

Bargaining 101: How Your Collective Agreement Is Negotiated

Collective bargaining is the process where your union and employer negotiate the terms and conditions of your workplace. This includes wages, benefits, hours of work, job security, and other key provisions that directly impact your day-to-day work life.

The process begins before anyone sits at the table. Your union gathers input from members—through surveys, meetings, and conversations—to understand priorities. These issues are then developed into formal proposals that reflect what members want to see improved, protected, or clarified in the next agreement.

Once proposals are ready, both the union and the employer exchange them and begin negotiations. This is where each side presents its position, explains its reasoning, and works toward finding common ground. Some items are straightforward and can be agreed to quickly. Others—especially wages, remote work, or workload—often require more discussion.

Bargaining doesn't usually wrap up in one meeting. It takes place over multiple sessions, sometimes over weeks or months. Throughout this time, your bargaining committee represents your interests at the table, pushes back where needed, and looks for solutions that balance fairness with practicality.

When a tentative agreement is reached, it is brought back to you—the members—for a vote. This step is critical. The agreement does not take effect unless a majority of members vote to accept it. This ensures that the final deal reflects the collective will of the membership.

If an agreement cannot be reached, there are additional steps that may follow, such as mediation or other legal processes. These are designed to help both sides reach a resolution.

Collective bargaining is ultimately about having a voice. Through your union, you are not negotiating alone—you are part of a unified group working together to secure fair and reasonable working conditions.

