

6 Weeks to Power Training and Beyond

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President-elect and 6 Weeks to Power, Team Member

In the Fall of 2024 four members of MEA-Retired, Bob Jean, Susan Grondin, Debbie Killam, and Molly Smith undertook the challenge of learning more about creating organizational campaigns and developing effective organizing skills.

Joining the online nationwide training program *6 Weeks to Power*, in collaboration with several national organizations lead by AROS (The Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools) over 250 individuals from 150 cities, in 34 states representing 20 nationwide groups including the educational unions of American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association came together focusing on strategies to protect and improve public education.

The original thought was by participating in the training the team would develop skills that could be used collaborating with other groups in Maine. MEA-Retired could team with organizations or associations that were also concerned about issues related to retired public employees and to strengthening public education. Upon completion of the training an action plan would be developed and submitted. With approval an award of \$2400 and the support of a coach from AROS would be provided to the team for 1 year to carry out the designed plan or campaign.

Early into the training the MEA-Retired team members realize that before effectively reaching out and coalescing with other organization there needed to be a systemic internal review of the MEA-Retired Association. An inquiry was made of current members and past leaders to gain an understanding if and when a similar undertaking had been undertaken in the past. The team learned that there had been an effort to do so in decades past, where some information was gathered focusing on systems, functions and outcomes of the organization. That all proved interesting, but there had been limited follow-through using the information toward future planning and development.

The team continued its involvement in the *6 Weeks to Power* training and with consultation of organizers at NEA-C4O (Center for Organizing) proceed to learn about external organizing. While at the same time while shifting its focus on organizing an internal examination and review process that would be an opportunity for MEA-Retired to “get its own house in order”. This was thought to be necessary before we were ready to do any “external organizing” and collaboration with other organizations. The team was assured that by completing the *6 Weeks to Power* training future access to grant money and coaching support would be available.

With the vision was to improve the lives of all retired educators, both current and future by enhancing opportunities and by promoting positive outcomes in the areas of communication; economic well-being; physical, psychological and emotional health. Thereby strengthening the Maine Education Association of Retired Educators (MEA-Retired), the team undertook the task to create and initiate a plan, by developing a process to revitalize the organization and to increase member engagement consistent with its stated mission.

So, what's next? The goal is to ...focus on the needs of our members, the organizational structure, its functioning and the revitalization of MEA-Retired. This work is currently in progress with the team working on this goal since October 2024. The process will be a marathon, not a sprint, having started on December 2, 2024, with the sharing of the initiative and a discussion with the MEA-Retired Executive Committee. The process will start in earnest the Spring of 2025, culminating May 2026.

The team sees this as an organic process. The journey will in part lead us. A timeline is currently being developed, as are other components of this initiative.

Some of the identified methods are listed below but are not intended to be totally inclusive respecting the "organic nature" of the process.

- Revisiting our Mission
- A survey of the general membership, all 5000+ of us with an eye toward understanding demographics of affiliation, level of leadership experience, thoughts on mission and policy, governance, membership engagement and technology
- Needs assessments
- Resource assessments
- Reviewing organizational structure
- Engagement and input from all levels of governance, to include but not limited to the Executive Board, the Board of Directors, committees/chairs, representatives and trustees, delegates, our affiliates, the MEA and NEA.

Where will resources come from to support this initiative? Existing ideas to date include.

- Current *6 Weeks to Power* Team
- Member volunteers to assume leadership roles
- Existing governance meetings
- Leadership Training "2025", with an existing budget of \$3600
Applying for the now combined NEA Retired Organizing and CORAL (Coalition of Retired Activist and Leaders) grant projects. Funded up to \$8500 per state affiliate, per year.
- Support from NEA C4O (Center for Organizing)
- Support from MEA
- Other, to be determined

What Is the information process?

- Word of mouth, presentations to internal governance bodies
- Written information letter to the entire MEA-Retired membership, sent via email by MEA. Periodic updates as determined
- Publication in the Clarion (January 2025) and ongoing updates thereafter
- Postings via MEA-Retired website (mearetired.org)
- Presentations at local affiliates, upon request
- Presentations at the Annual Meeting and Convention (May 2025) and (May 2026)

The team was encouraged by the reception and input received from the Executive Committee when the initiative was presented to them December 2024. It is hoped that all members of MEA-Retired will seize the opportunity to participate and contribute to this initiative, hopefully resulting in a revitalized and strengthened association.