

NEA's Guide to New Hire Orientations

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The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's nearly 3 million members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

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Introduction to New Hire Orientations

First impressions matter.

New hires never forget the friendly face on orientation day who made them feel welcomed. Walking into a new school—or a new profession—is an exciting and overwhelming time. **Personal connections matter.**

Researchers agree. A joint study with Penn State University and the Jobs with Justice Education Fund suggests that **effective orientation programs have an “outsized” and “lasting” impact on the strength of unions.**

In the longitudinal study conducted in six states, new hires who attended a helpful orientation were more likely to feel a greater commitment to the union and were 35 percent more likely to participate in union activities.

Essentially, **a good orientation is a smart and strategic way to connect with new hires, boost membership numbers and build a foundation for later activism.**

On the flip side, an unhelpful orientation, or one thrown together at the last minute (think typos, old handouts and unprepared presenters), can cast doubt about the union and make it even harder to recruit new members.

This guide offers step-by-step planning and some research-based best practices for putting together a successful orientation that sets the stage for growing and strengthening the union.



I met my union rep at orientation, and she was the most important person in my life during my first year.”

OBJECTIVE 1:

Gain Access to New Hire Orientations

1. Work with the district

Ask for time on the district's agenda to give a presentation.

If the district won't make space, find a way to show up anyway—tabling or greeting people outside, etc.

2. Buy some time with lunch

Some districts give more time to the union at the orientation if lunch is provided. Depending on state law, buying lunch could get you exclusive access to potential members for up to an hour.

3. Create your own orientation

Create your own union orientation and invite all new hires to join, especially if your district has mid-year hiring.

(See [sample agenda on page 5](#).)

4. Pass legislation

Some states, like California, have successfully [legislated guaranteed access to orientations](#) (AB 119).

5. Bargain contract language

Strong contract language ensures the Association has contact with new employees before the school year begins. Here is an example from the Washington Education Association:



Resource: For additional model or negotiated contract language, email NEA's Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy department at collectivebargaining@nea.org.

Sample Contract Language

Washington Education Association
Orientation of Staff

At the annual meeting of all employees prior to the opening of school for students, the president of the Association or his designee shall each have equal time to address the employees.

In the formal program provided by the District for the orientation of new employees, there shall be adequate opportunity for participation by Association representatives.

The first day of in-service released time activities for new employees shall be planned and implemented mutually by the Association and the District.

The names of all employees, their building, grade and subject assignments shall be provided to the Association by September 15.

What if my school, campus or system leadership doesn't have an orientation for ESPs?

All employees deserve a helpful orientation—so make sure that includes Education Support Professionals (ESPs). If ESPs do not already have an orientation, which is often the case, schedule one in partnership with the district or hold your own. ESPs are hired throughout the year, so a process for continuous onboarding is essential. In California, the Ventura ESP Association (VESPA) holds rotating orientations on a monthly basis where each new employee is asked to join. Reps receive a monthly updated list of who hasn't joined yet.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Build a Potential Member List

1. Reach out to your district for a new hire list Request phone numbers, mailing addresses, email addresses, and work locations.

2. Pass legislation For example, New Jersey has the [Workplace Democracy Enhancement Act](#).

3. Negotiate contract language to get the new hire list from the district

The union can negotiate language that requires the school district to provide the employee contact information in regular intervals. Ideally, language should also guarantee that the union can use bulletin boards, staff mailboxes, email, or other means to maintain a consistent and ongoing presence in members' lives.

4. Make a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request Reach out to your state affiliate for legal writing assistance. If necessary, the NEA Center for Organizing and Affiliate Support (C4OAS) can provide you with sample language as well.

Sample Contract Language

Idaho Education Association
4.12 New Personnel

Names and addresses of newly hired teachers shall be provided to the Association within fourteen (14) days after their employment.



Resource: Download the New Hire List Acquisition Toolkit from www.nea.org/YROResources



OBJECTIVE 3:

Prepare for Orientation Day

Ask 100% of new hires to join the union

Key Research Finding

Professional-grade materials and an understanding of how new hires prefer to communicate can encourage sign ups and commitment.

[See the research.](#)

A strong game plan for the day will help you approach, recruit and follow up with each potential new member.

1. Prepare a Welcome Kit

Develop a high-quality, polished kit that includes a welcome letter (sample provided), a membership application, an NEA YRO survey card, contact information for local leaders and affiliate staff, your [union publication](#) and a calendar of upcoming union-sponsored professional learning opportunities. *Additional NEA handouts to consider:* [NEA Guide to Transformational Organizing Conversations](#), [NEA MB Online Resources Flyer](#).

2. Choose diverse member organizers

Select a positive, upbeat and diverse group of member organizers in terms of race, gender, age and job category who know how to talk about the value of union membership from personal experience. Recruit as many early career educators as possible to share their commitment to the union. Potential members need to hear from them. Consider inviting multiple or diverse presenters to join the president for the presentation.

3. Train member organizers, then give them a job to do

Bring in enough member organizers to have one-on-one conversations with every potential member (about a 1-to-10 ratio.) Whether it's presenting at the front of the room, welcoming people at the door or sitting at a specific table to talk to the potential members at that table, give member organizers a specific job to do.

4. Track the day with data

Use the YRO Survey card to gather data about members' specific issue interests and use MiniVAN to track the number and the outcome of organizing conversations. For an orientation on using MiniVAN, reach out to YRO@nea.org.

5. Write a strong agenda

Stay on time and offer interesting and helpful content. *(See sample agenda on page 5.)*

3.1: Sample Orientation Agenda

1. Introduce your union and its mission

- Use “we” and “our union” to emphasize that we’re all in this together. Share how your union is a solutions-based group that meets the needs of the district’s students and educators.
- Provide context for members to understand their relationship to the local, state, and national unions.

2. Talk about the power of collective action

- Explain key recent wins of the union and areas of current advocacy related to protecting educators’ time, increasing their compensation, or amplifying their voice in the workplace.
- Talk about how to deal with issues at work, i.e. when to call the union.

3. Highlight opportunities for professional growth through the union

4. Ask for membership

“I am here today to invite you to join us. As a union, we have developed the resources and support you need to thrive because we have been there. Every one of us has stepped into the classroom for the first time at some point. It can be isolating, but there’s power in numbers. When we come together through the union, we get closer to getting the schools our students deserve.”

5. Invite members to get involved outside the workplace

- Professional development opportunities
- Influencing public education policy by attending school board meetings
- Supporting the political action fund (PAC Fund) and pro-public education candidates running for office

6. Allow time for questions in small groups at tables

7. Breakfast/Lunch hosted by the Local Association



Key Research Finding

Professional-grade materials and an understanding of how new hires prefer to communicate can encourage sign ups and commitment.

[See more research here.](#)

OBJECTIVE 4:

Debrief and Follow Up

What are the next steps?

Debrief with your member organizers. *What went well? Who were your potential leaders? How can you improve next year? What themes came up during conversations? What are the next steps?* For worksite representatives struggling with recruitment, consider a follow-up training or support from some of your stronger recruiters.



Follow Up To-Dos

- ☐ Ask every new hire to join within the first 30 days of school.
- ☐ Provide building representatives and member organizers with YRO survey card information to support their follow-up one-on-one conversations.
- ☐ Each month, request a refreshed list of new hires from the district. Share with your union leaders—building/association representatives—and member organizers to schedule one-on-one conversations to recruit them to the union.
- ☐ Plan to visit worksites where there are no building representatives.
- ☐ Send a personal letter to each new hire.

4.1 Sample Welcome Letter for New Hires

Dear _____,

Welcome to the _____ School District, where you will make a difference in the lives of students every day. The [local union] is driven by dedicated educators, just like you, who advocate for students, the profession, our classrooms and our community.

With the [local union], you're never on your own. When you join us, you are also a member of the [state Association] and the National Education Association, where nearly 3 million educators across the country share your passion for public education.

As trusted professionals, educators are best equipped to make school and classroom decisions to ensure student success. It's our mission to ensure educators have a seat at the table. As members of the union, we have a powerful voice in creating education policies that enrich the lives of the students.

Being an educator isn't a job, it's a calling. It's also personally rewarding and professionally demanding. That's why the union strives to provide you with the support you need to be great at what you do.

Finally, if you just joined, welcome to our union! If you haven't joined yet, you can get a membership form from your building's union representative or go to nea.org/join. [add local union join link]. Join Today!

Sincerely,

Jill Doe

First Vice-President for Membership, Anytown Education Association
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