



GRADUATE “FUNDING” PACKAGES AND THEIR AFTERMATH:

Table of Contents

Preface.....	1
Graduate Student “funding”: a Short History	1
Bargaining in the Age of “Funding” Packages.....	6
1) <i>Bargaining Demands</i>	7
2) <i>Member Mobilization</i>	10
3) Bargaining Strategies.....	12

Preface

I started my graduate student and academic worker life at the University of Alberta in Edmonton in a province where contingent academic workers are legislatively barred from organizing and collective bargaining. After one year in that unwelcoming climate, I moved to the University of Toronto and began a six year sojourn there that more or less coincided with the introduction of Canada's first comprehensive "graduate funding package." In those six years, I was involved in three rounds of collective bargaining, two of which centred around the introduction and the implementation of these packages. What the University of Toronto did in 2001 is fast becoming an industry standard in 2006: a number of universities, including Carleton and Queen's, have switched over to the model of graduate "funding" packages while others, such as Victoria, are actively considering it. What follows is an attempt to anatomize the generic model of graduate "funding" packages – if you like, to "unpackage" it – in the light of collective bargaining scenarios that currently obtain in so many Canadian Union of Public Employee locals that are having to deal with the problem of bargaining a "package" that they do not have very much control over. As "funding" packages have only made an appearance in Canada in relation to graduate student employees, in this report, I talk about almost exclusively of your graduate student members; those academic worker locals that represent undergraduate students, postdoctoral fellows, sessional lecturers or others please note that this is by no means an attempt to exclude these of your members; rather, it is an attempt to begin the discussion of a very particular issue which affects many CUPE members.

It is crucial to begin by understanding why "funding" packages appeal to administrators and to union members. It is only with a clear sense of this appeal that the postsecondary education sector of our union can move forward with a united strategy for dealing with these packages. From where I stand, it seems as though "funding" packages of some sort are here to stay; we need to acknowledge that their introduction and implementation has changed the ground of collective bargaining for academic worker locals in the postsecondary education sector within CUPE (and for that matter, even beyond CUPE). In order to keep representing our members to the best of our ability, we need to come up with bargaining strategies that address the particularities of "funding" packages and allow us to have some say in how they are configured and implemented.

Archana Rampure
September 2006

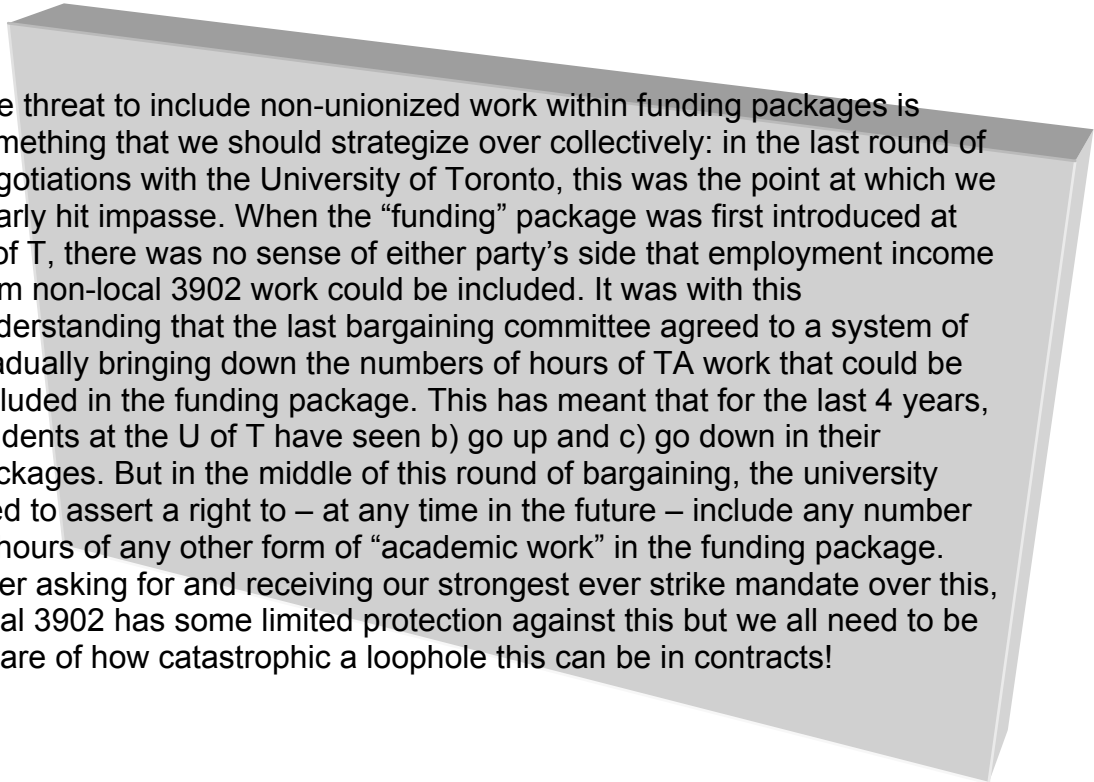
Graduate Student “funding”: a Short History

Post secondary institutions in Canada operate on a system of mixed funding, where they derive a portion of their own funding from transfers, federal and provincial sources, and then try to make up their operating budgets with corporate funding and tuition fees. Following a pattern of *graduate funding* that owes more to the American system than to any other, there are primarily five ways for graduate students to fund themselves through the Canadian university system. Historically, “funding” was made up of portions of a number of or all of these sources. Trade unions negotiated only the wage rates and working conditions that related to c) although there have been many attempts – and some limited successes – in getting b) attached to c). The introduction of the “funding” packages have meant though that suddenly we have to be in a position to negotiate on all of these fronts simultaneously, and with the full awareness of our collective lack of influence over factors such as a) or e).

- a) The most desirable form of funding comes from external funding agencies, such as SSHRC, CIHR and NSERC as well as smaller provincial funds such as OGS or Heritage Foundation grants and private scholarship funds from bodies such as the Killam or the Ford Foundations. Such funding is considered desirable not only because it often tends to be the most lucrative funding but also because it carries no obligation to work for any part of the money.
- b) University fellowships constitute another layer of “scholarship” funding: again, this is funding, pure and simple and it does not require any work. Such fellowships tend to be of lower value and are sometimes used to recruit students at the discretion of Departments and Divisions. One of the key battles in terms of “funding” packages is over how much fellowship money goes into the base “funding” of any given “package” – the general rule of thumb here is that more is better.
- c) Unionized work income – most often, this is income from Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant¹ work. In general, the rule with employment income is that it is used to make up the gap between fellowship money and the promised threshold of “funding” in the package. Unions are often in a difficult position here because while they want to reduce this as much as possible, they need to make sure that it is significant enough as a category that they have a seat at the table where “funding” packages are negotiated (which is quite often not at the bargaining table).

¹ Note that I’m including GA work, assisting at Labs or working as a student course instructor, in this category.

- d) Non-unionized work income creates another huge problem for unions when it comes to dealing with “funding” packages. There has to be the highest priority on making sure that non-union work income is not included in “funding” packages; if it is, trade unions will lose whatever power we have to influence these packages. The truly alarming scenario is that the amount of unionized work that goes into a “funding” package can be minimal and so can the fellowship amount, if universities are at liberty to include as many hours of non-unionized work as they like into “funding” packages.
- e) Research assistantships in the sciences are often a confusing category that need to be considered separately from either unionized or non-unionized RA work income. In many cases, such income derives from faculty members’ own research grants. Graduate programs in the sciences often require students to work for a certain number of hours in labs or as research assistants – there needs to be a distinction made here by T4 and T4A income – if the RA work is essential to the graduate student’s own research, it should not be considered to be the same as c) or d) above.



The threat to include non-unionized work within funding packages is something that we should strategize over collectively: in the last round of negotiations with the University of Toronto, this was the point at which we nearly hit impasse. When the “funding” package was first introduced at U of T, there was no sense of either party’s side that employment income from non-local 3902 work could be included. It was with this understanding that the last bargaining committee agreed to a system of gradually bringing down the numbers of hours of TA work that could be included in the funding package. This has meant that for the last 4 years, students at the U of T have seen b) go up and c) go down in their packages. But in the middle of this round of bargaining, the university tried to assert a right to – at any time in the future – include any number of hours of any other form of “academic work” in the funding package. After asking for and receiving our strongest ever strike mandate over this, local 3902 has some limited protection against this but we all need to be aware of how catastrophic a loophole this can be in contracts!

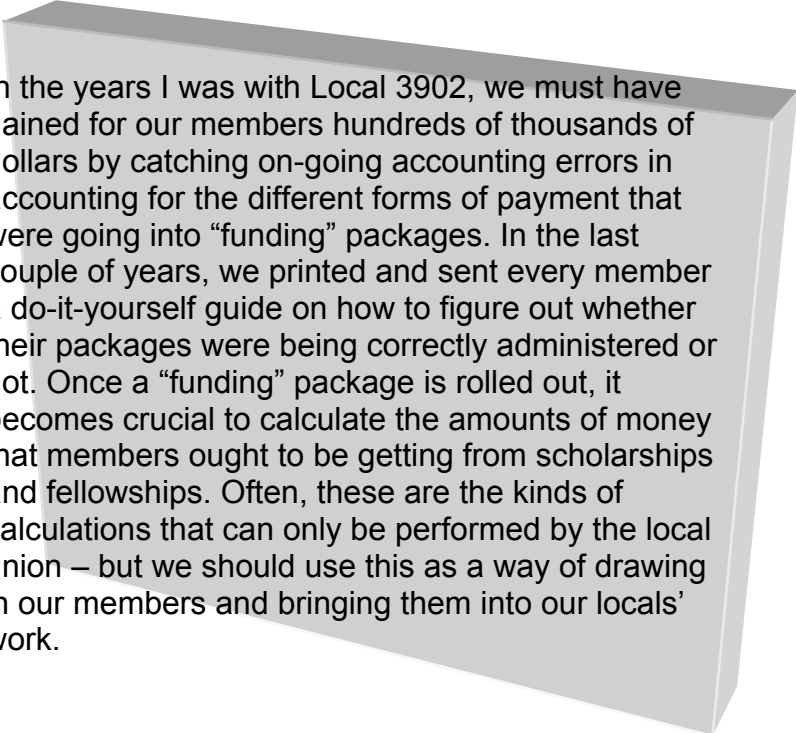
“Funding” Packages

From the perspective of many rank and file members, who aren't interested in the process of collective bargaining, and who don't know the complicated history of graduate student funding in Canada, the introduction of a graduate “funding” package simply translated into “free money for school.” But as anyone who is more deeply concerned with collective bargaining on Canadian university campuses these days knows, “funding” packages don't quite live up to this hype. The “funding” package was created as a way to make sure that every “funded” student could be guaranteed a certain minimum threshold of institutional support for a fixed period of time. In theory, this is a great idea that most university locals would have been more than happy to embrace, had it not been for the simple fact that different forms of funding – scholarship monies, fellowships, and unionized and non-unionized work wages, T4A and T4 income, for instance – are all swept up into these so-called “comprehensive” or “blended funding packages.” In the aftermath of the introduction of these “funding” packages, it is now up to our locals to educate our members as to their many consequences.

We can only find effective ways of communicating the importance of this issue to our members if we can understand that this is attractive to incoming members who often do not quite understand how graduate students “funding” is different from employment income. Returning members, too, might often find it less confusing to at least know what level of income they can count on, rather than on having to put together various forms of funding and employment income themselves. *In order to find effective communication strategies for countering this fallacy that graduate “funding” packages are indeed “free money for school,” we need to understand why it can be so appealing; if we do not, we risk alienating members who only see the Union objecting to something that seems to be a positive development.*

From the perspective of trade unions, it would have been much better had it been possible to limit what universities can call graduate “funding” only to scholarship and fellowship monies so that employment income stays separate. In this scenario, “funding” packages would have formed a base layer of funding and the rates of pay campus trade unions negotiated for the academic labour of their members would have been on top of this base funding. However, universities have been extremely unwilling to come to this understanding: since so much of the motivation for the introduction of graduate student packages in the first place is the positive publicity the announcement of such packages generates, universities have wanted to be able to put the biggest dollar amount out and call it “funding.” For instance, the University of Toronto's introductory base rate for its package was \$12,000 + tuition a year for five years for every “funded student.” While there are all sorts of caveats about how to determine who was to be a

“funded student” – and these are the caveats that unions need to exploit – it is obvious that the kind of public goodwill U of T was able to buy with this is far more than it would have been able to buy with an announcement to the effect that it would fund its graduate students with a \$6000 package, when tuition itself was close to \$6000.



In the years I was with Local 3902, we must have gained for our members hundreds of thousands of dollars by catching on-going accounting errors in accounting for the different forms of payment that were going into “funding” packages. In the last couple of years, we printed and sent every member a do-it-yourself guide on how to figure out whether their packages were being correctly administered or not. Once a “funding” package is rolled out, it becomes crucial to calculate the amounts of money that members ought to be getting from scholarships and fellowships. Often, these are the kinds of calculations that can only be performed by the local union – but we should use this as a way of drawing in our members and bringing them into our locals’ work.

One of the lessons the union movement can learn from this is that positive publicity is of tremendous import to most universities. If we must have “funding” packages, if we cannot ensure that “funding” packages contain only monies that can accurately be characterized as “funding”, then we must strive to make sure that employer’s most generous interpretations of such packages are made as public as possible. And the task then becomes one of holding successive university administrations to what has been promised and making sure that their commitments are followed through to the letter. This doesn’t mean that those locals that still have not seen the introduction of “funding” packages should be trying to make sure that paid work is not counted into such packages. If you still have that option, push that as much as you can – even in bargaining. It is much better to have “funding” packages that are as limited as possible in terms of the types of funding they can include than to try and negotiate improvements to the package once university administrations have already rolled them out!

Given that the cost of tuition has been rising at a reprehensible pace, it is of the utmost importance to try to have tuition included *as tuition* (as opposed to as a dollar figure) in “funding” packages. Even if “funding” packages are rolled out incrementally or do not cover all students or even all graduate students, to the extent that any group of students is protected from tuition fee increases provides a powerful disincentive to the jacking up of tuition rates. University administrators will be loath to increase tuition across the board when they know that they will have to fund that increase for a portion of their students. Further, the presence of students who have their tuitions effectively frozen is a powerful incentive to other students who would no doubt like to be in the same position – so both for reasons of solidarity with the student movement and because this is the one point at which “funding” packages can only be a positive for our own members, we should bring to bear whatever pressure we can in making sure that tuition is included *as tuition* in any new graduate “funding” package any university administration introduces from this point onward.

For those locals where “funding” packages are already the norm, this is clearly not an option. Other strategies that deal more directly with the issue of how to bargain in the context of the introduction and the implementation of “funding” packages are called for. Locals that are operating within the purview of “funding” packages have to have a two-fold strategy that deals with bargaining on the one hand while also maintaining steady communications about complicated financial issues with memberships that tend to be transient, part time and in most cases, new to the world of labour unions.

There are, as all those of you who have been involved with the labour movement on university campuses, know all too well, very many other particular circumstances that could be elaborated upon here in the context of the changes wrought about in the model of graduate education itself by the introduction of this kind of “funding” package. This report is only a preliminary to the discussions that must take place if the labour movement is to be in a position in the years to come to ensure that these packages serve the interests of our members and public interest research most broadly defined. If trade unions on campus do not continue taking the strong positions they have historically taken in support of their members and of the public funding of their research in the interests of the public, as a society we risk letting the tradition of public funded and accessible postsecondary education devolved into a privately funded and for profit model which will further the income stratification of our society.

Bargaining in the Age of “Funding” Packages

But the main question still remains: how do we undertake collective bargaining on behalf of our members in the context of so-called comprehensive or “blended funding packages”? What should we be asking for? How do we deal with the fact that different groups of our members will be affected differently by the introduction of “funding” packages? How do we develop strategies? How do we explain these strategies to our members? How do we actually go about bargaining now?

Each of these sections deals with some of the above questions. But these are also the areas that would need to be discussed as broadly as possible. I would suggest that these are the areas that need to be developed into strategic plans within the postsecondary education sector caucus. So what you’ll see on the following pages are skeletal suggestions from which to generate real strategies that locals can customize for their particular scenarios.

Bargaining Demands: Just as we have a common understanding around certain bargaining demands – “no concessions,” for instance – we need to move toward sector-wide understandings of what our members cannot live with in the context of “funding” packages.

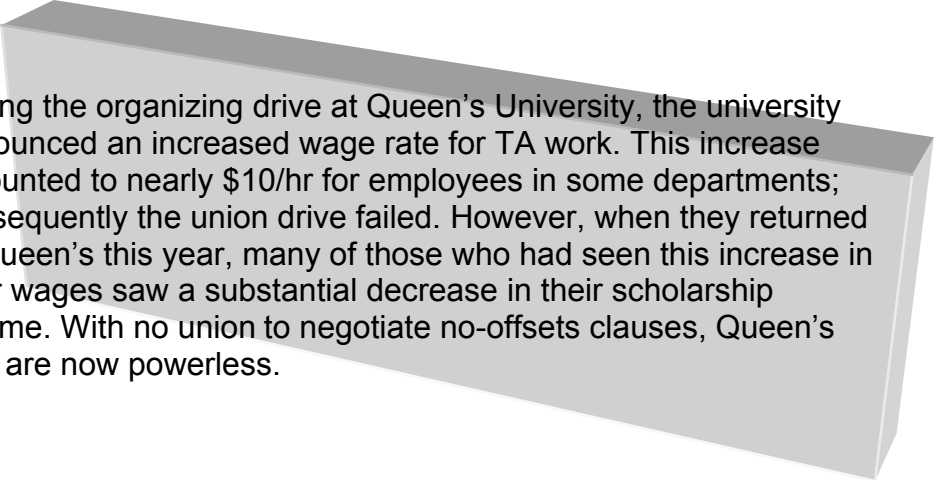
Member Mobilization: Every local needs to familiarize its activists with the ins and outs of “funding” packages so they can effectively communicate the local’s position to the broadest possible audience. We need to make sure that our members realize just what is being counted into the “funding” packages that they are being offered.

Bargaining Strategies: We need to come up with ways of actually dealing with employer committees who might believe that “funding” packages are wonderful things; we need to have our research done and convincing arguments ready – both for our members and for employer committees – about the ways in which our locals need to be involved in the implementation of “funding” packages.

Bargaining in the Age of “Funding” Packages:

1) Bargaining Demands

1. Non-union employment income should NEVER be part of “funding” packages – since our jurisdiction to bargain wage rates and conditions of work only apply to the unionized work our members perform – we should make sure that our work is the only “negotiable” part of the “funding” package.
2. Unless you have a common bargaining table, this means that only one local’s work should be part of a “funding” package – the risk of the employer playing one local or one union off another in order to negotiate lower wages or more hours within a package maximum is too great.
3. Tuition should be included as tuition (and fees, if you can negotiate that) within “funding” packages.
4. NO-OFFSETS clauses are invaluable – this means that any negotiated increase in wage rates or benefits will be seen by members over and above the established package rate. Vacation pay, for instance, should always be negotiated to be over and above the “funding” package because it is a legislated – not negotiated – benefit that accrues to all workers.



During the organizing drive at Queen’s University, the university announced an increased wage rate for TA work. This increase amounted to nearly \$10/hr for employees in some departments; subsequently the union drive failed. However, when they returned to Queen’s this year, many of those who had seen this increase in their wages saw a substantial decrease in their scholarship income. With no union to negotiate no-offsets clauses, Queen’s TAs are now powerless.

5. Establish clear thresholds of the maximum number of hours of work that can be counted into a “funding” package.

NOTE: This can be a back-door into negotiating 1. above – if your CA mandates a maximum number of **total work hours** that can be included as part of a “funding” package, it will mean that even if your members are forced to perform work that is paid at a lower wage for the same number of hours, they will receive the same total monies for the same total number of hours of work. Be strategic about this: if you know that 1. is not going to be negotiable, work this angle; if the employer wants to specify hours of your bargaining unit’s work at a late stage in bargaining, use that as an opportunity to generate negative publicity for the institution).

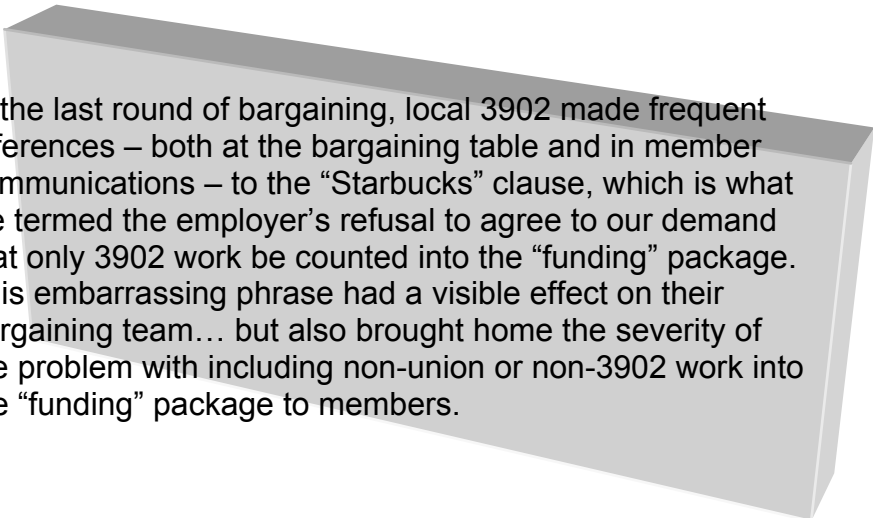
6. Attempt to get the university to agree to a gradual reduction in the amount of paid work that will be counted into “funding” packages. An annual reduction of 20 hours can translate into an extra \$700 of scholarship or fellowship money for each member.
7. Try to make sure that there are no differential levels of funding available – insist that all students and workers deserve the same levels of financial support – the easier argument to use here is that cost of living is not affected by discipline or faculty. If departments, divisions or faculties want to top up “funding” packages, encourage them to do so but do not enter into agreements with the employer about differential “funding” packages on the basis of discipline or student status. This can lead to conflicts within the membership that can only damage solidarity.
8. Negotiate the local’s right to have voting members on any administrative or employer board, committee or body that makes decisions about implementing or administering these “funding” packages – these will often be tied to the Faculty or School of Graduate Studies.
9. Since “funding” packages are likely to be offered for multiple years for PhD students, demand that they be offered for 6 years and don’t settle for less than 5 (York currently offers 6 years of funding; UofT 5).
10. Demand that as many training and orientation hours as possible be counted into the hours of work calculation at the start of every new appointment.

11. “Funding” packages are also generally offered on a year round basis; try to make sure that any benefit entitlements you have are also on a year-round basis: this will mean that members have access to benefits even when they are not working. Also, make sure that members who need to go on leave or do fieldwork can compress or postpone their employment into one term.
12. Ideally, the “funding” package should figure as part of the collective agreement itself – there has been a disturbing trend of universities wanting to have side agreements on “funding” packages or letters of intent – try to negotiate these into the body of the CA itself.

Bargaining in the Age of “Funding” Packages:

2) Member Mobilization

1. Make sure all of your local’s activists understand the “funding” package – after all, member mobilization is all about making sure your members know – and *understand* – what are the negotiations are about.
2. Organize training sessions for all your stewards and go over all the minute details of how your institution’s “funding” package works. You should have a number of people on the ground who can explain this to rank and file members and who can accurately judge whether or not your members are being paid what they are entitled to.
3. Explain the concept of “funding” packages to members as lucidly as possible – the briefest explanation is that it is a combination deal of scholarship money and wages – and also keep repeating that it is “not free money.” The title of this position paper should become a mantra that your members all understand: “funding that your work is not free money for school... it is the wage you are getting for the work you are performing for the university.”
4. Do not be afraid to repeatedly stress the catastrophic consequences of not being able to negotiate some of the key bargaining demands outlined in the last section. Our locals can only bargain from a position of strength when everyone on campus knows that the union’s bargaining committee is only expressing the will of members.



In the last round of bargaining, local 3902 made frequent references – both at the bargaining table and in member communications – to the “Starbucks” clause, which is what we termed the employer’s refusal to agree to our demand that only 3902 work be counted into the “funding” package. This embarrassing phrase had a visible effect on their bargaining team... but also brought home the severity of the problem with including non-union or non-3902 work into the “funding” package to members.

5. Be prepared for confusion – “funding” packages *are* confusing beasts!
6. Keep stressing all of the other benefits members get from the union – benefit entitlements, vacation pay, no discrimination policies, leaves of absence, EI help – whatever you have won in other rounds of bargaining and whatever you have on the table during negotiations. Don’t let your members buy into the myth that there’s no need for a union when they have “funding” packages.

Bargaining in the Age of “Funding” Packages:

3) Bargaining Strategies

1. Go into bargaining with a concentrated plan of action with regard to “funding” packages – do not let your employer set the agenda. This does not mean, however, that you need to announce your vision for your “funding” package on the first day of bargaining.
2. Be strategic about when you want to talk about package issues – it will likely take time and it will probably be one of the most difficult parts of your negotiations so you might want to clear smaller issues off the table. This will build your relationship both with your employer’s bargaining committee and with your own membership, which will be more likely to trust your judgement on the big issues when you have been able to demonstrate your proficiency in making gains on smaller issues.
3. If your institution does not have a “funding” package yet, survey your membership NOW to determine how many hours people work, what their average (and median) annual incomes from union work and scholarship or fellowship monies are, average time-to-completion of various graduate degrees and if possible, collect this data over a period of years and with faculty divisions.
4. If you are trying to negotiate alterations to an already existing “funding” package, start mobilizing your membership as early as you can – go into bargaining with a clear idea of what you want the “funding” package to look like: publicize this as widely as you can, look for support from other campus trade union, faculty members, student organizations etc.
5. Entirely remodelling a “funding” package that a university has already implemented may not be easy; concentrate on small changes (so changes to amounts of scholarship monies or number of hours of work required or timing of employment) rather than on trying to rewrite the “funding” package entirely. In other words, be strategic about how you can derive the most benefits for your members.
6. Adapt and make available freely information about other universities “funding” packages – this may be used to provide comparative data to your members or even to your employer’s bargaining committees.

7. It may be useful to keep stressing your members dual roles as both graduate students and employees of the same institution – demand that employer bargaining team members acknowledge that your members are their students and colleagues – use this as a wedge to talk about why they need to have most of their “funding” in the form of scholarship or fellowship income.
8. Depending on where you are in negotiations and the relationships your union or your activists have with faculty or with faculty associations or unions, consider asking departments to adopt motions with regard to the maximum number of hours their graduate students can work and still maintain research programs.
9. Have information sessions about “funding” packages and bargaining issues that are open to students who may currently be funded – if your institution has a “funding” package but does not extend it to Master’s students, include those Master’s students who are interested in any public discussion on the future of “funding” packages. This could be a great way of drawing in those who will be your members in the future.
10. Make sure your bargaining committee has a complete understanding of your institution’s budget, and how much funding it derives for graduate education. Assign someone on your bargaining team to be cost all available variations of “funding” packages – so often, hundreds of thousands of dollars are at stake in every detail.
11. Attend meetings of your university’s Graduate Student Union or Association and update them on any bargaining matters related to “funding” packages. Given that “funding” packages generally cover more students than those who are also union members, the broader your local’s reach, the more influence you will be able to bring to bear on your university administration.
12. If at all possible, include your institution’s Graduate Student Union or Association in your strategic planning over “funding” packages – your aim should be to make sure that your employer does not strike side deals with your GSU or GSA on any aspect of “funding” packages. Be warned that universities will try this, often under the guise that graduate “funding” packages cover all graduate students, not just those employed by the university under your union contract.

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CUPE Research

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