



RESTAURANT OPPORTUNITIES CENTERS UNITED
275 SEVENTH AVE., 23rd FLOOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10001
TEL: (212) 243-6900
FAX: (212) 243-6800

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ROC-UNITED

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WHAT IS ROC-UNITED?

ROC-United is a national restaurant workers' organization that engages in six programs: 1) developing new restaurant worker organizing projects; 2) providing training and technical assistance to restaurant worker organizing projects; 3) conducting national research on the restaurant industry; 4) engaging in national policy work to improve working conditions for restaurant workers; 5) coordinating national campaigns of restaurant workers; and 6) convening restaurant workers across the country.

WHAT IS THE HISTORY OF ROC-UNITED?

Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC-United) was launched in January 2008 based on calls for support from around the country. The Co-Founders of the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY) organized the country's first national restaurant workers' convening in Chicago in August 2007, where ROC-United was born.

ROC-United is helping to start ROC branches around the country based on the experience of the ROC-NY model. Since its founding after 9/11, ROC-NY has successfully conducted restaurant workplace justice campaigns, provided job training and placement, opened its own cooperative restaurant, and conducted research and policy work. Although initially founded after September 11th, 2001 to provide support to restaurant workers displaced as a result of the World Trade Center tragedy, ROC-NY has grown to support restaurant workers all over New York City and advocate for improved working conditions. Over the last five years, we have won eight workplace justice campaigns against exploitative high-profile restaurant companies, obtaining \$580,000 and improvements in workplace policies for restaurant workers. We have also trained more than 1000 restaurant workers to find good jobs and advance within the industry, published two ground-breaking reports on the restaurant industry, played an instrumental role in winning a statewide minimum wage increase for tipped workers, organized 40 restaurant workers to open their own cooperatively-owned restaurant, and grown to include 2300 restaurant workers in our membership. Based on our successful efforts in New York City, groups in several other cities, have approached us about initiating ROC branches in their cities. Thus, we created ROC-United, a national intermediary that has helped to initiate Restaurant Opportunities Centers in New Orleans, Maine, Detroit, and Chicago, working with local groups in each of these places to conduct comprehensive studies of restaurant workers' needs in each region, and create an advanced restaurant worker training and placement programs to place workers in high-end restaurant jobs.

WHAT IS THE ROC MODEL?

The ROC model involves ‘surrounding the industry’ – a tri-pronged approach to building power for restaurant workers. ROC simultaneously 1) conducts comprehensive research and policy work to raise consciousness and lift standards for workers in the industry; 2) organizes workers through our ‘11-step’ method to combine litigation, organizing, clergy involvement, and consumer boycotts to win workplace policy improvements in ‘low-road’ restaurant companies; and 3) promotes ‘high-road’ restaurant owners that pay and treat their workers well.

WHO BELONGS TO ROC-UNITED?

ROC-United currently has one independent affiliate, four incubated affiliates, and numerous partners across the country. For interested locations, ROC-United can conduct fundraising to hire at least one staffmember to launch a ROC in a particular city, and then provide intensive training and technical assistance to help develop that ROC branch. After two to three years of providing such support, our goal is to help each incubated affiliate become an independent affiliate within the coalition.

WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA TO BE A ROC?

ROC’s are multiracial organizations that focus on organizing restaurant workers, and are led by a steering committee or board of restaurant workers. Every ROC engages in research, training, policy, and campaign work. Every ROC provides political education and leadership development to its members. Most importantly, every ROC follows the ROC mission.

WHAT IS THE PROCESS OF ROC DEVELOPMENT?

Most ROC’s start as incubated affiliates of ROC-United. After two to three years, and after the local ROC has developed a solid multiracial restaurant worker base and steering committee, and is able to fundraise on its own, local ROC’s can graduate to become independent affiliates.

HOW WOULD I START A NEW ROC BRANCH IN MY CITY?

In launching a new ROC branch, ROC-United recommends starting by engaging in three simultaneous projects: 1) developing a leadership board of restaurant workers to guide the project; 2) conducting a comprehensive research study of restaurant workers in the location, including 500 surveys of restaurant workers in the location, Census and Department of Labor analysis, and 40-50 employer interviews; and 3) providing a limited amount of job training and placement services as privileges to new members of the ROC branch. ROC-United can provide surveys, curricula, and other materials to help launch these projects.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

Contact ROC-United at 212-243-6900. ROC-United bases its ability to help start a ROC branch in a particular city on the level of interest and energy local workers and organizations are willing to invest in making it happen, so the more demonstrated interest there is in starting a ROC in your city, the better. We will find a way to help you.