



**ASU**

AUSTRALIAN SERVICES UNION

[www.asumembers.org.au](http://www.asumembers.org.au)

# What we believe in How we organise





## Members are our Union

We understand that our union is only as strong as our members. We believe that what we can achieve as an organised group of workers is far more than we can achieve as individuals. For this reason we ensure resources are spent on building and maintaining our collective strength. The decisions we make are based on the understanding that members' interests always come first.

### This means:

- We do not believe in third party unionism – union staff and the union office are not the union, the members are the union. We reject attempts by employers or others to label or treat “the union” as anything other than the membership.
- We believe that it is members who determine what we do and how we do it. This means that members or workers decide what issues to organise around.
- All decisions should always be made on the basis of what is in the interest of the members.
- Union Officials only act with the authority and permission of members – “never a decision about us without us”.
- Members are always with us when we meet management unless members have decided otherwise.
- We always seek to avoid members becoming dependent on paid officials by providing them with the skills, knowledge and permission to make their own decisions. We work towards workplaces being self-sustaining and self-sufficient – we believe this defines an organised workplace.
- We aim to have relationships with employers that are premised on our strength of organisation and their respect and recognition of our elected delegates and structures.

## Democratic decision making

We believe that decisions should be made democratically. We believe that our society should be more democratic and power should not be in the hands of a few. People have few experiences in their day to day working lives of making collective decisions. Part of being a Union member is having a space where this is possible; this is a benefit and responsibility of membership. Within our Union we prioritise supporting, maintaining and building democratic structures at all levels so that members can participate in democratic decision making wherever possible. We value leadership but we do not believe in imposing decisions from above. We value debate and differences of opinion as essential to democracy and the development of ideas. However, once decisions are made we believe in uniting around the majority view because this gives us strength.

### This means:

Building a culture of collective decision making by giving people the skills and experience of operating this way is a key part of the job of Union Officials.

- We must continually work to empower members to have the tools and ability to make decisions themselves. Democratic structures start at the workplace and this is the first priority.
- Knowledge must be shared with members so they can make decisions. Paid officials are responsible for ensuring members receive the best advice and the benefit of the collective skills and experience of the Union.
- Whilst it is the job of paid officials to give the very best advice to members, we respect the right of members to make decisions.
- We respect the often divergent views of members and encourage debate and dialogue.
- Once a decision is made we work to unite members behind it.
- Members decide what issues they want to organise around and what actions they are prepared to take to achieve an outcome.





## Our delegates are our most valued members

Our delegates are elected by the members they represent. As representatives of groups of members, their role is highly respected and supported. The collective resources of the union are used to support and defend them whenever necessary. Delegates are the leaders of our union and strong leadership enhances the decisions members make and the level of our strength and unity. Therefore we invest in developing the skills and experience of our delegates.

### This means:

- We work to increase the number of delegates by identifying and supporting leaders in groups of workers, we aim to have one delegate for every ten members elected by members.
- That we will work to develop, grow and support our delegates.
- That we respect the delegate as the voice of the workers in their workplace.
- We build networks of delegates to build and share their collective understanding.
- We invest in the long term development of our delegates.
- We will vigorously defend and support any delegate who comes under attack for performing their role as a delegate.
- There are many roles union members can play other than being the elected delegate. We also encourage and support the active involvement of members at whatever level such as being contacts, assistants in campaigns, activists around particular issues. If a member expresses an interest our priority should always be to find a way to involve them.

## Building power at our workplaces and industries

We believe that the most important place to build power is in the workplace. We also understand that building power within an industry makes our union stronger and builds co-operation instead of competition between workers. We understand that our power depends on our membership density, our level of organisation, the quality of our leadership and the decisions members make. Therefore we prioritise strengthening all of these to build power.

### This means:

- We always work to increase and/or maintain our density at a workplace level. In workplaces with high density, this is by being well organised – having delegates and a union structure and culture. In workplaces with low density, this is by organising around issues that are important to workers.
- Recruiting new members is a priority for Union organisers and Union delegates in all our work – in every meeting and in every conversation with a non-member.
- We want to know our membership density at all times, so we know our strengths and weakness and can develop strategies to address them. We use tools like mapping to achieve this.
- It is a Union Organiser's job to educate workers around issues and to agitate, if necessary, so that workers can make an informed decision as to whether enough people feel strongly to organise around the issue.
- It is the job of Union officials to provide the best advice on strategy to win or resolve issues. This does not mean that the paid organiser is the only person with ideas, but they need to bring their – as well as the collective skills and experience of the workers, to debates around strategy. Paid officials are in a privileged position in that they do not work for the employer and they are paid to think and consider strategy and tactics to assist members.
- We work to unite workers across workplaces to build industry power, we do so through delegates or members forums or meetings where workers can share knowledge, make decisions and build unity across an industry.
- We believe that industry based campaigning is the most powerful way to organise and it is the best way to ensure the rights and conditions for all workers are improved and protected.





## Collective Action

We believe that power is best exercised through the collective action of members as this is the most powerful and also leads to the building of long term strength through the experience of taking such action. Having sufficient organisation to mobilise and to take collective action is therefore a priority. We believe that the forms of action are only limited by our imagination. We are a Union that believes in encouraging and supporting collective action whenever possible.

### This means:

- Action is always decided democratically.
- Acting collectively can be anything from a petition to strike action – decisions should be made on the basis of what will be most effective and what action has support amongst the members.
- Action should always act to build unity, not undermine it.
- Collective action does not need to be the only type of power or pressure exerted on the employer. The Union should look to all avenues to achieve an outcome. However, working to build or maintain the capacity to engage in collective actions is always the priority.
- Should members decide to take collective action, the resources of the Union will be prioritised in order to support them.
- We see building organisational capacity so members can be mobilised if necessary as a key priority of the Union.

## Solidarity

We believe in building solidarity at all levels within our union – at the workplace, employer and industry level. We are a union of many industries – we believe in building solidarity across all our industries. We also believe in acting in solidarity with other Unions here and overseas and with all those who share our goals. Finally, we believe in the principle of the strong supporting the not so strong and lending our support to others where we can.

### This means:

- We work to build union solidarity in a workplace or employer that cuts across divisions between workers such as job classification, gender or race. Workers often have differences, but when acting on Union issues we stick together.
- All ASU members are equal and should be respected. Members who are managers have the same rights as members, except where they are “wearing management’s hat” and they then should exclude themselves from union decision making.
- We do not tolerate discrimination against anyone on the basis of race, gender, religion, sexuality, age or disability and will stand up against discrimination whenever we see it. We will also work to ensure that union activities and forums are welcoming and accessible to all our members.
- We respect all industry divisions of our union and aim to build solidarity between them – we are all ASU. We also respect the different traditions and cultures of each industry division.
- We take the attitude that an injury to one is an injury to all and will act to support workers in other unions here and overseas where we can.
- We believe that union resources are best spent fighting the employer and not other unions. We aim to have co-operative and respectful relations with other Unions. We believe that the best way to deal with unavoidable competition with other Unions is to focus on being really good at what we do.
- We believe in the Union movement and will work to be an active part of it and to work to make it stronger.

