

NEA's Guide to Higher Ed New Hire Orientations

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The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's three million members work at every level of education – from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.



Introduction to New Hire Orientations

First impressions matter.

New Educators never forget the friendly face on orientation day who made them feel welcomed. Walking onto a new campus – or into a new profession – is an exciting and overwhelming time. **Personal connections matter.**

Researchers agree. A joint study with Penn State University and the Jobs with Justice Education Fund suggests that **effective orientation programs have an “outsized” and “lasting” impact on the strength of unions.**¹

In the longitudinal study conducted in six states, new hires who attended a helpful orientation were more likely to feel a greater commitment to the union and were 35 percent more likely to participate in union activities.

Essentially, **a good orientation is a smart and strategic way to connect with new hires, boost membership numbers, and build a foundation for later activism.**

On the flip side, an unhelpful orientation, or one thrown together at the last minute (think typos, old handouts, and unprepared presenters), can cast doubt about the union and make it even harder to recruit new members.

This guide offers step-by-step planning and some research-based best practices for putting together a successful orientation that sets the stage for growing and strengthening the union.



I met my union rep at orientation, and she was the most important person in my life during my first year.”

1. “Making the Case for Union Membership: The Strategic Value of New Hire Orientations,” by Jobs With Justice Education Fund and Penn State School of Labor and Employment Relations, funded by Union Privilege.



OBJECTIVE 1:

Gain Access to New Hire Orientations

1. Work with your administration.

Ask for time on the administration's agenda to give a presentation. If the employer won't make space, find a way to show up anyway – tabling or greeting people outside, etc. Don't forget department new hire events.

2. Buy some time with lunch.

Some employers give more time to the Association at the orientation if lunch is provided. Depending on state law, buying lunch could get you exclusive access to potential members for up to an hour.

3. Create your own orientation.

Create your own union orientation and invite all new hires to join. [\(See sample agenda\).](#)

4. Pass legislation.

Some states, like New Hampshire, have successfully [legislated guaranteed access to orientations](#) (SB 148).

5. Bargain contract language.

Strong contract language ensures the Association has contact with new employees before the school year begins. Here is an example from the Washington Education Association:



Resource: To access NEA's higher ed contract online database (HECAS), see: <http://www.neacollectivebargaining.org>.

Sample Contract Language

Washington Education Association
Orientation of Staff

At the annual meeting of all employees prior to the first day of classes, the president of the Association or his designee shall each have equal time to address the employees.

In the formal program provided by the employer for the orientation of new employees, there shall be adequate opportunity for participation by Association representatives.

The first day of in-service released time activities for new employees shall be planned and implemented mutually by the Association and the employer.

The names of all employees, their job title, department, and office location shall be provided to the Association by September 15.

What if my school, campus, or system leadership doesn't have an orientation for ESPs?

All employees deserve a helpful orientation—so make sure that includes academic staff professionals and Education Support Professionals. If these staff do not already have an orientation, which is often the case, schedule one in partnership with the employer or hold your own. These staff are hired throughout the year, so a process for continuous onboarding is essential. In California, the Ventura ESP Association (VESPA) holds rotating orientations on a monthly basis where each new employee is asked to join. Reps receive a monthly updated list of who hasn't joined yet.



OBJECTIVE 2:

Build a Potential Member List

- 1. Reach out to your administration for a new hire list.** Request phone numbers, mailing addresses, email addresses, and work locations.
- 2. Pass legislation.** For example, New Jersey has the [Workplace Democracy Enhancement Act](#).

- 3. Negotiate contract language to get the new hire list from your employer.**

The Association can negotiate language that requires the employer to provide the Association with employee contact information at regular intervals. Ideally, language should also guarantee that the Association can use bulletin boards, staff mailboxes, email, or other means to maintain a consistent and ongoing presence in members' lives.

- 4. Make a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.** Reach out to your state affiliate for legal writing assistance. If necessary, the NEA Center for Organizing can provide you with sample language as well.

Sample Contract Language

Idaho Education Association
4.12 New Personnel

Names and addresses of newly hired teachers shall be provided to the Association within fourteen (14) days after their employment.



Resource: Download the New Hire List Acquisition Toolkit from [Creative Companion](#) or email a request to NewEducator@nea.org.



OBJECTIVE 3:

Prepare for Orientation Day

Ask 100% of new hires to join the Association

Key Research Finding

Professional-grade materials and an understanding of how new hires prefer to communicate can encourage sign ups and commitment.

https://www.jwj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/NMO-two-pager_FINAL.pdf

A strong game plan for the day will help you approach, recruit, and follow up with each potential new member.

1. Prepare a Welcome Kit.

Develop a high-quality, polished kit that includes a welcome letter (sample provided), a membership application, [an NEA New Educator card](#), contact information for local leaders and affiliate staff, your union publication, and a calendar of upcoming union-sponsored professional learning opportunities. *Additional NEA handouts to consider:* What You Need to Know About NEA Higher Ed, NEA Member Benefits Brochure.

2. Choose diverse member organizers.

Select a positive, upbeat, and diverse group of member organizers in terms of race, gender, age, and job category who know how to talk about the value of union membership from personal experience. Recruit as many early career educators as possible to share their commitment to the Association. Potential members need to hear from them. Consider inviting multiple or diverse presenters to join the president for the presentation.

3. Train member organizers and then give them a job to do.

Bring in enough member organizers to have one-on-one conversations with every potential member (about a 1-to-10 ratio). Whether it's presenting at the front of the room, welcoming people at the door, or sitting at a specific table to talk to the potential members at that table, give member organizers a specific job to do.

4. Track the day with data.

Use the New Ed Card to gather data about members' specific issue interests and use MiniVAN to track the number and the outcome of organizing conversations. For an orientation on using MiniVAN, reach out to NewEducator@nea.org.

5. Write a strong agenda.

Stay on time and offer interesting and helpful content. (See sample agenda). *Continued on next page*



3.1: Sample Orientation Agenda

1. Introduce your union and its mission.

- Use “we” and “our union” to emphasize that we’re all in this together. Share how your Association is a solutions-based group that meets the needs of your college/university’s faculty/staff/graduate assistants and students.
- Provide context for members to understand their relationship to the local, state, and national Associations.

2. Talk about the power of collective action and share recent successes.

- Explain key pieces of your collective bargaining agreement: salary schedule, leaves (including medical, personal), health and retirement benefits, work day, safe working conditions, recent gains, etc.
- Talk about how to deal with issues at work, i.e. when to call the Association.

3. Highlight opportunities for professional growth through the Association.

4. Ask for membership.

“I am here today to ask you to join us. As an Association, we have developed the resources and support you need to thrive because we have been there. Every one of us has stepped onto the campus for the first time at some point. It can be isolating, but there’s power in numbers. When we come together through the Association, we get closer to getting our students the support they need to succeed.”

5. Invite members to get involved outside the workplace.

- Professional development opportunities
- Influencing campus policy by attending Board of Trustees meetings
- Supporting the political action fund (PAC Fund) and pro-public education candidates running for office

6. Allow time for questions in small groups at tables.

7. Breakfast/Lunch hosted by the Local Association.



Paper copies of NEA’s version of [Secrets of a Successful Organizer](#) can be requested at NewEducator@nea.org.

Key Research Finding

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The [New Educator Campaign Training Template](#) is a step-by-step training curriculum that includes “tough questions” about dues. It is available on [Creative Companion](#) for download, or email NewEducator@nea.org to request a PDF or paper copy.



OBJECTIVE 4:

Debrief and Follow Up

What are the next steps?

Debrief with your member organizers. *What went well? Who were your potential leaders? How can you improve next time? What themes came up during conversations? What are the next steps?* For reps struggling with recruitment, consider a follow-up training or support from some of your stronger organizers, e.g., pairing up to do office visits or off-campus meetings together.



Follow Up To-Dos

- Ask every new hire to join within the first 30 days.
- Provide building reps and member organizers New Ed card information to support their one-on-one conversations.
- Send New Ed cards to NEA through your state New Ed contact.
- Periodically request a refreshed list of new hires from your Human Resources Department. Share with your worksite leaders and have them recruit these people to the union.
- Plan to visit worksites or departments where there are no building representatives.
- Send a personal letter to each new hire.



4.1 Sample Welcome Letter for New Hires

Dear _____,

Welcome to _____, where you will make a difference in the lives of students every day. The [local Association] is driven by dedicated faculty/professional staff/support staff/graduate assistants, just like you, who advocate for students, the profession, our classrooms, and our community.

With the [local Association], you're never on your own. When you join us, you are also a member of the [state Association] and the National Education Association, where three million educators across the country share your passion for public education.

As trusted professionals, educators are best equipped to make campus and classroom decisions to ensure student success. It's our mission to ensure our members have a seat at the table. As members of the Association, we have a powerful voice in creating higher education policies that enrich the lives of the students.

As faculty/professional staff/support staff/graduate assistants, you have the opportunity to help our students realize their dreams. Your work is critical to their success and the mission of our institution. It's also personally rewarding and professionally demanding. That's why the Association strives to provide you with the support you need to be great at what you do.

Join today!

Sincerely,
Jill Doe
President, Campus Education Association
Department of History

Email@hotmail.com