

7 Steps to a Contract

Want to make Nova Scotia Power work better for you, your co-workers and your families? By following these steps – and understanding the legal rights that protect you and your fellow employees – you’ll be on your way toward acquiring the kinds of wages, retirement security and other benefits that you deserve.

Step One

Talk to your co-workers

What do you want to change?

The first step to making positive change on the job is to decide which concerns you want addressed. Everyone has different issues, but usually there’s a common theme – such as lack of a voice in the workplace, favoritism, low pay, or little retirement security.

Quietly ask your co-workers what improvements they’d like to see and gauge their interest in forming a union.

The vast majority of employers will spend significant resources to defeat a union campaign. But after workers organize successfully, most employers learn that by negotiating a contract, showing respect for and working more close with their employees can they can actually improve their businesses.

Step Two

Reach out and connect

After you and a group of trusted co-workers have privately discussed key workplace issues, make a plan to contact the IBEW. When you’re ready, get in touch with us, and an IBEW representative will meet with you and a small group of co-workers to answer questions. Tell us about your concerns on the job and ask about the benefits of union representation. Then you’ll begin to develop a comprehensive organizing plan together.

Step Three

Form an organizing committee

Your IBEW representative will help you build an organizing committee made up of your co-workers from throughout the facility. It's important to get buy-in from representatives of all departments and shifts, and the committee should reflect the racial, ethnic, age and gender diversity at the facility. This group will work with the IBEW representative on the best way to implement the organizing plan.

Here's where the rubber meets the road. The committee must be prepared to work hard to educate yourselves and your co-workers about the union and to warn and inform co-workers about the tactics companies often use to block workers from joining together. The IBEW has fact sheets and literature for you to use or modify to help educate your co-workers. You also need to learn all you can about workers' rights to organize and must understand the union's democratic policies and principles.

In order for the organizing committee to communicate with all members, the following information must be gathered as completely as possible:

- **Workplace structure:** departments, work areas, jobs, shifts
- **Employee information:** name, address, phone number, shift, job title, and department for each worker
- **Employer information:** other locations, parent company, products, customers, union history, relationship with other union-represented facilities
- **The status** of employer-worker relations and morale in each department

This may seem like a lot of work – but keep in mind that your IBEW organizer will be able to help gather this information. He or she can also connect you with IBEW members across Nova Scotia who can help.

Step Four

Identify the improvements you want to make

The organizing committee should outline concrete changes that need to be made at work. These are the issues that will be used to gain support and get people involved, and that will be addressed in the first union contract – such as wages, shift scheduling and more. It is important that you address the concerns of your co-workers without making promises you can't keep. Be realistic about the improvements a union can make, learn about and refer to gains made by other IBEW members at unionized companies.

Clearly stating the issues during the campaign will help win the support of your co-workers.

Step Five

Sign up a majority on authorization cards

When one of your co-workers supports the union, you may then ask them to sign an authorization card. This is simply a document that allows a local union of the IBEW to represent you in collective bargaining.

Under law, management is never told who has signed cards and who hasn't. It's just another way your decision stays private and confidential.

The law also requires that the IBEW return your card to you if you request it. And nobody will ever force you to sign a card. The decision to sign is entirely up to you and you alone. (To download a card, [click here](#).)

When at least 65 percent of the cards are signed and collected in Nova Scotia, the IBEW will file an application for certification with the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board and a secret ballot vote will occur usually on the fifth business day.

Step Six

Win the union election

While you await your vote, the volunteer organizing committee needs to stay active. It becomes even more important to spread accurate information to defeat unsubstantiated rumors and stand by anyone who appears to be targeted by management because of their

support for organizing a union. Sometimes it is necessary to “act like a union” by showing solidarity in support of positive changes in the workplace. This may be as simple as wearing buttons or as complex as contacting local community leaders or other labour organizations for support.

Winning a union election not only requires a strong, diverse organizing committee and a solid way of addressing worker concerns – but there must also be a plan to fight Nova Scotia’s anti-union campaign.

It is helpful to know the common tactics used by employers in anti-union drives in order to let other workers know what to expect. Many employers will use both legal and illegal tactics to discourage workers from organizing. That is why it is important to know your rights, and know when your employer is breaking the law. You should always keep detailed notes of any violation of your rights and make sure that the IBEW organizer knows about the situation. When in doubt, write it down and tell the organizer. On your election day, you and your co-workers will vote by secret ballot for representation. A simple majority of 50 percent plus one wins.

Step Seven

Negotiate a contract

The organizing campaign does not let up after an election victory. The real goal of the campaign is getting a union contract – the legal document the IBEW and the employer negotiate and sign, covering everything from wages, benefits and retirement security to how disputes will be handled.

Workers must be mobilized to support their contract demands and convince management to meet them. In many cases, winning a first contract requires as much if not more work than the organizing campaign. The momentum from an organizing win needs to be funneled directly into your efforts to secure the collective bargaining agreement with the company. At this point, your camaraderie will be strong, your skills honed, and your goals clear – all of which will help immensely.

After you have negotiated a first agreement, the IBEW will continue to be there for you, ensuring that the contract is enforced by handling grievances, keeping you informed of programs and activities, and – most importantly – giving you a voice at work!

Remember – your right to organize is protected by law.

What you're doing is completely legal. It is your legal right to discuss employment conditions with your co-workers and to join together to negotiate work conditions with the company.

Under the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Act, you have the legal right to form a union in your workplace. The act says:

- An employee has the right to join a trade union of his or her own choice and to participate in its lawful activities.
- An employee has the right to cast a secret ballot in favour of, or in opposition to, a trade union at a representation vote ordered by the Board.
- An employee has the right not to be discriminated against or penalized by an employer or by a trade union because he or she is exercising rights under the Trade union act.
- An employee has the right not to be penalized because he or she participated in a proceeding under the Trade union act.