

"a new
NTEU"



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Organizing: what is it, why is it so important, and why doesn't the NTEU do it?

Organizing in a union context has a very specific meaning.

Some important union activities that *are not* organizing include: lobbying, advocacy, postering, flyers, social media and even some meetings.

Organizing is an activity in which you convince a worker to take an action that they previously would not have taken. Typically this involves you having a conversation, perhaps several, *with someone who doesn't already agree with you*, in order to convince them to take the action. The action may be as fundamental as joining the union, or as risky as going on strike. It is only by having these interactions with workers who are not involved, and that may even disagree with us, and from fighting and actually winning material gains for tertiary education workers, that we will win them over and **grow our union's size and strength**.

If you were to ask a friend to take an action, for example to attend a rally, and you were already 99% sure they would do it because they had previously attended rallies, then this bolstering the numbers at the rally would not be organizing because the person you were talking to *didn't need to be politically moved* - they already agreed with you and just needed the suggestion. This would instead be called *mobilizing*.

If you were to talk to someone who never had never attended a rally before and you convinced them to come then you have organized them because *they are doing something they wouldn't have otherwise done* - attended a given rally or taken a given action.

The most effective form of organizing is a one-on-one conversation, which ideally takes place face-to-face. Union organizers and delegates usually need to practice these structured conversations, and the union itself needs to be committed to this approach if it is going to work.

Organizing is the process by which we *expand* that ready and willing base of workers prepared to take action, and that happens through one on one conversations. This is what successful unions are good at and right now **it is the number one most important thing our union is failing to do because our union is not set up to organize**.

What we need to do:

The NTEU has a member density below 20% for a number of external and internal reasons. Externally, neoliberalism, including the corporatization of universities and the union accords of the 80s in which unions became legalistic service unions, have had a huge negative impact felt across all Australian unions.

However, there are also internal reasons as to why our absolute numbers and density are low: despite the rhetoric of our current leaders, our union does not *organize* university workers. The NTEU does not have regular, sustained contact with workers who are not in the union with the goal of getting them to join the union. Our delegate system (the core of a strong, active union) is non-existent, with **at most 100**

active delegates in the entire country when we should have thousands. It is standard practice *not* to supply delegates with the training and resources (such as member lists) they need to successfully organize colleagues in their work area. The majority of workers in the sector have never been personally approached by a delegate or a paid organizer about joining the union.

Instead, the NTEU focuses on *mobilizing* and *advocacy*.

As mentioned above, mobilizing is getting people *who already agree with you* to take action. This is not very effective in a union with very low density and a high level of member disengagement. **Currently the NTEU tries to mobilize its low membership to take strikes, rather than organizing the unorganized workers to grow our numbers and power *before* going on strike.** They take trips to Canberra and do other various lobbying efforts, but without a strong union behind them **all this amounts to begging.**

Organizing is the way forward

It is only via a concerted change of the union's orientation, from mobilizing and advocacy towards **organizing**, that the NTEU can grow in size and strength and therefore have the ability to effectively fight for our workplace rights, whether it is negotiating a difficult Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA), to taking a majority strike where over 90% of workers are on the picket line.

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