



# VSEA HANDBOOK

a quick reference guide for your union



**If you have questions about anything in this booklet please do not hesitate to contact VSEA HQ.**



**Vermont State Employees' Association**  
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### **Email Updates:**

Sign up to receive emails from your union. These emails include: union meeting notices, bargaining unit updates, VSEA HQ alerts, VSEA insurance enrollment information, new Advantage Program benefits and more! Subscribe to VSEA's email list here: [vsea.org/subscribe](http://vsea.org/subscribe)

### **Week In Action Newsletter:**

Your union's weekly newsletter, *Week In Action*, is sent every Friday afternoon. *Week In Action* is the best way to stay up to date with weekly VSEA news! Subscribe to VSEA's *Week In Action* Newsletter email list here: [vsea.org/subscribe](http://vsea.org/subscribe)

### **SMS Text Message Alerts:**

Texting is a great way for VSEA to let members know about important state employee issues or fights in a timely manner, but VSEA can't text you if we don't have your correct cell phone number. Sign up to receive VSEA texts here: [vsea.org/subscribe](http://vsea.org/subscribe)

### **Social Media:**

Follow your Union on VSEA's social media pages! Whether you prefer Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube or you can easily stay engaged with VSEA online.

### **Update Your Mailing Address With VSEA HQ:**

Occasionally VSEA will send members documents through the USPS. You can ensure VSEA HQ has your correct mailing address here: [vsea.org/subscribe](http://vsea.org/subscribe)

### **View/Download a Copy of Your Contract: [VSEA.org/Contracts](http://VSEA.org/Contracts)**

**Mission:** The Vermont State Employees' Association (VSEA) is a member-driven union working to ensure dignified wages, working conditions, benefits, and retirement plans.

**Values Statement:** VSEA highly values organized labor, the environment, social justice, and collective bargaining that maintain the core values of our mission. We further value an involved membership as they become active leaders in the work necessary to meet our goals.

## VII. SUBSCRIBE TO VSEA

### VSEA.org:

Your union's website is a great resource for all VSEA members.

On VSEA.org you can:

- View and download your Unit contract at anytime
- Read the latest union news and updates
- Find contact information for your union officers, Board of Trustees and Council members, Unit Chairs, Stewards and VSEA staff
- Learn about the current VSEA trainings being offered, view the VSEA calendar and access information about VSEA supplemental insurance offerings
- Download VSEA flyers and member-only documents
- See what member-only discounts you are eligible for through the popular VSEA Advantage Discount Program, which is saving VSEA members hundreds of dollars a year

VSEA.org is a VSEA member's go-to source for the latest news, updates and general information about your union. Visit [VSEA.org](http://VSEA.org) today!

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VSEA members collect non-perishable items for a food drive to support local food shelves. Learn about upcoming events, like food-drives, by subscribing to VSEA.

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## I. RIGHT TO REPRESENTATION

### Your VSEA Contract Provides:

*“Whenever you are required by a supervisor or manager to give oral or written statements on a non-criminal issue which may lead to discipline against you, or whenever you are called to a meeting where discipline will be imposed, you have the right to request the presence of a VSEA representative (Field Rep or Steward), and upon request, the VSEA representative shall have the right to accompany you to the meeting.”*

If you are questioned on a criminal matter where you might possibly be a suspect, before answering any questions, ask if you are being ordered to answer questions. If you are ordered to answer questions, immediately request a VSEA Representative. If you are given a Miranda warning, immediately invoke your right to an attorney, and stop answering questions.

### Get Active!

There are many great ways to get involved with your union. Becoming a worksite contact is a great start. You can also become a Steward, Chapter officer, or you could run for a Board of Trustees seat, Council seat, or a Bargaining Team seat. You are your union!



**Email**  
**vsea@vsea.org**  
**or your Union**  
**Organizer to**  
**learn more about**  
**becoming active**  
**in VSEA.**

New VSEA Council members are sword in.

- Ballots are returned 14 days after mailing; and
- Elected in the off year.

### 4. VSEA Endorsed Candidates:

In advance of elections, VSEA conducts an endorsement process led by rank-and-file union members. Here's how it works:

- VSEA's Legislative Committee, which consists of members assisted by a staff liaison, meets to review the list of elections and all the candidates who have declared;
- The Committee distributes an issue-position survey to all the declared candidates, reviews and discusses what's been submitted, and then makes all responses available online for the entire membership to view;
- For statewide elections the Committee asks the entire membership to participate in an email straw poll to determine which candidates have the support of VSEA members;
- The Committee meets to review all the input collected and makes final endorsement recommendations to the VSEA Board of Trustees, which then approves or rejects the Committee's recommendations;
- The endorsement list is then sent to the VSEA Council for debate and final approval; and
- VSEA publishes the list of endorsed candidates to the membership and urges support for the candidates who earned the union's backing.

VSEA members holding signs with messages of support for their Bargaining Team Members during contract negotiations.



• **At least 25 active member signatures are needed;**

- Ballots are sent within 15 work days after June 1
- Ballots have to be returned by August 1

**2. Council Elections:**

**Chapter Council Seats:**

- Elected in odd numbered years
- Elections are held at your local Chapter's Annual Meeting
- Two year terms
- Take office October 1 after VSEA's Annual Meeting
- Chapter vacancies are filled at a Chapter meeting duly warned for that purpose
- Vacancies are filled only for the duration of the term

**Department Council Seats:**

- Elected in odd numbered years
- Elections are conducted through VSEA HQ
- Request for candidates are emailed to members
- Two year terms
- Take Office October 1 after VSEA's Annual Meeting

- Vacancies are filled by writing a letter of interest to the VSEA 1st Vice President who then selects/approves the candidate

**3. Bargaining Team Elections:**

- Self-nominations are due at VSEA's Annual Meeting or 5 days prior in writing;
- Ballots are sent no later than 20 work days after Annual Meeting;

**II. RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN UNION ACTIVITY**

It is against the law for an employer or supervisor to "interfere with, restrain or coerce employees" who choose to exercise their rights to belong to and participate in union activities:

**Managers and Supervisors Cannot:**

- Discriminate against an employee based on union membership;
- Discriminate in regard to hiring or tenure, layoff or discharge against an employee for union activity;
- Threaten, harass, intimidate or retaliate against an employee for filing a complaint or grievance;
- Tell a worker that they will be punished or fired for union membership or activity;
- Create adverse or discriminatory working conditions for an employee because of their union activity;
- Ask an employee about confidential union issues or complaint/grievance activity that may be pending; and
- Prohibit an employee from meeting with a Union Representative or Steward to discuss a complaint or grievance without demonstrating an overriding work conflict.

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A proud VSEA member holds a sign in support of State employees at a union event.



### III. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

#### VSEA Maintains A Contract For Each Of The Following Nine Bargaining Units:

- Corrections
- Defender General
- Deputy Sheriffs
- Judiciary
- Non-Management
- State Attorney's Offices
- Supervisory
- Vermont State Colleges
- Vermont State Housing Authority (VSHA)

Collective bargaining is the process by which unionized employees negotiate with their employer over mandatory subjects of bargaining. Every two years, VSEA members bargain a contract with management that defends and extends our rights to decent wages, benefits, job security, retirement plans and safety in the workplace. We continue to improve upon our contract at each round of negotiations and look to our VSEA membership to guide Bargaining Team members.

#### 1. Preparation:

Before collective bargaining can commence, there are several steps employees must take to prepare for negotiations. First, employees must elect a Bargaining Team to represent workers' interests at the bargaining table. Second, the Bargaining Teams must solicit proposals and/or concepts to effectively address the issues members have identified as the most important to them. Finally, the Bargaining Team must collect the evidence required to justify members' chosen bargaining proposals.

#### 2. Ground Rules:

Before beginning negotiations, your union and your employer generally agree to a set of ground rules to govern how the negotiations will proceed. Ground rules frequently cover topics like identifying the lead negotiators for each side, scheduling bargaining dates, when final proposals must be submitted, what information can be shared with union members prior to the ratification vote, and when statements to the broader public are permissible.

### VI. UNION ELECTION INFORMATION

#### 1. Board of Trustees Elections:

##### Officers:

President, 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Treasurer, and Clerk.

- Elected every 2 years;
- Petitions are due no less than 60 calendar days prior to VSEA's Annual Meeting;
- **At least 25 active member signatures are needed;**
- Ballots are mailed no less than 21 calendar days prior to VSEA's Annual Meeting;
- Ballots returned no later than 5 calendar days prior to VSEA's Annual Meeting; and
- Begin term at VSEA's Annual Meeting;

##### District Seats:

- June 1 is the due date for petitions/self-nominations;
- Petitions can be requested by members in good standing that live or work in a specific district;
- **At least 25 active member signatures are needed;**
- Ballots are sent within 15 workdays after June 1; and
- Ballots have to be returned by August 1.

##### Unit Seats:

- June 1 is the due date for petitions/self-nominations;
- Petitions can be requested by unit members in good standing;

#### Union Election Information Continued on Page 13.

## 6. Board of Trustees (BOT):

- Elected by the membership and only members can be elected
- Manages the operations of your union
- Determines the direction and goals of VSEA as well as handing fiscal oversight and policy development

## 7. Officers: There are five Officer seats:

- President
- 1st Vice President
- 2nd Vice President
- Treasurer
- Clerk

## 8. District Trustee Seats: There are six District Trustee seats:

- **District 1:** Barre, Montpelier, and Central Vermont
- **District 2:** Waterbury, and Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital
- **District 3:** Newport/Island Pond, Lamoille, Northeast Kingdom, and St. Johnsbury
- **District 4:** Franklin/Grand Isle, Chittenden, and Addison
- **District 5:** Rutland and Bennington
- **District 6:** Brattleboro, Springfield, and White River Junction

## 9. Unit Seats:

- Corrections
- Defender General
- Judiciary
- Non-Management
- Supervisory
- State's Attorney's Office
- State Deputy Sheriffs
- Vermont State Colleges
- Vermont State Housing Authority

## 3. Direct Negotiations:

When unionized employees meet with their employer at the bargaining table, they are meeting as equals. Collective-bargaining statutes also require both parties to negotiate in good faith to reach a collective agreement. Your VSEA Bargaining Team and your employer each present various proposals, which the other side can counter, accept, or reject, but only after honest consideration of the proposal.

## 4. Mediation:

Ideally, direct negotiations will eventually lead to a collective-bargaining agreement that is acceptable to both parties. However, if this is not possible, either side can declare what's referred to as "impasse" and initiate a process to try to resolve differences. The first step in the impasse procedure is mediation, where a federal or private mediator will work with both parties in hopes of facilitating an agreement to end impasse.

## 5. Fact Finding:

If a mediator cannot achieve a mutually agreeable solution, the parties will proceed to what is called "fact-finding." In this process, each side selects its top-priority proposals to advance to fact finding, and each presents its evidence to a third-party, known as a fact finder. The fact finder then issues a report, based on the evidence presented, and, in it, he or she will recommend solutions to address each contested proposal. After receiving the fact-finder's report, your union and employer will meet to see if the fact-finder's report can be used as the foundation to reach a settlement.

## 6. Arbitration:

Unlike private-sector employees, public employees do not have a right to strike. Up until the 2019 legislative session, if a fact-finder's report did not result in a mutually accepted contract agreement, the Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB) would choose whether to impose a binding settlement that included one of the two last-best-offers submitted by the parties or one derived directly from the fact-finder's report. But in 2019, VSEA members successfully lobbied for passage of a bill to change the negotiating process for its members in the Executive Branch and in the State's Attorney's Offices. VSEA's legislation allows the union and the State to choose whether the VLRB or a mutually selected neutral arbitrator will make the final decision between a last-best-contract-offer or the fact-finders report. Once decided, the report is sent to Legislature for funding.

**Learn more about your VSEA Bargaining Team or contact your Bargaining Team members online: [vsea.org/bargaining-units](http://vsea.org/bargaining-units)**

## IV. VSEA HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **1944** - VSEA forms, focusing its efforts on advocating for the right of Vermont state employees in the legislature
- **1969** - With passage of the State Employees' Labor Relations Act (SELRA), state employees start negotiating contracts with management with VSEA as their exclusive representative
- **1977** - SELRA is amended, enabling state employees to bargain over wages and opening the door to decades of hard-won struggles for the wages, benefits, job security and retirement packages of Vermont state employees
- **1992** - Employees of the Vermont State Colleges working in housekeeping, security, maintenance, libraries, and office support join VSEA as the VSC Staff Federation
- **1994** - The support and maintenance staff of the Vermont State Housing Authority joins VSEA as VSHA Staff Federation
- **1999** - The clerical/ support staff of the Vermont Defender General joins VSEA
- **2018** - Vermont Supreme Court rules in favor of VSEA, finding that the State was violating contractual language by capping sick leave at 6 weeks a year for VSEA members who have serious illnesses or injuries
- **2019** - Employees working in State's Attorney's Offices across Vermont vote overwhelmingly to join VSEA
- **2023** - State Deputy Sheriffs vote unanimously to join the VSEA



### Get Active!

Volunteering to give testimony at the State House gives you the opportunity to speak directly with lawmakers who make decisions about your workplace.

VSEA members giving testimony at the Vermont State House.

## 4. VSEA Chapters

- There are 16 Chapters which represent regions of the state or large institutions across Vermont. Chapters offer members the ability to join with other state workers and unify their needs and goals, while developing community action, regional political education forums and social activities.
  - Addison
  - Barre
  - Bennington
  - Brattleboro
  - Central Vermont
  - Chittenden
  - Franklin/Grand Isle
  - Lamoille Valley
  - Newport/Island Pond
  - Northeast Kingdom/St. Johnsbury
  - Retired Members
  - Rutland
  - Springfield
  - Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital
  - Waterbury
  - White River Junction

## 5. VSEA Council:

- Comprised of approximately 150 members elected by the membership from Departments, Agencies, and VSEA Chapters. In addition, the VSEA Chapter Presidents and Bargaining Unit Chairs are Council members. VSEA Past Presidents and VSEA Committee Chairs are also members of the Council, ex officio and without a vote.
- Meets quarterly to hear Committee reports, Unit proposals and to recommend action to the Board on matters concerning the budget, bylaws, legislation and VSEA policy.
- A vehicle to disseminate information to the local Chapters and to State employees in Departments and Agencies across Vermont.
- Recommends action to the Board of Trustees and approves and adopts the meeting agenda.
- Approves and adopts a yearly legislative agenda.

### 3. Member Committees and Labor Management:

- The VSEA President appoints members to a number of standing and ad-hoc Committees, all charged with investigating and developing policies and proposals in specialized areas or achieving specific goals, as designated by the President;
- The **Labor Management Committee** (LMC) consists of labor members appointed by their respective Unit Executive Committees along with management representatives. The LMC typically meets periodically with management to discuss a mutually agreed upon agenda which may include methods of improving labor relations, productivity, safety, and other problems which impact conditions of employment including evaluation forms. The items addressed by LMCs are non-contractual issues. Committee members, per their union contract, are granted leave to participate in these meetings.

#### **VSEA Member Committees:**

- Awards and Scholarships Committee
- Benefits Advisory Committee
- Budget Committee
- Building Committee
- Bylaws Committee
- Chapter Officers Committee
- Communications Committee
- Computer Committee
- Diversity Committee
- Elections, Rules And Nominating (ERN) Committee
- Labor Management Committee
- Legislative Committee
- Member Dues Structure
- Member Insurance Programs Committee
- Member Support Committee
- Membership Recruitment Committee
- Personnel Committee
- Policy Committee
- Retirement Study Committee
- Special Events Committee
- Veteran's Council

**Learn more about VSEA Member Committees, or request to join by visiting: [vsea.org/vsea-member-committees](http://vsea.org/vsea-member-committees)**

## V. VSEA STRUCTURE

VSEA is a democratically-structured, worker-led organization. While the union employs a dedicated staff of representatives, organizers and other skilled professionals to assist the membership, the state employees who belong to the union are the ultimate authority over everything the union does. On this page, you'll find information on a wide range of ways that you can become a leader of your union and connect with your colleagues who are already working to improve state services in Vermont.

### 1. VSEA Members Like You!

- As a member, you are VSEA. As in any democratic organization, your interest, input and involvement on all levels is crucial;
- VSEA, as a union, is only as strong as its members. You have the knowledge and insight your Officers, Board, Council, Chapters, Stewards, and Staff need; and
- Only VSEA members can run for elected positions and vote in elections. Email [vsea@vsea.org](mailto:vsea@vsea.org) if you are interested in running for an elected position in your union.

### 2. VSEA Stewards

- Stewards are appointed by their respective Unit Executive Committee;
- Stewards are worksite leaders who assist members with contract interpretation and grievances. They also provide representation to members who are under investigation or filing a grievance or complaint;
- Stewards direct members to the proper union representative when additional assistance is needed and also inform their assigned VSEA Union Representative of potential contract violations at the worksite; and
- Stewards are granted up to 100 hours per year to process complaints and grievances.

**VSEA Structure Continued on Page 9.**

