

The birth and growth of CMG



The Canadian Media Guild began in the 1950s as a relatively small local of The Newspaper Guild called the Canadian Wire Service Guild and, by the early 1990s, had about 700 members in newsrooms at the CBC, the Canadian Press and Reuters Canada.

In 1993, the Guild faced off against ACTRA and the Canadian Union of Public Employees in an election to represent everyone at the CBC involved in production and presentation. The Guild had the backing of two important producers unions. After an intense campaign, the Guild won the vote in December of that year and tripled in size overnight. The CBC production and presentation workers chose the Guild in part because it stood for a system of permanent staff status for workers while ACTRA proposed a concept of a contract style work arrangement to allow workers to transfer more easily from one media workplace to another.

The founding convention of the Canadian Media Guild was held in January 1994, in Toronto. The work to blend several union cultures would play prominently in its evolving history.

The founding convention was actually called a “constituent assembly” to reflect the idea that it was a formative event. Delegates were elected from the “old” unions in all locations across the country. The main issues at the founding convention were relatively small but still feature in some ongoing discussions: amount of money that should be dedicated to location units; how often conventions should be held; level of francophone representation and staff; whether the new union would be Toronto-centric or truly representative of the country and how that would work; and whether the decision-making authority would be a national council or in locations across the country. At the same time, there was a desire to ensure members at Canadian Press and Reuters did not feel overwhelmed. The end result was the first version of the CMG bylaws, which we have today. Leaders of the new union believed in:

- Inclusivity
- No subsuming of one group into another
- Taking the best of the predecessor unions’ histories
- Ensuring proper representation for members across the country
- “Transition teams” that were in place across the country involving people from all predecessor unions—that’s how location units were born
- Union culture rooted in journalism/media work in some ways set it apart some of the traditions of big labour. That CMG would not/could not make political contributions led to a feeling of distinctiveness that would be further defined over the next 20 years.

Since 1994, CBC administrative and technical employees and media workers from TVO, TFO, Aboriginal Peoples’ Television Network, ZoomerMedia, Shaw Media, CKOI, and Maritime Broadcasting System have joined the Guild. The union has also just launched a new “voluntary” membership for media freelancers who work for more than one engager.