

# MRFA Organizational Review: Intent of the Reorganization and Impetus for Review

In 2022, following a protracted round of collective bargaining, the Mount Royal Faculty Association (MRFA) undertook an organizational review to assess whether its bargaining and governance structures were serving members effectively. The review was prompted in part by the transition to the *Alberta Labour Relations Code*, which restored free collective bargaining and the right to strike. This return to strike/lockout as a dispute resolution option marked a significant shift from the framework in place since 2005. At that point, an interest arbitration ruling confirmed that the provincial government had removed the MRFA's pre-existing and never relinquished right to strike and imposed arbitration as the final dispute resolution mechanism. The 2018 and 2020 rounds of bargaining, the latter under the new sector wide bargaining model, revealed the Association's existing structures did not adequately address the new strike/lock out context nor did they fully reflect the Association's commitment to the Organizing Model of unionism adopted in 2017.

The resulting changes—including the creation of a Negotiations Policy and the establishment of the Collective Bargaining Caucus (CBC)—were implemented in advance of the 2024 round of bargaining, with the understanding that the new system would be evaluated once one full round was complete.

This current review, carried out by the Organizational Review sub-Committee, is therefore the second step in a longer process: first, to review the implementation of the new structures; and second, to refine our practices to ensure that they best serve the Membership in future rounds of bargaining. It is imperative that the structures in place to support bargaining ensure the membership is engaged and ready to support a strike vote if needed.

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## Intent of the Initial Reorganization

The initial reorganization sought to address several challenges that had been observed in the 2018 and 2020 bargaining rounds. At its core, the intent was to create structures that promoted faculty solidarity through more inclusive, transparent, accountable, and sustainable.

The new context of strike/lockout means that member solidarity is the key to successfully pursuing faculty interests at the bargaining table. Unlike the past, where disagreements especially over wages could be referred to binding arbitration, the possibility of employer lockout or faculty strike introduced higher stakes and the need to ensure the Association's representatives had the support of the membership and the possibility of a strike. In short, unlike

the past, the Association needed to show member solidarity to offer credibility to the bargaining team at the table. This need to cultivate solidarity underwrote the following changes.

### **1. Improving mandate development.**

A key driver of the reorganization was to strengthen the process for developing the bargaining mandate. By situating mandate discussions in the caucus and creating clearer links between the caucus and the team, the process aimed to produce mandates that were more representative and strategically prioritized. In the review currently underway, the Association will be assessing whether the new process for developing a mandate worked more or less effectively than prior rounds. It is likely that further clarity is needed on the scope and prioritization of items in the bargaining mandate, as well as the authority and roles of various groups and individuals involved.

### **2. Strengthening inclusion and broadening engagement.**

To broaden participation and ensure that bargaining decisions reflected a larger, more representative body of members, the Association amended its bylaws to strike a Collective Bargaining Caucus. The goals here included addressing a need

- to create more pathways for members to engage in the bargaining process—such as through observer roles—without needing to commit immediately to serving on the Bargaining Team.
- to increase member engagement with more diverse constituencies represented
- to prepare future team members for bargaining.

### **2. Enhancing transparency.**

Some members had expressed frustration in past rounds with the lack of visibility into bargaining processes. The inclusion of observers at the table and a more intentional open flow of information was intent to address this concern and ensure that members could see how decisions were being made, while still protecting sensitive details as required.

### **3. Clarifying roles and accountability.**

The reorganization aimed to resolve longstanding ambiguity about the respective roles of the Executive Board and the Negotiations Committee. The new structures sought to delineate functions in the Negotiations Policy and Committee charters so that authority, accountability, and responsibility remained clear. In particular, the initial Organizational Review Committee identified the need to separate roles that had previously been concentrated in one individual (for example, the Negotiations Officer serving simultaneously as Chair of the Bargaining Team). The intent was to ensure that responsibilities such as chairing, serving as chief bargainer, and communicating with the Membership were distributed across multiple people, allowing for more effective execution and avoiding burnout.

### **5. Building capacity and expertise.**

The reorganization also emphasized the need to appoint bargaining team members with the right experience and expertise, while ensuring that their appointment was ratified by the Membership to secure legitimacy. It recognized that the workload required for bargaining cannot

be assumed simply by virtue of holding an elected office and that team composition must balance skill sets, capacity, and willingness to serve.

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## **Impetus for the Current Review**

With one full round of bargaining now completed under the new structures and as envisioned in 2022, the Association is undertaking a systematic review of the completed round of bargaining to assess what worked, what fell short, and how processes can be refined. The impetus for this review rests on several key considerations:

### **1. Evaluating effectiveness.**

***The committee is tasked with determining whether the reorganization met its goals of cultivating solidarity that would enhance the Association's credibility and power at the table.*** Did increasing transparency, clarifying roles, and improving mandate development help with this goal? Some successes were evident but challenges remain in areas such as committee and staff workload balance, role boundaries, and accountability in mandate implementation.

### **2. Gathering member feedback.**

As part of the Review Committee's mandate to offer members their chance to express their experience of the new structure, the team has created anonymous surveys aimed at both those who participated in bargaining and those who did not. Optional interviews are being conducted to ensure members can provide candid input to inform the Committee's recommendations.

### **3. Learning from operational challenges.**

The 2024 round highlighted several operational issues that need attention, such as the clarity of the ratification process (particularly in areas like retroactive pay), and the need for better training and orientation of new team members.

### **4. Planning for future sustainability.**

The review also recognizes that strong clearly understood structures are central to the Association's future collective bargaining role. Clearer policies, role descriptions, and training programs are required to ensure the bargaining process remains effective and sustainable across leadership transitions.

### **5. Realigning with strategic goals.**

Ultimately, this review is about ensuring that MRFA's bargaining processes reflect its broader values: inclusion, democratic engagement, transparency, accountability, and effective advocacy. By incorporating lessons learned and considering external models, the Association can continue to refine its structures to better serve members and strengthen its collective bargaining power.

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**Conclusion**

The 2022 reorganization of MRFA's bargaining structures was an initial step toward cultivating a greater member engagement, transparency, and accountability. This current review provides an opportunity to consolidate lessons learned, address ongoing challenges, and ensure that MRFA's bargaining structures remain strong, sustainable, and aligned with the Membership's values and priorities for the future.