

Telling Folks About Your Pay: Six Ways to Keep It *Real*

Use Personal Stories and Stats to Campaign for a Living Wage

If you and your co-workers push for a living wage, never, ever assume that other people know how little you earn, be they taxpayers, better-paid colleagues, or even some higher-level administrators.

Tell *personal economic stories* the best way you know how, through an Association flyer, newsletter, slide show, web site, video, or actual speakers—either your boldest colleagues or your most respected supporters in the community.

Select stories that no opponent can correct or deny, staying focused on stuff that you *know*. And use facts that will surprise, educate, move, and motivate your audience.

There's no single kind of living wage “product” or presentation. But consider basing it on a **simple campaign message or logo**, then fleshing it out with these “human” components:

Photo: NYSUT



2. Real impact on student achievement. Be your members preK-12 paraeducators, building custodians, or contingent (adjunct) college instructors working several jobs to survive, they have taught, “reached and touched,” motivated, or protected countless students over the years. **Get them to tell those stories.**

3. Real incomes. Have members spell out—in terms of an hourly, monthly, or annual wage; or take-home pay—how little they earn for the complex work they do. **And never assume that any audience grasps the value and importance of your members’ work.**



Think about basing a local Association living wage campaign on a simple message or logo.

1. Real names, real faces. In printed or electronic media, **use professional-looking photos or clips of your members**—possibly doing or saying something—that illustrate the diversity of your local affiliate. And consider using a member questionnaire to spot and publicize advanced training, service awards, and/or community involvement.



WEA video

In this video, Yakima (Washington) paraeducator Kristie Maxwell says: “I have gone to a counselor with things about a child that no one else could find out. But I had the time to sit with this kid and talk about why he was naughty on the playground.”

4. Real local living wage estimates.

Use a locally appropriate costing method (such as an online family budget calculator, estimates from a credit union or state agency, or a member-computed monthly survival budget), to contrast your region's living wage—for, say, a one parent-one child family—with members' real wages.

Why a Living Wage?

- Debbie lives in a shelter.
- Wanda uses food stamps.
- Jerry works five jobs.
- Fahima can't afford a car.
- Maria only shops at yard sales.
- Our kids are on free and reduced lunches.

—From a Fairfax (Virginia) Education Association living wage T-shirt.

Basic Family Budget Calculator

Yakima, WA MSA
One Parent, One Child

Item	Cost
Monthly Housing	\$700
Monthly Food	\$317
Monthly Child Care	\$757
Monthly Transportation	\$343
Monthly Health Care	\$220
Monthly Other Necessities	\$245
Monthly Taxes	\$260
Monthly Total	\$2841
Annual Total	\$34093

Family Type:

One Parent, One Child

State:

WA

Area Name:

Yakima, WA MSA

CALCULATE BUDGET

This family budget calculator, at www.epi.org/content/budget_calculator, can help you determine a livable wage for a variety of family sizes.

5. Real personal struggles. Use brief, compelling anecdotes and member quotes on the economic struggles you face. **What basic needs are your members doing without?**

Must they survive on public or family assistance? And what does poverty pay mean for their daily work lives, their family situations, and their hopes for a better future?

6. Real ways your audience can help. Ask supporters to do something concrete—write a letter, make a phone call, attend a meeting, or appear at a rally—and tell them where to go for more, reliable information. The best source should be your NEA local affiliate.



—Dave Winans and Debbie Minnick,
NEA Collective Bargaining & Member
Advocacy Department, March 2009



“I think our school board would be very surprised to find that there are several ESPs who have lived like I have, who have lived without heat, without the everyday necessities they need for survival.”