

From PSAC Young Workers in British Columbia

A Guide To Involving Young Workers



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It's about PSAC's future

Welcome to this primer on involving young PSAC members in our Union. We've put this toolkit together for PSAC Locals, Area Councils, Committees and activists.

As one of Canada's biggest, strongest, and most diverse Unions, PSAC has a key role to play in shaping a brighter future for young people. To do that we need your help.

We're counting on existing PSAC activists who've worked hard to build our Union, to engage and empower a younger generation to take on and continue this important work.

We hope this guide will help members grow and become stronger with that work.

Why young workers?

There are many young workers already active within PSAC.

However, our Union is experiencing a pretty major turnover, as members and staff retire. That's going to have an impact on the Union, the workforce, and the public and other services many PSAC members provide.

Share the workload

Young workers are ready and willing to move in. Young people are looking for opportunities to develop more skills and contribute to others with what they already have – and looking to get involved with their Union. It'll bring in fresh ideas, energy and a new crop of activists.

Think about the benefits of having more young workers in the roles of stewards, health and safety representatives, local officers and many other excellent leadership roles within the Union.

Young workers are ready, willing and able and sharing the workload is one very good reason to bring in young members.

It's about rights

Finding and reaching out to young members also helps ensure that each and every PSAC member knows and is enforcing their collective agreement rights, and is being treated fairly in a safe work environment.

Young workers are often the most vulnerable in a workplace. They may be the ones with term or part-time jobs and while they're eager to know their rights, they may not always know where to start.

It's about energy

Involving young members is also about expanding PSAC's base of activists and leaders – locally, regionally, and nationally. The energy, experience, and ideas of a new generation will keep PSAC strong and dynamic. New members will bring fresh approaches and perspectives to our work for equality and social justice in the workplace and society.

What are young workers concerned about?

Young workers have many of the same issues as any other worker – but these are some that affect them more

- Part-time or term work
- Childcare
- Not knowing rights
- Need for training
- Mentorship
- Job insecurity
- Erosion of safety net
- Not getting information from the Union
- Undeveloped or unrecognized skills

PSAC young workers share tips in their own words

In the workplace - DO

- give tours around the work area(s)
- give introductions (name & what you do)
- tell people about resources available
- get paperwork/email, workstation etc. ready before we start
- give security orientations as soon as possible
- help provide collective agreements
- create space for everyone, there is room for all
- make people feel welcome
- mentor/job shadow
- give health and safety info

In the workplace - DON'T

- assume acronyms – explain them!
- behave unprofessionally
- single people out
- play favourites
- use 'isms
- overwhelm people
- delay orientations
- leave people unprepared – giving tasks we don't have training for



In the Union - DO

- let us know that support is available
- provide knowledge/introduction package
- promote fairness
- make new friends
- encourage participation
- be more active introducing of yourselves to new employees, especially executive, representatives
- explain the roles of the executive committee/representative
- offer to feed people/give prizes/provide swag
- encourage positive/open atmosphere
- keep it short
- respect the political diversity of the membership
- give people without experience a chance

In the Union - DON'T

- make critical comments of people
- bring in personal agendas
- talk in jargon/acronyms
- encourage "angry" comments/ideas
- bombard us with Union ideology
- negatively point out mistakes when we use acronyms that are unfamiliar to us



Involving young members

It's a challenge to get any new member involved in the Union, and in some ways young members are no different. But it's a myth that young people don't care about Unions, and don't want to be part of the Union.

Recruiting a young member can be a lot like organizing a new group of workers. Most people just need to know where to start.

Get creative

Part of the secret to reaching new members is not relying on the same methods. Did your last meeting draw many members – not to mention young ones? When was the last time your Local or Area Council Executive went to meet with members in the workplace? As much as possible, try to find new and different ways to reach young members. You'll probably find other interested members along the way – this will benefit all your members.

Have a good communications network

An important first step is mapping your workplace and identifying where those young members are. Having a good communications network can help with this work. One of the best forms of communications is two-way – members can give feedback as well as receive information.

Set up a buddy system

Think back to when you first became a Union member. Things didn't all make sense. The meetings probably seemed strange. You may not have been quite sure what your role was. But you wanted to get involved, and at some point or another, someone lent a hand. Don't wait, take the initiative. Have a buddy system where new members are accompanied to their first meeting and Union events.

Keep meetings on track and interesting

When you do have meetings, have a clear agenda. Set a time limit and stick to it. Make sure there's a clear decision-making process and fair and strong facilitation. Explain what's happening as you go along. Have a period in every meeting where new members can ask questions. Give practical information.

Try and have something fun or different as part of the meeting, or an incentive like a door prize to bring out new people. And get the word out after meetings about what went on, including the fun stuff. Slowly you might coax people into coming out to meetings. Meetings are an important tool, but there are other ways of sharing information in a local and making decisions, so don't get hung up on lots of meetings.

Listening is the key

Young members want to be listened to and heard. They don't want to just listen to others. So no matter how you do it, reaching out means listening, and acting on what you hear. Create spaces in your Union's activities where the executive can hear from young members and other members. Be available. Be sure you have a variety of ways you can be reached – email, phone, message box, your Union website or a social media tool like a Facebook page.



What can I do?

More often than not, if you ask someone to help you with something, give them the information and support they need to do it, and give constructive feedback, they'll get involved.

Inform

This means educating young members about Unions and their rights. By helping young members understand what they are able to do and what is possible, you help build activists. Education – whether it's formal PSAC courses (especially the ones targeting young workers), mentoring, or one-on-one informal chats – it will make the difference.

Inspire

Think back to the moment when you knew getting involved in the Union was the right thing to do, when you wanted to do more, when you were inspired to fight for workers' rights. What did it feel like? How did it happen? How can we develop the same feelings in young workers?



Involve

Unless someone is truly involved in the workings of the Union, they won't feel like they're part of the PSAC. They will not know how the Union works or understand the difference the Union makes in members' lives.

Remember who it is you're trying to reach

It's new people, not the veterans. New approaches are good, and plain language is a must. All your members will appreciate accessible language that doesn't use acronyms or jargon. Clear language includes everyone, and allows everyone to speak and understand. That's the key to participating in the Union.

Give new members an orientation

An orientation is a chance to talk about Union victories and principles. It will let members know about their rights under the collective agreement. And it's a chance to explain the reasoning behind some of the structures they encounter, often for the first time. Many PSAC collective agreements include a clause that there must be a Union orientation for new members – check yours.

And tools they can use

A good example is the PSAC stewards' kit, which contains a wealth of information for stewards and Local Executive members. PSAC regional offices have many other resources, kits, guides, and even posters that may be of use. Contact your PSAC Regional Representative for more ideas and information.

Promote PSAC education to young members

Opening the door to education for young members is key. Sharing knowledge and training is what builds a new generation of activists. Give young members the opportunity to get more involved in the Union by sharing educational opportunities with them.

Select young members as convention and conference delegates

Get young members involved in the Union's decision-making process. Sending a young member as part of your delegation to PSAC's Regional and Component Conventions, Health and Safety, Human Rights, and Women's Conferences, and BC Federation of Labour Convention allows them to deepen their understanding of and involvement in the issues PSAC is taking on.

Designate executive positions

This can be as simple as ensuring that one of your current executive positions is held by a younger member, and then recruiting actively when it comes to elections. Encouraging turnover in your executive doesn't have to mean a loss of continuity and institutional memory. Elections can be staggered so that half the executive is elected every year or two, ensuring there is both continuity and energy. Once you have a young person on your executive, make sure they get the support and training they need to be a productive, fully functioning executive member.

Include young members in other Union committees and decision-making bodies

Have a young person on your Union's health and safety committee, as a delegate to a PSAC Area Council or Human Rights Committee, District Labour Council or other group. Remember to involve young workers in the broader work of the Union. The goal is to ensure everyone's issues and needs are being met. That can't happen unless young members have a voice in shaping how the Union operates and makes decisions.



Thinking beyond the bulletin board

Communicating is the key to reaching and involving young members. Here are some ways you can “think beyond the bulletin board”.

Use social media to reach new members

More and more people are using social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter to reach out to the world. Consider setting up a Facebook page, it's easy to do and free. Once you've done that, don't forget to keep the content fresh and the information flowing. People stop viewing if there are no frequent updates. Consider a mailing list where you can reach people directly.

Go on worksite visits

This is one of the best ways to meet members and hear from them directly, letting them have a say in the Union and identify any problems they're facing. You'll meet new members, and they'll put a face to the Union through you. Contact your PSAC Regional Representative if you need assistance setting up a worksite visit.



Organize social events

Bust the myth that Unions are no fun – build the social side of your Union. And hand the organizing of these activities to young members. Let them organize events that appeal to them ... you'll be amazed what comes out.

Get involved in the community around you

In the same way that social activities play an important role in your local, so does community. Many of your members are probably plugged into activities in their communities, from softball teams to social justice issues. Young members are no exception, and may be even more likely to be involved in environmental and social justice activism. Take steps to involve your Union in community activities – this will help show young members the relevance of the Union, and it will build allies in the community.

Resources

Education

Education is important for all Union members – visit www.psacbc.com/education for a list of upcoming courses. PSAC BC has also held several successful courses designed for young workers, and will continue to do so – contact your PSAC Regional Office for more information.

Self-identification

Help young workers get plugged in to their Union by encouraging them to self-identify through our ongoing regional survey, available at www.psacbc.com/young-worker-survey-2015. This information is voluntary and kept confidential and will be used for the purposes of supporting our young worker initiatives and programs. This could include seeking their participation in committees, conferences, and conventions and sending them information about similar PSAC initiatives.



Young Workers

In the PSAC-BC Region young workers who are thirty-five years of age and under actively come together to share their experiences, discuss common struggles, and analyze the issues they face at work and in the Union.

We first formed as a Caucus in 2002 through the Solidarity Campaign for Young Workers and held many events and educational opportunities designed to appeal to younger workers. In 2012, the PSAC formally recognized the need for Young Worker Committees in the Regions. BC was the first to form such geographically-based committees, beginning with Vancouver Island, and soon after for the BC Mainland.

Young Workers have a political voice - for PSAC BC there is a Regional Council Young workers Coordinator and each Committee also has its own President. For more information, visit www.psacbc.com/young-workers

Get involved today!

This Guide To Involving Young Workers was inspired by the Hospital Employees Union - thanks and Solidarity!