



GREETING AND ORIENTING NEW SGEU MEMBERS

Think about how you felt when you showed up for your first day of work. Or how you feel when you walk into a room full of people you don't know. It can be stressful and uncomfortable.

As a steward, you can help build union loyalty and good relations in the workplace by taking the time to greet new members on their first day or days on the job. By being a friendly face in a crowd of strangers, you can help them feel comfortable at work and with the union. By providing them with

basic information about SGEU and their workplace rights, you help build their interest in the union.

When you greet new members:

1. Provide them with:
 - a copy of the collective agreement
 - a list of stewards and other union leaders in the workplace or bargaining unit
 - a list of upcoming meeting dates and events they can take part in
 - a copy of SGEU's new-member orientation kit (available from SGEU's education program by calling extension 211, 1-800-667-5221 or 5228571)
2. Tell them that they will be receiving a further mailing and welcome letter from the union once the employer has forwarded their contact information to the Regina office.
3. Orient them to SGEU's structure and function by using the speaking notes provided in the table below. This orientation can be done in 15 minutes or 2 hours, depending on how much time and interest the new member has.
4. Conclude by encouraging them to get ahold of you, their steward, when they have any questions about how things work in the workplace or in the union.

Speaking notes for orienting new members

Introduce yourself and your role.

Tell the member:

- your name
- that you are a steward
- what your role is (to answer questions about the union and the collective agreement, to provide information about union activities such as collective bargaining or campaigns, and to assist the member in resolving any problems faced in the workplace)
- how they can contact you (telephone, e-mail, where your desk or work area is).



Explain the union's full name and how many members belong to it.

- SGEU stands for the Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union.
- Over 20,000 members.

Describe the union's sectors.

- SGEU has six sectors, based on the kind of work our members do.
- (1) Public Service: workers in direct government departments
- (2) Crowns: workers in Crown corporations, such as the Workers' Compensation Board or local housing authorities
- (3) Health: workers in health districts and cancer agencies
- (4) Education: workers in community colleges and technical institutes, such as SIAST
- (5) Community Services: workers at community-based organizations providing social services, such as women's shelters or group homes for people with mental disabilities
- (6) Retail/Regulatory: workers in liquor-board stores and casinos.

Describe our growing diversity.

- More than half of SGEU's membership is female.
- As Saskatchewan's population grows and changes, the workforce will increasingly be made up of Aboriginal people and of course young people.
- You may hear the term "representative workforce", which means making sure that the groups we see in Saskatchewan society as a whole are present in our workplaces in the same percentages.
- In many workplaces, the union is working with the employer and the government to achieve a representative workforce.



Explain what bargaining unit, local, and sector the member belongs to.

"You are in _____ bargaining unit, Local _____, of the _____ Sector."

Ask if they know what the term 'bargaining unit' means. [The group of workers, recognized by law, who bargain together with the employer and are covered by the same collective agreement.]

Describe the union's structure, using the circle diagram.

- Locals and sectors are parts of the structure that SGEU members have created.
- You, the member, are at the heart of it all.
- You are in a local, the first level of union structure. (Your local could also be its own bargaining unit or could be part of a unit that includes other locals.)
- Every local is part of one of the 6 sectors.
- All the sectors together form SGEU.
- SGEU is a member of the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour or SFL at the provincial level, along with more than 35 other unions.
- At the national level, we are a member of the National Union of Public and General Employees or NUPGE, which brings together SGEU and its provincial counterparts from all across Canada.
- Through NUPGE, we are all members of the Canadian Labour Congress or CLC, which represents 2 ½ million workers in Canada.
- On the international level, we're part of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.
- You are part of network of workers and unions across the country and the globe, all working to make conditions better for you, your family, and your community.

Explain what a collective agreement is.

- A collective agreement is a legal document setting out your rights on the job.
- Both the employer and the union have agreed to all of its contents.

Explain how to have input into bargaining.

- You and other members have input into what goes into your collective agreement.
- You suggest and vote on new provisions at proposals-gathering meetings.
- You elect your bargaining committee. You can run to be elected to the committee.
- Your committee meets with management to bargain. When an agreement is reached, you and the other members vote on whether to accept it or not.

Review key provisions of your specific agreement, such as:

- Employment status of the member you're meeting with
- Hours of work
- Vacation
- Pay level
- Sick benefits
- Grievance procedure
- Other



Encourage the member to read their contract and to approach you with any questions, or if they think they are having a problem. Make sure they have a copy of the contract; arrange to give them one if not.

Describe where the member can get in touch with the union.

- Your steward is your first point of contact with the union.
- Some locals have offices in the workplace. [If this is the case for your local, give the location, office hours, and telephone number.]
- Most locals will have bulletin boards in the workplace where union information is posted. [If this is the case for your local, give the location(s).]
- The union has a web site: www.sgeu.org.
- SGEU has three offices, in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert. Addresses and toll-free telephone numbers are available on the union web site.

Explain how the member can get involved in the union.

- You're involved all the time, by being aware of your rights and making sure those rights are respected.
- Your local may hold regular meetings and you are entitled to attend. [Give the date, time, and location of the next meeting.]
- Your sector holds meetings that you can attend. [Give dates, times, and locations of any upcoming meetings.]
- SGEU holds its convention each March, and you can put your name forward to be a delegate by attending your local meetings.
- SGEU offers union education courses and conferences. A calendar of events is on the SGEU web site, with information about how to apply.

Address any other questions the member might have about the union or the contract.

(Don't be afraid to admit if you don't know the answer and that you need to get back to them, once you've consulted with another steward or your AAA.)

Be prepared for some workers not to understand why we have unions anymore. (I.e., "Unions are obsolete.")



Point out that we have unions because

- we can negotiate hours of work, pay rates, etc.
- we are stronger together than alone
- they balance the power of employers
- employers still want to cut wages and increase workloads, like they did 150 years ago when the first unions started
- to fight for good things for all Canadians, like medicare, unemployment insurance, maternity leave

Some members may not know why we have collective agreements.

You can point out that:

- nonunionized workers have to bargain wages and rights individually
- it is a legal document that can be enforced
- it obliges the employer to resolving members' complaints through problem-solving and grievance processes

The member may ask why he/she has to pay union dues.

You can say that dues cover the costs of:

- bargaining contracts
- solving workplace problems, dealing with members' grievances
- union communications and education
- democratic structures, like local meetings, committees, and conventions where members have their say
- lobbying
- campaigns with other unions to improve conditions in workplaces and communities

SGEU dues are 1.5% of regular pay. Point out that union dues are tax-deductible and should appear on your T4.

