

Membership Criteria for DSLC Draft Proposal

The following is a draft proposal for defining criteria of membership in the DSLC. It merges proposals from steering committee members AV, SC, and JK.

Proposal

Persistent barriers to DSLC organizing has been navigating the distinctions between the many kinds of labor formations in DSA Chapters, connecting with labor activist members outside of our personal networks, and the different levels of involvement DSA members have in the labor movement. This proposal aims to resolve these issues by requiring a basic level of organization and connection to the DSLC from local labor groups. From there the DSLC will be better able to support existing and mentor new DSA labor formations in ways that fit their local contexts.

Disadvantages of one-size-fits-all system

In areas like New York City, with a significant rate of unionization even in the private sector and a large and active labor movement, it is both simple and sensible to set clear limits on membership. It allows for groups to focus their organizing efforts, as we see with the NYC Labor Branch intentionally orienting around rank-and-file work. Not every chapter exists within these conditions. Other DSA chapters in metro areas like Tulsa or Little Rock face a workforce where only about 3% of the private sector is unionized and where the labor bureaucracy has generally abandoned the movement. If the DSLC adopted a strict universal definition of membership then these organizers would have no voice in the DSLC despite doing important work to help reignite the labor movement in areas that desperately need it.

Benefits of the Proposed Criteria

Tying membership to Labor Formations that have a definition and purpose will give direction to our networks of labor activists. Hopefully, it will also deepen the connections of various chapter labor formations to each other through the DSLC. Over time this model will more or less do the work of the Mapping Subcommittee automatically as new locals will reach out to us to apply, will we mentor them into formation, and they will periodically provide us with a list of members for as long as they remain active.

Merged Proposal:

Membership of the DSLC

1. Must be a dues current member of the DSA
AND
2. Must be a member of a recognized Labor Formation within DSA
OR
3. Must meet the Criteria for Individual Membership and be vetted and approved by the DSLC Steering Committee or a sub-committee tasked by the Steering Committee for this purpose

Labor Formations

- The DSLC Steering will solicit and approve applications of Labor Formations of DSA Labor Activists. These may be local working groups and branches of DSA chapters, or trans-chapter networks organized by sector, etc.
- Labor Formations will define their own membership requirements and statements of purpose (DSLSC will offer and encourage the use of boilerplates from existing model working groups to avoid needless bylaws debate). They are expected to maintain a list of members to share with the DSLC SC, operate democratically, and are encouraged to participate in the national work of the DSLC.

Criteria of Individual Membership

Individuals are eligible to join the Democratic Socialist Labor Commission, and approved by the DSLC Steering or a committee established for the purpose of approving members, if they are a dues-paying member of DSA and meet at least one of the following criteria:

Are a rank-and-file member (active or retired) of a union or worker center

OR

Are employed as staff for a union, worker center or legal advocacy firm that represents workers

OR

Are part of a coordinated organizing drive seeking to unionize employees under a discrete employer, either as a worker or a member of a solidarity organizing committee

OR

Are an academic, journalist, or writer with a focus in labor studies and/or political economy