Employee Free Choice Act
Tips for Talking to Union Members

Really engage union members about the Employee Free Choice Act. The good news is that most union members will ultimately support the Employee Free Choice Act. But few members have heard of it, know what this legislation is about, or are familiar with the problems it solves. For example, only 54 percent of members know companies resist organizing drives. So unions must substantially expand the effort to educate members about the urgent need for the Employee Free Choice Act.

Lead with an economic frame. Place the Employee Free Choice Act in the larger context of working people's economic struggles and unions' agenda for improving workers' lives. This is about the survival of the middle class and the American Dream, not labor law. A frame on unionbusting or broken labor law is not as effective for members.

Tap into members' anger at corporate CEOs. CEOs, more than businesses in general, are seen as the source of many of the economic problems facing workers. Take advantage of this anger, and insert CEOs, and their record salary/retirement packages into your messages when you can. You can point out corporations' double standard—providing written contracts to CEOs while fighting to prevent workers from enjoying the same protection. You can also paint unionbusting and opposition to the bill as examples of CEOs and corporations overreaching. For example, suppressing unions is part of larger effort by CEOs to prevent working people from getting their fair share. These are the same people that are against the minimum wage, improving your health care, etc.

Give members a clearer sense of their own personal stake in this battle. Union members will support the Employee Free Choice Act, but often voice an important caveat: "Don't forget about us." So share how this will help raise the living standards of today's union members, as well as workers who become members in the future. Conveying a 'strength in numbers' is key: More workers having unions means, collectively, we have an increased ability to raise wages, improve health care, and help stop corporate America's race to the bottom.

Communicate the reality of employer anti-union campaigns, so that members can see the need for legislation. Even though we do not recommend leading with this message, it is critical to explain the barriers that workers face trying to form a union. Most union members have never gone through an organizing campaign, so they don't know how bad it can be for workers. Union members will object strongly to several common illegal and anti-union tactics, especially the firing of pro-union workers (97 percent say this is "unacceptable").

Whenever you can, keep the policy discussion simple. Fully 84 percent of members are more likely to support the bill when it is described simply as "making it much easier for workers to gain union representation in their workplace." Very few union members will want or need more details. This short summary of the law's purpose, together with highlighting the broader economic benefits it will bring, often will do the job for members.

Majority sign-up is effective, legitimate, direct, and fair. Your members have most likely never experienced organizing through majority sign-up. In longer settings, take the opportunity to frame the process in positive terms. It is an alternative to a company-dominated system that is long, bureaucratic, intimidating, and undemocratic. One of the most convincing methods is to share the names of large, national companies which have allowed their employees to organize via majority sign-up, to underscore that it works, and is mainstream.

Remember the Language You Use Matters

It's the Employee Free Choice Act, NEVER "EFCA." Research confirms that "Employee Free Choice Act" is a very strong name for the legislation. We lose this advantage by calling it by its acronym. We must discipline ourselves to use the full name, which reinforces a key part of our message, and to never use variations or acronyms.

It's "majority sign-up," not "card check." The phrase "card check" has no real meaning to union members or other workers. However, the phrase "majority sign-up"—while also a new concept— is more descriptive, and conveys a positive value. The name reinforces the democratic legitimacy of the procedure, which strengthens our message considerably.

It's about workers wanting unions, not unions getting members. It is essential that union members (and the public) understand that the Employee Free Choice Act is about workers seeking economic opportunity through unions, and not unions seeking members.

Don't use the opposition's language. We should never describe the current system as a "secret-ballot election" system. It puts you in the opposition's frame that obscures the larger anti-democratic nature of anti-union campaigns. Always describe the status quo as a company-dominated system that denies workers a true free choice.

Give members compelling facts and information, not over-the-top rhetoric. What members want to get from their unions on this issue are facts and information. Over-the-top rhetoric actually weakens our case. Examples that caused a negative reaction from members include, "our unions are under assault," and "unions… could even disappear." So instead, give them succinct, compelling messages bolstered by supporting facts and a sense of urgency.

A Shift on How Workers' Stories & Case Studies Can Be Used

Our message research underscores our movement's need to shift the type of workers' stories we use for this campaign. As always, we want workers—union and non-union—to be the messengers. But the **stories that matter most are those which highlight the economic reasons that workers want unions**, or the economic gains achieved from having a union (victory stories – "thank goodness I have a union.")

Showing numbers and scale is important too. We need to convey that a large-scale crisis exists in order to share our solution. Therefore stories which make this case are recommended. For example, we'd suggest highlighting the campaigns of hundreds or thousands of workers at a company who wanted a union so they could obtain health insurance. Or use an example of a name brand, large employer that is fighting its employees (still highlighting the economic consequences for workers of course).

It's not helpful to hold up individual victim stories. By over-emphasizing the plight of a worker who was fired for union activity and still hasn't gotten his job back, we make the story about a single victimized worker. While that may elicit some sympathy, it doesn't seem like a large problem or one that affects most union members.