



Your Union Election FAQ

Very soon you'll have the chance to vote to join the Writers Guild of America, East. We have met with many of you already and want to share our responses to some of the common questions we've received from your fellow producers and APs.

For those not currently working at Original: Why am I eligible to vote?

The labor board and the Writers Guild recognize that as a freelance employee you may not be employed by a company at all times. We also recognize that you share an interest in the working conditions and terms set by a company that you have spent some time working at, because whether or not you return, you should have a right to vote.

I am not currently working at Original, how does this affect me?

A yes vote will be your way of saying that writer/producers should have a voice in decisions about compensation and benefits. Whether it is at Original or one of the many companies that you and others cycle through, establishing a union at Original will send a clear message that producers expect to win contracts that include employer paid healthcare, minimum rates and time off provisions. This is an industry campaign and voting yes is an important early step to establishing healthcare, benefits and a voice in your career as the norm.

How will the election work?

The National Labor Board sent out ballots on June 20th. We have confirmed many addresses but to make sure we have the correct one contact us! The mail ballots are due in to the Labor Board on **July 10th** and the vote count is **July 11th**.

Who is eligible?

You are receiving this FAQ because you are on the list of eligible voters. Eligible voters worked at Original for over two weeks from May 16th 2013 to May 16th 2014, the day we filed for a union election, and are APs, Writers, Story, Coordinating, Field, and Post Producers.

What does voting yes for the union mean?

A vote yes means you want to see improvements for Producers and APs in the industry. When a company goes union, it means they are legally obligated to negotiate in good faith over working conditions. It starts the conversation about how people in this industry will be treated and compensated for their work. The goal of negotiations is a union contract.

What is a union contract?

A union contract is a legal agreement between a group of employees and their employer. The contract holds the employer accountable to their employees and guarantees their benefits. Without a contract any benefits you have are at your employers' discretion and can be taken away at their whim. However, if you have a contract your employer is legally required to abide by it. Moreover, if an employer does not abide by the terms established in your contract you have the strength of the union behind you to step in – you don't have to go it alone.

What can the union guarantee?

We obviously cannot and do not promise anything. However, the union has a track record of providing access to high quality healthcare and other benefits to thousands of creative professionals in various parts of the entertainment industry. In Nonfiction we have negotiated contracts at Lion, Optomen, and Sharp which include 90% employer paid healthcare, minimum rates for APs and Producers with scheduled increases, paid vacation, holidays, and sick days.

How do we decide what goes into a contract?

Each contract negotiation is different because each production company is different. Over the course of the organizing, we spoke to as many people as possible and will conduct a survey to find out what the widest and deepest felt issues are. These priorities are the basis for what we try to get in a contract.

Will we have to go on strike?

You would not go on strike unless non-fiction TV writers and producers as a group voted overwhelmingly to do so. A strike or work stoppage only occurs if the employees vote to go on strike— you will make the decision, not WGAE staff. While the WGA did strike some years back, strikes are exceedingly rare, they are the absolute last resort.

Will I have to go through the WGAE staff every time I want to talk with my employer?

No. If that were true *Saturday Night Live* or the *Evening News* would NEVER air on time! When people are in the union they still work directly with their boss. The union does not come between you and your employer because you are the union. Being in a union simply means having a binding contract with legal protections to guarantee your benefits and working conditions. If you aren't comfortable going to your boss with an issue, the Guild is there to back you up but that's your choice.

Will I still be able to negotiate my own deals?

Yes. Most WGAE members do. A collective bargaining contract allows for a floor in your pay and treatment. You can always negotiate for more. The difference will be that now you will also have a collective bargaining process to help improve standards as a group.

If I am a member of the union will union rules dictate where I work?

No. This part of the industry is largely non-union, so it does not make sense to restrict the jobs that a member can take.

Refusing non-union work is something that you as a freelancer can do, but it is not something that we can impose on you.

How do dues work?

Dues are the necessary resources for a union to serve its members. Usually, dues are mandatory if you work under a union contract, and are 1.5% of your earnings under that contract. However, because this is a new organizing drive there will be no initiation fee for you to join, and there will be no mandatory dues

until seven production companies have union contracts and benefits.

If you are working at a union company now it is optional to become a member and pay dues.

How will the union raise standards throughout the industry?

What's needed in the industry is a counter to the downward pressure being put on budgets, production schedules, and rates. The union is the counter. Creative professionals need to cooperate across the industry from company to company. Individual production companies may be in competition with one another, but the freelancers who create their shows share a common interest in working together to apply some upward pressure on the race to the bottom market.

To that end, we are building an organization that is industry-wide. The companies that have already gone union have made some real improvements as a result, but in order to make even more significant changes in the industry, producers need to organize at more companies.

If we are going to win a portable health care system in Nonfiction TV, high minimum compensation, overtime pay, respect, and standards that allow for sustainable and happy careers and lives, we need to organize the industry. And winning at Original will be a huge step in the right direction!

Where do I find more info?

Contact Isham the WGA organizer who has been working with folks from Original:

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Or visit: wgaeast.org or nonfictionunited.org