



# Member Action Teams

A Guide to Strengthening Your Union at Work



Get started at [www.wfse.org/mat](http://www.wfse.org/mat).

# What is a member action team (MAT)?

When union **members** take **action** as a **team**, anything is possible. A MAT is a group of workers organized to build power and address issues at work. MATs are the grassroots level and the face of our union on the job. Through coordinated and collective action, a MAT can help you and our co-workers secure better policy, settle disputes, address issues, demand respect, and improve morale at work. MATs activate our co-workers when action is needed to make improvements at the agency, regional, statewide or national levels.

## Union solidarity begins at our worksites.

A strong MAT is built on strong relationships with our coworkers. Through smart coordination, we can accomplish more than what any one of us can accomplish alone. It's at the core of unionism and how we speak up for our jobs, families, and communities.

## MATs are the foundation of our union.

**Union power isn't nested in one individual or location.** The power we build in worksites determines what we can accomplish at all levels.

MATs can address worksite issues.



Policy committees can address agency/employer issues.



Locals can address local/regional issues.



Councils can address statewide issues.

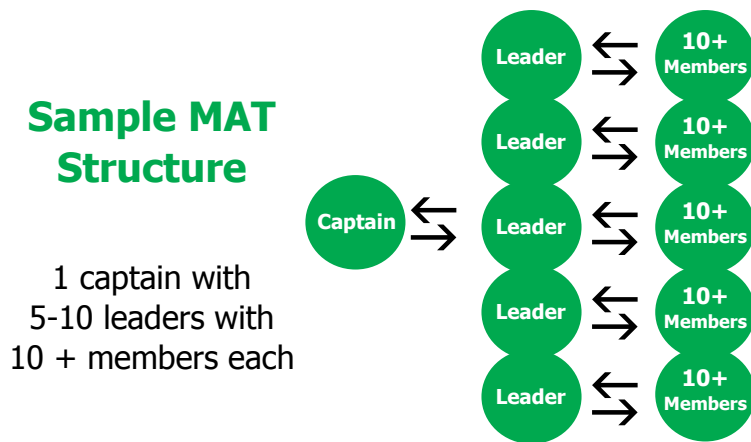


National unions can address national issues.



# An effective MAT requires organization and communication.

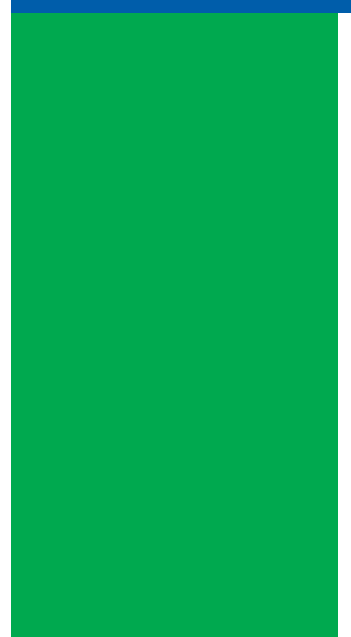
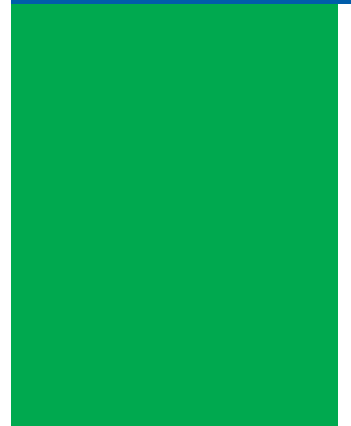
By organizing together into teams, we can ensure that no one is left out when it comes to communication and collective action. It's how we build power and level the field with our employers. It's how we ensure that we're heard on the job, in our communities and at the state capitol. Here's what your team might look like:



Every structure might look a little different, but the concept is the same. By organizing into a communication structure, we can take collective action at a moment's notice. It's not about hierarchy, it's about disseminating and elevating information quickly and efficiently.

## Putting Your MAT to Work

Imagine a scenario where your manager unilaterally issues a policy that violates our collective bargaining agreement. A MAT could quickly inform all employees of the new policy, notify council representatives, survey members, distribute a worksite petition, and recruit a delegation to deliver the petition. Collective action like this has been proven to work and often solves problems before they rise to the level of a formal (and sometimes lengthy) grievance process.



# Takin' It to the MAT: Seattle Colleges Secured Hazard Pay Twice

After [winning hazard pay in March of 2020](#)—a first for public service workers in Washington State—WFSE Local 304 members at Seattle Colleges fought for and won hazard pay again, this time as a lump sum for essential workers. Here's how they did it:

## Step 1: Identify a Widely Felt Issue

All successful union organizing campaigns have two things in common: the organizing issue is both **widely felt across the workplace and deeply felt**. The desire for hazard pay fit the bill.

## Step 2: One-on-One Conversations

To turn this workplace issue into action, Seattle Central College maintenance mechanic and union shop steward Monty Diaz went door-to-door checking on his coworkers to see if they were okay and to convince them that they should push for reinstatement of hazard pay. To get everyone on board, he built relationships with coworkers in other departments like security and the mailroom and even visited his coworkers at home after work.

## Step 3: Build Solidarity

With essential workers unified, the next step was to get the support of people who were working from home—people who would not directly benefit from hazard pay. The group that developed this solidarity organically was the Seattle Colleges MAT, which includes employees from all job classes. The MAT decided to go all-in on the push for hazard pay during union-management meetings.



Darwin Ruiz De La Riva



It wasn't just about money. Winning hazard pay was about forcing them to acknowledge that I am a person, a human being, not just a body.



Monty Diaz



I told them, 'We deserve this. We risked our safety to keep this place open. We're people. We're not here just to serve them and go home.' When you explain it like that, it's really easy to get people moving.



Get the full story at [wfse.org/news](https://wfse.org/news).



## Step 4: Develop Leadership

Another benefit of having a strong MAT in place was being able to bring new faces into meetings with management. When management saw people they didn't expect to be involved in union activism asking for hazard pay, they knew the workplace had been thoroughly organized.

## Step 5: Take Action

On May 15, 2021, leaders attended a town hall discussing WFSE and AFSCME's legislative victories. One item in the American Rescue Plan caught their eye: the over \$10 million dollars of federal funding that Seattle Colleges received that could be used for pandemic-related pay.

They brought it up during the next union-management meeting, and told them, "You already have the money, so use it."

## Victory!

Finally, after a year of tireless effort from union activists, Seattle Colleges issued a one-time lump sum payment of between \$2,500 and \$1,500 to those classified staff who were routinely required to be on campus over the past year.



Dawnelle Wilkie

“

When we realized how much risk our union siblings were putting themselves in for the college to function, we were incensed. We really understood how this was affecting people's wellness and their feeling about whether or not they are valued.

”



Johnny Dwyer

“

Getting our MAT together was the critical first step. Then we demonstrated this organization and solidarity with one another by taking the fight to management's doorstep. ”

# Takin' It to the MAT: Saving Jobs & Services



## MAT Saves Cafe at UW Campus

In April of 2021, Café workers and their WFSE Member Action Team mobilized quickly to gather over 430 petition signatures from doctors, local residents, and WFSE union siblings who agreed that Maleng Café should stay open. "I am glad we have a union," said Aster Morrow, a Food Service Worker Lead. "Because if we didn't have a union, it would be a different story."



## MAT Saves an Award-Winning Early Learning Center

In March of 2022, members at the Everett Community College Early Learning Center put their MAT into action and stopped the administration from closing their award-winning center. "We're a tight knit community," said WFSE member Alejandra Wood. "The relationships we've built between staff and the families that attend here are a strong bond."

Get the full story at [wfse.org/news](https://www.wfse.org/news).

# The MAT Toolkit

## Resources to Get Started

As WFSE members, we have access to a host of resources to help us get our MATs up and running. Ready to get started? Reach out to your council representative or the [WFSE Member Connection Center](#) today.

### Mapping & Charting

A key to building an effective MAT is knowing our membership. This is how we ensure our union is reaching all of our coworkers. Mapping and charting our workplace is one of the first steps we can take in building our MAT and determining the structure that's best for our workplace or team. Here are some resources you can use to get started:

[Mapping Exercise \(PDF\)](#)

[Charting Exercise \(PDF\)](#)

### Leadership Development & Resources

Members can choose from a variety of roles. MATs typically consist of a captain, leaders and participants who all help to disseminate and elevate information as needed.

[Identifying, Recruiting and Developing Leaders \(PDF\)](#)

[How to run a meeting \(PDF\)](#)

[Leadership Calendar](#)

[Leadership Center](#)

### Organizing Conversations

An effective organizing conversation starts with a relationship and helps members move from individual issues to collective action. Here are some frameworks for having union conversations:

[Organizing Conversation Framework \(PDF\)](#)

[Affirm, Answer, Redirect \(PDF\)](#)

### Issue Campaigns

Issue campaigns bring co-workers together to solve problems collectively. Issue campaigns that are strategic, thoughtful, and involve most members build solidarity and power in our union. Here are some resources MAT leaders can use in organizing issue campaigns with coworkers:

[Download the MAT Campaign Planning Packet \(PDF\)](#)

### New Employee Outreach

New Employee Outreach (NEO) is critical to building union power. When new coworkers are hired, it is important that someone from our union welcomes them, asks them to

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join our union and shares key information and resources. This might involve multiple conversations with different union leaders. Relationships are key to building a strong union. Whether through a formal workplace orientation or a follow up conversation with a union leader at the worksite, a positive NEO experience helps build a powerful and engaged union in our worksites and communities. MATs can work with your local to ensure there is a strong NEO program in your worksite.

### Problem-Solving Approaches

MATs work together with their council representative to determine which tools are best for different scenarios.

- **Collective Action:** Members take action together to solve a problem. These actions are strategic, creative and involve a group of members. There is a clear target and remedy. These actions should be part of a plan or series of escalating actions designed to address an issue.

- **Communication:** A concise and consistent message that resonates with

our co-workers and the public can make all the difference. When developing a communications plan, it's important to consider the audience, the message and messengers, and the appropriate communication channels. A media strategy crafted in partnership with staff may also help you meet your objectives.

- **Political Action:** No other workforce has more at stake when it comes to decisions made by elected leaders. Members participate in this problem solving approach by taking action to support the issues and candidates that support state workers and the work we do. Member actions include lobbying legislators, candidate endorsements, donating to PEOPLE, and participating in elections and campaigns.

- **Collective Bargaining:** Union and management negotiate a contract that is a legally binding agreement between employer and our membership. Most of our contracts operate on two-year cycles. Members participate in this process in various ways, such as submitting bargaining proposals, serving on the negotiation



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team, taking workplace action for a fair contract and lobbying legislators to fund our contracts. If management wants to change wages, benefits or working conditions during the term of the contract, our union may demand to bargain this change.

- **Grievance Procedure:** This is a formal process for problem solving between union and management as defined in our collective bargaining agreement. This problem solving approach, which can be taken on behalf of an individual or a group of members, follows clear steps and adheres to strict timelines. The goal is to resolve an issue at the lowest level possible, but some cases go to arbitration.



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this toolkit.