

Contract Ratification

SkillBrief

Once you have a tentative agreement, you will need to move quickly to provide the details to your members before rumors can spread or management can distort the settlement.

Three methods are possible:

Membership meetings away from the worksite are the most common method. They can be organized quickly, provide opportunity for questions and discussion, and, if well planned, allow you to build group pride in what was achieved and determination to win further gains in the future.

Worksite meetings may be used if workers feel comfortable having a free and open discussion in that setting. The main advantage is the potential for higher attendance.

Mail ballots may be used when the bargaining unit is very large or if workers are unlikely to come to meetings and therefore not enough people would vote to prove support for the new agreement.

Ratification meetings provide opportunities for questions and discussions about the new contract provisions.

Members should be provided with a summary of major contract provisions in addition to a more detailed explanation.

No matter which method is used, arrangements should be in place before the tentative agreement is reached. For example, location(s) for membership meeting(s), sound systems, ballots, refreshments (if needed), child care, and so on should already be lined up.

Before members vote, the negotiating committee should meet with the bargaining support or contract campaign committee, stewards, and other worksite leaders to review the settlement. That will give the team the opportunity to identify potential areas of confusion or controversy and to line up support.

Membership meetings should be conducted in a way that demonstrates leadership unity. In some cases, that may mean having a number of members of the team present parts of the contract. Where that is not practical, each member of the team might make a very brief statement of support at the beginning of the meeting so that no member is left wondering where each team member stands.

Members should be provided with a written explanation of the terms of the settlement which should begin by highlighting in summary form the major improvements and, if appropriate, the major management propos-

als that were defeated.

At the same time, the weaknesses of the agreement should not be hidden. If you bring them up during the ratification process, then responsibility for choosing whether to make certain compromises is shared by leadership and membership alike. If you gloss over problems in the agreement and members only discover them after ratification, then they are free to be angry both over the compromises and over being misled.

Sample Rules for Ratification Vote

1. Only union members may attend the meeting and vote.
2. Members must register to receive their ballot.
3. A worker whose name does not appear on the membership roster may vote but the vote will be challenged and sealed until the question of membership is resolved.
4. Voting will begin only after full presentation of the agreement is completed.
5. Voting may begin during the question-and-answer period only if moved, seconded, and approved by the membership.
6. Ballot boxes will be sealed when the last member in the room has cast his or her vote.
7. No ballots will be accepted after ballot boxes are sealed.