

## **Higher ed labor strategy in response to the call for solidarity from the Palestinian trade union movement**

In addition to the statements, petitions, and resolutions we have seen appear, workers in the higher ed labor movement are seeking concrete and material ways to act in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

The Department of Defense (DoD) funds billions of dollars of research in U.S. universities. In return, research conducted in DoD-sponsored labs strengthens the U.S. military, which has historically and ongoingly sent armaments, munitions, technologies, and research to support Israeli military assaults on Palestine.

Workers in labs receiving DoD funds are uniquely placed to answer the call by Palestinian trade unions for “halting the arms trade with Israel, as well as all funding and military research.”

This is a step-by-step guide to organizing with these workers. The priority is to stage lab-level meetings of workers to strategize a response to the call for solidarity. We cannot know in advance what will be possible among specific sets of workers, or likely even what the best tactics and strategies may be, until we meet collectively with the relevant workers, and learn the labor process in their lab.

We are trying to build something new in response to an emergency, in the hope that examples of worker action can be amplified and replicated. This is a strategy open to rank and file workers at any university that receives DoD funding, whether unionized or not.

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## Step 1: Find links to the U.S. Department of Defense at your institution

### Steward Outreach

It is often the case that workers already know which labs in their department receive this funding. If you have stewards or other contacts through previous labor organizing, reach out for a discussion. For tips on how to have these discussions, see [below](#).

### General links to your institution

Your institution may generate annual research funding reports (especially public universities) that break down the total research funds that the university receives from state and federal agencies. This will likely include a section on DoD funding streams. For example, the [University of California's Appropriations Priorities report for the 2024 fiscal year](#) states that the UC supports research for over \$23 billion of DoD funds. The report does not fully specify the breakdown of those funds by campus or lab, but it does offer keywords for further investigation (see “Search keywords” section below).

The National Science Foundation's Higher Education Research Development (HERD) survey contains a (probably incomplete) list of U.S. universities that receive DoD funding, ranked by funding amount. [See Table 60 at this link](#). Note that this database currently reflects funding allocations for 2021, and will be updated sometime in November 2023 to reflect the 2022 cycle.

Major research universities house centralized research offices that maintain detailed information about all externally-funded projects on their campus, some of which is publicly accessible. For example, the UC Santa Cruz Office of Sponsored Projects, housed in the UCSC Office of Research, publishes [monthly bulletins online](#) highlighting STEM research awards greater than \$150,000, many of which are military-funded projects. UC Berkeley's Sponsored Projects Office features [a searchable online database](#) of external research funding on campus that includes specific military agencies as filters.

Reviewing self-published faculty CVs in heavily military-funded departments, as the author of [this study](#) did, can also yield considerable information on your university's military links.

### General internet searches

Many direct funding links between the DoD and university research labs can be found with simple searches on Google or other platforms. You want to look out for announcements of funding or grant recipients from DoD (or subsidiary) reports, or announcements by your university. The DoD and its subsidiaries often release lists of funding awardees for specific annual grants. Less frequently, funding awards from the DoD will be announced on lab websites or on news releases published by your institution, but these are harder to find right away.

### Search keywords

If starting from scratch, you can often make progress by simply searching “department of defense” + “[your institution].” An important tip is to spell out your institution's name in full when you search, even if it is better known by an acronym or other short-form spelling. DoD award lists typically spell out university names in full.

Even more importantly, the DoD is not a monolith body, and has many subsidiaries. Even individual DoD subsidiaries may have distinct names for certain funding programs or research grant awards. This means that there may be multiple labs at your institution that receive DoD funding even though the DoD is not directly named as a funding source.

You may be able to narrow your search by swapping out “department of defense” in your searches with the names of some of the subsidiaries listed below. If you can find research funding reports released by your institution, these may give you more specific search terms to refine your investigation or reveal labs that you might have missed with a more general DoD search.

Here is a (non-exhaustive) list of DoD subsidiaries and grant funding programs to search for. Links are also provided where available for recent funding recipient lists or research award databases.

- Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)
- Army Research Office (ARO)
- Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR)
- Office of Naval Research (ONR)
- Basic Research
  - [Minerva Institute](#) (social science research)
- [Small Business Innovation Research \(SBIR\)](#)
  - and especially Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR)
- [Multidisciplinary University Research Initiative \(MURI\)](#)
- Army University and Industry Research Centers
  - Army University Affiliated Research Center (UARC)
- Army Network C3I Technology
- Navy Defense Research Science Programs
- Navy University Research Initiatives
  - Defense University Research Instrumentation Program (DURIP)
- Ocean Warfighting Environment Applied Research
  - Task Force Ocean
- Air Force Defense Research Sciences Programs
- Defense-Wide Manufacturing Science and Technology Program
- DoD Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs
- Force Protection Applied Research
- Language Flagship program (National Security Education Office)
  - STARTALK Teacher Training Grant program (National Security Administration)

## **Step 2: Identify specific labs**

Using the search tips above, the information you find will probably help you identify which specific labs at your institution receive DoD research funding. These labs will often be housed in

engineering, physical science or biological science departments, but you may find DoD awards in the social sciences as well. The best specifying information to help you identify labs are:

- the name of the Principal Investigator (PI) or Project Director (PD), who will often be listed as the awardee or named recipient of the DoD (or subsidiary) grant
- the name or title of the research project

Once you have this, try to find the lab's website. Labs or PIs usually publish their websites online for recruitment purposes, and are often easy to find. The PI name is usually a much better route to finding the lab than the title of a specific project, since labs frequently encompass multiple concurrent or consecutive research projects through multiple funding sources.

If you wish to confirm DoD (or subsidiary) funding for a given PI or research project, you can also look up recent publications where the PI is a named author or co-author. The author info or acknowledgment section on published articles will sometimes directly point to DoD funding sources for the research.

### **Step 3: Do power mapping for DoD-funded labs at your institution**

For most unionists in U.S. universities, the PI of the identified labs will not be your primary target. There will always be many workers in a given lab, from postdocs to lab techs and other staff to graduate and undergraduate student researchers. Most of the workers in the lab will be named in some section of the lab's website.

The first step in power mapping is to give yourself a full picture of the workers in the lab. Create a spreadsheet for each identified lab where you list the names of every worker in the lab, along with their job title and contact information.

Then, use your existing resources and prior organizing experiences to prioritize your plan of outreach. If you are a graduate student, you will likely want to prioritize graduate student researchers in the lab, who will have common experiences with you and will be more likely to engage in conversations about the Palestinian trade union call and their lab's ties to the DoD. We suggest starting where you expect to have the most receptive audience — it will be easier to reach further once we have concrete examples to point towards.

If you have access to official union resources, contact lists, or membership data, use a variety of indicators to assess if workers in your union are more likely to be receptive to a conversation. Which workers in the lab are union members? Which workers in the lab voted in your union's most recent Strike Authorization Vote? Did they sign in at recent pickets? These and similar questions will help you start your outreach in a non-random way.

### **Step 4: The Initial Outreach**

#### General Notes

- Before you call someone you don't know: look them up and see if there are any red flags online!

- The idea of the call is not to put anyone on the spot with regard to their position or politics, but to give the opportunity for the worker to take up an action item, or not, rather than stake out a political position as such.

#### Guide to the conversation:

- Introduction:
  - Greetings, identify yourself as a fellow worker and member of the same union. Be up front that this might be a difficult conversation. The fact that we are in the same union does not mean that we all have the same views on what's going on in the Middle East.
  - However, a group of us in our union are working on responding to a call for solidarity that has been made by the Palestinian Trade Union Movement.
- The call for solidarity:
  - The Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions have made a call for solidarity to all workers in industries related to the military, including research. I can send you more information on this if you'd like.
    - <https://progressive.international/wire/2023-10-16-an-urgent-call-from-palestinian-trade-unions-end-all-complicity-stop-arming-israel/en/>
- We are reaching out to workers in all the labs on campus that receive research funding from the Department of Defense.
  - We want you to reach out to see if we start some sort of collaboration in solidarity with the Palestinian unions and Gazans in general.
  - We are not really sure what this looks like at this stage, but a first step we think would be to have a conversation with people in your lab.
    - What do you think about that, and what do you think people in your lab would think about holding a meeting like this (just grads for now, not PIs)?
- **The ask:** get a lab meeting (doesn't need to be everyone in the lab, whatever makes the most sense in their specific case)
  - Is there a good time where people meet regularly anyway, whether at work or socially?
  - Offer as much help as necessary/desired. We can offer template emails and text messages, template agenda docs. We can strategize about how to get the meeting together. We can come to the meeting, offer an introduction, facilitate the meeting, or leave it entirely in the workers' hands. Whatever makes most sense.
- Note that you will follow up in a couple days to check in on progress.

#### Text template (if no answer):

Hi \_\_\_\_! This is \_\_\_\_, a fellow grad worker in the \_\_\_\_ department at [University]. I'm working on an organizing campaign right now specific to researchers in STEM fields. Do you have 10-15 minutes to talk on the phone sometime this week?

#### **Step 5: The Meeting (tbd)**