

We're Joining Together to Form a Union!



Q: What is a union exactly?

A: A union is a non-profit employee organization run completely by and for its members, and funded solely from member dues. The purpose of a union is to improve wages, benefits and working conditions and to give employees the legal framework to act as one united group. It's a way to balance power in the workplace for the benefit of all.

Q: How will having a union benefit me?

A: Right now working conditions, pay, benefits, hours, and policies all get decided by management. Becoming union changes that lopsided structure. With a union, we will talk with management on a more level playing field. We gain the right to negotiate, with help from union staff, over the improvements we'd like to see for ourselves in the workplace. What issues we want to see addressed at the bargaining table will be decided by us.

Q: What can we expect from management in response to us forming a union?

A: Our goal is to foster a cooperative, respectful relationship with Forterra management. We hope our employer will honor our right to form a union and remain neutral in this process rather than engaging in behaviors that could mislead or pressure us. Many employers, because they don't want to give up any control, will try very hard, in the guise of "education", to convince employees forming a union is a bad idea. This can include mandatory meetings, letters, 1:1 talks and other tactics designed to weaken our resolve to unite as one strong employee group.

Q: Can I get in trouble for supporting our union?

A: No. It would be illegal for our employer to question us about our union activity or to fire, demote, discipline or in any way interfere with our right to form a union. The National Labor Relations Act is the federal labor law that protects employees with these rights.

Q: When would we pay dues and how much are dues?

A: No one will pay any dues until after we negotiate, review and vote to approve our own union contract. The decision to approve or reject the contract lies with the employees. This way we will see the results of our efforts first before paying any dues. We wouldn't approve a contract that didn't make enough improvements. Coming out ahead is the whole point of forming a union. OPEIU Local 8 dues are on a sliding scale based on 1.5% of our gross monthly income. A quick way to calculate this is to figure \$7.50 for every \$500. We won't pay an initiation fee or any other kind of fee. New employees hired after our contract is in place pay a one-time initiation fee, 50% of which can be refunded for attending a meeting.

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Q: What about strikes? Can we be forced to go on strike?

A: No. A strike is very rare. OPEIU settles 99% of its contracts without ever going on strike. There could only be a strike at Forterra if the vast majority of employees voted to do so and even then there are other steps that must occur. Union officers or staff can't "call a strike" nor can OPEIU members from other workplaces. Only union members at Forterra could make that decision. Besides, there are many more effective alternatives to striking.

Q: Who is OPEIU?

A: OPEIU Local 8 membership is made up of over 7,000 workers in Washington State including Northwest Justice Project, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, Solid Ground, YouthCare, Crisis Connections, Low Income Housing Institute, Plymouth Housing, Compass Housing Alliance, Seattle, Tacoma and Pierce County Housing Authorities, Senior Life Resources, Metropolitan Development Council, Tri-Cities Community Health Center, Kaiser - WA, Providence Regional Medical Center, Valley Medical Center, Olympic and Coastal Community Action Program, and many other organizations.

Q: How will this impact our ability to carry out Forterra's mission?

A: Forming our own employee organization, where frontline staff have a way to address important workplace issues, can have a positive effect on our morale, turnover rate and ability to do our work in a safe and healthy environment. Our outcomes are better served when employees feel supported and have a say over what happens on the job.

Q: Who is eligible to be in a union?

A: Under the law, all employees who are not supervisory, managerial, or confidential are eligible to be included in a union, all of which have legal definitions under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). At Forterra, the structure is such that some employees may fall into a gray area. If you're not sure if your position may fall into one of these categories, members of the Organizing committee have information to help assess whether you can be included.

Q: Can I talk about the union at work?

A: If we're allowed to talk about other non-work topics at work, then we can talk about our union. It's best to limit the time we talk about union activities to non-work time like breaks, lunch or before or after work. We also have the legal right to distribute union information as long as we do it during a break or other non-work time and in non-work areas. Our union activity is protected under the National Labor Relations Act.

Q: What's the next step?

A: Once everyone has had an opportunity to have questions answered and show support for forming a union by signing [this card](#), we can have our Union legally recognized through either voluntary recognition by our employer or a secret ballot election run by the National Labor Relations Board. The next step is negotiating our union contract.

For more information, ask a Union Organizing Committee Member, or contact Local 8 Organizer Corinne by phone or text at 425-318-2650 or email corinne@opeiu8.org

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