

### What is a Women's Council?

Regional Councils are established by your District Director. They are based on geographic areas within your District where density of local union Women's Committees has been established.

Not all local union Women's Committees participate in a Women's Council although they may have a very active Women's Committee in the workplace.

### Why Women's Councils?

Women want to be involved in their union yet have often found it difficult to be real activists for a variety of reasons. Often they are separated within the workplace based on shifts and the jobs they perform. Their responsibilities outside the work place puts a strain on the time they have "to learn the ropes" of becoming involved or a leader. The USW, by Constitution, requires local unions where women are in the workforce, to start Local Union Women's Committees.

These committees often find it difficult to get started or to continue with development because they are outside the normal information and educational networks of the union. By bringing the leadership of each local union committee together quarterly, committees can help support one another in the development of all local union committees by sharing ideas, issues, information and education.

Women's Councils are NOT a substitute for building a strong local union Women's Committee. Council's can help the chairs of local committees grow and develop new ways to mentor less active women, build their self-confidence, and build a network of sisters to support one another.

### How does a Women's Council Form?

Once the Director determines that enough locals exist in a common geographic region, a central location within driving distance from each local is determined. A circle is drawn from the center and all the locals within it will form a Council. Time factors, such as city and expressway access, will determine the actual geographic coverage. The design is made to include as many locals as possible.

### Who Can Attend Council Meetings?

Once the jurisdiction covered by a specific council is determined, each of the local union presidents within that region will be contacted by the District Women's Coordinator. She shall invite the local's Women's Committee Chair and/or Co-Chair to the next meeting. Since there is usually lost time and expenses incurred by the local for their representative(s) to attend these meetings, the local must agree to support sending their delegate(s) to each meeting.

### Women's Coordinator(s)

The District Women's Coordinator will attend each meeting as the Director's representative acting as a resource to the Council and its members.

In some districts there may be more than one Coordinator. This is done to keep costs down and to provide each Council with a district representative familiar with their issues and concerns. The Coordinator will give a report at each of the council meetings updating representatives on activities in the Region, District and International. She will assist Council members in finding necessary information and maintaining the records of the Council. At each meeting, she will provide for an educational or informational component that representatives can

take back and use with their local Women's Committee. She will be a voice for women within her District and a sister that women can feel secure in going to with issues and concerns.

### Typical Council Meeting Agenda

The activities of each Council are determined by the representatives and coordinator. However, there are several advised elements in all agendas:

- Representatives report on their local committee, union and community issues of importance.
- District Women's Coordinator's report.
- Educational/Informational presentation that can be used by representatives for local committee meetings or events.
- Sponsoring or development of one activity/event in the region annually that raises awareness and support of women's and working families' issues.

Some Councils plan tours of each other's workplaces providing opportunities to learn more about each other and meet additional women. Others have visited a picket line, worked on election leafleting, and joined a support rally on an organizing campaign. Councils develop most of their own agendas to enhance the visibility and mentoring of "Women of Steel" throughout the workplace and community.

This means each member on the Council must attend regularly, participate and share responsibility for building a stronger Women's movement in the region they represent.

### How Does a Local Join?

First step is to form a local union Women's Committee and name a chair/co-chair. The Chair's contact information should be provided to the District by the local union. The Women's Coordinator will then contact the local's chair to get

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her into the Council and other activities.

No charges are assessed to the local for belonging to a Council, however, lost time and expenses of its representative(s) (on the day of the pre-scheduled meeting) is the responsibility of the local (like all other committees). Only one approval at a local union meeting is needed to cover the expenses of having representatives attend quarterly meetings.

After each meeting, the coordinator will contact your president advising who attended and the date of the next meeting to assure proper notification of call-off and reimbursement of lost time and expenses.

### Are Councils Funded by the District?

The Council should plan all funding for activities and events. By developing strategies for planning an event, each representative can centrally be a part of the project, including fund raising. Skills learned from holding an event helps build self-confidence and the experience level of each Council member. Some activities/events may only require woman-power and planning.

### Does Our Local Have to Have a Women's Committee to Join a Council?

Yes. The Council is a meeting of local union Women's Committee chairs and co-chairs who are working together to build activism among women in their locals. The purpose of the Council is to assist and support those sisters in building their local union committees **not** as a substitute for having a committee. Some local union committees may be having a hard time getting started due to lack of active members; that does not mean they cannot join a Council.

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### What have other Councils done?

- Sponsored a self-defense class and developed literature on violence against women.
- Developed a (women's) fund raiser for a government official who supporter the union.
- Jointly sponsored a Women's Health Fair with other community groups.
- Sponsored scholarships for children of union members.
- Provided a Women's Shelter proceeds from a garage sale.
- Entered a float in a community parade that depicted a labor-related event in Women's history.
- Attended the annual commemoration of Women's Day, March 8 that celebrates women, their accomplishments and struggles.
- Provided school classes with speakers to educate on Women in unions and the jobs they perform as such.
- Sponsored phone banks and lobby days targeting women.
- Held an event that recognized sisters in their recently formed locals.
- Held a candle-light vigil and marched on company gates to protest an injunction placed on workers.
- Created scholarships for union women to attend training.
- Sponsored Holiday toy collections for children of locked-out members.



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### Thought to Ponder:

***To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world***