

Checklist: Protecting public services during the pandemic and beyond

This checklist is designed to help CUPE public sector workers and our allies spot privatization threats and contracting out opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery.

As the initial crisis recedes, greedy corporations will be pitching your employer with privatization projects. Even though the pandemic highlighted the importance of public services in keeping Canadians healthy and safe, cash-strapped employers may be vulnerable to a sales pitch for contracting out, public-private partnerships (P3s), or other privatization schemes.

The response to COVID-19 must put workers and the public interest first, not line corporate pockets. We should be strengthening and expanding our public services and facilities as we move through this crisis into the recovery.

Be alert

Budgetary problems

An employer in financial difficulty may consider privatizing because of misguided desperation, even though privatization costs more and delivers less.

- Does your employer have increased expenses related to COVID-19?
- Have your employer's revenue sources decreased because of COVID-19?
- Was your employer having financial difficulty before the pandemic?
- Are there options for financial support available to your employer?

Layoffs or redeployments

Reduced or frozen staff could set the stage for privatization

- Has your employer laid off members because of the pandemic? If yes, how many workers have been laid off? What departments or types of work were affected by layoffs? Did these layoffs affect full-time, part-time or temporary workers? Were seasonal workers affected?
- Have workers been redeployed to other service areas?
- These questions also apply to hiring freezes.

Cuts to public services

Public services cuts could lead to privatization

- Have public services been cut, suspended, or cancelled in response to COVID-19?
- Which types of services have been affected?
- How will this affect the public?

Emergency legislation and by-laws

Changes to procurement rules or collective agreement protections as a result of emergency legislation could set the stage for privatization

- What has emergency legislation changed for your employer (e.g. workforce redeployment, public service levels, collective agreement protections)?
- Has emergency legislation suspended collective agreement protections against contracting out?
- Has your employer hired additional staff during the pandemic to do bargaining unit work? Has your local negotiated a Letter of Understanding regarding any staff hired while the collective agreement was suspended?

Contracting in

If workers are laid off, are there opportunities to bring contracted out work back in house?

- Is your employer putting out tenders for newly contracted out work? Could this work be done by workers who are laid off or by hiring additional workers?
- Is there a possibility for your employer to cancel private contracts and redeploy workers instead of laying them off, bringing work back in house?
- Has COVID-19 highlighted any problems with contracted-out services? Could there be an opportunity to contract in work such as landscaping, cleaning, food services, or IT?

Be prepared

Monitor your employer

- Get volunteers to take turns watching all public meetings of the employer (municipal council, agency, board, etc.). Many will be virtual because of COVID-19.
- If no one can attend, monitor and review all meeting agendas, minutes and reports.
- Monitor tenders your employer releases asking companies to bid on work.
- Build relationships with local elected officials and senior staff.

Identify corporations and contractors

- Have any companies been meeting with your employer or decision-makers to pitch their services since the pandemic began?
- Has anyone from federal or provincial P3 agencies been meeting with your employer such as the Canada Infrastructure Bank, SaskBuilds or Infrastructure Ontario?
- Identify contractors who already operate at your workplace and think ahead to other work they may go after.
- Find out when contracts expire, so you can see whether there are opportunities to bring the work back in house.

Review your collective agreement

- Go over your collective agreement language on contracting-out and contracting-in to see what protections and opportunities exist.
- Enforce your collective agreement where the employer is violating contracting-out clauses.

Take action

Spread the word

- Build awareness about the privatization warning signs through virtual conversations, your local's web site and social media, email bulletins, virtual local meetings – whatever works best to reach your members.
- Build communication networks that work well during COVID-19 to let you quickly share information and hear back from your members.

Promote public services

- Throughout the pandemic, public service workers have shown strength, resiliency and heart. Public services have expanded to meet the needs of the public in creative and thoughtful ways.
- Highlight these examples to show how strengthening public services helps us build strong communities.

Build relationships

- Build relationships with local elected officials and other community leaders or groups.
- Have regular meetings with individual councillors, trustees, or any other elected officials that have influence over your employer. These meetings will likely be virtual during the pandemic.

Connect in your community

- Reach out to members of the public who may be affected by COVID-19 service reductions. By showing that we care and are involved in the community, we put a public face to our work.
- This also lays the groundwork for strong local coalitions by creating the allies we need to defend public services.

If you spot a warning sign of privatization, or an opportunity to contract in work, during the COVID-19 recovery, spread the word. Talk to your steward, anti-privatization committee and your local executive. Make sure your CUPE staff representative knows what's going on. They'll help you assess the threat and connect you with other staff in education, communications and research to develop a plan.

Together, we can stop privatization before it starts. Together we can bring privatized services back in house.

For more information on privatization, visit cupe.ca/privatization

*This checklist was developed based on a [resource](#) developed by In the Public Interest, a US anti-privatization advocacy organization.

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