

# **Library on fire!**

A P L A N F O R

## **Remaking Local 1808**

"Intelligent discontent is the  
mainspring of civilization.  
Progress is born of agitation.  
It is agitation or stagnation."

— EUGENE V. DEBS

# Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction                               | 03 |
| How will this work?                        | 04 |
| Consensus                                  | 05 |
| Committee Descriptions                     | 06 |
| Table of committees                        | 10 |
| Calendar of meetings                       | 11 |
| Building Base-up                           | 12 |
| What can I do now?                         | 13 |
| About Bargaining & Grievances              | 14 |
| About AFSCME Local 1808                    | 16 |
| Visions & Reflections                      | 17 |
| Sample Committee Agendas                   | 18 |
| Organizational Chart ( <i>back cover</i> ) | 20 |

"Library on Fire: Remaking Local 1808" v1.1

Licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

15 March 2024 | Rev. 24 January 2025

Created by Yonah Bromberg Gaber

with contributions by David Gillette, Verity Sturm, and Domonique Smith

Available digitally @ [sparkunity.us](https://sparkunity.us)

# Introduction

This zine lays out a plan for a major overhaul of the leadership and participation structure of AFSCME Local 1808. The goal of this plan is to democratize the union, increase participation, and expand work capacity, all in service of our overarching aim of radically improving DCPL working conditions.

## What can a Union do for us?

There are two essential functions of any union: Negotiation (setting the terms of employment) and Grievance (enforcing those terms when they aren't followed).

The current Local 1808 system fails us in several ways, leading to our terrible work conditions. First, we lack a mechanism for determining *what members want* from the negotiation process. Second, there is no pressure or strategy for negotiation, meaning that Local 1808 has not renegotiated its Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) *since 1998*. Third, the grievance process isn't known to most members, is difficult to access, and lacks a unified strategy on moving grievances to negotiations.

## What can we do for our Union?

A small group of Executive Board members is *not sufficient* because there is too much work, and they can't know how everyone in the union is feeling. We have to **push the union forward** and **do the work collaboratively** to have a functioning union.

This plan delineates **roles** and **responsibilities** that collectively need to be filled by *any* union member, most with a low barrier to entry. This framework emphasizes flexibility and continuity, meaning that individuals can involve themselves as they are able (**commitments should typically last only 1-2 meetings/months**), while ensuring that no work is falling by the wayside.

# How will this work?

Most of the work of Negotiation and Grievance, as well as work to strengthen the union, will move from the Executive Board to a network of open subcommittees and working groups (see *Committees, page 06 and Org Chart, page 20*) during open monthly Standing Meetings (see *a draft Calendar of Meetings, page 11*). The Executive Board will retain fiduciary duties and serve as official representatives to DCPL.

There will be five types of committees:

1. Business committees—official work (Exec Board, Elections)
2. Steward Council—reps from each location
3. Issue Subcommittees—open meetings to set work priorities and discuss and analyze workplace issues
4. Working Groups—Carry out work prioritized by committees, plan events and conduct other union work
5. Big Committees—rotating reps from Subcommittees choose priorities and assign work to working groups

This plan allows every member to bring issues to the union.

First, any member can add an issue to the agenda of the appropriate Issue Subcommittee or working group. The subcommittee will discuss it, decide through consensus what action the union should take (e.g. file a grievance, renegotiate a term, combine the question with a larger issue, etc.), and then select subcommittee representatives to participate in a Big committee meeting.

In that month's Big committee meetings, representatives from each subcommittee (plus from the Steward Council) will decide on work assignments for the month and assign them to specific people or Working Groups.

At each meeting, each group should designate a facilitator to collect the agenda throughout the month and run the next meeting. Committee facilitators are not in charge of the committee's work, but the meetings themselves.

# Consensus

## Why Consensus?

Majority-rule decision making often leaves out many voices, and encourages binary conflict. One way to avoid those pitfalls is to use consensus-based decision-making.

*"Consensus is the community resolution when opposing parties set aside their differences and agree on a statement that is agreeable to all, even if only barely.*

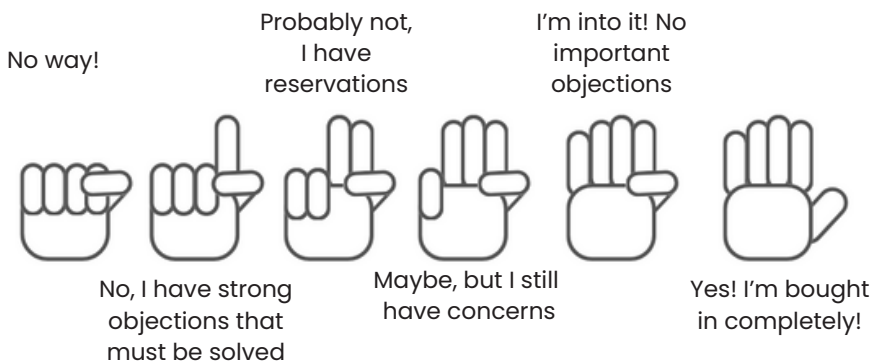
*[...] Consensus is not a majority vote. Every opinion counts. Consensus accounts for dissent and addresses it, although it does not always accommodate it. An option preferred by 51% of people is generally not enough for consensus. An option that is narrowly preferred is almost never consensus.*

*[...] A consensus can be found by looking for common ground and synthesizing the best solution that the group can achieve at that time."*

From "Wikipedia: What is Consensus"

## "Fist to Five"

Consensus can be as simple hearing objections until all are addressed. Calling for a "Fist to Five" is another way to check consensus in a group setting, by having each member share their level of support for a proposal using numbers of fingers. As a rule of thumb, consensus is achieved when group members are all at a four or five, and discussion continues until all (or at least almost all) consent to moving forward.



# Committee Descriptions

*See page 10 for a table of meeting participants and monthly tasks by committee.*

*See page 11 for a calendar of meetings by week.*

*See page 18 for sample agendas for each committee type.*

*See page 20 (back page) for the organizational chart.*

## **Executive Board**

Federal and local law requires unions to have an elected executive board. In this plan, that board will only controls finances and other official representation tasks such as receiving management requests and signing official documents. They do not control other committees, but may participate as members. They also convene the quarterly all-member meeting.

## **Elections Committee**

The elections committee is a special committee that plans and conducts union elections. In the eighteenth month after an executive board election, the Steward Council will select members to serve on the committee.

## **Branch & Department Steward Council**

Stewards will serve as a point of contact for members in branches, and more specifically focus on hearing and promoting the mood of members across the union. Stewards should be selected by members at that branch and should share or rotate the responsibilities with others.

Each month, the Steward Council will convene to suggest priorities for the Big committees by sending representatives from each cluster and reporting back.

The council will be responsible for reaching out to branches and departments that do not have a steward.

## **Administrative Relations Committee (ARC)**

This committee is a standing meeting of representatives chosen each month from the below subcommittees and working groups. The ARC will control the core work of the union, namely bargaining and grievances, by convening representatives from the several subcommittees and working groups below to shape an overall strategy and choose work priorities. The ARC designates management representatives as required.

Each month the ARC will hear subcommittee reports, set the month's priorities for the Bargaining and Grievances Working Group, assign analysis of workplace issues and proposals, and choose next month's facilitator.

### **ARC SUBCOMMITTEES:**

Each subcommittee is an open forum for discussing workplace issues and recommending action to the ARC. Each month each subcommittee will recommend action related to their domain, choose representatives to send to the ARC, and choose a facilitator for the next meeting.

#### **... on Work Conditions, Health & Safety**

Responsible for issues pertaining to workplace safety and daily functions, including:

- Facilities & Maintenance
- Public Safety
- Scheduling & Work Requirements

#### **... on Library Management & Jobs**

Responsible for issues pertaining to agency management and administration, including:

- Staffing models
- Job definitions and classifications
- Agency Mission and Strategy
- Advancement/Promotion

## ARC SUBCOMMITTEES:

### **... on Compensation & Benefits**

Responsible for issues pertaining to compensation and benefits, including:

- Overall and comparative compensation structure
- Benefits
- Administration of Benefits and compensation

### **Bargaining & Grievances Working Group**

The BGWG will serve as the core workers focused on preparing and executing grievances and bargaining proposals, based on the priorities set by the ARC. They will also track compliance and follow through from admin. As such, they will meet most frequently to do work. Any member can participate in the meetings or work.

### **Disability & Equity Working Group**

The DEWG will function as a combined ARC subcommittee and working group by both recommending action to the ARC and carrying out certain grievances and bargaining, especially in cases of discrimination—supplementing the work of the Bargaining & Grievances group as specialists. It will focus on disability compliance and inclusion, discrimination issues and incidents, and equity analysis.



## **Community & Membership Committee (CMC)**

While the ARC conducts the union's work, the similarly-structured CMC is responsible for the strength and health of the union. Tasks include membership engagement, recruitment, and relationship building with the community. Reps for each working group meet monthly to coordinate strategy and goals.

### **CMC WORKING GROUPS:**

#### **... Recruitment & Membership Benefits**

The R&MB meets monthly to plan recruitment drives, advocate for special membership benefits, and encourage social connection between members, including planning social events.

#### **... Community Justice & Political Action**

The CJPA meets monthly to plan union activities that engage with the wider community to advance the Union's mission through political engagement, including community service, political endorsements, and political action and resolutions.

#### **... Communication & Education**

The C&E meets monthly to plan education of the membership about Union activities, functions, values, and processes. The working group manages member communications, including a forum and newsletter, and holds education sessions and union training.

#### **Solidarity Action Working Group**

As needed, the CMC can vote to establish this team to organize membership-wide actions. They would support stewards in planning and partner with other unions, especially Library and other DC Government Unions.

| <b>Committee</b>                        | <b>Tasks/Products</b>   | <b>Active Participants</b>                          |
|---|---|---|
| Executive board                         | - Approve spending  | Executive board                                     |
| Steward Council                         | - ARC Work priorities<br>- ARC meeting reps<br>- CMC meeting reps<br>- Check on absents | Branch and department stewards                      |
| Administrative Relations Committee      | - Set work priorities<br>- Delegate analysis<br>- Management reps                       | 2 Reps each: B&G, WCHS, LM&J, C&B, DEAT; + stewards |
| Bargaining & Grievances WG              | - Report on work<br>- ARC meeting reps  | Open  |
| Work Conditions, Health, and Safety     | - ARC Work priorities<br>- ARC meeting reps   | Open  |
| Library Management & Jobs               | - ARC Work priorities<br>- ARC meeting reps   | Open  |
| Compensation & Benefits                 | - ARC Work priorities<br>- ARC meeting reps   | Open  |
| Disability & Equity Working Group       | - Report on work<br>- ARC meeting reps<br>- ARC Work priorities                         | Open  |
| Community & Membership                  | - Choose & delegate monthly work  | 2 Reps each: R&M, CJPA, C&E; + stewards             |
| Recruitment & Membership WG             | - Membership update<br>- Calendar of any events<br>- CMC priorities & reps              | Open  |
| Community Justice & Political Action WG | - Report on work<br>- Calendar of any events<br>- CMC priorities & reps                 | Open  |
| Communication & Education WG            | - Assign newsletter writer<br>- Calendar of any events<br>- CMC priorities & reps       | Open  |

# Calendar of Meetings

Meetings take place via video chat on the same day of the same week each month.

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| Week 1 | Steward Council; Bargaining & Grievances Working Group (BGWG); Quarterly Membership Meetings  |
| Week 2 | Work Conditions, Health & Safety; Library Management & Jobs; Compensation & Benefits; BGWG; Disability & Equity Working Group                 |
| Week 3 | Administrative Relations (ARC) <sup>†</sup> ; Communication & Education; Community Justice & Political Action; Recruitment & Membership; BGWG |
| Week 4 | Community & Membership (CMC) <sup>†</sup> ; Disability & Equity Working Group; BGWG; Executive Board  |

† In the “Building Base-up” plan (see page 12), the Big Committee meetings of the ARC and CMC will take place in the preceding week as a joint meeting of subcommittees, until capacity is high enough to separate them out.

# Building Base-Up

We want to move from a model of top-down leadership to relying on active participation from members, but we likely will have only limited start-up capacity. Rather than starting with the top-level committees and building out as needs come up, we will emphasize building the workloads of the subcommittees and workgroups together until we have the capacity or need to segment the work.

Only three groups will meet monthly to start: the Steward Council, all Administrative Relations Committee (ARC) subcommittees together, and all Community & Membership Committee (CMC) working groups together.

The Steward Council will focus first on filling its membership and recruiting stewards. The Steward Council's work will mostly look the same from the start.

The Administrative Relations Committee will start with all subcommittees meeting in aggregate and mimicking the ARC process by separating out discussion for each subgroup before setting monthly work. When capacity allows, the Disability & Equity Working Group (DEWG) should begin meeting on an additional week as the first breakout. Then when capacity allows or needs demand, the subcommittees will begin meeting on their own and selecting representatives for each month's ARC meeting.

Similarly, the Community & Membership Committee should start as a joint meeting of subcommittees, and practice producing those work products. When there is enough capacity and work, the subcommittees should start with breakout sessions, and then move the CMC meeting to be separate when it is clearly needed.

# What can I do now?

## **Talk to your coworkers**

Talk to members you work with about what you want to see from our union. Change starts when we complain to each other about our work problems and realize we have goals in common with each other.

## **Focus on an issue, working group, or subcommittee**

Is there a work problem that you really care about or a skill you like to use? Start talking to coworkers, research and discuss solutions, and bring them to subcommittee meetings. If you have expertise in an issue, you can start connecting with others to provide support for their solutions.

## **Show up to meetings**

As this structure builds up, go to as many meeting as you have capacity for. Make your voice heard, and figure out what role you can play going forward. Try different committees to see what the discussion is like.

## **Learn more about union work**

Study our contract, learn how to compose a grievance, research organizing methods, and talk to experienced members. An informed union will be a stronger union, especially if more members learn about the processes. Below are some explanations and resources to start with.

## **Think sustainably**

Union work is difficult, and members will not always agree on essential questions. As you get involved, think about what you have capacity for, and what's important to you to fight for.

# About Bargaining

Local 1808, our union, can bargain over two broad domains: compensation (wages and benefits) and working conditions.

We bargain compensation as part of a broader group of DC public workers, Compensation Units 1 & 2, represented by several different unions from different agencies. This happens every three years, and will next occur in 2025. Our president is our sole representative in those negotiations, which often last longer than a year.

Working Conditions agreements typically last for three-year terms, but ours has not been renegotiated since 1998. This makes our contract more than two decades old, and most provisions in it are out-of-date with the library's operations. The good news is that the union can start renegotiating whenever we like by submitting a letter of intent.

While the elected Executive Board will retain the official responsibilities of representation as legally required, in this proposed framework they should defer to the goals set out by the Administrative Relations Committee and rely upon the proposals they put forward.

Those goals should develop from discussions between members about what we want a new contract to look like and which terms to prioritize over others. Those conversations should be protected from management so that we do not give away the entire negotiation hand.

# About Grievances

Grievances are formal legal documents of enforcement that the union can file with management when we feel that there has been a specific violation of our contract or of the law. A grievance isn't just a statement that the library did something we don't like, but an explicit allegation that the library broke a formal rule. The grievance lays out the specific violations and how the union would like the issue resolved ("adjustments").

A grievance is filed on behalf of a union member or members by being sent to the relevant manager, usually the staff member's immediate supervisor. (Frequently the note "please forward as relevant" is included since the immediate supervisor isn't necessarily the person who can take action.)

Grievances are typically resolved within two weeks, although sometimes the process is much faster or much slower. The library usually investigates the allegation in the grievance before they make an initial offer to resolve it; the union can then choose to accept or escalate, step by step, going up the library chain of command.

There is frequently an element of negotiation embedded in the grievance process: we don't always get every adjustment we ask for, so it's useful for the grievant to know what they want to prioritize. If the library stonewalls or only offers unacceptable resolution, we can ask Council 20 to submit the matter to arbitration, which is a process that can cost the local thousands of dollars in legal fees.

# About AFSCME Local 1808

Unions increase their power and distribute risk by joining with workers from other workplaces. Those parent organizations typically provide staff support, manage administrative issues, and handle lawyers.

Local 1808 is a constituent member of AFSCME Council 20, which represents dozens of public-sector unions across DC. Our sister union representing DCPL Facilities workers, Local 877, is also a part of Council 20. In turn, Council 20 is part of the million-strong international (US-focused) union American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and AFSCME is part of the AFL-CIO labor federation.

Council 20 is governed by the presidents of the various locals under it and by officials (the Executive Director) elected indirectly at our Council convention every few years.

AFSCME is governed by the international executive board, elected indirectly at our international convention every few years.



# Visions & Reflections

The committee meeting I'm most excited to take part in is:

---

The three most important issues I want to see addressed by the union are:

---

---

---

The union/labor issues I want to learn more about are:

---

---

---

I have capacity to participate in union business in these ways:

---

---

---

# Sample Agendas

These can and should change! While Robert's Rules of Order serve as a basic outline, committees are encouraged to adapt processes to match their needs.

## STEWARD COUNCIL

**Attendees:** Steward/any rep from each branch or department; plus steward reps to prior month's ARC/CMC

**Time:** 1 hour

- [1 m] Call to Order
- [4 m] Roll Call (by branch/department)
- [5 m] Updates from the CMC (from the prior month rep)
- [5 m] Updates from the ARC (from the prior month rep)
- [10 m] Old concerns discussion
- [10 m] New concerns discussion
- [10 m] Select priorities to send to ARC
- [3 m] Designate reps for that month to go to ARC & CMC
- [3 m] Designate reps to check with absent branches
- [3 m] Designate facilitator for next month's Steward Council
- [5 m] Announcements
- [1 m] Adjournment

## ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONS COMMITTEE

**Attendees:** One steward/cluster, Two reps from each subcommittee (Working Conditions, Health & Safety; Library Management & Jobs, Compensation & Benefits, Disability & Equity, Bargaining and Grievances WG)

**Time:** 1 hour

- [1 m] Call to Order
- [4 m] Roll Call (by subcommittee)
- [10 m] Bargaining & Grievance Working Group Report
- [10 m] Disability & Equity Working Group Report
- [5 m] Work Conditions, Health & Safety Report
- [5 m] Library Management & Jobs Report
- [5 m] Compensation & Benefits Report
- [15 m] Discussion/assign work priorities
- [3 m] Designate facilitator for next month's ARC meeting
- [2 m] Adjournment

## **COMMUNITY & MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE**

**Attendees:** Two reps from each working group (Community Justice & Political Action, Recruitment & Membership, Community & Education, Solidarity Action Working Group)

**Time:** 30 mins

- [1 m] Call to Order
- [2 m] Roll Call (by subcommittee)
- [3 m] Recruitment & Membership Report
- [3 m] Community Justice & Political Action Report
- [3 m] Communication & Education Report
- [5 m] Old business
- [5 m] New business
- [5 m] Action Items
- [2 m] Designate facilitator for next month's CMC meeting
- [1 m] Adjournment

## **ISSUE SUBCOMMITTEES**

**Attendees:** Open, + Facilitator selected at the prior meeting, sub committee reps who went to the prior ARC meeting

**Time:** 30 mins

- [1 m] Call to Order
- [4 m] Attendance/introductions
- [5 m] ARC meeting report
- [5 m] Old concerns
- [5 m] New concerns
- [3 m] Select items to send to the ARC
- [3 m] Designate two reps to attend and present at the ARC
- [3 m] Designate facilitator for next month's meeting
- [1 m] Adjournment

## **WORKING GROUPS**

**Attendees:** Open, + Facilitator selected at the prior meeting, working group reps who went to the prior CMC meeting

**Time:** 30 mins

- [1 m] Call to Order
- [4 m] Attendance/introductions
- [5 m] CMC meeting report
- [5 m] Old business
- [5 m] New business
- [5 m] Action items/deliverables assigned
- [2 m] Designate two reps to attend and present at the CMC
- [2 m] Designate facilitator for the next Working Group meeting
- [1 m] Adjournment

# Proposed Local 1808 Organizational Chart

Executive Board

Steward Council

Elections  
Committee

## Administrative Relations Committee

Bargaining &  
Grievances  
Working Group

Subcommittee on Library  
Management & Jobs

Subcommittee on

Compensation & Benefits

Disability &  
Equity Working  
Group

Subcommittee on Work  
Conditions, Health & Safety

## Community & Membership Committee

Recruitment & Membership  
Working Group

Communication & Education  
Working Group

Community Justice & Political  
Action Working Group

Solidarity Action Working Group

Business Committee

Big Committee

Steward Council

Issue Subcommittee

Working Group