



Living Wage Campaign Toolkit



A Union of Professionals

AFT PSRP

Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel



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OUR MISSION

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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The AFT Paraprofessionals and School-Related Personnel Program and Policy Council has identified the lack of a living wage for many of our members as a central issue for the constituency. This toolkit is designed to provide locals with tools, training and supports as they develop their own living wage campaign tailored to the specific political, economic and social conditions found in their state or school system.





When planning any campaign, there are three basic things we must do to be successful:

- Educate
- Mobilize
- Amplify

Within these main headings are tools that interconnect with one another. Each tool should be used to educate, mobilize and amplify your campaign.

The tools include information and best practices for:

1. Research techniques
2. Surveys
3. Communications (internal and external)
4. Power Analysis
5. Legislation and Political Influence
6. Member Engagement and Direct Action

The toolkit may be used in its entirety as a comprehensive living wage campaign; or, pieces of the toolkit may be used as needed or as appropriate based on the goals of the local membership. The AFT PSRP Department can assist any local considering a living wage campaign and can help tailor the campaign to the specific environment and goals of the local.

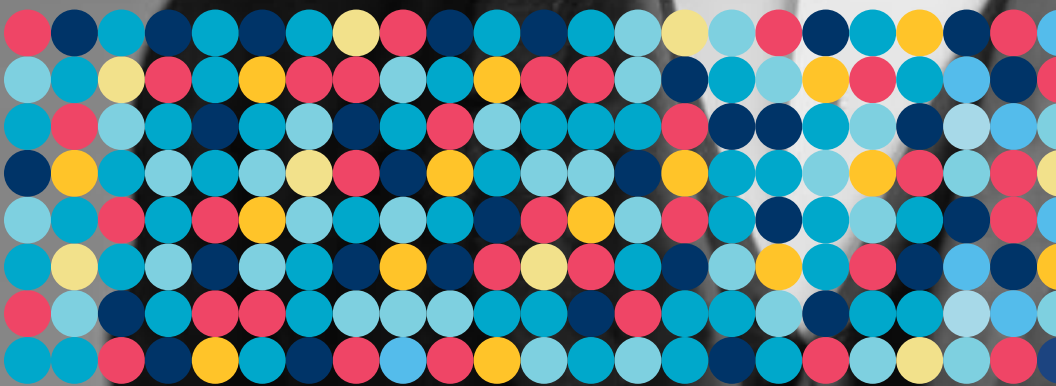


We want more school
houses and less jails;
more books and less
arsenals; more learning
and less vice; more
constant work and less
crime; more leisure and
less greed; more justice
and less revenge; in fact,

**more of the
opportunities**

to cultivate our better
natures. ...

—Samuel Gompers



Educate



Part of our job as organizers is to bring everyone—members, administrators, elected officials and the general public—up to a baseline understanding of a subject. In this case, it's a minimum understanding of what a living wage is, why it's important, and how paying a living wage helps the entire community.

Education in a campaign is multifaceted; education happens internally within the union structure, as well as externally. As leaders in our union, we must educate ourselves on the priorities of the membership. We must also educate ourselves on the financial and political realities of our state or district, and determine where leverage opportunities exist. Looking externally, we must educate the employer, the public and local politicians on the benefits of paying our members a living wage.

The foundation for our education campaign is research—we should research our employers, but also look internally to research ourselves; we must find out what our own members care about and have the will to accomplish.

When looking inward, surveys are a good place to start and a crucial first step in any member engagement activity. Before beginning your living wage efforts, it's important to know whether this is an issue your members care about and are willing to spend their time and energy fighting for.

Surveys

Surveys help educate and inform local leadership, and can be used to gather data to educate and inform your membership or the public at large.

Imagine how you could mobilize your members to take action for a living wage if you had data showing that 75 percent of your membership had to choose which bills to pay each month and which to default on. With the help of good data, you can educate on a larger scale; pulling the public into your fight for a living wage, will bring more pressure to your campaign than simply mobilizing your membership.

Multiple survey tools are available— each having different strengths and weaknesses depending on the objective. Below are some examples of survey tools and methods for distribution. A sample member survey can be found in the [appendix](#). *(For help crafting your research plan, you can contact the PSRP department.)*

- **AFT LeaderNet Survey tool:** This is available to all AFT locals; the tool allows for multiple types of questions and for direct distribution via paper copy, or an emailed link. The survey can also be embedded within a website or social media post.
- **Survey Monkey:** This is a versatile tool that allows for multiple types of survey questions as well as advanced analytics. The free version has limited functionality and caps the number of responses. Paid versions will allow for unlimited responses, access to advanced analytics and for you to brand your survey. These surveys can be emailed, printed, or embedded in websites or social media.
- **Google Forms Survey tool:** This is a basic survey tool using Google Forms. Responses are captured via spreadsheet with some analytics (graphs, response counts, etc.). This tool is good for creating quick snap surveys or for surveys with a limited number of respondents. The tool does not allow branding.
- **Paper Survey:** Paper surveys may be old school—but because they are distributed by hand, they allow members to have face-to-face conversations. This direct member-to-member engagement can sometimes be more valuable than the information generated through the survey responses.

Questions to consider as you build out your survey tool:

- Who are you surveying?
- What survey format or tool is most effective for collecting the data you want?
- What will you use the data for?
- How will the data you gather help you tell a compelling story?
- What people or groups can you influence with the data you gather?
- How can you use your survey to educate your members or the public?

Once you know where your membership stands, it is time to learn what you can about the employer and the living wage issue more broadly. There are two types of research that will help us understand these issues: foundational research and financial analysis.

Foundational Research

Foundational research is information related to your campaign topic. In this case, it is information about the wages of workers in your location, the cost of living in your city, and any other information that is useful as you *educate* your members and the public about why paying a living wage is so important.

Examples:

- What is a living wage in my state? <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>
- What has my state done recently to raise the minimum wage? www.epi.org/minimum-wage-tracker/
- Paid time off also impacts members' income security—what laws are there in my state that provide paid sick leave or family leave? www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/paid-family-leave-resources.aspx and www.abetterbalance.org/resources/paid-sick-time-legislative-successes/
- How much do members need to earn to afford rent in my city? <https://reports.nlihc.org/oor>

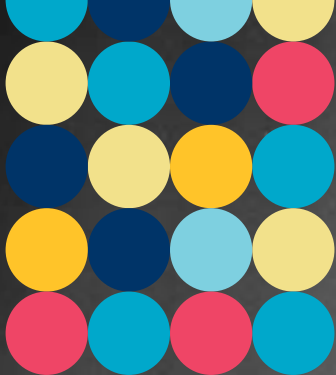
Financial Analysis

Financial analysis is research into the financial health of an employer or person. We can run the best organizing campaign in history, but if the money simply isn't there to give us what we are asking for, we won't be able to win our campaign.

Examples:

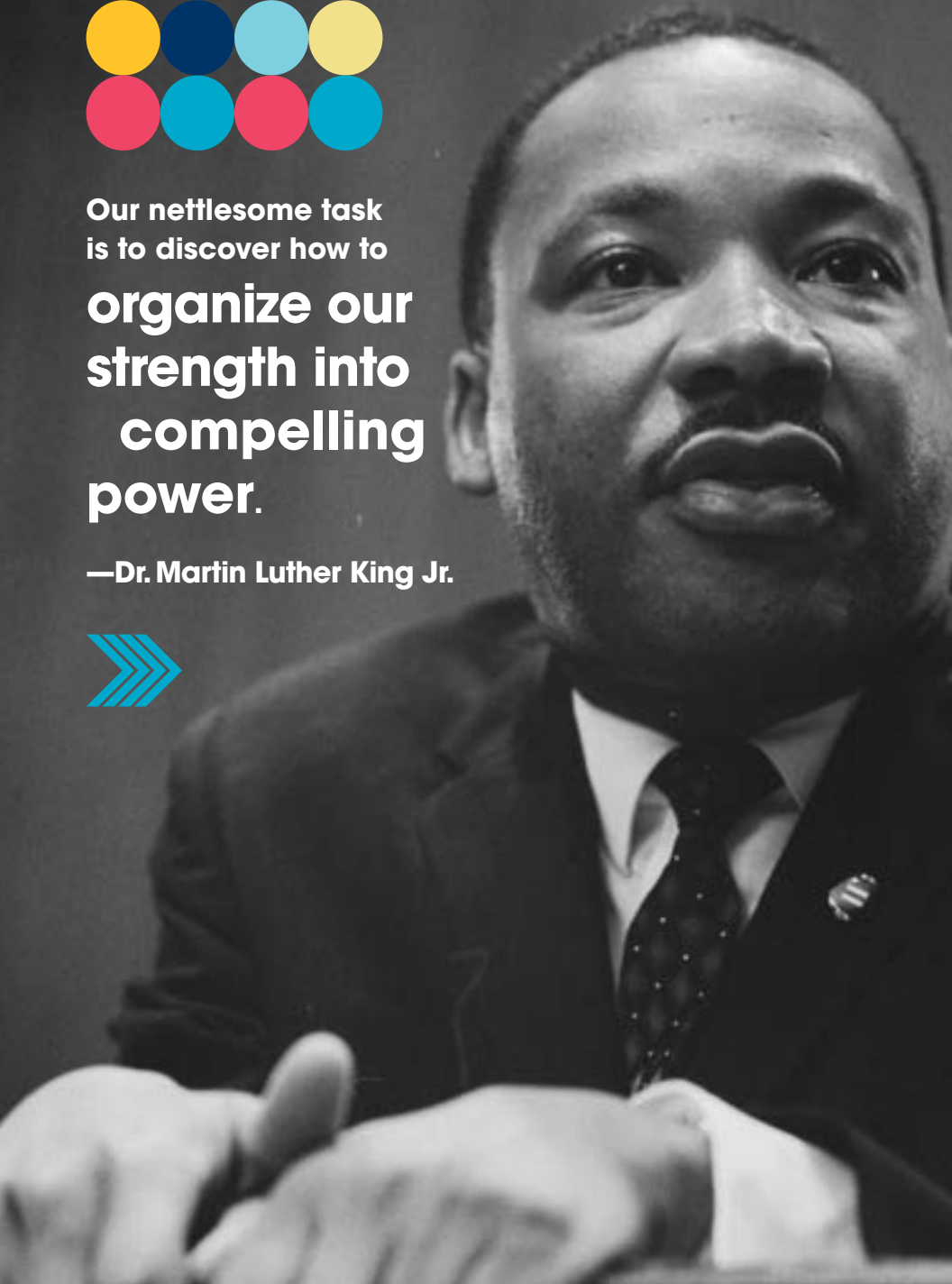
- **School district finances.** Can the district afford to increase wages? How much can it afford? Are budget priorities aligned with student and community needs?
- **State budgets.** How does the state spend resources? Can the state redirect resources to PSRP salaries?
- **Federal programs.** Is there a federal program that could free up local money so it can be redirected to PSRP salaries?
- **Opposition research.** Which people or organizations have something to gain or lose if your campaign is successful?

It is difficult to build a winning campaign without first doing the appropriate research. Knowing the facts on the ground will help you educate your members and the public. *Please contact the AFT PSRP Department if you need assistance building your research and education plan.*



Our nettlesome task
is to discover how to
**organize our
strength into
compelling
power.**

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Mobilize



We know that we are stronger together. A single voice advocating for a living wage can be easily ignored; when we lift all our voices at once to demand a living wage, we become a force that cannot be ignored. Our union becomes stronger when we find a way to galvanize support from a broad coalition of people. We win when we can demonstrate solidarity with each other and with other groups that share our commitment to expanding the dignity and power of working people. Our ability to mobilize not only our members but also entire communities to take action for a cause is one of our greatest strengths.

Effective mobilization takes into account various power dynamics within a community. Power and leverage depend on the relationship between your members and local business leaders, elected officials, political candidates and other organizations that have influence within your community.

There is power in your community; one of your first tasks is to recognize who has it and who does not through a “power analysis.” When there is a solid understanding of the power structures present within a community, you will be able to effectively use your power and the power of your allies to accomplish your campaign goal.

Several tools are available that can help you think critically about the power dynamics in your community. It is often helpful to create a visual representation or chart of who has the power to influence your campaign, how much power they have, in what way they are predisposed to use their power to influence your campaign (will they help you or stand in your way?), and what sort of relationship you have with them.





Our struggle is not easy. Those who oppose our cause are rich and powerful and they have many allies in high places. We are poor. Our allies are few. But we have something the rich do not own.

We have our bodies and spirits and the justice of our cause as our weapons.

—César Chávez



“The direct action of our members is one of the most visible and powerful tools we have.”



Power Analysis

Before you can mobilize your members and amplify your living wage campaign, you must determine who the decision-maker is, and who in your community holds the power and influence over that decision-maker.

Power analysis is a tool that will help you:

- Identify influential organizations and individuals in your community;
- Create a visual map to analyze positions, relationships and patterns of influence in the community; and
- Plan strategies for forming or strengthening relationships based on shared values and goals.

The AFT has resources to help you identify who has power in your community. Contact the PSRP Department for help developing your community-specific power analysis.

Direct Action and Member Engagement

The direct action of our members is one of the most visible and powerful tools we have. Engaging members to take action on the fight for a living wage should be a critical component of your campaign. However, your members' direct action is not the only mobilization you should be considering. You also need to think about how your members' actions feed into your community and elected official mobilization plans.

Direct actions are the visible things your members do to help move the campaign forward; the most recognizable and serious direct action a union might take is a strike. A strike is never something we want to do; we would much rather reach an agreement with our employer and continue working with our students. However, if a majority of

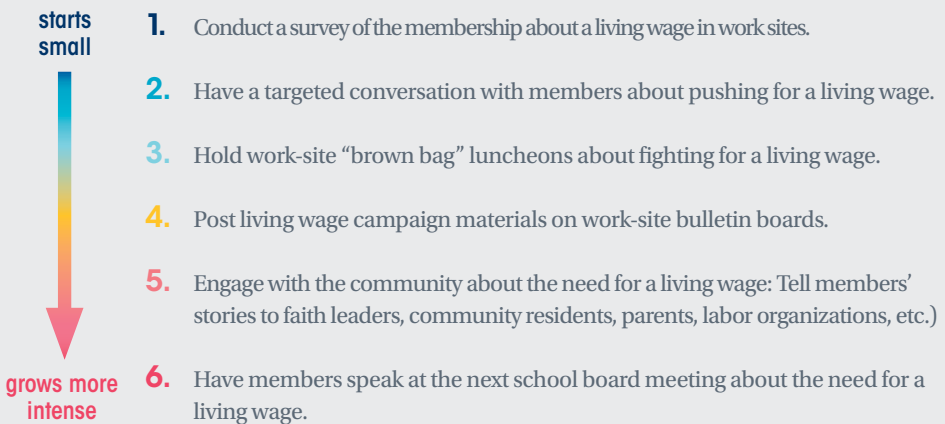
the membership agrees that the employer is being unreasonable, the membership may call for a strike vote and strike action. This is a serious step and is used only as a last resort. There are many smaller actions you can undertake to reach an agreement with the employer before considering a strike action. You can think of direct actions like a mountain to climb. We start at the bottom with small steps and gradually, with one step at a time, we make our way to the top. As we are escalating our actions, we make frequent stops along the way to ask decision-makers if they will agree to a living wage—if not, we keep climbing and escalating until we reach the top. It is important to remember that the objective is to achieve our goal of a living wage with as little rancor and hostility as possible. After each escalation, we should provide decision-makers an opportunity to concede and give us what we asked for without losing face.


As you plan your member mobilization actions remember they should:

- Start small;
- Grow in intensity over time;
- Be timed to maximize leverage (e.g., around contract expiration, elections, public events, etc.); and
- Be planned in advance. (Use a calendar to plan out your actions and escalations.)

In the **appendix** is an example of the first month of a typical escalation plan for a living wage and how it could be calendared out. A full escalation plan would take several months and include many more steps and escalation points (see the example below).

Please contact the PSRP Department for help developing a full escalation plan and calendar.





In February 2011, thousands protested inside the state capitol in Madison against Governor Scott Walker's Act 10, which hobbled public employee unions in Wisconsin.

Legislative and Political Mobilization

Winning means we need the funding necessary to pay people a living wage. Whether winning a living wage for our members happens through collective bargaining or through changes at the legislature, navigating local politics, politicians and legislation is necessary, and will require forethought and planning.

Depending on the makeup of your state's house and senate, you may be able to accomplish a great deal through legislation, or you may not be able to pass a single bill. Even the most unfriendly legislatures will have some representatives who will be willing to meet and discuss your push for a living wage. Raising the political profile of your campaign can be accomplished even when no substantive legislative gains are possible.

Here are a few examples of ways to engage politicians and the public around your fight for a living wage:

- Mobilize members and the public to call their lawmakers.
- Circulate and deliver a petition calling on your legislators to take action on your living wage agenda.
- Encourage a friendly legislator to sponsor or co-sponsor a piece of legislation.
- Ask a friendly legislator to attend or give a speech at a rally or other event in support of a living wage.
- Get your lawmakers on the record in support of a living wage for your members—and let the public know about it. (If the lawmakers don't support a living wage, let the public know that too!)



**There's power in
allowing yourself
to be known**

and heard, in owning
your unique story, in using
your authentic voice. And
there's grace in being willing
to know and hear others.

—Michelle Obama

Amplify



Communications

An effective campaign pulls people (your members, parents, politicians, community groups, etc.) to your cause. How we communicate about an issue is important. A well-run internal and external messaging campaign can galvanize the entire community behind your membership and their agenda. On the other hand, a poorly managed or nonexistent communication strategy can sink your campaign before it fully gets off the ground.

There are two communication strategies that every campaign should develop a plan for:

1. Internal communications

are messages targeted at your membership that are designed to inform your members (*educate*), or agitate your members with a call to action (*mobilize*).

2. **External communications** are targeted at the public. They are designed to galvanize support, expose bad behavior, and persuade the public to join your cause (*amplify*).

Internal communications should:

- Be informative;
- Focus on the goal of the campaign;
- Take into account the way your members prefer to communicate (if no one reads emails, don't use email to get your message across); and
- Ask members to take a specific action.

Members are your audience, but be aware that anything you communicate internally will likely be seen by external audiences as well.

Examples: union newsletter, direct verbal communication to members, closed Facebook groups, list serves, direct mailing to members, members-only sections of local union website, direct text or Hustle messages, email blasts, etc.

“Winning a living wage for your members can mean a significant improvement in their quality of life.”



External communications should:

- Be clear and on your message (focus on getting your message out—not on countering your opponent’s narrative);
- Tell a story that is easy for the public to understand and relate to;
- Be compelling (use graphics and pictures to help tell your story when possible); and
- Amplify your campaign and your “ask.”

Examples: op-ed in the local paper; direct mailing; public speaking at meetings; Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts or advertisements; highway billboards; leafletting, etc.

Wrapup

Winning a living wage for your members can mean a significant improvement in their quality of life. A well-planned and executed living wage campaign will require investment in time, political capital, energy and resources on the part of your local; however, the return on that investment for your membership will be significant—both for individual members and for the overall health of your local.

The AFT’s Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel Department has both staff and resources standing at the ready to help locals that wish to undertake a campaign for a living wage. For assistance in building and resourcing a customized campaign plan, please reach out to PSRP@aft.org or call 202-434-4696 and ask to speak with a member of the PSRP Department.

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Appendix



Sample Living Wage Survey

Name: _____ (optional)

1. What is your job title?
2. How many years have you worked in the school system?
3. What is your current salary?
4. Do you receive pay all year round or does your normal pay end when school is over for the summer?
5. Have you ever been in a situation where you could not pay all of your regular monthly expenses on time? (i.e. you deferred some of your normal monthly expenses to the next month or your next paycheck so you could pay the most important bills on time.)
6. If your paycheck stopped coming, how many months could you continue to pay all of your normal expenses before you fell behind?
7. If you had a \$400 unexpected expense like a car breaking down or an injury that was not fully covered by insurance, would you be able to pay that expense and continue to pay all of your other normal monthly expenses on time?

November 2020

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 Send Out Member Survey	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 Begin one-on-one member conversations	10 Begin one-on-one member conversations	11 One-on-one member conversations	12 Living Wage Brownbag	13 One-on-one conversations & Analyze Survey Data	14 One-on-one member conversations
15	16 Update union bulletin board for living wage	17 Members speak at school board meeting	18 One-on-one member conversations	19 One-on-one member conversations	20 One-on-one member conversations	21
22	23 Members meet with community about need for living wage	24 Members meet with community about need for living wage	25 Vacation	26 Thanksgiving Day	27 Vacation	28
29	30					

EVENTS

Member Survey
What would winning a living wage mean to our members?

One-on-One Conversations
Ongoing personal conversations about a living wage and why winning it will be beneficial.

Community Engagement
Members to speak at school board meetings.
Members to use Thanksgiving break as an opportunity to engage with community allies and rally support.



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