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Strategies of Old and New: Organizing SEIU Local 1021



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Dedication

To my mother, Marlene Barbosa Soeiro, who endured and sacrificed for her children. I could only hope to be as strong and as resilient as you, thank you. And to my amazing partner Patrick Cass, who has been my rock throughout this whole academic journey.

Disclaimer

This study has been prepared for SEIU Local 1021, Oakland, California. The author conducted this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Policy at Mills College. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Mills College Public Policy Program, the sponsoring organization, or any other agency.

Terms/Acronyms

AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations)

AMI (Area Median Income)

BPP (Black Panther Party)

CCWCS (Chicago Center for Working-Class Studies)

NLRA (National Labor Relations Act)

NLRB (National Labor Relations Board)

SCOTUS (Supreme Court of the United States)

SEIU (Service Employees International Union)

RTW (Right-To-Work)

UFW (United Farm Workers)

Definitions

Chapters: A group of unionized employees that are part of the SEIU Local 1021 affiliate. Each chapter has its own worksite and employer.

Chapter Leaders: President, Vice President, and other leadership positions of a chapter. These positions are elected by peer members of the union chapter.

Organizing: To form a group of people into a labor union, and/or to coordinate a group of people for activities related to the labor union including, but not limited, to improving worker conditions and collective bargaining.

SEIU Local 1021: An affiliate of the national SEIU organization. The regional jurisdiction for this affiliate is the northern California area including the San Joaquin valley, bay area, and far northern region.

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Executive Summary

Like many unions nation-wide, SEIU Local 1021 is facing obstacles to ensuing union stability and increasing membership. Many unions are attempting to increase their current membership numbers to strengthen their base as the threat of national Right-To-Work legislation, a law that bans Agency Shop or “Fair Share” fees, nears the Supreme Court of the United States as *Friedrichs v California Teachers Association*. SEIU Local 1021 has chosen to use increased member organizing as their strategy for strengthening their organization’s resources.

This report seeks to enhance SEIU Local 1021’s current strategy by exploring successful models and frameworks used by different labor organizations that can be applied to SEIU Local 1021. These frameworks were carefully evaluated and took into consideration the current goals of the Local as well as the city of Oakland. The result being the following recommendation: that SEIU Local 1021 enhances their current organizing framework by using the Strategic Capacity Model, which assesses the Local’s member identities, social networks, and skills. This includes collecting and assessing chapter leadership biographical data in order for the Local to ensure a heterogeneous leadership team while also assessing and identifying any potential gaps in memberships. This information acts as a tool for evaluating organizing practices, identify gaps in organizing, informing future decision-making.