

Union Types Explained: How They Impact Employer Strategy

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When employers receive notice that employees have filed a petition with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to unionize, one question becomes immediately important: *What type of union are we dealing with?*

Employees might be joining a well-established, nationally affiliated union such as the Communication Workers of America or the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Or, as has been the trend in recent years, they could affiliate with an independent union of their own creation. The answer can shape negotiation strategy, resource planning, and long-term labor relations management.

Understanding the Two Models

Well-established, national unions provide robust infrastructure support: assistance with election procedures, contract negotiation expertise, legal representation, strike funds, and training programs. These organizations bring decades of collective bargaining experience and established relationships with labor attorneys.

Independent unions, by contrast, operate with greater autonomy. Examples such as the Amazon Labor Union – prior to its affiliation with the Teamsters – demonstrate how workers maintain more direct control over internal operations and strategic decisions. Members avoid contributing high percentages of their dues to national overhead costs, keeping resources concentrated at the local level.

At the bargaining table, both union types pursue the same fundamental goal: negotiating over wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Key Differences that Impact Employers

Once employees vote to unionize, the process moves into collective bargaining, and national and independent unions bring different expertise and resources to this process. National unions bring professional negotiators with extensive experience and established bargaining strategies. Employers face well-prepared adversaries but ones that may be more predictable. Independent unions may initially lack professional negotiating experience, leading to longer, more unpredictable sessions, but they may be more flexible and creative when responding to employer proposals during negotiations.

In addition, more established unions may provide strike funds, legal support, and public relations resources that enable sustained labor disputes. On the other hand, independent unions operate with limited resources but often generate strong member commitment and community support that resonates locally.

A third key difference is that national unions feature formal procedures and hierarchical structures, offering employers clear

points of contact but potentially resulting in bureaucratic delays. Independent unions often use direct democracy, facilitating faster problem-solving but potentially complicating negotiations when leadership must repeatedly seek membership approval.

Whether facing a well-established, national union with decades of experience or an independent union born from your workplace, success requires thorough preparation, legal compliance, and commitment to constructive dialogue.