
The Steward's Job Description



Stewards have a primary responsibility to build union power through organizing and representation. This involves playing multiple intertwined roles as workplace organizers, communicators and educators, problem-solvers, and representatives.

As **workplace organizers**, stewards engage and mobilize their co-workers to build power necessary to enforce the contract, but also to give workers power and a voice at work, in their communities, and beyond.

As **communicators and educators**, stewards keep critical information flowing between co-workers and union leaders. As a steward, you are accountable to the members you represent and to our union as a whole. Ideally, stewards advance our union's values and priorities through strong working relationships with members, other union leaders, management, and community leaders.

As **problem-solvers**, stewards actively seek to understand co-workers' issues and concerns, and to find positive resolutions to workplace problems.

As legally recognized **union representatives**, stewards serve as front-line enforcers of the union contract and the law each and every day, making sure workers' rights become realities. Without strong stewards to hold management accountable, language negotiated into collective bargaining agreements can easily be violated. Even major state and federal laws often go ignored unless knowledgeable stewards are in place to serve as workplace watchdogs.

Stewards who cultivate skills in each of these areas create a strong union where workers have the power to shape their workplace and their future. Here is a sample list of some the specific responsibilities CWA local unions often call on stewards to take on:

1. Sign up every co-worker to be a participating member of the Union.
2. Sign up members to the CWA Political Action Fund and help facilitate the local union's political program.
3. Act as the face of the union on the job.
4. Communicate between and connect local leaders with all union members
5. Serve as "mobilization captain" to coordinate collective actions during contract bargaining or other issue campaigns.
6. Enforce the contract by educating members, monitoring for violations, and filing grievances.
7. Represent members during employer investigations and hold management accountable to "just cause" standards when issuing discipline.
8. Communicate with management on behalf of members.
9. Work with local leadership to advance union priorities and build the union's power.

CWA Stewards: The Heart of Our Union

CWA stewards are the key to our union's power. Stewards bring our union to life each day by:

- **educating** co-workers about their rights in the workplace
- **building and maintaining** a strong, unified, and informed union membership
- **working** with members to solve problems, strengthen workers' rights, and improve conditions on the job, in the community, and beyond.

Within CWA, stewards are the most critical layer of leadership on all three sides of the "CWA Triangle." Where our stewards are strong, our union is

strong. Where stewards are absent or weak, our union is weak.

You should expect serving as a steward to be both rewarding and challenging. You may be called on to learn complicated rules and policies, creatively respond to tough problems, and juggle competing demands for your time.

Most of all, you should expect to encounter ongoing challenges to your power. Because management almost never shares power willingly, building and maintaining our union's power are constant priorities. Strong stewards stay vigilant in enforcing the limits of management's power, and never stop working to empower our members.

Avoiding DFR charges: Tips for stewards

The Duty of Fair Representation does not mean that union stewards are required to be perfect or always be right—it just requires that you do your best to be thorough and fair. When asked to rule on duty of fair representation claims, labor boards and courts generally consider whether the union's action was **arbitrary, discriminatory**, or showed **bad faith**.

To ensure you are fulfilling the duty of fair representation:

- Consider all grievances solely on the merits.
- Investigate all grievances thoroughly.
- Process the grievance promptly – observe grievance procedure time limits for filing and appealing grievances.

- Take careful notes and keep detailed written records.
- Keep the grievant informed on the status of their case in a timely manner.
- Treat all members of the bargaining unit the same.
- Communicate all decisions and settlements to the grievant in writing in a timely manner.
- Have a valid reason for any action taken on a grievant and work with local leadership to understand processes around grievances.

Handout materials from the CWA Stewards Resource Manual. For a deeper dive check out the [111 page manual](#).