

## 2012 PSAC Education Meetings summary

### ***Summary:***

In November and December 2012 the Prairie Region Council (PRC) Education Committee hosted a series of education planning meetings across the Prairies. Each meeting was attended by a staff regional representative from the PSAC RO, the Regional Education Officer (REO), in some cases a member of the PRC Education Committee, and members from the area. In total, there were 8 meetings with 13 PRC reps, 47 members, and 9 staff in attendance.

Each meeting discussed the same four questions and the responses to these questions are summarized below. At meetings with at least 8 participants (not including the REO) we also did an “Open Spaces” activity where participants identified the topics and recorded notes on their discussion. A summary of those discussions is also below.

Several other members sent feedback via e-mail or phone and their ideas have been included in this summary.

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### **The Four Questions:**

#### **1. What is the purpose of Union Education?** The main themes that emerged were:

Union education helps members understand their rights, which in turn empowers members at the workplace.

Union education builds the union by engaging and informing members. Educated members are more likely to become active members.

Union education provides a place for members to network and learn from one another.

Union education brings a deeper understanding of the value the Union brings to our members' lives.

Union education helps us build for the future. It appreciates our past and our present, supports emerging leaders, sparks action for change, and is a safe place to talk about controversial and contentious issues.

## 2. Who comes to Union Training?

There was consensus that many Local Executive officers, Stewards, and active union members readily participate in the education program when they can.

Some members attend training because of a situation at work that makes them angry or confused and they come to the course looking for strategies and solutions. Other members attend courses because of a personal interest in the course topic i.e. political action, issues for equity-seeking members, etc...

More women than men attend PSAC training (this is anecdotal only – we don't keep statistics on gender representation on our courses), and members are more likely to attend training when someone (i.e. a steward) has approached them and encouraged them to register for a particular course.

### Who should come?

There was widespread consensus that every member would benefit from participating in at least one education event. Specific "groups" of members were also mentioned, including young workers, equity-seeking members, new members, members with great people skills, and local representatives. One meeting suggested a buddy approach, where members already registered for a course be invited to bring one co-worker with them to the course.

It was also suggested that we open some of our education events to allies from labour and community groups.

### Barriers?

Some meetings had conversations about why some members don't come to education events i.e. what some of the barriers are. Responses included:

- the perception that union training is only for local executive officers
- members aren't prepared to give up a weekend to get more information about their union
- our policies and practices regarding course hours, locations, lack of on-site childcare, etc.

## 3. What are the education "needs" of your Local or Committee? Responses to this question came from two different directions – specific course topics (which have been included in the main themes in question #4 below), and ideas for increasing membership participation in the education program which include:

- recognize and support membership diversity (i.e. rural members, shift workers, workers with family care responsibilities) by holding courses in different communities, combining courses in rural areas, offering more on-line and e-learning opportunities, providing on-site childcare, etc.
- add fun and social experiences that build solidarity

- consider developing union learning plans (i.e. a menu of options for union opportunities)
- develop a mentorship program for use on courses, across component lines for workplace or Local concerns
- offer the TUB, in bite-sized pieces that are easy to understand (i.e. over lunch, and PSAC brings the pizza)
- utilize existing powerful material (i.e. “The Corporation”; “Food Inc”)
- Refresher clinics for activists;
- hold “Hot Topics” sessions where facilitators bring resources once the hot topic has been identified (by the Local or Committee);
- leaders should stop trying to wear more than one hat – share the wealth of union opportunities.

4. **What new education could we offer to members?** Many ideas for course topics were generated through the discussions of questions 3 and 4. The responses have been grouped below in two ways:

- based on the anticipated course participants (members, stewards or leaders)
- general themes

**Members:**

- Your Union
- Your Rights
- Political Activism
- Workplace problems
- Building a Better Future

**Stewards:**

- Connecting with Members
- Representation
- Sustainable Activism

**Leaders:**

- Building Leadership Capacity
  - Working with Others
  - Sustainable Activism
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## **Other trends that emerged at the meetings:**

### **Scheduling of education events:**

- Lunch'n'learns don't work at every workplace; it depends on the availability of meeting space, how much time is available (or could be negotiated with the employer), etc.
- Train stewards to "host/facilitate" workplace conversations on topical issues (on lunch breaks, etc)
- try different time frames and formats to better meet the needs of the members in specific locations.
- Offer a new Saturday morning "Understanding your Collective Agreement"

### **New ideas to try:**

- Change the name of the TUB so that it's more descriptive of what's covered on the course, and is interesting-sounding, and so members don't think it's just for stewards or local officers.
- pilot a web-i-nar – maybe on basic workplace rights?
- post "Union Moments" stories on the website, on YouTube, etc.
- Have a contest, incentive or promotion to build interest in e-learning
- what's the success rate of union training – need to evaluate and assess
- Try a "bring a buddy to the course with you" campaign to boost participation
- post some education resources on the website
- try monthly Union Education forums on a variety of topics and for a variety of groups (i.e. leaders, stewards, young workers).

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**Open Space topics and recommendations:** There were a total of 29 open space discussions during the eight meetings. Some ideas have been incorporated into the "course ideas" or "new ideas to try" sections above. Below are the main themes that came with some recommendations.

<b>Union Schools:</b>
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There can be several types of union schools:

- the traditional Prairies school which is a 5-day event of advanced courses;
- the new mini-union school (piloted in Winnipeg twice) which offers 3 x 3 hour sessions on different topics but members stay for all three sessions);
- a new idea discussed in one region would be a full three days (Friday to Sunday) involving employer leave for the Friday and family activities for the Saturday and Sunday.

Recommend next steps:

- survey the membership about whether or not we should have a school, and if it should be a mini-school or a longer version.
- If the members want a longer school, consider where to hold it i.e. university setting (which might be a barrier for some members who won't be comfortable with the setting/accommodations, but it's less expensive so more members could attend) or a hotel (which is more costly and harder to keep members together in a "community environment" but which has nicer accommodations)
- identify a theme for the school and have courses that tie into that theme
- Possible themes for mini-schools are bullying; leadership.

### **On-line and e-based courses**

The benefits to on-line and e-based courses are that they can reach more members. Some course topics lend themselves to an on-line approach (i.e. rights, union history, understanding the collective agreement) and some courses could be started on-line with additional face-to-face sessions to build on the e-learning. Web-i-nars are also possible for a more interactive approach to on-line learning, and they could be set up with three or four weekly evening sessions that members can join from their homes, etc.

Some of the existing e-learning courses are very good, but there isn't much promotion or advertising so many members aren't aware of them.

### **Recruiting and engaging members with new technologies**

There were a number of different discussions on the theme of membership engagement. Some of the ideas involving new technologies include:

- Utilize calendar and event applications such as GoMeeting, Google Hangouts, iCal, Facebook and Skype. They are one-click engagement tools that are mobile and tablet friendly, and will encourage more members to engage, increase accessibility, and save \$\$\$.
- Information should be short and to the point (you don't want information overload!).
- Video testimonials and audio blogs can be a powerful tool to engage members in some of the work we do (i.e. look at the example of some of the work involving residential school survivors). The PSAC – NAPC video "It's Time" is a brilliant video, but it's not getting enough viewing because it's hard to find on the PSAC website.
- Social media can be used to introduce new Local Officers and stewards to the members, and to create interest in union events and activities (like courses).

## **Ongoing consultation about the regional education program:**

We want to have an education plan that is flexible and considers:

- how are courses developed?
- how can we ensure ongoing communication between the PRC education committee, Locals and the PSAC Regional Offices?
- How can we use technology to support our consultations, because we can't all be in the same room at the same time?
- How can we utilize the Alliance Facilitator network to develop the education program?
- how can we have more input into the e-learning program (i.e. what gets developed, how are priorities determined, who does the work)?
- the PRC education committee should take the lead in developing ongoing strategies to communicate with Locals.