Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine their terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more.

AFL-CIO

1. Unions are popular!

67% of Americans approve of labor unions and

641,000 Ohioans were members of a union in 2023.

2. Collective bargaining means workers have a say in their workplace.

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3. Many workers are joining or organizing unions because inequality between workers and their employers has skyrocketed.

- The median share of income spent on rent in 2022 was 28%, representing a steady increase after a decade of decline.
- Between 2020 and 2023, annual gas/electric costs for Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus residents increased 16-23%.
- If your grocery bill was $100 per week at the start of 2021, by the end of 2023, the same groceries cost $121.10.
- An Ohio family must make $250,385 a year to afford care for an infant and a toddler at the average childcare center.

Use the Economic Policy Institute’s Family Budget Calculator to see what monthly and annual costs your family needs to achieve basic economic security.
Through collective bargaining, workers can win higher wages and provisions like Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) that maintain the value of their pay.

Wages get eroded over time by inflation. Depending on when your employment or contract started, you need to make more today to keep the same buying power. For your pay to have the same purchasing power in 2024 as it did in 2023, you’d need a 3.5% raise. To have the same purchasing power in 2024 as it did in 2019, you’d need a 22.9% raise. This is just the cost of living adjustment, before you make any “real wage” gains that would boost your buying power. Check out the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ CPI Inflation Calculator to see how the spending power of your wage has changed over time.

You can bargain for more than just pay.

Here are some things people can win in their contracts:

- Better paid holiday & vacation day policies
- Paid family and medical leave policies with an expansive definition of “family”
- Lower health insurance copays
- Stronger mental health coverage
- Reasonable sick time policies that support you and your family
- Consistent, transparent scheduling policies
- Public transit passes
- Pay transparency in hiring and promotions and equal pay policies

Workers are protected from employer retaliation for organizing.

In response to unionizing efforts at their organizations, employers cannot:

- reduce pay
- reduce hours
- reduce benefits
- demote employees
- fire employees

and Collective Bargaining Agreements can further protect workers from termination without cause.

There is also sector-specific data available to support and inform your bargaining and organizing efforts. For example:

- In the manufacturing sector, Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators had the most common manufacturing job in 2023 with 99,020 workers. They were paid a wage of $19.31-per-hour at the median.
- In the accommodation and food services, only 36% of private companies offered healthcare benefits in 2023.
- In the construction industry, one study showed that union jobsites were 19 percent less likely to have health and safety violations than non-union job sites.

For more industry-specific data, check out the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Industries at a Glance.