff organizer would share information with workplace leaders about which members in their unit had signed, encouraging them to speak to a few more if participation was weak.

After a few weeks of report-backs with workplace leaders, we shared the petition on our listserv, which bumped up the participation rate by a few percent.

Through these methods, 74% of active APUO members signed the petition, which our negotiating team delivered to the employer at the bargaining table in November 2024. We also held a press conference and posted the group photo of all the members that attended to our social media.

The CAT is not a cheerleading squad but a sounding board that supports genuine two-way communication. In one 30-minute Zoom meeting, for example, a member's suggestion prompted the executive to reconsider a planned action: a letter to the Board of Governors about the quality of education that we intended APUO members to sign and circulate to their students. The member argued that if students were being asked to sign, the letter should be a joint statement co-signed by one of the students' unions.

The APUO contacted the University of Ottawa Students' Union (UOSU), the largest union on campus. We already had a strong working relationship with the UOSU thanks to our cross-campus inter-union coalition. While co-drafting the letter took a few weeks, it was worth it. The UOSU produced a short Instagram video to promote the letter, which featured two members of our executive who described how our demands mattered to students and explained what it would mean for them if we went on strike. The UOSU released the video a few days before we were scheduled to meet with the employer in conciliation in mid-January 2025. The video received 15,000 views. It is likely one of the main reasons we got a fair deal.

Information sharing

Union power cannot be built without having a high level of transparency and sharing information with members. As Jane McAlevey (2020) notes, workplace leaders are more likely to join if they know that you have a credible plan to win. It is also important to include as many members as possible in strategy discussions. Members must perceive that they have access to decision-making processes and can actively contribute to the development of union campaigns.

We found that one of the most difficult internal conversations we had about how to implement the organizing model was deciding how much and with whom to share information about collective actions. Skeptical members who are new to the organizing model often pushed back, saying that measuring participation in structure tests is a form of 'surveillance.'

Following McAlevey's advice, we decided that it is important to share information about bargaining objectives and organizing goals broadly. Increased member awareness of the union's goals is the only way to build power.³ Transparency and information sharing fosters participation, builds momentum, and helps prevent the employer from dividing us. A union characterized by openness, democracy, and transparency is robust; it enables members to engage actively, fostering a sense of collective strength and empowerment.

While members have a right to privacy, a culture of secrecy can undermine organizing efforts, creating unnecessary barriers to participation and fostering suspicion instead of solidarity. Secrecy diminishes our collective effectiveness since it can exacerbate feelings of individualism and alienation among members, resulting in decreased participation. Secrecy also contributes to employer narratives. Employers frequently employ secrecy to portray unions as conspiratorial or disconnected from reality. Transparency in our actions reinforces our position as a democratic entity that embodies the collective will of our members.

In any case, in the university setting, it is likely that the employer is already aware of many of our union activities. We can be fairly certain that at least one member who attended a general meeting is reporting to the boss. Transparency, not confidentiality, is one source of our strength. Although an organizing drive to establish a new union may need to maintain higher a level of secrecy, for those of us who are already members of certified bargaining units, we should push to normalize discussions about unions in the workplace; union activism should not be perceived as a covert endeavour. It should be integrated into routine workplace discussions. Union work is work (see Rutherford et al., this volume).

Adopting a new strategy and trying new tactics are processes, however, and it may be unwise to implement all elements of the 'organizing model' in a short period of time. As noted above, at the APUO we have implemented some baby steps, such as creating a password-protected database and allowing access to that information to a subset of members that has been approved by the board.

Conclusion

The best structure tests in a large university setting that will be the most impactful are activities that can be easily decentralized, require the active participation of members involved in an ever-expanding communications network, and occur over a few weeks. As the bargaining campaign gains momentum and the union gains strength, structure tests that are likely to have high participation and are visible to the employer are the most effective.

In this recent round of bargaining, it was our first time implementing structure tests. We learned many lessons, but a couple are key.

First, you can never know *which* structure test was the one that finally moved your employer. As one of the CAUT organizing staff put it, “it is not what you have just done that the employer is scared of; it is not knowing what you will do next.” In our case, the employer continued to drag their heels after our November 2024 strike mandate vote, but we agreed to continue talks in conciliation scheduled for January 2025. It took the video launching the joint letter with the students and the threat of ‘no board’ in the context of conciliation to inspire the employer to offer a fair deal at the table.

Second, we activists in academic staff unions have much to learn from each other. Organizers always have something new to learn and we are always sharpening our skills. The organizing process is also never finished. It must be constantly renewed as members, leaders, and circumstances change. We at the APUO learned some lessons the hard way, but most of all we learned that no organizing process will be perfect. It is only important to be moving in the right direction. And, you will never know if a certain tactic will work unless you try.

If you want to win, organize, don’t just mobilize!

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Endnotes

¹ Due to issues with translation, at APUO we call our CAT the Collective Agreement Action Team (CAAT) but I use the more widely used definition here.

² Organizing is about building relationships; it is also about building lists. For unions and associations that do not get membership lists from the employer (e.g. a list of dues paying members), this step will take more work. Organizers in such contexts often use creative tactics to build member lists, such as reaching out to workers on the ground, copying lists from bulletin boards, or getting a list of workers (e.g. part-time professors) from administrative staff, etc.

³ Credit goes to our staff organizer, Armaan Singh, for this formulation, drawing on a guide we wrote together with Jennifer Blair, APUO Mobilization Officer from 2022 to 2025. The APUO guide is based on the BUFA one mentioned earlier.