

Business Plan for National Tim Hortons Employee Unionization

This AI-generated draft was prepared for discussion by Marie Landry's Spy Shop
(www.marielandryceo.com)

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Abstract

This document presents a strategic business plan for the national unionization of Tim Hortons employees across Canada. It is predicated on comprehensive Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) which reveals a fundamental disconnect between Tim Hortons' carefully cultivated brand as a Canadian cultural icon and the operational reality of its parent company, Restaurant Brands International (RBI), a multinational conglomerate focused on aggressive cost-cutting. The plan outlines a multi-phase campaign to organize workers, leveraging identified corporate vulnerabilities including declining public perception, a history of anti-labor practices, and internal franchisee dissent. The strategy proposes a dual approach: a public narrative campaign to reframe the struggle as one of Canadian workers versus a detached global entity, and a grassroots organizing effort targeting corporate-owned stores and key franchise regions. The plan includes detailed sections on governance, operational phases, financial projections, risk assessment, and key performance indicators. It is intended as a foundational blueprint for a worker-led movement, designed to be adapted and executed by Tim Hortons employees to achieve a first collective agreement and establish new standards in the Canadian service sector.

Contents

1	Executive Summary	3
2	Legal & Market Landscape	3
2.1	Regulatory Framework	3
2.2	Industry & Employer Profile: Intelligence Brief	3
3	Governance & Organizational Structure	4
4	Campaign Phases & Operations	4
4.1	Phase 1: Foundation & Outreach (Months 1-6)	4
4.2	Phase 2: Card-Check & Certification (Months 7-15)	5
4.3	Phase 3: Collective Bargaining & Ratification (Months 16-18+)	5
5	Financial Plan	5
6	Risk Assessment & Mitigation	6
7	Social Impact & Sustainability	6
8	Timeline & Milestones	7
9	Monitoring & Evaluation	7
9.1	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	7
9.2	Reporting Cadence	7
10	Next Steps	8
A	An Open Letter and Proposal	9
B	References	10

1 Executive Summary

- **Mission:** Unite Tim Hortons employees coast-to-coast into a democratically governed union that wins living wages, benefits, and a collective voice in workplace decisions.
- **Vision:** A robust, sustainable union setting new service-sector labour standards and restoring the promise of a Canadian brand that truly values its people.
- **18-Month Strategic Goals:**
 1. **Build the Foundation:** Establish active Organizing Committees (POCs) in Ontario, British Columbia, and one Atlantic province.
 2. **Launch Public Narrative:** Execute a public-awareness campaign highlighting the disconnect between Tim Hortons' "Canadian" image and the reality of its ownership by Restaurant Brands International (RBI) and 3G Capital.
 3. **Win First Certifications:** Achieve successful union certification at strategic locations, prioritizing corporate-owned stores (like the Toronto Innovation Café) and franchises in key urban centres.
 4. **Begin First Contract Campaign:** Commence collective bargaining for a first contract, establishing a "pattern" of core economic gains and workplace rights to be replicated across the country.

2 Legal & Market Landscape

2.1 Regulatory Framework

Each province and federally regulated outlet follows distinct certification procedures:

- **Federally Regulated Outlets:** A minority of locations (e.g., in airports) governed by the Canada Industrial Relations Board. Direct certification is possible with majority (>50%) support, or a vote can be triggered with 35-50% support.
- **Provincially Regulated Outlets:** The vast majority of stores are governed by Provincial Labour Relations Acts. Thresholds for certification vary but typically fall into two categories:
 - **Auto-certification:** 55%+ signed cards can lead to direct certification without a vote in some provinces.
 - **Card-check + Vote:** 45-55% signed cards triggers a secret-ballot vote.

2.2 Industry & Employer Profile: Intelligence Brief

- **Primary Adversary: Restaurant Brands International (RBI).** Tim Hortons is not a Canadian company in practice. It is owned by RBI, a multinational conglomerate controlled by investment firm 3G Capital, which is notorious for aggressive, systemic cost-cutting to maximize shareholder returns.¹ This is the source of the pressure felt in stores.
- **Secondary Adversary: The Franchise Network.** The majority of the ~4,000 stores are individually owned, creating a legal "shield" that RBI uses to deny responsibility for labour practices.
- **Key Vulnerabilities & Opportunities:**

¹See Hsu (2014) in References.

- **The Identity Crisis:** There is a massive gap between the brand’s image as a “Canadian icon” and the reality of its ownership and labour practices. This is the central narrative weakness to exploit.
- **Declining Public Trust:** The brand’s reputation has plummeted. A 2018 Leger poll showed its corporate reputation had fallen from 4th place to 50th.² The public is already primed to be sympathetic to workers.
- **The 2018 Minimum Wage Backlash:** The public has a strong memory of franchisees clawing back worker benefits after a wage hike in Ontario, an action that sparked widespread public backlash and protests.³
- **Franchisee Dissent:** RBI’s cost-cutting mandates have created significant, public conflict with its own franchisees, who formed a dissident group, the Great White North Franchisee Association (GWNFA), to fight back.⁴ This division can be exploited.
- **Known Precedents:** Unionization is possible. Successful certifications in Winnipeg (2015)⁵ and Canora, SK (2017), and most importantly at a **corporate-owned** “Innovation Café” in Toronto (2020) with UFCW,⁶ prove the model can be broken.

3 Governance & Organizational Structure

- **Interim National Organizing Committee (INOC):** An initial body of volunteer leaders from key regions, responsible for executing Phase 1 of the plan and facilitating the first democratic elections.
- **National Steering Committee (NSC):** A democratically elected body of 15 regional representatives plus 3 at-large youth representatives. The NSC is responsible for overseeing national strategy, coordinating legal action, managing communications, and fostering solidarity between provinces.
- **Provincial Organizing Committees (POCs):** Comprised of 5–10 local leaders per province, elected by members within that province. POCs manage on-the-ground canvassing, worker training, local meeting logistics, and the specifics of provincial certification filings.
- **All-Member Assembly:** Quarterly virtual town halls open to all signed members. This assembly serves as the highest democratic body for one-person/one-vote decisions on major issues such as national budgets, ratification of national bargaining priorities, and NSC elections.

4 Campaign Phases & Operations

4.1 Phase 1: Foundation & Outreach (Months 1-6)

1. **Launch “Together We Brew / Reclaim Our Tims” Campaign:** Develop and distribute branding, leaflets, and social media toolkits based on the core narrative: workers vs. a multinational conglomerate (RBI).
2. **Legal Rights Workshops (“Union 101”):** Conduct online and in-person workshops educating workers on their specific provincial rights, the card-signing process, and the company’s documented history of union-busting tactics to inoculate them against employer interference.

²See The Canadian Press (2018).

³See Harris (2018).

⁴See Strauss (2018).

⁵See Press (2015).

⁶See UFCW Canada (2020).

3. **Digital Organizing & Leader Identification:** Establish secure communication channels (e.g., Signal groups) for store and city-level organizing. The primary goal is to identify, recruit, and train 1-2 key workplace leaders per location.

4.2 Phase 2: Card-Check & Certification (Months 7-15)

1. **Strategic Card Collection:** Launch a coordinated, province-by-province card-signing drive. The target is 60% sign-up in priority zones: corporate-owned stores first, followed by franchises in high-visibility urban areas.
2. **Submit Applications:** POCs handle provincial filings; the NSC coordinates federal filings and overarching legal strategy to ensure consistency.
3. **Intensify Public Solidarity:** Launch press releases, community coalition events, and online petitions timed with certification filings. The campaign will focus on the core RBI narrative to build public pressure on the company.

4.3 Phase 3: Collective Bargaining & Ratification (Months 16-18+)

1. **Conduct Member Surveys:** Democratically define bargaining priorities through comprehensive surveys and town halls to ensure the bargaining committee's mandate reflects the will of the members.
2. **Form Bargaining Teams:** Teams will be composed of elected members from certified workplaces, supported by professional legal counsel from a partner union.
3. **Push for Pattern Bargaining:** Use any wins at corporate stores to set a public standard ("the RBI standard") that franchise locations will be pressured to meet or exceed.
4. **Ratification Vote:** No agreement is final until approved by a 50%+1 majority vote of the members in the bargaining unit.

5 Financial Plan

This budget is a preliminary estimate for a pilot phase and assumes partnership with an established union for major funding and resources.

Estimated Pilot Phase Budget

- **Campaign Materials & Design: \$10,000**

Notes: Flyers, banners, digital ads, website development. Materials will be based on the core "Reclaim Our Tims" narrative.

- **Training & Meeting Logistics: \$8,000**

Notes: Venue rentals for meetings, refreshments, travel stipends for volunteer organizers, training materials.

- **Legal & Certification Fees: \$15,000**

Notes: Initial estimate for application fees and preliminary legal counsel. This line item must be significantly scaled up for a protracted fight, especially for a "common employer" legal challenge against RBI.

- **Digital Infrastructure: \$5,000**

Notes: Secure chat platforms, secure database for membership lists, microsites, email services.

- **Contingency (10%): \$3,800**

Notes: For unforeseen expenses and opportunities.

Total Estimated Pilot Cost: \$41,800

Funding Sources

- **Seed Funding:** The most critical source will be seed funding and resource support from a partner national union. This plan serves as a prospectus to secure that partnership.
- **Initiation Fees:** A one-time initiation fee of \$5-\$10 per member upon signing a card or joining.
- **Monthly Dues:** Regular dues of approximately \$15 per member, which will only be collected *after* a first collective agreement is successfully ratified.
- **Solidarity Grants:** Applications for grants from labor-aligned foundations and solidarity funds.

6 Risk Assessment & Mitigation

Aggressive Union-Busting

The company has a documented history of union avoidance.⁷ Mitigation involves a pre-emptive strategy: (a) Inoculate workers through "Union 101" training about expected tactics; (b) Prepare rapid-response public campaigns based on successful past models; (c) Use OSINT to anticipate adversary tactics; (d) Distribute "Know Your Rights" cards with contact info for legal support.

Franchise Model Shields RBI

This is the central structural challenge. Mitigation requires a multi-pronged approach: (a) Launch a long-term legal strategy to file a "common employer" application with a provincial labour board; (b) Foster inter-franchise communication to break worker isolation; (c) Target corporate-owned stores first to bypass the shield and set a public precedent.

High Membership Turnover

The transient nature of the workforce challenges maintaining density. Mitigation includes: (a) Implementing continuous recruitment drives ("Always Be Organizing"); (b) Building a strong sense of community and solidarity that outlasts individual employment terms; (c) Maintaining an active and engaging digital presence to keep former employees as public supporters.

Insufficient Funds

A grassroots campaign cannot outspend a multinational corporation. Mitigation is straightforward: (a) **Secure a partnership with a major union early.** This is non-negotiable and the primary path to funding; (b) Implement tiered fundraising targets and apply for solidarity grants.

7 Social Impact & Sustainability

- **Economic Justice:** By establishing a living-wage floor, predictable scheduling, and robust benefits, this campaign aims to set a new, higher standard for the entire Canadian fast-food and service sector.
- **Brand Accountability:** A core social impact is to restore public trust in a Canadian institution by forcing its corporate practices to align with its public image.

⁷See Gollom (2018).

- **Environmental Advocacy:** A union contract can be a vehicle for environmental change. The union can bargain for commitments to compostable cups, waste reduction programs, and the use of energy-efficient equipment.
- **Community Partnerships:** The union will actively seek partnerships with local food-security groups, shelters, and environmental NGOs.

8 Timeline & Milestones

Months	Key Milestone
1 – 3	INOC formation. Secure a formal partnership with a national union. Launch "Reclaim Our Tims" public narrative and brand identity.
4 – 9	Rollout of "Union 101" workshops in pilot provinces. Identify and train workplace leaders. Begin targeted, strategic card collection with a goal of reaching 40% signed cards in pilot regions.
10 – 15	File first certification applications, prioritizing corporate stores and key urban centers. Launch peak public pressure campaign, including media outreach and community actions. Prepare for initial bargaining.
16 – 18+	Table bargaining proposals in first certified workplaces. Conduct ratification votes. Use any ratified agreements as a template for pattern bargaining across other franchises.

9 Monitoring & Evaluation

Success will be measured through a combination of quantitative and qualitative Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

9.1 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- **Organizing Metrics:** Percentage of employees card-signed; Number of active POCs; Number of trained leaders.
- **Financial Metrics:** Funds raised vs. budget; Value of contributions from partner union.
- **Engagement Metrics:** Attendance rates for training; Engagement on digital platforms.
- **Impact Metrics:** Media mentions of the core narrative; Successful certifications; Favorable public polling.

9.2 Reporting Cadence

- **Weekly:** Check-ins between leaders and POCs.
- **Monthly:** POCs submit KPI reports to the NSC.
- **Quarterly:** The NSC compiles a national report for the All-Member Assembly.

10 Next Steps

1. **Distribute This Plan:** Share this intelligence brief securely with trusted Tim Hortons employees and allies.
2. **Convene an Interim Committee:** Form the INOC from a core group of founders to adopt this plan.
3. **Engage Potential Union Partners:** Use this plan as a prospectus to secure backing from a major Canadian union.
4. **Launch Phase 1:** Upon securing a partnership, begin executing Phase 1.

A An Open Letter and Proposal

To the Employees of Tim Hortons,

My name is Marie Landry. I am an independent OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence) researcher and strategist. I am not a Tim Hortons employee, nor am I affiliated with any major union. I am an outside observer who believes that every worker deserves a living wage, job security, and a voice in their workplace.

This document is a **gifted draft**—a starting point for discussion. It is a strategic blueprint built on verifiable, publicly available information that you are free to use, adapt, critique, or discard as you see fit.

The mention of "AI-generated" and my "Spy Shop" is for transparency about my methods and my professional identity; it is simply the name of my one-person consultancy. It is not meant to imply secrecy or anything other than a passion for strategic problem-solving.

This plan does not belong to me. If it is to succeed, it must belong to you. I offer it as a tool, with no strings attached, in solidarity with your efforts.

Sincerely,
Marie S. Landry

B References

References

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