

## LABOR UNION STRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATION

As union members, you play a vital role in translating your union plans into action, in the process, you will need a structure or a foundation to fall back on as you face the challenges in the struggling world of trade unionism. Thus, the need for a working knowledge of Labor Union Structure and Administration which is a necessary ingredient for an efficient and productive organization.

### WHAT IS A LABOR UNION STRUCTURE?

A labor union structure is an organizational set-up that defines key positions and their respective functions in the organization. Your union's organizational structure is embodied in your Constitution and By-laws. The organizational set-up of a union is composed of four branches: the General membership, the Executive Board, the Executive Officers, and the Committees.

### WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP?

You, the members, comprise the highest decision-making body of the union. The main function of the General Membership is to formulate major policies for the general administration of the union. Also, it is from this branch that the members of the Executive Board and the Executive Officers are elected.

As members, you are entitled access to educational and training opportunities, grievance machinery, employee welfare, legal assistance, socio-civic enhancement and other similar privileges provided by the union to its members.

It is your duty to know your Constitution and by-laws including your rights and duties; to attend and participate in union meetings, elections and other union activities; and to pay your membership and other dues that may be asked from you by the union.

### WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXECUTIVE BOARD?

The Executive Board (or Board of Directors) ranks next to General Membership in the organizational structure. It is the immediate representative of the highest decision-making body and its main function is to organize, review and echo the policies formulated by the General Membership. The Executive Board also runs the affairs of the union in between sessions of the General Membership.

### WHAT ARE THE EXECUTIVE OFFICERS?

The President

The President acts as Administrator of the union. He supervises all the day-to-day activities of each officer and committee. He presides general membership, executive officers and executive board meetings. He also approves and signs important documents of the union.

#### The Vice-President

The Vice-President acts as President in the absence of the latter and performs other functions as may be assigned to him by the President. (Usually, he acts as Chairperson of Grievance Committee)

#### Secretary

The Secretary prepares the minutes of meetings and keeps the records of the union.

#### Treasurer

The treasurer collects dues and other assessments from members, conducts regular accounting of union funds, and maintains all records of financial transactions of the union.

#### Auditor

The Auditor conducts periodic audits of union funds. He ensures that the union funds are spent wisely and honestly.

#### The Shop Stewards

The Shop Steward receives processes grievances of union members. It is also his responsibility to educate members on the importance, functions and policies of the labor union.

### WHAT ARE THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMITTEES?

#### The Education and Training Committee

This committee educates union members on their rights and responsibilities and subjects relating to trade unionism and society.

#### The Research and Information Committee

The committee provides the union with necessary data, particularly those that are used in collective bargaining negotiation.

#### The Negotiations Committee

This committee organizes union demands and represents the union in the negotiation of these demands with the management.

#### The Grievance Committee

This committee settles conflicts between the workers and the management. It prevents and handles grievances of the union.

#### The Finance Committee

This committee takes charge of the fund generation, safekeeping and wise management of union funds.

#### The Legal Committee

This committee handles all legal matters and transactions of the union.

#### The Employee Welfare Committee

This committee negotiates for the provision of social services like death benefits, loan benefits, educational benefits, etc. to the members.

### HOW IS THE LOCAL UNION CONNECTED WITH OTHER LABOR UNIONS?

Labor unions at the enterprise level are grouped according to either their geographical location or the type of industry they are engaged in. In many cases, labor unions of any type are grouped together.

Local unions that are grouped according to geographical locations are called area federations. An example of this type of federation is the Mindanao Federation of Labor (MFL).

Those unions grouped according to trade or industry is called trade or industry federations. An example of this is the Union of Workers in the Garments, Textiles and Cottage Industry (GATCORD).

A national federation can also be connected with regional or international labor unions; For example, the FFW is a member of the Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unionists (BATU), an organization of national federations in the Asian region. Meanwhile, BATU is the regional arm of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), an international community of trade unions.

### WHAT IS LABOR UNION ADMINISTRATION?

Labor union administration is the process of planning, allocating, controlling and evaluating the material resources (e.g. money, facilities and equipment) and non-material (e.g. manpower and time) of the union to achieve certain goal(s).

## WHY IS LABOR UNION ADMINISTRATION NECESSARY?

Labor union administration provides the mechanisms for an efficient way of running a union.

It is a democratic process that encourages participation by all, particularly by members, in policy and decision-making activities.

It maximizes the proper use of resources.

It ensures the implementation of union plans.

## WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERN LABOR UNION ADMINISTRATION?

The Constitution and By-laws of the union embodies the basic principles of good labor union administration.

### Membership Sovereignty

The union is reflection of the quality of its members. Good unionism depends on the assertiveness of members of their rights and responsibilities and their devotion to carry out the tasks set forth by the union. Thus, members are held supreme because they determine the strength and effectiveness of the union.

### Representation

Members elect representatives who reflect the interest of the majority. These representatives voice the ideas and sentiments of the members.

### Delegation

Delegation means the prudent distribution of authority, power, and responsibilities among union members. The president alone cannot attend to all the technicalities necessary for the smooth administration of the union.

### Service

Labor unionism is service to workers. Its success lies on the service and dedication of members and leaders. It is a venue where workers toil hand in hand for a common goal. Selfish interests have no place in unionism where workers think in terms of “we” not “I”, and where sacrifice, dedication, commitment, discipline and service are called for in a meaningful struggle for liberation and progress.

## WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD UNION ADMINISTRATION?

### Clear Definition and Sound Implementation of Policies

Policies or guide plans should be clearly explained in the Constitution and By-laws of the union. Members must be apprised of such policies for them to know their duties and responsibilities. On the other hand, members must take the initiative of knowing these policies. If these policies are not clear to them they must not hesitate to approach their officers for clarification.

#### Division, Planning, and Programming of Work

Policies must be converted into actions through an operational and realistic program of activities. The program must specify the strategies, resource utilization techniques and standards of evaluation of the union.

#### Proper Allocation of Resources

The resources of the union are varied: manpower, technical, physical, financial, time and other resources. These raw materials must be budgeted wisely so as to achieve an equitable allocation of resources based on availability and priorities.

#### Periodic Evaluation

Members and officers must review and assess the kind of administration that runs the union and arrive at a concrete analysis of the union's thrusts.

#### WHAT ARE THE COMMON PROBLEMS THAT ARE PREVALENT IN UNION ADMINISTRATION?

Unwise disbursement of union funds.

Poor delegation of work.

Untapped member participation and the tendency towards one-man rule.

Indifference of members to union affairs.

Poor managerial and administrative skills of leaders that are evident in the inability of union officers to conduct meetings motivate members, use funds wisely.

Dogmatic administrations that can neither cope with nor meet changing needs.

Lack of knowledge of the Union's Constitution and By-laws.

#### HOW CAN MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE SMOOTH AND PROPER ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNION?

Members can make or unmake a union. Without them, no union can ever exist. The members are given the responsibility to get involved in the affairs of the union. They must cooperate with officers in planning, implementing, and evaluating union objectives. To accomplish this task, members must know their rights and responsibilities. Furthermore, they must be honest, sincere and dedicated to the vision of the union.

#### WHY IS A UNION FUND NECESSARY?

Money is the life-blood of the union. Without it, the activities of the union may not be realized. Thus, funds are necessary to the union.

#### WHERE DO UNION FUNDS CAME FROM?

Membership and other union fees paid by members.  
Donations and solicitations.  
Fund raising campaign.

#### WHERE DO UNION FUNDS GO?

Education and training of members.  
Grievance handling  
Collective bargaining research and negotiations.  
Welfare and financial assistance during emergencies and in time of calamities.  
The national federation that services the local unions in term of legal assistance, education and training and other important services which the local union on its own cannot undertake.

#### HOW ARE UNION FUNDS SAFEGUARDED?

The treasurer and the auditor are responsible for the safety of union funds. It is their duty to see to it that union funds are properly allocated and that whatever goes out of the union funds is properly documented with a receipt. The president also plays a vital role in safeguarding union funds by deciding on and monitoring the allocation and disbursements of funds. Most importantly, the members play a significant role in safeguarding union funds through vigilance and assertion of their right to see to it that union funds are properly budgeted and spent.