
Human
RIGHTS
CWA

**NATIONAL & LOCAL
COMMITTEES**

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

The purpose of this manual is to help CWA Locals establish functioning and effective Civil Rights and Equity and Women's Committees in their locals. This manual can be used as a resource for newsletters, articles, posters, flyers, and informational handouts.

For more information about CWA's Human Rights Department, please visit our website at:

www.cwa-union.org/national-issues/human-rights

or send an email to HumanRights@cwa-union.org.

Created by:

CWA Human Rights
Department 501 3rd St NW
Washington, DC 20001

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INTRO

“The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.

Human Rights are under attack and CWA will not stand for it! We can no longer afford to allow systems of oppression and hatred to create division between us while the 1% reaps the benefits of our hard work. For decades, CWA activists have stood as champions and protectors of democracy and human rights. We fought for the abolishment of child labor. We fought for equal voting rights for women and people of color. We participated in historical movements resulting in the inclusion of people of all races; regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religious belief, or socioeconomic status. Though we have made much progress, the unfortunate reality is that there is still a great deal of work to be done.

National political leaders are trying to roll back the clock and undo decades of progress on fundamental laws ranging from citizenship to healthcare to labor rights. Government and state legislation attacks people based on religion, race, sexual orientation, and citizenship status nearly every day. Yet, at a time when we feel defeated, it is imperative we remain dedicated to preserving, protecting, and expanding our democracy. Now is the time to use our people power to tear down the walls of division in society and build a bridge of commonality and shared goals. We must share our stories and work together to transform our minds and remove the fear preventing us from creating a progressive culture that values social and economic justice.



To do this, CWA leaders must build a powerful network of organizers through the recruitment and development of human rights activists in our union. By developing and sustaining active coalitions with like-minded groups and individuals, we can win the fight for social and economic justice and democracy.



We can win the fight to hold elected officials accountable to the people by supporting public and small donor financing initiatives and increasing our Political Action Fund contributions.



We can win the fight to make sure everyone is treated fairly at work by negotiating contracts that protect working people against discrimination based on gender identity.



We can win the fight to protect the right to vote by challenging voter suppression legislation and advocating for the reinstatement of voting privileges to disenfranchised citizens.



We can win the fight to secure good, family and community supporting jobs by actively opposing the outsourcing and offshoring of American jobs.



We can win the fight for healthcare by advocating for legislation providing quality health care and a secure retirement for American workers.



We can win the fight to protect working people from the threat of deportation by urging Congress to pass legislation that provides a path to citizenship for immigrants.



We can win the fight to decriminalize marginalized communities by collaborating with grassroots organizations to pass criminal justice reform.

When we fight, we win!

CWA Human Rights HISTORY

Motivation

During the 1973 CWA Convention, extensive discussions were held on the methods by which CWA handled and resolved the problems of women, people of color, and all members of marginalized communities. For months conversations were held with the National Executive Board to determine how CWA could move forward as an inclusive union and embrace all of its diverse members.

Establishment

After much discussion and persistence from women and minority members, in 1973 the National Executive Board established the **“Blacks and Other Minorities Structure Committee”** and the **“Female Structure Committee”** to make recommendations to the President and the Executive Board on ways to better involve women and minority members. In 1974 resolutions were adopted to establish a **“Committee on Equity”** (COE) and the **“Concerned Women’s Advancement Committee”** (CWAC) to include a rank and file member as a representative from each District. Committee members would serve as activists who defend, promote, and protect the Human Rights of the entire membership and our communities.

Timeline of Significant Events

- 1978** CWA held its first annual National Women's Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Resolutions on Equal Rights Amendment, child care and job pressures were presented to the CWA Executive Board
- 1982** The first National Minority Conference was held.
- 1983** In response to recommendations by the National Committee on Equity for training opportunities devoted to minorities, the Executive Board established the Minorities Leadership Institute - an intensive study program dedicated to increasing the involvement of minorities at all levels of the union
- 1989** Executive Board adopts the COE's recommendation to include a discrimination policy in the Constitution
- 1991** Delegates made changes to the CWA Constitution to allow the COE and the CWAC to give annual reports and recommendations to future Conventions
- 2002** The Executive Board amends CWA's Policy on Mutual Respect to include the statement "Freedom from discrimination within our Union is a right and privilege of all CWA members. Any abridgment of this right and privilege shall be subject to a complaint under the CWA Internal Appeals Procedures."
- 2005** Delegates adopt a Constitutional amendment requiring the COE Committee and the CWAC become regular standing committees in all CWA Locals
- 2007** Convention delegates adopted a resolution and made the corresponding constitutional changes to add four At-Large Diversity Executive Board Members to the CWA Executive Board with the goal of having at least three people of color and at least two women (to be elected at the 2008 convention).
- 2008** Four At-Large Diversity Executive Board members were elected, establishing the Executive Diversity Committee.

- 2009** The Human Rights Ad Hoc Committee is established to expand participation at all levels of the Human Rights program, develop materials for locals, and use resources in ways that build the effectiveness of CWA's Human Rights effort
- 2010** Delegates adopted a resolution to change the COE's name to CWA 2010 National Civil Rights and Equity Committee. The CWAC's name was changed to CWA National Women's Committee
- 2012** On International Human Rights Day, CWA joined with over 100 progressive organizations to launch a nationwide democracy initiative
- 2015** CWA members, alongside the NAACP and other allies, participated in America's Journey for Justice March. Marchers covered more than 860 miles and held teach-ins in almost 40 locations between Selma, AL, and Washington, DC.
- 2016** CWA Human Rights activists joined the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in South and North Dakota to fight the development of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The pipeline posed a great threat to the Tribe's community, land, and water supply
- 2017** Convention delegates adopted the CWA STRONG resolution. The CWA STRONG resolution calls for an increased focus on organizing, legislative and political action, and human rights by establishing functioning, effective committees and improving workplace mobilization structures
- 2017** Convention delegates adopted the "WORKERS' RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS: THE FIGHT FORWARD" resolution creating the Fight Forward Program to grow and strengthen local human rights committees by building power through local activism and mobilization
- 2018** The National Executive Board and CWA members rallied in Washington, D.C. with the co-organizer of the renewal of the Poor People's Campaign, Reverend William Barber, II. Activists marched to the Supreme Court and engaged in civil disobedience to draw national attention to the lack of progress made on education, living wages, jobs, and housing

2021

The CWA Human Rights Department launches the Building an Anti-Racist Union Training in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and heightened violence against communities of color.

2023

The CWA Human Rights Department rolls out the Gender Justice Training across the nation, fighting the inequities women and the LGBTQIA+ community face. Over 300 CWA Human Rights activists from across the country rally in Washington, D.C., for the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

2024

CWA Human Rights activists rallied on the National Mall for the Poor People's Campaign Mass Rally-Moral March and Low Wage Workers' Assembly to the Polls. At the 2024 Human Rights Conference in Houston, the CWA Minority Leadership Institute was renamed the CWA Dennis Serrette Minority Leadership Institute in honor of the long-time CWA staff member and human rights activist.



HUMAN RIGHTS



Program and Goals

The CWA Human Rights Program is developed, supported, and implemented by CWA activists who work to engage members on social justice issues beyond solely economic and worker justice. Activists strive to educate members and the community on Human Rights issues. Such issues include, but are not limited to:

Human Rights Issues

- Reproductive rights
- LGBTQIA+ rights
- Sexual harassment
- Violence against women
- Human rights issues in Artificial Intelligence and other technologies
- Voter suppression
- Environmental justice
- Disability discrimination and accessibility issues
- Healthcare, paid family leave, and access to affordable childcare
- Pay inequity
- Economic security
- Systemic racism
- Religious discrimination
- Hate crimes
- Criminal justice reform
- Immigration reform
- Affirmative action

The goals of CWA's Human Rights Program are to:

- Work to fully integrate Human Rights issues into the core work of the union
- Fight against all forms of discrimination in our union, the industries we represent, and the community
- Develop and empower members of color, women, LGBTQIA+ members, and all members of marginalized communities at all levels of the union
- Expand CWA's network of Human Rights activists by creating and maintaining a structured, international network of socially progressive union and community organizers
- Increase engagement and visibility of CWA Civil Rights & Equity and Women's Committees in communities
- Increase grassroots activity on Human Rights issues directly impacting the working class
- Collaborate with and provide support to grassroots community organizations actively engaged with members whose work align with on campaigns related to CWA's broader goals of social and economic justice

To reach our goals . . .



*We coordinate a **national structure** in which appointed representatives organize Human Rights work in every CWA District and Sector:*

We are led by the Joint National Human Rights Committee, which is made up of the National Civil Rights & Equity Committee and the National Women's Committee.



*We **educate** our membership on social justice issues that impact our union and the greater community.*

We offer two dynamic trainings that can be used at locals, district meetings, and conferences. The trainings are adaptable to specific needs.

- Building an Anti-Racist Union Training
- Gender Justice Training

We also host the Dennis Serrette Minority Leadership Institute (MLI), a program that provides education and leadership development to people of color, women, LGBTQIA+ folks, and all minoritized members of our union.



*We **engage** with progressive organizations and individuals to take action and cultivate a strong solidarity that encompasses all working peoples' struggles.*

Allies (Non-Exhaustive List)

- AFL-CIO Constituency Groups
 - APALA - Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
 - APRI - A. Philip Randolph Institute
 - CLUW - Coalition of Labor Union Women
 - CBTU - Coalition of Black Trade Unionists
 - LCLAA - Labor Council of Latin American Advancement
- Pride At Work
- Union Veterans Council
- Black Labor Week Project Inc.
- BlueGreen Alliance
- Common Defense
- EPIC - Empowering Pacific Islander Communities
- Greenpeace
- IN4WS - Interreligious Network for Worker Solidarity
- IWA - International Women's Alliance
- Justice For All Immigrants
- LCCR - Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- LNS - Labor Network for Sustainability
- NAACP - National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
- NBWC - National Black Worker Center
- NCNW - National Council of Negro Women, Inc.
- NOW - National Organization for Women
- NCTE - National Center for Transgender Equality
- NWLC - National Women's Law Center
- Poor People's Campaign
- Sierra Club
- Social Security Works
- WISE - Women's Institute for Solidarity and Empowerment

Building an Anti-Racist Union TRAINING

Our Building an Anti-Racist Union aims:

- to educate participants on their own biases and how to hold themselves accountable;
- to explore racism as a system of power and what that looks like in our communities;
- to forge anti-racist action in our union through the formation of local Human Rights Committees and activism

Modules:

1. Implicit Bias: Understanding & Interrupting the Unconscious
2. What Does Racial Difference / Bias Look Like?
3. Understanding Racism & Anti-Racism
4. Building an Anti-Racist Union
5. Union Values
6. How Do We Build Power?
7. Forming Human Rights Committees

Gender Justice TRAINING

Our Gender Justice Training aims:

- to demonstrate the presence and significance of gender bias, patriarchy, and homophobia in labor throughout history and today;
- to push members to interrogate and challenge their own gender biases; and
- to promote community engagement across locals to create a more proactive movement for gender justice

Modules:

1. Bias
2. Gender in Labor
3. Building Power & Solidarity
4. Community Engagement

Why Do We Need HUMAN RIGHTS CWA

Committees



We are led by the Joint National Human Rights Committee, which is made up of the National Civil Rights & Equity Committee and the National Women's Committee. Both committees create space for CWA activists with experience, passion and knowledge around key human rights issues to come together and ensure that Human Rights issues are central to CWA's work on all three sides of the triangle: bargaining, organizing and movement building, including legislative/political action.

These committees also make it clear to our members, employers and communities that CWA is committed to addressing the needs and protecting the interests of the entire membership and our communities. Working together to ensure Human Rights are protected builds power and strengthens the credibility of our Union.

- **Every District and Sector is represented by at least 1 National Human Rights Committee member** (appointed by their District Vice President/Sector President) and at least 1 Human Rights staff person.
- **You can find your Women's representative and staff person(s) at this link:** <https://cwa-union.org/national-issues/human-rights/womens-committee>
- **You can find your Civil Rights & Equity representative and staff person(s) at this link:** <https://cwa-union.org/national-issues/human-rights/committee-on-civil-rights-and-equity>

National Committee Member Duties

- Work to fully integrate Human Rights issues into the core work of the union
- Establish ongoing regular communication with and support to locals within District/Sector to grow the number of functioning and effective Local Human Rights Committees
- Promote local education and engagement on human rights issues to ensure that Local Human Rights Committees are equipped to uphold the principles of human rights and mutual respect within their locals
- Create and maintain a mobilization structure of Human Rights activists in District/Sector that allows for rapid national engagement on social justice issues that impact our members and the community
- Promote, manage, and facilitate CWA Human Rights Trainings in District/Sector
- Participate in organizing the CWA Human Rights Conference
- Research, report, and make recommendations to give direction to the National Executive Board and Convention delegates on actions which address Human Rights issues
- Work along all sides of the CWA triangle to engage members on social justice issues and campaigns which may fall outside of the traditional union domain
- Execute the operational duties needed to achieve the outlined tasks in coordination and with support from the National Human Rights staff, District/Sector staff and leadership, other National Human Rights Committee members, local leadership, and more

National Women's Committee



- **Mission Statement:** To educate, inspire, and empower women while working all sides of the CWA Triangle.
- **Vision Statement:** To create a just and equal society for all women by protecting the interests of the membership and our communities.

National Civil Rights & Equity Committee



- **Mission Statement:** To advocate for the removal of systemic barriers that affect the fair and just treatment of working people.
- **Vision Statement:** To build a society where members of all races, cultures, religions, sexual orientations, genders, disabilities, ages, and nationalities feel welcomed, respected, and heard in our union and our communities.

Establishing a Local Committee

Per the CWA Constitution, each chartered Local must have a Human Rights Committee. However, if your local does not have a committee, you should start by talking to your Local Executive Board. The committee should function under the direction of the Executive Board, and its members will be appointed, or elected, according to local bylaws. Contact your Local President for more information.

Local Women's and Civil Rights & Equity Committee Member Duties

- Build and encourage the establishment of functioning Local Civil Rights & Equity Committees
- Work cooperatively with the Local Executive Board, stewards, and community activists to defend attacks against the human rights of the working class by increasing grassroots activity on Human Rights issues
- Educate the membership on current Human Rights issues impacting the local and the community
- Work all sides of the CWA triangle to strengthen labor by building coalitions and working with grassroots community organizations on campaigns related to social and economic justice
- Coordinate and communicate regularly with District/Sector National Human Rights Committee person(s) and Human Rights staff person(s)

To fulfill the outlined duties, Local Human Rights Committees should

- Meet regularly to educate membership on relevant Human Rights issues, as well as engage members in Human Rights activism through events, mobilizations, and collaborative work with ally organizations
- Assign Roles
 - Chair: Creates the agenda and leads the meeting. Also serves as a liaison between the Local and National Committees
 - Treasurer: Sets and manages the budget for events and operations
 - Secretary: Takes minutes and handles administrative tasks
 - All Committee Members: Brings relevant Human Rights issues, concerns, and engagement opportunities to the committee. Also educates local members and distributes information

- Depending on the level of engagement and size of the committee, you may also want to consider creating sub-committees on specific Human Rights issues.
- Identify needs and opportunities within your local and your community. Approach your local leadership with ideas to lead the fight or support the cause
- Once you have identified issues, establish a budget to participate in campaigns and provide support to grassroots community organizations

TIPS

- **ADDRESS** issues that directly impact your community or workplace. Take advantage of the momentum and use the opportunity to recruit new members!
- **CREATE** social media pages to introduce Human Rights topics to members, as well as keep them updated on upcoming events and public union news.
- **SET** short-term priorities (achievable within 4-6 months), medium-term goals (7-12 months), and long-term goals (1-2 years).
- **HOLD** at least TWO Human Rights Trainings per year to ensure that members are consistently learning about Human Rights issues and how to take action on such issues.
- **ENGAGE** coalition partners and organizations in your community that align with our Human Rights work to collaborate on key campaigns. Be strategic and community-minded: ensure that these relationships are mutually beneficial. For example, on our end, we could offer union resources (union hall, volunteers, copies, etc.) to support their work.
- **ENCOURAGE** members to sign up for CWA's Activist network at www.cwa-union.org/pages/human_rights_activist_card
- **DO NOT GIVE UP!** Having a small committee is okay. A small group of people can change the world for many.

CWA POLICY ON MUTUAL RESPECT

The CWA Policy on Discrimination is as follows:

- 1.** The Communications Workers of America reaffirms its commitment as a matter of principle and policy that all forms of discrimination, for whatever reason, be vigorously opposed until all vestiges of discrimination are eliminated from society.
- 2.** Freedom from discrimination within our Union is a right and privilege of all CWA members. Any abridgment of this right and privilege shall be subject to a complaint under the CWA Internal Appeals Procedures and should be investigated immediately without fear of reprisal and retaliation.
- 3.** In restating our policy for conduct within our Union, it is equally important that our employers reflect this policy so that neither the Company nor the Union shall unlawfully discriminate against a person on account of race, color, gender, religion, age, marital/parental status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, or because a person is handicapped, a disabled veteran, or a veteran of the military service. This means what it says: "No form of Discrimination will be tolerated at any level of CWA."
- 4.** Any matter which relates to the field of discrimination should be immediately and appropriately handled by the appropriate level of the Union that comes across the allegation of discrimination. It should be handled thoroughly in an honest and positive manner.
- 5.** It is a matter of principle that no one member is more equal than another. The handling of the representation of our members at all levels of CWA should be done in an evenhanded way with no fear; no preference; no favorites.
- 6.** Local Equity and Women's Committees can play a positive role by providing continuous education training assistance and by reporting to the members of the Local on the ways and means of eliminating discrimination in its entirety.
- 7.** CWA Constitutional Committees should be representative of the Union. Local CWA Constitutional Committees should be representative of all the Local membership and should be active committees, not paper committees.
- 8.** The Union policy to have a job steward for each fifteen members should be fully implemented and should be reflective and representative of the entire membership of each Local.

*(Adopted by the CWA Executive Board June 11, 2002;
revised December 17, 2009)*

