



Women@Unions



A Template for Change Across the Australian Education Union

Prepared by the AEU
Women's Committee

September 2002

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WOMEN@UNIONS:

A TEMPLATE FOR CHANGE ACROSS THE AEU

The focus of Women @ Unions is the morphing of union structure, culture, language and practices to ensure that these truly reflect the priorities and concerns of the majority of the AEU membership, that is women.

Background:

At Federal AEU Women's Conference in 1998 it was again raised that the vast majority of members of the AEU are women and their issues should be a fundamental part of the priorities of the union.

This approach also reflects the input from members contained in two national research projects "Building the Foundations of our Future" 1999 and TAFE 2001 "Facing the Challenge". Through the two surveys key issues of concern and pertinence to women in their work and life were identified and an informed discussion has resulted within the AEU.

The 2001 Federal Women's Conference called upon the AEU to produce a document called Women@Unions which would bring a women's perspective to the ACTU document "Unions@Work, The Challenge for Unions in Creating a Just and Fair Society".

The ground work in terms of recommendations for Women@Unions was developed at the 2001 Federal Women's Conference.

This document summarises these recommendations and also lists specific actions to be taken.

Process:

Women @ Unions is written to be a working paper for Federal Executive and to be presented to each Branch/Associated Body Executive for discussion and debate.

It is envisaged that this working paper will also be distributed to each Branch/Associated Bodies Women's Committee.

At each Branch/Associated Body Women's Committee there will need to be debate, education, implementation and evaluation of this document and the recommended approaches.

Evaluation of this document and these specific, practical approaches will be reported to the Federal Women's Conference in October 2002 in order to start the evaluation of the Women@Unions document.

This is an evolving document.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS ACROSS THE FOUR STRANDS OF UNIONS@WORK

Communication for our Time

That Union communication strategies be built on the primacy of face to face communication and recognises that this is the most effective strategy for involving women.

Key Principles should include:

- diverse communication methods;
- access to resources and technology;
- offering members communication and active involvement at the workplace level.

Strength in the Workplace

That a kit will be developed for workplace representatives with templates for trade union training that positively shift union culture in the workplace. This will encompass:

- Mentoring and support;
- Culture; and
- Diversity.

Growth In New Areas

That Branches/Associated Bodies and AEU Federal Office carry out a structured plan to increase union membership amongst target groups of potential women members.

That this plan would involve a “like to like” approach and take place within paid work time to ensure the maximum effectiveness for women.

A Strong Union Voice

That campaigns and the image of the AEU should reflect women’s priorities and concerns and address a broad range of industrial, social and professional issues.

That behaviours, practices and structures that impede the process of a transparent, inclusive and democratic culture in the AEU be identified and addressed.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT WOMEN@UNIONS

1. That a checklist will be developed based on the “Choosing an Issue” Checklist from *Working Together – Recruitment in the Workplace*, Trade Union Training Authority, 1995. (Attachment 1)

Each Branch/Associated Body decision could then be measured against this checklist before final decision.

These decisions might include: budget decisions, Enterprising Bargaining Agreements and claims, campaigns, training, industrial prioritising and researching decisions.

The checklist will include that each decision /initiative should:

- meet women’s stated concerns;
 - involve women;
 - reach women;
 - recruit women;
 - increase the visibility of the Union in the workplace to women.
2. That at all levels of the AEU and Branches/Associated Bodies will develop strategies so that, elected and appointed staff and delegates will by 2006, reflect the gender proportions/make up of the population and, if greater, of the membership.

Full details are contained in the 2001 Federal Women’s Conference recommendations (Attachment 2). This working paper should be read in conjunction with these recommendations as these contain detailed strategies for implementing Women@Unions.

Checklist

Choosing an issue

Issue

Will the issue _____

Be winnable/partly winnable? _____

Be widely felt? _____

Be deeply felt? _____

Result in a real improvement? _____

Give workers a sense of their own power? _____

Be easy to understand? _____

Increase the visibility of the union? _____

Be non-divisive among workers/members? _____

Send a message to management? _____

Build union solidarity? _____

What other reasons would make this a good issue for organising?

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION UNION
AEU FEDERAL WOMEN'S CONFERENCE 2001
AMENDED DECISIONS

3. **COMMUNICATION FOR OUR TIME** (Workshop 3)

** **DECISION**

Preamble

That union communication strategies be built on the primacy of face-to-face communication.

Other communication methods can supplement but not replace face-to-face communication as the best way to built collective solidarity and activism.

1. That the AEU recognises that the key to successful communication processes within unions is to use diverse communication methods including:
 - face-to-face meetings;
 - telephone/voice-mail contact/text messaging;
 - video conferencing/Sky Channel;
 - e-mail/CD Rom;
 - fax-stream/mail-outs of written material e.g. posters, postcards, kits, newsletters, badges, stickers;
 - electronic bulletin boards/chat rooms.
2. That the AEU acknowledge the need for access for women members to the basics, in terms of resources and communication equipment and appropriate professional development (as outlined in Clause 1(a) Draft Claim for Electronic Access) but that face-to-face interaction be the preferred model of communication.
3. That in order to enhance and improve electronic communication channels Branches/Associated Bodies be requested to consider the following:
 - I. regularly update and maintain union websites including links with other relevant websites;
 - II. setting up a hotline with a recorded message in times of industrial action;
 - III. enhance membership databases to include member's personal home email addresses;

- IV. adopting the principles of the AEU Claim on Electronic Access (adopted at 2000 Federal Conference) and including in EB/Certified agreements which will enable unions to communicate with their representatives via the employer email system;
 - V. provide inter-Branch access for union officials to the “Member Only” sections of AEU Federal and Branch/Associated Body websites;
 - VI. explore the possibility of video teleconferencing for meetings and training days to increase access and participation for all members, in particular members from rural and remote areas and members with family responsibilities;
 - VII. provision of CD Rom versions of Union materials i.e. union reps. kit, women’s contact kit.
4. That AEU encourage Branches/Associated Bodies to strengthen communication at the workplace to empower members to participate actively in union activities.
- That Branches/Associated Bodies be encouraged to consider providing communication skills training as part of Trade Union Training.
5. That Branches/Associated Bodies consider the following specific strategies:
- friendly pickets;
 - get in the ‘loop’ (networks within workplaces or communities/regions);
 - email website URL to all members (e.g. annually);
 - hotlines/phone-trees
 - time at staff meetings;
 - share union jobs around at workplace;
 - maintain union notice board and include photo of rep. and other union posters;
 - social functions in lieu of standard union meetings;
 - special-interest sub-branches;
 - celebrate successes of union through development of appropriate material e.g. posters, stickers, websites;
 - invite every member to be active;
 - provide web discussion forums i.e. bulletin boards, chat rooms, etc. to facilitate member to member communication.
6. That Branches and Associated Bodies consider campaigning for funding for up to date Computer Technology in Early Childhood centres.
7. That Branches and associated Bodies consider pursuing the AEU Draft Claim on Electronic Access in their next round of Enterprise Bargaining where this has not yet occurred.
8. That Branches/Associated Bodies be requested to report back to the 2002 Federal Women’s Conference on progress of recommendations.

4. STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE (Workshop 1)

** DECISION

That the Federal Office in conjunction with Branches/Associated Bodies develop a kit for workplace representatives and templates for Trade Union training that positively shift union culture in the workplace. This would encompass:

- mentoring and support for members and activists – particularly women;
- developing new ways to support union representation in the workplace;
- redefining Trade Union training programmes with a strong orientation towards inclusive practices and workplace organisation and identifying good practice and success stories that model ways of organising in the workplace based on gender analysis and cultural diversity.

These developments must be part of an ongoing and dynamic process to strengthen the activism of educational unionists.

5. GROWTH IN NEW AREAS

** DECISION

That the Federal Executive endorses in principle the Action Plan and recommends it to Branches and Associated Bodies.

ACTION PLAN

That each Branch and Associated Body select one to three growth area target groups for women members, such as:

- precarious workers - those employed as relief, contract, sessional teachers or trainers across sectors particularly TAFE;
- Early Childhood Teachers;
- Beginning teachers;
- pre-service teachers;
- women in leadership positions in the AEU and Branches/Associated Bodies;
- allied non-teaching staff;
- working mothers;
- educational leadership;
- Indigenous and non-English speaking women.

That each Branch/Associated Body consider appointing a paid organiser from each of the selected growth area target group(s) for up to 12 months.

That this person's role be to establish an Activist Committee for the target growth area. This Activist Committee should include indigenous women, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

That the Activist Committee surveys potential members and members from target group(s) to identify priority issues for these potential members and what prevents them from joining the union. It is believed that this work should be done by the Activist Committee in paid work time.

That the union pays for relief so that the Activist Committee can meet and work in paid work time (or paid union education leave is used if available).

That best practice examples are collected, developed and shared across Branches/Associated Bodies by the paid organiser working in the target growth area.

That a Federally organised and funded campaign be instituted based on top priorities as identified by the activist committees.

Required Additional Actions:

1. That Branches and Associated Bodies be urged to pursue as a matter of importance Paid Union Education Leave and it becomes a top priority in bargaining, where this does not already exist or is not already the case.
2. That at all levels of the AEU and Branches and Associated Bodies strategies are developed for elected and appointed staff and delegates to achieve the gender representation of the membership by 2006.
3. That the AEU and Branches and Associated Bodies identify and implement actions to enable women to take up leadership positions in the profession.
4. That pre-service teachers are offered free Associate Memberships where this is not the case.
5. That the AEU and Branches and Associated Bodies set a target for resource allocation to recruitment and retention of members as recommended in the Unions@Work document. That Branches and Associated Bodies consider setting this figure at 30% of Branch and Associated Bodies resources.

6. A STRONG UNION VOICE (Workshop 4)

** **DECISION**

That Branches/Associated Bodies consider the following:

Action 1:

That the AEU reflects in its image a commitment to social justice through activism.

- Develop a strong media presence across sectors.
- Have a range of faces and voices which reflect diversity within and amongst groups.

Action 2:

Campaigns should reflect women's priorities and address a broad range of industrial, social and professional issues.

- campaigns to be developed in consultation with members;
- provide for a variety of actions, activities and strategies that acknowledge member's different skills and time constraints;
- allow members to generate their own activities and be supported by union resources as appropriate to union policies and principles;
- connect with community bodies as appropriate and build alliances;
- value a range of actions as effective/valid, both political and industrial.

Action 3:

Identify and address behaviours that impede the process of a transparent, inclusive and democratic culture in the AEU.

- Encourage Branches and Associated Bodies to identify and address behaviours such as:
 - Bullying
 - Apathy
 - Negativity and cynicism
 - Isolation behaviours left out of the loop, privileged information, dismissive of others views, undermining, ownership, not valuing ideas
 - Lack of debate
 - Hidden agendas
 - Trivialising views of others
 - Belligerence and intimidation
 - Monopolising debate

- Only allowing for one form of debate, e.g., very big meetings, over-formal procedures
 - Top-down communication, being told, not asked or actively encouraged
 - Meetings not culturally inclusive
 - Gate-keeping – knowledge police
 - Informally stitching up the outcome prior to the meeting, e.g., at the pub
 - Subversive behaviours in meetings, e.g. sneers, grunts etc.
 - Valuing time served, not merit
 - Ageism
 - Sexism
 - Cronyism
 - Racism
 - Paternalism
- Establish mentor programs which identify the needs of target groups.
 - Provide maps of union structures and specific training for targeted groups on accessing these structures.
 - Ensure that caucuses and specific decision-making structures for identified groups occur are supported including financial support.
 - Use technology to provide chances to contribute.
 - Provide opportunities for job-sharing in union roles Create family-friendly environments and structures for activists and union officials.