



EARLY ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS

Promising practices

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Introduction

Addressing the undervaluation of women's work through pay equity is an important commitment. To achieve pay equity, a high degree of organization and cooperation is needed.

Employers, bargaining agents and employees can develop an **early workplace engagement structure** to facilitate collaboration and dialogue and to plan for the establishment of a pay equity committee.

Early engagement structures can take many different forms and can be tailored to suit the needs and characteristics of a particular workplace. Some options for the structure are: a steering committee, a joint committee, a joint task force and a multi-stakeholder discussion group.

This document offers **promising practices** on **how to create an early engagement structure** and the benefits of doing so.

Forming an early engagement structure

This document outlines the following **key elements**:

1. The rationale for establishing an early engagement structure;
2. The benefits of implementing such a structure;
3. The composition of the structure; and,
4. The launch of a selection process for non-unionized representatives.

1. Rationale for establishing an early engagement structure

The purpose of an early engagement structure is to prepare the workplace for the pay equity process and to **set a strategic direction** for the implementation of the Pay Equity Act. One of the primary goals of this structure should be to establish a pay equity committee.

The early engagement structure should **not replace the pay equity committee and should not undertake any of the steps falling under the mandate of the committee**. It should be seen as a structure to help launch the pay equity exercise and pave the way to facilitate collaboration between the various workplace parties and encourage them to get actively involved in the process.

In particular, putting an early engagement structure in place can assist with:

- Raising workplace parties' awareness of pay equity;
- Establishing a high-level work plan;
- Identifying possible legal issues or questions;
- Putting in place any necessary processes to foster collaboration and conflict resolution;
- Identifying resources (for example, financial, human and tools) that the pay equity committee will need; and,
- Identifying an employee or group of employees that will take charge of the selection process for non-unionized employee representatives.

It is a **good practice** to implement a process that will foster collaboration and timely conflict resolution. This is essential to completing the pay equity exercise on time. For more information on how to build consensus and work collaboratively, you may consult the following resources available on the Canadian Human Rights Commission Pay Equity website:

- Promising practices for working in a pay equity committee – Building consensus
- Promising practices for working in a pay equity committee – Collaboration

2. Benefits of putting in place an early engagement structure

Putting in place an early engagement structure within the workplace is a great **opportunity to discuss key pay equity topics** prior to the implementation of the Pay Equity Act, such as:

- Deciding whether to file an application for multiple plans;
- Discussing the composition of the pay equity committee (or committees if multiple plans are authorized) and whom to choose as representatives;
- Considering the use of a consultant;
- Conducting an initial review of existing data;
- Developing strategies to support the recruitment of non-unionized employees for the pay equity committee and the identification of a non-unionized worker to facilitate the vote;
- Identifying areas of common interest and possible issues or concerns; and,
- Exploring how the pay equity exercise will be promoted and communicated.

It could also help to:

- Avoid or minimize implementation delays;
- Reduce disputes and mitigate the risk of confrontation between the workplace parties;
- Disseminate pay equity tools and resources (for example, [pay equity notice templates](#) and [publications on pay equity issues](#));
- Facilitate communication prior to the establishment of the pay equity committee; and,
- Establish how and when directions will be provided by the employer and bargaining agents to allow the members of the pay equity committee to perform their work.

3. Composition of the early engagement structure

The structure of this early engagement should reflect the specifics of the workplace and may take various forms, such as a steering committee, a joint committee, a joint task force or a multi-stakeholder discussion group.

Steering committee: A steering committee may decide on the priorities or order of business for the pay equity process and manage the general course of the pay equity exercise and compliance with pay equity legislation. Generally speaking, its members may include representatives of the employer and representatives of bargaining units.

Joint committee: A joint committee, which is typically composed of members from two or more workplace parties, holds discussion on the strategic direction that the workplace should follow to conduct the pay equity process.

Joint task force: A joint task force is a temporary grouping of individuals and resources put in place for the accomplishment of the specific objective of launching the pay equity process. The members may include experts from outside the workplace.

Multi-stakeholder discussion group: A multi-stakeholder discussion group is composed of people from different workplace departments and different bargaining units who meet to discuss key topics of interest related to the pay equity process. This type of structure may allow for more informal discussions.

Having these types of structures can help ensure that the pay equity process runs efficiently and smoothly. Moreover, it helps ensure that all parties contribute in the discussions about the strategic direction to be taken for the pay equity process and develop a **common understanding** of the work to be done and the **key principles of pay equity**.

To avoid potential overlap and conflict with the mandate of the pay equity committee, the early engagement structure should be **temporary and dissolved** once the employer has established a pay equity committee.

The Pay Equity Act assigns specific roles and duties to the pay equity committee, and it is important for the early engagement structure not to undertake these. For example, the early engagement structure should not evaluate jobs, collect job information or determine the methodology to use for the comparison of predominantly female and male job classes.

Some members who participated in the early engagement process may, however, **become members of the pay equity committee** later on (if selected) and share their newly acquired expertise.

As a **good practice**, the following elements should be considered when forming the early engagement structure:

- Gender balance and diversity;
- Representation of all workplace parties;
- Inclusion of people who know the mission and goals of the organization;
- Expertise in project management;
- Expertise in communications; and,
- Expertise in pay equity if possible.

In general, the structure should be small enough to facilitate decision-making (for example, 10 people) and should reflect the circumstances of the workplace.

Having a diverse engagement structure will promote the inclusion of different perspectives and a **balance of views** and will help **address any biases**.

Diversity among the membership is also a good way to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the tasks and efforts required to conduct the pay equity process. It can also ensure that the equipment and the products that are used and developed will meet the needs of all employees.

Example: Composition of an early engagement structure in a large workplace (500 employees or more)

The following engagement structure ensures that all sectors of the workplace are adequately represented and promotes a balance of views and interests, while its size allows for an informed decision-making process.

Members

- Representative(s) of management and other non-unionized employees
- Representative(s) of bargaining units
- Member of finance division
- Member of human resources division
- Member of communications division
- Member of procurement
- Executive assistant

Based on the nature of the tasks required to be accomplished by the early engagement structure, it is important to include members that have the level of expertise and level of authority to make informed decisions and set the strategic direction for the implementation of the Pay Equity Act.

Tasks

- Develop a communication strategy and issue joint communications
- Raise awareness on the key pay equity milestones with all workplace parties
- Facilitate the enrolment of members in the pay equity committee
- Decide whether to file an application for multiple plans
- Establish the time frames for the completion of the work up until the pay equity committee is established and running
- Identify financial resources and support that the pay equity committee may need (e.g., hiring of consultants, contracting with a research firm to collect data)
- Arrange for physical and/or virtual space to be available at the start of the pay equity committee's work

4. Launch of the selection process for non-unionized representatives

The early engagement structure **should not select** the member(s) to represent non-unionized employees on the pay equity committee, nor should it interfere in the selection process. Non-unionized employees remain in control of their own selection process.

One option is to see the selection of the member(s) representing non-unionized employees as a two-step process:

1. The first step is for the early engagement structure to recruit one or more non-unionized employees to manage the selection process (hereafter “the facilitators”).
2. The second step is for the facilitator(s) recruited under step 1 to manage the election of the member(s) representing non-unionized employees on the pay equity committee. This may include overseeing the election campaign, holding discussions with non-union employees, organizing the vote, etc.

The early engagement structure may be more involved in the recruitment process under step 1. For step 2, however, it should have a supporting role. This could include providing facilitators with access to the company’s email list or website and putting in place a communications strategy or an awareness plan.

Although the facilitators should be responsible for the process of selecting the member(s) from start to finish (conduct the vote, tally results, etc.), the early engagement structure should provide them with the **tools, communications and promotional support they need**.

The annex of this document provides a list of actions to promote and support the selection process. These actions may be carried out by the facilitators, the early engagement structure or, as a last resort, the employer. While the employer ideally removes themselves from the process, it is ultimately their responsibility to make all reasonable efforts to establish a pay equity committee that is compliant with the Pay Equity Act.

Resources

For more **information on promising practices** on early engagement within the workplace, please explore the following resources.

Chicha, M.-T. *Promoting equity: Gender-neutral job evaluation for equal pay: A step-by-step guide*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organization, 2008.

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---declaration/documents/publication/wcms_122372.pdf

New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees and Government of New Brunswick. *Pay equity job evaluation study*. Retrieved September 23, 2021, from

http://www.nbu.ca/images/pdf/PAY_EQUITY_JOB_EVALUATION_STUDY.pdf

Poirier, T., and Perron, J. *The value of care: Pay equity maintenance in home care, transition houses, and community residences*. Moncton, NB: New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity, 2020, October.

<https://equite-equity.com/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020-10%20The%20Value%20of%20Care.pdf>

Annex

Promotion and communication tool: Selection of members to represent non-unionized employeesⁱ

IMPORTANT

When designing and implementing promotion and communication tools, it is essential to consider the perspectives and needs of the diverse groups of individuals that the election process will affect and make sure that the material is accessible to all.

Date	Actionⁱⁱ	Message
As soon as the employer becomes subject to the Pay Equity Act	Posters/flyers/email	Inform employees of the coming into force of the Pay Equity Act and the resulting obligations (for example, the creation of a pay equity committee).
Eight weeks before voting	Newsletter election article	Announce the election and provide date(s), the number of candidates sought and information on the role of the pay equity committee.
Seven weeks before voting	Website posting	Link to election information showing dates and the nomination form.
Six weeks before voting	Website posting and email	Announce why non-unionized employees should vote and remind them of the role of the pay equity committee.
Five weeks before voting	Email to all voters	Include a reminder of the election date and note any changes to the voting process.
Four weeks before voting	Email	Provide information about how and when to vote and encourage employees to vote and participate in the debate or presentation session, if applicable.
Three weeks before voting	Newsletter election update	Remind voters of the election date and note any changes to the voting process.
Two weeks before voting	Posters/flyers/email	List where and how non-unionized employees can vote. Include instructions on how they can cast their ballots (for example, whether they have to do it in person or through online polling).
One week before voting	Email reminder	Remind employees of how and when to vote and convey any last minute information that the election team would like to share.

ⁱ Based on “Sample Promotion Plan” in *How to conduct a successful election* developed by ezVote: <https://www.ezvoteonline.com/pdf/How%20to%20conduct%20a%20successful%20election.pdf>

ⁱⁱ The elements included in the table are examples and may not be appropriate for all workplaces. Please consider what is best for your workplace and make sure your promotion and communication tools are accessible to all.