

WildBrain Union FAQ

At this crucial stage of the campaign it's important to us that everyone understands what a union is, how a union can help us at WildBrain, and what's involved as we move forward.

We've had a lot of questions since launching the campaign and will address some of the most common ones here. No secrets and no extravagant promises - we just want to make sure everyone has all the information they need to make the right decision.

If you don't see your question answered here, you can contact the worker led WildBrain Organizing Committee at wildbrainorganizing@gmail.com. Alternatively, you can contact our IATSE Rep Will Gladman at wgladman@iatse.net.

In either case, all communications are strictly confidential.

Question: How does the unionization process in Vancouver work?

In BC, generally speaking, the road to unionization involves a 4-step process:

1. Workers at WildBrain approach the union and start gauging the level of support at the workplace.
2. Sign union support cards.
3. Once 55% or more of the eligible workers sign a membership application card, the union files an application for certification with the BC Labour Relations Board and becomes automatically certified as the union entitled to represent the workers.
4. The workers, with the support of the union, negotiate the terms of the contract with the employer.

The union contract that is signed is called a "Collective Agreement". It is negotiated and agreed to by both the workers forming the union and the employers, so that it is fair to both parties. We talk more about bargaining and the collective agreement below.

Q: What are 'union cards'?

A union card, or 'Authorization Card', is the worker's way of indicating that they would like to be represented by a union. In BC, these union cards expire after 6 months.

We have mostly been using digital union cards which can be sent by email and signed using a computer. You can also sign a paper card if you prefer.

Whether or not a worker has signed a card is kept **completely confidential** between the worker, the union, and the Labour Board. It is illegal for union cards to be disclosed to an employer at any point in the unionization process. Employers are also not allowed to ask workers whether or not they've signed a card.

To sign a card, you can email wgladman@iatse.net or visit <https://forms.gle/WeZewBokQdPQkJLJ9>. All correspondence is completely confidential.

Q: Who is eligible to join the union at WildBrain?

All artists and production workers are eligible to join the union. This includes supervisors, leads, directors, production managers and most other positions even if they have supervisory duties.

Only management is totally ineligible. This generally means people who have hiring and firing capacity at the studio.

Some people are not management but also are not artists or production staff. Positions like facilities, IT, and pipeline may be eligible and we will work hard to include them if they also want to be represented by the union.

We are gathering support cards from all non-management workers at the studio. More support can never hurt so if you would like to sign a card, you should! Please reach out to us if you are unsure if you are eligible and we'll help you figure it out.

Ultimately the decision of who is eligible is made by the Labour Board

Q: Are there fees? What are the union dues?

Union dues are the regular payments made by members to maintain their union membership. By paying union dues, workers are pooling their resources and investing them to ensure that members are protected and are getting all of the benefits of their collective agreements.

Union dues are tax deductible, meaning that you get a sizable portion of your dues payments back during tax season.

Each local is free to decide dues structure. CAG members pay two kinds of dues: regular dues and working dues.

Regular Dues are a flat fee payment, payable to the union by all members. The regular dues for CAG Local 938 are \$80 per quarter, however, members who choose to pay the entirety of their regular dues at the beginning of the year will save 10%.

Working Dues are a percentage that is deducted directly from the gross wages of members who are working under a union contract. For Local 938, working dues are 2% of gross wages. You do not start paying dues until the collective agreement is ratified and you are actually getting the benefits of membership.

Q: Why do we have to pay dues?

Funds collected via dues payments contribute to all aspects of running the union. Dues fund the staff and resources provided by the Union to help workers negotiate and enforce their contracts. They also fund all kinds of other items like training and legal support for members,

and through economies of scale allow the Union to provide a host of other benefits not normally available to non-union workers.

Ultimately, the democratically elected board of the local Union makes the decisions about how its funds are spent, as directed by the members.

Unionized workers enjoy higher wages and better benefits than non-union ones, and are well protected by the union in case anything goes wrong.

Q: Do I have to join the union if the studio unionizes, even if I didn't sign a card?

A: Yes - once a union is certified at WildBrain and the collective agreement is ratified, everyone who works at the studio will need to be a member of the union. Anyone who joins WildBrain at a later date will have to join the union as a condition of their employment. This is the law in Canada.

Workers who did not sign a card will have all the same rights, benefits, and obligations as those who did sign. They will still have the opportunity to contribute their ideas about what our bargaining proposals should be, and can even participate in committees and other activities at the union should they have a change of heart.

Issues at Work and Collective Bargaining

Q: How does bargaining/negotiating a first contract work, and how do workers provide input for the contract negotiations?

Collective bargaining is a worker-led and run process from start to finish.

Once the union is formed, employees establish a Bargaining Committee that is made up of WildBrain workers. The Bargaining Committee will send out surveys and have meetings with workers to discover what things people want to include in bargaining. These might be things that we need to keep the same, things that need to change, or even problems without an immediately obvious solution.

IATSE representatives and lawyers will then assist the Bargaining Committee to create bargaining proposals from those priorities.

The Bargaining Committee will then go to bargaining with WildBrain as the employer. They will have a series of meetings together to negotiate the first contract. It is us as workers who sit across the table from the employers to bargain the new contract, with IATSE reps and lawyers playing a supporting role.

Once a tentative agreement is reached, all the workers at the studio will vote on whether to ratify it or not. If a majority of workers agree, then the agreement is ratified. If they do not ratify the contract, then the Bargaining Committee and the employer go back to negotiations to fix the things that need fixing.

Q: What kind of things are guaranteed in a collective agreement?

There are no guarantees at this stage as to what ends up in our collective agreement. This is because, as described above, the contract depends on 2 things:

1. What workers at WildBrain want; and
2. What WildBrain is prepared to negotiate for at bargaining.

However, we can take inspiration from the Titmouse agreement and are helped by IATSE's decades of experience negotiating collective agreements both in animation and in other similar industries. Some examples of what was achieved at Titmouse:

- Some workers saw \$400 per week increases
- 20% increase in sick/personal days
- 15% wage increase for supervisor duties
- Move to more efficient union-run RRSP
- Clear OT procedure and ability to say no to overtime
- Worker-written anti-bullying and harassment policy
- Wage minimums increase each year
- Protections against outsourcing

What we can promise is that nobody will have to be on their own anymore and will always get support to deal with things at work. We are also guaranteed a seat at the table to have a voice on the things that impact our daily lives.

Q: How does having a collective agreement improve wages?

Our collective agreement will include a wage grid which sets the minimum pay scale for each position. The grid is based on an increase from the current wages at WildBrain.

Importantly, **nobody's wage will go down as a result of workers forming a union**. Likely, not everyone will see the same increase to their wages; those who currently make more may not get as much of an increase as those who are currently paid the least.

A collective agreement can also secure predictable annual wage increases. You might negotiate a flat % annual raise or work out a complicated formula that is tied to inflation. Exactly how annual raises work will depend on what we agree on with WildBrain at bargaining, but some annual increase is very likely to be included.

Q: How do union-provided health benefits work?

We have heard from countless workers at WildBrain that we need health benefits that cover us when we are out of work. This is an important part of building some stability into our kind of contract-based work.

IATSE Local 938 does not yet offer health benefits to its members working at Titmouse. This is because Titmouse workers decided during bargaining to keep using the plan they already used. However, once WildBrain is on board the Local will be able to access the IATSE Health Plan and offer portable benefits to its members through Canada Life.

Having access to this plan via IATSE would mean that we could access benefits whether we are working at a union studio or not. We could even get benefits while we are not working at all. Local 938 has a Health Plan Committee which has set aside some funds to invest in the Health Plan once it is up and running.

Q: Will forming a union mean the studio just outsources more work? How could we protect against outsourcing taking jobs away from the studio?

Studios, including WildBrain in particular, are already outsourcing an increasing amount of work. This negatively impacts our ability to find and keep jobs and is a major concern we've heard from many WildBrain workers.

We hear from some people that they are worried unionizing could mean even more outsourcing of work. In fact, **the opposite is true**. A collective agreement can contain language which limits a studio's ability to outsource work, keeping jobs at the studio.

For example, the Titmouse collective agreement contains language which means that the studio cannot outsource work when it has staff at the studio who can perform that work. This means that nobody loses their job because the studio wants to cut costs through outsourcing.

Without a collective agreement, there is nothing we can do about it.

Q: How could we protect against AI taking jobs from workers?

Similar to the above, a collective agreement can contain language that addresses technological change, including the use of AI in the workplace. With these protections in place, an employer may be restricted by how and when they can use certain technology at work, or whether they can use it at all. They may be required to consult with the workers when new technology is developed to ensure that it does not impact union jobs.

Again, bear in mind that there are no guarantees at this stage. However, a collective agreement is the only way for workers to get a seat at the table to decide how these things are done. The more of us stand together, the stronger our bargaining power and the more we can achieve.

Common Fears and Concerns

Q: Some of our benefits are already pretty good – do we risk losing them by forming a union?

No – nobody will lose pay or benefits from forming a union.

We know that there is a lot to like about working at WildBrain, but there are also things that we can improve. That's why the first priority is to lock in the things we like and then improve the things that need some work. Workers at WildBrain are in charge of the bargaining process and, simply put, we would not agree to having our benefits stripped back.

Without a union, WildBrain can remove the benefits we enjoy with no notice or consultation with employees. That isn't possible when we are protected by the terms of a collective agreement.

Q: Will our agreement be based on the Titmouse agreement?

A: No - in BC, the workers at each studio negotiate their own collective agreement with their employer. Because each employer is different and there are different benefits and drawbacks to working at each studio, each collective agreement will contain different things.

We will be negotiating improvements based on what WildBrain already offers - it doesn't make a difference to us how much Titmouse workers get paid or how many days' vacation they get.

However, we can still draw inspiration from other unionized workplaces, including Titmouse. See above for some of the gains workers achieved at Titmouse when they formed a union.

Q: Does forming a union mean we will have to go on strike?

A: No. Strikes only happen under certain circumstances where an employer has continuously failed to come to the bargaining table in good faith. It is the last tool in the toolkit of unionized workers whose employer is not treating them with respect. Most issues in bargaining are resolved without even coming close to a strike.

Crucially, a strike is only ever authorized by a vote of the workers who would actually be going on strike. **If the workers don't want it, it doesn't happen.** The vast majority of union members have never been on strike. Note that in BC, even if you want to, you can't legally go on strike for problems negotiating a first collective agreement.

Q: Will having a union change the way hiring and promotions work? Will it be based on seniority instead of merit?

A: No, not all unions have seniority and we do not believe there is an appetite for seniority at WildBrain.

Unless we negotiate otherwise with WildBrain, hiring and promotions will stay broadly the same once we form our union. The studio will still hire on the merit of a person's work and experience and the union will not be involved in who they pick for certain roles. The studio will not be forced to hire or promote particular people because of the union.

What will change is that you will now have all the support you need when you are negotiating with the employer or figuring out issues with your contract. You'll no longer have to go it alone.

Q: Will I be able to negotiate my own wage and other terms under a collective agreement?

A: Yes. The collective agreement sets a floor so that nobody is paid less or treated worse than those minimum standards that we have all agreed upon. But that does not mean that we lose our ability to negotiate for ourselves as individuals.

Every worker is free to negotiate a higher rate or other improved terms based on our individual skills, level of experience etc.

Q: If we unionize animation in Vancouver, won't all the jobs be sent overseas?

A: Many industries have moved jobs overseas and animation is no exception. Animators in Korea, the Philippines, and India already work for much lower rates than animators in Canada or the USA with or without a union, and yet, animation is still being done in North America.

Hollywood animators have enjoyed the benefits of unionization since 1941. Live action film in BC has been unionized since the 1990s. The actors who record voices for the cartoons we make are also in a union. Animation work is likely to stay here for a number of reasons:

- Generous Tax Credit program
- Same language and time zone as LA
- Close proximity and similar culture to the LA industry
- US Dollar vs Canadian dollar
- Infrastructure setup and a large pool of talented artists
- A well-established Canadian entertainment industry that needs Canadian talent for CanCon (Canadian Content) requirements.

Since Titmouse workers unionized to form CAG in 2020, Titmouse Vancouver has still been getting work and has doubled in size. Animation in Vancouver did not flinch or slump at news of unionization; in fact, new studios continue to open here, because of the reasons listed above.

As described further up in this FAQ, we can also aim to include language that prevents the studio from outsourcing work when we are able to do the jobs in-house.

Q: Will unionization hurt the studios?

Actually, unionization can be very beneficial for the studios. It can guarantee labour stability, which can ensure that the studio can meet their deadlines. It can draw talent to the studio, as workers will often want to be at a studio where their needs are met and their interests are represented. It can lessen the burden on employers to provide benefit and retirement plans to their employees. In short, unionization can, and does, benefit employers just as much as it will benefit employees!

In the end, both workers and employers want a strong industry where everyone can thrive. As we see in BC's film and TV industry, a strong union can actually join employers to fight for an environment that helps the industry grow and build resilience.

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For example, BC's film and TV unions have long fought alongside industry to maintain and improve BC's tax credit system. This kind of strong partnership brings in more work and therefore more reliable, high quality jobs, benefiting everyone involved.

Studios may say that their biggest challenge with a unionized workforce is a lack of complete flexibility. However, unregulated flexibility is often a detriment to employees, and needs to be weighed appropriately in a workplace. With a union, animation workers would be an integral part of that conversation.

Q: Life is already busy enough. Will I be forced to participate in union meetings, committees etc?

No - if you support workers forming a union at WildBrain then all you need to do is sign a confidential support card.

While the union is worker-run at every level, you can be as involved or as uninvolved as you like. There are a whole host of opportunities to participate in bargaining, join or launch committees, or run for elected office and more. However, if you prefer to let others handle all of that, that's totally fine.