# above all
# the floor is yours

CSN | secteurpublic

**Facilitator's guide**

**For unions**

**CSN's public sector consultation**

# CSN'S PUBLIC SECTOR CONSULTATION

## INTRODUCTION

Your collective agreements will expire on March 31, 2020. As public-sector workers, you are in the best position to identify network issues and reflect on solutions. It is within this context that we want to begin to work with you to prepare for the upcoming public-sector negotiations.

This facilitator's guide is the result of work carried out by the CSN's four public-sector federations, in particular, after the consultation forum that took place in the fall with your union representatives. It is a tool for unions that complements a member survey.

The consultation will end on Sunday, January 13, 2019.

The survey can be found here: **https://secteurpublic.quebec/consultation**.

The purpose of this consultation is to increase means of and forums for exchange in order to help develop bargaining proposals, mobilization plans, and information strategies that are in line with your concerns.

At this step, the point is not to adopt bargaining proposals, but instead to hear from members before developing them.

Above all, the floor is yours!

**Once completed to your satisfaction, please send this document by mail to the following address:**

Comité de coordination des secteurs public et parapublic
Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN)

1601, av. De Lorimier, suite 2700
Montréal (Québec) H2K 4M5

**You can also individually complete the survey at:**

https://secteurpublic.quebec/consultation

**Following this link, you will also find various tools to improve your discussions.**

**CSN's union number ID** ______________________

**Local union name** ______________________

## IMPORTANT ISSUES

In health and social services institutions, as well as in schools, CEGEPs, and government agencies, workers are at the end of their rope. While some daily issues are experienced across all sectors, others are specific to a single workplace.

While there are many areas of concern, some seem to have grown in recent years. Issues such as **attraction and retention, job insecurity, subcontracting, privatization, work overload, and burnout** regularly make the headlines. With the reorganization of the networks, workers have also seen their **professional autonomy** decrease significantly.

What about issues related to remuneration in the public sector? **Wages, group insurance, and the pension plan** are also some of the major concerns of employees in the health and social services, education, and government agency networks.

**How important to you are the following issues?**

- Attraction and retention
- Group insurance
- Professional autonomy
- Wages
- Job insecurity
- Pension plan
- Subcontracting and privatization
- Work overload and burnout
- Other(s) (please specify)

## ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF LABOUR

Quebec's public sector is currently experiencing the largest turnover in its history. This turnover is occurring in the context of a large decline in population, which has led to labour shortages in numerous private and public sectors. In the education and health and social services networks, as well as in that of government agencies, employers are having trouble recruiting workers for certain job titles and retaining them in the public sector. In addition to making the public sector less attractive to those who are entering the labour market, the deterioration of working conditions resulting from the massive budget cuts in recent years is driving many current employees to want to leave the public sector.

**What possible solutions could fix attraction and retention problems for your job title/profession?**

*Improving pay?*

For several years, the wage gap has widened between all Quebec workers and government employees. It is now often more profitable, for comparable positions, to work outside of the public sector.

*Improving schedules and reducing work overload?*

The years of austerity under the previous Liberal government wreaked havoc in public networks. Public-sector workers were the first to experience it while trying to maintain public services with fewer and fewer resources.

# BARGAINING

## Attraction and Retention of Labour (continued)

**What possible solutions could fix attraction and retention problems for your job title/profession?**

*Reducing job insecurity?*

Job security for public-sector workers was once the envy of all Quebec workers. Today, with the percentage of employees with precarious jobs reaching almost 70% in some sectors, job security is a thing of the past for a large number of workers in the public sector.

*Facilitating integration for immigrants?*

Each year, thousands of qualified workers immigrate to Quebec. Some among them worked in public-sector jobs in their countries of origin. They have acquired skills and sometimes have foreign academic credentials that are not recognized here.

## WAGE DEMANDS

Traditionally, each time bargaining begins, the union formulates wage increase demands, and the government then responds with its own offers. This begins the back-and-forth of bargaining to find common ground. The union justifies its wage increase demands with various principles, while the government generally uses its ability to pay to explain its offers.

**Are wage increases important to you?**

**What would an adequate wage increase level?**

## Wage Demands (continued)

There are many possible principles that can be used to develop a wage demand. Here are some examples:

- **A demand based on the principle of collective increases**, which, by raising salaries in accordance with economic indicators (e.g., the gross domestic product (GDP)), could allow public-sector employees to benefit from a share of economic growth.
- **A demand based on a principle of equity with all Quebec workers** could allow the wages of public-sector employees to catch up with those of employees in other sectors, in particular, the private and municipal sectors. It is important to note that according to data from 2017 from the Institut de la statistique du Québec, overall remuneration for public-sector employees was 8.6% below that of other Quebec employees for all benchmark jobs.
- **A demand based on a principle of equity with the workers of other provinces.**
- **A demand based on the principle of protection of purchasing power**, i.e. wage increases based on inflation.
- **A demand based on the principle of reducing gaps between high-income and low-income employees.**

**Would a bargaining proposal centred on any of these principles be interesting for developing wage demands?**

**Are there other interesting principles to consider?**

## WHAT FORM OF INCREASES?

Wage increases in the public sector can take various forms:

**A fixed increase** is consistent with the goal of reducing gaps between the highest- and lowest-income unionized workers in the public sector: the percentage increase decreases the higher the income. As a result, an increase of $1 per hour corresponds to slightly more than a 5% increase for the lowest-income workers, but less than 2% for the highest-income workers. The salary gap has varied over the years: while the maximum salary was about 4.5 times higher than the minimum in the early 1970s, it was about 2.5 times higher in the 1990s, and has remained relatively stable at that rate since. This wage demand model generally fits into a social justice approach, but it can also lead to division between members of the same union or federation.

**One percentage for everyone** means that all employees will receive the same percentage increase on April 1st of each year. It is a classic formula that is both simple and provides everyone with a salary increase of an equal percentage. The salary policy that results often applies to other groups of workers who are not directly involved in public-sector bargaining; some examples are workers in government agencies and childcare centres.

**A variable percentage based on labour market comparisons** is aimed at catching up with jobs outside of the Quebec public sector. The public sector, as a whole, is behind with regard to the rest of the labour market, but this lag varies based on job title. For example, it is larger among semi-skilled workers than food service employees. Catching up could have a positive impact with regard to attraction and retention, but also risks providing salary increases that vary from one job to another and may reproduce certain labour market inequalities, such as lower salaries for jobs typically held by women.

**A variable percentage that favours low-income workers** is also aimed at reducing pay gaps between the highest- and lowest-income workers in the public sector. The fixed amount model generates a variable percentage, but other mathematical formulas can also be used, which can determine a freeze or minimum increase percentages for certain jobs.

**A percentage or amount that varies based on principles** that were mentioned previously (protection of purchasing power, collective increases, equity with other workers, etc.) is also possible. This form of increase is therefore not quantified in advance.

## What Form of Increases? (continued)

**In your opinion, what form should the next public-sector wage increases take?**

- A fixed amount
- One percentage for everyone
- A percentage that varies based on labour market comparisons
- A variable percentage that favours low-income workers
- A percentage or amount that varies based on principles (protection of purchasing power, collective increases, equity with other workers, etc.)
- Other(s) (please specify)

## UNITING BEHIND COMMON DEMANDS

The public sector has more than 500,000 workers in a variety of workplaces, with tasks and responsibilities that are sometimes very different. This strongly influences their concerns with regard to remuneration and working conditions. Among the organizations that represent these 500,000 government employees, the CSN represents the largest number of employees, which is its strength and allows it to defend the rights and interests of all.

**In your opinion, are there any demands that could unite all public-sector members in health and social services, education, and government agencies?**

## RREGOP

The Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan (RREGOP) covers more than 540,000 active members and more than 230,000 retirees from the public and parapublic sectors, as well as from government agencies. It is a defined-benefit plan, with funding that has been equally shared with the employer since 1982. With a capitalization rate of about 107% as of the most recent actuarial valuation, the RREGOP is in good financial health.

While the RREGOP is subject to the Act Respecting the Government and Public Employees Retirement Plan, amendments to the plan are almost always the subject of agreements negotiated between the parties. In the previous round of bargaining, the parties agreed to form a working group 18 months prior to the expiration of the collective agreement to examine the state of the pension plan, accounting for its maturity, increased life expectancy, and financial market developments. The analyses carried out by this working committee between rounds of bargaining could potentially provide us with insight with regard to our pension demands.

The consultation forum also allowed us to identify some concerns members have with regard to retirement. Accounting for the impacts that various elements could have on the funding of the RREGOP and on its financial sustainability, and also accounting for certain dimensions that are unique to working in the public sector, such as an increase in the demanding nature of the work, which seems to be becoming widespread...

**What elements are most important to you with regard to your pension plan?**

*Retirement Age?*

On July 1, 2019, new eligibility criteria for immediate unreduced pensions will come into effect. Three criteria will then apply, two of which directly relate to retirement age:

**Having reached 35 years of service credited for eligibility to benefits**
or
**Being at least 61 years old**
or
**Being at least 60 years old and having reached the “90 factor” (age (at least 60 years old) + years of service credited for eligibility to benefits = 90)**

## RREGOP (continued)

**What elements are most important to you with regard to your pension plan?**

*Early Retirement Penalty?*

Currently, the rate of reduction if you stop participating in an immediate plan in advance is 4% per year. In the previous round of bargaining, the parties agreed that starting July 1, 2020, the rate will increase from 4% to 6% per year in advance. While the Conseil du trésor wanted to increase the rate to 7.2%, analyses showed that a rate of reduction of 6% covered the cost to balance the plan, i.e. that with a penalty of 6% per year in advance, active members would not be funding part of the early retirement of retirees.

*Contribution Rates?*

While the RREGOP is a defined-benefit plan, workers fund their plan equally with the employer, with contribution rates that accumulate and increase in value in members' pension funds. Contribution rates vary based on periodic actuarial valuations of the plan, which means that employees bear a significant share of the financial risks related to the administration of the plan. For example, following the 2008 financial crisis, contribution rates went from 8.19% to 11.12% between 2008 and 2016. In 2018, the contribution rate is now 10.97%. It is important to note that this percentage applies to the portion of the salary that exceeds $13,975 (25% of the maximum pensionable earnings (MPE) set by Retraite Québec, which is currently $55,900).

## RREGOP (continued)

### What elements are most important to you with regard to your pension plan?

*Pension Indexing?*

Once you begin receiving your RREGOP pension, it will be indexed on January 1st of each year. The indexation rate for the pension plan varies according to three periods of plan membership:

- For years of service performed prior to July 1, 1982: full indexation of the plan based on the inflation rate used by Retraite Québec;
- For years of service performed between July 1, 1982, and December 31, 1999: partial indexation based on the inflation rate used by Retraite Québec minus 3%; and
- For years of service performed between January 1, 2000, and now: partial indexation based on the inflation rate used by Retraite Québec minus 3%, but at a minimum of 50% of the Retraite Québec inflation rate.

The most recent changes to indexing standards occurred in 2010, when we introduced the possibility of improving pension indexing for the years between July 1, 1982, and December 31, 1999, when there was a sufficient surplus in the pension fund. During the previous round of bargaining, the employer wanted to discuss introducing conditional pension indexing mechanisms, but we refused this option. Improving pension indexing for retirees certainly affects the cost of the plan.

## YOUR PRIORITY

While it is not easy to choose ONE priority for bargaining, the question is still worth asking.

**What should be the priority in the upcoming negotiations?**

- Improving working conditions and practices
- Improving wages
- Both
- Other (please specify)

## PRESSURE TACTICS

Mobilization is one of the main tools at our collective disposal for reaching our bargaining objectives. Through a variety of mobilization actions, we can make the other side and the public understand the merits of our demands and show our determination to achieve better working conditions. During the most recent round of public-sector bargaining, public-sector workers mobilized massively. Through province-wide, regional, and even targeted local actions, mobilization allowed us to increase our balance of power with our employer, the Quebec government.

Mobilization actions, when used to support bargaining, must at all times keep pace with such bargaining. Pressure tactics often begin with simple actions to gain momentum during bargaining sessions, based on the intended strategy, and intensify over time.

**What means of action do you think would be most effective?**

## Pressure Tactics (continued)

Member commitment to the variety of methods of action initiated on the ground is essential to the success of such action. In fact, it is crucial to have as much participation as possible for various mobilization actions because it is a clear indication to those sitting across from us at the bargaining table that our demands are very important to us. For members to mobilize, actions must be promising and address the varied concerns of our members.

**What would encourage you to get involved in your negotiations?**

- Carrying out short activities at various times during the day
- Being consulted frequently
- Being informed regularly
- Being able to adapt actions at the local or regional level

**Are there other methods that could be used to encourage you to get involved?**

## OBSTACLES AND MEANS

In the bargaining context, information is a key factor that enables us to explain issues, take ownership of demands, mobilize activists, and contribute to building unity within unions and the movement. When bargaining intensifies, the amount of information increases and the speed at which it must be disseminated can become a major challenge.

In various public-sector workplaces, there are numerous obstacles with regard to the proper dissemination of information, as well as its effectiveness:

- Number of institutions in my union
- Length and/or complexity of informative documents
- Misuse of technological tools
- Gaps in the information structure
- Increased sources of information

**Do you have any possible solutions to overcome these obstacles?**

## Obstacles and Means (continued)

Over the past 10 years, the emergence of a variety of new technological platforms has led to important questions about our methods of communication. Some are faster, but open the door to the transformation of such information and sometimes to the introduction of errors. Other, more traditional platforms allow for more complete information, but generate less interest and reach fewer of our members.

**Which method of communication would you prefer?**

- Informal union activities (e.g., town hall meetings)
- Mobile application that allows you to receive targeted information quickly
- General assemblies
- Telephone tree
- Email
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)
- Information sessions with local union representatives

**Do you have any suggestions of methods of communication?**

## Obstacles and Means (continued)

Each time bargaining occurs, some vehicles of information start up again, such as Info-Négo newsletters. New tools are also developed to ensure that content is offered in a variety of ways so that all members can access information in the manner that best suits their needs.

**Which information tools would you like to have access to during negotiations?**

- Detailed arguments on bargaining issues
- Information newsletters (e.g., Info-Négo)
- Video clips
- Press releases
- Union newspaper
- Mainstream information tools (e.g., leaflets, various items)
- Social media posts

**Are there other information tools that you would like to have access to?**

## BARGAINING AND PUBLIC OPINION

Public-sector bargaining is not like other negotiations. The government as the employer constantly relies on the argument of sound public finances. The public is often called on by the government to, in practice, act as a referee between the union and the employer with regard to demands. This is why, very early on in the bargaining process, we must work to build public opinion that favours our demands.

**In your opinion, what are some methods of doing so?**

**Would a media campaign suffice?**

**Are there any collective actions that could be effective that would target users at the workplaces?**

**Could workers be called on to intervene on an individual basis, at and outside of their workplace, to influence public opinion?**

## ALLIANCES

During the next few weeks and months, public-sector CSN members will once again have to think about the impact that alliances have on the balance of power and, as a result, on achieving bargaining objectives.

When forming a common front, allied organizations bargain jointly on matters at the central bargaining table and align their demands, action plans, and calendars. They also come to agreements about various methods of operation.

**What conditions could ensure the success of potential union alliances during negotiations?**

## OPEN DISCUSSION

**Do you have anything else to add?**