

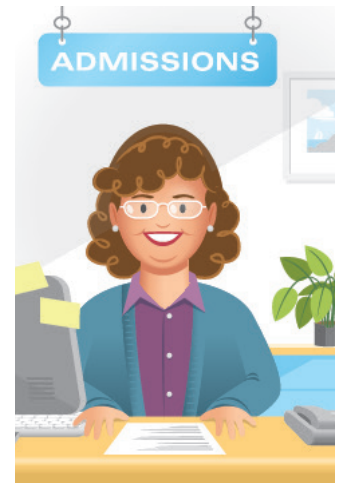


NSGEU

Making Workplaces Better

JOIN US

902-424-4063 | 1-877-556-7438 | WWW.NSGEU.CA



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A message from the NSGEU President,

My name is Jason MacLean and I am the elected President of the NSGEU. I became involved with the NSGEU as a member working in Corrections, in Sydney, Cape Breton. I was curious about how my union worked and wanted to help improve working conditions for myself and my fellow workers. I would like to extend a warm welcome to you for being interested in joining our NSGEU community.

The NSGEU is a dynamic organization with a place for you and your co-workers. We have over 60 years' experience representing working women and men who provide a vast array of public services for Nova Scotians. Whether you are

working at a group home, in home support, in long term care, or in housing, or pensions, or tourism, or more... there is a spot for you in the NSGEU.

We recognize the work our members have done over the years to build the NSGEU into what it is today – one of the strongest and most effective unions in the province.

The NSGEU has hired incredible staff, most from the membership, who have experience and skills in negotiating contracts and helping you navigate through your workplace rights if you encounter any problems at work. We have staff who specialize in pensions, occupational health & safety, research, and policy analysis, and coordinate important union initiatives. We also have staff who help organize groups of workers like yours.

The NSGEU has a strong history of making life better for all Nova Scotians as well as our own membership. Joining the NSGEU means you are joining a group of 31,000 other Nova Scotians who are working together to improve equity and fairness in our workplaces and in society at large.

If you do not know much about unions or the NSGEU, do not worry. We have an education program which will teach you all you need to know about who we are and your fundamental rights in the workplace. You can also learn a great deal by becoming familiar with our website (<https://nsgeu.ca/>) or following us on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/nsgeu>) or Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/nsgeu>).

We look forward to representing you and welcoming you into our community.



Jason MacLean, President, NSGEU



A Union Will Make a Difference in Your Work Life

Being part of a union is a human and legal right – no matter where you work in Nova Scotia.

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Hi. I'm Lori Smith. I am here to help you and your coworkers come together to bargain collectively.

Through my membership in the Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union, I have learned how important a union is to my life, my community, and my workplace. When I first joined the NSGEU as a member of Local 66 (Regional Residential Services Society), I became a union activist and am now the NSGEU's Organizing Officer.



I believe it is in every worker's best interest to belong to a union.

I also believe and respect that it is your choice.

You will find information in this booklet on:

- the benefits of belonging to a union
- the services and benefits that come with NSGEU membership
- a step by step outline of the process of bringing a union to your workplace
- a Frequently Asked Question section for some of the most commonly asked questions we get about joining NSGEU.

If you want a voice in your workplace, and are interested in hearing about how the NSGEU can help you, please contact me at 1-902-456-6531 or by email at lsmith@nsgeu.ca.

What is a union?



A union is a group of working people who come together to improve their working conditions.

Alone, you might not have any power to improve your working conditions, but together, you have a voice and the power to make change.

When you belong to a union, you help decide what is bargained for. Commonly, locals bargain for: higher wages, better benefits, better pensions, longer vacations, and paid sick time.

Unions raise the standard for other workers in your community because as you bargain for better working conditions, other employers mirror what you have achieved as they compete to attract employees.

For example, unions are responsible for:

- Weekends
- All Breaks at Work, including your Lunch Breaks
- Paid Vacation
- Maternity and Parental Leave
- Sick Leave
- Canada Pension Plan
- Minimum Wage
- Human Rights Acts (Prohibits Employer Discrimination)
- 8-Hour Work Day (or less)

- Overtime Pay
- Child Labour Laws
- Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS)
- 40 Hour Work Week (or less)
- Worker's Compensation
- Employment Insurance
- Workplace Pensions
- Workplace Safety Standards and Regulations
- Employer Health Care Benefits e.g. Dental, Life, and Vision Insurance
- Collective Bargaining Rights for Employees
- Labour Standards Acts
- Whistleblower Protection Laws
- Compensation increases
- Sexual Harassment Laws
- Holiday Pay
- Employer rights limitations
- The Right to Strike
- Equal Pay and Employment Equity
- Job Security

Why join the NSGEU?

By joining the NSGEU, you are joining a made-in-Nova Scotia union with a proven track record of improving the working conditions of our members.

Your Collective Agreement:

A collective agreement lays out the rules both the workers and the employer agree to follow.

When you have a collective agreement, and a strong union to represent you, you can have a workplace that is fair for all.

Your voice in bargaining

As a member of the largest union in Nova Scotia, you and your co-workers can draw on significant resources and experience to support your contract negotiations in the pursuit of a fair collective agreement. The NSGEU helps negotiate more than 80 collective agreements for members who work for government, school boards, universities, hospitals, group homes, liquor stores, correctional facilities, nursing homes, municipal departments, Cape Breton police, and more.

With the NSGEU, you have the strength and support of 31,000 fellow members.

NSGEU - WHY JOIN?

Fair and affordable membership dues

All NSGEU members pay union dues of 1.25 per cent of gross annual earnings. Dues are not assessed on overtime, pay premiums, or allowances). Dues are 100% tax deductible and will appear on your T-4 slip.

Union dues are NSGEU's only source of money. The union is non-profit and democratic: all spending decisions are made by members elected by their locals. See page 10 for more information on locals.

You will not pay union dues until you have a signed collective agreement in effect.

What do your union dues pay for?

1. A say in your working conditions
2. A negotiated collective agreement with grievance processes, fair hiring practices, appropriate rates of pay, consistent and reasonable scheduling, and other improved working conditions
3. Opportunities for union education and training
4. Access to NSGEU scholarships and bursaries for you and your dependents
5. Employment contract related legal services
6. Access the NSGEU discount list and discount programs
7. Support in areas like pensions and benefits, research, government policy, communications, occupational health & safety, and campaign organizing
8. Membership in a provincial union that defends and protects public services in communities across the province.

See NSGEU Membership Benefits, pages 24-27.

As a new member, we don't expect you to know what a union is all about.

Check out our education courses and educational videos at www.nsgeu.ca.

Support when you need it

NSGEU is a democratic organization with active members in workplaces across the province.

We have a staff of over 60 people who work as Employee Relations Officers (EROs), negotiators, administrative professionals, and membership clerks. They also include specialized services officers in such areas as, occupational health & safety, pension and benefits, research, policy analysis, organizing, education, and communications.

Your NSGEU Employee Relations Officer (ERO) and Administrative Support Staff

Every NSGEU local has at least one NSGEU staff person assigned specifically to help them negotiate and enforce their collective agreement. These staff members are called Employee Relations Officers (EROs). Most are former NSGEU members and they are committed to the principles and philosophies of the NSGEU and the labour movement in general.

Every ERO is assigned an administrative support staff who assists them in their day-to-day work and ensures work flows smoothly.

An Employee Relations Officer (ERO) will be assigned to your local. Your ERO is there to assist your local in negotiating your collective agreement and they are there to help you if there are any problems in your workplace.

NSGEU's Labour Resource Centre

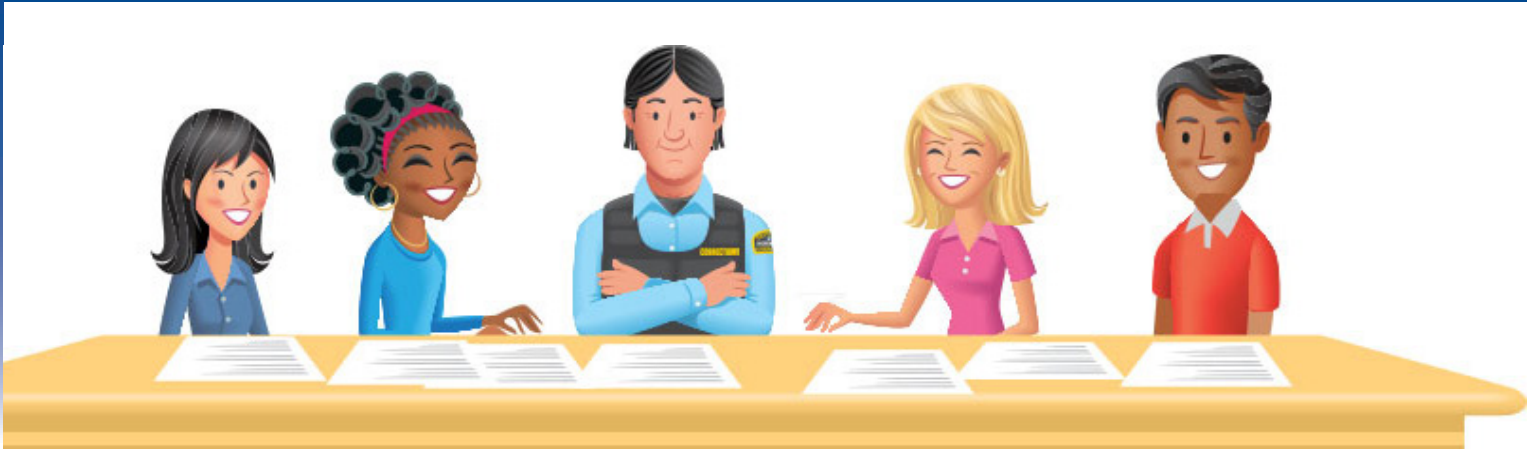
The NSGEU works hard to make sure we are available to you when you need us.

Our staff includes a dedicated team that we call the Labour Resource Centre (LRC) who work Monday – Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. They'll either answer your workplace-related questions directly, or will document your question and forward it to the person who can answer it including your Employee Relations Officer. You can also leave a message after hours.

The LRC provides members with an immediate and accessible means of dealing with day-to-day inquiries including follow-up to union related issues. It also provides stewards in the workplace with up to date information and assistance when dealing with members' issues.

Our staff can assist you with any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to call us. Contact: 902-424-4063 Toll-Free: 1-877-556-7438 Email: inquiry@nsgeu.ca.

NSGEU - WHY JOIN?



Education you can use

As a new member, we don't expect you to know what a union is all about. We offer you educational opportunities where you can learn the skills to succeed in any positions you decide to take on in the union. Our members are often surprised at the skills they develop and the opportunities that arise when they get involved.

If you are interested in union education, once you are a member, please watch your email for invitations to apply for courses, call us, or check our on-line calendar at <https://nsgeu.ca/>.

Occupational Health & Safety - An NSGEU priority!

The NSGEU has a full-time Occupational Health & Safety Officer who supports members and committees to address workplace concerns and make improvements to health & safety in general.

Over the years we have taken many initiatives to improve Health & Safety for our members including:

- taking an active role in the establishment of a safety association (AWARE NS) for health & community care workers,
- forming a coalition with other unions and mounting a campaign to pressure the government to enact violence in the workplace regulations,
- co-founding the Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia which advocates for increased support for Mental Health services

KNOW YOUR HEALTH & SAFETY RIGHTS:

The Right to Know

The Right to Refuse Unsafe Work

The Right to Participate

NSGEU's Bully-Free Workplace Program

Bullying is a form of violence in the workplace; it is not part of the job. We all have a responsibility to stop it and to create workplaces free from bullying.



NSGEU's Bully-Free Workplace Program was launched on Sept 8, 2010 after bullying was identified as a wide-spread psychological health & safety issue among our membership. The program has been delivered to our members and employers throughout Nova Scotia ever since.

At the core of our approach is the understanding that people learn best from their co-workers and peers and we have trained NSGEU members to deliver our internationally recognized program in workplaces across the province. If you think your workplace could benefit from our Bully Free Workplaces Program, please contact us at 424-4063 or 1-877-556-7438 or inquiry@nsgeu.ca.

Your voice in the community

As an NSGEU member, you will be part of a much larger union community with many new opportunities and connections to communities across Nova Scotia through our Regional, and Occupational Councils, our Committees, and our Board of Directors.

We also donate to many community organizations that matter to all Nova Scotians like Feed Nova Scotia, Kids Help Line, Mental Health Coalition of Nova Scotia, Transition Houses of Nova Scotia, and more.

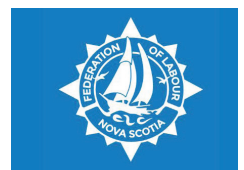
We care about the public services that members of the NSGEU provide. We know services make a real difference to families and communities. We'll speak up when cuts or other government decisions are threatening the quality of public services for all Nova Scotians.

Your voice in the larger labour movement

The NSGEU communicates and co-operates with other labour and social groups to promote labour and worker concerns. Among these are the many District Labour Councils in Nova Scotia as well as the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour (NSFL). There are bursaries, awards and educational opportunities available to our members through the NSFL. For more information about the NSFL visit <http://nslabour.ca/>.



NSGEU is one of many provincial government organizations that make up the 325,000 member National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). Through NUPGE we hold membership in the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Canada's largest labour body with more than 2.5 million members.



There are bursaries and educational opportunities available to our members through our affiliation with NUPGE and with the CLC. For more information about NUPGE, visit <https://www.nupge.ca/>. For more information about the CLC, visit www.canadianlabour.ca.

About the NSGEU

Your Local

A local is a group of workers who work for the same employer and have been certified by the Nova Scotia Labour Board to bargain collectively with their employer. It is the basic building block of the NSGEU – the foundation of the union. The NSGEU has over 80 locals.

Members work together at the local level with support from union staff and fellow union members to improve their specific working conditions, and to ensure the employer is following the collective agreement.

We encourage our new members to attend local meetings and stay connected. This is where you will elect the leadership of your local and share your concerns or successes with your co-workers.

Local meetings

Cellphones, email, telephone town halls, and video calls have revolutionized communication, but there is still no better way for a group of people to exchange information, debate issues and find common cause than during face-to-face meetings.

We encourage all members to attend local meetings and do our best to make that easy for you. That's why the union reimburses (at set rates) mileage and child-and elder-care expenses you incur to attend your local meeting.

At a local meeting, you can:

- Share workplace issues and concerns
- Run (or vote) for the following positions: your local executive, stewards, bargaining committee members, regional and occupational councillors, delegates to the Triennial NSGEU Convention, your health and safety representatives, your local District Labour Council representatives, and your Labour/Management Committee representatives
- Share information about union education and opportunities

Child Care and Elder Care Expenses

Provided that the guidelines are met, the NSGEU will subsidize child care and elder care expenses for members on authorized NSGEU business, including local meetings and education programs.

Local Stewards



Stewards are members of your local who are very familiar with your collective agreement and help co-workers and the employer ensure that the agreement is being adhered to.

Being a local steward is challenging but incredibly rewarding. You help ensure the employer abides by the collective agreement and you help advise your co-workers of their rights in the workplace. You are the person who co-workers will come to when they are having issues or concerns at work. Management may also come to you for clarification of their roles and responsibilities.

To be an effective steward, you need to know your collective agreement. You must be a trusted co-worker, a good listener, and able to keep co-worker information confidential.

A steward keeps your local chief steward and your Employee Relations Officer in the loop, is informed about complaints, and potential areas of labour-management conflict.

Stewards are appointed by your local executive, subject to a vote by the membership during a local meeting.

How do I become a steward?

Stewards are voted in by their co-workers and ratified by the membership at a local meeting. The number of stewards for your local will depend on the size of your workplace and the number of members.

Don't worry if you do not know much about what your roles or responsibilities are. The NSGEU has courses for you to take and people to support you as you learn how to be an effective union steward.

Local Executive

Local elections are held every three years at a local meeting, within a month of the NSGEU Triennial Convention or as soon as your local joins the NSGEU.

Every member in good standing, a.k.a. a signed member, is entitled to run for and/or vote for these positions. **Signed members are those who have signed a membership application card.**

Your local will need to elect an executive made up of a president, at least one vice-president, a secretary, a treasurer, and a Chief Steward.

The Local President

The local president conducts the affairs of the local by holding regular local meetings and facilitating communication between NSGEU head office and the local members.



To become a member of your Local's executive, you need to be a member in good standing, a.k.a. a signed member and you need to be elected at a local meeting.

The Local Vice-President

The local vice-president assists the president in her or his duties, and acts as local president when the elected president is absent.

The Local Secretary

The local secretary prepares meeting notices and agendas, and takes, distributes, and stores the minutes of local meetings. The secretary must also ensure that copies of all minutes are kept in the local's minute book or binder and keep accurate attendance records for all local meetings.

The Local Treasurer

The local treasurer keeps accurate records of all the local's financial transactions, and ensures adherence to the NSGEU's financial policies. He or she reimburses members' mileage and child- or elder-care costs incurred while attending local meetings.

The Chief Steward

The Chief Steward helps find solutions to workplace issues and concerns, and ensures your employer adheres to your collective agreement.

Other Representatives of Your Local

Your local also has a variety of other elected officials who play an important role in your work life, and who help your local marshal the power of the entire NSGEU when you need it. They include:

Bargaining Committee:

Your Bargaining Committee members are responsible for negotiating your local's collective agreement. Collective agreements always have a set term, which is usually between two and five years. Your local will elect at least two members to meet regularly with your local's Employee Relations Officer to set your bargaining priorities and proposals.

Convention Delegates:

Your Triennial Convention delegates attend and actively participate in the single most important event on NSGEU's calendar — the Triennial Convention. Every third spring, at least two members from each NSGEU local gather for several days of debate and discussion that set the union's overall goals and strategies for three years. Convention Delegates also elect (and are eligible to run for) the five positions on the NSGEU Provincial Executive Committee, which exercises day-to-day authority over the union.

Regional Council Representative(s):

Your Regional Council representative(s) attends the regular meetings of your Local's Regional Council, where issues and concerns specific to your region of Nova Scotia are discussed and debated. Your regional council rep is a vital link between your local and the NSGEU Board of Directors.

Occupational Council Representative(s):

Your Occupational Council representative(s) attend the regular meetings of your Local's Occupational Council(s) where they discuss and debate issues and concerns pertinent to your profession. Like your Regional Council rep, your Occupational Council rep(s) is a vital link between your local and the NSGEU Board of Directors.



Your Committee Pool representatives:

When you elect Committee Pool representatives, they are eligible to be assigned by the Provincial Executive Committee to sit on one of NSGEU's Committees of the Board. Representatives on committees are chosen to ensure regional representation and meet regularly to help inform and carry out various facets of the union's activities.

Committees of the Board include: the Finance Committee, the Health, Safety & Environment (HSE) Committee, the Women's Issues Committee, Human Rights Committee, Political Action Committee, Education Committee and more.



Safety Representative / Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) members.

For any workplace with more than five employees, the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act mandates that the employer recognizes at least one employee as a workers' safety representative. The act doesn't say that a local must elect these representatives, but many do.

Labour-Management Committee representatives:

Many workplaces have Labour-Management Committees which meet in a relatively informal manner to keep the lines of communication open between employees and managers. There is no rule that says a local must elect its representatives to this committee, but again, many do.

District Labour Council representative:

If your local is based in an area which has a District Labour Council, your local might elect a member to represent you at your particular labour council.

NSGEU Provincial Committees

Ad Hoc Young Workers — Members of this committee are 35 years old or younger. They recommend action/policy to ensure young workers have a strong voice in the NSGEU and the broader labour movement.

Human Rights — The Human Rights Committee monitors human rights and social issues, particularly those of concern to under-represented groups.

Health and Safety & Environment — This committee is responsible for all aspects of workplace health and safety concerns and for collecting information on hazardous workplace conditions.

Ad Hoc Pension and Benefits — This committee specializes in pension legislation and regulations, the improvement of pension benefits, and in insurance coverage of benefit to the membership.

Political Action — This committee aims to raise the awareness of NSGEU members to political matters and concerns without endorsing specific political parties or individuals.

Resolutions — The Resolution Committee provides information and clarification of all non-Constitutional resolutions to the NSGEU's Triennial Convention.

Education — This committee approves financial assistance in the form of scholarships and bursaries for members and dependents for educational pursuits.

Social and Recreational — The Social Rec Committee organizes social and recreational events for NSGEU members and dependents including the NSGEU annual picnic.

Women's — The Women's Committee encourages participation in the Union by women while striving to eliminate barriers to participation. As well, they raise awareness of workplace issues important to women and celebrate women's achievements.

Finance — This Committee is charged with reviewing the Union's budget and audited statements and review finance related policies and make recommendations to the Board.



Collective Bargaining

Bargaining is one of the key ways belonging to the NSGEU helps improve your work life.

We help you negotiate strong collective agreements that provide you with legally binding terms of employment. Your collective agreement sets the terms and conditions of work in such areas as: wages, job security, vacation, scheduling, job-posting procedures, hours of work, overtime allocation, expenses, travel allowances, treatment of part-time/casual employees, and benefits. In some cases, collective agreements also set the terms of health plans, pension plans, and long-term disability plans.

We help enforce the terms of your collective agreement.

When your Bargaining Committee negotiates your first collective agreement it is important to realize that this is a document that both the union and the employer has agreed to. If you find that your employer acts in a way that is inconsistent with the terms and conditions written in the collective agreement, you have the support of your local steward, your local executive, and the staff at the NSGEU including your ERO.

If your employer does violate the collective agreement, you will have a way to hold them accountable - it is called a grievance process.

You are supported all the way along by your ERO if you decide to enter into the grievance process. The NSGEU will assume expenses associated with grievance hearings or arbitrations, including legal fees, paid time off, and travel costs.

Your collective agreement will have provisions that lay out a process by which grievances can be resolved. Most of these provisions lay out a "step" system, which gives the employer and employee a variety of opportunities to solve the problem, ranging from a simple meeting between the parties to a formal court-like process called arbitration.



WE NEGOTIATE:

- Wages
- Job Security
- Vacation
- Scheduling
- Job-Posting procedures
- Hours of work
- Overtime allocation
- Expenses
- Travel allowances
- Treatment of part-time/casual employees
- Benefits... and more

Your collective agreement includes terms and conditions of work agreed to by the employer and the union. These include things like: job security, vacation, scheduling language, job posting procedures, hours of work, pension, benefits, and more...

NSGEU Scholarships and Bursaries

NSGEU is pleased to provide financial assistance to members in good standing and their dependents who are pursuing higher education.

Bursaries and scholarships are available to those who are full-time students pursuing a degree, diploma or certificate from a university or other recognized institution of higher learning. A member or dependent may apply for assistance once every two years.

MEMBER BURSARIES

Every year, the union offers 29 member bursaries (14 in March and 15 in October). They are awarded based on financial need and at the discretion of the NSGEU Education Committee.

MEMBER'S DEPENDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

Once a year, the union offers 10 dependent scholarship awards: one \$2,500 scholarship, four \$1,500 scholarships, and five \$1,000 scholarships. Scholarships are awarded based on scholastic achievement at the discretion of the NSGEU Education Committee.

MEMBER'S DEPENDENT BURSARIES

Once a year, the union offers 15 dependent bursary awards of \$1,000 (up to two of these can be awarded to dependent spouses of members). Bursaries will be awarded based on the financial need of the applicant at the discretion of the NSGEU Education Committee.

AMATEUR SPORTS AWARDS AND FINE ART AWARDS

Each year, the NSGEU Social/Recreation Committee may issue up to 15 Amateur Sports Awards (of which up to three may be Fine Arts Awards) of \$300 each to members, or children of members, who are amateur athletes or artists. These awards help defray the costs of participation in or training for sports or art.



How to Organize a Union at Your Workplace

1. BEGIN WITH AN ORGANIZING DRIVE AT YOUR WORKPLACE

Invite the NSGEU to begin an organizing drive in your workplace. Call the NSGEU Organizing Officer, Lori Smith at 902-456-6531 or by email at lsmith@nsgeu.ca

2. SIGNING UNION CARDS

Once NSGEU has been invited to begin an organizing campaign in your workplace, you and your co-workers will have an opportunity to show your support for the union by signing union cards.

A signed union card is the first step toward defining yourselves as members of a bargaining unit in the NSGEU.

3. UNION FILES APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION

Once the signed union cards are gathered, the NSGEU Organizing Officer will submit the signed cards to the Labour Board. This is called an Application for Certification. The law requires that at least 40% of the affected employees must sign a card in order to certify the bargaining unit. NSGEU has a policy that requires 65% of the bargaining unit to sign a card in order to proceed. The Application will also describe the new proposed bargaining unit.

The Labour Board is required to hold a secret ballot vote within seven days of the filing of the application.

4. A SECRET BALLOT VOTE.

A secret ballot vote will decide whether or not you get to have a union at your workplace. There is a strict process in place that ensures that no one will know how you voted.

All employees are entitled to vote. The vote happens at your place of work and your employer is required to give you the opportunity to vote.

If a majority of the voters (50% plus 1) in your workplace vote to become a local of the NSGEU, the Labour Board will certify your union.

5. **CERTIFICATION OF LOCAL**

Once your bargaining unit is certified then the NSGEU becomes your official bargaining agent and negotiates on your behalf.

Your employer can no longer settle wages, outstanding issues or working conditions directly with individual employees.

6. **LOCAL ELECTIONS**

Once the votes are counted and you are members you will elect your Local Executive, your Regional and Occupational Council representatives, your Chief Steward, your Bargaining Committee and your Committee Pool representatives. You will also elect your NSGEU Triennial Convention Delegates and your District Labour Council Representatives.

7. **BEGIN NEGOTIATING YOUR FIRST COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT**

Your Local's Bargaining Committee will serve notice to bargain and begin the process of negotiating your first collective agreement. They will collect information from you in the form of a survey to find out what issues are most important to you. Together with NSGEU staff, they will assemble the bargaining proposals that will be negotiated with your employer.

Once your Bargaining Committee and your employer have reached agreement, this document is called a tentative agreement. Before it becomes your first legal collective agreement, you must vote on it. This is called ratification. It takes 50 percent plus one of those members who vote to ratify the tentative agreement.



The Secret Ballot Vote

All employees are entitled to vote. The vote will occur at your place of work and your employer is required to give you the opportunity to vote.

The vote is by secret ballot. NO ONE will know how you voted.

An Officer of the Labour Board will be present along with two scrutineers - one from your management team and one appointed by the NSGEU.

You will mark your ballot in privacy, indicating your choice by marking an "X" in the box. Refold the ballot and seal it in the plain, unmarked envelope provided. There must be no markings on this envelope. Return the sealed envelope to the Labour Board's Officer.

The Officer will place the unmarked envelope in a second envelope marked with your name and place it in the ballot box.

When the voting has ended, the ballot box is sealed and returned to the Labour Board, where it will be counted at a later date.

The outer envelope is marked with a name to allow the Labour Board to remove a ballot before the vote is counted. As an example, if your manager voted it is quite reasonable that she would not be included in the union's bargaining unit because she is management. Before the actual vote count, her ballot would be removed and destroyed; no one would know how she voted.

The Vote Count

The ballots are counted by a member of the Labour Board staff and two scrutineers, someone representing your management and someone representing the NSGEU.

When the Ballot Box is opened, the envelopes for any employees who have been excluded will be removed and destroyed. No one will ever know how they voted.

The remaining ballots will then have the outside envelope containing the name removed and the inner plain, unmarked envelope is put back in the Ballot Box.

The Ballot Box will then be reopened and the ballots are removed from the unmarked envelopes. The ballots are then counted.

This lengthy procedure ensures complete privacy.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is every employee eligible to join the union?

Not necessarily. There are some employees who may hold positions that for a variety of reasons are excluded from being part of the bargaining unit. They may exercise managerial functions or they may be employed in areas where they are responsible for confidential labour relations matters, for example.

Can I help my co-workers in joining the union?

Yes. Organizing a union and participating in one are legal activities and rights, protected under the Trade Union Act. It is also a human right and protected under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. You cannot conduct union business during working hours however. It should be done off site during non-working hours.

Can my employer take any action against me for joining a union? (see page 22)

The Trade Union Act, under Unfair Practices, Section 3, also makes it illegal for your employer to penalize you or threaten you in any way because of your union involvement.

Once the application for certification is filed, the employer may not alter your wage rates or any other condition of your employment without the union's consent.

This freeze takes effect on the date the union applies for certification and remains in place until your first collective agreement is signed.

What happens if an employer violates workers' rights during an organizing drive?

Notify the NSGEU's Organizing Officer, Lori Smith, right away. The union can file an "Unfair Labour Practice Complaint" with the Labour Board, who in turn has the authority to order any remedy that they feel is appropriate and that addresses any violation of the Act.

Does the employer ever find out who supported the union?

No. The Labour Relations Act guarantees the secrecy of all membership evidence. Employers never find out who signed cards or how any of the members voted.

Does joining a union mean I will be going on strike?

When you join a union you do not go on strike unless you and your coworkers vote to go on strike. It is your decision and does not happen unless you choose to. Going on strike is an option for those members who have the right to strike and cannot reach an agreement otherwise. It is a last resort and is not ever used lightly.

During the Certification Process:

The Employer May:

- Continue to operate their business in the usual manner.
- Communicate with employees for the purpose of expressing their views, **provided such statements are not coercive or intimidating.**

The Employer May Not:

- Discharge, suspend, transfer, lay off, or otherwise discipline an employee during a certification drive, except for proper cause;
- Alter the terms and conditions of employment, without the consent of the Labour Relations Board;
- Promise employees a pay increase, promotion, improved working conditions, additional benefits or special favours to stay out of the union or vote against it;
- Deny merit or automatic pay increases if the purpose is to discourage union activity;
- Give individual employees raises during a union campaign, if the purpose is to influence an employee to vote against the union;
- Threaten employees with loss of their jobs, reduction of wages or the loss of benefits;
- Use any threatening or intimidating language designed to influence an employee in the exercise of his or her rights to join or not join a union;
- Threaten to close or move the company or to drastically reduce operations if the union is certified;
- Discriminate against any employee because of his or her taking part in union organizing activities;
- Ask employees if they signed a Union card or how they are going to vote;
- Prohibit employees from participating in union solicitation during their own time, such as breaks and meal periods;
- Prohibit employees from distributing union literature in non-working areas during non-working time;
- Say that they won't bargain or deal with the union if it gets in.

YOUR RIGHTS DURING CERTIFICATION



NSGEU Membership Benefits

1. **Negotiations** – a bargaining committee is elected by and from the members of the particular local preparing to negotiate. The committee then calls for proposals from all the local members and prepares the bargaining package. NSGEU provides a trained negotiator to lead the bargaining team.
2. **Arbitration/Adjudication** – members who wish to file grievances have the assistance of trained Stewards at their workplace and union staff. The NSGEU will assume expenses associated with grievance hearings or arbitrations, including legal fees, paid time off, and travel costs as per NSGEU policies.
3. **Policy and Research** – NSGEU provides policy analysis of government legislation, and research services for negotiations, arbitrations, and any other membership requirements that are within the scope of union labour and social concerns.
4. **Education** – NSGEU has a year-round varied program which includes Local Officer, Steward, leadership, communications, and courses in trade unionism, pre-retirement, and other membership-specific education.
5. **Member Support** – the Employee Relations Officers (EROs) are NSGEU staff who provide services to the membership in contract interpretation, grievance handling, and many other contract and membership matters. EROs are assigned to the Locals to answer questions or deal with concerns of individual members.
6. **Labour Resource Centre (LRC)** – the Labour Resource Centre handles all incoming calls and general inquiry e-mails during an 8:30am – 5:30pm schedule from Monday to Friday. The LRC provides members with an immediate and accessible means of dealing with day to day inquiries including follow-up. The LRC provides stewards in the workplace with up to date information and assistance when dealing with members issues.
7. **Communications/Public Relations** – each NSGEU member receives the union newsletter, The Union Stand, and other special information through direct and/or electronic mail and workplace distribution. Union clothing may be purchased at reasonable cost. External communications are conducted by the Union President or designated persons through news releases, press conferences, and other media events.

NSGEU MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

8. **Committee Services** – provincial and ad hoc committees formed from members in all parts of the province have provided information and direction to the NSGEU Executive and Board of Directors. Among these:
- (a) **Constitution and By-Laws** – this committee is generally activated prior to the Biennial Convention to evaluate and recommend proposals for constitutional change.
 - (b) **Education** – Assist the Education Officer to analyze and review members' educational programs and develop an education calendar of training. The Committee decides on the eligibility of applicants for NSGEU Scholarships and Bursaries. Bursary/Scholarship recipients will be determined by a majority vote in accordance with the Guidelines for Scholarships and Bursaries as approved by the Board.
 - (c) **Finance** – oversees the financial concerns of the NSGEU. The Committee reviews the budget and makes recommendations to the Board, and reviews the Financial Statements and audited Statements ensuring these are published in the NSGEU newsletter.
 - (d) **Health, Safety & Environment** – envision workplaces where work related injury, illness and environmental harm are not tolerated, and where NSGEU members and employees are armed with the knowledge and resources to demand safe, healthy workplaces in environmentally sustainable communities.

Ensure our members and employees are provided the knowledge, support and encouragement to achieve our vision. We will advocate for their success and intervene on their behalf when barriers are encountered.
 - (e) **Human Rights** – encompasses issues pertaining to members in the workplace and any other areas of Union involvement as it relates to Human Rights. Acknowledge that Human Rights are the recognition of the equal and inalienable rights and the inherent dignity of all members of the Human family.
 - (f) **Political Action** – this committee aims to raise the awareness of NSGEU members to political matters and concerns without endorsing specific political parties or individuals.
 - (h) **Resolutions** – provides information and clarification of all non-Constitutional resolutions to the NSGEU's Biennial Convention, including recommendations of concurrence or non-concurrence to the Convention delegates.
 - (i) **Social Recreation** – is to facilitate social functions in each region through the Regional Councils, to provide financial assistance to Regional Councils in their organizing of social and recreational activities for the members in their region, to select Amateur and Fine Arts Awards recipients and to oversee the social functions of the NSGEU convention.

NSGEU MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- (j) **Women's Issues** – to recognize and resolve problems relating to women within our union; to give advice on these issues to the Executive Committee for the Board; to stress the importance for equality in the workplace; to underline the importance of using the Union and the collective bargaining process to make changes in the interest of women and equality; to encourage more active participation in the union by women members; to be more Pro active in the education and awareness of women in the Union.
9. **NSGEU Financial Assistance** – the NSGEU offers financial assistance to its Locals, members, families and others through the following:
- (a) **Amateur Sports Awards** – six sports awards of \$300 each, including one for Fine Arts, are given annually through the Social/Recreation committee, to members or children of members engaged in amateur athletics, to help defray costs of participation or training for competition. The deadline for application is March 31 of each year.
 - (b) **Atlantic Region Labour Law Course** – the NSGEU will provide up to \$600 for a member to attend the week long “Labour Law” course offered each year in Memramcook N.B.
 - (c) **Bursaries** – several financial awards in varying amounts are made during the year to NSGEU members who are upgrading their education/training, full or part-time. Bursaries are awarded primarily on the basis of need. Special bursaries are also awarded to the children of members. Other bursaries are available through the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour.
 - (d) **Labour College Scholarships** – special scholarships are available on an annual basis for any NSGEU member accepted to the Labour College of Canada. If no NSGEU member is attending Labour College, the scholarship may be awarded to a member from any NUPGE component, or from any other eligible unit.
 - (e) **Scholarships** – several scholarship awards are available each year for children of NSGEU members. Awards are made primarily on scholastic achievement and secondarily on financial need. Mature students are eligible to apply. In addition, scholarships may also be available through other labour organizations, most notably the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). The NUPGE awards give special consideration to applicants with disabilities, to aboriginal Canadians, and to visible minorities.

NSGEU MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

10. **Merchant Discounts** – by showing your NSGEU membership ID card, our members are entitled to the discounts noted. A list of these retailers is published on the NSGEU web page www.nsg.eu.ca and from time to time in the NSGEU Union Stand or can be requested from membership services. It should be noted that NSGEU takes no responsibility for any dissatisfaction with the goods or services provided.

11. **NS Government Retired Employees Association (NSGREA)** – a self-managed organization for retired NSGEU members who wish to maintain their connection to the union for social and labour-related activities.

12. **Provincial affiliations** – the NSGEU communicates and co-operates with other labour and social groups to promote labour and worker concerns. Among these is the NS Federation of Labour (NSFL). We also encourage our membership to become actively involved in their District Labour Councils throughout the province.

13. **National affiliations** – NSGEU is one of several provincial government organizations that make up the 340,000 member National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). Through NUPGE we hold membership in the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), Canada’s largest labour body with more than 3 million members. NSGEU is affiliated for many reasons, but principally because it allows us to present our views at the national and international level.

Please note: that financing for the above services and benefits is derived from our membership’s union dues, the amount being determined at the NSGEU’s biennial conventions. Dues are deducted from the member’s pay every two weeks. NSGEU dues were last set in 1997 at 1.25 per cent of regular salary.



If you have any further questions about joining a union, please
contact:

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