



# EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

## **STANDING COMMITTEES: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A STRONG UNION**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The Purpose of Standing Committees	3
UAW Constitution Article 44: Standing Committees	5
UAW Core Values and Standing Committees	6
How Standing Committees Operate	8
The Ten Mandated Standing Committees	8
Citizenship and Legislative Committee	8
Civil and Human Rights Committee	9
Community Services Committee	9
Conservation and Recreation Committee	9
Constitution and Bylaws Committee	10
Consumer Affairs Committee	10
Education Committee	11
Union Label Committee	11
Veterans Committee	11
Women’s Committee	12
Other Committees	12
The Benefits of Getting Involved in Standing Committees	13
How to Get Active	16
Closing	16
Standing Committee Worksheet	17

# Introduction

Vibrant local unions and progressive social movements don't just happen. They are planned for and worked on by people like you - members who care about our union's future, members who care about what kind of future we want for all working families. One way to make a difference in all aspects of our union movement is through standing committees. While this publication is a helpful resource for anyone, it is designed with you, the rank-and-file member, in mind. This document will detail information on each of the mandated standing committees and their functions within our union. Also included is information to help you become the change you would like to see in your local union.

## The Purpose of Standing Committees

Local union standing committees are probably the least understood element of our union's structure. Most members understand our union's role in making gains at the bargaining table. Additionally, most understand the role that solidarity plays to achieve those gains. This solidarity is born through our shared experiences, hopes, and values. It is in this context that standing committees shine! Through our standing committees, we discover our shared interests and learn to work together towards common goals. By working in our standing committees, we can view our membership as a whole, not just a body of coworkers. In our standing committees' activities, we demonstrate our values and work together toward building solidarity.

We all are voters, taxpayers, community members, and consumers. We care about the quality of our air and water, the safety of the food we eat, how our tax dollars are spent, the fair treatment of all people, and so much more. We bring all these identities, passions, and concerns with us as we engage with our union. Our standing committees bring us together.

Standing committees work in conjunction with our local union leadership to implement our union's policies and shared values. They are the engine behind many of the activities in our locals. Committees are where much of the work of our union is planned and put into action. Winter coat drives for kids? That is often our community services committee. Voter registration? You will often see members of the CAP or civil and human rights committee leading the charge. Educating members about local businesses who have ripped off community members? That is an activity for the consumer affairs committee.

# The Purpose of **Standing Committees**

An effective standing committee uses its local membership's diversity to bring together ideas to support common goals. Standing committees should:

- Build solidarity among the membership
- Encourage members to take part in activities in the local union
- Assist communication links within the workplace
- Encourage political activism
- Setting up classes and exchanging information on issues that concern working families
- Work with our coalition partners in building a progressive social movement



# UAW Constitution Article 44: Standing Committees

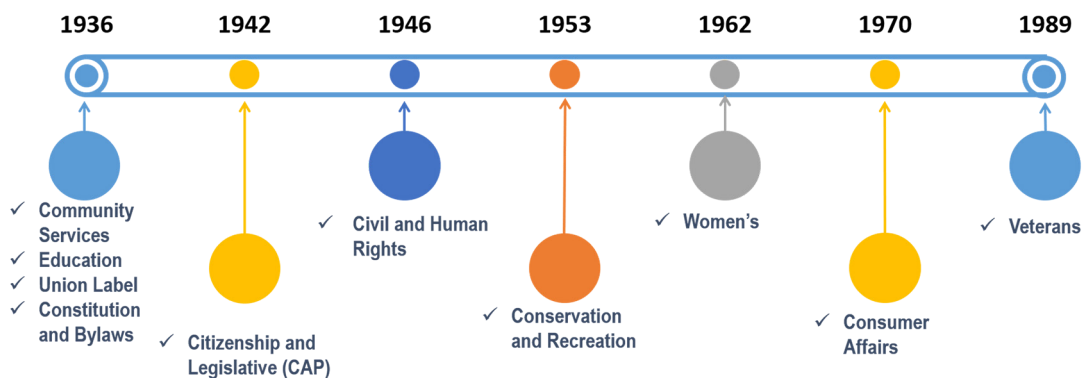
Article 44 of the UAW Constitution requires each local union to establish ten local union committees. These committees have defined functions. These committees are:

- Citizenship and Legislative (CAP)
- Civil and Human Rights
- Community Services
- Consumer Affairs
- Conservation and Recreation
- Constitution and Bylaws
- Education
- Union Label
- Veterans
- Women's
- and such other committees local unions deem necessary



Article 44 further states, “All committees should be appointed or elected, subject to the discretion of the Local Union or Unit Workplace Organization in the case of an Amalgamated Local Union.”

## 10 MANDATED STANDING COMMITTEES



# UAW Core Values and Standing Committees

Elements of our union's core values are all around us: In our history, our actions, in documents such as our Constitution, and the activities of local union standing committees. Values are principles. They are standards, convictions, and beliefs that people and groups adopt as their guidelines in daily activities. Values are shared. They are community-based. Being aware of our core values as an organization is the first step toward understanding who we are and why our union has developed the policies, practices, and structure that we maintain. All UAW members must understand the UAW's core values to understand our great union's mission.

Our union's core values are:



**Bargaining** – a mandate to build, protect and maintain high standards in contracts. The words "maintain" and "protect" are essential because they stress a long-range view of bargaining.

*"To improve working conditions, create a uniform system of shorter hours, higher wages, health care, and pensions; to maintain and protect the interests of workers under the jurisdiction of this International Union."*

-UAW Constitution, Article 2 (Objects), Section 1.



**Equality** – All people are equal. This is the underpinning of our commitment to civil rights.

*"To unite in one organization, regardless of religion, race, creed, color, sex, political affiliation or nationality, age, disability, marital status or sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, all employees under the jurisdiction of this International Union."*

-UAW Constitution, Article 2 (Objects), Section 2.

**Core values are the fundamental beliefs of a person or organization. These guiding principles dictate behavior and can help people understand the difference between right and wrong. Core values also help organizations to determine if they are on the right path and fulfilling their goals by creating an unwavering guide.**



**Solidarity** – We fight for everyone, not just ourselves.

*"All men and women are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men and women, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Within the orderly processes of such government lies the hope of the worker in advancing society toward the ultimate goal of social and economic justice".*

-UAW Constitution Preamble.



**Voting** – The notion that political activism is essential to promote, protect and maintain the joint interests of the membership

*"To engage in legislative, political, educational, civic, welfare and other activities which further, directly or indirectly, the joint interests of the membership of this organization in the improvement of general economic and social conditions in the United States of America, Canada, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and generally in the nations of the world."*

-UAW Constitution, Article 2, Section 5.

Our values have been constant for over 80 years, but we have learned to adapt them to the ever-changing conditions and challenges we face. Our core values are shared and are honored by action. Much of this action is taken by our standing committees.

# How Standing Committees Operate

Standing committees have officers as well as members. Most standing committees consist of:

- A chairperson
- A vice/co-chair
- A recording secretary
- A treasurer/financial secretary
- Members
- Sometimes sub-committees/task forces

As provided under Article 40 of the UAW Constitution, the local union president is an ex-officio member of all committees in the local union. Standing committees hold meetings regularly as determined by their local union bylaws or as determined by the committee in consultation with the leadership.

## The 10 Mandated Standing Committees

### Citizenship and Legislative Committee

The citizenship and legislative committee, most often referred to as the community action program (CAP), is the political-legislative arm of the local union and the vital workplace political activator. Suppose you believe that the people we elect significantly impact the political climate for working families and want your voice heard. In that case, this is the committee to join. CAP committee members work on identified key issues adopted by convention action. This agenda includes:

- Protecting workers' rights
- Fair trade
- Health and safety
- Other issues that affect working families

These issues are given priority based on, among other things, urgency and geography. We support candidates who support and fight for our agenda. The CAP committee assists in voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, dollar drives, letter-writing campaigns, and publicizing public officials' issues and positions. This is the committee for hands-on political experiences that allow you to grow and learn.



# The 10 Mandated Local Standing Committees

## Civil and Human Rights Committee

The civil and human rights committee is the essential guardian of our union's "No Discrimination" policy. Members of this committee fulfill the local union's commitment to assuring members full rights regardless of religion, race, creed, color, sex, political affiliation, national origin, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The committee informs members of steps and procedures, including filing complaints and hearings, whenever a member or members believe their rights have been violated. The committee works toward the elimination of discrimination in the workplace, the community, and the nation. This committee needs members who feel a moral obligation to speak out on the issues of intolerance, injustice, and bigotry.

## Community Services Committee

The community services committee performs the critical task of helping members and their families in times of need. If you feel strongly about being there for others when an emergency, natural disaster, or other hardship strikes, then this is the committee for you. Some examples of community service activities include:

- Support during layoffs, worksite closings, and strikes
- Hurricane relief
- Organ donor awareness
- Food drives
- Blood drives

The community services committee works through public and private organizations to ensure that members faced with emergencies get relief when needed. This committee serves as the local's link with the community to help those in need.

## Conservation and Recreation Committee

The conservation and recreation committee provides a variety of opportunities that fall into two categories. Recreation, which includes leisure time activities, and conservation, which includes environmental concerns. It has been proven that in today's busy work environment, people need to combat stress with quality family and individual leisure time activities. If you enjoy organizing events such as bowling leagues, hunting trips, sporting events, team sport competitions, and the like, then the conservation and recreation committee could be your committee of choice. This committee is also an avenue to explore if clean air, clean water, developing parks, and other environmental concerns are of interest to you. The committee challenges are not limited to your neighborhood or state, they are as widespread as national and global issues that affect us all.

# The 10 Mandated Local Standing Committees

## Constitution and Bylaws Committee

The bylaws of each local union, with the UAW Constitution, set out the rules by which the local operates. In a new local, this committee's work sets the stage for how the local will function. But even well-established locals may need to modify or amend their bylaws. Members of this committee are responsible for submitting original and/or amended bylaws provisions to the local union membership for discussion and approval. This committee monitors the required local union bylaw amendment procedure to ensure compliance with the current bylaws and constitutional provisions. Once the local union membership has approved the amended bylaws provision(s), this committee monitors the process to ensure that the amendment is immediately submitted to the International Executive Board pursuant to Article 37, Section 3 of the Constitution. Join this committee to strengthen your local union's bylaws and structure.

## Consumer Affairs Committee

The consumer affairs committee believes that the labor movement should monitor companies' social conscience and performance to provide safe and honest products and services. This committee educates members on issues that affect all consumers, such as:

- Child labor
- Truth in lending
- Truth in packaging
- Truth in advertising
- Utilities
- Consumer fraud
- Credit, and the like

If you are interested in keeping the membership informed on various consumer protection activities and legislation, this committee needs you!

# The 10 Mandated Local Standing Committees

## Education Committee

Building the power of the labor movement through educating and training our members is the education committee's responsibility. Members of this committee work with local union leaders to determine the membership's needs and provide classes, materials, and information based on these needs. In many subject areas, the National Education Department has programs that can be delivered to your members. Some of these programs include:

- New member orientation
- Grievance handling
- Leading with vision
- The structure of standing committees

If you are committed to providing education that informs, develops skills, and motivates our leadership and members, this is the committee for you.

## Union Label Committee

An effective union label committee supports the labor movement by informing and educating members about the products we buy as consumers. This committee emphasizes the importance of supporting those goods and services produced by union members under union-won working conditions. The committee also keeps members informed of union products and their availability in the community. This committee also helps bring to the attention of our members those products produced under non-union conditions and by anti-union manufacturers. Committee members identify items on the AFL-CIO boycott list and encourage support of these boycotts. The work of this committee need not be limited to personal consumption. As citizens, we can demand that tax dollars be spent on quality, union-made products, including cars, buses, and the like.

## Veterans Committee

The veterans committee seeks members who are willing to represent the interests of all active and retired UAW veterans and their families. This committee is dedicated to advocating for the political and social concerns of veterans. This is accomplished through leadership, guidance, and education on matters of concern, including dependent care, disabilities, benefits, and more. The people who came to the aid of our nation when they were called upon are a valuable resource to the entire labor movement. If you want to build and enhance the dignity that all veterans have earned by serving their country, this is the committee for you!

# The 10 Mandated Local Standing Committees

## Women's Committee

The women's committee works to further the gains of women in the workplace and society. This committee informs and educates to broaden the scope of traditional women's roles. The sisters and brothers on the women's committee encourage women to become active in local, national, and community causes and programs. If you are interested in issues and topics such as legislative action, initiatives for work and family, women in politics and pay equity, this may be the committee for you.

## Other Committees

Some local unions have additional committees outside of the ten mandated by our Constitution. Some of these committees exist as subcommittees to the mandated ten. Local unions can establish other committees to meet the local's needs. Such committees are necessary when a situation arises that does not fall within the scope of one of the above committees or is of such magnitude that the local union believes a particular emphasis should be given to that project.

Consider the following example:

*Knowing that they were heading into likely difficult negotiations in the next year, Local 12345 decided that they needed to act fast to get their members plugged in to the local, so they could act together in solidarity when push came to shove. They had low meeting attendance and a very young workforce. Through casual conversations, they found out that many of their members were into video games and decided to start a gaming committee. But instead of getting together with a small group of people just to talk or play video games, the union found a local pop-up arcade company that brings in old-fashioned arcade games, and hosted an arcade night at the local hall. In doing so, they could bring together formerly disengaged members (and their families) around something they enjoyed. They made sure to have one-on-one conversations with all the attendees about the upcoming negotiations and used the opportunity to educate and recruit for the impending fight.*

When considering creating an additional standing committee, consult your local's leadership and the bylaws for direction on the appropriate process and procedure.

# The Benefits of Getting Involved in Standing Committees

## Improved Communication

One of the most notable benefits of standing committees is the improved level of communication when committees operate effectively. A vital function of a standing committee is to report its activity to the membership. Reports are a way to communicate committee progress. This is how we make our movement stronger: By engaging our membership and helping them see how everything fits into the bigger vision. Reports can be formal or informal, oral or written.

Written reports are often submitted for approval or acceptance, and verbal reports are often used for updating people on the status of the committee and projects. Written reports should include enough information so that all members can understand what is being submitted or requested. They should be short and to the point and keep the audience's attention. Some topics to include in a report are:

- Purpose of the report
- Dates and times of meetings
- Status of current projects
- Plans for future projects
- Requests for help and/or resources
- Success of the committee
- Specific actions recommended

At union meetings, you will likely give oral reports on your committee's activities.

Local union Facebook pages and websites are excellent places to share original content like photos of committee events and updates from your committee meetings.

Regardless of how you report your activities, you must consider connecting your committee's work to the membership's passions, interests, and motivations.

It is essential to understand the role of communication among members of the committee and the local union leadership, other committees, and the general membership of the local. Many projects and activities overlap between committees; talking and offering support to those committees will ensure success for all of us. Through your local union meetings, leadership, and communication channels, you communicate to the membership. This is critical. How can you expect your initiatives to further the local's goals if members don't know what you're doing?

# The Benefits of Getting Involved in Standing Committees

## Creating Unionists and Activists

Standing committees are often where unionists become activists. A unionist is a member who:

- Is aware that the power of a union comes from the members
- Is reasonably knowledgeable about significant issues related to their local union
- Reads union literature and occasionally attends union meetings
- Is willing to show union pride by wearing a local union t-shirt or putting a bumper sticker on their car

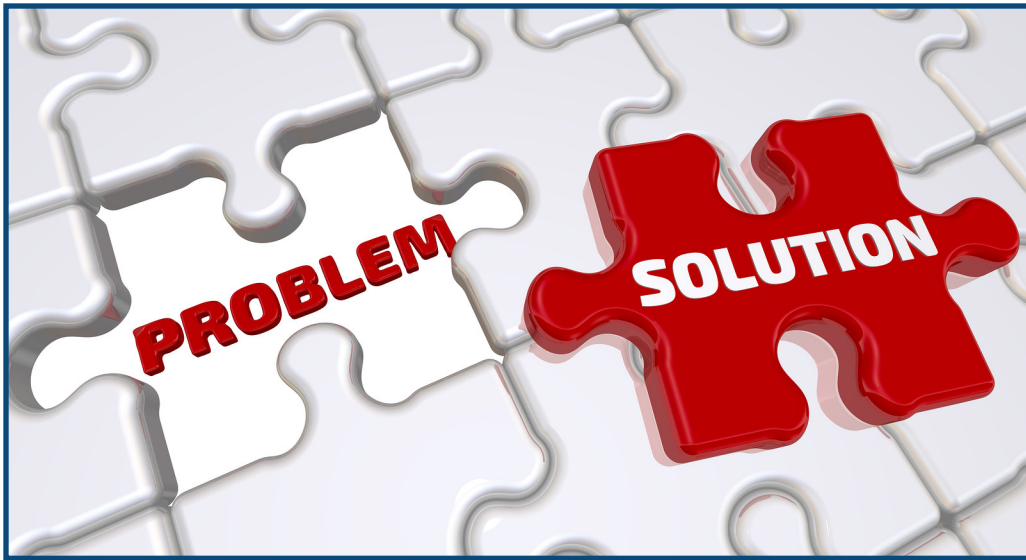
For a unionist, their actions or participation will be directly aligned with their union membership. Their actions can be direct, ranging from attending monthly union meetings or joining a standing committee, to active involvement in a protest or rally. Their actions can be indirect but still vitally important, such as increasing their awareness and knowledge on issues, policies, or causes related to their union or the labor movement. Unionists can be leaders at the forefront, or they can be passionate supporters behind the scene. Whatever the case may be, a unionist is not passive or idle. They are in many ways on their way to becoming an activist. An activist is an individual who expresses their ideas by getting involved and taking action. They believe in an issue, cause, organization, or policy enough to move towards some type of involvement.

**All activists are unionists.  
But not all unionists are activists.**

Activists act: They join standing committees, hand out flyers, go to rallies, etc. Activists are on the front lines every day.

Let's compare this to our understanding of a unionist. An activist appears to be that very next step up in the ladder of involvement. A unionist may act upon their union identity and beliefs. That act can be direct or indirect, and the action itself can be significant or simply supportive. An activist takes much stronger actions. They become leaders in a movement. Their efforts are much more likely to fall in the significant category than supportive.

# The Benefits of Getting Involved in Standing Committees



## Problem Solving

Standing committees are where many of the local union's problems are considered and where solutions are developed. Standing committees examine concerns in specific areas and plan activities to increase awareness around the matter or develop solutions to alleviate the concern. In the process of problem solving, your standing committees should:

**Ask questions** to learn as much as possible about the objectives and purpose of the standing committees in the local. Find out what needs to be done and what the priorities are for your committee. Encourage others to voice their opinions and ask questions to clearly understand the issues from the leadership and rank and file perspectives.

**Listen** not merely to hear what is said, but to understand the attitudes and opinions of others and to increase your awareness and allow others to have a voice in committee decisions.

**Take on challenges** and become creative when looking for a solution. Be prepared to look for alternatives when faced with a problem. Don't reject an idea only because it's never been done before.

**Keep going** and resist getting discouraged! Build on small successes and activities that give your committee credibility and pride. Encourage each other and remember that working collectively can accomplish more than working alone.

# How to Get **Active**

A union is made up of people. It is vitally important that members such as yourself get involved and engage even more of our members. When you choose to join a standing committee, you decide to become an activist. As an activist, you determine if your union is strong or not, whether it has the support and the backing to take on the fights necessary for improving the lives of its members and the communities in which we work. If you are already involved in the activities of your local union, accept the call, and challenge yourself to do more. Consider joining or even leading a standing committee. Does your local union have challenges? Want to be a part of the solution? Standing committees are a good starting place for your involvement. As a committee member, you are encouraged to think outside of the box, work with others, and develop solutions to those challenges.

Article 44 of the Constitution states that all committee members should be appointed or elected, subject to the discretion of the local union or unit workplace organization (in the case of an amalgamated local union.) In many cases, the local union bylaws determine how to become a standing committee member. Some local union standing committee members are elected, while others are appointed by the local union president. If you'd like to get involved, please contact your local union president regarding the procedure for becoming a standing committee member.

Please use the worksheet on the following page to help assess your interest in the various committees and plan your conversation with your local union president.

## **Closing**

Local standing committee training and support are available from various national departments. Assistance is available through your local union leadership, who can contact your regional office. Committees are not limited to and can exceed the descriptions in this book.



# Standing Committee **Worksheet**

## My Plan for Building the Power of Our Union Through Standing Committees

### Committees I am interested in:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Citizenship and Legislative (CAP) | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil and Human Rights            | <input type="checkbox"/> Union Label                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Services                | <input type="checkbox"/> Veterans                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer Affairs                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Women's                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation and Recreation       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other committees as deemed necessary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constitution and Bylaws           |   |

Who can I talk to about what this committee does in my worksite?

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### I can commit to:

- Helping on a single project
- Being an active member of the committee
- Being open to what's needed

Who can I talk to about what this committee does in my worksite?

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