

## MODULE 4

# Bargaining for the Common Good

### NEA Unionism Curriculum 2018

Curriculum to “promote the attitudes, values, and goals of unionism, solidarity, justice, fairness, and the search for the common good.”

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## SUMMARY

This module exposes participants to the progressive, movement-building practice of expanding unionism beyond the boundaries of the bargaining unit or the contract through Bargaining for the Common Good.

### Goals:

- To understand the parameters of collective bargaining
- To identify and assess non-bargaining unit groups that share common interests with members of the bargaining unit
- To discuss bringing diverse proposals to the bargaining table
- To strategize about partnerships through planned actions, events, and campaigns

### Materials:

- Flip Chart Paper
- Markers
- Seattle article copies
- City of LA in Crisis  
<https://tinyurl.com/LAinCrisisVid>
- 3 copies of STRATEGIZING questions
- Next steps handout (developed locally)

# AGENDA

EXERCISE	FORMAT	TIME
Group Introductions	Go-Around or Individual Conversations	5 minutes
Bargaining For The Common Good	Presentation, Video Viewing and Large Group Discussion	20 minutes
Applying the Strategy	Small Groups and Large Group Discussion	30 minutes
Debrief and Close	Large Group	5 minutes
<b>TOTAL TIME: 60 minutes</b>		

## GROUP INTRODUCTIONS (5 minutes)

**NOTE:** Do introductions as a go-round if you are working with a group small enough to accomplish this in 5 mins (suggested max of 10 people). If you are working with a group larger than this, have people turn to one or two people around them that they don't know and introduce themselves.

- Ask participants to give their names, their preferred pronouns (see the facilitator's guide for guidance on preferred pronouns), anything else about their identities they wish to share, and why they are at this training.

## BARGAINING FOR THE COMMON GOOD (20 MINUTES)

### UNIT INTRODUCTION

**SAY:** "Among public servants, no group has been more demonized than educators. Educators, our unions, and our collective bargaining agreements are blamed for everything from breaking the budgets of cities, counties and states, to undermining the morality of young people."

**Ask why?** What's the motivation behind this concerted anti-educator union campaign?  
(Pause and brainstorm)

**SAY:** "One answer is privatization. The private sector sees K-12 education as a lucrative market that they are excluded from (they have already made plenty of inroads into profit-

making opportunities in higher education). Charter school initiatives or voucher systems are the front line in the push to gain access to the education “market” in K-12.

Another answer is that public servants are, in fact, perfectly poised to become champions for better public services. You already know that our union doesn’t just negotiate for our wages and benefits at the bargaining table, we put a lot of money into politics at every level to try and increase funding for education, decrease class sizes, make sure that special needs kids are getting the services they deserve, etc.

This directly contradicts the private sector argument that educators and their unions are ‘just in it for themselves.’ Of course, then they turn around and complain about how public-sector unions are ‘playing politics.’

**Bargaining for the Common Good** is a way to bring the kind of broader political action that we fund in city councils, school boards, etc right into our negotiations. Here’s a basic definition of BFTCG:”

**NOTE: Write** this on a flip chart sheet in advance

*Bargaining for the Common Good brings together unions and community organizations around common interests and issues effecting the daily lives of working families. This strategy seeks to align those interests around concrete goals for change and go on the offense, especially in challenging the financial sector. This practice will lead to bringing aligned interests to the bargaining table and our bargaining out into the community.*

**SAY:** “Broad national planning among public sector unions for this kind of strategy began in 2014 and has generated an organization you can go to for more information. Their website address is <http://www.bargainingforthecommongood.org/> (**Write** this on the flip chart sheet)

By using our negotiations as a forum to address broader needs for our students, their families, and their communities, we are ‘bargaining for the common good.’ So how does this work?

First, a simple example – the Seattle teacher’s strike of 2015. They went on strike for recess! (**Appendix A: Pass out** article to read later) This is an example of a win-win fight. Kids needed recess – teachers needed kids who could pay attention because they had a chance to run around – parents needed kids who has a positive experience at school, including recess, etc, etc.

In this case, the demand also had a racial and class justice aspect to it because it was the poorer schools, where more kids of color attended, that were particularly trying to plug

budget holes with mistaken policies like cutting recess. It will often be the case that bargaining for the common good issues will have aspects of racial or gender justice, or be about the needs of immigrant kids, or special needs kids.

The Seattle teachers' strike went beyond the normal wages & working conditions demands of regular bargaining, and even outside the legal parameters of traditional bargaining. Let's spend a moment defining what traditional collective bargaining covers.

If in a collective bargaining state **SAY:**

In collective bargaining there are 3 kinds of subjects – mandatory, permissive, and illegal. Only things directly related to the wages & working conditions of workers in the bargaining unit are mandatory, and these can vary by state. Do you know our state's bargaining restrictions?

Some subjects can be negotiated if both sides agree – these are permissive.

Then there are a limited number of subjects that are illegal to negotiate into a collective bargaining agreement – we're not going to worry about those right now.

So do you think that recess is either a mandatory or permissions subject of bargaining?

If *not* in a collective bargaining state **SAY:**

We are not given a statutory right to bargain, but does that prevent us from working with our administration, school board, principal or superintendent for our goals, especially when they are important to student success?

The idea of "Bargaining for the Common Good" can still apply to apply to our own labor management processes. Even without statutory bargaining rights, what might be call a parallel process? (**Pause** to discuss: e.g. Meet and Confer for the Common Good, Organizing the School Board for the Common Good, Labor/Management Committees for the Common Good).

**SAY:** "The bottom line is that relying on a legal argument or mandate for why something should be brought to the bargaining table isn't going to put us in the strongest position. It wasn't what the Seattle teachers did. They insisted that the recess demand be part of their negotiations, and part of their strike, because it was the right thing to do, and it worked!

Once we broaden our notion of the purpose of collective bargaining and start looking around for issues that can serve the common good, we start to see lots of potential allies and the opportunity to build real partnerships.

Before asking you to do some work on this concept yourself, I want to offer you another example.

This brief video about a campaign in Los Angeles that is a bit more complicated than the Seattle teacher's demand for recess. This has to do with wastewater collection workers in L.A. This part of the city of L.A. budget has seen severe cuts in recent years, with critical impacts on communities. Although the video doesn't say this explicitly, the context for this campaign was yet another round of bargaining when the city wanted to slash the wastewater workforce. Here's how the community responded. As you watch this video, keep these three questions in mind:"

**(Write these on a flipchart):**

1. Who are the allies that are working together in this campaign? What common interest do they share?
2. What pot of money did they identify as providing the resources needed to "fix L.A.?" Who is currently benefitting from that financial arrangement?
3. What happens to the stereotype of these public workers, the wastewater workers, as greedy burdens on the public coffers when the campaign provides an alternative analysis of the financial situation?

## **SHOW VIDEO**

**LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION** of the three questions

## **APPLYING THE STRATEGY (30 minutes total)**

**NOTE:** Have the three discussion questions written on separate sheets of paper in advance.

**SAY:** "Now that you have a taste for what bargaining for the common good can be, I'd like you to break in to three groups to discuss these three questions:"

- **Create** 3 groups (count off)
  - **Hand-out** one question to each group
  - **Ask** them to designate a reporter
1. Who are the potential allies your union could develop relationships with if you wanted to build towards a bargaining for the common good strategy? What might some of the challenges be in forming those alliances?
  2. What are some of the issues that you see in your current work environment that potential allies outside of your bargaining unit might care about? How would you tell

the story of these issues to build solidarity and highlight how bargaining can focus energy and attention on the issue, both within your union, and in the broader community?

3. What changes, if any, would need to be made within your union to be prepared to take advantage of a bargaining for the common good strategy? What might some of the barriers be to making those changes?

### **GROUP WORK (15 minutes)**

#### **REPORT-BACKS & DISCUSSION (15 minutes)**

- Starting with the group with question 1, have each group read out their question and describe the discussion that they had.
- If each report-back takes a couple of minutes, you should have an additional 2-3 minutes per group for the larger group to ask questions and make observations

### **DEBRIEF AND CLOSE (5 minutes)**

SAY: “I hope that this training got you excited about broad, community-engaged unionism. These are not easy campaigns to define, plan for, or pull off, and it’s a pretty new area for union development generally. But if you want to put some energy into this kind of work, here are a couple of opportunities for you:”

**Hand out** a flyer with information about a few union-based committees or other structures, or community-based groups that people could get involved with. Plan for follow-up.

## **APPENDIX A**

# **The surprising things Seattle teachers won for students by striking**

By [Valerie Strauss](#) September 25, 2015 *The Washington Post*



*Striking Seattle School District teachers and other educators walk a picket line Sept. 10 near Franklin High School in Seattle. (Ted S. Warren/AP)*

Seattle teachers went on strike for a week this month with a list of goals for a new contract. By the time the strike officially ended this week, teachers had won some of the usual stuff of contract negotiations — for example, the first cost-of-living raises in six years — but also less standard objectives.

For one thing, teachers demanded, and won, guaranteed daily recess for all elementary school students — 30 minutes each day. In an era when recess for many students has become limited or non-existent despite the known benefits of physical activity, this is a big deal, and something parents had sought.

What's more, the union and school officials agreed to create committees at 30 schools to look at equity issues, including disciplinary measures that disproportionately affect minorities. Several days after the end of the strike, the Seattle School Board voted for a one-year ban on out-of-school suspensions of elementary students who commit specific nonviolent offenses, and called for a plan that could eliminate all elementary school suspensions.

Other wins for students in Seattle's nearly 100 traditional public schools include:

Teachers won an end to the use of student standardized test scores to evaluate them — and now, teachers will be included in decisions on the amount of standardized testing for students. This evaluation practice has been slammed by assessment experts as invalid and unreliable, and has led to the narrowing of curriculum, with emphasis on the two subjects for which there are

standardized tests, math and English Language arts.

Special education teachers will have fewer students to work with at a time. In addition, there will be caseload limits for other specialists, including psychologists and occupational therapists.

Seattle teachers had said they were not only fighting for pay raises but to make the system better for students. It sounds like they did.

### **Best Practices and Recommendations for Facilitating Challenging Trainings**

Facilitating training sessions on social justice topics, and especially those concerning diversity, equity, and inclusion, can be mentally and emotionally taxing for the facilitator and the participants.

Facilitating requires more than time in the classroom. Thoughtful and thorough preparation is essential, as is de-brief and decompression afterwards. Being unprepared will put you and your

learning objectives at risk. Having some strategies at hand for when people are emotionally “triggered” is strongly advised. These and other best practices can ensure that you arrive in the educational space, and orchestrate the development of the educational community, in the best possible way.

Through intentional practice, you will find methods for holistic preparation and decompression that work best for you and feel healthy. Following the recommendations below can help you to grow as a facilitator who can sustain the learning space for the duration of the training, and do these kinds of trainings throughout your career. This list of best practices can serve as a checklist when you initially begin your facilitator journey.

### Before the Training

- **Know your audience.** Anticipate and research the historical and current practices and news about the group you will be working with. You may want to send out a pre-training survey to the group. This will help you assess the level of understanding and salient questions about the training topic.
- **Prepare thoroughly** including learning objectives, a timed-out teaching plan, interactive exercises, accessible materials, etc.
- **Don’t train alone** if you can avoid it. This is especially true for less experienced facilitators. We all learn from unexpected road blocks, but make sure you have support from a co-facilitator who can share the weight of the training. Design your division of labor to give each other breaks.
- **Build facilitation teams in light of the topic(s).** Particularly if you are training on racial justice, make sure the facilitation team includes people of color. Similarly, if you are training around gender justice issues, having a male and female facilitator working together is a good way to go. This can also be true for generational differences.
- **Pay attention to language justice.** If you are expecting to train in a multi-lingual environment, make sure that you have the needed interpreters and equipment.
- **Consider triggering.** Make sure that you spend some time preparing yourself mentally and emotionally for managing not only curriculum implementation, but also the thoughts and feelings of your participants.
- **Study models** for methods of communication and conflict resolution. Use the ones that work best for your training and communication style. Get input from others about how they manage conflict in trainings. Disagreement is not a bad thing, but should be managed so that the time spent on it is productive for everyone sharing the experience.
- **Create a routine** that helps you feel good going in to and coming out of the training.

### During the Training

- **Establish ground rules** (or group agreements) at the beginning. Ideally, these would be generated by the group itself but have a list of the things that are important to you in mind as well. Make sure people understand that this is a serious endeavor and that part of your role as facilitator is to call out infringements of the behavioral norms and expectations the group has established. Their purpose is to ensure that the space remains as safe as possible. That doesn't mean everyone will feel comfortable all of the time.
- **Be prepared to adjust the timing** in your teaching plan. You will know by "reading the room" when it is appropriate to spend more time on particular aspects of the training, but check in with the group for their consent to stay on the topic or to move on. You have the option of coming back to a topic at the conclusion of your training, either in wrap-up, one-on-one follow-ups, or collectively if participants want to stay longer and if the space is available.
- **Keep the learning objectives in mind!** Interesting and unexpected divergences can have value, but don't let your plan get totally de-railed.
- **Manage triggering as it occurs.** Triggering may show up as anger or withdrawal, dominating the dialogue or being silenced, tears or defensive body language. If you believe someone is being triggered, don't ignore it. Use classroom conflict techniques to manage interactions. Sometimes taking a break and speaking to someone privately is appropriate. Make sure everyone understands that the impact of particular information or discussion isn't the same for everyone. Members of traditionally marginalized groups may have strong (and legitimate) reactions that should not be ignored. They also should not dominate the learning process for the entire group. This can be a tricky balance to achieve.
- **Provide evaluation opportunity** for participants.

### After the Training

- **Do self-reflection** on your own personal evaluation, and de-brief with your co-facilitator as soon as possible after the class. Compare your self-evaluation to the feedback from participants' evaluations. The opinions of your participants are important, but so is your own critical self-evaluation. Experiences of triggering, or the reactions of others to triggering can also show up in evaluations.
- **Become a part of collectives** for trainers, educators, or facilitators on diversity, equity, and inclusions so that you have a place to process with peers who do what you do. This is useful for learning tips, best practices, other forms of curriculum, and group dynamics.

