

How USW locals can support Indigenous rights

Delegates to the 2017 USW National Workshop for Indigenous Steelworkers discussed this question. Here are just some of the ideas they came up with:

- Encourage Indigenous members to self-identify so they connect with other Indigenous members and so the local has statistics to use when planning
- Survey Indigenous members to find out what their issues, concerns and needs are
- Take the time to build relationships of trust with Indigenous communities and their leaders
- When invited, attend key community events
- Consult and communicate with chief and council, including as a way to address concerns about bargaining, collective agreements, etc.
- Form an Indigenous committee in the local
- Appoint a liason person to promote understanding between First Nations community and local union
- Conduct meetings in a talking circle or using a talking stick/stone (only the person with the talking stick/stone speaks and everyone else listens)
- Include family in all union events
- Ensure there is Indigenous representation on the executive and at bargaining
- Educate the local union executive and members about Indigenous rights and cultural sensitivity
- Challenge systemic racism within the workplace
- Create a training/mentoring program to enable Indigenous people to be better qualified for positions
- Negotiate a concrete commitment by the employer to hire a percentage of Indigenous people from the local community
- Educate about National Indigenous Day and make it a paid holiday
- Bargain time off to attend ceremonies and take part in other cultural practices, time off for bereavements of extended family, leave to be an elder, etc.
- Where there is a school in an Indigenous community, give presentations to students about unions

(From USW's course: Unionism on Turtle Island.)