



Fighting Contracting Out – Tips for a Quick Response

Contracting out of state jobs and the privatization of state services are problems that effect every OCSEA member. The transfer of tax dollars from the public sector to private companies is a trend that will continue unless OCSEA members are vigilant in identifying what work is being considered for privatization by management and the legislature and acting to prevent job loss. Here are some things to watch out for and steps you can take to organize with your union brothers and sisters to stop the sale of government services to greedy corporations:

Early warning signs:

- Budget problems or fiscal restructuring.
- Hostile labor-management relations.
- Vendors visiting worksites.
- Frequent complaints about problems of high cost or poor quality of services by public officials or top management.
- An “efficiency study” by a private company or other institutions.
- Legislation that is hostile to public services.

Quick Action:

- Review agency websites for requests for proposals (RFPs) or an invitation to bid (ITB).
- Notify union stewards, chapter presidents, and staff representatives.
- Gather information about the contracting out and find out who, what, when, how, and why. Take detailed notes at meetings or gatherings about the contracting out.
- Compile any documents such as letters, memos, and reports about the possible contracting-out.
- Demand a cost effectiveness study to be done before the management makes any decisions about contracting-out.

Things to say to management:

- Both management and Union employees are accountable for the positive image of government services. Contracting out provides a negative image about government services.
- Poor quality service may be received from private contractors. Because a private contractor is profit driven, they have an incentive to cut corners and reduce quality.
- Focus on long-run cost efficiency instead of short-run alleged savings. Private contractors have been known to “low ball” their bids and raise prices later. It might be too late to change back to public service delivery once the state gets rid of equipment and expertise.
- Accountability and flexibility and confidentiality have to be considered.
- Contract monitoring and administration may be inadequate and will incur additional costs.
- Decreased morale of in-house employees can impact delivery of other services.

What to do when the service is already contracted out?

- Monitor the contractor’s work. Demand information about cost and other quality measures.
- Gather and document information about the contracted-out work.
- Inform your union leaders about the information and prepare bids for contracting in the work. (See Article 39.02.)

(Continued)

The union has a variety of resources to help you in the anti-privatization battle. By working with your local leadership, you can figure out the best plan for stopping privatization and contracting out at your particular workplace or agency.

Additional Steps to Consider

Sometimes the fight against contracting out needs to extend beyond your workplace. Often, cost numbers alone don't tell the whole story about the value of the services you provide to the local community and taxpayers. Developing relationships with the media and other organizations (unions, community groups, churches, business organizations, etc) in your area that are interested in public services can provide you with friends to help in the fight. Prepare to act quickly when contracting out is threatened by:

- Develop contact lists of local radio, TV and newspaper media outlets.
- Draft a Letter to the Editor, Q&A or Talking Points sheet about the service to be contracted out and about all the services your members deliver.
- Talk to management about media tours and open houses for your facility or worksite to educate the media and public about what you do.
- Identify radio talk shows that allow call-in reports and questions from listeners.

- Recruit volunteers from the chapter who are willing to talk to the media and community groups about the value of keeping public services public.
- Talk to OCSEA members from other agencies and ask them to help.

Taking the above steps will help you to act quickly when a particular service is threatened to mobilize both OCSEA members and community residents to fight back. Chapter leadership, staff representatives and the OCSEA Public Affairs department can help you prepare materials and develop a communications plan for your area.

Sometimes, the contracting out threat comes from the legislature and not the managers and administration of your agency. Fighting legislative threats requires additional approaches beyond bidding for work and public relations. A strong and informed legislative committee at your assembly and/or chapter level can be the focal point for getting information out to members and activating phone calls and letters to elected officials at appropriate times. The OCSEA Legislative and Political Affairs department can help you to set up committees to monitor legislative activity around privatization and contracting out.

Finally, the OCSEA Education and Development Department has classes available on fighting privatization, preparing bids to contract-in, and developing coalitions that can be taught at whatever time and place you need them.

Reference

Article 39.02