UNIONS
WHAT ARE THEY & WHY DO WE CARE?
THE LOBBY POSITION   1
UNION BASICS   2
WHAT YOU CAN DO   3
ARCHITECTURAL WORKERS ORGANIZATIONS   4
FURTHER RESOURCES   5
Unions can deliver material and immaterial benefits for current and future Lobby members. By giving architectural workers a seat at the table with legal force, the benefits of unionization correlate with many of the demands of The Architecture Lobby. The evidence is clear (and compiled on the following pages): UNIONS MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR WORKERS.
SOME NUMBERS FROM THE U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS 2017 FINDINGS:

- 34.4% of public sector workers and 6.5% of private-sector workers were in unions.¹
- In “Architecture and Engineering Occupations,” there were 4,544,000 total employed wage and salary workers, 178,000 (3.9%) of whom were members of unions and 225,000 (4.9%) of whom are represented by unions.²

THE MATERIAL BENEFITS OF UNIONIZATION TO WORKERS

Unions raise wages for union and non-union workers.

- On average, a worker covered by a union contract earns 13.2% more in wages than a peer with similar education, occupation, and experience in a nonunionized workplace in the same sector.\(^3\)
- Where unions are strong, negotiations have potential to raise wages across industries, not just union members. If a union raises wages in one workplace, other employers are pressured to do the same.\(^4\)

Collective bargaining results in better health benefits for employees.

- For union workers, access to medical care benefits was 94% and access to life insurance was 85%. Nonunion workers' access to these benefits was 66% for medical care and 54% for life insurance.\(^5\)
- Union employers pay 77.4% more (per hour worked) toward their employees' health coverage (providing better benefits for a greater share of workers) than comparable nonunion employers.\(^6\)

Collective bargaining can allow workers to have a say in how their time is spent.

- Flexibility is a buzzword in the office these days—but often can mean the collapse of work/life distinctions. Flexibility can be a valuable benefit if in control of workers.\(^7\)
- Almost half (46%) of nonunion workers say they have little or no input into the number of hours they work each week, compared with less than a quarter (22%) of union workers.\(^8\)

---

\(^6\) EPI. "...unions help working people." p14.
\(^8\) EPI. "...unions help working people." p15.
A collectively bargained union contract could win things that are rare in the architecture profession, such as: benefits that are not tied to "full-time" employment of 40 hours, a shorter work week, no mandatory overtime, and paid time off.

- 87% of workers covered by a union contract have access to paid sick days, compared with 69% of nonunion workers.9
- In the private sector, 89% of workers covered by a union contract get paid vacation and paid holidays, whereas 75% of nonunion workers get paid vacation and 76% get paid holidays.10
- 90% of union workers participate in a retirement plan, compared with 75% of nonunion workers.11
- Per federal law, architects and other “exempt” professionals12 making above $23k a year are not obligated to receive overtime.13
- Many designers work hourly and still do not get compensation for overtime work.14

Union contracts tend to encourage equal pay for equal work across race and gender.15

- While the pay gap between men and women is, on average, 19%, in unionized workplaces it is 11%.16
- Unionizing architecture could set sector-wide transparent wage and promotion standards and procedures that would cut through gender and racial disparities and benefit all workers and make it easier for workers to win raises.17
- Bargained contracts can require more equitable hiring practices.

---

9 EPI. "...unions help working people." p14.
10 EPI. "...unions help working people." p15.
11 EPI. "...unions help working people." p15.
Since collectively bargained contracts are regulated and enforced by the state, illegal unpaid internships are impossible in unionized architecture offices.

- Unpaid internships are still common practice in architecture and are often illegal.  

Unions empower workers in conflict resolution, establishing grievances policies and processes, rather than leaving such policies at the discretion of an employer.

- Unions are the only way to prevent employers from restricting group arbitration (mandating individual arbitration) as a condition of employment, as of 2018.
- Labor Management Committees (equal representation between management/employees) will anonymously take concerns and negotiate solutions.
- Unions establish due process for firing/demoting.

THE BENEFITS OF UNIONIZATION FOR THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE

More equitable pay and working conditions for architectural workers

- Doing so would better value architectural and design services.
- Trade unions can require that certain jobs (eg. those with public funding) hire union labor.
- Will keep more diverse staff by making profession more accessible to everyone.

Happy workers do better work.

- Output per worker is higher in economies with a higher density of organized labor.22

Unions can benefit bosses and employers.

- Unions in architecture could grow overall compensation at firms and across the industry.
- With the backing of unions, architects and their firms could secure more work.
- Happier and more productive workers could benefit firm culture, productivity, and creative output.

A union of architectural workers could level the playing field and lower barriers to entry by combating counterproductive competition and fee reduction.

- Similar to the arts, architecture can have low barriers to entry. A union could help combat costly RFP processes, unpaid competitions, and other industry threats.23
- Collective bargaining can promote, small, new, minority-owned, and local firms through things like community workforce agreements.24

Building solidarity networks across industry and community can strengthen the position of architects, and the public value of design work.

- Organizing with other unions can help raise working conditions for all workers in the building trades.
- Community support is important for the success of unions. The process of gaining that support can better the connection of architects and their publics (look at Chicago teachers' strike, etc. for community support for workers).

Education, Licensure, & Standards

- Musicians unions are active in advocating for creative labor in industries of changing technologies and markets.
- An organized union of architectural workers is an institution that can dialogue with NCARB and make pushes for changing requirements for licensure.
- NCARB is led by the Board of Directors, which consists of 14 volunteers (13 of whom presently are in management positions) elected annually by the Member Boards: 12 architects, one public director, and one executive from a state board. Unions could be an avenue to better represent architecture workers in NCARB.

Relationship to technological advancement/skills training

- AFL-CIO Unions offer apprenticeship-training programs, and labor-management partnerships.
- Apprenticeship programs: integrate systematic on-the-job training, guided by an experienced master-level practitioner in an occupation, with classroom instruction.
- The programs are operated by sponsors representing labor and management organizations and funded through collectively bargained contributions to tax-exempt trust funds.
- Examples for the apprenticeship-training programs: Painters and Allied Trades Finishing Trades Institute; Operating Engineers; Bricklayers Masonry Institute etc.

26 Timberg. "Can Unions Save the Arts..."
27 NCARB. "Board of Directors." https://www.ncarb.org/about/board-directors
28 With the exception of one representative who is an educator, all members of the NCARB board come from management and are not workers. Further the board appears to be lacking in diversity as compared to architectural workers.
• Labor-Management Partnerships: By partnering with employers, unions help working people develop in-demand skills in many other industries including health care, construction, manufacturing, hospitality and aerospace.

Unions addressing cost/debt of education
• Collective money and power can help with lobbying and mutual aid. For example, the Union Plus Scholarship program, sponsored by the Union Plus Education Foundation, helps union members and their families defray the cost of higher education.
• For the past 20 years, Union Plus has distributed over 3.4 million scholarship dollars to union members and their families. Amounts range from $500 to $4,000. Students may re-apply each year.

WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF OUR LIVES?
The material benefits that unionization afford have wide repercussions outside of work life which are felt deeply in workers’ personal lives:

Work-Life Balance
• Unions center workers, not just their product.
  ◊ Architecture is characterized by “pay gaps, insufficient parental-leave policies, and inflexible hours that are incompatible with society’s expectations about child-rearing.”
  ◊ Research in the UK found that there are twice as many work-life balance practices in unionized workplaces compared to non-unionized workplace.
    Union-led collective bargaining in the UK
  ◊ significantly reduces the incidence of long-hours working (over 48 hours per week) and employees’ perception of a long-hours culture.

30 The Kaiser Permanente Labor Management Partnership covers 115,000 union-represented workers, 14,000 managers and 19,000 physicians.
• Unions can help combat “the popular trend of reclassifying people as self-employed and contractors encourages overwork, because you only get paid for the direct hours you put in.”

Organized workers can better confront policies and cultures that encourage “work-mania.”

**Flexibility to deal with life**

• 28-hour workweek won by IGM workers in Germany when they need to take care of stuff.

**Happiness**

• Recent study showed that union members are more satisfied with their lives than those who are not members, and the substantive effect of union membership on life satisfaction rivals other common predictors of quality of life.

**Value**

• Unions can help ensure recognition for work. For instance, the Writers Guilds registries have been instrumental in creating robust and democratized copyright enforcement.

• Unions ARE the workers; a union is a step towards equality with management.

• There is no existing place for people to settle grievances in the profession.

---


POLITICAL ACTION

Unions are political. They are synonymous with class consciousness, and while there's a mixed history of attempts to depoliticize shop floors, they’re ideological organizations.

- Neoliberal economic and market policies threaten working people in all aspects of their lives. For the business class, unions are the primary tools of workers to fight back.
- Strikes have shown to be an effective means for political purposes outside the workplace. The case of D.C. Metro’s refusal to transport “Unite the Right” protesters is an example.
- Within the profession, unions can be used for political action where AIA’s (tepid, tone-deaf, reprehensible) responses to many issues proves need for an alternative.
- Unions (like the International Union of Architects) can address issues which cross borders, to address issues that face all working in and users of the built environment.

Through unions, architects could force a national conversation by boycotting certain designs, and demand alternatives.

- Coordinating withholding labor could, for example, head off threats that design/build or other methods might pose by circumventing architectural opposition to things like prison design.
- As professionals, unions could empower us to take collective political action rather than just voluntary pledges.
- Actions by unions such as, “a day without immigrants,” US unions support for BDS, or the building of housing cooperatives in NYC can serve as models for an architecture union.
- A union might empower architects to take positions on things like incarceration, the border wall, labor abuses in construction sites, gentrification, displacement, the privatization of public spaces-resources, land-grabs, environmental injustices, and ecological destruction.
- More foundationally, unions could position architects to influence market-driven development.
Unions provide a basis for large numbers of workers to come together; potentially creating a mechanism for workers to make radical demands in radical moments.

38 Boots Riley. "If you want a living wage, be prepared to go on strike for it." The Guardian. 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/20/if-you-want-a-living-wage-be-prepared-to-go-on-strike-for-it
41 APDSR. "AIA Code of Ethics Reform." https://www.adpsr.org/iaiaethics
45 The Architecture Lobby Manifesto http://architecture-lobby.org/about/
The Architecture Lobby sees unionization as a way for workers to gain power and use it to assert their value and make change in our profession. HERE IS HOW THEY WORK:

WHAT IS A UNION?

A union is a body of workers who collectively bargain with employers over the conditions of their employment. This means that workers are the union, and that anything they bargain for is set forth collectively and agreed on democratically.

• A subset of a union (one in a specific workplace, for example), is called a local.
• Locals are further subdivided into units. More on this to follow.
HOW DO UNIONS WORK?

Most commonly, a union is formed and officially recognized when a majority of workers vote in favor of unionization. In a typical unionization campaign, workers will spend months or years talking to their fellow workers and organizing them to vote in favor of unionization. These organizing efforts will usually culminate in either a union election, or a card-signing campaign (more on this later).

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) is the federal government entity that governs unionization. They interpret and enforce laws that govern what unions and management can and cannot do throughout the process of unionization and define what is negotiable in collective bargaining. If there is a contested union election, they have the power to make a decision regarding its formation. The NLRB is hardly impartial as the membership of its rotating, five-member board is appointed by the U.S. President. This lack of impartiality can create barriers to unionizing, particularly when the board is majority Republican. Enforcement of unionization laws is through lawsuits brought before the NLRB which can create cost and time barriers to union efforts.

A Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) is commonly known as a union contract. Collective bargaining is the negotiation process between a group of employees and their employer. These are typically negotiations around wages and work conditions held by a representative committee of workers assisted by union organizers and lawyers. When the committee and management arrive at a contract deal, a vote is put to the workers about whether to accept the agreement. The period of negotiating a CBA can take weeks, months, or years.
A Collective Bargaining Unit (CBU) is the group of workers that is covered under a collective bargaining agreement, commonly known as a union contract. There is no legally defined minimum or maximum number of employees who can be in a CBU; rather, the NLRB makes a judgement on whether workers who would be part of the CBU have a similar enough set of interests to make collective bargaining appropriate. The CBU comprises all workers covered under the contract - not just the committee that is negotiating the deal.

Most CBUs affiliate with existing unions, though this is not necessary. A CBU can form and proclaim itself an independent union, though the resources required to sustain this—lawyers, administrative staffers, organizers—usually make it infeasible to do so. More likely, a group of workers who want to organize their workplace will affiliate with an existing union who represents workers in their sector.

CBUs represent every worker in the unit (eg. a workplace), whether they join the union or not. Any negotiations the unit makes affects all workers.

◊ Until the recent Janus vs. AFSCME Supreme Court decision, workers who chose not to become members of the union still paid fair-share fees.

◊ Full members of the union pay union dues. They can also vote in union elections, run for positions of leadership, and be part of the bargaining team.
The CBU—not the union—is at the heart of National Labor Relations Board legislation. A union is in effect a group of CBU’s, or those interested in establishing a CBU, who have banded together and combined resources to better advocate for their interests.

The CBU-establishment process, in detail, goes like this:

**Workers must first organize themselves with the goal of convincing a majority of their coworkers to undertake a unionization campaign.**

- Workers are usually supported by organizers from existing unions, but this phase of organizing can take many different forms depending on the nature of the industry, whether unions are already present in adjacent workplaces, and the specific conditions of each workplace. This period of organizing can take years, but there have been many cases of workers progressing from unorganized to finalizing a contract within a few months. Whatever the situation, a strong majority of workers should be on board before taking the next step.

- Examples of the kind of self-organizing that might lead to a unionizing effort include having ‘organizing conversations’ with potential leaders and allies in the workplace, agitating around workplace issues without the explicit goal of unionization to build worker confidence and test management, plugging coworkers into political and activist activity outside of work, collective self-education (how meta!) about unions and organizing. No matter what form the self-organizing takes it important to go one step at a time, and understand the situation and personalities involved before acting. Plan conversations in advance, and grow the worker leadership in the office one person at a time (and eventually, have them do the same!).

**Workers petition the NLRB to hold a secret ballot election.**

- It is at this point that the NLRB makes a judgement on which workers would be included in the potential CBU. This is crucial, because a unionization campaign depends on a majority of potential CBU members voting in favor.

- When it comes to unionization, management is roughly defined as company representatives who have hiring and firing power. Overseeing the tasks of other workers does not necessarily make you a manager in the eyes of the NLRB. Still, the distinction between management and worker can be murky and is defined primarily through case law and NLRB precedent.
If over 30% of workers sign the petition in favor of an election, the NLRB then administers a secret ballot vote. Workers vote either “yes” or “no” on the establishment of a CBU.

If in that secret ballot vote over 50% of workers vote in the affirmative, they establish a CBU and begin negotiations with management and choose whether or not to affiliate with a bigger labor formation.

• If over 50% of workers signed the initial petition calling for the vote, the employer can waive the secret ballot and simply recognize the union. Some unionization campaigns, when they know more than 50% of workers are in support, use card-signing to show majority demand for a union, foregoing the election process entirely. Similarly, if the NLRB has reason to believe that management will use unlawfully coercive anti-union tactics, they can also establish a union without a secret ballot.

• Though CBUs affiliate officially with existing unions after an affirmative vote, often union organizers from an existing union will organize the campaign, effectively (though informally) producing an affiliation.

After the election, workers in the CBU pay dues to the union. Since the Janus vs. AFSCME case in 2018, workers do not have to pay dues—making organizing expansive union support in a CBU vital. Full members, those who sign a union membership card, pay union dues (typically around 2% of wages). The union represents the interests of all workers, and all workers get the contract changes won at the negotiating table whether they voted for the union or not.

• In the June 2018 Janus vs. AFSCME decision, the Supreme Court removed the ability to collect fair-share fees from unions that represent government workers. This may set precedent in the case law for all fair-share fee allowances (including in private sector) to be revoked, effectively making every state a "right to work" state.46

• A portion of union dues collected from a CBU go up the chain to a union local (a collection of CBUs), to the union itself (which is a collection of locals), and then potentially to a labor federation (a collection of unions, national or international).

Once a CBU is established, it has the authority to collectively bargain for a contract (a CBA, or Collective Bargaining Agreement) with management that dictates the working conditions, pay structure, and benefits that covers all members of the CBU.

- The union bargaining team consists of employee representatives along with lawyers and union staffers. Once the CBA is approved, individual negotiation and contracts are prohibited.
- Once management and the bargaining team have come to agreement, the contract must then be voted on and approved by all the workers in the CBU.
- The contract is typically only for a fixed period of time. When the contract expires, it must be renegotiated.

The CBU enforces its contract by filing grievances against management. A grievance is any alleged violation of the contract, past practice, employer rules, previous grievance or arbitration settlements, or any violation of any laws, such as OSHA, ADA, FMLA, or EEOC regulations on race, age, or sex discrimination. The quasi-judicial grievance process also typically involves the union seeking a remedy for said grievance.

- The grievance process, because it is backed up by the collective strength of the CBU and the rules and agreements of the CBA which typically go well beyond labor law minimums, means that workers have recourse in situations that a non-union worker might just have to stomach or else risk being punished or fired.
- If grievances cannot be resolved they go to arbitration. Arbitration, however, can present the same problem that seeking legal remedies for labor law violations in non-union workplaces often creates—the need for expensive legal proceedings that may not justify the remedy. In this case however, you have the backing and resources of the union, rather than having to rely on individual action or resources.

---

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Through this effort, we are developing a strategy. Organizing is a muscle that we need to work out, which will strengthen our position in other fights and workplace struggles. This means getting involved. Here are some ways that you can jump in:
With the lobby
• Join the unionization working group.
• Increase membership.
• Participate in shaping our organizing strategy.

At your work
• Talk to your coworkers about The Architecture Lobby.
• Grow Lobby membership.
• Talk to your coworkers about grievances.
• Get involved with the Solidarity Bloc, led by the Lobby’s #metoo working group.
• Support academic unions.

Outside Of Work
• Find labor advocacy organizations active in your area.

And if you have questions on any of this, don’t hesitate to reach out to:

Marianela D'Aprile  marianeladaprile@gmail.com
Keefer Dunn       kdunn1@hawk.iit.edu
Alexander Froehlich alexpfroehlich@gmail.com
Rio Morales       riolorenzomorales@gmail.com
Alican Yildiz     alicanyildiz0@gmail.com
ARCHITECTURAL WORKERS ORGANIZATIONS

ACTIVE

Union of Architecture Workers

◊ UK-based. Not yet a union (in process).

Civil Service Technical Guild

◊ “Today, we represent some 8,000 Engineers, Architects, Scientists, Chemists, Planners and other technical trades working for the City of New York.”

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers

Swedish Association of Architects

Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects

Syndicat de l’Architecture

◊ The Syndicat de l’Architecture is a French labor union for architects co-founded by Jean Nouvel.
INACTIVE

Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists, and Technicians (FAECT)

- Established as unemployment among architects and draftsmen in the United States of 90 percent or more. From 1933 until after World War II, served as a trade union and activist organization for the purpose of securing higher wages, employment benefits, and labor rights. For architectural workers the organization also focused on a commitment to affordable housing and the efficiency of manufactured housing.

- After initially seeking affiliation with AFL, became CIO affiliate. organized in schools to recruit new members.

NON-UNION AFFINITY GROUPS

Architectural Workers

- UK - focused on social housing.

American Designers and Planners for Social Responsibility

- Focused on awareness, petitions, re: social responsibility

Union Of Construction Allied Trades & Technicians

- “Absorbed into the British mega union, Unite” 1/1/17

American Society of Planners and Architects (1943-48)

- Not focused on labor practices (FAECT did, and was contemporary, and the two interacted), but attempted to establish a progressive vision for planning/architecture.
UNIONS

WHAT ARE THEY & WHY DO WE CARE?