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NATIONAL  
EDUCATION  
ASSOCIATION

TRAINING GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS WITH OR  
WITHOUT COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS.

# THE JOIN GUIDE

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**TOGETHER. A STRONGER VOICE.**  
Together, We're Stronger. Together, We're Heard.

*Thank you for taking time to build a stronger union. As you engage with potential members, it is important to tailor your message for your specific audience. Whether you're talking to a K-12 teacher or Support Staff (Education Support Professionals) - in a state with or without a collective bargaining agreement - this guide includes poll-tested messaging guidance so you can navigate tough questions and highlight all union membership has to offer.*

## HERE ARE SOME TIPS FOR HOW YOU CAN GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS GUIDE:

- **When recruiting, don't read this guide verbatim.** The most compelling way to get your colleagues to join is through a one-on-one conversation where you are engaging authentically.
- **Ask questions about the person and don't be afraid to share a bit about yourself.** Building a personal connection is the best way to recruit new members.
- **Emphasize personal experience and local wins** that members working with their union have collectively delivered for educators.
- **Active listening is your best tool to recruit members.** Try to listen 80% of the time and talk 20% of the time so you can meaningfully address the issues that matter most to the person you're recruiting.

## KEY MESSAGING GUIDANCE

*No matter profession or geographic location, the most important messages to highlight when talking to potential members are:*

- NEA is the largest labor union in the country and is dedicated to ensuring teachers and support staff have a stronger voice.
- By banding together, we can secure higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives and the lives of our students.
- Our union has a proven track record of success, but with more members like you, we can have an even stronger voice.

## SAMPLE CONVERSATION

Please note this sample conversation flow is baseline for recruiting conversations with teachers in states with a collective bargaining agreement. **If you're speaking with support staff, or are operating in a non-collective bargaining state, please read through this section, then refer to the "Tailoring Your Pitch" section to see how your messaging might change.**

### Starting the Conversation

- I'm \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.  
insert name insert your role insert school or worksite
- I'm here today as a member of \_\_\_\_\_, our \_\_\_\_\_ union for teachers and support staff like you.  
SEA/LEA State/Local

### Ask Questions

- How long have you been working here? How's it going this year?
- What is one thing that you would change about your job?
- Are you familiar with \_\_\_\_\_?  
Local Association
  - We have \_\_\_\_\_ members right here in \_\_\_\_\_ and are part of a national network with nearly three million members.  
insert state or local membership # insert state or local chapter
  - \_\_\_\_\_ is made up of \_\_\_\_\_ like us, who band together to help give all of us a stronger voice to negotiate for better wages and benefits, changes that improve our daily lives, and help you change things like \_\_\_\_\_.  
Local Association teachers/support staff fill in with concerns shared by recruit
  - We have a legally protected right to negotiate for higher salaries and better working conditions for \_\_\_\_\_ right here in \_\_\_\_\_.  
teachers/support staff insert state/local

## Hope and Urgency

• Together, we have negotiated and worked with administrators, schoolboards, and lawmakers from both political parties to: \_\_\_\_\_

reference specific SEA/LEA wins if possible

• Successfully negotiate for salary increases. We know this is only a start and \_\_\_\_\_ deserve more.

teachers/support staff

• Win dedicated planning time.

• Protect us from mandates for additional work on nights and weekends.

• Get schools to hire more staff to reduce class sizes.

• Expand student loan forgiveness in income-based payment plans.

• Improve the daily lives of \_\_\_\_\_ so we are equipped to give students our best.

teachers/support staff

## Call to Action

Ask them to join their local or state association:

• Being a \_\_\_\_\_ is one of the hardest jobs in the world and it's never been harder than right now. With more members like you, we'll have a stronger collective voice to secure salary increases and other important benefits to improve our daily lives so we can give students our best. Will you join us as a member?

teacher/support staff

## Possible Follow-Up

Do you know much about the benefits of being a member?

• In addition to giving us a stronger voice in important decisions that impact our daily lives, \_\_\_\_\_ members receive comprehensive benefits including:

Local Association

• Liability insurance to protect us from false or unfair accusations

• Discounts on school-related items

• Student loan assistance

• Professional learning resources and opportunities

• Are these things you could find helpful?

## TAILORING YOUR PITCH:

While the above sample conversation flow can be used as a foundation for your recruitment conversations, you should tailor your messaging - especially when talking to support staff or if you're organizing in a state without a collective bargaining agreement.

### Do's & Don'ts for K-12 Teachers and Support Staff (Education Support Professionals)

DO	DON'T
Ground your conversations in your local community. Research shows potential members respond best to pitches that are localized and relevant to their daily lives.	Don't refer to NEA or its state affiliates as an "association". Research shows that referring to NEA as a "union" increases the likelihood someone will join.
Educate teachers that there is, in fact, a union they can join that advocates on their behalf. Demonstrate the value and benefits of membership by highlighting local wins.	Don't proactively bring up the cost of dues.
Respond to questions about dues by talking about the monthly cost.	Don't respond to questions about dues by talking about the annual cost.
Make the argument our union will be more powerful and better able to win higher wages and benefits with more members.	Don't accuse people of "freeloading" or proactively bring up that teachers and support staff can still benefit from the union's efforts without joining

### Additional Do's & Don'ts for Support Staff (Education Support Professionals)

DO	DON'T
Say "support staff" or the specific job title of the person you are recruiting	<p><b>Refer to support staff as "ESPs" or "educators". Our research shows these terms are not well known and don't resonate with potential members.</b></p>
For paraprofessionals, focus heavily on wages, with our union's ability to provide "safety from physical abuse" as a complementary message.	
For clerical, technical, and health workers, focus on how our union can convince administrators to listen to them, and highlight our union's work to provide professional development as a complementary message.	
For custodial, transportation, security, and food service workers, highlight our union's work to stop privatization and emphasize that our union is one they can join.	

## GUIDANCE FOR NON-COLLECTIVE BARGAINING STATES

Not all states in the country have laws to protect the right to collectively bargain. If you live in one of these states, here are some tips you can use to assuage the concerns of potential members while effectively discussing our union's impact.

• **DON'T SAY:** *"The union has a legally protected right to negotiate on behalf of..."*

**RATHER SAY:** *"Our union regularly advocates on behalf of teachers and support staff".*

• There is a significant need to educate potential members about unions. Be sure to emphasize that state or local is a union they can join despite living in a state without collective bargaining protections. Here's some suggested messaging to help make that point:

• *"You may have been told unions aren't allowed in your state, but that isn't true"*

## QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS

*Whenever answering questions be sure to use the Framework of Affirm, Answer, Redirect, when possible.*

### **DUES:**

*Our research found dues are the most significant barrier to joining. You will undoubtedly get questions about dues, and below is some guidance on how you can talk about this important issue.*

### **How much does it cost to join?**

*Avoid saying the annual fee unless explicitly asked. Also do NOT compare the cost to other daily expenses (like coffee, transport, etc.). Make sure to find out how much dues cost for members in your local.*

**AFFIRM:** Great question.

**ANSWER:** Relevant monthly cost.

**REDIRECT:** What is one thing that you wish you could change within your school or work environment?

### **I'd like to join but the fees are too high.**

**AFFIRM:** I can understand why you would be concerned about dues. Teachers and support staff certainly aren't paid what they deserve.

**ANSWER:** Joining your local adds your voice to thousands of teachers and support staff just like us across the state and millions of teachers and support staff across the country to accomplish things one teacher, one bus driver, one custodian, or even one district can't. When we negotiate as part of our local union, we can make significant changes, like increasing salaries and better benefits – things that improve our daily lives.

**REDIRECT:** What is one thing that you wish you could change within your school or work environment?

## OTHER COMMON QUESTIONS:

*Our research found dues are the most significant barrier to joining. You will undoubtedly get questions about dues, and below is some guidance on how you can talk about this important issue.*

### **I thought my state was a right to work/non-union state. Are you sure unions are legal?**

**AFFIRM:** I know some people have heard that, but that's actually not true.

**ANSWER:** Our local is a union for teachers and support staff just like us in [school district/state]. This means that we can regularly negotiate and work with school administrators, school boards, and lawmakers from both parties for higher wages, better benefits, and improved working conditions.

**REDIRECT:** Unions get strength from members, and as more teachers and support staff like us join, we'll have a stronger voice to deliver real results that make a difference in our daily lives. Will you join our local as a member?

### **I just have a hard time believing that joining a union will make a real difference in my life.**

*If you can, respond to this question with wins that your state or local have delivered for members. Also try to highlight wins that connect with any frustrations that the recruit voiced earlier in the conversation.*

**AFFIRM:** I can understand your concern.

**ANSWER:** Joining our local adds your voice to thousands of teachers and support staff across the state and millions across the country to accomplish things one teacher, one bus driver, one custodian, or even one district can't. When we band together, we have a stronger voice and that means we can make significant changes, like increasing salaries, protecting teacher and support staff time, and securing better benefits to improve our daily lives.

Together, we can influence policy and deliver important wins like adding dedicated planning time, protecting teachers and support staff from mandates for additional work on nights and weekends, and providing professional development opportunities so you can continue to grow your career.

Collectively, we've already delivered on many of these wins, but with more members, we can have a stronger voice, giving us more power to improve daily life. Things that seem insignificant to administrators can have a significant impact for us. So, in addition to some of the big wins like higher wages and dedicated planning time, we also negotiate for things like getting a principal to reconsider an inconvenient new schedule or to finally fix broken air conditioners.

**REDIRECT:** Together, our voice can be even stronger to improve our daily lives and give students our best. Will you join our union as a member?

## Unions are too political.

**AFFIRM:** I understand, we got involved with education to make a difference in students' lives. Providing a quality education is not a partisan issue.

**ANSWER:** That's exactly why our union meets regularly with lawmakers from both parties to increase support for public education. There are just some issues, like higher salaries and winning funding so that our schools can hire more staff to reduce class sizes and avoid understaffing, that require a strong collective voice to bring about the change we need in our classrooms. Our goal is not to advance a partisan agenda, but to make sure that lawmakers on both sides of the aisle give teachers and support staff the tools we need so we can give students our best.

**REDIRECT:** Together, our voice can be even stronger to improve our daily lives and give students our best. Will you join our union as a member?

## Unions are too aggressive.

**AFFIRM:** I was nervous too. I'm also a [teacher/support staff], so my first instinct is to work together and help students – not agitate.

**ANSWER:** I have actually found our union to be very collaborative and supportive. We are working together with administrators and lawmakers from both parties to find a shared path forward and I know we can be even more successful with a voice like yours at the table.

**REDIRECT:** Together, our voice can be even stronger to improve our daily lives and give students our best. Will you join our union as a member?

## I'm not sure what my colleagues or my community would think about my involvement in a union.

**AFFIRM:** I understand.

**ANSWER:** First, you should know you have a legally protected right to join without retaliation. But beyond that, it's important to know you aren't alone. Our union is a community of local teachers & support staff, just like us, who improve our daily lives so we can give students our best. More than [insert state or local membership #] teachers and support staff have joined our union because we work hand-in-hand with others in our community and our administrators to give everyone a stronger voice at the table.

**REDIRECT:** Together, our voice can be even stronger to improve our daily lives and give students our best. Will you join our union as a member?

## Unions don't look out for students.

**AFFIRM:** We became [teachers/support staff] because we care about providing the best education possible and setting students up for success.

**ANSWER:** When [teachers/support staff] are respected, appreciated, heard, and have the resources we need, we can give students our very best. With more members like you, we'll have a stronger collective voice that can deliver a future where we live better lives, and our students get the best education possible.

**REDIRECT:** Together, our voice can be even stronger to improve our daily lives and give students our best. Will you join our union as a member?

## Our union isn't for support staff and education support professionals.

**AFFIRM:** I hear this all the time. Far too often, support staff are overlooked by school and administration officials. That's why it's so important to have the power of the union on your side.

**ANSWER:** Our union is a union for you. We have a legally protected right to negotiate on behalf of support staff, including paraprofessionals, transportation workers, librarians, food service workers [BE SURE TO LIST THE JOB OF THE PERSON YOU ARE RECRUITING] and teachers, so we can get higher wages, better benefits, and improvements to our daily lives.

**REDIRECT:** Without our union, staff like us are underappreciated and often unheard. When more members join our union, administrators listen to us – giving us a stronger voice to negotiate.







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