

# Labor Negotiations

Matthew U. Watkins, *Labor Consultant, NJLM*

## Municipal Management Workshops Labor Management Series

The New Jersey League of Municipalities has partnered with NJ Community Solutions to provide a new educational program that will teach individuals about the practical side of managing municipalities in our great State. Municipal Management Workshops begin in January with sessions held in North, Central, and South Jersey.

The Municipal Management Workshops are a series of three-hour practical educational sessions. Each session will be held in person in small class sizes to provide opportunities to learn, discuss and question key aspects of managing a New Jersey municipality.

In last month's article, I gave an outline of the General Management series covering 1. financial and personnel management; 2. managing the two largest departments, public works and public safety that will include police and fire; 3. organizational management including other departments; 4. council and community relations; and 5. insurance management, understanding municipal audits, and ethics.

This month, I outline Series 2 on Labor Management. The most expensive part of any organization is personnel cost. The labor management series covers: 1. construction of a labor agreement; 2. how to negotiate that labor agreement; 3. health insurance provisions within an agreement; 4. arbitration and grievance arbitration; and 5. disciplinary action.

**Contact construction:** About 85% of full-time employees are subject to collectively bargained agreements between the town and its employees. Those agreements cover many aspects of the cost of labor including salaries, work schedules, and benefits. Construction of this agreement is vital to having a cohesive and cooperative workforce. During this workshop, we will talk about the typical provisions of an agreement and how best to interpret and ensure that that agreement is clear, concise, and comprehensive.

**Labor negotiations:** In this workshop, we will discuss ways to prepare for negotiations of a collectively bargained agreement. Certain steps that can easily be taken will help to ensure that the negotiations go well, thoroughly discussed and basically how to anticipate those negotiations whether you use a labor attorney (recommended) or not. Labor negotiations are not something that can be done quickly. Oftentimes, management does not allow enough

preparation time to have successful negotiations.

**Health insurance:** This workshop discusses health insurance as it relates to labor agreements. I have isolated this part of an agreement since I have seen many labor agreements binding municipalities to this single-most expensive part of the cost of labor for a municipality. Certain aspects of health insurance and how it is written into an agreement are vital to ensure that employees maintain good health insurance but allows for flexibility for the administration to make changes that will potentially save tax dollars for this exponentially growing cost.

**Arbitration & Grievance Arbitration:** While having a good labor agreement is essential for the efficient operation of any organization, there are times when reaching an agreement or disputes over what the agreement says can lead to arbitration or grievances that must be handled properly in order to come to a resolution of the dispute. In the arbitration and grievance arbitration workshop, we will discuss methods to evaluate, prepare, and conduct arbitration meetings/hearings that include contract, or interest, arbitration as well as grievance arbitration or grievance hearings.

**Disciplinary action:** In the fifth workshop, we will discuss the various forms and levels of disciplinary action that necessarily take place in any organization. In New Jersey, municipalities are divided into civil service communities and non-civil service communities. You know who you are! When an employee violates work rules and must be disciplined, it is important to evaluate that discipline as compared with other disciplinary action within the organization. There are steps that an administrator should take to prepare for the action, judge the severity, and properly impose discipline on the employee. We will cover those steps depending on whether the community is governed by Civil Service regulations or those towns that do not fall under those rules.

I hope you will join me for these educational opportunities brought to you by the New Jersey League of Municipalities and NJ community solutions. Watch the League website, [www.njlm.org/ManagementSeries](http://www.njlm.org/ManagementSeries), for locations, dates, and more information. 📍

@ Email [Matt@njcs.us](mailto:Matt@njcs.us), or  
call 973-259-6177.

