

RESOLUTION 22 – 2013 HSA Annual Convention

Delegates to the 2013 Annual HSA Convention passed the following resolution requesting a business case as a point of discussion around changing the frequency of conventions.

Therefore be it resolved: That the Health Sciences Association of BC Board prepare a business case for the 2014 annual Convention so the delegates may debate the merits of a biennial Convention; and

Be it further resolved: That the business case be presented to the membership at least 30 days in advance of the call for Convention resolutions for 2014.

A number of unanticipated events occurred in the months succeeding the convention including the resignation of the union's President, early bargaining in all three of the public sector bargaining associations in which a majority of HSA members are represented, and an unprecedented widespread raid attempt on a significant number of HSA members.

While the Board of Directors regrets the delay in delivering this document, the constitutional requirement necessitated by the 2014 by-election for President triggered by the past President's resignation guaranteed that annual conventions shall be held in 2014 as well as 2015, allowing the discussion about the issue of frequency of HSA conventions to continue at least throughout 2014 and 2015.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, delegates to HSA's convention considered a resolution calling for a move from annual to biennial conventions.

Arguments for and against the change were debated, and delegates voted to keep the status quo, i.e., annual conventions. The debate raised a number of questions and in 2013 the above resolution was put to delegates.

This paper addresses the financial implications and opportunities that may arise from a change in the governance structure from holding conventions every year to every two years.

The paper does not make a recommendation, but serves as information for members who wish to consider the possibility of a change in frequency of union conventions.

BACKGROUND

In recent years moving to less frequent conventions has become a trend for many labour organizations across Canada. The reason for this change varies from organization to organization, but at its root are a number of factors that have been driving this recent trend:

- **Technology** - Advancing technology has played a major role in redefining the relationship between activists and their union. Updates, decisions, news releases and directives are in the hands of activists within hours of these developments. Activists (or members) have never been as well informed or in such continual contact with their union.
- **Expense** – Annual conventions are a valuable opportunity for activists to connect and be re-invigorated in their work representing the union in the workplace. Conventions also provide the forum where policies are debated and adopted providing the policy framework which guides the activities of the union for the coming year. But increasingly, conventions are becoming more and more costly as the cost of everything from food, to facilities, to convention services, and travel has steadily increased over time.
- **Repetition** – In looking at the body of resolutions that labour organizations consider year to year for debate, it is clear that there are a number of repetitive themes. While such resolutions allow for valuable discussion by and education for delegates, many of these resolutions have already been adopted in previous years and already form the policy framework for the union.
- **Outreach** – Increasingly labour organizations in Canada have been adopting regional engagement strategies in an effort to better understand the diversity of regional concerns, and to deepen the engagement of members and activists in advancing our common concerns and interests. With such a large and growing province, regional considerations and input will be critical in strengthening the union and ensuring that regional perspectives and solutions are factored into the unions' decision-making.

In previous discussion about moving to a biennial convention the question has arisen: How can members run their union if a decision-making meeting is eliminated?

Several unions and labour federations hold biennial or triennial conventions – and do not suffer from challenges in governance: In BC, the Hospital Employees' Union meets every two years, as do the United Steelworkers Union (USW). The BC Government and Service Employees' Union meets every three years. Other examples from across Canada: BC Federation of Labour and Manitoba Government Employees' Union, biennial; NUPGE, CLC, and PSAC, triennial.

The union would continue to be governed by a duly-elected board of directors, and through communication, consultation, and increased opportunity for regional meetings and education, members have several avenues for feedback and direction. There would still be annual constituting of committees and annual reports.

Democracy and accountability are built into the electoral cycle. Election of regional directors is not at annual conventions, but every second year through region-specific balloting. Election of the president is every two years, and moving to a biennial convention would not upset this cycle.

In the event of unforeseen circumstances, the HSA constitution allows for Special Conventions. While not frequent, Special Conventions have been constituted in HSA's history, and are a mechanism that can be triggered by a petition by members or by the Board of Directors.

COST ANALYSIS

Table 1 looks at costs associated to the past three annual conventions. The bulk of costs is attributed to three areas: wage replacement, meals, and accommodations.

Table 1:

Year	Delegates	Total cost	Wage replacement*	Meals	Accommodation	Total cost per delegate
2011	338	\$634,810	\$210,333	\$157,944	\$100,949	\$1,878
2012	311	\$599,486	\$173,316	\$161,544	\$95,125	\$1,927
2013	320	\$653,705	\$191,089	\$163,757	\$114,725	\$2,042

*wage replacement costs are generally for two days, as most delegates do not attract wage replacement on Saturday of convention.

Table 2 looks at costs associated to annual regional meetings.

Table 2:

Year	Delegates	Total cost	Wage Replacement	Total cost per delegate
2011	222	\$120,039	\$68,611	\$540
2012	199	\$109,530	\$46,238	\$550
2013	225	\$142,941	\$69,899	\$635

*wage replacement costs are generally for one day. In some cases, due to travel, wage replacement may extend to two days. The cost of wage replacement for education is separate from the regional meeting budget.

Table 3 looks at costs associated to steward education. Education sessions vary in length from one to three days. Wage replacement accounts for the largest percentage of the education and training budget.

Table 3:

Year	Members trained	Total Cost	Wage Replacement	Total cost per member trained
2010	465	\$546,952	\$275,151	\$1176
2011	519	\$476,629	\$238,814	\$918
2012	419	\$346,655	\$166,160	\$827
2013	542	\$504,102	\$295,626	\$930

Annual convention is the costliest per capita union activity in the realm of union governance and member education. The biggest proportion of those costs is attributable to wage replacement, with meals, accommodation and facility costs making up the bulk of expenses.

Education costs roughly 50% less per capita than convention participation, and expenses related to regional meetings are about 25% of the cost per capita of convention. In addition, effective representation garners direct economic return for members.

Consistently, more members participate in union education over the course of a year than attend convention. There is a clear demand and interest in union-delivered education. Courses are almost always fully subscribed, and wait lists are maintained.

RECENT COST PRESSURES:

For the past decade, HSA has been in a constant cycle of bargaining. This has resulted in increased costs related to staffing bargaining while maintain servicing levels. In addition to staff costs, costs associated with member representation at the bargaining table (largely wage replacement) have drawn on the union's resources.

In 2013, two unbudgeted-for areas of spending resulted in considerable pressure on the union's budget: a lengthy and costly grievance against a ground-breaking policy on flu prevention, and a vigorous defense against a raid by the BC Nurses Union and Union of Psychiatric Nurses on HSA's Registered Psychiatric Nurses. In the former instance, these are one-time costs associated with legal and scientific expertise to support the grievance. In the case of the latter, the costs are expected to be ongoing, as the BC Nurses' Union shows no sign of abandoning a campaign to expand its membership at any cost.

Through the 2013 raid campaign, we identified a need to devote considerably increased resources to providing service and resources to RPNs. As evidenced by the success in the 2013 defense against the raid, HSA RPNs want to remain in the union. To keep them engaged, HSA must increase its visibility in the workplace, and provide the resources to stewards to improve their understanding of and ability to advocate for members covered by the Nurses' Bargaining Association collective agreement. The need for increased visibility and connection with the membership is true not only with RPNs, but all members.

GOVERNANCE VS. SERVICES:

While we all recognize the advantages of in-person meetings and networking with fellow activists at annual conventions, every year delegates report frustration and questions about the effectiveness of the same resolutions coming forward to convention to recommit the union to issues members are concerned about. Dozens of resolutions go through without debate. They are often a reaffirmation of the principles that HSA members are committed to.

We also hear consistently about the need for increased labour relations support for stewards representing and advocating for members in the workplace. As well, rank-and-file members in our

workplaces tell us they want more outreach to see increased HSA presence in their chapters. Activists often report they favour spring regional meetings to gather for needed collaboration and training.

At the 2013 convention plenary, delegates received a detailed report of the financial returns for members achieved through labour relations and legal advocacy.

In the 2011-12 period, monetary returns for members totaled in excess of \$2.2 million to members through advocacy in classifications, labour relations, and legal matters. The returns to and protection for members are easily demonstrated by the rate of success in grievance and other disputes, including benefits achieved in WorkSafe and Long Term Disability claims.

Less quantifiable, but demonstrably proven, is the value of effective advocacy by labour relations officers and stewards on behalf of members to address potential collective agreement violations and other disputes before they start, protecting the rights and wages of members.

It is at the local level that trained and experienced stewards make an important difference for members, being available to hear problems, intervene with the employer, and advocate on their behalf.

A constant theme we hear from stewards is a desire for additional and more advanced training, as well as support for the time to advocate on behalf of members. With the addition of a senior staff member to update, develop, and deliver training, the union has started to address that demand.

CONCLUSION:

There is clearly a case to be made for additional education opportunities for members, and at half the per capita cost, if the cost of convention were eliminated every second year, education for members could double each year.

Other options for reallocating spending associated with convention every two years include increased member and steward education – including targeted education as needed. such as site-based education; increased staffing; and increased time for stewards and other members to connect with members – and not just in times of labour relations grief. Having the time to get to know the members from the various departments and sites at your worksite is critical if HSA is going to succeed in engaging members in their union.

The cost of delivering union education, or holding region-based opportunities for steward collaboration and discussion as happens at the fall annual regional meetings, is 50 to 75% less costly per capita than annual conventions. Should HSA to move to biennial conventions, there would be opportunities to increase education and improve service to and interaction with members without necessarily increasing the union's overall annual budget.