Why unions matter to all of us

![Graph showing Union Membership and Income Inequality, 1917-2008](image)

*Figure 10.1 Union Membership and Income Inequality, 1917–2008*


Note: Data for 1917 to 1930 and data from 1930 to 2008 are from different sources and are not fully compatible. A union membership figure for 1982 could not be obtained; the number there has been taken as halfway between the 1981 and 1983 figures.
Construction Trades

• Democratic organizations responsible for welfare of their members

• Complex ecosystem
  – Multiple trades
  – Signatory contractors
  – Owners

• Cut-throat, low-bid construction industry
Understanding Laborers

- Of the Trades... but
- Diverse membership
- Diverse skill set
What does it mean for our members?

• Green building?
  – Some new skills, new work (e.g. decon)
  – But not really about workers

• Clean energy?
  – Pipeline: Oil vs. Gas
  – Renewable vs. conventional

• Smart growth?
  – Highway vs. transit
  – Repair vs. new construction

• Sustainability?
  – Green infrastructure
  – Water conservation
What does it mean for our members?

• Construction is a cut-throat, low-bid industry
• The social compact has fallen apart
• As a result
  – Change could be our friend, but often isn’t
  – Decentralization, devolution, disaggregation make our work much harder
Austin, Texas

• Unofficial motto is Keep Austin Weird
• Have own version of LEED (they were first!)
• Committed to green building, green space, smart growth, you name it...
• Among top urban infill construction markets
Austin, Texas

Workers Defense Project survey:
- Half earn poverty level wages ($10/hour)
- 1 in 5 are victims of wage theft, over 1/3 misclassified
- 3 in 4 lack health coverage, sick or vacation days
- 1 in 5 has been injured, 2/3 get no safety training
- Three workers died in single accident after publication
  “If a firefighter or a cop gets killed in the line of duty, his family is almost fed for life. If a construction worker gets killed on a construction site, he’s lucky if they even put a ribbon on a cone for him.”
Washington DC

- Urban infill, bike lanes,
- Among hottest construction markets
- Among most expensive places to live
Washington DC

- Average wage for laborer is under $15
- A quarter earn less than $12
- Yet DC residents can’t get on a job
- Less than 20% of construction jobs go to city residents
Why should you care?

• A sustainable world requires strong unions
• Unions play a key political role
• A skilled construction workforce is needed for execution
Help us help you

• Equity and economic sustainability needs to be part of program and that should extend to construction workers

• We need your help defining smart growth and its impacts on us

• We need your help establishing policies and standards that ensure good union job creation