



The Benefits of Collective Bargaining for Professionals

Professionals have the right to join together with their colleagues and negotiate with their employer on workplace issues that affect them. This form of employer–employee relations is formally known as collective bargaining. Similar to the contracts CEOs have that guarantee pay, benefits, and other conditions of employment, the terms agreed upon during collective bargaining are solidified in a contract called the collective bargaining agreement. The easiest, most common, and legally protected way to collectively bargain is with union representation.

Over six million doctors, nurses, teachers, professors, scientists, engineers, entertainers, performers, sales representatives, administrative personnel, and professionals in countless other occupations use collective bargaining to negotiate for better pay, benefits, and working conditions. Additionally, professionals customize collective bargaining agreements to meet the needs of their specific occupation and employer.

Aside from being able to speak with one voice, professionals who are in unions and have collective bargaining agreements are better positioned than non-union professionals in a number of ways. Union professionals on average have higher salaries than non-union professionals.¹ Union members also have better access to health, retirement, and life insurance benefits, as well as paid sick leave.² Employees in unions also averaged more paid holidays than those not in a union.³ The wage gap is another area where being in a union makes a difference. For women, Black and African American employees, and Hispanic and Latino employees in unions the wage gap is much narrower.⁴

This fact sheet overviews the ways professionals benefit from collective bargaining. It will examine different components of collective bargaining agreements and highlight provisions of specific contracts to illustrate the kinds of workplace issues can be addressed through collective bargaining.

Forms of Compensation and Benefits

Union members in professional and technical fields are more likely than non-professionals to have part of their compensation based on productivity, performance, or other measurable factors. Compensation based on productivity includes bonuses, profit-sharing, incentive pay, and stock options.

The form of employee compensation is a reflection of employee preference and is voted on first by the bargaining team, which is made up of fellow employees, and then members of the bargaining unit. “[A]s unions are political institutions with contract ratification and leadership selection done by majority voting...unions will negotiate compensation packages to reflect the preferences of the average worker...”⁵

Minimum Salaries and Annual Pay Increases

Many collective bargaining agreements set a wage floor or a guaranteed minimum salary, as well as minimum annual pay increases. The employee and the employer are then free to negotiate for a salary based on individual performance or other factors above the minimum requirement. Union members are also more likely to receive regular raises than non-union members due to collective bargaining.

- Musicians in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra (BSO) are members of Local 40-543 of the [American Federation of Musicians](#) and have a collective bargaining agreement that requires a minimum weekly salary of \$1,591.00.⁶
- Editorial employees at *VICE*, who are represented by Writers Guild of America, East ([WGAE](#)), have a contract that sets a minimum yearly salary at \$45,000 and establishes minimum pay increases for subsequent years of the contract. Employees are eligible for additional pay increases above the minimum requirement, taking job performance and other factors into consideration.⁷

Overtime Pay

Collective bargaining agreements also often address overtime pay. In fact, union members are more likely to receive overtime pay than non-union members.⁸

- Broadcast technicians at CBS Broadcasting, Inc. (CBS), who are represented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers ([IBEW](#)) have a collective bargaining agreement that sets forth minimum weekly salaries and allows for additional pay increases based on performance, but are also eligible for overtime pay. The IBEW collective bargaining agreement states that any time worked in excess of an eight-hour day must be compensated at one and one-half times regular pay.ⁱ
- The crew members of the NBC television show “Spartan: Ultimate Team Challenge,” represented by International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts ([IATSE](#)), contract includes triple time pay after 15 hours worked.⁹

Merit Pay

While most collective bargaining agreements ensure that all professionals receive fair wages, some also allow the employer to reward those who excel. Merit pay, or monetary awards based on performance, is another form of compensation detailed in professionals’ collective bargaining agreements.

- Faculty and librarians at Temple University are represented by the Temple Association of University Professionals and the American Federation of Teachers ([AFT](#)). Their collective bargaining agreement establishes that the faculty and librarians are eligible for merit pay in the form of “merit awards.” These monetary awards are “given principally for outstanding performance in teaching/instruction and in research/scholarship/creative activity.” Awards can also be given on the basis of “outstanding performance in service to the University, in service to the profession/discipline and in discipline-based community service.” Since the collective bargaining agreement is voted on by faculty and librarians, the agreement reflects their support for merit awards.¹⁰
- At the Boeing Company, the engineers are represented by the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace ([SPEEA](#)), International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers ([IFPTE](#)) Local 2001. Engineers at Boeing are eligible for annual pay raises (salary adjustments) based on their work performance in addition to their annual minimum raise. Determinations regarding the salary adjustment and amount of the salary adjustments are made at the manager’s sole discretion. SPEEA’s collective bargaining

ⁱ The employee is paid overtime for the amount of work in excess of the eight-hour day. The employee is not required to first work 40 hours before earning overtime pay.

agreement with Boeing sets forth a formula for determining the amount of money available for salary adjustments. SPEEA also negotiated for a bonus program and a program for rewarding engineers and engineering technicians who perform exceptional work.¹¹

- Employees at the Center for American Progress (CAP), a non-profit organization focused on advocating for progressive policies based in Washington, D.C., also receive annual minimum pay increases (ranging from two to two and a half percent) and their collective bargaining agreement sets aside a secure pool of money for merit pay increases.¹²
- Doctors at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart hospital in Springfield, Ore. who are members of Pacific Northwest Hospital Medicine Association (PNWHMA), AFT Local 6552, have a collective bargaining agreement that allows for performance bonuses for things like avoiding patient readmission, quality of care, and efficiency in discharging patients.^{13 14}

Benefits

In general, union members in professional and technical fields have better fringe benefits which include, but are not limited to, health insurance, life and disability insurance, pension, paid holidays, flexible scheduling, and sick time. These benefits are bargained for and reflected in collective bargaining agreements.

- Editorial staff at *VICE* who are members of WGAE have a contract that provides for *VICE* to match employees' 401k plan contributions up to three percent of their pay.¹⁵
- Professional and technical office employees, which includes business analysts, operation resource coordinators, and administrative assistants, at DTE Energy in Dearborn, Mich. are members of Utilities Workers Union of America ([UWUA](#)) Local 223 and have a collective bargaining agreement that recognizes 11 holidays, including Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and gives them the day off with pay (if the employee can be spared from work). If it is essential for that employee to work, the employee is compensated for working the holiday.¹⁶
- Civilian employees at the Coast Guard represented by the American Federation of Government Employees ([AFGE](#)) have a collective bargaining agreement that allows eligible employees to work from home three to four days a week and flexible scheduling. The flexible scheduling provision allows varying start and end times and working hours each workday, split scheduling, and varying total hours each week.¹⁷
- State employees in Connecticut's judicial branch who are members of the Judicial Professional Employee Union, an affiliate of AFT, have a collective bargaining agreement that designates \$12,000 per year for the tuition reimbursement program.¹⁸
- Professional employees at Boeing represented by SPEEA have a group benefits package that includes life benefits, accidental death and dismemberment benefits, disability benefits, medical benefits and dental benefits, as well as medical benefits and dental benefits for their dependents. Additionally, the professional Boeing employees have access to a supplemental life plan, supplemental AD&D plan, 10 percent supplemental long term disability plan benefit, and health care and dependent care spending account plans.¹⁹

Equal Pay

Unions also help to counter pay inequities based on gender and minority status. The difference between men and women's earnings has a significant impact on women's lifetime earnings and retirement benefits. Unions have been successful in helping to close the wage gap. In 2016, the wage gap between nonunion men and women was 19 cents and the wage gap among union men and women was nine cents.²⁰

By including policies that give women an equal footing in the workplace, collective bargaining agreements have helped working women get closer to achieving equal pay. Standardized wages can help mitigate the effects of gender discrimination. Pay transparency exposes when employees are getting paid less. Grievance procedures allow employees to seek recourse for any wrong doing by their employer and ensure anti-discrimination policies are enforced. Paid leave provisions allow women to take off time to fulfill family obligations, but still maintain employment. All of these policies—standardized wages, pay transparency, grievance procedures, and paid leave—are common in collective bargaining agreements.²¹

- Professional and technical office employees represented by UWUA at DTE Energy have a collective bargaining agreement that standardizes wages for each position. For example, the minimum a business analyst in 2016 could make an hour was \$35.48 and the maximum was \$44.50 an hour.²²
- CAP employees' collective bargaining agreement provides for 12 weeks of paid leave for the birth or adoption of a child and six weeks paid leave for family caregiving.²³
- The editorial staff at the *Huffington Post* represented by WGAE have a grievance and arbitration procedure that allows a neutral third-party arbitrator to be brought in to help resolve contract disputes.²⁴

Addressing Workplace Concerns through Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is an important way for employees to come together and let their voice be heard in the workplace. Through collective bargaining, employees can earn and maintain middle-class wages; have access to benefits, including health and pension; and bargain on issues that allow employees to do their jobs right. One goal of collective bargaining is for employees to be heard on non-compensation issues. Since agreements addressing non-compensation issues are not written in a one-size-fits-all manner, the agreement reflects issues of particular concern to the union members.

Adequate Staffing

The number of employees working at a time can have a big impact on certain occupations and workplaces. For nurses, adequate staffing can improve nurse retention and patient outcomes. While, for teachers, the number of educators can impact student learning.

- Registered nurses at Brooklyn's Lutheran Medical Center are represented by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), a chapter of the AFT, and their 2013 collective bargaining agreement required 25 additional nurses to be hired to address understaffing.²⁵
- Registered nurses at Mt. Clemens General Hospital in Mt. Clemens, Mich. reached a new contract where a three percent pay raise offered by the hospital was turned down in favor of a two percent raise and the hiring of 25 additional nurses in an effort to offer better, more professional patient care.²⁶
- The collective bargaining agreement for the San Francisco Unified School District allowed the teachers' union (United Educators of San Francisco, AFT Local 61, AFL-CIO, NEA/CTA) and the San Francisco Board of Education to address issues of classroom size and health and safety. The agreement sets a goal of having no more than 22 students per teacher in grades kindergarten through three; 30 students per teacher in grades four and five; 30 in middle school; and 30 in high school.²⁷

Improving Working Conditions

For professionals, safety concerns vary depending on the occupation and collective bargaining agreements can make sure specific safety issues are addressed.

- The collective bargaining agreement for teachers at San Francisco Unified School District addresses health and safety. The collective bargaining agreement requires that: there be a comprehensive safety and disaster plan; all safety notices be conspicuously posted; information from the Health Department be immediately provided to teachers; teachers have a mechanism for immediately notifying district officials of hazardous conditions; and all classrooms have a first-aid kit.²⁸
- Collective bargaining agreements for firefighters often include provisions for the acquisition, cleaning, and maintenance of “turnout gear,” the lifesaving equipment worn by firefighters, as well as other safety equipment. For example, the City of Philadelphia and the [International Association of Fire Fighters](#), Local 22 bargained for the acquisition, cleaning, and maintenance of protective clothing. The collective bargaining agreement also provided for a second set of turnout gear and two-way radios for use by each active firefighter while at a fire. A firefighter’s ability to communicate with fellow firefighters and command while at a fire is critical to firefighter safety.
- Members of arts, entertainment, and media unions can face unique challenges in the workplace. For example, [SAG-AFTRA](#) bargains protections for stunt performers in its film and television contracts. Specifically, “a qualified first-aid person, visually identifiable, shall be present on all sets where hazardous work is planned. The Producer shall properly equip this person, establish the capabilities of nearby medical facilities, and provide transportation and communication with these facilities.” SAG-AFTRA also provides protections for dancers who are susceptible to injury when dancing under “hazardous” conditions.
- Theater actors represented by Actors’ Equity Association ([AEA](#)) have a collective bargaining agreement with the League of Resident Theaters (LORT), a professional theater association that includes 72 non-profit theaters across the United States, which provides for preventative physical therapy for choreography-heavy performances that last longer than eight weeks.²⁹

Making Industries More Inclusive

Professionals have an interest in ensuring their profession reflects the larger population. Those in the entertainment industry, for example, are concerned that if the stage or screen lacks diversity and does not reflect the population that they will no longer be relevant—which could cause attendance to drop. In fact, AEA recently published a report finding that women and minority actors were getting fewer roles and were paid less than white male actors. Unions of professionals have made increasing diversity in the workforce a priority and, as a result, have incorporated policies meant to increase diversity into their collective bargaining agreements.

- The editorial staff at *The Huffington Post* are represented by WGAE and have a collective bargaining agreement that includes provisions to increase diversity in the newsroom. These provisions include, a system for posting jobs and a diversity committee.³⁰
- Similarly, the editorial staff at *Gawker* (now *Gizmodo*), also represented by WGAE, have a provision in their collective bargaining agreement that says the company will regularly meet with a committee of union members to discuss issues related to diversity in the workplace.³¹
- Performers working in motion pictures, scripted prime-time dramatic television, and new media production are members of SAG-AFTRA and have a collective bargaining agreement

with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP). In July 2017, SAG-AFTRA negotiated for recognition of Middle Eastern North African as a diverse category in the casting data report.³²

- Additionally, SAG-AFTRA contracts also help to ensure reasonable accommodation for performers who are blind or visually impaired. The collective bargaining agreement provides that the “Producers and performer shall make mutually acceptable provisions to make the script available to the performer in advance of auditions.”

Labor-Management Committees

Another way that collective bargaining agreements address workplace concerns is through the creation of Labor-Management Committees (LMCs). LMCs are made up of an equal number of union appointees and management appointees. The purpose is to allow the union and the employer to raise workplace concerns. LMCs tend to be informal and protected settings where employee and employer concerns can be brought for resolution. An employee raising a concern can usually do so anonymously through a union representative.

- Faculty and management at the University of Montana, Helena (UM-Helena) have an LMC, which was created “for the purpose of discussing any matters of mutual concern and to improve communications between the employer and members of the bargaining unit.” The faculty is represented by the Helena Teachers’ Union, MEA-MFT, NEA, AFT, AFL-CIO. The collective bargaining agreement at UM-Helena specifically provides that “disagreements concerning use of flexible days” are referred to the LMC. Also, disputes regarding a faculty member’s request for recognition of professional development activity (a criterion for promotion) can be taken to the LMC.
- The editorial staff at *The Huffington Post* have a LMC to discuss issues that arise during the length of the contract.³³
- *VICE*’s editorial staff also have a LMC that meets monthly to “discuss diversity, work load, business/editorial issues, and more.”³⁴
- The doctors at PeaceHealth Sacred Heart hospital represented by AFT have a LMC made up of three doctors and three administrators to discuss patient loads and staffing levels. A majority of the LMC is needed to make any significant changes to work load or working conditions.³⁵

Addressing Grievances and Discipline

A central tenet of all collective bargaining agreements is due process or a process to resolve disputes that ensures fair and equal treatment during the arbitration process. Due process requires that an employee have notice and an opportunity to respond to allegations made by the employer. It is not a coincidence that due process is also a central tenet of our criminal justice system as enshrined in the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

The employer and the union establish and agree to grievance and discipline procedures. Nearly all collective bargaining agreements have provisions for resolving grievances and disciplining employees. Those provisions are clearly set forth, in writing, in the collective bargaining agreement, which is distributed to all union members. Collective bargaining agreements only require that an employer follow procedures that are clearly laid out in the agreement when seeking to reprimand, demote, or terminate an employee. A union job is not a “job for life.” However, a union job does afford employees greater protection against unfair

unilateral actions by employers—after all, a workplace dispute has the potential to cost a person their job and, as a result, their livelihood.

- The collective bargaining agreement between the Defense Contract Management Agency and the AFGE Council 170 provides for the creation and use of written performance plans to objectively monitor employee progress. Employees who receive successful evaluations may be eligible for cash awards, time-off awards, quality step increases, and honorary awards, among other things. In the case of employees who receive a poor performance evaluation, supervisors must take action to warn employees of the poor performance and take other steps to try to improve the employee's performance. If, after taking steps to improve performance, that is not possible, then the supervisor must take action to reassign, demote, or remove the employee. The action required as a result of unacceptable performance is clearly laid out in just two pages in the collective bargaining agreement.
- Faculty at Portland State University are represented by AFT Local 3571 and their collective bargaining agreement with Portland State University lays out the formal procedure for the investigation and resolution of grievances, which includes the presentation of the grievances and the arbitration process.³⁶
- Directors and choreographers employed by productions of the Broadway League are members of Stage Directors and Choreographers Society ([SDC](#)) and have a collective bargaining with a tiered arbitration process. If the parties (producer, director and/or choreographer, SDC and the Broadway League) attempt to promptly settle the matter amicably and cannot resolve it, the formal process is triggered.³⁷

Conclusion

Collective bargaining has allowed over six million professionals to come together to achieve workplace improvements. The type of workplace improvements addressed by a collective bargaining agreement is determined solely by the members who will be covered by the collective bargaining agreement. Uniquely tailored collective bargaining agreements have resulted in the wide range of contract provisions covered in this fact sheet.

As demonstrated in this fact sheet, millions of professionals have chosen collective bargaining because it has allowed them to work together to achieve better pay and benefits, but also the ability to improve the quality of their work and service.

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For more information on professional workers or for more information on how to gain collective bargaining in your workplace, check the DPE website: www.dpeaflcio.org

For answers to common questions about unions for professionals, see "[I'm a Professional. What can a Union do for Me?](#)"

The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 23 AFL-CIO unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE-affiliated unions represent: teachers, college professors, and school administrators; library workers; nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals; engineers, scientists, and IT workers; journalists and writers, broadcast technicians and communications specialists; performing and visual artists; professional athletes; professional firefighters; psychologists, social workers, and many others. DPE was chartered by the AFL-CIO in 1977 in recognition of the rapidly growing professional and technical occupations.

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