

## **Innovation to Strengthen State, Area and Local Central Bodies**

We are living in a moment of profound economic change and political polarization. From the local level to the national stage, the labor movement is actively reimagining a new “future of work,” including changes in policies, public investments and who benefits from economic activity. We are reimagining a world where all people can have a better life, where one job is enough, and where all have access to affordable and quality health care and secure retirement.

Unfortunately, corporations and powerful special interests are working to shape a very different future. A future in which millions more people join the ranks of the “gig economy,” a future in which more workers can be misclassified and denied wages and benefits, a future in which corporations, shareholders and the 1% continue to “win” at the expense of society and working people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need to reconsider how and for whom our economies are working, and the role the labor movement will play in building a more just society. Women, Black, Indigenous, Latino and other people of color and LGBTQ+ workers have been some of the most negatively impacted by the pandemic and are overrepresented in sectors of the economy where we see the most inequality.

As the preamble to our Constitution reminds us, we must “...dedicate ourselves to improving the lives of working families, bringing fairness and dignity to the workplace and securing social equity in the Nation. We will prevail by building a strong, free and democratic labor movement.”

To meet this moment, we must modernize and revitalize our critical infrastructure of state federations and central labor councils. These bodies are uniquely positioned to support the needs of workers and their unions through politics, legislation, community engagement and organizing.

Yet most of the local organizations were established in industrial centers around the turn of the last century. In many cases, the labor movement has changed significantly, while these structures have not. Valid concerns around consistency, programmatic effectiveness, structural functionality, alignment, participation, affiliation, and funding of state federations and central labor councils exist.

This is a moment that requires a deliberate and thoughtful reimagining of this vital infrastructure. While these concerns are valid, we believe that the fundamental need for local labor unions to work through a coordinated structure is vital—so vital that we are using this infrastructure to mobilize for the 2022 elections and beyond.

Following the successful model of the Commission on the Future of Work and Unions, we recommend that the AFL-CIO form a Commission on Strengthening State Federations and Area and Central Labor Councils. The commission, which will include representatives from state and local bodies, must address the following questions:

- Programmatic impact
- Governance
- Participation, affiliation and financing, including the National Affiliation Fee Program Structure

The commission will work throughout 2022, providing interim reports to the AFL-CIO Executive Council during that period. The deliberations and recommendations of the commission shall be brought to the AFL-CIO Executive Council at its meeting in the summer of 2023 and to the General Board in a special session following that EC meeting, if necessary.