



**Texas State Teachers Association/  
National Education Association**

# Association Representative Guide



**Prepared by the Organizing  
Center for Affiliate and  
Leadership Development**

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## Supplemental Resources

## Letter from TSTA President Ovidia Molina



Dear #TeamTSTA Association Representative (AR),

Thank you for serving as a worksite leader! The work you do to represent your colleagues is at the heart of what makes TSTA a successful union. Your worksite leadership is essential in ensuring that our locals are focused on the issues that members want to be addressed. You are also the key point of information for members at your worksite so that they are informed about how we will work together to improve our working conditions and our students' learning conditions.

The AR role is an integral part of a local's leadership team because it connects the local union to a worksite. This connection creates a relationship between a member and the union -- it is the infrastructure upon which a successful union is built. This handbook and the accompanying resources have been put together to support you in this work. There are three components that are highlighted in this handbook which are: Communication, Advocacy, and Recruitment. These are key components to keep our organizing efforts focused on the needs of our members and students.

Communication with members is most effective at the one-on-one level, and your proximity to members and potential members creates a meaningful opportunity to engage and relate to fellow educators. In addition to serving as a liaison between the worksite and the local for relaying information, talking to your colleagues and creating spaces for them to share stories is one of the most rewarding parts of leading as an Association Representative.

As a worksite leader, people may come to you for guidance. Being comfortable in helping colleagues find answers is an important skill for Association Representatives. Information in this handbook will provide a clear and concise tool for you to use when someone comes to you with an issue. It also contains best practices for worksite-wide advocacy.

Advocacy is supercharged by power. TSTA organizes members to build power, and we build power to accomplish better working and learning conditions. Simply put, the more members we have, the more power we can generate to create meaningful changes. As an Association Representative, you are uniquely positioned to recruit because you know your colleagues at the worksite and you know what joining the union could mean for them. You are ready to share your "why(s)" – why you are an educator and why you joined. You are also eager to know their why and their story.

We believe in the power of public education and know its value. We need to address the challenges that we are facing through collective action at the local level. The important decisions that are made every month by the school board impact everything we do, and we must be organized to impact those decisions. When we do, we have the power to ensure that school boards do the right things for educational employees and our students. It takes all of us to make positive changes at our worksites and in our districts. As a worksite leader, you have the capacity to generate, build, and amplify power through your union. As president of TSTA, I thank you for your commitment and look forward to working with you to accomplish great things.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ovidia Molina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line extending from the end.

Ovidia Molina, TSTA President



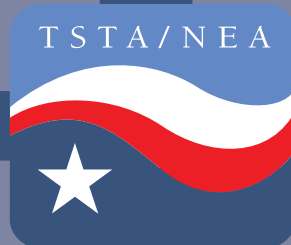
# TSTA Strategic Focus

**Developing  
Leaders  
at All Levels**

**Engaging  
Members  
in Collective  
Action**

**Organizing  
for Change  
Through  
Political Power**

**Protecting  
Interests of  
Members**



# Effective Communication with Members

## Communication

A key role of the AR is to communicate with worksite members about what is going on at the local and state levels of the union, as well as communicating with local leadership about what is going on at the campus level.

As a communication link, worksite leaders need to:

- Understand and communicate what it means to be a member of the association.
- Be an active listener to member concerns about the association.
- Stay informed of what the association is doing and what it stands for.
- Have monthly 10-minute meetings at the worksite.
- Send a friendly note to everyone in your building to introduce yourself and provide your contact information.
- Wear your TSTA gear!!! Your lanyard, pin, or t-shirt helps your colleagues know that you are the TSTA resource at the worksite.

## Reaching Your Audience

### ***Do you know who the members are in your building?***

Maintain an up-to-date worksite roster that identifies who is and who is not a member.

### ***Share contact information with local officers and your TSTA Organizer.***

### ***Listen to staff and keep the pulse at your worksite***

As you have one-on-one conversations, create a database of their responses, interests, etc.

### ***Opportunities to communicate with members and potential members to keep them aware of issues, opportunities, local goals, and successes include:***

- One-on-one conversations — Listen and share information with members and potential members in order to build and maintain relationships and understand needs and interests.

- 10-minute meetings — A great opportunity to share and gather important information.
- Quarterly newsletters — A quick information blast pasted into an email or text.
- Social media — Post, post, post on all platforms regularly.
- Website/App — Steer members and potential members to the association website or to download the TSTA app.
- Phone/Text tree — For emergencies or critical information.
- Mailbox notices — Great for imparting important information confidentially.
- Email notices — Develop a contact list of members.
- Bulletin boards — Maintain a bulletin board in the staff lounge with association news.



**Communication is the key to understanding the union's ability to exercise POWER!**

# Recruiting Potential Members



## A Vital Part of Being an AR is Recruiting

There is power in numbers. In order to accomplish our union goals and make positive change, we need more members. This gives us leverage at every level of advocacy — workplace, local district, state, and national.

## Recruiting Timeline — Recruiting is an ongoing process throughout the year:

- Get the names and contact information of new employees in June/July. Your TSTA Organizer should have this information.
- Send the new employees a welcome message.
- Invite them to a social event (breakfast, luncheon, happy hour, etc.) before the start of the school year. Have the local president speak to new employees at the social.
- If some new employees cannot attend the function, arrange for a time when you can talk to them individually and privately. Then, sign them up.
- Reach out to your local president and TSTA Organizer to include your worksite in local recruitment efforts. Invite potential members to attend.

- Refer to the Supplemental Resources section of this guide for ideas to engage potential members and current members throughout the year.
- Constantly look for campus issues to possibly organize collectively around.

## The key to any recruitment effort is engaging potential members in a one-on-one conversation.

### *The components of an effective one-on-one conversation are:*

- Homework: Know who you are talking to!
- Assume they want to join! Come to the conversation from a positive space -- this is a positive interaction.
- Getting THEIR story / Using open-ended questions: This conversation is about THEM. Lead with asking them about themselves.
- Making connections: Differentiate TSTA in the conversation.
- Engage potential members in union activities and collective action (ex. sign petition, social invitation) even if they are not ready to join yet.
- The Ask: Invite potential members to join!
- Thank You and Follow Up: Set up a meeting or a phone call.



# Recruiting Potential Members



**Helpful Questions: It is important to remember that the “why” questions get to goals and interests. The “how” and “what” questions get to capacity and commitment.**

- What are you passionate about?
- Why did you choose to work in education? What was your ultimate goal? Has that happened? (Point out how your role in TSTA can make that happen.) This is why we are here -- to fill that gap.
- If you could change just one thing about your job, what would it be?
- What are you doing to change that?
- What worksite issues do you and your co-workers talk about the most?

**Recruit groups of members and potential members on your campus by:**

- Constantly look for campus issues
- Sending out short surveys

- Scheduling quick meetings to talk about issues - consider scheduling one at a nearby coffee shop/ restaurant

## **RECRUITING TIPS FOR ARs:**

- Promote the Union at EVERY opportunity.
- Be the first to welcome new employees, then follow up by inviting them to join.
- Engage members in collective actions.
- Assist the Union leadership with building visits and organizing efforts.
- Know how to enroll new members and have materials ready.
- Have lots of membership applications with you.
- Make appointments to discuss membership at a time when full discussion of issues is possible.
- If you cannot get membership at first discussion, it's ok. Do not leave the membership application. Follow-up with another visit.
- When working in pairs, remember to have only one person speak at once.
- Focus on the potential members who are open to joining.
- Ask for help; build upon current member relationships.
- When you find that key issue, stick with it.
- Tell the WHY: Why it is important to be a member; know what makes our union worth joining.
- Be prepared to answer questions and help members find the information they seek; it is also ok to tell a member or a potential member that you need some time to research an answer and get back to them.
- Forward enrollment forms immediately according to the local process.

# Recruiting Potential Members

## What do I say when potential members compare TSTA to other groups?

- The best thing to do is talk about TSTA / NEA — what we believe in, who we are, and what your local union is doing.
- But if the potential member pushes, you can use the information below to compare.

You may want to start with this piece of information:

**The NEA is the largest organized labor union in the country with over three million members! This creates power and influence no one else can match.**

### Other Organizations:

**ATPE**  
**Association of Texas Professional Educators**

- ATPE is the anti-union association. They oppose collective bargaining, mandatory consultation, and support right-to-work legislation.
- With no national affiliate, ATPE has no influence on federal legislation that affects education and educational employees.

**AFT**  
**American Federation of Teachers**

- AFT is affiliated with the AFL-CIO which is involved in multiple disciplines, while TSTA is affiliated with NEA and is the only union whose sole focus is education. AFT restricts full membership to large locals.
- AFT has an internal structure of representative vs direct voting, and has no term limits for officers.

**TCTA**  
**Texas Classroom Teachers Association**

- TCTA is an anti-union association that collective bargaining, mandatory consultation, and supports right-to-work laws.

**AMP**  
**Associate Member Program**

- AMP is a separate not-for-profit group chartered in Texas, and is not actually part of AFT.
- AMP members have no voice in the decisions of the AFT. They cannot vote or run for office. They have inferior legal defense benefits.



# Advocating for Your Members

## Be an Advocate for Your Building/Worksite

Advocating for your building or worksite means more than addressing concerns and issues. It also means amplifying the great things that you do every day for children and members. Your worksite colleagues may be aware of what is happening in your building, but elementary teachers on the other side of the district may not know. Develop a way to share with all members what is taking place districtwide, so all members benefit from your advocacy.

## Reporting Out

Your local has regular meetings of the Executive Board and the Association Representatives (ARs). This is an opportunity to share news with leadership. This sharing could/should include concerns and positives, as well as general information.

## Four Tips for Reporting Out

1. Share general information about your building/worksites. Do not share personal details. Present facts as they occurred.
2. Share positives as well as concerns.
3. Be respectful of time. A worksite/building report should last between one and two minutes.
4. Create an outline. This will allow you to stay on track.



## Meet with Your Administration

Being an AR means that you wear a hat that is much different than your educator hat. Your work as an employee of the district comes first. It is not expected or recommended that you do association work during work hours. The climate of your building depends in large part on the collaborative work that is done with your building administration.

Regularly meeting with your building administration is a great way to build collaboration, transparency, and a positive worksite climate.

## Tips for Meeting with Administration

1. **Focus on positives.** There are a lot of great things that happen daily in your building. Share those positives.
2. **Collaborate on building/worksites activities and events.** Think about goals for boosting morale. Jeans Days and Food Days are a good way to make connections between the union and the building administration.
3. **Ask to share.** Offer to share union and other news to members and potential members at staff meetings.
4. **Discuss concerns positively and professionally.** Let your administrator know that as part of your duties, you may share details of your conversations with local leaders or your TSTA Organizer. You are advocating for your members.

## You are the Member's first point of contact:

An effective AR should provide on-the-spot assistance for the members who may need assistance dealing with an issue or concern.

Some things can be handled by you at the worksite level and some things should be referred to the TSTA Help Center. **Association Representatives must not and should not provide legal advice.**

# Advocating for Your Members



Members can contact the Help Center for legal advice at **877.ASK.TSTA** or by the following links:

## English:

<https://tsta.wufoo.com/forms/tsta-help-center/>

## Spanish:

<https://tsta.wufoo.com/forms/centro-de-ayuda-del-tsta/>

Here are some examples of when a member should contact the TSTA Help Center directly:

- Terminations and Non-Renewals
- Use of Force
- Any situation that could result in criminal allegations
- Denial of Assault Leave

## Assess what the member is telling you. Is it...

- **A Problem** — Problems are large and common throughout the profession, ex. low teacher pay. Problems should be sent to leadership; there's nothing the AR can do at that moment.
- **An Issue** — Issues are smaller and less widespread, ex. Our school district pays less than our neighboring districts. Issues also should be sent to leadership as they may be potential organizing issues.
- **A Concern** — Concerns are things that personally affect one or more individuals and are emotionally upsetting, ex. The principal just cut my hours/pay

and I need the money. Concerns should first be handled in the building by the AR.

- **A Situation** — Situations are building specific, ex. Our high school has two staff meetings per month and the other high school has one. Situations can also be dealt with initially by the AR.

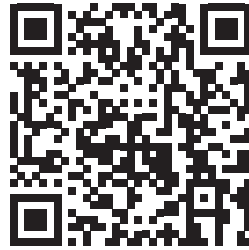
## Once assessment takes place:

If you are not able to resolve a member's needs, follow the internal local process.

If you are working with a member on a concern, it is important to keep their concerns confidential and advise the member of the following:

- Document what occurred and details leading up to what occurred. Be prepared to share that information electronically.
- Get and keep copies of all written documents and emails, as well as a list of individuals involved.
- If asked to meet with your supervisor, request to have your AR or another TSTA representative with you. Please note the request could be denied.
- If you are asked to resign, do not resign without speaking to the TSTA Help Center.
- Do not submit anything in writing or in email form without consulting with the TSTA Help Center.
- BE HONEST AND TRUTHFUL.





### **Effective Communication with Members**

- 10-minute Meetings
- One-on-One Conversations
- Bulletin Boards
- Welcome email template, sample letter and mailbox card

### **Recruiting Potential Members**

- Nuts and Bolts of Recruitment
- Campus Mapping
- The Feel – Felt – Found Approach
- “The Four Ps”

### **Advocating for Your Members**

- Assault Leave
- Removing the Disruptive Student (Ch 37)
- Essential Rights Handbook
- Reasonable Use of Force