



Newsletter

January 2021

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Important Messages From Your Group Executive

Over the past months, a number of our Members have been enquiring about the status of our negotiations as well as the mandated reduced work week and Bill 28 – The Public Service Sustainability Act. The following summarises the current status of these concerns.

Negotiations:

The Negotiations Team consists of Harald Larsen, Cory Graham, Asit Dey, Sanjit (Sunny) Sidhu, as well as our negotiator, Pierre Ouellet. Sunny joined the Team this past summer after Kris Maranchuk resigned from Government to pursue other opportunities. Our last Agreement with the Province expired on March 29, 2019 and over the last 12 months, or so, we have met with the Employer on seven occasions in an attempt to improve the Agreement to the benefit of our Members.

The Negotiations Team met with the Employer on March 2 and 3, 2020 with a number of additional dates scheduled until the end of June when COVID-19 prohibited in-person meetings for Institute activities. As a result, we did not have our next meetings until October 14 and 15 when we met virtually. We have since met on three additional days and have tentative dates planned for February and March. To say the least, this round of negotiations has been most challenging, but we believe a favourable tentative new Agreement can be achieved for consideration by the Members of MAGE. Further information will be provided as these negotiations proceed and significant progress is made.

Involuntary Reduced Workweek:

It was a very difficult decision for the Group to make regarding the Employer's options they presented to reduce salary costs. The unity by the Members of MAGE to overwhelmingly agree to take 5 days unpaid leave rather than have the Employer layoff an unknown number of Engineers for an unknown length of time is commendable. This is a strong indication of our Membership's solidarity.

Bill 28 – The Public Service Sustainability Act:

The court challenge of Bill 28 was successful and was ruled to be 'draconian' and illegal by the learned judge. Unfortunately, the Government has appealed this ruling and we are now awaiting the next steps as part of this appeal. Time will tell if the Employer is successful in their appeal or if they will be told a similar answer. For those that do not recall, the Government's intent of this Act is to limit salary increments related to cost of living to 0, 0, 0.75 and 1.0 percent in years 1, 2, 3 and 4, respectively, following the expiry of the current Agreements. We are not done yet fighting Bill 28 that has not yet been proclaimed law.

Group Executive:

President: Harald Larsen
Treasurer: Asit Dey

Vice President: Cory Graham
Secretary: Sunny Sidhu

Members at Large:
Yasir Shah, Mamdouh Thomas

President's Report:

Many of you may have been wondering what has been happening with the Group since we last held any in-person meetings. Well the short answer is, 'not much.' The longer answer is, 'a lot has been happening.'

While we were not able to conduct our Annual General Meeting last April, the Group Executive has been meeting regularly since then, albeit virtually. There was a resignation from the Executive, as well as the Negotiations Team when Kris Maranchuk resigned from Infrastructure to pursue other another professional opportunity. We wish him well and thank him for his efforts on the Executive and Negotiations Team. The vacancy created by the resignation of Kris prompted the Executive to fill his position of Secretary. At the Group's Executive meeting in June, a motion was passed to appoint Sanjit (Sunny) Sidhu to the position of Secretary as permitted in the Group's Constitution (Article 6.3.2). Congratulations and thanks are extended to Sunny for taking on this role as well as becoming a member of the Negotiations Team.

There continues to be an exodus of Engineers from Government for various reasons over the past 12 months or more at various classifications. I have had conversations with a number of the departing Engineers and they have not indicated to me any particular negative reason for their departures; other professional opportunities, family commitments, and retirements were identified to me. Unfortunately, the Employer does not appear to deem it important to permanently fill these vacancies in almost all cases and other Members are either placed in 'acting' status or performing 'double duty' along with their normal duties. The various Employing Authorities (i.e., Branch/Regional Directors) are fully aware of these vacancies and the impact they have on: overall staff morale; individual work loads; ability of staff to complete tasks in a timely manner; and work-life balance among others. If any of you are affected by these vacancies, I encourage you to take advantage any supports that are available to you to ensure your personal well-being is maintained.

Your personal well-being may also be affected by the continuing, and varying, COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have been implemented by the Provincial Government. These restrictions vary by Health Authority in the Province but do not prevent Civil Servants from performing their duties if travel to various parts of the Province are required. Guidance has been developed by the Employer for all Engineers (employees in general) that are required to travel. I am not an expert on the pandemic by any means but I defer to the guidance by the Province that is based on science and I encourage you to follow it in your daily activities. Perhaps one day, soon, we will achieve a 'new normal' that will allow more freedoms in our daily lives and enjoy the company of friends and family in person.

If you have any comments, concerns or questions regarding your work situation, please do not hesitate to contact me, a Member of the Executive or one of the Group's Stewards. We will be more than happy to provide you with the support and assistance you need.

Regards and stay well,

Harald

Member Benefits:

Members of MAGE continue to enjoy the benefits of discount passes for City of Winnipeg fitness facilities for themselves, family members and friends. This has demonstrated to be a very popular benefit for many Members. In addition to these fitness benefits, Members of the Institute (including MAGE Members) are eligible to join GoodLife Corporate Wellness at reduced cost. Please follow the following link (<https://www.serviceplusgroup.ca>) to learn more about this benefit as well as other programs such as The BRICK, Telus, RW and Co, Reebok and others.

The Executive would like to offer similar benefits to Members of MAGE in other communities. To help us identify these facilities, please send us an email with information so we may investigate possible arrangements in your community.

We would also like to have your input on other possible discount suggestions that may be possible. These may include season tickets or even game day tickets to sports events (e.g. Brandon Wheat Kings, Winnipeg Goldeyes, Dauphin Kings, etc.), or perhaps live theatre, the symphony, etc. Other events could be attendance at a dinner theatre, comedy club, etc. The Executive needs your input and suggestions on how we can provide you the service, support and benefits you would like and need.

To access the full benefits of ServicePlus, Members of the Institute will require their Membership number. If you do not have access to your Membership number, it can be obtained from the PIPSC website at: <https://pipsc.ca/member-tools/find-your-membership-number>. It is your Member benefits program where you can take advantage of preferential rates, discounts and savings on a variety of products and services available exclusively to Members. Top brands are included for life insurance, travel, hotels, fitness, etc. PIPSC members are encouraged to join the Members Benefits Program and start saving today!

COVID-19 Working from Home

As a result of COVID-19, many Members of MAGE have been working from home since early 2020. The Federal Government has implemented a tax benefit in the amount of \$400 (maximum) for the 2020 taxation year. The rules and allowances for this are available from the Government of Canada and is accessible at: <https://canada.ca/cra-home-workspace-expenses>. Page 6 of this newsletter also contains a summary of work from home tax benefit program.

PIPSC 100th Anniversary:

PIPSC celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2020. There were numerous events held across the Country in recognition of this including events hosted by the Winnipeg Regional office staff, Winnipeg and Southern Manitoba Branch as well as our Group. These events gave the Institute, Branch and Group an opportunity to showcase what has been accomplished over the first 100 years since its inception and allow Members to join together in this celebration. The PIPSC website (<https://pipsc.ca>) is still active to show various events that occurred last year.

Labour Relations:

The Group has a number of Stewards that are available to provide support to its Members on various matters. These include, but are not limited to, interpretation of the Collective Agreement and various policies established by the Employer and their effect on your working arrangement. Our current Stewards are: Wisam Abdul-Razaq; Abu Ahmed; Burnid Briggs; Asit Dey; Cory Graham; Sung Joon Kim; Harald Larsen; Kanwarjit (Ken) Rakhra; and Purushottam

(Puru) Raj Singh. If you would be interested in becoming a Steward of our Group, please contact any one of the current Steward for some information on becoming a valuable resource for the Members of MAGE; this is not limited to Members within the Capital Region.

If you have any concerns or need clarification/interpretation of various matters related to work, please do not hesitate to contact any Steward. They are listed on the Group's website at: <https://pipsc.ca/groups/mage>.

In addition to the Stewards, our Labour Relations Officer from PIPSC is Meira Gisser. Her office is located in Winnipeg on Broadway. Should you require her assistance on labour matters, she can be contacted by email at mgisser@pipsc.ca or by phone at (204) 942-1304 or (800) 665-0094 Ext. 3325.

We have recently been provided the seniority list for our Members to the end of 2019; this information has been shared with the Group's Executive and all Stewards. If you would like a copy of the most current list in pdf format, please contact a member of the Executive or a Steward; contact information for the Executive and Stewards can be obtained at: <https://pipsc.ca/groups/mage>.

Member Engagement:

The Group Executive held a successful information session that presented possible changes to the Group's Constitution on February 4, 2020. These changes were to be formally presented at the following AGM on April 8, 2020 however COVID-19 prevented our Group from having in-person meetings and the AGM was cancelled.

We attempted to arrange our 2020 AGM on a number of dates since it was cancelled, but the Institute's continuation of prohibiting in-person meetings would not allow this to happen. At the present, these conditions are expected to continue for at least another 4 to 6 months.

As a result of the cancelled AGM, the Group was not able to conduct elections for the Executive positions. Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the PIPSC Board of Directors approved extensions of all Group Executive positions until a later date. The Institutes' Board of Directors has continued these extensions into 2021 or until such time that in-person meetings can resume. We will strive to ensure our Group's next AGM occurs in a timely manner after in-person meetings resume.

Classification Modernisation:

As many of you know, the Government is undertaking an initiative to modernise its classification structure of employee's position starting with a rewrite of position descriptions. A number of Engineers participated in training sessions that were conducted in December 2020.

As part of this exercise, there is a Working Team that consists of representatives from the Employer and PIPSC/MAGE. The representatives from PIPSC/MAGE are: Harald Larsen as well as Pierre Ouellet, Tawfik Said and/or Ryan Husk from PIPSC in Ottawa. The Working Team currently meets bi-weekly to ensure a smooth transition into the new system.

The initial steps is for all Engineering position descriptions to be rewritten into the new format which will be a document that does not exceed four (4) pages in length. This format will be applicable to all PDs and started with the PDs of the Deputy Ministers.

Once the position descriptions have been created in the new format, a sampling of these will be reviewed by the Working Team to ensure content and evaluation of the classification has been completed in an acceptable manner. With our current classifications of our Members (EE 1 to 4 and EG 1 to 5) there may not be much change to the number of classifications but that still remains to be determined. The current proposed classifications of Engineers are: Junior Engineer; Engineer; Senior Engineer; and Engineering Manager.

It is unknown if any Engineers will be reclassified as part of this exercise but there are processes that need to be followed in the event this is encountered.

The current proposed timeline suggests this process is to be completed by February 10, 2021 when the final packages are sent to Compensation Services.

If you need any assistance with the development of your new PD, or have any questions regarding this initiative, please do not hesitate to contact Harald Larsen at hlarsen@pipsc.ca.

Upcoming Event(s):

In the context of prohibited in-person meetings and events, the Group's Executive is exploring options for virtual meetings/presentations during 'lunch and learns'. As these events become available, you will be invited to attend and register.

Some possible topics that may be presented are: working from home; managing stress while working from home (the new workplace); mental health and wellness; diversity and inclusion; etc. There will not be any cost to participate in these events and there may be 'door' prizes for your participation.



Working from home?

Consider using the new temporary flat rate method to claim your expenses

As an employee, you may be able to claim a deduction for certain home office expenses (work-space-in-the-home expenses, office supplies, and certain phone expenses). The new temporary flat rate method simplifies your claim for a home office expenses deduction.



Eligibility

If you worked more than 50% of the time from home for a period of **at least** four consecutive weeks in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, you can claim \$2 for each day you worked from home during that period. You can then also claim \$2 for any additional days you worked at home in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The maximum you can claim for the temporary flat rate method is **\$400 per individual**.

This method can only be used for the 2020 tax year.



What counts as a work day

Days that CAN be counted:

- ✓ Days you worked full-time hours from home
- ✓ Days you worked part-time hours from home

Days that CANNOT be counted:

- ✗ Days off
- ✗ Vacation days
- ✗ Sick leave days
- ✗ Other leave or absence



Simplified for you

You do not have to:

- » calculate your work space details
- » keep supporting documents

Simplified for your employer

Your employer does not have to:

- » complete and sign the Form T2200S or Form T2200

If you have a larger claim, you can still choose to use the detailed method to calculate your employment expenses, get a completed and signed Form T2200S or Form T2200 from your employer and keep documents to support your claim.



For more information on working from home expenses for employees go to canada.ca/cra-home-workspace-expenses