



Frequently asked questions about OPS bargaining

Q1. Bargaining with the government starts Nov. 4. What are the demands that the union will present to the employer?

A. For several weeks now, the bargaining teams have worked with union staff, specialists in benefits, pensions and collective bargaining, to turn the demands voted on by members into proposals to present at the table. We can't reveal the proposals ahead of the employer and union meeting for the first time Nov. 4. The last thing we want to do is to tell the employer our priorities before bargaining even begins.

Q2. Will the union and employer's bargaining proposals be posted on the OPSEU website after bargaining begins Nov. 4?

A. Some information about the proposals will be posted shortly after Nov. 4, but there will not be much detail. When bargaining starts, it is vital that the bargaining teams have the ability to reveal positions to the employer when it's most strategic. They can only do this if information about the proposals remains confidential.

Q3. Are we going on strike?

A. It is much too soon to say that. There are a number of steps that would have to happen before a strike could take place. For example, there would need to be a strike vote. Another step is that Essential and Emergency Services negotiations for those workplaces where there has been significant change since 2004 would have to be concluded. The thing to keep in mind is, that the bargaining teams want to bargain a good contract, not a strike. That's why they need your support. The employer needs to see the members standing squarely behind the bargaining teams in order to give us a fair offer.

Q4. How will the current economic situation affect bargaining?

A. We won't know the answer to that until we start bargaining with the employer, Nov. 4. We expect the government to take into consideration a number of factors

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when it bargains with us. The current economic situation is one factor. Another is recent wage settlements in the public sector. We need to ensure our wage increases stay even or above inflation and other public sector wage settlements.

Q5. Shouldn't we expect less because of the current economic situation?

A. It's true that our bargaining doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's also true that we have never known a government to say before a round of bargaining that the cupboard is not bare. There are three reasons why OPSEU members shouldn't be embarrassed to ask for an improvement in their wages and working conditions: 1) Good public sector jobs help communities stay afloat in tough times. 2) The OPS is a very efficient operation. Ontario's spending on government is the second-lowest per capita of all provincial governments in Canada. 3) OPSEU members have already sacrificed. We paid a stiff price for the slash-and-burn policies of the former Tory governments. Members lost their jobs, our work was transferred outside the OPS and we either got zero wage increases or settlements that were below inflation.

Q6. What is the timeframe for bargaining?

A. The union and the employer will start bargaining Nov. 4. We will negotiate until we reach a tentative settlement or come to an impasse. That could happen quickly or take a while. The two sides have agreed that by Dec. 23, we should be able to negotiate a deal. Failing that, we will get a final offer from the employer that we can take to a strike vote. The aim is to have a ratification vote or a strike vote by mid-January.

Q7. What can I do to support my bargaining teams?

A. We all have a role to play in ensuring we get a good contract. When your local asks you to participate in an activity or event that supports the bargaining teams, please do so. Many areas will be holding bargaining kick-off events Nov. 4. Talk to your steward to find out your area's event or go to <http://www.opseu.org/ops/barg2008/index.htm>. Every member needs to find a way to show their support in the workplace. Wear the OPS bargaining trillium t-shirt. Your local can order them at <http://www.opseu.org/merchandise/opsmerchandise.htm> Wear the trillium sticker or pin it in your workstation. Sign the trillium card. You will receive the trillium cards and stickers from your steward in the coming days.