

Overcoming Barriers to People of Color in Union Leadership

REPORT TO THE AFL-CIO EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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Introduction

ONE OF OUR UNION MOVEMENT'S greatest strengths is the diversity of its membership. As workforce demographics have changed, so have the demographics of our unions. However, while the full participation of women, people of color and other groups is vital to the strength of our union movement, they have not always been sufficiently included in union leadership structures and program activities. Over time efforts have been made, with limited success, through programs, policy changes and other actions, to address the issues of diversity and full participation. The AFL-CIO and many unions have internal policies, departments, structures, programs and/or caucuses to promote issues of concern to women, people of color and lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual communities; and many AFL-CIO constituency groups were formed, in part, as a way to advance the leadership and also to address specific issues. Unfortunately, despite these and other efforts to achieve change, the barriers of discrimination, racism, sexism and homophobia continue to cause women and people of color to be under-represented in union leadership and programs. More work must be done.

In 1995, the AFL-CIO Executive Council's Committee on Full Participation, chaired by the late John Sturdivant, president of AFGE, submitted a report (Attachment 1) that provided general recommendations with regard to diversity and inclusion in organizing, political action and leadership development. This report laid the foundation for the 1995 AFL-CIO resolution, "Diversity and

Full Participation," that was passed at the 21st Constitutional Convention (Attachment 2). Among the proposed resolution actions was: *"The AFL-CIO will work in cooperation with its affiliates and allied constituency organizations to increase the levels of participation of women, minority and younger members in all AFL-CIO-sponsored programs, events and activities."*

It has been 10 years since the report on full participation. In preparation for the 2005 AFL-CIO Convention, the AFL-CIO, under the direction of the Executive Council's Civil and Human Rights Committee, initiated a study to consider what other steps can be taken to address the under-representation of people of color in union leadership. It is hoped that this report will serve as a complement to a similar report on working women that was submitted to the Executive Council by the Executive Council's Working Women's Committee in March 2004, entitled, "Overcoming Barriers to Women in Organizing and Leadership."

This report, "Overcoming Barriers to People of Color in Union Leadership," is divided into four parts: 1) a general overview of workforce and union demographics; 2) results of a survey of people of color who hold union leadership positions, both elected and appointed; 3) a summary of some of the programs, actions, policy changes and leadership development training programs that have been implemented by unions, the AFL-CIO, constituency groups and university-based labor centers; and 4) recommendations for the future.

People of Color in the Workforce and in Unions

THE ISSUE OF PARTICIPATION of people of color in union leadership is of special importance to a union movement that is seeking to retain and expand its ability to include, defend and advance an increasingly diverse workforce. Several workforce and union membership trends highlight the importance of diversity, including

Today more than **42 million people of color are in the workforce.**

In today's economy, **people of color work in every industry.** Several industries in which workers of color are concentrated—leisure and hospitality, education and health services and public administration—are some of the industries in which the number of union members grew in 2004.

More than 2.1 million African Americans, 1.6 million Latinos and 600,000 Asian Pacific Americans are in unions, representing almost **29 percent of the total membership** of more than 15 million. (Note: Numbers for Native Americans were unavailable.)

Union density in 2004 among African Americans, Latinos and Asian Pacific Americans was 15.1 percent, 10.1 percent and 11.3 percent, respectively, compared with the overall average of 12.5 percent. (Source: Current Population Survey, 2005)

Union membership is important for African American, Asian American and Latino workers who are subjected to continuing discrimination and exploitation because collective bargaining emphasizes equal pay and fair treatment in the workplace. African American union members earn 29 percent more than their nonunion counterparts. For Latino workers, the union advantage

totals 59 percent and for Asian Pacific American workers, the union advantage is 11 percent.

Union density among people of color could be even higher because **people of color think more favorably of unions than the public overall.** For example, a March 2005 poll of attitudes toward unions by Peter D. Hart Research Associates showed that 72 percent of blacks and 69 percent of Latinos approve of unions in general, compared with 64 percent of the general public. Asked whether they would vote for a union in their workplace, 77 percent of black workers and 71 percent of Latino workers said they would definitely or probably vote for forming a union, compared with 53 percent overall. (This was a poll of nonmanagerial/nonunion workers. Note: The polling data did not include a large enough sample of Asian Pacific Americans to measure their views.)

The “vast majority” of new union members who are organizing through National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections are women and people of color. For example, according to *Blueprint for Change: a National Assessment of Winning Union Organizing Strategies* by Kate Bronfenbrenner and Robert Hickey (2003), NLRB election win rates increase as the proportion of workers of color and women increase. Win rates average 35 percent in units with a majority of white men, but are “53 percent in units with a majority of workers of color and 56 percent in units with at least 75 percent workers of color.” The highest win rates—82 percent—involve units “with 75 percent or more women workers of color.”

These facts underscore the unrealized opportunities for increasing the number of people of color in unions through organizing as well as the need

for increasing diversity in union leadership. If the union movement is to position itself as the organization of choice in the 21st century, it must continue to assess the rapid changes in work, new entrants into the workforce (increasingly

people of color, women and immigrants) and union participation. It is, therefore, extremely important that our union leadership reflects the membership it represents.

Survey Findings on Barriers to Union Leadership

BETWEEN APRIL 17 AND JUNE 3, 2005, the AFL-CIO conducted, with the help of research analyst and strategist Dr. Silas Lee of Dr. Silas Lee and Associates, a survey of union leaders of color from around the country who represent a cross-section of communities by race, gender, ethnicities and sexual orientation. These leaders hold elected or appointed leadership positions in unions, state federations, central labor councils and constituency groups. Seventy leaders out of 146 individuals who were identified and contacted responded to the survey.

The purpose of the survey was to hear from current unionists of color who hold elected or appointed leadership positions about their views and perceptions of barriers to union leadership and to assist in developing recommendations to the AFL-CIO Executive Council on ways to achieve and advance diversity goals.

The survey was divided into four broad categories: Union Experience and Background, Union Structures and Leadership, Networking and Institutional Views. Respondents also had the opportunity to reflect on best practices and to make recommendations about what should be done to improve leadership participation for people of color. Because those who participated in the survey hold elected or appointed positions in their respective organizations, their experiences and ideas are considered very important to this report. What follows is a summary of key findings from the survey:

Union Experience and Background

Firstly, the survey sought to find out what motivated individuals to become involved and active with their unions. Overall, respondents said they were motivated to become union activists and also to seek higher positions of responsibility because of their desire to make a difference and a belief that their participation would indeed make a difference and that their participation would make

changes for working families. This is important to note because it shows the level of commitment to the union movement as a means to achieve their own personal beliefs.

The survey also sought to find out what guidance or support, if any, the survey respondents received as they assumed more responsibility. Although more than six in 10 of those surveyed said they had a mentor, 36 percent said they did not have someone to guide them in navigating the political terrain of their organization or in transferring institutional knowledge to them. Fifty-five percent acknowledged the absence of a supportive environment for people of color to move into elected or appointed positions.

Sixty-four percent of respondents said they believe there were barriers to people of color to becoming leaders in their unions. Racism/sexism, unequal or disparate access to information and lack of training were identified as the three main barriers that make it difficult for people of color to move into elected or appointed leadership positions.

Comments included:

- *"There's a built-in system of limited opportunities for upward mobility."*
- *"The union leadership puts very little importance into the inclusion of people of color in union leadership."*
- *"There is a lack of education, training and mentoring."*

When asked what contributed to their success in achieving a leadership position, respondents identified personal diligence and mentors as the key factors, while racism, lack of experience and self-doubt were identified as factors that subverted attempts for leadership positions. Comments on the latter included:

- *"I was not the right color or gender and I was straightforward and honest about issues. I was not going to play certain games to move up."*
- *"The failures came when I was too trusting and not as prepared for the competition as I should have been."*

Union Structures and Leadership

Even after achieving a leadership position, people of color continue to face challenges. Nearly seven of 10 (67 percent) asserted they were not adequately involved in the administrative or policy decision-making processes of their unions. And although the majority (71 percent) said they received information about leadership and other training opportunities, the information was unequally distributed—sometimes to a select few and other times not to people of color. As one respondent said: *“It could be that the leaders feel we may not be interested or smart enough to be considered. It could also be they fear that we will gain too much power, and they are insecure.”*

While 59 percent of respondents said they thought people of color were given the same opportunities as others to participate in leadership training programs, 41 percent did not share this belief. Sixty-seven percent did say that their unions offered financial assistance to cover costs for any union member to attend programs.

Networking

People of color extensively rely on support from networks that operate formally and informally both within and outside the union. Sixty-seven percent of respondents said their union had a minority caucus that either is recognized officially by the union or operates informally. Ninety percent participate in one or more of these caucuses. And the overwhelming consensus, with 89 percent of the respondents, is that there is a need for minority caucuses and that the purpose of these caucuses should be to pursue equality and opportunity, train members and provide support when necessary.

Participation in AFL-CIO constituency groups—the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA), A. Philip Randolph Institute (APRI), Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) and Pride At Work (PAW)—are important networks for women unionists, unionists of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) unionists. Nearly nine of 10 (86 percent) of the respondents reported they participated in one or more of the constituency

groups. Seventy-four percent indicated they “hold an elected position in a constituency group with the encouragement and financial support of their union.” However, 26 percent reported the absence of support from their union for participation in constituency groups.

With regard to participation in state federations, area labor federations and central labor bodies, a combined 40 percent of those surveyed said their union was affiliated with the state or local central body. They reported, however, that union leaders of color primarily served on boards and did not necessarily serve as principal officers at either the state or local level.

Institutional Views

The results from a series of questions about unions as institutions also reflect the challenges that people of color are likely to encounter as they attempt to move into positions of leadership. Fifty-eight percent of respondents said people of color were encouraged to seek office or apply for advancement opportunities, but 64 percent said their national union did not have an overall plan to achieve diversity. Of those who said their union had a plan, half (50 percent) said the plan was not being implemented. Further contributing to the lack of diversity in union leadership is the prevailing absence of an institutionalized mentoring program (only 3 percent reported that their union had a mentorship program, either formal or informal). And there is a void of plans to promote diversity in delegates to national union conventions or the AFL-CIO national Convention, as reported by 75 percent of the respondents.

The results of the survey indicate that many people of color in the union movement still are haunted by negative stereotypes, racism and sexism. They primarily rely on themselves, mentors and minority networks for support. Although some of those who responded to the survey have achieved leadership positions at some level, the absence of an accommodating and supportive culture can have an impact not only an individual’s advancement, but also can impair overall morale or may create a climate of exclusion and marginalization.

PART III

Programs, Policies and Leadership Development Trainings

THE UNION MOVEMENT has not been idle in responding to the concerns discussed above. This summary relies in part upon the survey results, but also upon additional research performed for this study. Numerous programs, strategies and policy changes have been adopted and implemented over the years to address the issue of full participation throughout the union movement. Below is a summary of *some* of the efforts that have been made by national unions, constituency groups, state and local central bodies and university-based labor centers. (Note: This summary is not intended to be all-inclusive, but should provide a general picture of some of the work that has been undertaken to address issues of diversity and full inclusion.)

Survey Respondents

As part of the survey, respondents were asked to give examples of best practices in their unions that have helped to promote diversity. In general, the best diversity practices suggested by the respondents incorporated inclusion, training and communications into prospective strategies. Some of the more detailed best practices described to strengthen diversity were:

- *"1) Delegates to be 50 percent female and 50 percent male 2) All committees and workshops are co-chaired and one has to be a minority 3) Training programs on diversity. Help to get people to accept and understand differences."*
- *"Our union has a Minority Leadership Institute that I have attended. I believe with a little tweaking, this could be a very effective program."*
- *"Caucuses have provided an avenue for people of color and immigrants to come together to address their issues. Leadership programs, training on immigration and race."*

National Union Affiliate Programs

The AFL-CIO Department of Civil, Human and Women's Rights contacted the civil, human and

women's rights designees and other affiliate representatives of various unions to discuss what programs, policies or other activities they have implemented to address the issue of diversity in leadership. A summary of those discussions follows.

According to the affiliate representatives, many unions have created structures specifically for their members of color, including leadership training programs, caucuses and conferences. The goals of these structures are to educate and "activate" their members of color, build leadership skills and provide them with networking and mentoring opportunities needed to take on leadership positions.

Several unions hold smaller, advanced leadership trainings for their members of color, which they regard as very effective. These intensive study programs focus on advanced mobilizing skills, strategic planning and organizing or political campaign coordination skills. Run by the international union, these trainings are offered a few times a year and unions invite different members to attend each time. For a few unions, these intensive trainings may last several weeks and are coordinated with the National Labor College.

A greater number of unions hold larger civil rights or minority conferences or caucus meetings that include leadership training components. These conferences are open to more people and serve as a networking opportunity with a focus on broad political, workplace or economic issues and educating activists.

To improve communications and inclusion, one union is in the process of developing a five-year diversity plan that includes membership training and education on diversity issues. The plan establishes a national diversity committee of 6,000 members from locals across the country to ensure

all leaders and members receive needed training. The committee will be coordinated, staffed and funded directly by the international union.

Another resource that unions utilize to involve their members of color are constituency groups. Many unions send their members to constituency group conferences or trainings to help build their leadership skill-set, learn more about salient political and workplace issues affecting workers of color and network with other members of color. Constituency group conferences enable union members of color to meet activists in the broader civil rights community and to develop the union-community relationships that are crucial in organizing campaigns. However, many minority union representatives think in-house trainings specific to their union members' needs also are needed. Finally, it was stated it is important to make sure unions that support member involvement in constituency groups do not use this participation as a way to avoid making internal changes that promote leadership diversity within their own organizations.

Constituency Groups

The constituency groups are national coalitions representing women, people of color and LGBT union members and their supporters and have such goals as leadership development, serving as a bridge between unions and the community, ensuring that issues of concern to their various constituencies are a priority within the union movement and promoting union organizing and nonpartisan political action.

Constituency groups frequently hold conventions, conferences and trainings aimed in whole or in part at:

- Teaching general union leadership skills;
- Teaching special skills needed to participate in union nonpartisan political action, organizing and other key programs;
- Providing substantive information about key policy areas impacting union members; and
- Providing skills necessary to advance the effectiveness of the groups themselves.

- Constituency group leadership training has been well received and, as a result of their participation, many individuals have moved forward within their unions and other structures.

Constituency group leaders often are called upon to be leaders and spokespeople within their communities and within their unions, providing further opportunities for leadership development. In addition, constituency group meetings and elections run in the same formal manner as union meetings and elections, and therefore provide more opportunities to learn important leadership advancement skills. Finally, constituency group programs, such as get-out-the-vote (GOTV) activities and mobilization in support of union organizing, provide members with skills useful to overall union leadership development.

Experiences from University-Based Labor Centers

There are labor education centers operating in universities in about 25 states around the country. These university-based labor centers have a long history of providing education and training to countless numbers of union members directly and through collaboration with different unions. Over the years, several programs specifically have targeted the particular needs of women, people of color and other such populations as LGBT communities and immigrant workers.

For this study, several prominent labor educators from around the country were contacted and asked about the goals of their leadership development programs, the recruitment process, program participation levels and the impact of their programs. They also were asked for their observations on key barriers to leadership for people of color and for recommendations the union movement might consider to overcome those barriers. These labor educators, with their broad labor and academic perspectives, provided additional insight into the challenges facing people of color who want to achieve leadership positions and the role of leadership development programs in their effort. Below is a summary of their responses:

■ **Goals and Audiences.** Many of the leadership development programs target specific “audiences, e.g. African Americans, Latinos, multiracial, Asian Pacific American, LGBT “workers and bilingual and monolingual immigrants. Training often is targeted to a wide range of individuals, including union leaders, administrators, organizers, members and activists. The goals of the trainings include, among others, leadership development in all aspects, providing opportunities to learn about union structure, politics and process where none would normally exist and creating networks of diverse leaders who can assist additional leadership development.

■ **Recruitment and Participation.** Participants primarily are recruited through unions that express an interest in leadership development. But for some unions, developing new leaders may not be a priority and as a result, the labor centers do significant recruitment themselves. In general, among those programs surveyed, participation is increasing in leadership programs for people of color and women. One program that targets African American men, for example, is consistently full well in advance. (Note: While participation in these programs is increasing, we do not know whether the number of leadership programs overall in the country is increasing or decreasing.)

■ **Program Impact.** Although most labor centers survey their program participants in depth after the program, they mainly rely on general reports rather than formal tracking to learn how the programs may have impacted the participant’s advancement. These general reports indicate that the programs have provided a foundation for leadership for many participants, although not every ensuing program effort or every attempt to become a leader is successful. Many graduates have assumed positions of greater responsibility within their unions after the training, e.g. local executive board members and union officers, and graduates often express appreciation for the support

networks that result from their participation in leadership education programs.

From the perspective of the labor educators who were contacted, the barriers that continue to limit the participation of people of color in union leadership include:

- Racial and gender discrimination within the union movement, including “traditional old boy’s networks” that advance themselves;
- Lack of leadership training programs;
- Lack of a support system of experienced leaders that people of color activists can turn to;
- Lack of confidence to campaign for a leadership position;
- Unresponsive governing bodies;
- Assignment of people of color and women to positions within the union with less power and influence;
- A failure to aggressively organize immigrant workers;
- The erroneous beliefs by some that people of color cannot lead those who are not their color; and
- Lack of affirmative action programs, which means that current racial/gender patterns regenerate themselves and possibly worsen as unions consolidate.

The labor educators stressed a number of important factors that can contribute to the development of successful leadership development programs. Some of their suggestions include:

- Instructors should be people of color who can serve as role models;
- Allow for participant involvement in the training planning process, which creates greater buy-in and additional recruitment efforts;
- Ensure materials are relevant to the union movement;
- Use popular education and participatory methods;
- Develop post-training action plans for participants;
- Involve key union and community leaders who can share their experiences;
- Provide reasonable access in terms of cost and location;

- Target audiences of color; and
- Encourage multiunion involvement.

One labor educator also suggested that a successful program should focus on organizing skills that can be used both internally and externally, noting that without the power base that comes from organizing, “technical” leadership skills (i.e., how to run a meeting) will not be helpful.

Changes in the Rules Governing State and Local Central Bodies

In the 1995 resolution on diversity and full participation adopted by the 21st AFL-CIO Constitutional Convention, one of the recommendations stated: *“The federation will also assist the state and local central bodies in developing greater opportunities for participation by the AFL-CIO-supported constituency groups that represent women and minority workers in the labor movement.”*

This recommendation was addressed in one of the seven strategies for a central labor council to become a *“Union City,”* which said: *“Demand diversity through concrete improvements in diversity of all labor council committees.”* In addition to that action, changes were made to the national rules governing state federations and area and central labor councils to allow for the affiliation of constituency groups. By June 2005, at least 25 state federations and more than 30 area and central labor councils had adopted language in their constitutions to allow constituency group affiliation. This means It meant that in cases in which the constitution was changed, constituency group delegates can could hold office, introduce resolutions and amendments and enjoy all rights and privileges afforded to affiliates and delegates of the state federation or area or central labor body.

In July 2005 the The AFL-CIO Executive Council took this action one step further and in July 2005 the Council adopted changes to the rules by eliminating the need for state federations, area labor

councils or central labor councils to amend their constitution, thus making constituency group affiliation automatic.

The amended language reads as follows:

Rule 3 (Composition)

[State central bodies] [Area labor councils, central labor councils and chapters] shall be composed exclusively of locals of national and international unions and organizing committees affiliated with the Federation, directly affiliated local unions, local central bodies, and local and state councils chartered by the trade and industrial departments of the AFL-CIO within the geographical limits of the state, **and, subject to paragraph (d) of this rule, state or local chapters of AFL-CIO constituency groups within the geographical limits of the state that are chartered by a national AFL-CIO constituency group.** Joint boards, district councils, state associations and similar subordinate organizations within the geographical limits of the state that are chartered by an affiliate of the AFL-CIO may affiliate where the constitution of the state central body so provides. Any question that may arise with respect to the proper state central body or bodies to which local unions or other subordinate bodies or constituency groups are to affiliate or the extent of such affiliation shall be determined by the President of the AFL-CIO.

[no change to current text]

A state chapter of an AFL-CIO constituency group may be admitted as an affiliate, ~~where the constitution of the central body so provides,~~ with one delegate and one vote, subject to the delegate eligibility requirements of Rule 10. [Rest of rule stays the same].

While this represents an additional advance for inclusion in state and local governing bodies, more needs to be done to address the absence of women and people of color in leadership positions in state and local structures.

PART IV

Recommendations

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, the 1995 Report on Full Participation presented a number of recommendations to address the issue of diversity and full inclusion. Broadly speaking, those recommendations focused on structural changes within the union movement at the national, state and local level, encouraging and assisting affiliates as they pursue their own programs and work with constituency groups. Some of the recommendations have been acted on.

In March 2005, the AFL-CIO Executive Council's Working Women's Committee and the Civil and Human Rights Committee adopted a set of diversity principles to serve as a basis for action to achieve full participation (Attachment 3). It is hoped that these principles will be adopted at all levels of the union movement.

This report suggests that the union movement should revisit previous recommendations, assess progress and explore additional or new approaches to strengthen diversity. A number of suggestions were put forth by civil rights and women's designees of national unions, the survey participants, respondents to a question posted on the AFL-CIO website and by university-based labor educators. A brief summary of the recommendations is outlined below.

Survey Respondents

Acknowledging that the survival and growth of the union movement are tied to having a diverse union and leadership structure, the respondents to the survey suggested a trio of recommendations to fortify current diversity policy.

Mentoring—create a strategy that ensures the transfer of skills and the development of future union leaders that is inclusive and not arbitrary.

Inclusion—engage people of color in all aspects of the union's work, especially in the core work of organizing and political action.

Environment—create an inclusive atmosphere by committing time, resources and infrastructures that support diversity.

Having a viable and resource-driven diversity policy with monitoring and enforcement mechanisms also was emphasized. In their own words, survey respondents made the following observations:

- *"The future of the labor movement depends on workers of color. The labor movement needs to systematically engage people of color to offer advice and work on core issues of the union as they pertain to people of color."*
- *"If you want to organize people of color you have to have more inclusion of minority leaders. There are not enough minority leaders compared to the number of minorities that are union members."*
- *"I would recommend an immediate policy of inclusion at every level of the decision making body. I would further recommend a vehicle for advancement structured on the local and international level, complete with mentors."*
- *"Create and support an environment for minorities (i.e., women, people of color) to gather and discuss issues from their perspective and what it means for others in their group whether in the union or not."*
- *"Make it a requirement that all local unions offer some training on diversity. Help to encourage the participation among all members in every aspect of the union. Create a diverse presentation at all gatherings that is more than show."*
- *"Develop a mentorship program that would encourage and support minorities in trying to obtain leadership positions. Encourage minorities to run for office. Post job openings within the local union and international when positions become available."*

National Union Affiliates

Reflecting on their previous work, several union civil and human rights representatives suggested that unions need to do a better job of disseminating information to their members of color, who may not be “in the loop” with their local or regional leaders.

They also pointed out that although many unions have programs and caucuses for members of color, there is usually only one staff person assigned to support the structure. As a result, the opportunities available to members of color often are minimal and marginalized within the union. Therefore, union structures and programs designed to address the needs of people of color must be adequately staffed and funded to be effective.

AFL-CIO Website Question

In addition to the one-on-one survey reference throughout this report, the AFL-CIO posted a question on its website to hear from a broader audience. The question posted was, “*What steps can the union movement take to make sure leadership (local, regional, state and/or national) is representative of the racial, ethnic and gender makeup of union membership?*” Here is a summary of the recommendations:

A majority of the respondents made recommendations that fall into several broad categories: recruiting and providing leadership training and mentoring for women, people of color and LGBT members at local and regional levels; education for union membership; and massive education of the general public about the benefits of unionism.

The next most frequently repeated responses were: leadership should be inclusive; conduct fair and impartial labor leadership elections; improve communications to the overall membership about union meetings and important information; and facilitate attendance at union meetings, including release time.

Finally, other general recommendations included: enforce anti-discrimination laws; investigate charges of discrimination; use trained union

organizers who look like the workers who are organizing; and maintain and promote constituency groups.

University-Based Labor Educators

The university-based labor educators made the following recommendations:

- Ensure that promotions do not go to family and friends.
- Develop a union commitment and plan to ensure the leadership looks like the membership.
- Place greater emphasis on organizing and education of people of color.
- Develop a stronger civil, human and women’s rights agenda and department and a stronger partnership with communities of color and civil and women’s rights groups.
- Increase the dialogue about diversity among union leaders.
- Promote greater activism from the constituency groups and ensure their independence.
- Set numerical affirmative action benchmarks, as some unions do in other countries.
- Consider developing a specific program at the National Labor College–George Meany Campus to provide leadership training for women and people of color.

2005 Summit on Diversity in Our Union Movement

In July 2005, in advance of the AFL-CIO Convention, the AFL-CIO and the six constituency groups under the umbrella organization Labor Coalition for Community Action (LCCA) co-sponsored a National Summit on Diversity. Nearly 700 trade union leaders, activists and rank-and-file members from around the country participated in the summit to discuss the issue of diversity as it relates to organizing, political action and union leadership. Speakers at the summit repeatedly noted that women and people of color have been and continue to be critical to the union movement’s success in organizing and political action, and that the movement’s ability to grow is contingent upon both outreach to and involvement of women and people of color in all aspects of organizing and political campaigns. Further, it

was noted that diversity in union leadership at all levels of the union movement is essential. There was significant support for proposals to increase leadership diversity in union structures as outlined in the Unity Statement (Attachment 4) issued by LCCA.

A final segment of the summit provided an opportunity for all participants to express their views in two areas: best practices and the question of improving diversity in leadership. In general,

the responses echoed the observations and recommendations previously made in this report with constituency groups playing a key role in that effort. Particular emphasis was placed not only on the need to work with and through our communities on common issues of concern but to make the commitment to implement the various suggestions, such as changing the composition of elected boards in the union movement at all levels, inclusion in real decision-making and actively pursuing a civil rights agenda.

Conclusion

AN ANALYSIS OF THE data and responses from all of the sources noted in this report yields the following observations and conclusions:

Many people of color in the union movement still encounter negative stereotypes, racism, sexism and homophobia. Although the conventional wisdom has been that the creation of diversity policies and programs would help break down the barriers of racism and exclusion, the reality is that people of color still face significant challenges to becoming union leaders, and the problems persist even after individuals reach leadership positions.

While efforts have been made over the years to address and respond to the issues of diversity and full inclusion, if real progress is to be made policies and programs cannot simply be developed on paper or in principle, but must be advocated significantly throughout the union movement, with specific, concrete and measurable goals.

There are multiple strategies and approaches that can be undertaken, but the No. 1 strategy is the political will to enact policies and programs that will result in real change.

The set of Diversity Principles (Attachment 4) adopted by the Executive Council set some change in motion. Subsequently, the July 2005 AFL-CIO Convention passed Resolution 2, *“A Diverse Movement Calls for Diverse Leadership,”* (Attachment 5) that states that the AFL-CIO will:

- Increase training and leadership development of state federation and central labor council leaders and staff to build capacity among a diverse group of leaders in our movement;
- Accelerate our efforts to attract and recruit a diverse pool of young people into the union movement through Union Summer and targeted public outreach;

- Establish as federation policy that each national and international union and organizing committee’s credentialed delegations to the AFL-CIO Convention generally shall reflect the racial and gender diversity of its membership and urge affiliates to include young workers as delegates;
- Require diversity in participation at AFL-CIO-sponsored and -supported conferences and trainings;
- Make the AFL-CIO itself a model of hiring and promotion practices for women and people of color;
- Expand the preliminary work done through the Union Cities and New Alliance processes to fully integrate the AFL-CIO constituency groups into state federation and central labor council programs and leadership;
- Urge affiliated national unions to sign a set of diversity principles, to be developed by the Civil Rights and Working Women’s committees and approved by the Executive Council, and provide for affiliated national unions to report annually on the representation of women and people of color in their membership as well as in staff and elected leadership positions at all levels;
- Require the AFL-CIO Executive Council and other governing bodies as well as state federations and central labor councils to develop targeted levels of leadership diversity and plans to reach them by the 2009 Convention; and
- To ensure diversity at the highest levels of the AFL-CIO, representatives of the six constituency groups should be added to the federation’s General Board. In addition, measures to ensure and enhance gender and racial diversity on the Executive Council should be strengthened and the Executive Committee should include representatives who ensure diversity by race and gender.

The resolution was further solidified through Constitutional Amendments 1, 3, 28 and 31 (Attachment 6) that implement structural changes at all levels of the union movement.

Through this resolution and the constitutional amendments, the AFL-CIO has taken a historic step of laying out a way to achieve greater leadership diversity. It now is incumbent upon the union movement to follow-through on the

convention resolution and the many common sense proposals for increased leadership and program diversity as outlined in this report.

In sum, the content of this report illustrates the need for a continuous and determined focus on diversity by the union movement's top leaders and all those who realize the future of the movement is dependent on increased diversity.

Attachments

Report from the Full Participation Committee, 1995

Resolution on Diversity and Full Participation Adopted by the
21st Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, October 1995

Diversity Principles Adopted by the Executive Council, March 2005

Unity Statement Submitted by the Labor Coalition for Community Action

Resolution 2: A Diverse Movement Calls for Diverse Leadership, Adopted by the
25th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, July 2005

Constitutional Amendments 1, 3, 28 and 31, passed by the
25th Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO, July 2005