

DRAFT Walkthrough Sheet November 2025

Here's a DRAFT guide to an organizing conversation on walkthroughs. It starts with an introduction and open-ended conversation—we want to make sure that the student feels heard!—and ends with some specific asks. You or your partner can fill out the [TAA organizing survey](#) linked at this QR code:



Introduction:

Introduce yourself, ask if your colleague has some time to talk.

We're with the TAA, or Teaching Assistants' Association – do you know what that is?

We're the union for all graduate workers—RAs, TAs and lecturers, PAs, Fellows, and casual hourly workers—here at UW Madison.

We're here to learn about what issues graduate workers are facing, and to talk about some of the ways that you can get involved in TAA's fights to improve them.

What role are you currently working in? What are some of the ways that your life in that role could be improved? *[Whatever they bring up here should probably be ranked as extremely important in the below qualitative questions. In some ways this is the most important question—make sure to listen to this and really think through the ways that this issue could be addressed!]*

How important to you are each of the following...

...12 weeks of paid family and medical leave (currently, the only university-wide mandate is 6 weeks of paid parental leave)

...Remission or elimination of mandatory fees (international student fees and segregated fees)

...Protection against arbitrary dismissal and retaliation, even for nominally academic reasons

...Pay that keeps up with the cost of living

...Help with in-kind basic needs (e.g. transportation, food, diapers, mental health care)?

...Sexual harassment protection?

...Workplace health and safety?

...Protecting and supporting international students?

Qualitative questions

Ask some or all of these, depending on how the conversation is going – and you don't need to take them as a script! If asking one of the above prompts some commentary that might answer one of the below, feel free to elaborate on that.

TAA consists of all graduate student workers at UW-Madison, including international students, parents, those with disabilities, and others with specific needs or vulnerabilities in the workplace. That is, while we all struggle with inadequate pay and support from the university, we want to ensure the diverse and intersecting needs of our members are centered in our organizing. What would you like to see TAA organizing towards in support of your and your colleagues' needs at UW-Madison?

If you are an international student, student parent, student with disabilities, or otherwise have specific needs or vulnerabilities in the workplace, what would you like to see TAA organizing towards to help you?

What do you wish we'd asked you about on this survey?

If you could choose one of these issues to devote two hours a month of your time to, which would it be?

If you wanted to make a change on a workplace issue like these, what would you try first?

Which other grad(s) in your department should we talk to about working with the TAA to improve things?

Closing the conversation—find an Ask for next steps.

Based on your colleague's answers so far, think of a good next step for them to get more involved (more details in the FAQ). Should they....

- Come to an upcoming social or GMM?
taa-madison.org/events
- Join Stewards' Council and start organizing their department?
stewco.chair@taa-madison.org
- Join or start a working group based on a specific issue?
taa@taa-madison.org
- Contact Contract Enforcement Committee for help with a specific issue?
stewco.chair@taa-madison.org
- Join the Discord, email list, or Signal group for future updates?
taa@taa-madison.org

FAQs and their answers

The best end to any organizing conversation is to find a next step that the worker you're talking with can get involved! Try to steer them towards an opportunity that meets their interests, financial resources, and availability.

How can I get involved?

There are lots of ways to get involved with the TAA all with varying levels of time commitment. We welcome all to do what they can to make our union (and all grad workers at UW-Madison) stronger.

- **Join the TAA:** Find the link to join here <https://taa-madison.org/join/>
- **Join the Discord and/or follow us on social media (easy, low time commitment):** The TAA is active on Discord and Instagram. You can also join our listserv to get emails from us. There will be links on our site to do this soon, but for now email taa@taa-madison.org or give me your email to get connected.
- **Come to a social! (a couple hours once a month):** We are starting to host socials once a month. Check out <https://taa-madison.org/events/> to see when the next social will be!
- **Talk to your coworkers about the union (varying levels of time commitment):** Ask your co-workers what workers' issues are impacting them. See if they've heard of the TAA. Tell them about what's currently happening in the TAA.
- **Plan and host a departmental organizing meeting (~5 hours):** If you're interested in organizing the graduate workers in your department, consider hosting an organizing meeting for your colleagues. Pick a time and place, advertise your meeting, and lead the discussion for issues that are important to the graduate workers in your program. This is a great way to gather information, formulate questions, and/or generate a plan to address your concerns. Think about coming to a StewCo meeting if you need ideas on how to get this started for your department.
- **Steward's Council (StewCo) (2-3 hours monthly):** The stewards council meetings are our main organizing meetings for the union. We aim for each department to have a steward who can serve as the connection between the union and their department. At these meetings you can hear about what is going on in other departments and brainstorm ideas for how to address issues in your department. StewCo meets once every 2 weeks either on Zoom or at the TAA office. Check out <https://taa-madison.org/events/> to see when the next StewCo meeting will be.
- **GMMs (1.5 hours monthly during the school year):** If you are curious about what is happening with the TAA, come to a general membership meeting (GMM). We hold GMMs once a month from September through May, and we discuss general TAA business as well as recent and upcoming actions. At GMM you can meet and chat with grad workers from all over campus. Go to <https://taa-madison.org/events/> to see when the next GMM will be and RSVP to get some free pizza at the meeting.
- **Volunteer for a TAA action (varying levels of time commitment):** We are always looking for help with upcoming actions. You can sign-up to chat with other grad students on campus during walkthroughs, to attend rallies, to sign petitions, or to

stand in solidarity with other unions in our community. If you're not currently a member getting TAA emails, join the TAA listserv here: <http://eepurl.com/doH0Yn>

- **Join a committee (varying levels of time commitment):** Committees can be a great way to focus on an issue that is important to you! If you're interested in joining a committee, reach out to taa@taa-madison.org to get connected with a committee.
 - Communications committee
 - Political education committee
 - International student working group
 - Member data working group

Do I have to pay dues to get involved? Where do dues go?

When you pay dues, you are funding our efforts to organize and advocate for all graduate students at UW-Madison. Our union is self-funded, meaning that dues from members are our only source of funding; we are not supported by the University.

When the union wins raises, your dues put money back in your pocket. The larger the number of dues paying members we have, the more power we have at the negotiating table.

Paying dues allows us to be affiliated with a national organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), that provides us with support we could not afford on our own, like a full-time organizer, administrative support (keeping track of financial documents, taxes, and membership lists is a lot of work for us to do alone), and a legal team.

TAA dues funded the organizing resources necessary to win six weeks of paid parental leave for graduate assistants in 2024. Dues ensured our affiliation and legal resources necessary for us to sue Act 10 in 2023. Many of the benefits we enjoy today, like tuition remission and health insurance, were won because TAA members paid their dues! Your dues also allow us to bring more of our colleagues into the union, hold training and informational meetings about the union, rent an office space, organize social events. Your dues go towards local organizing efforts, new organizing efforts in Wisconsin, legal support, overhead, support for other AFT locals, a strike fund, and national and international labor solidarity. As a member, you have a say in how your dues money is used—each spring next year's budget is discussed and amended at General Membership Meeting and subject to a vote of all membership. You can also serve on the AFT and AFL-CIO committees that shape how our parent organizations spend affiliates' dues.

I thought public sector unions were restricted in Wisconsin? What's going on with that?

In 2011, the Wisconsin legislature passed, and then-governor Scott Walker signed, "Act 10," a law that places restrictions on public-sector unions in Wisconsin. We are both operating within the bounds of Act 10 and suing to overturn it, but **even under Act 10, nothing prevents you from organizing with your coworkers, nor the University from sitting down to meet with us.**

Some of the most important restrictions placed on us are:

- To be a “certified” union—that is, to legally force UW to bargain with us—we need to win annual certification elections in which 51% of the bargaining unit must vote ‘yes.’
- Even once certified, UW could not be held to any provisions in a collective bargaining agreement, except for raises up to (but not over) the cost of living)

In recent years, in part due to grad workers’ demands, the University has raised the minimum graduate assistant stipend at rates faster than inflation—sorely needed, since the stipends we were starting from were pathetically low—and has implemented uniform paid leave minimums for all graduate assistants at UW–Madison. This shows the power of UW employees—graduate and otherwise—to demand and achieve changes outside the bargaining process.

However, there’s more to be done. With a coalition of other unions across the state, we’re suing Act 10; in December 2024, a district court ruled the law unconstitutional, though Act 10 is still in force while the legislature appeals. We’re confident our case will eventually convince the Wisconsin Supreme Court!

So we’re building power towards a recertification campaign once the law is struck down, and continuing to exercise our first-amendment rights to organize, bargain and agitate—we hope you’ll join us!

I heard TAA is pushing some departments to pay segregated fees or international student fees. How does that work? Why go department-by-department?

While segregated fees are set at the campus level, individual colleges, departments, and even supervisors have some ability to pay their graduate assistants’ and fellows’ mandatory fees (which include both segregated fees and international student fees). Most graduate fellows, for instance, have these fees remitted alongside their tuition.

Each department is funded by a different mix of tuition, state, grant, and gift funds, each of which can be spent for some purposes and not others. Gift funds are often the least restrictive of these, and in many departments it is these gift funds from which remission for mandatory fees is being paid.

We believe that no graduate assistant should pay any international or segregated fees—nobody should have to pay their employer to work! We are pursuing this end by working in individual departments to find ways that they can pay these fees. This both builds power at the departmental level and provides momentum as individual departments win victories. It also changes the incentive structure for departmental administration: now if fees are reduced or eliminated departments that *do* pay their students’ fees will save money and departments that *don’t* pay them will close a pay gap between their students and others. Our goal is for this, combined with concerted organizing, bargaining, and legal pressure, will lead to the elimination of segregated fees for *all* graduate workers.

Can international students join TAA? What is TAA doing to help international students?

Yes! In the 55-year history of the TAA, no international student has had any problems with the university or with her visa status as a result of her involvement with the union. Many international students have long been active and valued members and organizers in the union, and we are stronger with them—and with you!

You may have heard about conditions on your visa that restrict your political involvement. These primarily pertain to contributions or actions relevant to *electoral* politics (local, state, and federal elections) and do not affect your ability to join your union. It is against the law for the university to discriminate against anyone as a result of her union activity, and union activity legally cannot be taken into account when the USCIS considers your visa. However, the federal government has been taking what we regard as obviously pretextual and retaliatory measures that affect international students' status to intimidate them. TAA is committed to supporting and protecting *all* our members, including international students on campus. We are stronger together on this and all fronts.

While we do collect member names in order to support our organizing, these are not shared outside AFT (our parent union) and TAA membership. If you'd like to get involved but would not like to share a real name, we would still love to work with you! We have an Announcements channel and several organizing groups on Signal or you can sign up for our email list or Discord using a pseudonymous email. There will be links on our site to do this soon, but for now email taa@taa-madison.org or give me your email to get connected.

This past year, we made four demands of UW's administration and state officials:

1. That UW and UWPD will continue UWPD's policy of not providing information to or cooperating with ICE
2. That UW staff and instructors should not let ICE into private spaces, including classrooms, labs, and offices, without a judicial warrant
3. Providing timely alerts of ICE activity on or near campus
4. Providing legal and administrative support for students and workers facing deportation or attacks on their status in the US. Specifically, contesting the visa revocations that have recently been inflicted upon students and staff and committing to allowing affected students to continue their studies from abroad

If you're an international student who has further ideas about how to effectively organize and support international students in these times, we'd love to hear from you! [[If we get an international student working group up and running, this would be a great place to point students towards this as a way to get involved.]]