A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Workshop

Overview
This workshop will introduce participants to *A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Everything You Need to Know to Make a Difference* by Jane LaTour, in consultation with Lois Gray and Maria Figueroa, published by the Worker Institute at the Cornell University ILR School and the Berger-Marks Foundation. This workshop will be most effective if several women from a union or organization attend the workshop together.

Objectives
At the end of the 2-hour workshop participants will have
- Examined the Guide as a tool for developing or strengthening women’s committees
- Explored what a woman’s committee could do for the union or organization
- Reviewed some steps in creating a women’s committee
- Discussed strategies for recruiting members to the organizing committee
- Practiced creating a plan to form or grow a women’s committee

Materials

**Materials needed:**
- Easel and flip chart
- Markers
- Tape
- Handouts for each participant

**Time**
2 Hours
Suggestions for shortening appear at the end of the workshop.

Other Resources
*Women’s Committees in Worker Organizations: Still Making a Difference*, Lois Gray and Maria Figueroa, The Worker Institute at the Cornell University ILR School and the Berger-Marks Foundation

*A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Everything You Need to Know to Make a Difference*, Jane LaTour with Lois Gray and Maria Figueroa, The Worker Institute at the Cornell University ILR School and the Berger-Marks Foundation.
Activities

1. Who’s in the Room and Where Are We?

- Create two imaginary lines on either side of the room. Ask participants to locate themselves along the appropriate line indicating either where they think their union or organization is in the process of establishing (line A) or growing (line B) a Women’s Committee.

  Line A: (for unions or organizations without a women’s committee): One end of the line indicates little interest. The other end indicates strong interest on the part of members and strong support of the leadership for starting a women’s committee.
  Line B: (for unions or organizations with a women’s committee): One end indicates a dysfunctional women’s committee while the other end indicates an active, productive and leadership-supported committee.

- Report out: Ask participants to introduce themselves, name their union or organization and say why they are standing where they are. Chart names and post.

- Sum-up: We are all in different stages of creating or growing a women’s committee. *A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Everything You Need to Know to Make a Difference*, developed by The Worker Institute at Cornell University ILR School with the support of the Berger-Marks Foundation, will be of great help to all of us, no matter where we are in the process.

2. Workshop Overview

Review objectives and agenda and establish ground rules. Some possible ground rules to start with: cell-phones off, share the air. Ask for additions.

3. Introduction to A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees

Mini-rap: Using the handout *Overview of A Guide to Organizing...*
Women’s Committees, introduce the Guide as a new and valuable resource, naming the sections, including the Appendices. Name the authors, The Worker Institute at Cornell, and Berger-Marks, as the funder.

4. Why Organize a Women’s Committee

- Brainstorm: Ask: What is the purpose of a women’s committee? What do you think an effective women’s committee might do for your members and for the union or organization? Chart responses.

- Review handout Why Organize a Women’s Committee, drawn from the Guide.

- Ask: What does the Guide add that we have not named?

5. Practice Planning Part I
Building the Organizing Committee

- In small groups ask participants to use the handout Recruiting Your Committee: Possible Members and the accompanying worksheet to review the list of possible members to recruit for the organizing committee. Have them choose their top 2-3. Be prepared to share your choices.

- Report back: Ask each group to share one of their choices and explain why. Chart all choices.

- Discuss the importance of thinking strategically about recruiting – about what skills, contacts, and position different women bring to the work.

6. Practice Planning Part II
Getting Started

- Review handout A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Getting Started

- Working in groups of women from the same union or organization, have participants use the worksheet Getting Started Worksheet to begin planning. Group together women who are the only ones from their organization and

Time: 15 minutes
Handout: Why Organize a Women’s Committee
Flipchart: Why Organize a Women’s Committee (title only)

Time: 25 minutes
Handouts: Recruiting Your Organizing Committee: Possible Members; Recruiting Your Organizing Committee: Possible Members Worksheet
Flipchart: Who to Recruit

Time: 30 minutes
Handouts: A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Getting Started; Getting Started Worksheet
practice planning using one of the organizations represented in the group.

- Report back: What is one next step you or your group will take after you leave this workshop?

7. Wrap-up:

- Pass out the Guide and point out what’s already been discussed and what other information is there to be used – e.g. understanding union politics and structure, the importance of allies, etc. Emphasize “Getting the Work Done” and “Programs” on p.16, as the meat of what needs to be done to keep a women’s committee vibrant and relevant.

- Explain that additional copies of the Guide and this workshop outline are available on the Berger-Marks website: http://www.bergermarks.org/resources/reports.html

8. Evaluation:

- Create two columns on the flip chart, one headed “+” and the other “Δ” (Delta - the Greek symbol for change).
- Ask:
  - What worked in this workshop?
  - What would you suggest we change when we do it again?
  - List responses under appropriate column.

Shortening the Workshop

The above outline is for a 2-hour workshop. This workshop can be shortened, but the objectives, agenda and participant outline would then need to be revised.

A shorter workshop might:

1. **Use a shorter warm-up** to establish who comes from a union or organization with a women’s committee and who without.

   **Short Warm-Up: Stand Up/Sit Down**
Go around the room and introduce yourself – name and organization.

Ask participants to stand up or sit down based on each of the statements below:
- Stand up if you already have a women’s committee. Sit down if it is effective – has a number of members and is supported by the leadership.
- Stand up if you would like to establish an effective women’s committee. Sit down if you have begun the conversation.

Ask after each statement: What do you notice?

**Sum-up:** We are all in different stages of creating or growing women’s committees. *A Guide to Organizing Women’s Committees: Everything You Need to Know to Make a Difference!,* developed by Cornell University ILR School and the Cornell Workers Institute, with the support of the Berger-Marks Foundation, will be of great help to all of us, no matter where we are in the process.

2. **Use a shorter recruiting task** to encourage learners to think about how to recruit.

**Recruiting Members: Short Version**
- Brainstorm: Share tips for recruiting drawn from your own experience. Note: We are women and we have a lot of life experience asking others to do some work! Chart tips.
- Review handout *Recruiting New Committee Members.*
- Ask: What would you add from this handout? Add to chart.

3. **Shorten the planning session** to give participants a tool to use with their committee to get started.

**Getting Started: Short Version**
Introduce the *Getting Started* handout and the *Getting Started Worksheet* planning worksheet. Model how it might be used to start a women’s committee. Encourage participants to take the handouts back to their union or organization and work with their organizing committee to map out a plan.