

RESOLUTION 36

CELEBRATING DPE: 40 YEARS OF GROWING PROFESSIONAL UNION MEMBERSHIP

The Department for Professional Employees (DPE), the trade department for unions representing professional and technical employees, turns 40 this year. Over the course of the last 40 years, DPE and its affiliates have helped grow union membership by organizing professionals—now 42 percent of the labor movement.

In 1972, when President George Meany was approached about forming a trade department for professional and technical employees, professionals were only 25 percent of the workforce and less than 18 percent of the labor movement. Despite skepticism that professionals would be drawn to unions, the Council of AFL-CIO Unions for Scientific, Professional and Cultural Employees (SPACE) was established. Five years later, in December 1977, SPACE was given trade department status and recognized as the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO.

Professionals have grown to become a large component of the workforce and the labor movement. The following statistics reveal how far professionals have come in the last 40 years:

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in the first half of 2017, employees in professional and technical occupations were 38 percent of the workforce and 42 percent of union members.
- In the last 15 years, 12.6 million of the 15.4 million new jobs created were in a professional or technical occupation.
- Since 2013, the number of union members in a professional and technical occupation grew by over 400,000.
- Over the past 20 years, people with at least an associate's degree in an academic program grew from 29 percent to 43 percent of the workforce.
- In 1997, just 32 percent of union members had at least an associate's degree in an academic program; by 2017, that increased to 48 percent.

DPE's mission is as relevant as ever: facilitate collaboration among affiliates; assist in organizing and bargaining on behalf of professionals; communicate the value professionals derive from joining together; and advocate for public policy and legislation that benefits professionals.

A core DPE principal is that by working together we can build a strong, dynamic labor movement. Affiliate collaboration has facilitated the sharing of expertise, technology, ideas and resources, which has led to better contract wins and more organized professionals.

DPE assistance with organizing and bargaining has taken many forms over the last 40 years. However, a central theme has been to identify and understand professionals' unique preferences and disseminate that information to affiliates through practical, action-oriented resources. DPE has been at the forefront of researching the professional workforce, and its research-based resources have been instrumental in helping affiliates identify where organizing opportunities exist. DPE-created resources to highlight include:

- Three attitudinal surveys of professionals commissioned and analyzed by DPE. The latest survey was conducted in 2016.
- DPE produced several editions of its Guide to Organizing Professionals. The latest edition was published in 2016.
- In 2016, DPE created a step-by-step guide to launching an internal organizing campaign directed at professionals.

- In 2017, DPE developed a resource for creating or improving a new hire orientation program for professionals.
- DPE launched a program series to examine how work and the professional workforce is changing and how affiliates can best position their unions to adjust to changes.
- Reports analyzing the health care and utility industries, which examined workforce and union member changes and identified where future organizing potential exists.

Looking to the future, DPE is undertaking more efforts than ever to proactively reach nonunion professionals with positive, pro-union messages in an effort to generate organizing leads for affiliates and influence the narrative about professionals in unions. Utilizing the DPE website as well as social and traditional media, DPE has worked to promote the benefits of union representation for professionals, often as the lone source for comprehensive information about professionals in unions.

Professional and technical members are part of almost every union. Regardless of their concentration of professional members, all DPE affiliate unions recognize that professionals need to see themselves in their union and in the labor movement.

For the last 40 years, DPE has been the place where the unique concerns of professionals have been represented in the labor movement. In the next 40 years, DPE aims to continue in this role and to build unprecedented support for unions among professionals, as the labor movement's viability weighs heavily on the shoulders of professionals.

While professionals were not the face of the labor movement of the past, it is clear that the future is professional.