

USW Human Rights Committees



STEELWORKER
equity

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
MÉTALLOS

How to use this guide

This guide is a practical tool for USW Human Rights Committees. It includes:

- The constitutional requirement for local union Human Rights Committees
- What does a Human Rights Committee do?
- How does a Human Rights Committee carry out its roles?
 - USW resources for human rights issues
 - USW human rights education
 - USW National Policy Conference resolutions
 - Collective bargaining
- Action planning: a practical example of how to integrate this whole guide

The constitutional requirement for local Human Rights Committees

The United Steelworkers (USW)'s International Constitution calls for every local union to set up a Human Rights/Civil Rights Committee. It reads:

Section 12. A Civil Rights Committee (which may also be known as a Human Rights Committee), under the direction of the International Union or its designated representative, shall be established in each local union to implement our union's commitment to the protection and extension of civil and human rights and liberties. With respect to an amalgamated local union, the local union president shall, for each unit, either appoint a unit representative to the committee or co-operate with the unit chair to establish a unit-based committee.

Civil rights are normally understood as basic political rights (e.g., the right to vote; freedom of speech; equal treatment before the law).

Human rights as we use the term in Canada, includes those basic civil and political rights and the broader range of social, economic, cultural and anti-discrimination rights that are codified in the United Nations Declaration of Universal Human Rights (the Declaration). While there are signatory countries to the declaration, the declaration itself is not legally binding.

All human rights codes and laws in Canada are binding, however. In other words, codes and laws put "teeth" into the aspirations of the declaration. In turn, this is reflected in the USW Constitution and our collective bargaining agreements. Further, our union policies such as the USW Anti-Harassment and Anti-Violence Policy and Procedures are also binding. Visit usw.ca/policies to access the USW's Anti-Harassment and Anti-Violence Policy and Procedures.



Who should be on a Human Rights Committee?

Whether you are in a large amalgamated local union or a small single workplace local union, ideally, the Human Rights Committee should be reflective of the diversity in the membership, and representative of the different shifts or work performed in the workplace.

As our union is the most diverse it has ever been in history, diversity includes people who are Indigenous, Black and racialized, from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, people living with mental and physical disabilities, those practising diverse religions and spiritual practices and other members from equity-seeking groups.

Considering your membership, try to have at least one person from each equity-seeking group on the committee.

Appointed or elected?

Generally, members are appointed by the local union president or unit chairperson and may include the president and grievance chairperson or chief steward. The committee does not have to be large. But, the members need to have the confidence of co-workers as well as the unit and local union officers.

Members need to be prepared to “walk the talk,” helping to build an atmosphere in the workplace and at union events of mutual respect and understanding of diversity. Members need to be good listeners, letting people know they are available to answer questions, discuss current and sometimes difficult issues and work together to find solutions that help foster respect.



What does a Human Rights Committee do?

The three main roles of a Human Rights Committee are:

Communicate:

- Provide advice and guidance on how to prevent and deal with harassment and discrimination
- Promote the union's Anti-Harassment and Anti-Violence Policies and Procedures
- Make recommendations to the negotiating committee on key provisions or changes to the collective agreement to ensure compliance with the law and the union's policies
- Monitor the hiring and retention practices of the employer and work with the negotiating committee to bargain fair hiring practices and effective measures to retain employees.
- Use the workplace or union bulletin board or the local union's printed or electronic newsletter to share your successes and communicate human rights information
- Communicate with the District Human Rights Committee and Women's Committee.
- Communicate with the various national committees: Indigenous Committee, Anti-Racism Committee and Women's Committee and the Steel Pride Working Group. Your USW Staff Representative can help connect you with the District Staff assigned to the national committee/working group
- Communicate with your local union membership

Educate:

- Promote the union's Anti-Harassment and Anti-Violence in the Workplace Policies and Procedures
- Work with local union committees and the membership to promote fairness and mutual respect inside and outside of the workplace
- Educate local union members on their rights and responsibilities under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Human Rights law
- Act as mentors and a support group to individuals in traditionally marginalized, disadvantaged and equity-seeking groups
- Promote human rights education and USW human rights courses and workshops

Motivate:

- Use the Steelworkers' calendar of religious and special days to recognize and promote special days and traditions in a diverse society
- Encourage local union members to attend human rights-related events put on by area councils, districts, regional or labour councils and by community partner organizations
- Work with progressive partners in the community and through labour coalitions to raise support for legislative changes to protect and advance human rights

How does a Human Rights Committee carry out its roles?

The work of the Human Rights Committee integrates the areas below:

1. USW electronic resources

To start with, a Human Rights Committee familiarizes itself with USW resources on the union's website. In addition to the committee itself accessing union resources, these internet links are invaluable as a way of communicating useful information to members.

Some essential resources can be found at: usw.ca/human-rights

This section of the USW website has specific information and resources on:

- Indigenous rights and issues
- 2SLGBTQIA+ rights and issues
- Disability rights and issues
- Women's rights and issues
- USW Anti-Harassment and Anti-Violence in the Workplace policies and procedures
- Calendar of religious and special days, which lists all the major dates and names for diverse religious and spiritual practices

There are also resources such as bargaining guides and work and inclusion for 2SLGBTQIA+ members available on the website.

2. USW education courses and workshops on human rights

The USW Canadian National Office and districts have several human rights workshops available for local unions. Please check with your District Education Co-ordinator for availability and schedules. For course information, visit usw.ca/courses.

3. National Policy Conference resolutions

The National Policy Conference (NPC) is an event held every three years by our union in Canada and organized by the USW Canadian National Office. The conference is a place where resolutions from local unions are presented, debated and decided. If a resolution is passed, that resolution then officially becomes part of the union's work. The process to submit human rights resolutions is as follows:

Step 1: Submit a resolution to be put on the agenda at your local monthly meeting. Ensure that the members of the Human Rights Committee are at the meeting to speak in support and vote in favour of the proposal.

Here is an example of a written resolution:

Whereas the diversity of our membership is at its greatest in our union’s history; and

Whereas members of equity-seeking groups still suffer harassment in the workplace and in the union; and

Whereas education is crucial in informing local Human Rights Committees in how to support diversity in building solidarity.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Education and Equity Department of the USW Canadian National Office create a short online session on Leadership for Equity.

Be it further resolved that Leadership for Equity be made available to human rights committees across Canada.

Step 2: Local resolutions can be submitted electronically to a website that will be made available in advance of the conference. Submit the resolution.

For samples from the 2023 Policy Conference see usw.ca/events/npc2023/#resolutions.



4. Take stock: Build a human rights profile of your workplace and local union

Nearly 50% of women are sexually harassed at work. Indigenous, Black and racialized workers and workers living with disabilities are more likely to face harassment and discrimination in the workplace than white and/or able-bodied workers. Despite growing numbers of diversity in the workforce, workplaces are predominantly white in most communities in Canada.

Develop a profile of your workplace or the workplaces in your local union or region and examine some of the issues that need to be addressed by the Human Rights Committee. Study your collective agreement for discriminatory provisions against women, Indigenous, Black and racialized workers, 2SLGBTQIA+ workers or workers living with disabilities.

A few examples of what to look for:

- Who is working where? Note the composition of the units in your local union and the job classifications of members of traditionally marginalized groups. Compare overall composition of the workforce with the population in the community.
- Are training opportunities available to everyone? Are hiring procedures equitable and postings easily accessible and available?
- Do workers know about anti-harassment and anti-violence policies and procedures for complaint investigation?
- Does new worker orientation include an overview of the policies to prevent and deal with harassment and violence?
- Is there a record of human rights-based issues that have come up in the workplace?

5. Writing human rights collective bargaining proposals

Writing a human rights collective bargaining proposal begins with simple and realistic ideas at your workplace. In turn, these ideas are written formally into a bargaining proposal. To do this, a Human Rights Committee would get together to discuss:

1. What are human rights issues occurring in our workplace?
2. What should be done about it?
3. Create an action plan to implement it.

After the committee has completed the four simple steps, language can then be developed. For an example model language, see the following:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ rights: usw.ca/2slgbtqia-language
- USW Bargaining Guide for Advancing Indigenous Rights: usw.ca/indigenusbargainingguide
- Bargaining Guide for Closing the Gender Wage Gap: usw.ca/wagegapguide
- USW Action Guide for Raising the Bar on Women's Health and Safety: usw.ca/rbtguide

Prior to collective bargaining, your local will have a proposal meeting. Ensure your entire Human Rights Committee attends the meeting and have a spokesperson present and speak on the proposal, with the support of the whole committee.

During collective bargaining, it is common practice for the negotiating committee to provide updates on the bargaining. During this period, the whole committee should ensure that human rights proposals are not taken off the table.

6. Keeping track of the laws that govern human rights

Your Human Rights Committee needs to keep track of legislative changes that may have an impact on workplaces and collective agreements. The committee should consider working with the district Political Action Committee to lobby for legislative change(s) to benefit all working people.

Human rights laws and regulatory bodies didn't just happen. They are a result of union and community activists working together to lobby governments. Steelworkers are members of human rights coalitions, committees and working groups, which develop strategies to improve and enhance human rights laws and government practices. While Canada is a member of the United Nations and participates in the International Labour Organization, it must also be lobbied to sign-on and implement the conventions, resolutions and declarations.

Action planning

To keep track of your Human Rights Committee's efforts, develop an action plan. There are six steps:

1. What are key issues?
2. What activities are required to deal with each issue?
3. Who on the committee does what?
4. When will they do it by?
5. What resources are necessary?
6. What is the follow up?

On the next two pages is a sample action plan for a Human Rights Committee. This sample plan integrates the materials and topics from this Human Rights Committee Guide. Depending on your committee, you may have other key issues.

Key Issue 1:

Familiarize the entire committee on electronic USW resources on human rights

Activities

- Use the link provided in the guide to find website resources

Who does what?

- All members of the committee do research from the website resources

By when?

- Establish a date

Resources necessary

- Internet access

Follow up

- After the established date, have a full committee meeting to discuss highlights of research

Key Issue 2:

Human rights education

Activities

- Speak to the local union president regarding an agenda item for a local monthly meeting to send a few members to a human rights workshop

Who does what?

- Assign a committee member to speak to the local union president and get the item on the agenda
- Assign a committee member to speak in support of sending members to a human rights workshop
- Assign all committee members to support the motion in the meeting

By when?

- Establish a date

Resources necessary

- Attend the meeting

Follow up

- Ask the members who attended for a report back and reflection on the human rights education. Also ask how they are going to use the education to advance human rights in the workplace or at the local union level

Key Issue 3:

Send a local human rights resolution to the USW National Policy Conference and send at least one member of the Human Rights Committee

Activities

- Follow Steps 1 and 2 in the guide
- Get on the agenda at the monthly membership meeting

Who does what?

- Assign a committee member to get item on the agenda
- Assign the whole committee to present and support the motion at the meeting

By when?

- Establish a date

Resources necessary

- Written resolution for presentation
- Entire committee present to support the motion
- Ask local members to be at the meeting to support the motion

Follow up

- Ask the members who attended for a report back and reflection on the conference. Also ask how they are going to use what they learned at the conference to advance human rights in the workplace or at the local union level

Key Issue 4:

Submit a human rights collective bargaining proposal

Activities

- Use this guide to write one or more proposals

Who does what?

- All members of the committee help discuss and write the proposal
- All members of the committee attend the proposal meeting to present and support the proposal

By when?

- Establish a date

Resources necessary

- Finalized proposal language
- Attend the proposal meeting

Follow up

- During collective bargaining ensure human rights proposal remains at the table



 usw.ca   [uswmetallos](#)  [uswmetallos](#)  [SteelworkersCA](#)

<sru-sdr, cope-sepb 343>