



# Unit Secretary's Manual

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FEBRUARY 2021

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## **Unit Secretary's Manual**

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### **Introduction**

Hello Unit Secretary,

Congratulations on being chosen to take on a critically important position to your Unit and to our Local, whether you are new to the role or long-tenured.

While your Unit's Chair is responsible for leading the Unit, enforcing Union rules at the Unit level and chairing Unit meetings, you are responsible for making sure that the Unit runs properly in a technical manner. This means that you are to ensure proper communication between the Unit and the Union Office, that Unit meetings are adequately planned and their proceedings accurately recorded, that Unit expenses are properly authorized and submitted, that the Unit membership list is accurate, and much more. With these duties properly performed, your Unit should have the foundation needed to be organized and effective.

If you ever require any advice on your role, don't hesitate to contact me at [michael.phillips@usw1944.ca](mailto:michael.phillips@usw1944.ca)

In Solidarity,

Michael Phillips  
Secretary-Treasurer  
United Steelworkers Local 1944

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### **Contact Information Quick Reference**

Contact [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) for the following:

- Submission of Unit Meeting minutes*
- Submission of Unit Meeting Sign-In sheets*
- Submission of amendments to the Unit Meeting Notice*
- Submission of requests for Special Unit Meetings*
- Submission of Membership Applications*
- Submission of Unit Official Change notice*
- Submission of Correspondence and Resolutions to the Local Union Executive Board*

Contact [unit.expenses@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.expenses@usw1944.ca) for the following:

- Submission of Unit Expense Vouchers for obtaining per diems and reimbursement for any necessary expenses of the Unit, along with any required receipts to substantiate these expenses*

Contact [ludm.resolutions@usw1944.ca](mailto:ludm.resolutions@usw1944.ca) for the following:

- Submission of Resolutions to the Local Union Delegated Meeting*

Contact Local Secretary-Treasurer Michael Phillips at [michael.phillips@usw1944.ca](mailto:michael.phillips@usw1944.ca) or 604-437-8601 for any questions relating to the performance of Unit Secretary duties.

Members can contact [contact@usw1944.ca](mailto:contact@usw1944.ca) for our general mailbox.

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### **Duties**

#### **Duty #1 - Become familiar with the USW Local 1944 By-Laws**

While it is primarily the role of the Unit Chair to ensure that Unit business is performed in accordance with the rules of the Local and USW generally, a Unit Secretary should find familiarity with these rules useful to gain an understanding of how the Unit and Local are structured and how they function. Specifically, the Local By-Laws contain some provisions with regard to expenses and record keeping that relate to the duties of the Unit Secretary. While these duties are summarized below, it is useful to see them in context through reading the Local By-Laws. For instance, the duty to properly record meeting attendance (Duty #6) is made even more clear when you read the provisions relating to eligibility for Unit and Local election that rely on properly recorded Unit meeting attendance.

The USW Local 1944 By-Laws can be found on the Local website at <https://usw1944.ca/usw-local-1944/bylaws>.

#### **Duty #2 - Help arrange Unit Meeting locations and times**

Local Office staff will periodically contact you (usually once per year) to ask you whether a certain schedule of Unit meeting dates, times and locations work for the next few Unit meetings. You should canvass your Unit Officials, and perhaps even the Unit more widely, to see when and where they would prefer to meet. It's important that meeting times and locations be chosen not only to maximize attendance, but to get a good cross-section of your members attending from different shifts, job titles etc. Please respond to the Local Office promptly. Once the schedule is established, please let the Local Office know as soon as possible if things change and any meeting time/location need to be adjusted, prior to the meeting Notice being sent to all members.

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### Duty #3 - Submit to the Local Union office any additional Agenda items to go on the Meeting Notice

Local Office staff will generally send out a very standard looking Unit Regular Meeting Notice to all members prior to a meeting, which will say "Regular Order of Business" for the Agenda. If ever the Unit wants to have anything additional listed on the Agenda, it is your responsibility to let us know. Perhaps the Unit has a particular topic they want to discuss at the meeting, perhaps there will be resolutions to the Local Union Delegated meeting, perhaps a motion to amalgamate the Unit with another Unit is to be moved. In any of these cases, such business should be included on the Meeting Notice. If the meeting will be debating an issue that could have a permanent effect, like a Unit amalgamation, such a motion must be on the Notice.

You can also request that the Local Office always put certain wording in the Agenda, instead of just "Regular Order of Business" and you can ask staff to highlight something in the subject line of the Meeting Notice if it's really important.

All such requests for Meeting Notice amendment should be sent to [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) at least 3 weeks prior to the meeting date to ensure that changes are made prior to the Meeting Notice being distributed. In any case, requests to substantially amend a Meeting Notice made less than 10 calendar days prior to a meeting will not be approved, as there is insufficient time to ensure membership awareness of the change as some members are still mailed their Notices.

### Duty #4 - Send any requests for Special Unit Meetings to the Local Union office, including the Agenda

"Regular" Unit Meetings are held quarterly and are the only format of meeting that can pass motions regarding the conduct of Union business. However, a Unit may hold additional "Special" Unit Meetings which are topical in nature, and at which no motions can be passed. For instance, a Unit may wish to have a meeting to discuss a certain urgent workplace issue, or have a guest speaker, or even have a BBQ or other event. In this case, the Unit Secretary should contact [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) to request that the Union sanction a Special

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Unit Meeting, including booking a room and sending the Notice to all members. As the Local currently has a Social Fund, the request can include a request for funding for food or anything else that would facilitate turnout and a successful meeting.

A Special Unit Meeting Request should be specific on these points:

- Date and time of meeting
- Name and address of venue
- Name of requested room
- Expected number of attendees
- Any special requests (seating arrangement, etc)
- If funding is requested, how much, to purchase what, and why?

Special Unit Meeting Requests should be made as far in advance as possible to ensure that any preparations (room booking, purchases) can be made. The Local Office may deny a request so never assume approval until it is granted, and certainly never make any purchases, for which you expect reimbursement, prior to receiving specific approval of the purchases.

### Duty #5 - Approve or deny requests for Union Time Off for Unit business

The Local Union office is able to request that our members' employers allow members Union Time Off from work to conduct Union business. Unit Chairs and Unit Secretaries are able to request paid UTO for their own attendance at a Unit meeting, and Labour Council delegates are able to request paid UTO for attendance at a Labour Council general meeting. You, as Unit Secretary, may receive such a request from the Local Union office and you will be asked whether you approve of one of your Unit members receiving requested time off. Before approving, please ensure that you know what the UTO request is for, that the UTO is necessary and that the amount of time requested is not in excess of the amount of time required.

Please encourage members to submit their requests well in advance of the time off requested as this increases the chance that the time off will be approved by the employer. Likewise, please notify the Local Union office of your approval or

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disapproval of the time promptly. The Local Union office retains the ability to approve or disapprove any UTO request for Unit business.

### Facilitate the proceedings of the Unit Meeting, including:

#### Duty #6 - Record membership attendance at Unit General Meetings

While it is the Unit Chair that conducts the Unit meetings, the Unit Secretary has a variety of important responsibilities during the meeting.

As members are arriving to the meeting, a Unit Meeting Sign-In Sheet should be circulated, on which members will write their name and signature. These sheets can be found on the Local website under the "Member Resources" menu and "Current Forms" link. Completed Sign-In Sheets should be submitted by scan or photo to [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca), along with the Unit Meeting minutes. As Unit Secretary, you are responsible for ensuring that the Unit Meeting Sign-In Sheet has been properly completed. Every attendee at a Unit Meeting must record their attendance and sign the Sheet.

If a member is in attendance by Zoom, you are to record their name on the Sheet and sign for them yourself.

It is imperative that the Unit meeting only include individuals (members and guests) who are permitted to be there. While the responsibility for removing disallowed individuals is ultimately that of the Chair, your role as Unit Secretary is to be aware of, and track, the identities of all attendees. For larger Units, where not every member is known to every other member, the Unit Secretary should also have a recent Unit membership list on hand to be able to verify whether attendees are members in good standing of that Unit. This is information that the Chair requires to make any determination regarding removal of an individual from a meeting.

This identification process can be more challenging when meeting by Zoom. If there are any attendees by Zoom that cannot be visually identified by you, and have not identified themselves, please ensure that they are asked to identify themselves. It may be helpful to ask all Zoom attendees to type their names in the Zoom chat, or perhaps only those who are not visually identifiable. If there is any

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discrepancy, and an individual remains unknown despite all efforts to identify them, they should be removed from the meeting, and you should make such a recommendation to the Chair.

Among other reasons, it is critical that meeting attendance has been recorded in this way as members are ordinarily required to attend at least 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of their Unit's regular meetings (unless they are excused) to be eligible to become a Local Executive Board Officer or Unit Official.

Members may be excused from attendance if it can be demonstrated that their absence was due to the member's Union activities, working hours, service in the armed forces of Canada or the United States, sickness which confines, death in the immediate family or jury duty. Any member who claims inability to attend a Unit meeting because of a 'sickness which confines' must notify the Unit Secretary within one month of this meeting, and the Sheet should be amended to add that the member was "Absent Excused". If you receive word of a member who was "Absent Excused" after the form had been submitted to the Union Office, please email [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) again to let them know.

It should be made clear on the Sheet if any attendees are guests at the meeting, meaning anyone who is not a member of the Unit.

Without the relevant Sign-In Sheet being submitted to the Local Union office, no per diems will be issued to the Unit Chair or Unit Secretary for attendance at a Unit Meeting as the Book is the official record to verify attendance.

No attendance needs to be taken at Unit Special Meetings as these cannot transact Union business, only at the quarterly Unit General Meetings.

### Duty #7 - Compose Minutes

The minutes of a Unit Meeting are the single authoritative account of what transpired at the meeting. These minutes are authored by the Unit Secretary and are to be approved at the next Unit Meeting. These approved minutes are then to be submitted to the Local Union office at [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) within 14 days of approval.



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The Unit Secretary must take notes (a draft set of minutes) throughout the Unit Meeting, accounting for the essentials of what occurs. Details of conversations or debates need not be recorded and no information of a strategic, confidential or private nature should be recorded. Otherwise, the transaction of all business that comes before the meeting should be recorded.

The Local website provides a template minutes document named "Minutes of Unit General Meetings" on which your meeting minutes should be written, found under the "Member Resources" menu and "Forms" link. Using the notes taken at the meeting, the minutes should later be composed in a way clear and concise enough that someone who was not at the meeting could learn everything noteworthy that occurred at the meeting by reading them. When any question arises, even years later, concerning a decision or action occurring at a Unit Meeting, it is the Unit Meeting minutes that are relied upon, not anyone's recollection or personal notes.

As an Official of the Unit, you will be receiving the approved minutes of the Local's Executive Board Meetings. These are a good model to use in determining how to notate the proceedings of your Unit's meetings.

### Duty #8 - Conduct Roll Call of Unit Officials

After the Unit Chair has brought the Unit Meeting to order, they will ask the Unit Secretary to conduct the Roll Call. Each Unit Official's name is called out and the Unit Official acknowledges that they are present. If a Unit Official is absent, the Unit Secretary should attempt to determine if they are absent for one of the 6 excusable reasons (Union activities, working hours, service in the armed forces of Canada or the United States, sickness which confines, death in the immediate family or jury duty).

The Unit Secretary will note the presence or absence of each Unit Official in the minutes and, in the case of absent Officials, will note if the absence is excused.

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### Duty #9 - Seek approval of the Minutes of the previous meeting

Preceding the start of the Unit Meeting, at the same time that you circulate the Unit Meeting Sign-In Sheet, you should also distribute copies of the draft minutes composed from the previous meeting.

After the Roll Call, the Unit Secretary must put forward a motion to approve the circulated minutes. Once the membership is satisfied that the minutes are an accurate representation of the business of the previous meeting, and have carried the motion, those minutes become the authoritative account of that meeting. If the meeting amends the minutes in any way before approving them, the Unit Secretary must make these changes before submitting the minutes to the Local Union office.

### Duty #10 - Read Communications received by the Unit

After the minutes of the previous meeting have been approved, the Unit Secretary must read to the Unit Meeting any correspondence addressed to the Unit. This might include, for example, a notice from the Local Secretary-Treasurer to all Units, a thank you letter from a community organization, a note from a member who is absent from the meeting etc.

Any motion to take an action concerning a piece of correspondence should be brought forward later, under New Business.

### Duty #11 - Submit any membership applications you receive to the Union Office promptly

Members are able to submit their own membership forms to the Union office, however, some members, or stewards, may pass them along to yourself to submit to the Union Office as you are the principal communication liaison between the Unit and the office. Please submit any membership form you receive to [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca). The form asks a member to send the completed form to [contact@usw1944.ca](mailto:contact@usw1944.ca), so you could do that as well.

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Delays in submitting a member's completed membership form can have serious repercussions. The member may have signed up to the Employee Life and Health Trust using the form, and think they are member, when the form hasn't yet been submitted. Delay in joining the ELHT plan can make the criteria of eligibility to join the plan more difficult later on. A member would also not get a ballot for a Union vote, Meeting Notices, and other correspondence until their form is submitted.

### Duty #12 - Submit expenses for Unit business to the Local Union office

There are some expenses for Unit business that the Local Union will pay for by cheque to a member.

These expenses must be submitted by having the member who will receive the expense cheque complete and sign a "Unit Expense Voucher" found on the Local website under the "Member Resources" menu and "Forms" link. Two Unit Officials must sign their approval on the Voucher, and one of these Officials must be the Unit Secretary unless the cheque is payable to the Unit Secretary. If a Unit does not have enough Unit Officials to obtain two signatures in this way, this must be indicated on the Voucher. The Voucher must then be submitted to the Local Union office, preferably by email to [unit.expenses@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.expenses@usw1944.ca). The Local Union office retains the ability to approve or disapprove any request for expenses for Unit business.

The Local Union will, at its discretion, pay or reimburse members for the following:

- A Unit Chair or Unit Secretary's per diem for attending a Unit general meeting, as per the policies of the Local relating to expenses. This per diem is for the sole purpose of paying for any retail meal expense required due to attendance at a Unit Meeting. An itemized receipt for the meal expense must be submitted and a per diem is only payable for substantiated expenses up to a certain maximum amount which is reviewed every year by the USW International. The Local Secretary-Treasurer will send all Unit Secretaries a Bulletin whenever the maximum per diem amounts change. Only after the Unit Secretary has submitted to the Local Union office a copy of the relevant Unit Meeting Sign-in Sheet, substantiating the Official's attendance, may a per diem be issued.

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- A Unit member's per diem for retail meal expenses related to attending a meeting of the Labour Council to which their Unit, or the Local, is an affiliate and to which they are a credentialed delegate, as per the policies of the Local relating to expenses. This per diem is for the same purpose, and uses the same limit and substantiation process, as the per diem described above.
- Reimbursement to the Unit Secretary for supplies necessary for the performance of their duties. Receipts are required to substantiate the expenses.
- Reimbursement to a member for event expenses incurred by them relating to the holding of a Unit Special Meeting (ex. food, draw prizes etc). Such expenses must be reasonable and pre-approved by the Local Secretary-Treasurer.

Expenses other than these are exceptional and, in such cases, advance approval must be obtained from the Local Secretary-Treasurer to ensure that pay or reimbursement would be possible.

### Duty #13 - Send any correspondence or resolutions from the Unit to the appropriate contact

It is your responsibility as Unit Secretary to not only receive correspondence to the Unit, but to send out any correspondence, and resolutions from the Unit, to the appropriate contact.

Outbound correspondence and resolutions include the following:

*-Unit correspondence to the Local Executive Board*

A Unit may wish to send a letter to the Local Executive Board and may do so by emailing [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) . A Unit may wish to send a resolution to the Executive Board and give the Executive Board the opportunity to vote on it. In such a case, the resolution passed by the Unit should follow the format of the appropriate "Resolution to Executive Board" form, found on the Local website under the "Member Resources" menu and "Forms" link. The resolution must be submitted in this format, and with all information required by the form completed, to [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) . Any correspondence sent by a Unit to the Executive Board must be received by the Local Union office no later than 10 days prior to the Executive Board meeting to ensure that it will

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be placed on the agenda. Correspondence and resolutions to the Local Executive Board must be sent separately from the submission of the Unit Meeting minutes.

- *Unit resolutions to the Local Union Delegated Meeting*

A Unit may wish to send a resolution to the Local Union Delegated Meeting to be decided upon by the Local. In such a case, the resolution passed by the Unit should follow the format of the appropriate "Resolution to Local Union Delegated Meeting" form, found on the Local website under the "Member Resources" menu and "Forms" link. The resolution must be submitted in this format, and with all information required by the form completed, to [ludm.resolutions@usw1944.ca](mailto:ludm.resolutions@usw1944.ca). Any correspondence sent by a Unit to the Local Union Delegated Meeting must be received by the Local Union office prior to the established deadline, which will be communicated to all Units, in order to permit debate on the resolution. Resolutions to the LUDM must be sent separately from the submission of the Unit Meeting minutes.

### Duty #14 - Notify the Local Union office of any changes among the Unit's Officials

In the event of a vacancy (other than a temporary vacancy) in a Unit Official position, the remaining Unit Officials shall, by majority vote, select a successor to serve the remainder of the term, valid upon ratification by the Local Union Executive Board. Similarly, where a temporary vacancy occurs in a Unit Official position, a "Temporary Acting" replacement shall be selected by majority vote of the remaining Unit Officials, valid upon ratification by the Local Union Executive Board.

The existence of a Unit Officials vacancy, and any selection of a successor, will be communicated by the Unit Secretary to the Local Union office at [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) as soon as possible to ensure a timely transition. The Local Secretary-Treasurer will bring any selection of a successor to the next Executive Board meeting for approval.

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### Duty #15 - Periodically review the Unit membership list for accuracy.

The Local will occasionally send each Unit Secretary and Unit Chair their Unit's membership contact list. This list is confidential and only the Unit Chair, Unit Secretary and PUMA Unit Prime are able to access it, so don't share it outside that group. You will be asked to check the list for accuracy, which means just look it over and see if any mistakes jump out at you. If you notice that a member's headquarters or job title are listed incorrectly, or that someone's last name has changed, etc, please let us know at [unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca](mailto:unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca) .

### Duty #16 - Keep Unit Records for at least 3 years

Record keeping is an important duty of the Unit Secretary. A piece of correspondence or a meeting attendance sheet that might not seem important at the time may turn out to be essential later. The Unit Secretary must keep all documentation relating to Unit business for a period of at least 3 years. A Unit Secretary should not assume that because a copy of a document was submitted to the Local Union office, there is no longer any need to keep the original. Rather, the Unit should, when necessary, be submitting copies of its documentation to the Local Union office and should be keeping the originals for at least 3 years. Using an accordion file or other record filing system will assist when the need arises to find documents from years past.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you very much for taking on the responsibility of being your Unit's Secretary. As this Manual makes clear, the Unit Secretary has many responsibilities in ensuring the proper operation of their Unit. When these duties are performed with care, the co-workers that you represent benefit by having a stronger and more effective Union in their workplaces.

Again, don't hesitate to contact the Local Secretary-Treasurer Michael Phillips at [michael.phillips@usw1944.ca](mailto:michael.phillips@usw1944.ca) or 604-437-8601 if you need clarification on any aspect of the Unit Secretary position or require any advice on your role.