



INITIATIVE BRIEF

January 18, 2026

FIELD SUPERVISION

Drawing on input from fourteen contractors, this brief highlights both the strengths and the challenges within our current field supervision practices. Foremen are widely recognized for their craftsmanship, problem-solving, and leadership, yet ten recurring issues—particularly around planning, communication, and time discipline—are affecting jobsite performance. These insights will shape a focused, collaborative conversation on reinforcing expectations and supporting foremen in their critical role.

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UNITY THROUGH TRUST - LEADERSHIP THROUGH SERVICE - STRENGTH THROUGH BONDS

Initial Request for information

From: Greg Johnson <gjohnson@mcadetroit.org>

Sent: Monday, January 5, 2026 3:50 PM

Cc: Chris Freeman <cfreeman@mcadetroit.org>; Bill James <bjames@mcadetroit.org>; Della DellaPella <ddellapella@mcadetroit.org>

Subject: Field Supervision - Request For Contractor Input

*Important Feedback Requested by Friday, 1.9.26

Signatory Contractor –

Over the past several months, both MCA Detroit and our labor partners have received feedback suggesting that some field practices may not be consistently meeting the standards we all expect on our projects. Labor leadership has been clear that, in their view, many of these concerns point back to the supervision layer — specifically the role of the Foreman in setting tone, reinforcing expectations, and ensuring commitments are upheld on the job.

In response, MCA Detroit is preparing to host a Foreman-focused meeting to reestablish expectations, reinforce best practices, and ensure alignment across the field. Labor leadership has confirmed they will be present to show solidarity and support the shared standard of excellence that defines our industry. Before we finalize the agenda, we would greatly appreciate your insight.

If there are recurring issues, patterns, or concerns you've observed with field labor performance — whether related to communication, productivity, jobsite coordination, adherence to procedures, or anything else — we invite you to share them with us. No company or staff names will be associated with the submitted feedback.

Your feedback will help us ensure the meeting is practical, relevant, and directly responsive to the challenges you're seeing. Our goal is to equip Foremen with clear expectations and reinforce the supervisory practices that keep projects running smoothly and professionally. We will also confirm the support of local union leadership when enforcing the language and rules in both the CBA and Employer policies, which do not conflict with the CBA.

Please feel free to reply directly to this email or contact me confidentially if you prefer.
Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to excellence.

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Field Supervision Feedback Initiative Brief

In preparation for the upcoming Foreman Expectations Meeting, MCA Detroit requested input from signatory contractors regarding recurring field-level challenges, supervisory gaps, and opportunities to strengthen jobsite performance. The request emphasized that labor leadership has identified the supervision layer—specifically the role of the Foreman—as central to setting tone, reinforcing expectations, and ensuring commitments are upheld on the job. Contractors were invited to share candid observations related to communication, productivity, jobsite coordination, adherence to procedures, and any other patterns affecting project outcomes. A total of fourteen respondents provided detailed feedback, generating ten distinct issue categories that reflect both the frequency of concerns and the nuance behind them.

Across all responses, contractors consistently affirmed the high skill level and craftsmanship of the workforce, while also identifying several supervisory behaviors that undermine productivity, professionalism, and jobsite efficiency. The most frequently cited concern involved attendance, start/stop times, and break abuse, with multiple contractors reporting chronic late starts, early departures, and breaks that routinely exceed contractual allowances. Closely following this theme was a widespread concern about insufficient planning and look-ahead practices. Many foremen were described as reactive rather than proactive, often beginning work without clear schedules, milestones, or properly staged materials, resulting in lost time and avoidable inefficiencies.

Communication challenges emerged as another major theme, including gaps between foremen and other trades, foremen and general contractors, and foremen and their own project managers. Respondents emphasized that poor communication contributes to sequencing conflicts, rework, and misaligned expectations. Paperwork quality and timeliness also surfaced as a longstanding issue, with several contractors noting incomplete daily reports, unclear documentation, and inconsistent adherence to required procedures such as test reports and pre-task plans.

Contractors also highlighted a cultural barrier affecting both foremen and journeymen: a growing fear of being brought up on internal charges by disgruntled members. These charges, often tied to interpretations of local bylaws, create hesitation and second-guessing among field leaders who are trying to enforce expectations or make decisions in the best interest of the project. This dynamic has led some foremen to question not only what is right for the job, but what they feel they are permitted to do without risking internal union discipline. As a result, supervisory authority can feel uncertain, and otherwise capable leaders may avoid necessary corrective action out of concern for personal repercussions.

Additional themes included resistance to technology, inconsistent soft-skills and professionalism, and a reluctance among some foremen to enforce work rules or hold crews accountable. Several contractors noted that required procedures and best practices are sometimes skipped unless explicitly enforced, creating safety and quality risks. Absenteeism and no-call/no-shows, while less frequent in the data set, were described as highly disruptive when they occur. Finally, a smaller but notable set of comments addressed tool loss, material management, and general jobsite stewardship.

Contractors also emphasized that foremen cannot succeed without proper support from the contractor side. Several respondents noted that inadequate project management, delayed drawings, insufficient tooling, or unclear expectations can set foremen up for failure. This reinforces the shared responsibility between contractors, foremen, and labor leadership in maintaining the standard of excellence expected on union jobsites.

Overall, the feedback provides a clear and actionable foundation for the upcoming Foreman-focused meeting. The ten identified issue categories—ranked by frequency and weighted by impact—will help shape an agenda that is practical, relevant, and aligned with both contractor needs and labor leadership priorities. The meeting will focus on reestablishing expectations, reinforcing best practices, and ensuring that foremen are equipped to lead safe, efficient, and professional jobsites with the full support of both MCA Detroit and the local unions.

Foreman Performance Issues — Ranked by Frequency & Weighted Impact

Summary Table

Rank	Issue Theme	% of Mentions	Notes
1	Attendance, start/stop times, break abuse	18%	Most universal frustration
2	Lack of planning & look-ahead	16%	Directly tied to productivity
3	Communication gaps	14%	Both foreman and contractor responsibility
4	Paperwork quality & timeliness	12%	Risk, documentation, and clarity
5	Technology avoidance	10%	Fear-based resistance
6	Soft skills & professionalism	10%	Culture-setting behaviors
7	Failure to enforce work rules	8%	Accountability gap
8	Skipping procedures & best practices	6%	Safety and quality risk
9	Absenteeism & no-shows	4%	High impact despite lower frequency
10	Tool loss & stewardship	2%	Operational but real

1. Attendance, Start/Stop Times, and Break Abuse

At ≈ 18% of all issues raised, this was the single most consistent frustration across contractors.

Patterns included:

- Chronic late starts (7:05–7:15 becoming normalized).
- Early quits (3:00 departures for a 3:30 end time).
- Breaks routinely exceeding allowances (15 becomes 25; 30 becomes 45).
- Foremen not policing breaks because “they’re adults.”
- Workers claiming paid lunches or extended coffee breaks that do not exist in the CBA.
- Foremen modeling poor time discipline, which cascades to crews.
- Significant cost impact when OT days still only produce 8–8.5 hours of actual work.
- This theme was mentioned directly or indirectly in nearly every contractor response.

2. Lack of Planning, Look-Ahead, and Proactive Job Management

At ≈ 16% of issues, contractors repeatedly described foremen who “run around putting out fires” instead of planning.

Key elements:

- Missing or incomplete 3-week look-aheads.
- Jobs starting without milestones, schedules, or sequencing.
- Foremen not coordinating with PMs early enough.
- GC PMs/Supers pushing unrealistic sequences because foremen didn’t assert trade-order realities.
- Foremen failing to ensure material, tools, and information are ready before work begins.
- Crews wasting time searching for materials in trailers instead of having them staged.
- This theme is tied directly to productivity, morale, and cost overruns.

3. Communication Gaps (Internal, Cross-Trade, and Upstream)

At ≈ 14% of issues, communication failures were cited as both a root cause and a symptom.

Nuances included:

- Foremen not communicating with other trades, leading to rework and inefficiency.
- Poor communication with GCs, especially when schedules are unrealistic.
- Inconsistent communication with PMs about impacts, delays, or needs.
- Foremen not clearly communicating expectations to their crews.
- Contractors acknowledging that they also sometimes fail to provide clear direction, drawings, or leadership support.
- This theme is both a foreman issue and a contractor-side accountability issue.

4. Paperwork Quality, Timeliness, and Accuracy

At ≈ 12% of issues, this was described as a “Neanderthal-era problem” that still plagues the industry.

Specific concerns:

- Daily reports not completed or completed inaccurately.
- Work orders written like novels instead of concise documentation.
- Missing test reports, pre-task plans, and required documentation.
- “If it isn’t written down, it didn’t happen” — but many foremen still treat paperwork as optional.
- Lack of clarity leading to disputes, misinterpretation, and lost revenue.
- Contractors emphasized that paperwork is not clerical — it is risk management.

5. Technology Avoidance or Fear of Failure

At ≈ 10% of issues, this was a surprisingly strong theme.

Examples:

- Foremen refusing to use iPads, layout tools, or digital reporting systems.
- Doing the bare minimum with technology because they fear “messing it up.”
- Resistance to new tools that would improve productivity and safety.
- Contractors explicitly asking for industry-wide training to modernize field leadership.
- This is a cultural barrier as much as a skills barrier.

6. Soft Skills, Professionalism, and Leadership Behavior

At ≈ 10% of issues, this theme was broad but consistent.

Included:

- Reliability, punctuality, and modeling professional behavior.
- Diplomacy during disagreements with GCs or other trades.
- Respectful communication with customers and office staff.
- Setting the tone for the crew — good or bad.
- Understanding the real cost of lost time, inefficiency, and poor morale.
- Contractors repeatedly said: “Foremen set the culture of the job.”

7. Failure to Enforce Work Rules or Hold Crews Accountable

At \approx 8% of issues, contractors expressed frustration that foremen avoid conflict.

Examples:

- Not addressing poor attendance or performance.
- Allowing crews to stretch breaks or leave early.
- Not correcting unsafe or non-compliant behavior.
- Saying “they’re adults, I shouldn’t have to police them.”
- This theme ties directly to leadership confidence and training.

8. Skipping Required Procedures, Best Practices, and Specs

At \approx 6% of issues, this was described as a “laziness” or “shortcut” problem.

Examples:

- Skipping pressure tests or test reports.
- Ignoring pre-task plans.
- Not following specs on plan-and-spec jobs.
- Cutting corners until reminded.
- This theme is smaller in volume but high in risk

9. Absenteeism and No-Call/No-Shows

At \approx 4% of issues, this was not the most frequent, it was described as the most disruptive.

Nuances:

- Chronic absenteeism from specific individuals.
- Foremen not reporting or addressing it.
- Contractors frustrated when the union protects repeat offenders.
- “Why is he still in the union if we promote a standard of excellence?”
- This theme is emotionally charged and tied to credibility.

10. Tool Loss, Material Waste, and Jobsite Stewardship

At \approx 2% of issues, this was mentioned less frequently but still present.

Examples:

- Tools disappearing.
- Poor material management.
- Lack of ownership for jobsite resources.
- This theme is more operational than cultural.

Feedback Comparison to Local Bylaws

To address longstanding perceptions that certain jobsite challenges stem from union bylaws, we conducted a focused comparison between the contractor feedback and the written rules contained in the Plumbers Local 98 and Pipefitters Local 636 bylaws. This review was not a legal interpretation, nor an examination of the Collective Bargaining Agreement itself, but rather a straightforward cross-reference to determine whether any of the concerns raised by contractors are supported—or contradicted—by the bylaws as written. While we are aware of several historical tension points between CBA language and bylaw provisions, and are actively working with each Local to clarify and align that language to prevent future unfair labor practices, this analysis was limited to comparing the collected feedback directly against the bylaws to identify any potential areas of overlap or misunderstanding.

Bylaws Used for Comparison:

- Plumbers Local 98 Constitution & Bylaws (2017)
- Pipefitters Local 636 Bylaws (2018)

Below is a clear, issue-by-issue breakdown of where the concerns do or do not intersect with written rules — and where the bylaws may unintentionally create tension, confusion, or fear for foremen.

High-Level Finding

There are no bylaws in either document that directly contradict the CBA on work hours, breaks, start/stop times, or jobsite conduct. However, both bylaws contain broad disciplinary language that can easily be interpreted (or misinterpreted) as grounds for internal charges.

This is the root of the fear foremen described.

Issue-by-Issue Comparison to Bylaws

1. Start Times, Breaks, Early Quits, and Work Hours

- Contractor concern:
 - Late starts, early quits, extended breaks, foremen not enforcing time discipline.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Neither Local 98 nor Local 636 bylaws define specific break times, coffee breaks, or cleanup time.
 - Local 636 does define the workday window (8 hours between 7:00–4:30), but this is superseded by the CBA, which governs actual start times and shift structures.
 - No bylaw grants members the right to extended breaks or early departure.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None. This is not a bylaw conflict — it's a foreman enforcement issue and a cultural drift.

2. Planning, Look-Ahead, and Job Coordination

- Contractor concern:
 - Foremen not planning, not coordinating with other trades, not staging materials.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - No bylaws in either document address planning, scheduling, or coordination responsibilities.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None. This is purely a performance and training issue, not a bylaw conflict.

3. Communication Gaps (Foreman ↔ PM, Foreman ↔ GC, Foreman ↔ Other Trades, Foreman ↔ Crew)

- Contractor concern:
 - Foremen are not consistently communicating with project managers, general contractors, other trades, or their own crews. This leads to sequencing conflicts, rework, unclear expectations, and avoidable inefficiencies.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Neither Local 98 nor Local 636 bylaws contain any language addressing communication responsibilities, expectations, or protocols.
 - No sections reference coordination with other trades, reporting requirements to contractors, or communication standards with GCs or PMs.
 - The bylaws do not define communication as a disciplinary matter, nor do they outline expectations for clarity, timeliness, or professionalism in jobsite communication.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None. There is no bylaw-driven barrier to communication. This issue is entirely cultural, behavioral, and training-related — not structural or rule-based.
- Contextual nuance:
 - While the bylaws do not address communication, they *do* contain broad language about:
 - Conduct becoming of a member
 - Protecting the dignity of the organization
 - Acting in the best interest of the trade
 - These statements are not operational, but they can create a perception that communication missteps could be interpreted as “violations” if a conflict escalates. This perception may contribute to hesitation or avoidance, even though the bylaws themselves do not restrict communication in any way.

4. Paperwork, Documentation, and Reporting

- Contractor concern:
 - Poor daily reports, missing test documentation, unclear paperwork.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Neither Local 98 nor Local 636 bylaws mention paperwork requirements.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None. This is entirely governed by contractor policy, CBA language, and jobsite requirements, not union bylaws.

5. Technology Avoidance

- Contractor concern:
 - Foremen refusing to use iPads, layout tools, digital systems.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - No bylaws address technology expectations.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None. This is a training and culture issue.

6. Soft Skills, Professionalism, and Leadership Behavior

- Contractor concern:
 - Communication, professionalism, reliability, diplomacy.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Both bylaws emphasize:
 - Conduct becoming of a member
 - Protecting the dignity of the organization
 - Not lowering the trade's standards
 - Pride in work
 - Attending meetings
 - Respecting officers and rules
 - These are broad, not operational.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None directly — but these broad statements can be used to justify internal charges if someone wants to weaponize them.

7. Enforcement of Work Rules / Holding Crews Accountable

- Contractor concern:
 - Foremen avoid conflict, don't enforce rules, let crews stretch time.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Local 636 Working Rules include:
 - Members must report violations (Rule 15)
 - Members must protect jurisdiction (Rule 19)
 - Members must follow jobsite rules
 - Members violating rules must appear before the Executive Board (Rule 17)
 - Local 98 includes similar broad disciplinary expectations.
- Potential sticking point:
 - Yes — these broad rules can be interpreted as grounds for charges, especially if a member feels a foreman "violated a rule" or "treated them unfairly."
 - This is where fear comes from.

8. Skipping Procedures, Best Practices, and Specs

- Contractor concern:
 - Skipping pressure tests, pre-task plans, best practices.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Neither bylaw document addresses jobsite procedures or testing requirements.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None. This is a contractor requirement, not a union rule.

9. Absenteeism and No-Call/No-Shows

- Contractor concern:
 - Chronic absenteeism, foremen not addressing it.
- Bylaw comparison:

- Local 636 Working Rules:
 - Members must report to the hall when unemployed
 - Members must report violations
 - Members must follow jobsite rules
 - Members can be disciplined for violating working rules
- Local 98:
 - Members can be disciplined for “violations of working rules and conditions”
 - Members can be suspended for unpaid dues
 - Members can be charged for “bad character” or misrepresentation
- Potential sticking point:
 - Yes — the bylaws allow discipline for members, but foremen may fear retaliation if they initiate discipline or report issues.

10. Tool Loss, Material Waste, Jobsite Stewardship

- Contractor concern:
 - Tools disappearing, poor material management.
- Bylaw comparison:
 - Local 636 Working Rule 13:
 - Members shall not furnish tools or equipment
 - Use of tools is governed by the CBA
 - No rules about stewardship or loss.
- Potential sticking point:
 - None

The Real Sticking Point: Internal Charges & Broad Disciplinary Language

Both bylaws contain very broad, open-ended disciplinary clauses, such as:

Local 98

- “Violations of working rules and conditions break down the economic standards of the trade.”
- Members may be expelled for “bad character.”
- Officers must impose fines for “dereliction of duty.”
- Members can be charged for violating any rule not otherwise specified.

Local 636

- Members must report violations.
- Members must protect jurisdiction.
- Members violating rules must appear before the Executive Board.
- Offenses and penalties follow the UA Constitution (which is broad).

Why This Matters

These clauses are not specific, and they do not define thresholds, which means:

- A disgruntled member can file a charge for almost anything.
- A foreman enforcing rules can be accused of “violating a working rule” or “mistreating a member.”
- Even if charges are dismissed, the process is stressful and time-consuming.
- Foremen learn to avoid conflict to avoid charges.

This is exactly what contractors described.

Bottom Line

Most contractor concerns do not stem from written bylaws, they stem from culture, enforcement gaps, and inconsistent expectations.

The one major exception is the fear of internal charges, which is supported by:

- Broad disciplinary language
- Vague definitions of “violations”
- Member-to-member reporting requirements
- Executive Board authority to impose penalties
- UA Constitution references that allow charges for almost anything

This creates a perceived risk for foremen who enforce rules, correct behavior, or discipline crew members.

Next Steps

In response to the themes identified in this report, MCA Detroit will be convening a Foreman Alignment Meeting for all field supervisors employed by signatory contractors. This session will bring together association leadership and representatives from each Local to ensure shared understanding, consistent expectations, and unified support for the supervisory role across all jobsites. Contractors are strongly encouraged to dispatch all acting foremen to this meeting, as their participation is essential to establishing clarity, strengthening communication, and reinforcing the standard of excellence expected throughout our industry. Additional details, including date, time, and location, will be provided shortly.

Proposed Field Supervision Meeting Agenda

Reestablishing Expectations, Strengthening Leadership, and Celebrating Excellence

1. Welcome, Purpose, and Tone Setting (10 minutes)

- Opening remarks from MCA Detroit, Local 98, and/or Local 636
- Statement of shared purpose: safe, efficient, professional jobsites
- Acknowledgment of labor leadership presence and partnership
- Reinforcing that this meeting is about support, not blame

2. Celebrating What's Working: Foreman Excellence (15 minutes)

A positive, energizing segment that highlights:

- Top-level craftsmanship and problem-solving skills across the region
- Examples of exceptional communication and coordination
- Foremen who model professionalism and set the tone for their crews
- Jobs that ran smoothly because of proactive planning and collaboration
- Recognition of adaptability, mentorship, and leadership under pressure

3. Industry Context: Why This Conversation Matters Now (10 minutes)

- Increasing competition from open-shop contractors
- Impact of schedule pressure, manpower shortages, and GC expectations
- The cost of lost time, inefficiency, and rework
- The importance of protecting the union standard of excellence
- Reinforcing that foremen are the frontline leaders who shape outcomes

4. Key Themes From Contractor Feedback (25 minutes)

A structured walk-through of the ten issue categories, framed constructively:

1. Attendance, start/stop times, and break discipline
2. Planning, look-ahead, and proactive job management
3. Communication gaps (cross-trade, GC, PM, crew)
4. Paperwork quality and timeliness
5. Technology resistance and training needs
6. Soft skills and professionalism
7. Enforcement of work rules and accountability
8. Skipping procedures and best practices
9. Absenteeism and no-call/no-shows
10. Tool loss and jobsite stewardship

Each theme includes:

- What contractors are seeing
- Why it matters
- How foremen can influence outcomes
- How MCA Detroit and labor leadership will support them

5. Navigating Internal Charges and Bylaw Concerns (15 minutes)

A critical segment addressing the fear foremen expressed:

- Clarifying what bylaws actually say
- Distinguishing between legitimate charges and interpersonal conflict
- Reinforcing that enforcing jobsite expectations is **not** a violation
- Labor leadership affirming support for foremen acting in good faith
- Practical guidance on documentation, communication, and escalation
- Emphasizing that foremen should not feel intimidated into inaction

6. Reestablishing Clear Expectations for Foremen (20 minutes)

A practical, actionable framework covering:

- Time discipline and modeling professional behavior
- Daily planning and 3-week look-ahead expectations
- Communication standards with PMs, GCs, and other trades
- Paperwork requirements and documentation best practices
- Technology use expectations
- Crew leadership, accountability, and conflict management
- Safety, quality, and adherence to procedures

7. Contractor Responsibilities: A Shared Accountability Model (10 minutes)

Contractors acknowledge their role in foreman success:

- Providing timely IFC drawings
- Ensuring proper tooling and material staging
- Offering clear direction and labor goals
- Supporting foremen when enforcing expectations
- Avoiding mixed messages between office and field

8. Open Dialogue: Questions, Scenarios, and Real-World Challenges (20 minutes)

A structured discussion where foremen can:

- Ask questions
- Share experiences
- Raise concerns
- Work through real jobsite scenarios
- Clarify expectations with labor leadership present

9. Closing: Commitment to Excellence & Next Steps (10 minutes)

- Summary of key takeaways
- Reinforcement of shared goals
- Outline of follow-up actions (training, resources, communication)
- Appreciation for the foremen's leadership and contributions
- Invitation to ongoing dialogue and continuous improvement