



Overcoming Barriers to Belonging

Use this resource to prepare for your conversation with a potential member. Practice overcoming barriers (you never know what might happen). Think of other useful answers, too. Good luck and remember that member recruitment is our lifeblood. Without members ... we have no unity ... we have no strength .. we have no voice ... we have no clout.

BARRIER: “I can’t afford to join. It costs too much.”

RESPONSE: “I understand that we’re asking you to make a financial commitment. Think of your dues as an investment in job insurance. And consider participating in some of our member benefits programs so you can save money on your dues investment. I like to think of belonging to our Association as an opportunity to improve things for my students and myself, rather than a service or product I am buying. That makes my dues dollars worth it to me.

BARRIER: “I’d be glad to join the local, but I don’t want to join ISTA or NEA.”

RESPONSE: “We can’t accommodate that request because we have a unified membership. All three levels of our Association work in tandem to address member needs and goals. ISTA and NEA provide services for our local and do things for us that we can’t do alone. And, ISTA and NEA dues come back to our local to help us fund programs for our members right here at home.”

BARRIER: “I can’t join because you give money to political candidates I don’t support.”

RESPONSE: “We contribute to our recommended candidates from our voluntarily-donated political action funds, Options Guaranteed. Options Guaranteed is the avenue used to collect money for political action. No dues dollars are spent. You can choose whether to donate to Options Guaranteed. The money that NEA contributes to recommended candidates also comes from members’ voluntary contributions as well.

BARRIER: “You are committed to electing only Democrats to office.”

RESPONSE: “We invite ALL candidates – Democrat, Republican or independent – to interview with our members. We use ONLY public education issues and issues that directly affect our members in deciding who to recommend. We want to be sure our recommended candidates measure up on the issues our members care about the most.”

BARRIER: “I’ll never need your help. The administration will watch out for me.”

RESPONSE: “First, that’s not the administration’s job. Second, there is no guarantee that your employer will help you if a parent sues you, a child is injured while under your supervision or someone accuses you of a crime – like child abuse.

Though the administration may be supportive, you need someone who will ADVOCATE for you, provide legal help, and make sure you are accorded due process. The Association will be there for you and be on your side.

BARRIER: “You protect bad employees.”

RESPONSE: “Our job is to protect every member’s right to due process in her/his job – to make sure the administration follows the rules and doesn’t violate your professional rights. We make sure you are treated fairly; but, we don’t judge whether you’re right, or wrong, good or bad.

We also expect our administrators to evaluate fairly and accurately. It’s not our job to decide who is doing a good job and who is not.”

BARRIER: “I can get liability insurance a lot cheaper.”

RESPONSE: “You might be able to find inexpensive liability insurance, but that’s not what educators need. You need legal services: immediate on-site help from experienced UniServ staff and ISTA attorneys if you have a job-related problem.

Unless the insurance you’re talking about provides immediate access to a professional skilled in labor and school law, your policy does not compare to Association protection.”

BARRIER: “There’s no reason to join. I get all the benefits without joining.”

RESPONSE: You may get the pay raise we negotiated; but, that’s where the benefits stop. If you are not a member, you have no voice in what we do. You don’t have access to our services such as legal assistance, liability insurance, workshops or publications.

Most important, you should belong to help build our solidarity and unity. There is strength in numbers. We can get more done if you are a member.

BARRIER: “I just don’t believe in joining a group or a union.”

RESPONSE: “We’re able to do more as a group than we can as individuals – in salary negotiations, lobbying, providing personal benefits that save you money. It may sound trite, but, together we can accomplish what none of us can do alone.

We are a union because we are people working together to achieve common goals. We’re a professional association because we advocate for public education beyond traditional “union” issues of job security and salaries.”

BARRIER: “I’m from a family of union members. Your organization isn’t strong enough for me.”

RESPONSE: “It’s great to meet someone with such good union values. We can really use your help in our Association. We are always working to improve. The more of us who are members, the easier it will be to get what we want and what is right for educators and public school employees.”

BARRIER: “I think I’ll just wait to see what you might do this year. I might join later.”

RESPONSE: “We really need you as a member now. We can do a lot more if you belong now, not later. We’re the group that looks out for your job, helps improve education, lobbies for school funding and represents educators.

If you wait to see if you need us, you should know that you must be a member at the time you need help. If you're not, we can't help you. Your membership can't be retroactive. It's just like auto insurance – you can't get coverage after the accident occurs."

BARRIER: "The Association doesn't do things for students. I'm in this for the kids."

RESPONSE: "That's not true. We lobby for adequate funding for public schools; we work to lower class sizes and improve student achievement. We help the public see public education in a positive way through our advertising programs and public relations efforts. We help members become better at their jobs through mentoring, workshops, seminars, research, grants, and much more."

BARRIER: "I don't always agree with the Association."

RESPONSE: "Few people agree with 100 percent of what any organization does – your church, club, political party, neighborhood association, your family or your country. That doesn't keep us from belonging. As an Association member, you have the right to disagree with what we do and to help change what you don't like. But, if you're not a member, you cannot bring about change."

BARRIER: "My spouse works for the same employer I do. Why do we both have to belong?"

RESPONSE: "Because you're both guaranteed our benefits and services as individuals."

BARRIER: "Many people mistakenly believe NEA is pro-abortion."

RESPONSE: "Actually, NEA supports the right to reproductive freedom, including the right of individuals to have children. One reason NEA got involved with this issue was because in many schools women were prohibited from being employed if they were pregnant even if they were married. Most NEA opponents won't share that NEA famously fought for the right of a member to keep her job, after she was fired following being raped, then becoming pregnant."

BARRIER: "The Association opposes teacher competency testing."

RESPONSE: "The Association supports the fair and unbiased testing of all applicants entering the teaching profession. We also support the on-going assessment of all teachers through a comprehensive evaluation process."

BARRIER: "The Association opposes parental choice and is out to destroy charter, private and parochial schools."

RESPONSE: "The Association has always believed that parents want to make the best decision for their children, especially concerning their schools. We support holding ALL schools to the same standards of accountability and access as traditional public schools."

BARRIER: "The Association fights measures that hold schools accountable for how well students learn and achieve. It's the greatest stumbling block to the education reform movement."

RESPONSE: "The Association supports the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, also known as No Child Left Behind Act) – high standards and high expectations for every student and educator. But we reject ESEA's notion that high-stakes testing is the ONLY adequate measure of academic success and oppose the law's punitive impact on Title 1 schools and students who need the most help."

