

History of the Working Relationship Agreement

Originally signed in September 1998, the Working Relationship Agreement (WRA) was a joint-undertaking of Union leaders and senior management of the day. After a period of serious conflict and tension, both sides agreed that an alternative method of labour relations could prove beneficial.

Assisted by the provincial government, who provided facilitators and mediators, a committee with representatives from Management and Union met over the course of several months to create a new foundation for labour relations at the City of Edmonton. The result of these meetings was the Working Relationship Agreement, which consisted of 7 principles and was signed by both Union leadership and senior management.

However, this wasn't just a document to hang on a wall. Along with the WRA was the rollout of training across the whole City and for Union executives and staff as well. This was to drive home a new way of doing business, along with a new conflict resolution model that started with informal consultation (as a way to address issues before they grew) and then escalated as appropriate.

In the year following the number of grievances across the City was significantly reduced, owing to a larger number of issues being solved at the informal consultation stage of the dispute resolution process. There were several critical elements that allowed the WRA to start building this success:

- Recognition by both the City and Unions that each side still had responsibilities. The preamble of the WRA states "A commitment to collaborative relations in no way diminishes the right and responsibility of managers to manage in the best interest of the organization or the right and responsibilities of unions to represent the best interests of their members."
- A commitment by both sides to building a relationship based on mutual respect, fair treatment, and ultimately trust.
- High levels of support from senior managers, Union leadership, and City Council.

This positive relationship continued for many years, owing to a continual willingness to work together and approach problems in an interest-based manner. In 2015, representatives from the City's Labour Relations area and CECU were proud to make a presentation to the delegates of the FCM when Edmonton hosted their annual convention and trade show.

