



Preparing for local negotiations

With national contract bargaining just around the corner, it's not too soon for branches to begin making preparations for negotiating local memorandums of understanding (LMOUs). Assuming a negotiated national agreement with the Postal Service is reached this November, the period for negotiating LMOUs could come as early as February. Even though that's six months away, there are things that branches can do now to be better prepared when the time for LMOU bargaining arrives.

Establish LMOU committees—Now is a good time to begin setting up branch LMOU committees. How many are needed depends on the size of the branch and how many installations it represents. Smaller branches representing a single installation might be able to get by with one committee, where a larger merged branch may want to establish separate committees for each of its installations.

At this early stage, committees do the important background work and information gathering that will be used to develop bargaining positions. Those chosen for these committees are not necessarily those who will actually sit at the negotiating table during the bargaining sessions, but they may be. Committee members should have a solid understanding of Article 30 as well as the current LMOU and the bargaining history behind it. It may be necessary to have a few preliminary meetings to bring everyone up to speed before the committee begins its work.

Gather information—A key to any successful negotiation is to have as much information as possible about the issues you are negotiating. A branch will have a greater likelihood of success in local negotiations if they do some research and gather information before sitting down at the bargaining table with management.

Article 31.3 gives the union the right to:

[A]ll relevant information necessary for collective bargaining... upon the request of the union, the Employer will furnish such information provided, however, the Employer may require the Union to reimburse the USPS for any costs reasonably incurred in obtaining the information.

Some items that you might request management to provide include:

- **Leave records, schedules, workload reports**—Since the majority of the items negotiated concern the local

leave program, obtaining such items as staffing records, schedules, workhour reports, FLASH reports and past leave calendars is a good place to start. This evidence can be used to support proposals regarding the number of carriers allowed off on leave and for the duration of the choice vacation period. These also can be used to defend against management claims that the current leave program creates an “unreasonable burden.” While Article 30.F places the burden to prove this unreasonable burden on management, it doesn't hurt to have evidence in hand to counter such claims.

- **Future event documentation**—Volume projections, FSS implementation schedules, withholding and excessing information all are evidence of future events that could affect bargaining. Management likely will be using them, so it's important to know what they are looking at and to check it for validity.
- **Past bargaining records**—Ideally your branch has kept records and notes from past LMOU bargaining sessions. Reviewing the proposals, counterproposals and the final agreements the parties made in past negotiations will show what each side tried to achieve, how the other side responded and what they finally were able to achieve. This information can be used to formulate the branch's proposals for the upcoming bargaining session as well as to develop strategies to deal with possible proposals from management.
- **Polling the membership**—Another early function of the committee is to find out what the members think about their LMOU, what's important to them, what changes they would like to see, etc. Some branches accomplish this by discussing it at branch meetings or by mailing out a questionnaire. Some engage in a one-on-one canvassing campaign, talking to as many members as possible to get their feedback. However it's done, getting input from those who are going to be affected by the negotiations is essential for union-building.

The sooner the information is obtained, the sooner the committee can start making decisions about bargaining objectives and how to achieve them. Once the national agreement is reached, there will not be a lot of time to prepare for LMOU discussions, so branches should get as much done as they can. ☒