Sunrise movement staff vote to unionize



Activists working for the influential youth-led environmental group, Sunrise Movement, have voted to form a union, they announced today. Some 96 percent of Sunrise workers voted for the union.

The group, which has pushed for a Green New Deal, will form a union with Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1180 in New York, CWA represents other big-name advocacy groups such as Amnesty International.

“Sunrise Movement unequivocally supports, and fights for, the right of any and all workers to unionize.”
“When we talk about creating millions of good jobs through a Green New Deal, we mean jobs where people get paid well, with the protections they deserve and that the labor movement fought for,” Sunrise Movement Executive Director Varshini Prakash said in a statement today. “Sunrise Movement unequivocally supports, and fights for, the right of any and all workers to unionize.”

The votes were validated by Senator Ed Markey, a long-time Sunrise ally who spoke at a live-streamed announcement today. The organization has 110 staff members; about 80 of them will be eligible to join the union.

Sunrise Movement, founded in 2017, gained momentum thanks to a huge network of grassroots organizers — the majority of whom are unpaid. There are thousands more Sunrise supporters that are volunteers, according to Sunrise. Volunteers will not be part of the union.

When asked about whether Sunrise workers are pushing for any particular protections or benefits, Gabbi Pierce, internal communications coordinator at Sunrise, said that wasn't a primary focus. Instead, workers unionized in order to gain tools that would let them deal with employment issues when they come up, "to protect what we have as workers in an organization that we really value," Pierce said. "We're more motivated to organize to protect what we like in our jobs, and what we have in our jobs."

The announcement follows the high-profile exit of former Sunrise regional organizer Akshai Singh. In July, Singh tweeted that they were fired "in the midst of a union organizing campaign." In response, a letter from other Sunrise staff said that Singh was "let go due to their performance, not retaliation for union activity."

> *I'm a queer organizer of color fighting for a just transition from militarized fossil fuel apartheid. Today I was fired from @sunrisemvmt — in the midst of a union organizing campaign.*
>
> *— Akshai Singh □□ □□ □ (@chezrebellion) July 10, 2020*

"All I want to say to that is that Sunrise management and leadership hasn't engaged in union busting or any anti-union tactics," Pierce told *The Verge* when asked about Singh's exit.

“The organization has alienated a lot of people.”
Singh’s departure in July struck a nerve, particularly among former volunteers who decided to leave the organization after experiencing burnout. A recent episode of the popular Netflix show Queer Eye also profiled a Sunrise movement organizer whose mother worried that she was devoting all of her time and energy to the group’s work.

“The organization has alienated a lot of people,” says Lynn Wang, who was a hub coordinator for Sunrise in Los Angeles before deciding to leave at the start of this year. “I think Sunrise maybe wants to put this behind them a little bit and move on.”

https://www.theverge.com/2020/12/15/22177063/climate-change-activists-sunrise-union