



# A Guide to Local Resource Sharing





**315,000 members from  
coast to coast to coast**



**UNIFOR**

theUnion | lesyndicat

# Introduction

Locals are at the core of our Union. When Unifor was formed in 2013, we made strengthening our local unions a priority. A necessary step to develop a strong, dynamic, and democratic Union. A necessary step to win the social, political, and economic changes we want to see in our workplaces and communities.

To accomplish this task, Unifor established the Local Union Task Force (LUTF) – a unionwide initiative that aimed to engage local unions, assess members’ needs and develop recommendations on how to increase member participation, develop grassroots activists, and strengthen local unions across the country.

To support the work of the LUTF, Unifor launched an online survey, and held 49 town hall meetings across the country. Detailed information was gathered about the needs and challenges facing our local unions. In addition, local union participants shared their successes and best practice strategies. Nearly 2,000 members from 350 locals across Canada participated in these town hall discussions.

The Task Force compiled and analyzed the information gathered over a 10-month period and produced a report entitled “Building Stronger Local Unions Together” ([available at unifor.org/lutf](http://unifor.org/lutf)).

The report contained 28 recommendations and an action plan focused on building stronger local unions. The report was presented and adopted at the 2016 Unifor Convention.

During our consultations, we heard about the challenges facing our locals, in particular small single unit local unions. In response, many local union leaders and members highlighted the need for enhanced resource sharing and collaboration among local unions. Members spoke and the task force listened.

**This document will focus one of the three key areas identified by the LUTF. There are more resources available to support local unions, please visit [unifor.org/resources](http://unifor.org/resources) to find more reference tools.**

With this document, our intent is to provide the knowledge and tools necessary for local unions to better collaborate and share resources. Where this objective is best achieved through mergers, we encourage local unions to do so.



# Local Union Resource Sharing

As mentioned, the variations in local union sizes have implications in terms of the amount of resources each local has access to. Compared to smaller local unions, larger locals will have greater access to funds and resources to help support internal operations, membership development, and enable broader participation in union and community engagement activities.

Our goal is to ensure that all locals not only fully maximize their resources, but that we also help create a greater sense of equity amongst locals who are more limited in their capacity. We want to continue building a strong network of local unions from coast to coast and one of the most effective ways to accomplish this task is to encourage local unions (whether they are formally merged or not) to find ways to share resources.

Pooling and sharing of local union resources can take many forms. This can include: sharing office and property space through co-ownership, co-locating, or co-leasing; sharing of administrative support staff or office personnel; sharing office equipment and supplies, and sharing other resources to increase community engagement and political advocacy efforts. This does not necessarily mean smaller locals must find a larger local to share resources with. A number of smaller locals in any given area can also look to pool resources together for common objectives.

## Local union resource sharing examples:

- ❑ Sharing of property and office space, including maintenance and utility costs
- ❑ Sharing costs associated with purchasing and maintaining office equipment and supplies
- ❑ Sharing of costs of personnel such as administrative support staff, IT, or office cleaners
- ❑ Look at co-hosting or co-organizing community or local union events and turning Union spaces into community hubs
- ❑ Share costs in purchasing union merchandise and promotional materials
- ❑ Find ways to integrate local union internal and external communications
- ❑ Sharing union support roles such as: Substance Abuse Representatives, Women's Advocates, or forming Joint-Local Union Standing Committees

Sharing resources is not new strategy. Many local unions have already been engaging in these practices for quite some time and have seen the immediate benefits and advantages that it provides. The following section will offer up examples of how local unions have successfully shared resources, provide some practical tips on how your local can also begin taking on this work, and areas in which the national office can assist you during this process.

## Local Union Resource Sharing: Steps to take

The following are some key steps that your local union can take to begin sharing resources with another local:



### Step One Identify your needs

It is important to first assess and identify what resources your local is looking to access or capacities you are looking to build upon. Are you interested in having a meeting space? Does your local want more access to office equipment, such as computers or photocopiers? Are you looking to secure additional expertise through specialized local representatives, such as a WSIB or Benefits Rep? Are you looking to build better connections in the community or strengthen your advocacy efforts?



### Step Two Reach out to area locals

Once needs are determined, begin reaching out to other Unifor local unions in your surrounding area to discuss the potential for resource sharing and greater collaboration. To assist you in finding locals in your area to reach out to, we suggest using Unifor's Local Administration System (LAS). The LAS is available to all local union executives, however, you must contact [lassupport@unifor.org](mailto:lassupport@unifor.org) in order to create an account. We also strongly encourage locals to contact their National Representative, Area Director, or Regional Director, to receive assistance on identifying potential resource sharing partners.



### Step Three Develop an action plan

Develop a proposal that contains an action plan of how local unions will work to pool their resources together. A formal written agreement, with a financial plan and budget, is useful so that there is a clear record and understanding of each local's roles. A paper record will also help to avoid any potential misunderstandings between locals down the road.



### **Step Four** **Get advice**

Once you have identified a resource sharing partner(s), contact other local unions that have undergone a similar resource sharing process and that can provide advice and strategies your local can also implement. Again, contacting your National Staff Representative, Area Director, or Regional Director can be a helpful resource to get information on which locals to contact.

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### **Step Five** **Reach out to the national office**

Contact the Unifor national office to see how we can support your proposal and joint initiatives. This can include getting advice from the National Secretary-Treasurer's office or our finance, legal, and operations & facilities departments.

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### **Step Six** **Get the local membership involved**

Make sure that the process is open and transparent. Bring any proposals to the local membership and make sure important decisions are opened up for questions and discussion, and that proposals are voted on and recorded.

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### **Step Seven** **Establish a working group**

Convene a smaller committee or working group comprised of representatives from each local that will work to implement the resource sharing plan. Make sure that members are kept up to date on the progress of the plan.

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### **Step Eight** **Record-keeping and evaluation**

Ensure that a proper record-keeping system is in place to track how local's finances are being managed. In addition, arrange for some time to evaluate the progress of your resource sharing plan and see where adjustments, if any, can be made.

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## Examples of local union resource sharing in Quebec

Several Unifor locals in Quebec have found ways to come together to share resources with each other. These include:

- Local 700 share their office space and support staff with locals, 1203, 199Q, 151, 140 and 134Q.
- Local 728 shares office space with local 1004.
- Locals 22, 26A, 352 & 375 share office space, equipment and services.
- Local 11 share office space, equipment, and services with locals 894-1225 and 1227
- Local 3057 shares office space with local 227.

## Sharing Local Union Office Space & Property

For many local unions, access to space is often a top priority; however, for smaller locals, this can often be difficult to secure. During our Local Union Task Force survey, it was revealed that half (52 per cent) of local unions had a dedicated union office space while 48 per cent had none. Of those that did have office space, 11 per cent indicated that this was located on an employer's premises.

While we traditionally think of union spaces in terms of 'Local Union Halls', the actual space can range anywhere from a simple boardroom to conduct meetings to full offices or halls/ auditoriums for larger events or membership meetings. A space for the union's work can provide a secure place outside of the workplace where members can convene for meetings, organize events, conduct workshops, or store materials.

There are a few ways in which local unions can work together to find ways to share space - depending on the local's needs, size, resources, and availability of space within a geographic area.

### Three main examples include:



**Co-locating:** Two or more local unions can share an existing union office space, look into co-locating within an entirely new space, or share a space within an existing organization (for example, another non-profit organization that may have extra room).



**Shared leasing:** Two or more local unions can look into signing a shared lease of a commercial space.



**Co-ownership:** Two or more local unions can pool resources to purchase a building or construct an entirely new commercial office place.



While each option has their own strengths, again, it depends on what the needs of the locals are, what resources are available to them, and what is actually financially feasible. Once needs are identified, searching for the appropriate space can follow. There are many types of spaces that can be considered, such as: an office building, a storefront property, or converted retail space. In Windsor, Ontario for example, two local unions came together to purchase an old school that was renovated to be used as their local union office. They then rented out extra space to three other locals.

Locals looking to purchase property space can seek assistance from the national office to help with the financing of a mortgage. To receive assistance, locals must first submit a written proposal to Unifor's National Secretary-Treasurer's office. The proposal is assessed to determine whether it is financially viable and sustainable, and then goes before the National Executive Board (NEB) for approval.

For locals that co-own or co-lease property, any unused office space could be used to help provide rental space for another organization or other Unifor group, such as retiree chapters. These arrangements can greatly offset the costs related to maintenance and the purchase of utilities. Some of our smaller locals also rent out extra space that is available at Unifor national branch offices across the country. This is currently practiced by some locals in New Westminster, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Halifax.

*"We share a local union hall with two other locals and a retiree chapter. The hall has an auditorium and office space and is bustling with both union and community activities - it embodies the purpose of social unionism."*

**- Local Union Task Force Participant**

## Sharing personnel and equipment

Sharing the costs of personnel staff and office equipment can help to alleviate some of the financial pressures that a single local union is faced to incur alone. This can consist of sharing the costs of administrative support staff for the local, IT support, or office cleaning staff. Resource sharing can also involve helping to cover expenses related to purchasing and maintaining of office equipment, such as: computers, fax machines, photocopiers, security systems, or general office supplies.

In addition, smaller locals with fewer members may not have the ability to secure some essential internal union committee positions, such as a Substance Abuse Representative or Women's Advocate. Having a person who can fill this role and support the membership in multiple union

locals can be a good way to ensure that this resource can be accessed. This concept can also be applied to any number of additional supportive local roles, such as pensions support, finances, trustees, or joint-local committees where there may not be enough member representatives to fill seats or participate, such as young workers, aboriginal and workers of colour, or pride committees.

## Local union finances

While each local will have systems in place in order to track and manage their local's finances, pooling or sharing resources may require adjustments to current accounting practices or that additional financial recording-keeping systems are put into place. This is important for the local to be in good-financial standing, as well as for accountability and transparency to the membership. Smaller locals who may not have a full-time treasurer, financial officer, or trustees may require further help and support. To assist our locals around finances, Unifor offers several accounting and financial reporting tools that can be accessed online by local executive members through our Local Administration System (LAS). You can also use the LAS to order supplies for your Local. As mentioned, you must contact [lassupport@unifor.org](mailto:lassupport@unifor.org) in order to create an account to access the LAS system.

Our national union Finance Department is also a key resource available to you should you require any assistance or advice on how to develop a proper accounting system for your local. The Finance Department can also provide advice in terms of payroll or taxes

for locals that have paid administrative staff. Unifor's Education Department also runs a three-day Local Union Finances course for financial officers or trustees to better develop their skills in this key area.

## Communications & union materials

Local unions often have their own member newsletters, websites, email lists, and social media accounts. For smaller single-unit locals, these communication tools may not exist – or if they do, it is often difficult to maintain or update on a regular basis. This can make it difficult to ensure all local members have access to pertinent union updates and information, and to let residents in the surrounding area know how Unifor members are contributing to the local community.

Combining resources can allow for a better social media and community presence by, for instance, merging local updates and relevant news stories together in specific geographic area. In the Windsor and surrounding area, for example, several local unions work collaboratively to publish a common newsletter magazine called 'The Guardian'. A joint newsletter provides members with important local and community information without inundating people with repetitive or duplicate information.

Locals can also pool their resources together to purchase ad or media space to inform the public of important social and political campaigns or collective bargaining updates that would have an impact locally.

A further way to promote the union in the broader community is through local union apparel (e.g., clothing, hats, pens, water bottles, etc.). Often times, purchasing these items in larger quantities can greatly reduce the overall price, thereby maximizing savings. Additional materials such as flags, signs, and banners, can also be jointly purchased and stored in a common location so that multiple locals can have easy access to them whenever they are needed.

## Strengthening solidarity and community engagement

While there are often opportunities for locals to come together around important events, for example, during Canadian and regional council meetings, industry councils, or educational classes, these occur only a few times a year.

Therefore, a significant advantage to sharing resources is that it invariably requires locals to interact and work more frequently together all year-round, resulting in stronger bonds being built between locals in the same region or community, increased solidarity and unity between members, and opening up opportunities to further engage with the greater community. These are the key building blocks that form the foundation of Unifor's social unionism work.

Often times, smaller locals working in isolation find it more difficult to get people to come support a rally or emergency action, or make their presence felt in the wider community. We have heard from locals who are engaged in resource sharing how they find it much easier to get fellow members from different locals to come out in support of a campaign or in support of another local, even with short notice.

In addition, working together with a variety of local unions representing different types of sectors, industries, and workers, allows for greater opportunities to find ways to share bargaining strategies and support organizing campaigns that benefit the overall work of the union.

Finally, shared local union spaces can also act as a community hub, providing a space for union members, their families, and other members of the community to gather for meetings, socials, or special events, such as Labour Day or International Women's Day.



## Local Union Resource Sharing Best Practices: The Windsor experience

In Windsor, Ontario, Unifor executive members from Local 2458 and Local 195 came together and discussed the possibility of acquiring a common shared space together. After deciding what their needs were (such as having separate working spaces, a larger space for membership meetings and an outside area for community gatherings), they decided to pool their resources and purchase an old school that was up for sale.

A proposal was brought to the membership of the respective locals, and was explained and voted on. Once the membership agreed, a board committee was formed consisting of two representatives from each local, to move forward with the purchase of the building and land. They requested help from Unifor's National Secretary-Treasurer's office to provide assistance in order to secure a mortgage (which the national office currently holds). Once the terms of the purchase were finalized and approved, the process to renovate the building began. Additionally, locals also voted on a dues levy of \$1.25 per member, per month to support the building purchase.

Keeping in mind how they wanted to utilize the space, the building was upgraded and modified to fit their needs. This included: having separate spaces for locals to work from, a meeting boardroom, repurposing the gymnasium to act as a meeting hall, and using the yard as a community garden and picnic area.

Currently, costs related to meeting rooms, housekeeping, and building maintenance are shared. In addition, Locals have the ability to utilize each other staff when needed. Other area local unions (Local 240 and 2027) now also rent space at this office, as well as a Unifor Retirees Chapter.

Windsor and surrounding area locals also pool their resources together to release a regular membership and community magazine called 'The Guardian', which provides news and updates from the locals into one main publication.

*"This has worked really well for us. All that's needed is a plan and a willingness to do it. We really encourage other locals across the country to find ways to work together to not only build our profile and work in the community, but to make our union stronger"*

**- Tullio DiPonti, Local 2458  
President**





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