

BUILDING REPRESENTATIVE MANUAL

Minnesota School Employees Association

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THE BARGAINING UNIT BUILDING REPRESENTATIVES

MSEA bargaining units need to select an active member at each work site to act, not necessarily as a grievance representative, but as a communications link between the members and the local bargaining unit officers.

Many bargaining units have already identified members at this grassroots level who serve as the immediate connection between MSEA and the membership at each location. These members may be called Job Representatives, Job Stewards, Site Representatives, Shop Stewards, Building Representatives, Stewards or Employee Representatives.

In some bargaining units these representatives are charged with the responsibility of handling member grievances and problems at the first steps of the contractual grievance procedure. If so authorized, they are truly performing the "Job Steward" function. They are expected to be well versed in the terms of the collective bargaining agreement and to have the ability, inclination and training to deal effectively with management in adversarial situations.

Increasingly, grievance representation is becoming primarily the responsibility of elected officers or designated Grievance Representatives who may have representational jurisdiction over **several** work locations or, in smaller bargaining units, **the entire school district**. This centralization of the Grievance Representative function is often necessary as members at the work-site level do not feel comfortable in the adversarial arena of grievance representation or because the bargaining unit has decided that contract administration is more effectively handled by fewer Representatives.

WHAT BUILDING REPRESENTATIVES ARE

The Building Representative is a significant part of MSEA, just as important and necessary as the bargaining unit officers, Board of Directors and MSEA staff. The Building Representative is the indispensable link between the members and the state office.

As a Building Representative you are the person in the middle--between the state office and the members it represents at you work location. You are the unifying force that makes MSEA and the members "one." Graphically your relationship between MSEA and the members looks like this:

MEMBERS		MSEA
Organize		Participate
Follow		Support
Educate	THE	Assist
Lead	BUILDING	Develop
Motivate	REP	Strengthen
Communicate		

You are the first **MSEA contact** for new employees and the primary MSEA contact for current employees. Your ability to convey the importance and value of MSEA membership determines whether the employees become active in the union or are "turned off."

You are the **MSEA representative** at the work site.

You are the **employees' representative** to the Bargaining Unit Chief Steward, the Job Steward, Bargaining Unit Committees, Field Representative and to the State Association.

You are the **two-way communications link** between the union and the MSEA bargaining unit members.

You are a **leader** because you work for union goals, establish the respect of the members, inspire the members and speak out for them at bargaining unit meeting and with MSEA officers and staff.

You are an **organizer** because you organize the unorganized by recruiting new MSEA members, unionize the organized by encouraging involvement in bargaining unit affairs, build solidarity and welcome new employees to the workplace.

You are an **educator** because you explain MSEA objectives, inform members about MSEA benefit and special service plans, spread unionism and the MSEA program, combat anti-MSEA activity, and answer basic questions from the members regarding the provisions of the contract affecting the employees.

You are a **conductor** because you direct people with problems to the proper channel, and direct members with grievances to the bargaining unit officer, Job Steward or Field Representative, as appropriate.

Leader, organizer, educator and conductor describes what you are. The following pages of this module explains how to translate this basic description into an active leadership role that will enhance the effectiveness of the union by making the local MSEA Bargaining unit as democratic, constructive and responsive as possible.

WHAT BUILDING REPRESENTATIVES DO

Organize your group.

The local MSEA leader is the cornerstone of the union. As the representative of the local bargaining unit at your work site, you are the key person in the relationship of MSEA to its members. You are truly the unifying force. You keep the bargaining unit officers informed of problems, grievances, complaints, gripes and suggestions from the members in your area. You keep the members informed of MSEA activities, programs and organizational policies.

In unity there is strength. The effectiveness of MSEA at the state level and at the bargaining unit's negotiation table is determined, to a large degree, by the number of employees that join the union. The more employees who become members, the stronger MSEA becomes. As more members become **informed of** and **active in** union affairs, the effectiveness of MSEA increases.

The Building Representative's job is to completely organize the work site. Organizing is really several things. It's signing up new members; strengthening MSEA, and providing leadership to the unit members in your area.

Signing up new members.

The easiest person to recruit is the *new employee* before he/she settles in. If you wait too long the new employee may become so settled in that he/she will feel that, having come this far without joining MSEA, there is no reason to join at all.

Management sees the new employee before you do and the employee may mistakenly assume that his/her salary and other benefits are the result of management's generosity. It is important for new employees to understand that their working conditions are a product of the relative strengths of the

union and the employer. A bargaining unit with a large, active membership will have a great impact on improving wages and working conditions, while a weak bargaining unit will not have much influence at all.

You should greet the new employee on her/his first day at work. Introduce yourself and extend a welcome on behalf of MSEA, the bargaining unit and the other employees. Make the new employee feel at home by showing her/him around, introducing the employee to other MSEA members and, generally, helping her/him break into the job on a positive note. Depending on your job requirements much of this can be done before work (new employees tend to arrive early), during breaks or at lunchtime.

Give the new employee a copy of the bargaining unit's newsletter and MSEA's newsletter, the *MSEA Classified*. If management didn't provide a copy of the current MSEA contract, you should. In either case you should point out a few of its major provisions that the new employee (especially if coming from private sector employment) may not be familiar with. For example, if covered in your contract, the following subjects may be worth explaining:

- * Personal Necessity Leave
- * Overtime rule including compensatory time off
- * Extended Illness Leave
- * Method of salary step advancement
- * Rights of Probationary Employees
- * Vacation carry-over and scheduling
- * Holidays (pay for and in lieu holidays, if any)
- * MSEA recognition as the exclusive voice of the employees
- * The right of probationary employees to join the union from the first day of work regardless of probationary status.

You should also give the new employee a New Member Packet containing:

- * MSEA application and a self-addressed, stamped envelope
- * MSEA General Info & Member Benefits booklet
- * MSEA Governing Documents booklet
- * Weingarten Rights laminated card

Offer to help the new employee fill out the application form and encourage them to mail it to MSEA as soon as possible. You should mention any special programs or events that are scheduled in the immediate future and point out the location of the MSEA bulletin board where announcements of union activities and programs will be posted.

If the building reps in your unit do not carry a supply of New Member Packets, be sure to notify the MSEA office immediately of the new hire and a packet will be mailed to the employee.

The bargaining unit may follow the Building Representative's initial contact of a new employee with a personal letter from the Bargaining Unit Chief Steward--explaining the history, operation and achievements of MSEA and the local bargaining unit, extending a personal invitation to join and to attend the bargaining unit meeting. You should then assume the responsibility of accompanying the new employee to the bargaining unit meeting and for introducing her/him to other members and officers before the meeting begins.

In addition to the new employees there are often **long-term employees** who, for one reason or another, have never joined the union as a member. You may be surprised how many of them have never even been approached about joining MSEA. As with the new employees, the primary method for signing them up is **contact**. Find out who the non-members are at your work site and talk to them about MSEA. You can request such a listing from the MSEA state office. You'll find that most people will join if you contact them and tell them about the union.

Some non-members, however, will give reasons for not joining or ask questions that may seem tough to answer. A few typical objections are:

- * Why should I join when I get the same benefits without joining?
- * I can't afford to join.
- * I don't believe in unions.
- * The school board and my supervisor will take care of us without MSEA.
- * I'm only going to be working here a short time.
- * My spouse (or parent) doesn't like unions.
- * The dues are too high.
- * MSEA doesn't do anything. Grievances are not settled. I don't like the people who are running things in MSEA.
- * All unions are corrupt.
- * MSEA is a company union. We need a real union.
- * My religion doesn't allow me to join a union.

As you can see, the objections you may get from non-members are not always easy to answer off the top of your head. Remember, the longer you serve as Building Representative, the more you will learn about MSEA and unionism in general. The questions will become easier to answer. If you do get a question that you can't answer, say so. Then check with a bargaining unit officer or MSEA staff so that you can respond intelligently and accurately to the non-member's question or objection.

Once you have recruited the non-members into MSEA you are on your way to building an effective organization at your work site-- but your job has just begun. From here on, you can be instrumental in causing new and current members to become *active union members*.

Communicating.

There is still more to be done after you've signed up the non-members at your work site. You have to let the members know what MSEA is doing for them and let the bargaining unit officers know about the feelings and desires of the members you represent.

To keep both the members and the officers informed you must be knowledgeable about what each group thinks. The best way to keep in touch is through meetings. Take the time to attend bargaining unit meetings. Listen to what the bargaining unit is involved in now and what it is planning for the future. While you're there, advise the bargaining unit and its officers what is of concern to the members at your work site.

Business that takes place at the bargaining unit meeting should be reported back to the members in your area who were not at the meeting. You should try to hold a short meeting at your work site every other week or so--perhaps at lunch or during a rest break. These get-togethers ("mini-meetings" or "shop-meetings") will help you stay in touch with your members.

Communicating has to go beyond the forum of the monthly MSEA bargaining unit meeting. Strengthening the union and building support of its programs is a continuous process. You are the MSEA leader at the work site and you must always keep the members updated regarding your union's activities and constantly build understanding of MSEA goals and programs. You should arrange to receive necessary information from bargaining unit officers as soon as it is available. You should routinely receive state office bulletins and brochures via your bargaining unit officers. Material of interest should be posted on the union bulletin board or, if time-critical, delivered to members individually. Important or controversial information should be discussed at a work site meeting.

During contract negotiations, call the chairperson of the negotiating committee after each session to get an update on the progress of bargaining and pass the word along to the members you represent. (Some bargaining units make it a practice of issuing a formal "Negotiations Update" after each bargaining session. Others establish a "hotline" for members to call and listen to a recorded update of negotiation activities.) Similarly, if there is a grievance pending which affects your work site, you should periodically check with the Job Steward or other bargaining unit officer regarding its progress or resolution.

Make sure that the members in your area know who, what and where you are. Post a sign on the bulletin board identifying you as the MSEA Building Representative. List your work location and/or phone number and the times that you are available to meet with individual members.

Keep in touch and keep the information flowing. Always remember that you are the representative of the employees **collectively** at your work site. When you are acting as their spokesperson, think and act for the welfare of the entire group. Stand up for what is right. Build up friendly internal relations by discouraging bickering and petty politics. By extending an open communications channel, you can help the MSEA bargaining unit function smoothly, efficiently and democratically so that the organization can truly represent the membership.

Information and Referral.

The MSEA Building Representative personifies the union's presence at the work site. You will find that the more you communicate between the bargaining unit officers and the members, the easier your job will get and the more you will become **the** source of MSEA information for members, officers, and, at times, site-level management.

As you become more comfortable in your role of Building Representative you will notice that the bargaining unit officers readily respond to your comments, suggestions and requests. In turn, the members will become more interested and involved in MSEA and will provide you with the back-up and assistance every leader needs to function effectively.

Your responsibility has been described by some as "the gatekeeper function." You are the spokesperson for your group and the channel through which information flows from the group and also into it. You don't necessarily know the answer to every question, but you know how to get the answer or to whom the members should be referred to get the answer for themselves.

For example, if a member asks you if the employer can move the Labor Day holiday, you either know the answer or you know how to find it in the collective bargaining agreement. If, however, the member asks if she/he is entitled to pay for a holiday which occurred on the day before the member is hired, it may be necessary to refer the question to the Grievance Representative or MSEA Field Representative. Depending on the circumstances, your responsibility is either **information** or **referral**. You should always exercise caution in giving a direct answer to what appears to be a simple regarding employee rights under law or the contract. The "simple question" may be disguising a more complicated problem. In the situation regarding moving the Labor Day holiday, the member's *unstated* concern may have been that the holiday was moved out of his/her work year so that the member lost holiday pay. The circumstances then would merit further investigation by the person responsible for handling employee grievances and problems. Before answering the apparently "simple question" attempt to find out *why* the member has a question in the first place. If the real reason for the question involves an interpretation of the contract or a situation that could be, but isn't covered by the contract, your responsibility is to refer the question or the member to the MSEA Field Representative who is well versed in the contract and/or law.

As the exclusive representative of the employees in your unit, MSEA is charged by law with the important and critical duty of representing all employees **fairly** in their relations with their employer. This means that employees in the unit at your work site have the right to union representation **whether or not they are full members of MSEA**. If an employee approaches you with a problem which may be considered a grievance under the contract or which otherwise involves the rights of the person as an employee, your responsibility is to refer him/her **immediately** to the bargaining unit officer, Grievance Representative or field representative designated to handle grievances for your bargaining unit. You should then follow up on this referral by notifying the representative of your action so that he/she may contact the employee if necessary.

Do not disregard concerns that are either not specifically covered in your MSEA contract or which appear to be obviously not a valid grievance under the contract. Contact the bargaining unit Chief Steward or Grievance Representative and discuss the situation. There may be other procedures, outside of the formal grievance procedure, which are available to resolve the concern or complaint.

There are other questions, issues and concerns that should be referred by you to another person:

- * Work related illness or accidents should be referred to the bargaining unit chief steward;

- * Members with legal questions or problems **not related to their employment** should be referred to the MSEA state office for legal advice;
- * Employee discipline matters immediately should be referred to the bargaining unit Chief Steward or the assigned MSEA Field Representative;
- * Technical questions regarding MSEA benefit and insurance plans should be referred to the state office;
- * Problems related to the proper payment of Association dues should be referred to the State Office.

In most cases, instead of merely directing the member to the appropriate officer, staff person or outside agency, you should offer to personally get the answer for the member. This not only enhances the role of the Building Representative as the person who "can get the answer" but, also, avoids shuttling the member around, as in a bureaucracy, by providing "one stop" service for most member concerns. On the other hand, complicated questions and complex problems are probably best handled by putting the member in direct contact with the person who knows the answers or can resolve the problem.

WHAT BUILDING REPRESENTATIVES KNOW

Know Your Rights.

As stated previously, the Building Representative does not directly represent members in any grievance matter. You should, however, have a general knowledge of the MSEA contract and the major subjects covered by it. If you do not have a "well-informed" member's understanding of what is in the contract, you will find it difficult to sell other employees on the union. One of your primary topics of discussion with members and non-members alike should be the benefits in the contract that the union has negotiated for the employees. In addition, you should become familiar with basic employee rights under the Public Employees Labor Relations Act that provides the base upon which most other benefits are built.

You are not expected to know each and every technical point of the law or the MSEA contract. As you become more involved in day-to-day MSEA business, your technical knowledge will increase and you can share what you know with the employees you represent.

Know Your People

People are not all alike and the people MSEA represents are quite diversified as to background, occupation and attitude. You have to treat each member as the individual she/he is and yet find the common thread that brings employees together in a union. If you know the members you represent, you can take their difference into account and you will be able to do a better job as their spokesperson.

The better you know your people--and the better they get to know you--the easier it will be to build the union. If the employees at your work site trust you as a friend, they will let you know when they have suggestions or complaints about MSEA. Member complaints are especially important because the union first has to know about complaints before steps can be taken to correct them. If the members have confidence in you, you will be able to help MSEA and your bargaining unit resolve internal problems.

Know Your Work Site.

There is certain information about your work site or school-site that you will know better than most. You know the personalities, how work is assigned, the classifications and the local procedures where you work. Even though you may not be an expert on the contract, you will know if one employee is being treated unfairly or differently than other employees. Your knowledge and your ability to express it to the bargaining unit Chief Steward will help her/him understand any grievance file at your work site.

When it comes time to prepare for contract negotiations, you will be able to explain to the negotiating committee any particular problems at your work site that should be addressed in the collective bargaining agreement.

Know Your Union.

One of your key jobs is to build MSEA. To do this, you have to know about the union--where it came from, what it is, where it is going *and why*. To be effective, you have to know the background.

Learn the history of MSEA and the labor movement in this country. Know what the union has done for employees over the years. Read MSEA literature to which you have access. Attend meetings and workshops and share what you learn with your fellow members. Keep in touch with bargaining unit officers and MSEA staff and talk to them about the union. Become familiar with the structure of MSEA, its goals and purposes. Find the different avenues of access to the organization for both yourself and the members you represent.

Know Your Duties.

You can be an effective Building Representative only if you know specifically what is expected of you. Your specific duties may depend on the size, location and structure of your bargaining unit and work site. Your bargaining unit will determine your responsibilities, which will probably include the following:

- * Keep members fully informed.
- * Organize--recruit new members into the union.
- * Clarify MSEA objectives--educate the membership.
- * Keep union bulletin boards up to date and clear of non-MSEA material.
- * Periodically conduct informational site-level meetings.
- * Explain MSEA benefit plans and special services.
- * Assist employees in completing membership applications.
- * Keep members informed of MSEA activity regarding grievances, appeals, BMS decisions, legislative action etc. . . . on both the local and state levels through the information supplied to your bargaining unit.
- * Make regular contact with your members and encourage new ideas.

- * Keep lines of communication open. Invite criticism and suggestions. Be the spokesperson from your group to the bargaining unit.
- * Invite members to bargaining unit meetings, workshops and seminars and make sure you attend.
- * Assist in grievance processing by referring problems to the Grievance Representative and providing her/him with necessary background information.
- * Provide input to the bargaining unit negotiating committee regarding the needs and desires of the employees at your work site.

WHAT BUILDING REPRESENTATIVES NEED

Access To Tools.

As with any other endeavor, you can't do the job if you don't have the proper tools. Because your responsibility is primarily **information**, much of the material you need will be in written or printed form. Some of the material, such as this publication, is prepared by the state office; other material is provided by your bargaining unit and you may choose to develop some material on your own. The Appendices to this publication contain forms to help you organize information that you will need to do your job well.

What You Need.

You should obtain, or be supplied with, something in which to keep the material you need. Depending on you location and job requirements this could be a file box or brief case, to be kept in a readily accessible place at your work site. All of the following material should be organized in separate file-folders so that any information can be immediately retrieved:

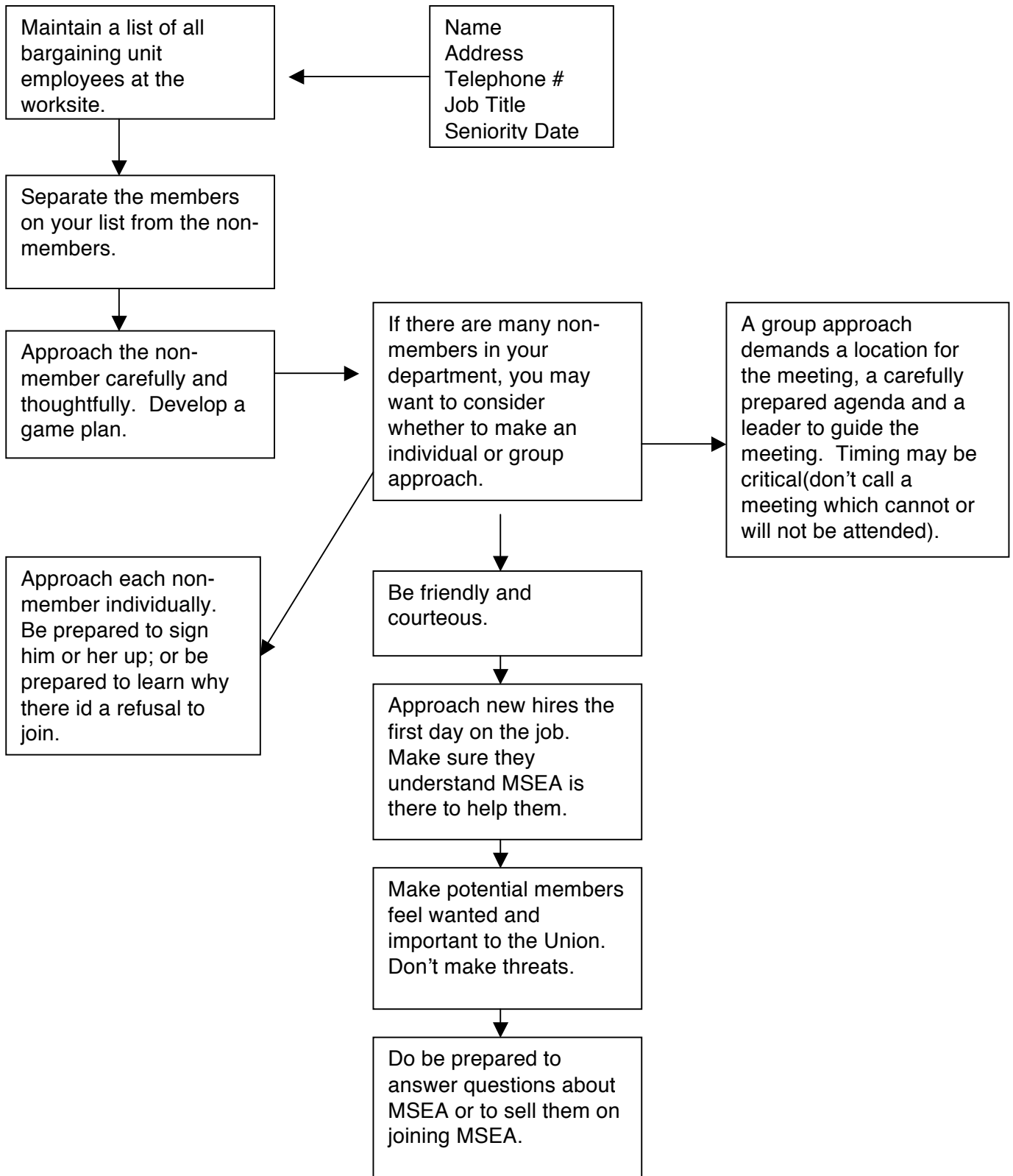
1. A personal copy of the current collective bargaining agreement between MSEA and your employer. Several extra copies should also be kept on hand for distribution to new employees (if necessary) and to replace copies lost by members.
2. MSEA New Member Packets, available from the state office.
3. Copies of MSEA's Governing Documents booklet which include the MSEA Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws and General Policies.
4. Copies MSEA's General Information & Member Benefits booklet. This publications explains programs provided by MSEA such as:
 - United Educators Credit Union membership
 - Nancy Crippen Educational Scholarships
 - no-cost life insurance
 - no-cost accidental death and dismemberment insurance
 - low-cost auto insurance
 - Summer Institute training
 - Minnesota Zoo/IMAX discount card
 - attorney referral
 - retirement fund
5. Copies of recent editions of the MSEA newsletter "The Classified".

6. Extra copies of the newsletter published by your bargaining unit.
7. Grievance forms used in the contractual grievance procedure.
8. Applications for scholarships sponsored by the MSEA.
9. A roster of bargaining unit employees at your work site listing their classification, address, phone numbers, seniority date and membership status.
10. A roster of bargaining unit officers and Grievance Representatives.
11. A directory of other useful addresses and phone numbers.
12. Copies of any rules, regulations, policies and general-distribution memos issued by the employer or sit-level management.
13. A copy of this publication for your reference.
14. Finally, a small notebook which you can keep with you at all times so that you can keep a record to remind you of members' questions, suggestions, requests, complaints and problems.

APPENDIX A

SIGNING UP THE NON-MEMBER

Basic steps to 100 percent membership



APPENDIX B

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION--COMPLETION OF FORM

Note: All employees wishing to become MSEA members MUST fill out and return the membership application to the MSEA state office. Employees wishing to remain fair share fee payers must also fill out the application—and must check the shaded box indicating their wish to stay fair share. The top white part of the application is to be sent to your school district's payroll office. If the entire application is returned to the state office, MSEA will keep the bottom yellow copy for its records and then send the white copy back to the district payroll office. The following information is requested on the application forms:

1. Member's Name
2. Address
3. City/State/Zip
4. Home Phone & Work Phone
5. E-Mail Address
6. Building to which they are assigned (if known)
7. School District Name
8. Date of Birth
9. Position
10. Date & Signature

APPENDIX C

Duplicate or cut along dotted line and post on the union bulletin board.

MINNESOTA STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

BARGAINING UNIT _____

YOUR MSEA BUILDING REPRESENTATIVE

At This Location is _____

MSEA is the **Exclusive** Representative of

_____ Employees in the bargaining unit.

If you have any questions, requests, suggestions, concerns or problems, please contact the person named above. Your MSEA Building Representative will be able to help you personally or will direct you through the appropriate channels.

APPENDIX D

CONTRACT QUESTIONS

Familiarize yourself with your contract. Remember, technical questions regarding language interpretation should be referred to the bargaining unit Chief Steward or MSEA Field Staff.

- A. Holiday schedule
 - 1. Number of holidays.
 - 2. Eligibility

- B. Vacation
 - 1. Rate earned for full time employees.
 - 2. Rate earned for part time employees.
 - 3. Amount that may be accumulated or carried over.
 - 4. Permission to take, how to schedule; who approves.

- C. Personal Necessity
 - 1. What is considered personal necessity.
 - 2. Exceptions.
 - 3. Prior permission?

- D. Bereavement Leave
 - 1. Number of days.
 - 2. Who is considered family
 - 3. Reports required.

- E. Illness Leave
 - 1. Rate earned.
 - 2. Reports required.
 - 3. Increment that may be taken.
 - 4. Extended Illness

- F. Salary Schedule
 - 1. Pay day
 - 2. Supplemental
 - 3. Anniversary date for step advancement
 - 4. Promotion, salary advancement upon.

- G. Hours & Overtime
 - 1. Who authorizes overtime?
 - 2. Overtime rate and how paid.
 - 3. Change, increase, or reduction in hours.

- H. Transfer & Promotion
 - 1. Posting & application
 - 2. Consideration of seniority.

APPENDIX E

REVIEWING YOUR UNIT SITUATION

If a check-mark appears in a box, it represents an item which you should work on.

	Yes	No
1. Do you have a list of members and non-members at your work site?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Do you have a copy of your MSEA contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Do you have copies of grievance forms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Do you have copies of MSEA's Governing Documents?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Do you have New Member Packets?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Do you have employees at your work site that are not MSEA members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Are there employees at your work site that are strongly anti-MSEA?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are there employees at your work site that could be considered problem employees or who constantly complain?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is your work site unhealthy or unsafe?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Do you have site-level managers how are difficult to deal with or who intimidate employees or who are strongly anti-union?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Do you feel that the bargaining unit officers or the Field Rep or the Grievance Representative ignores your work site?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Are the members at your work site involved in MSEA activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Do your fellow employees think of you as someone they can trust or who can represent their interests?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Are you reluctant to get involved and to recruit members for union activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Can you expect the support of your local bargaining unit in organizing your worksite and in being responsive to suggestions and criticism from you as a representative of a particular group of members?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

USE THIS REVIEW TO DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION.

APPENDIX G

MSEA DIRECTORY

Address: 190 E. 5th St, Suite 750
St. Paul, MN 55101

Phone: 800.622.0289
651.227.3623

Fax: 888.329.6732
651.297.6814

FIELD REPRESENTATIVE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Christina L. Clark

**ASST DIRECTOR OF
ACCOUNTING & BENEFITS** Lynn Jansen
Membership and Dues Information

OFFICE MANAGER: Jodi Lietzau
Event Planning and Member Benefits

ADMINISTRATIVE ASST: Melissa John
Address and Leadership Changes