

WELCOME
NEW MEMBERS

P | E | A

BC's Union for Professionals

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WHO IS THE PEA?

The Professional Employees Association (PEA) is BC's union for professionals. We are your union. We were formed in 1974 to represent licensed professionals employed in the BC Public Service. Since that time, we have grown to support a wide range of professionals in the education, legal, union and health care sectors. The professionals we represent are varied: foresters, lawyers, teachers and support staff, engineers, physiotherapists, psychologists, pharmacists, veterinarians, librarians, system administrators and more.

The PEA is divided into chapters. Each chapter represents a distinct workplace or group of professionals. We represent the professionals at the BC Energy Regulator, lawyers at the Family Maintenance Agency, Government Licensed Professionals in the BC Public Service, the staff at the Hospital Employees' Staff Union, Health Science Professionals, Law Society Lawyers, Legal Aid BC lawyers, Okanagan Regional Librarians, Pearson College, St. Margaret's School, and the professionals at the University of Victoria.



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MY UNION?

A union works to obtain fair working conditions and reasonable wages and benefits for its members. This is the ultimate goal of the PEA—to advocate for improvements in our collective agreements and ensure that the rights you are entitled to are honoured.

Your union provides you with a voice in the workplace. We offer a level of protection for employees to speak up about unsafe working conditions and unfair treatment. We are your advocates in the workplace with the ability to bring issues directly to the employer on your behalf without fear of retribution.

A union brings power to workers. Without a union, as an individual you have limited power to negotiate wages and benefits. As part of a coordinated group of professionals, you can raise your collective power to negotiate for a better deal. A union can also advocate for limits on workloads and on the number of hours you are expected to work.

Unions provide these crucial benefits so that professionals can eat dinner with their families and have weekend time with their friends and children. We believe people deserve to be treated justly, paid fairly and be respected in their workplaces. These are the benefits of being in a union.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PROFESSIONAL IN A UNION?

Professionals face the same problems in the workplace as other workers. Every engineer, forester, physiotherapist or lawyer, for example, deserves the opportunity to perform their job well. This requires having a manageable workload, reasonable hours, protection from unjust treatment, and recognition of one's skills, education and expertise.

In non-union environments, professionals often have little control of their work lives. Decisions concerning wages, benefits and working conditions rest solely with the management. Without a proper contract and a union to support it, employees may be fired or penalized for offering a view that is at odds with their supervisors. In contrast, belonging to the PEA provides professionals with the means to engage with management to ensure a respectful environment and decisions that work for everybody.

The PEA has been effective in advocating on behalf of our members at the municipal and provincial levels of government. This advocacy can directly impact the working lives of our members.



HOW AM I SUPPORTED?

The role of your union is to support you in the workplace. Your union is here to support you if you are facing harassment or discrimination, are being deprived of collective agreement rights, or anything else.

Your first line of support is your local representative. These are your fellow workers who volunteer to assist members in the workplace. Local reps receive training and education from the PEA to assist their co-workers with issues that arise.

Each member also has direct access to a labour relations officer. These are PEA staff members with experience in bargaining, labour relations and member servicing. Members in need of assistance are encouraged to seek out either their local rep or a labour relations officer.

There are a number of resources you can access as a PEA member. Educational resources can help you to better understand your rights at work. These include collective bargaining education resources and a frequently-asked-questions section relating to interpreting your collective agreement. The PEA also provides a scholarship and bursary program for members and their families pursuing post-secondary education. Information on these resources is available on our website, pea.org.



YOUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Your collective agreement is your contract with your employer. It sets out the terms of your wages, working conditions, sick leave, long-term disability, layoff and recall rights, health benefits and more.

PEA members negotiated the rights contained in your collective agreement, and it's important to stay informed about the benefits you're entitled to and to make use of them. The best way to understand your collective agreement is to attend workshops put on by the PEA or ask your local rep or labour relations officer. You can find your collective agreement at pea.org/collectiveagreements.

WHAT IS A GRIEVANCE?

A grievance is a way of addressing a violation of the collective agreement. When an employee, or the union as a whole, perceives that the employer has breached one or more provisions of the agreement, a grievance may be filed to address this disagreement. The issue can either be resolved at the grievance stage or referred on to arbitration. Arbitration is when the union and the employer argue their case before an impartial adjudicator, who will listen to both sides and make a ruling.

If your employer isn't following the terms of the collective agreement, you should talk to your local rep or labour relations officer.



WHAT IS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING?

Collective agreements are created through collective bargaining between employers and unionized employees.

In the PEA, bargaining committees are elected at the chapter level to bargain with representatives of the employer. The PEA staff assists the bargaining committees by providing resources, expertise, and coordination. Through surveys and consultation with the members, the bargaining committee develops a list of proposals they wish to bring forward for negotiation with the employer, who brings to the table its own set of proposals for discussion. Eventually, the parties will arrive at an agreement that balances the interests of both sides. The members then have the opportunity to accept or reject the agreement through a vote. Although bargaining committees try to achieve all of the improvements recommended by the membership, compromises are necessary to reach an agreement that both parties can sign on to.

In cases where the employer and the bargaining committee are unable to reach an agreement, the PEA members can vote to go on strike, or the employer can choose to lock the employees out (members aren't permitted to come to work). Although rare, strikes and lockouts do occur. The PEA would always make time for substantial consultation with members before taking any strike action. In the event of a strike, members will receive strike pay.



WHAT ARE PEA DUES?

PEA members automatically contribute one per cent of their paycheque to the PEA. These deductions fund all of the union's operations, including office space, staff salaries, legal costs for grievances and arbitrations, web and print communications, conferences and conventions, and special projects and campaigns to increase public awareness about issues that are important to members.

The PEA is committed to balancing excellent member servicing with fiscal prudence, and its dues are among the lowest in the province.

The PEA also holds a substantial pool of funds in reserve. These funds are kept for very specific purposes, such as strike pay for chapters that choose to go on strike during collective bargaining, and legal challenges to defend the interests of our members. These funds are kept separate from our operating budget and have been accumulating since the PEA's founding.

You can review the PEA's financial statements at pea.org/financials.



WHO IS IN THE PEA?

The PEA represents health care, education, public service, union and legal professionals.

HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

The PEA represents physiotherapists, pharmacists, health care officers and more. These members are employed by the various health authorities throughout the province and are organized within the PEA as the Health Science Professionals chapter.

EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

The PEA represents teachers, librarians, administrators and others who work in education. In the primary and secondary education sector (kindergarten to grade 12), we represent all workers at St. Margaret's School in Victoria, from teachers to support staff. We also represent the teachers at Pearson College.

In the post-secondary sector, we represent professionals at the University of Victoria. These members work in student services, information technology, and academic departments. They include administrative officers, systems specialists, program coordinators, academic assistants, lab instructors and more.

The PEA also represents librarians working in the Okanagan Regional Library system. The Okanagan Regional Library System covers local libraries from Kelowna to Golden and Revelstoke to Princeton.



WHO IS IN THE PEA?

LEGAL PROFESSIONALS

For over 30 years, the PEA has worked with legal professionals in BC to assist them in balancing the professional requirements of their work with their need for fair and reasonable wages and working conditions. The PEA represents four groups of legal professionals: Family Maintenance Agency lawyers, Law Society Lawyers, Legal Aid BC lawyers, and the lawyers that work for the Hospital Employees' Union.

PUBLIC SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

The PEA was originally formed to represent professionals working for the BC Public Service. Today, these members comprise the Government Licensed Professionals (GLP) chapter. They include engineers, foresters, psychologists, geoscientists, veterinarians, agrologists, psychologists and more. These individuals report to their respective licensing boards to ensure a high level of professionalism in the delivery and management and of our public services and resources. We also represent professionals at the BC Energy Regulator. These members include geologists, engineers and more.

UNION STAFF PROFESSIONALS

The PEA represents the staff at the Hospital Employees' Union. These members include accountants, administrators, researchers, graphic designers, legal counsel, union representatives and more.



HOW DO I STAY INFORMED?

Getting the most out of your union starts with staying informed. We send information out to members through a number of channels, including email, the PEA website, social media and our magazine, *The Professional*. Be sure to keep us up to date with your current contact information in order to receive these communications.

We also provide channels for two-way communication. We conduct an annual survey of members and also host regular meetings and webinars to engage with members on specific topics. If you have a question or concern, the local reps and labour relations officer are always available to assist.



HOW DO I GET INVOLVED?

Your time is valuable and you have many commitments, but becoming involved in the PEA is an enriching experience that comes with many benefits. These include opportunities to engage with colleagues from different areas of your workplace as well as with members from different PEA chapters from around the province. By participating on committees or chapter executives, or by serving as local reps, our members gain valuable skills in leadership, human resources, and governance. In many cases, these skills have helped them in their career and other areas of their life.

Getting involved with the PEA can be as small or as large a commitment as you like. It could be as simple as attending your chapter's AGM or a social event, or taking part in community events like the Pride Parade or the Labour Council picnic. You can also support the bargaining process by attending bargaining meetings and keeping informed of the bargaining progress. Other opportunities include representing your chapter at the biennial convention or to participate in training workshops and education conferences put on by the Association. If you want to learn new skills and make a positive impact in your workplace, you should consider a role as a local rep, bargaining committee member, or chapter executive member.

You can talk to a staff member at the PEA office if you're interested in getting involved. Call us at 1-800-779-7736.

Members

elects delegates
to the



Convention

elects four table
officers to the

elect leaders at
their AGM to

Chapter Executives

appoints members
to the

Association Executive

Representatives from each chapter plus the four table officers elected at Convention (President, First Vice President, Second Vice President and Secretary-Treasurer) make up the Association Executive. They make the major decisions for the union including issues related to finance, staffing and policy.

appoints the

hires and evaluates
the

Executive Committees

Meet on an as-needed basis on specific issues. They make recommendations to the Association Executive on the issues they are assigned to. A wide number of committees exist to address issues of the union. Some of the committees include finance and investment, policy review, grants and donations, staff relations and more.

Executive Director

The Executive Director leads a staff team made up of labour relations, communications, finance and administrative staff. The staff complete the day-to-day work of the union on behalf of the Association Executive.

HOW ARE DECISIONS MADE?

The PEA is made up of over 3,300 members from across BC and is run democratically through a structure of elected representatives. At the local level, members elect a chapter executive each year to represent their local interests. At the provincial level, the union is governed by the association executive, which comprises representatives appointed by the chapters and four table officers—the president, first vice-president, second vice-president and secretary-treasurer—elected by delegates at the PEA’s convention, held every second year.

Day-to-day operations of the PEA are managed by an executive director, who reports to the association executive, and a staff team composed of labour relations officers and communications, finance, and administrative staff, all of whom report to the executive director. The PEA office is located in Victoria.

Much of the association executive’s work is carried out through committees. Committees usually include executive members, staff representatives, and volunteers from the membership. Their role is to coordinate activities and make recommendations within specific focus areas, for example, policy review, equity and diversity, and political action. Committees are a great way for PEA members to participate in their union.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

DO I HAVE TO PAY DUES?

Yes — PEA collective agreements require that all employees, or all employees appointed after a given date, become Association members, and are required to pay dues.

HOW DOES THE PEA ACQUIRE THE RIGHT TO REPRESENT ME IN COLLECTIVE BARGAINING?

The Association acquired the right to bargain collectively for you because a majority of the employees in the unit voted to be represented by the PEA.

CAN I NEGOTIATE MY OWN TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT? CAN I BE REPRESENTED BY SOMEONE OTHER THAN THE PEA?

No. Labour legislation and the Association's various collective agreements contain provisions which recognize the PEA as the exclusive bargaining agent for all employees in our bargaining units.

WHAT CAN THE PEA DO IF MY EMPLOYER DOES SOMETHING I DON'T AGREE WITH?

If your employer offends you in a way that breaches a term of your collective agreement, or if you are unfairly disciplined, the PEA can file a grievance on your behalf. If the grievance procedure does not resolve the complaint, the PEA can take the matter to arbitration for a final and binding agreement.

WHICH MATTERS ARE GRIEVABLE?

There are only two kinds of grievances: 1) those objecting to employee discipline and 2) those alleging breaches of the collective agreement. Grievance rights are vested in the Association. A grievance can not be pursued by an individual without PEA support.

WHAT CAN I DO IF I FEEL THE PEA HAS TREATED ME UNFAIRLY?

A union member can make a written complaint to the Labour Relations Board. The Board will review the application and may proceed to a hearing if it finds that there appears to be a case against the union. In some cases the Board may make a decision based on the information it has already received.

CAN I FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE PEA'S HISTORY?

Yes. We compiled a history of our union at: pea.org/history.



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