

Responding to Employee Questions About the CAUSE-UAW Staff Union Election

A Guide for Supervisors & Managers

University of Alaska Labor Relations

What's Happening

A group of University of Alaska staff members affiliated with the United Auto Workers (UAW) is attempting to organize a new union. Alaska Labor law has rules on what employers, supervisors, and managers can say and do during unionization drives. In fact, managers and leaders could be held responsible for statements they make and actions they take if they violate these restrictions.

This guidance is intended for supervisors who manage staff eligible to vote in the CAUSE-UAW staff union election. Supervisors may receive questions from employees about the upcoming staff union election.

This guidance is intended to help supervisors:

- Respond to employee questions appropriately and lawfully
- Avoid prohibited conduct under labor law
- Share accurate, factual information
- Reflect the administration's position, encouraging employees to vote NO
- Ensure employees feel free to make their own decision without pressure

Supervisors are not expected to initiate conversations about unionization. However, when employees ask questions, supervisors may respond within the boundaries outlined below.

Questions? Concerns? Visit alaska.edu/union-organizing, or contact UA Labor Relations at ua-ler@alaska.edu.

General Guidance

Do Not engage in prohibited conduct.

To help you remember the key prohibitions, use the acronym T.I.P.S., which stands for Threats, Interrogation, Promises, and Surveillance. Refer to the Union Organizing Guidance available at alaska.edu/union-organizing for details.

Supervisors must also not ask employees:

- How they plan to vote
- Whether they signed an authorization card
- Who else supports or opposes the union
- What "led" to unionization

Supervisors must continue to enforce workplace rules and expectations consistently, regardless of an employee's views on unionization

These requirements are outlined in existing supervisor guidance and remain in full effect. Violations can create legal risk for both the supervisor and the university.



What Supervisors May Do

Supervisors are not required to remain silent. When employees voluntarily raise questions, supervisors may:

- Provide accurate, factual information
- Correct misinformation or incomplete statements
- Refer employees to official university resources
- Explain the administration's position
- Encourage employees to participate in the election
- Encourage employees to make their own informed decisions



Supervisors should not attempt to persuade employees or engage in debate.

Framing & Responding to Common Questions

Supervisors should consistently anchor conversations using the following framing:

“Union representation is a significant decision. If a union is certified, it would apply to everyone in the bargaining unit, including employees who vote no or do not vote. It’s important that employees understand the trade-offs before voting.”

This language aligns with official university communications and is appropriate to repeat.

“What is the university’s position on the union?”

Recommended response:

“The university respects employees’ right to decide. The administration believes it’s important that employees fully understand what union representation would mean before voting. From the administration’s perspective, maintaining a direct working relationship without union representation is preferable, which is why the university is encouraging employees to vote no.”

Supervisors should attribute this position to the administration, not themselves.

“What would change if the union is approved?”

Supervisors may share the following factual points:

- There would be one bargaining unit and one contract
- Union representation would apply to all eligible employees, including those who vote no or do not vote
- Many issues currently handled directly between employees and supervisors would move to more formal processes involving union representatives
- Pay, benefits, and workplace rules would be negotiated between the union and the university

“Can a union guarantee higher pay or better working conditions?”

Recommended response:

“No. A union can negotiate, but it cannot guarantee raises, job security, or financial outcomes. Any agreement would still be subject to the same institutional/state funding constraints that exist today.”

“What about union dues?”

Supervisors may share these factual points:



- Union dues are ongoing after certification
- Estimated dues are approximately 1.1%–1.44% of salary, based on other UA unions
- Dues are deducted from pay and are separate from wages or benefits
- Employees may opt out of paying dues, but cannot opt out of union representation

Sample response:

“Union representation involves ongoing dues. While employees may opt out of paying dues, they cannot opt out of being represented if their position is covered.”

“What do you think I should do?”

Supervisors should not express a personal opinion.

Recommended response:

“As a supervisor, I want to be careful not to influence anyone’s personal decision. I can share that the administration is encouraging employees to vote no, but it’s important that you review the information, weigh the trade-offs, and decide what’s best for you.”

This keeps the focus on management’s position while reinforcing employee choice.

“Should I vote at all?”

Appropriate response:

“Yes. The election is decided by a simple majority of actual votes cast. If you don’t vote, you have no say in the decision, but the outcome will still apply to you.”

When to Redirect the Conversation

If a discussion becomes prolonged, emotional, or feels like persuasion in either direction, supervisors should redirect:

“I want to make sure I stay within my role as a supervisor. I can share factual information, but I don’t want to improperly influence anyone. For more details, I encourage you to review the Election Basics and FAQs on the university website or contact Labor Relations.”

When to Contact Labor Relations

Supervisors should contact Labor Relations if:

- An employee raises concerns about intimidation or unfair treatment
- A supervisor is unsure how to answer a question
- Union-related activity is disrupting work rules
- Conversations feel escalating or contentious

Key Takeaways for Supervisors

- Do not initiate union-related discussions
- Stay factual and calm
- Attribute positions to the administration, not yourself
- Encourage employees to be informed and vote
- Communicate the administration’s position encouraging a NO vote, without pressure
- When unsure, pause and escalate.

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