For an Economy that Works for All

A tool kit for advocates for low-wage workers

For an Economy that Works for All
A tool kit for advocates of low-wage workers

Welcome, and thanks for your interest in this toolkit. The information and resources inside are designed to help people who care about building an economy that works for all Americans—one that provides profit to business owners and stable jobs with adequate pay and benefits to employees. All materials are based on extensive research that was conducted for a communications and technical assistance project called *For an Economy that Works for All*, funded by the Ford Foundation and coordinated by Douglas Gould & Co., Inc., a public interest communications firm. Complete background on the project and its products appear in the Situation Analysis included in this kit.

If you are reading this, you probably know very well that advocates have been working for a number of years, with varying degrees of success, to enact policies and programs that address the obstacles standing in the path of low-wage workers who are striving to achieve the American Dream. Issues such as the lack of affordable early care and healthcare, a minimum wage that has not kept pace with the cost of living and inadequate access to job training programs are some of the key challenges that we confront. While progress in these areas has occurred, there are a number of public perceptions that make it exceedingly difficult to achieve the policy changes necessary to improve the lives of low-wage working families. By framing these issues in a different way, advocates can shape public dialogue to create a climate that is more favorable toward low-wage workers and low-wage work. This is explained in greater detail in the Situation Analysis.

Also included in the toolkit are resources to help you communicate about key issues in ways that are "framed to win." There are examples of e-mail pitches, a media advisory, advice on how to write an op-ed, and a fact sheet with useful statistics that you may find helpful in preparing your own materials. We also have other useful resources, including guides to editorial board meetings and desk-side briefings along with a number of recent news stories that serve as good and poor examples of "framing to win."

We hope this toolkit proves helpful to you and to others who are working to improve conditions for low-wage workers in America.

Additional information about *For an Economy that Works for All* is available on the project website, www.economythatworks.org.

Background

Creating an economy that works for all Americans—one that provides profit to business owners and stable jobs with adequate pay and benefits to employees—requires responsible planning today. Business leaders, policymakers, the labor movement and community leaders throughout the nation need to work together to create an economy that works for all, not just a select few. But true prosperity—that benefits all American workers—cannot be achieved without a concerted and comprehensive effort.

People who work hard shouldn't be poor, but many are. There are as many as 31.1 million poor people in this country. Thirty million people—25% of the workforce—earn less than $8.50 per hour. At least six million Americans can be counted among the ranks of low-wage workers —individuals who spend at least 27 weeks per year in the American workforce, but whose incomes still fall below the federal poverty level.

Just being in the workforce no longer guarantees access to such critical benefits as sick days, healthcare and pay raises. This is a problem for business as well as for low-wage workers, since lack of paid time off contributes to employee burnout and high turnover. Government is also affected through the social problems that are created when families are stressed and parents are unable to provide for their children.

- Many of the people affected by these conditions are the sole support of their families.
- Growing numbers of contingent workers find themselves with no benefits of any kind and can no longer turn to the government for help.
- Facing fierce competition and a sputtering economy, some employers have cut back on healthcare benefits and offer limited opportunities for job training or advancement.
- Poor quality public schools, limited language ability, illness or infirmity and lack of adequate job training keep low-wage workers where they are.
- The weak economy and massive layoffs have left many living on the edge, vulnerable to any crisis—illness, recurring hunger, or sudden homelessness.
- The workforce does not offer people in low-wage jobs the protections that people in higher paying jobs are given as benefits or can buy with excess income—protections such as health insurance, safe places for their children during work hours, time off to attend to personal emergencies and other needs, paid sick leave and retirement benefits.

For an Economy That Works For All is a communications research and technical assistance project funded by the Ford Foundation. The project is refining messages and strategic communications tools and techniques to help raise public awareness about the conditions affecting low-wage workers and the need for government and corporate policy changes that will help this population gain equal access to the wealth and promise of the American economy. We seek to firmly establish low-wage working families in America's collective consciousness—as a group whose needs must be accounted for when decisions are made about jobs and the economy—by employers, investors and government.

The project's products to date are:

- A study of how the media covers issues related to low-wage work, conducted in 2001
- A polling analysis of opinion research on poverty, work and attitudes toward policies affecting low-wage workers, conducted in 2002
- Two reports of a series of focus groups and individual interviews, the first conducted in 2002 and a second conducted in 2004
- Two national opinion polls, the first conducted in 2002 and a follow-up poll conducted in 2004
- Message points to help advocates reframe the debate when they speak to the media
- A campaign toolkit that offers practical tips and resources for use in organizing local, state or national communications campaigns

What Low-Wage Workers Need

Higher wages—getting more cash into the hands of low-wage workers for the jobs they are doing today

Self-sufficiency and long-term economic security for individuals and families

Upward mobility in the workforce.

Achieving these results will require many policy changes. For this project, we focused on the following list:

- Requiring companies to provide full-time employees with at least five days off with pay annually for illness or a family emergency
- Government creating more job training and skill development programs
- Expanding early care subsidies to parents of young children who are working, but poor
- Adjusting poverty level guidelines to take into account an individual family's situation and the area's cost of living to determine the government assistance that family needs
- Government providing health insurance to low-wage workers whose employers do not provide it
- Requiring companies to provide employees that work at least 25 hours per week with the same range of benefits as full-time employees, meaning they would have all the same health, pension, and paid leave benefits, but adjusted proportionately to their work hours
- Increasing the minimum wage from $5.15 per hour to $8 per hour

The Communications Opportunity

We believe that policymakers in business and government—at all levels—can be equal partners in the effort to achieve the policy objectives outlined above, particularly those with the greatest amount of support. We have found compelling and effective ways to frame these issues and policies as compatible with basic American values.

Perceptions Today

People's policy attitudes are based on a complex and systematic set of values, perceptions and experiences that help people organize a worldview that helps them determine what issues and problems they need to attend to, and in what order of importance they should place them. These organizing principles or networks of ideas are called frames. A clear understanding of how people currently frame low-wage workers' issues as well as an understanding of how new frames shift policy support, allows communicators to make choices about the best way to present information about this subject.

Our preliminary analysis told us that:

- Most Americans believe first and foremost in the "American Dream"—that any one of us can achieve great wealth with hard work and good luck.
- Americans believe in the value of work and the positive example we set for our children through hard work. Welfare reform was driven by strong support for work and perceptions that many people on welfare did not want to work.
- Poverty is a low-priority issue for most Americans today even though they care about the poor.
- Poverty is seen as at least partially the fault of the poor person—a personal problem brought on by bad choices. Most poor people believe this, too.
- Most people believe that poverty is a given—that there will always be poor people.
- Most people believe that the economy is like a force of nature. It cannot be governed or changed and any attempts to do so are likely to thwart its growth.
- Most people have some connections to the poor—a family member, a friend, a friend of a friend, or they have "been there themselves."
- The media shapes and reinforces these perceptions about low-wage workers by focusing on how the welfare system promotes individual behavior that is inconsistent with American work ethics.
- While there may be a change from our study period, in 2001 press coverage appeared in just a few major urban centers and the problems of low-wage workers were not reported as a national problem. (We are currently

conducting a new media analysis based on press coverage during the first quarter of 2005. It will be available in May 2005 on the web at www.economythatworks.org.)

- Corporations and unions are not mentioned in connection with the issues related to low-wage workers.
- Stories about low-wage workers are framed in terms of government incompetence and the poor are portrayed as being "between a rock and a hard place." The oft-repeated story is that the federal government ended welfare and people obtained jobs. But this just made people's lives worse because the jobs pay so little and people have fewer supports for survival by being off welfare. So government is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

Re-framing the Debate

We believe that the issue is not "framed to win." But to reframe it requires facing a number of concerns:

- If it is about government and its failings, people will think nothing can be done that doesn't make matters worse.
- If it is about individuals, policymakers will look to reforming poor people rather than the systems that serve them.
- If we can make it an issue of systemic failure, which systems should we focus on? Education? The system of work and reward?
- If we reframe communications in terms of our common economic security and the creation of a workforce for the future, will we get broader, deeper support?

What other reframing options put the public in mind to consider those policy options judged most effective by experts?

Messages and Frames That Work

Research conducted in 2002 indicated that support for policy change erodes when opposing arguments are offered, but that certain message frames are more successful at retaining support than are other, less effective frames. Additional research in 2004 clarified our understanding of frames and indicated that messages based on the concepts of economic planning and community collaboration are most successful in building support for policies that help low-wage workers.

Our 2002 opinion poll tested a number of messages and frames to determine which ones increased the amount of support people would give to the list of policies outlined above. These included the "default" frame most often used by advocates working on behalf of low-wage workers. We called the default frame "Sympathy/Poverty:"

Sympathy/Poverty

America is increasingly being separated into the haves and have-nots. One of every three Americans is poor and two-thirds of those are single mothers with children. Try to imagine the plight of a single mother working a low-wage job. Even at $10 an hour—twice the minimum wage—she earns only about $20,000. Who could support a family on $20,000 a year?

The Sympathy/Poverty message was the least effective frame of all those we tested. The reasons for this are explained fully in the research reports. Generally, the problem with the Sympathy/Poverty frame is that it reinforces the idea that poverty is the result of bad individual choices, rather than a condition that requires systemic reform.

The most effective messages were based on frames we called "Economic Planning" and "Community Planning." These frames support policy change because they emphasize the systemic causes of poverty.

Economic Planning

Creating a better tomorrow requires responsible planning today. Instead of a short-term profit orientation, we need to think about building jobs and the economy for the long-term. Too many companies and decision makers focus on short-term profits and short-term thinking to the detriment of the greater good. We need to change that thinking and create a future with a strong economy and good jobs for all workers. That means investing in education and job training, and encouraging investment in industries with the kinds of good jobs that support families and strengthen communities.

In our 2004 research, we learned that the Economic Planning frame can be strengthened by the addition of a Community Planning frame:

Community Planning

Creating prosperous communities tomorrow requires responsible planning today. Too many companies and decision-makers focus on short-term profits and short-term thinking to the detriment of our communities. And when we allow one part of the community to weaken and struggle, it weights us all down, resulting in a lower standard of living. Our nation needs to change its short-term thinking and start building good-paying jobs with benefits and strong communities for the long term. With better planning we can repair our economic engine and create a future with good-paying jobs and strong communities.

The Economic and Community Planning frames, even when opposing arguments were offered, strongly supported the proposed policies as helpful to low-wage workers and their families. Thus, we recommend advocates frame their messages in terms of responsible planning and economic vision, with a strong secondary or reinforcing message about community planning. The research also shows that messages about teamwork in the workplace and respect for workers buttress support for policy change.

Spokespeople

Our polls also evaluated the public's responsiveness to a variety of spokespeople, including:

- A corporate CEO
- An economist
- A mayor of a mid-size city
- The head of an advocacy group that helps the working poor
- The head of a national labor union
- A waitress and single mom
- A religious leader

There was virtually no difference in the effectiveness of the message based on who delivered it. People from all these positions can credibly deliver a message about jobs and the economy in any public education campaign.

Targeting

Support was found across the board. However, core supporters should be seen as:

- Democrats (40% of the electorate)
- Labor union households (16% of the electorate)
- Non-white voters (19% of the electorate)
- Those earning less than $25,000 per year (22% of the electorate)
- Younger women (25% of the electorate)

While these groups are most strongly in our court, it should be noted that this list includes groups with low voter turnout, making them less influential in courting policymaker responsiveness. Thus, any communications strategy must include more groups with greater political clout.

To the extent that there is a potential swing group, it would be defined as:

- Northeast voters (19% of the electorate)
- Older women (26% of the electorate)
- Voters without a college education (33% of the electorate)
- Independents (20% of the electorate)

The Story-Telling Dilemma

While it may seem counter-intuitive and counter to all the advice media consultants have given advocates over the last decade, the telling of personal stories about the poor actually decreases people's support for the policy changes we are seeking. This goes for success stories as well as people still stuck in poverty.

When most people hear personal, emotional stories about the working poor, they see:

The personal flaws of the individual that may have contributed to the problem. "If he didn't take drugs, quit school, have a teenage mom, etc., he wouldn't be poor." This makes the problem about the individual, not the system. And we need to change the system.

Or, they marvel at the ability of the person to get out of the problem, meaning that anyone can do it.

Reporters and editors want to use compelling personal stories to open a window on social issues. They are not likely to change because many believe that such stories increase their audiences. The challenge is to find and pitch different types of stories that reinforce the frame that best supports the policy agenda we are advancing.

The economic and community planning frames can be best supported by stories that focus on people who represent "the system," such as:

- The restaurant owner and her employment practices rather than the struggling waitress.
- The business owner who offers benefits such as high quality, affordable early care and health care, rather than the workers who benefit from these programs, or employees at a competing company who cannot care for their sick children
- A city planner who is trying to create good jobs rather than the people who are unemployed.
- The job trainer rather than the people who attend her classes.

When the media does focus on "real people," the emphasis should be on groups or classes rather than individuals. Janitors or healthcare workers are excellent groups because the public understands the necessity of these workers and is more likely to see that these jobs play an important role in the overall economy.

Can advocates fully control what the media reports? Can coverage be re-directed over night? Certainly not. This will be a very difficult transition. However, advocates can pitch different stories. They can educate reporters about how the nature of their coverage encourages or undermines public understanding and action.

Advocates can also invest more resources in media vehicles that they control, such as radio actualities, video and audio news releases, op-ed pieces, websites and paid and public service advertising.

Sample Messages

As previously indicated, the public is supportive of low-wage workers when the issue is reframed. Here are some sample messages that may be useful when discussing low-wage workers.

1-Today's "short-term economy" is undermining our country, our communities and the future of our children.

- People who work hard should be able to support their families, but today many are struggling. It wasn't always this way. Jobs that used to support a family in our parents' generation, now barely support one person.
- Too many in society have a short-term vision, focused on immediate profits, rather than a long-term vision centered on investing in people, communities, and infrastructure.
- While there are many responsible employers, some companies and investors care only about the next quarterly earnings report, rather than the communities where they operate and the nation that sustains them.
- Too many policymakers focus on the smallest possible government and the lowest possible taxes, to the detriment of the greater good.

2-Creating a better tomorrow requires responsible planning today. Americans will only build a solid economic future when we look forward and plan for the long-term.

- Future prosperity requires that we start thinking today about the industries we want to develop, the infrastructure we will need, and the investments society makes in today's workforce.
- With good planning we can ensure growth for companies, workers, communities and the economy.
- Companies prosper when they treat their workers with respect and as members of a team.
- Communities prosper when we have a vision for the future and a plan in place to make that vision a reality.
- The investments we make today, in creating strong communities and a strong workforce, will pay off in a more prosperous future.

3-Let's create a strong, healthy economy for the long-term, by planning ahead, investing in

the workforce, and supporting companies that provide good jobs.

- Support companies that invest in workers and provide good jobs that support families and strengthen communities.
- Build the economy by providing job training to workers and industries we want to develop for the future.
- Break the cycle of poverty by subsidizing quality early care so that parents can work while being assured that their children are getting opportunities to discover and learn.
- Help employers reduce turnover and families balance work with family needs by providing workers with a minimum of five days paid leave per year to take care of family emergencies.

Adapting the Message

The values of responsible planning, community building, fairness and opportunity can be adapted to address a variety of policy goals.

Self-sufficiency: A strong growing economy requires that more working families become self-sufficient.

- It is only fair that people who work full-time should be able support their families with dignity.
- But jobs that used to support a family, like janitors or healthcare workers, now pay very low wages and frequently offer no benefits.
- The cost of living has skyrocketed while assistance with needs like healthcare or early care is not available to many who are working at low-wage jobs and living on the edge, like janitors and healthcare workers.

Let's strengthen our economy by getting people permanently on the road to self-sufficiency. This means:

- Paying wages that can really support a family. Our Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard shows what it actually costs to live in cities across the nation.
- Offering job training that enables workers to get better jobs and make greater contributions to our community.
- Providing adequate benefits, such as early care and healthcare, that keep people working and make business more productive.
- Ensuring that families receive the publicly funded work supports that will help them retain jobs and advance in the workforce. The Earned Income Tax Credit is a good example of a public program that many workers do not know about.

Health Insurance Transition

- A healthy economy requires a healthy workforce.
- But too many jobs like janitors and healthcare workers no longer offer access to health insurance as they once did.
- As a society, we need to guarantee that all families can obtain affordable, reliable healthcare coverage. This improves life in our communities today and assures a healthy workforce in the future.

Early Care & Education Transition

- A strong economy requires a strong and growing workforce that gives everyone an opportunity to participate in useful work.
- Working families need early care that works for children and helps parents be more productive.
- We need to provide our children with quality early care that provides opportunities to learn, grow, and start school prepared to succeed.

Job Training Transition

- To have a strong economy in the future, we need to invest in the workforce now.
- That means planning for the kinds of good jobs we will want and need in 10, 20 or 30 years, and starting to train workers now.
- To create opportunity for advancement, we need to increase access to job training for those who want to get ahead. This helps workers and employers, and strengthens the economy for everyone.

Expanded job training programs that help multiple employers can strengthen the U.S. workforce and make companies more profitable.

Responsible, Civic-Minded Employers

- Building a strong economy that works for all requires we support and reward civic-minded employers who value their workforces.
- Employers who pay decent wages and offer essential benefits shouldn't get penalized in the marketplace.
- Public policies should support good companies that treat workers fairly.
- Investors should look beyond short-term profits and support employers who invest in long-term growth.
- Employers who strengthen their workforces strengthen the economy and everyone gains.
- Too many employers today cannot find workers who are well trained and ready for the world of work.

Expanded job training programs that help multiple employers can strengthen the U.S. workforce and make companies more profitable.

Without publicly funded supports, many low-wage workers cannot meet their workplace and family obligations.

These workers need adequate salaries, access to healthcare and quality early care, as well as time off to handle emergencies without losing their jobs.

Groups and individuals working to build an economy that works for all Americans across the country need to organize around common strategies and goals in order to affect the positive changes they seek. This strategic plan template can assist groups in following the various steps that should be taken in order to conduct an effective advocacy campaign.

Background: Defining the Challenge

Many Americans perceive the economy as a force of nature—it exists, nobody "runs" it. In fact, human intervention in the economy is perceived as a bad thing, as it restricts growth. Regulations and bureaucracy are examples of government interference in the economy that are typically seen as bad.

Since there is no "system" that could be seen as fair or unfair, those who do not succeed have only themselves to blame. The person failed, not the economy or policies. These perceptions are primary impediments to the enactment of policies that will benefit low-wage workers.

Defining the Campaign Goals

In order to promote and ultimately affect positive change, we must define and stick to the central goal of the *For An Economy That Works For All* campaign: to change the way Americans view the U.S. economy and to change public policy to better support and enhance the efforts of low-wage workers and their families.

Along these lines, groups must seek to change perceptions about the economy so that Americans view the economy as a system that can and should be influenced through responsible planning in order to benefit all workers and their families. They must also seek to shift the focus of attention so that individuals are inclined to question the economic system, not the ability of individuals to succeed in the economy.

Target Audiences

Target audiences for our campaign include key decision-makers who have the power to influence or institute changes on the policy and corporate levels that will help improve the lives and working conditions for America's working families. Targets must include people who can get attention for the issues, influence public and private policy and activate supporters of economic reform.

Primary Target Audiences

Primary target audiences for any campaign designed to help low-wage workers must include the following groups:

1. Federal, state and local policymakers
2. Opinion leaders—including media members, academics, activists and clergy
3. Corporate leaders and small business owners
4. The thinking, talking public (people who vote, are involved in their communities and communicate with policymakers)

Allies

In addition to the primary target audiences of the campaign, there are groups who are likely to be allies in our efforts to change public perceptions and policy on behalf of low-wage workers. Advocates must reach out to these groups, seeking to educate them on the issues and enlist them as campaign messengers. To some extent, these allies overlap with the campaign's target audiences:

1. Organized labor
2. Clergy and religious groups
3. Civic-minded business people
4. Academics
5. Government agencies

Campaign Tactics

Here are some proven tactics for conveying our key messages to target audiences through the mass media. In some localities, certain tactics will be more effective than others, depending upon community norms and customs. You are the expert on what is likely to work best in your area, so let common sense and experience be your guide when choosing the right course to pursue.

Media Audit and Analysis

Before you begin a media initiative, you need to have accurate, current information on the media outlets that exist in your area. You also need to know something about each outlet, such as its audience, its reach, and the interests of its reporters and/or producers. The best way to acquire this information is to conduct a media audit of the outlets in your area and then analyze how those outlets have covered current news events that are of special interest to your organization.

A media audit is an annotated list of all the media outlets in your area, along with pertinent information such as the names of key columnists and the topics they write about, the names of the producers of nightly news broadcasts, and the names of producers of relevant talk shows. Remember to include non-traditional media, such as the in-house publications of large corporations in your area and the television station on the local university campus.

A media analysis is an assessment of how the media in your area have covered particular news stories. Knowing how your daily newspaper has framed its coverage of issues related to low-wage workers, for example, will tell you a lot about how to approach the paper with a potential story idea. For more information on how to conduct a media analysis, see *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, the media analysis report of how major media outlets have covered low-wage workers. It is available in PDF format at www.economythatworks.org.

Targeted Media Lists and Speaking Venues

Once you've identified all of the media in your area and know something about each one, you'll need to decide which outlets will be the most useful in getting out your messages to the target audiences. The media on this narrower, targeted list should be those that are read, watched, and listened to by the primary target group or allies discussed above.

The same holds true for speaking venues in your area, such as civic groups, bar associations, political clubs, and fraternal organizations. Make a list of all the organizations that offer speaking opportunities and prioritize them according to how likely each is to reach your target audiences.

The media and organizations that end up on the final, "A" list are the ones on which you should focus your communication efforts.

Press Releases and Media Materials

Prepare a press release on a newsworthy topic, such as an early care or job-training program. Distribute it, along with the enclosed fact sheet on how work has changed and any other pertinent information, to the media on your "A" list. Offer your organization's spokesperson for interviews on the topic.

Interviews

Before you give an interview to a publication or broadcast outlet, jot down the three most important points that you want to make in the interview and review the key messages discussed earlier in this toolkit. Take every opportunity to make your three points during the interview.

Press Briefings and Audio News Conferences

Another good technique for generating press coverage is to stage a briefing or audio news conference on a newsworthy topic and invite local media. Choose topics that will help forward the messages of your organization, such as living wage campaigns, job training and education or access to healthcare.

Op-eds and Letters-to-the-Editor

Using the advice on writing op-eds provided in this kit as a guide, write an opinion piece on a provocative topic (perhaps the same topic as the one you featured at a media briefing) and try to get it placed on the op-ed (opposite the editorial) page of your daily newspaper.

If the paper runs a story about a topic that is relevant to the lives or working conditions of low-wage workers, send a letter-to-the-editor commenting on the story. Be sure to include the key campaign messages in the letter.

Statements

Be opportunistic and keep an eye out for news stories on which you can piggyback. For example, if a story about early care or pre-K programs in your area is run, issue a brief statement that points out the need for quality early care or pre-K programs for working families in your area. Offer your spokesperson for interviews on the topic.

Advertisements

Craft your own ads to place in local print media outlets. Some may run the ads free of charge as a public service. If you find you must pay for the ad space, ask the publication if it offers a discounted rate for nonprofit organizations. Investigate the possibility of getting public service ad space in the publications of corporations, universities, labor unions, and other nonprofit organizations.

Speeches

Write a speech on a newsworthy topic that is pertinent to low-wage workers or a specific issue related to the mission of your organization. This can become your spokesperson's standard stump speech. Arrange for the spokesperson to deliver the speech to community organizations that are on the "A" list you developed as a result of your audit of media and speaking venues. Invite the media to cover the event.

Desk-side Briefings

Desk-side briefings offer the opportunity to meet face-to-face with a reporter to pitch your story or spokesperson. Reporters are busy people, so be prepared to work around their schedules, and bring your press kit or brochure and business card. More tips on desk-side briefings appear later in this toolkit.

Editorial Board Meetings

Like desk-side briefings, editorial board meetings can offer the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting with key staff members responsible for writing editorials. If you frame your point of view convincingly, you might influence them to write about your issue. Look for a news hook that is relevant to your work, and contact the editorial page editor to request a meeting. Have your messages in a "problem, solution, action" format, and be concise.

Evaluation: Measuring the Success of the Campaign

Most nonprofit organizations have multiple stakeholder groups—including donors, community leaders, clients, staff, regulatory agencies, peer organizations, volunteers, the public, and other groups. Because different people view success in different ways, it's best to use multiple measures of success when evaluating a communications campaign.

Here are some indicators you may wish to use in evaluating your campaign:

Benchmarks

Before the campaign begins, quantify the number of news stories on pertinent topics that appeared in your local media over the last year. (This can be easily done as part of your media audit and analysis.) Then, following the campaign kick-off, quantify the number of stories on the same topics that appear each quarter during the life of the campaign. If there is an increase in media coverage between the current and previous years, you will have an indication that your campaign is succeeding. If there is no increase, you may want to make some mid-course corrections in your implementation activities.

Impressions

At the end of each quarter, tally the circulation/audience figures for all of the media hits that you secured during that period. This will give you an estimate of the number of impressions that your messages made on readers/viewers/listeners. At the end of the campaign, total the number of impressions. Compare that total to a baseline benchmark, which is calculated by adding audience figures for all of the "A" list media you identified in your initial media audit. (Use this aggregated impressions figure as the baseline benchmark for future communication initiatives.)

Stories in Target Outlets

While media coverage in any outlet is welcome, your primary objective is to place stories in the target media on your "A" list. By the end of the first year, at least two stories should have appeared in each of the target media on your "A" list.

Message Pick-up

All media coverage is not equal. Stories that accurately convey the campaign's key messages are more valuable than general stories or articles that frame your issues in a tangential way. Also, as noted earlier in this toolkit, media coverage that focuses on systemic problems is far more valuable and effective than stories that focus on individuals and their problems. Each quarter, analyze all of the media coverage to assess how well the stories communicate the key messages of your campaign, and how reporters are framing the stories.

Public Speaking

Keep a tally of the number of people reached through speaking engagements and personal appearances of your spokesperson(s). Add a qualitative dimension to your measurement by assessing the "value" of the audience in terms of its demographic match with the target audiences identified for this campaign.

Advertising

Include a unique telephone number, e-mail address, and/or postal address in your advertisement. That way, any responses you receive at the unique contact point can be attributed to the success of the ad in motivating people to support programs and policies that help working families. Another somewhat less effective measure of successful advertising is the number of ads run by the media as a public service. You should also tally the total number of impressions achieved by the advertising, whether it is paid or public service.

Donations

It can be difficult to link an increase in donations to a particular public appearance, news story, or advertisement. However, you can gain some sense of how your efforts affected funding by benchmarking donations before and after the campaign, and by inserting a unique identifier in your various media materials, as described above.

Put It In Context

It's important to remember that no single measurement indicator tells the whole story about a campaign. View all of your measurement results in context. Recognize that one story placed in the right outlet that reaches the right target audience and communicates the right messages about low-wage workers is worth more than many general stories that reach diffuse audiences. Recognize, too, that a story placed in an obscure outlet that happens to be a favorite of one major donor might have more value in the long run than media hits that appear in more popular outlets. Taken together, all of the various measurement indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, will give a more realistic picture of the impact of the campaign than will a single measurement standard.

What's In a Word? A Guide For Journalists on How To Talk About Low-Wage Work.

By Joanne Omang, a former reporter, editor and correspondent for *The Washington Post*.

This guide was written for reporters to encourage them to expand their coverage on low-wage work and help readers get a clearer understanding of the experiences of America's low-wage workers. Much of public opinion and perceptions about low-wage workers are formed and reinforced by the media. In order for reporters to get to the heart of the story, they should consider broadening their perspective on the relationship between low-wage workers and our economy.

Research shows that news stories on low-wage workers emphasize that our economic system is broken, but offer few solutions to the problem. News stories often focus on the failings of government programs rather than potential solutions. By shifting their focus to potential solutions, reporters could emphasize that the nature of the problems facing low-wage workers are systemic, and overcome the prevailing notion among many Americans that the system cannot possibly be fixed.

In our capitalist economy, the continued existence of poverty stirs up strong emotions. Research shows that the word "poor" is not usually associated with the word "worker," but that is today's reality: more than 30 million Americans work full time but live below official poverty levels.

The public understands the gravity of this situation. Poll after poll shows Americans anxious about the state of the U.S. economy and about meeting family needs. People are concerned about fairness and opportunity, and whether jobs will be available for them and for their children.

Asking the right questions

1. Are the poor really "the other?"

- Recent economic news coverage has tended to feature stressed-out low-wage or unemployed workers, often evoking sympathy for them: they have failed to climb the ladder to success.
- Some stories go deeper into causes: the workers are uneducated or untrained; they are unhealthy, unmotivated, or from dysfunctional families; they don't work hard enough; they fear change; they can't manage their budgets—i.e., workers' situations are their own fault.
- Alternatively, workers' plights are the result of globalization, or market cycles, or other economic forces beyond human control—i.e., workers must simply learn to adapt.
- Coverage of solutions tends to follow suit: job training, education, perseverance and hard work lead to success; charities should teach a man to fish; winners never quit and quitters never win; creativity overcomes any obstacle—i.e., the solution is in workers' own hands.
- These stories assume that the American Dream is real and functioning, that the economy is a force of nature, and that anyone can succeed if they work hard and play by the rules.

2. Broadening the perspective

- What if the ladder to success is broken? What is the real economic landscape for workers?
- What about the rules that *employers* should play by? The minimum wage, equal pay for equal work, the right to unionize, anti-discrimination laws, job safety, heath care and retirement benefits—are these long-established traditions and laws being observed?
- What if the American Dream has proved false? Is the true engine of the economy hard work by individuals or investment in infrastructure?
- High-tech jobs demand higher education and training; how big a part do they play in the whole economy? U.S. job growth is in the service sector, where most Americans now work.
- Competition from globalization is a common rationale for wage and benefit cuts. But does globalization really affect the demand for nursing home workers, restaurant servers, retail clerks, security guards, teachers' aides, and other service providers?
- These approaches understand that the economy is a creation of policy and practices that can be changed, and that policies and practices should promote fair work and fair profits.

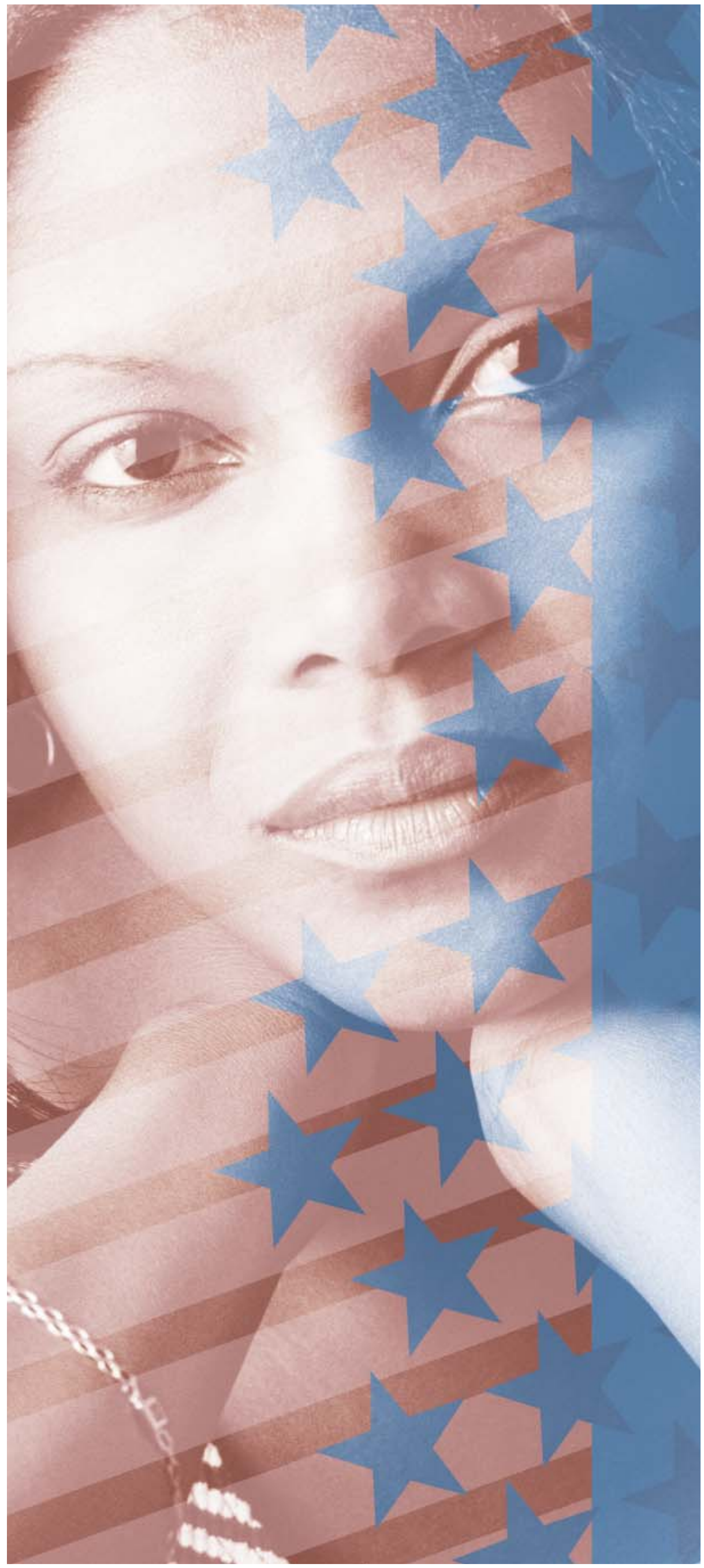
Finding the right answers

1. Creating understanding

- Economic well-being results from "opportunity jobs," fair jobs that offer workers the basics of a decent life for themselves and their families and the possibility of improvement.
- "Grab-and-go" employers come to communities for tax breaks and quick profits that they then send outside the area. Their jobs are dead-end: low-wage, low-benefit and often humiliating or dangerous, with little opportunity for advancement or training.
- Employers that embrace community stewardship forge commitment to local people with responsible planning, investment in their workers and family benefits.
- Globalization and market forces are terms for collections of decisions made by individuals, not inevitable or natural systems beyond human control.
- System failures result from government policy, employer decisions and lack of public information on what can be done to alter economic reality.
- Family-friendly jobs provide flexibility, good benefits, opportunity for training and advancement, and decent wages. The entire community improves in well-being.
- Employers that offer opportunity jobs have found that they increase productivity, lower employee turnover and error rates, and raise product quality. The employer's public image and bottom line improve together.

2. Covering results

- Question policymakers on their policies toward employers, not just toward workers.
- Focus on the restaurant owner and her employment practices—rather than the struggling waitress.
- Interview the employer who offers no health care or family leave—rather than the employee who can't afford medicine for his sick child.
- Profile the city planner who is trying to create jobs—rather than the jobless street person.
- Outline the job trainer's challenges—rather than those of the people in his class.
- Teamwork between employers and workers is so old-fashioned it's new again—and it still works to benefit everyone.



The fact sheet, "Low-income Children in the US" prepared for the National Center for Children in Poverty and used with permission, provides up to date statistics on the federal poverty level, children in low-income families, and trends. Statistics on children in low-income families are broken down by race, age, family structure, and other factors. These statistics may be useful to organizations in preparing communications materials and garnering media attention. We hope this information can help explain the difficulties many families face when trying to provide an economically stable life for themselves and their children.

The fact sheet, "Work Then and Now" highlights statistics that show the ground lost by low-income American workers in the past thirty years. As worker productivity increased by 74.2 percent, wages for minimum-wage workers fell by 35 percent.

NCCP National Center for Children in Poverty
Columbia University
MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Basic Facts About Low-Income Children in the United States (FEBRUARY 2005)

What was the federal poverty level (FPL) in 2004?[1]

- $18,850 for a family of 4.
- $15,670 for a family of 3.
- $12,490 for a family of 2.

Is a poverty-level income enough to support a family?

Research suggests that, on average, families need an income equal to about two times the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs.[2] Families with incomes below this level are referred to as *low income:*

- $37,700 for a family of 4.
- $31,340 for a family of 3.
- $24,980 for a family of 2.

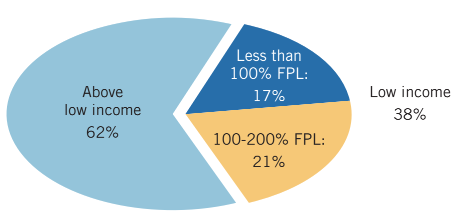
These figures approximate the average minimum income families need to make ends meet, but actual expenses vary greatly by locality. A family of 4 in Boston needs annual earnings of about $49,000; the same family needs $38,000 in Chicago, and $36,000 in Atlanta.[3]

How many children in the United States live in low-income families?

There are approximately 70 million children in the United States.

- 38%—almost 27 million—live in low-income families.
- 17%—more than 11 million—live in poor families.
- 62%—approximately 43 million—live in above low-income families.

Percentage of children by family income, 2003

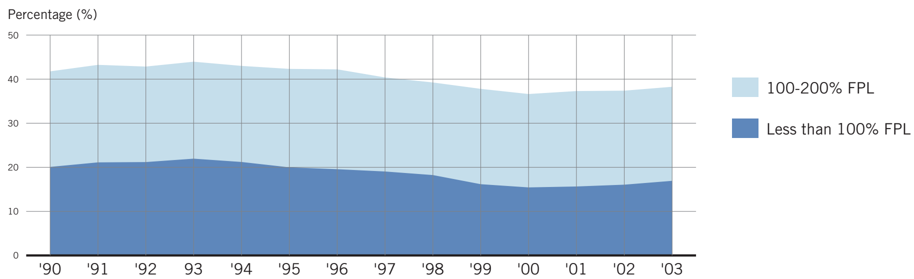


National Center for Children in Poverty
215 West 125th Street, 3rd floor ■ New York, NY 10027-4426
646-284-9600 ■ www.nccp.org

Have these numbers changed over time?

After a decade of decline, the proportion of children living in low-income families is rising again, a trend that began in 2000.

Percentage of children living in low-income families, 1990-2003



What are the family characteristics of low-income children?

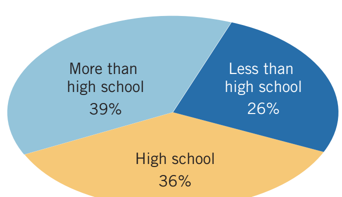
Parental Employment

- 55% of all children in low-income families—14.7 million—have at least one parent who works full-time, year-round.
- 28% of all children in low-income families—7.6 million—have at least one parent who works part-time or full-time, part-year.
- 17% of all children in low-income families—4.6 million—do not have an employed parent.

Parental Education

- 26% of children in low-income families—6.9 million—live with parents who have less than a high school education.
- 36% of children in low-income families—9.6 million—live with parents who have only a high school diploma.
- 39% of children in low-income families—10.4 million—live with parents who have more than a high school education.

Percentage of children living in low-income families, by parent's education level, 2003



Family Structure

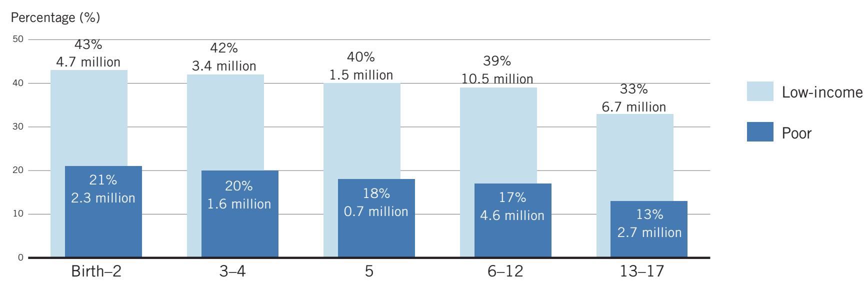
- 50% of children in low-income families—13.4 million—are headed by a single parent.
- 50% of children in low-income families—13.5 million—are headed by married parents.

Does the percentage of children in low-income families vary by children's ages?

Young children are disproportionally low income. 42% of children under age 6—nearly 10 million—live in low-income families.

- 43% of children from birth through age 2 years—4.7 million—live in low-income families.
- 42% of children ages 3 and 4 years—3.4 million—live in low-income families.
- 40% of children age 5 years—1.5 million—live in low-income families.
- 39% of children ages 6 through 12 years—10.5 million—live in low-income families.
- 33% of children ages 13 through 17 years—6.7 million—live in low-income families

Percentage and number of children living in low-income and poor families, by age group, 2003

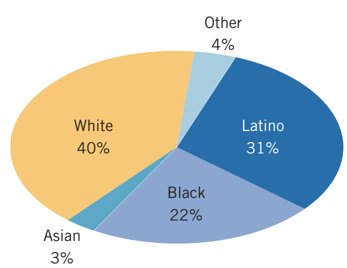


Does the percentage of children in low-income families vary by race and ethnicity?

- 62% of Latino children—8.2 million—live in low-income families.
- 60% of black children—6.0 million—live in low-income families.
- 28% of Asian children—0.8 million—live in low-income families.
- 26% of white children—10.9 million—live in low-income families.

Although Latino and black children are disproportionately low income, whites comprise the largest group of low-income children.

Percentage of children living in low-income families, by race and ethnicity, 2003



Does the percentage of children in low-income families vary by parent's country of origin?

- 58% of children of immigrant parents—6.7 million—live in low-income families.
- 35% of children of native-born parents—19.1 million—live in low-income families.

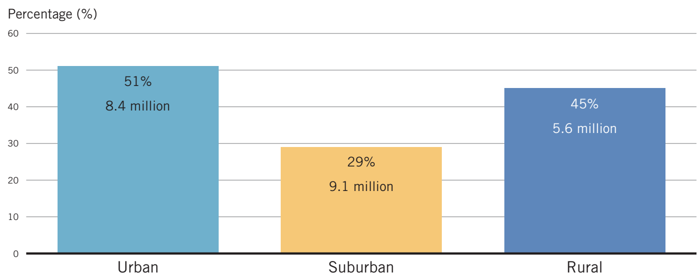
Does the percentage of children in low-income families vary by where children live?

Region

- 43% of children in the South—10.7 million—live in low-income families.
- 40% of children in the West —6.8 million—live in low-income families.
- 33% of children in the Northeast—4.0 million—live in low-income families.
- 33% of children in the Midwest—5.2 million—live in low-income families.

Type of Area

Percentage and number of children living in low-income families, in urban, suburban, and rural areas, 2003



Residential Instability

- 20% of children in low-income families—5.4 million—have moved in the last year.
- 10% of children in above low-income families—3 million—moved last year.

Endnotes

This fact sheet is part of the National Center for Children in Poverty's demographic fact sheet series and is updated annually. Estimates, unless otherwise noted, were prepared by Ayana Douglas-Hall and Heather Koball of NCCP based on the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2004.

1. These numbers are from the federal poverty guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The demographic findings in this fact sheet were calculated using a more complex version of the federal poverty measure—the thresholds issued by the U.S. Census Bureau. More information about federal poverty measures is available at <aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/04poverty.shtml>.

2. Bernstein, J.; Brocht, C.; & Spade-Aguilar, M. (2000). *How much is enough? Basic family budgets for working families*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

3. These figures were derived from NCCP's Family Resource Simulator <www.nccp.org/modeler/modeler.cgi>.

For state-level demographic data, see the National Center for Children in Poverty 50-State Demographics Wizard at **www.nccp.org**.

Work: Then and Now

In an effort to assist organizations that advocate for working families, Douglas Gould & Co., Inc. has created this fact sheet, which compares the nature of work today to that of decades before.

Minimum Wage – What It's Really Worth

In the US, nearly one out of four workers earns a wage that is too low to support a family, even with full-time and year-round employment.[1]

Between January 2002 and January 2003, real average hourly earnings for US workers increased by a mere 6 cents.[2]

Research indicates that today's minimum-wage workers earn one-third less than their counterparts did nearly thirty years ago. In terms of the real value of money in the year 2000, minimum-wage workers in 1968 earned $7.92 an hour, compared to today's minimum wage of $5.15 an hour—35 percent less than it was in 1968.[3]

At the current minimum wage of $5.15 an hour, a full-time, full year worker would make just $10,712 annually. Only households with two full-time working adults earning minimum wages with basic benefits and no children could meet their living needs, illustrating that the current minimum wage cannot cover the minimum necessities for a family.[4]

While worker productivity has risen over the past 30 years, wages did not reflect the increase. Between 1968 and 2000, productivity grew 74.2 percent, yet wages for minimum-wage workers fell by 35 percent.[5]

Some arguments against increasing the minimum wage are that most employees working at this wage are teenagers living with the support of their families, and therefore do not need a wage increase to sustain them. However, two out of every three minimum-wage workers are adults. And while women make up just under half of the total workforce, two out of every three minimum-wage workers are women.[6]

In 1980, the average CEO made as much as the combined incomes of 97 minimum-wage workers. In 2000, that number has skyrocketed, as the average CEO now makes as much as the combined incomes of 1,223 minimum-wage workers. The congressional pay in 1968 was nine times that of minimum-wage workers. Today, that pay is $145,100, nearly 14 times that of minimum-wage workers.[7]

Unemployment[8]

Between January 2000 and January 2001, 2.3 million private-sector jobs and 1.85 million manufacturing jobs were eliminated.

As of January 2003, 1.7 million Americans were unemployed for the long term (without work for 27 weeks).

Ten million Americans who want to work are unable to find work.

Hard Times For Working Families

Studies indicate that 18 percent of workers who took short leaves of absence (less than two months) were less likely to receive promotions and more likely to receive lower performance ratings during the year the absence occurred.[9]

Over the past thirty years, most families have been spending more time working and less time with their children. In 1969, families with middle incomes (between 40% and 60% of the population) worked an average of 78.2 weeks of the year. In 2000, these families worked an average of 97.9 weeks a year, an increase of nearly 20 weeks, or 5 months. However, families with incomes in the top fifth of the population experienced a decrease in the amount of weeks worked—nearly five weeks, from 107.2 in 1969 to 102.0 in 2000.[10]

In 1979, families with incomes in the lowest 20 percent of the population earned an average of $22,165. By 2000, the income of such families increased 10.8 percent to an average of $24,532. On the other hand, families with incomes in the top 20 percent of the population earned $108,141 in 1979. By 2000, their incomes had increased by 55.6 percent to $168,312.[11]

Between 1947 and 1973, the average income for families in the lowest 20 percent grew by 115.3

percent, while average incomes for families in the top 20 percent grew by 84 percent. However, between 1973 and 2000, these figures changed drastically, as the average income for families in the lowest 20 percent grew only 10 percent, while average incomes for families in the top 20 percent grew 61.6 percent, illustrating that the gap between the poor and the rich is quickly increasing.[12]

In real money value, today's families with heads of household under the age of 25 earn incomes that are an average of $2,100 less than their counterparts earned in 1979. In 1979, the median income for these families was $29,393 (adjusted for inflation), while in 2000, the median income was $27,282.[13]

In 1973, the ratio of family income in the top five percent to family income in the lowest 20 percent was 11.3. In 2000, that ratio increased to 19.1.[14]

According to the Federal Reserve Board of New York, half of the families that made early cash withdrawals from their 401K used it for non-retirement purposes, such as buying a home, reducing loan debt, or paying housing costs.[15]

Disappearing Benefits Package

In the 1970s, healthcare coverage was practically universal in the corporate sector. However, by 1995, one of every four workers in the nation's top employment companies did not receive healthcare benefits.[16]

In 1979, companies paid 63 cents per hour worked by an employee for pension costs. In 1997, that rate decreased to 45 cents.[17]

In the spring of 2002, families paid an average of 16 percent more in premiums for healthcare costs than they did in the spring of 2001.[18]

As of 2001, 41.2 million Americans were without healthcare coverage. Of these, 33 million were from working families and 8.5 million were children.[19]

In 2001, 1.66 million Americans in working families lost their health insurance coverage.[20]

In the US, 49 percent of workers with incomes less than $20,000 are without healthcare coverage.[21]

In 2001, 45 percent of those without healthcare coverage were Latino.[22]

Difficulties of Raising Children

Under the current child tax credit, families receive a refund of up to 10 percent of the amount by which their earnings exceed $10,000. This refund is available to families earning up to $110,000 a year. In other words, a family earning $110,000 would receive $10,000 in credit, while a single parent earning the full-time minimum wage of $10,712 a year would receive a $71 tax credit. A family earning $9,999 would receive no credit at all.[23]

In 1998, less than eight percent of the $2.5 billion in Dependent Care Child Tax Credit tax assistance went to families with incomes in the lowest fifth of the population, while 21 percent went to families with incomes in the top fifth.[24]

Only 42 percent of children between the ages of three and five whose families had an annual income of less than $15,000 were enrolled in pre-K, compared to 65 percent of children in families with annual incomes over $50,000.[25]

In 1999, employed mothers with children under the age of 14 who live below the poverty line spent one-third (33.25%) of their monthly incomes to pay for early care and education. Meanwhile, mothers with children under the age of 14 who live 200 percent above the poverty line spent just 5.78 percent of their monthly incomes to pay for early care and education.[26]

There Are Also Negative Trends for White-Collar Workers[27]

The average entry-level wage for male college graduates declined 6.5 percent between 1989 and 1997. Entry-level wages for female college graduates also fell during the 1990s—by 7.4 percent. When adjusted for inflation, female college graduates in 1997 were earning 75 cents less per hour compared to their counterparts in 1973.

From 1995 through 1997, 40 percent of laid off workers earned lower incomes once they were re-employed. One of four people surveyed took a pay cut of at least 20 percent when they re-entered the workforce.

When adjusted for inflation, white-collar males in 1973 earned nearly the same hourly wage as they did in 1997. In 1997, these workers earned an average of \$19.24 an hour, just six cents (three tenths of one percent) higher than their 1973 counterparts.

The average CEO's salary increased 44.6 percent between the years of 1989 and 1997. When factoring in stock options, long-term incentives and other forms of compensation, the average CEO's salary increased by 71 percent between 1992 and 1997.

Education and Job Training

The number of adults receiving adult education has increased over fifty percent in less than a decade, from 58 million in 1991 to 90 million in 1999.[28]

The average workweek for the working adult is 43.5 hours. This time constraint, along with family obligations, limits the amount of time available for workers to further their education. Thus, working adults overwhelmingly prefer short, intensive education programs to traditional 15-week semester programs.[29]

Twenty-eight percent of working parents enrolled in adult education programs were poor. Only 7.7 percent of all working parents received federal, state, or institutional financial assistance. Very few working parents received Perkins Loans or Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. This is, in part, because working adults often have too high an expected family contribution (EFC) for eligibility because they work.[30]

Studies show that programs in job training have increased low-income family earnings anywhere from 10 to 156 percent beyond what other job seekers receive without job training.[31]

Research indicates that low-income workers who receive job training are more likely to attain jobs with benefits (such as healthcare, retirement plans, and paid leave) than those who do not seek job training.[32]

People with more education tend to work more and earn more. In 2001, the unemployment rate for workers with a Bachelor's Degree was 2.5 percent. This group earned a median income of \$46,276. By comparison, the unemployment rate for workers with less than a high school education was 7.3 percent in 2001, and their median income was \$21,391.[33]

Country in Fiscal Crisis

36 states have reported budget gaps midway through fiscal year 2003.[34]

In 2000, the Federal Budget surplus was \$236 billion.[35]

In 2003, the Federal Budget deficit will be \$400 billion if the Bush Administration's tax cuts go into effect. States stand to lose \$64 billion in revenue.[36]

Without figuring in Social Security Trust Fund Resources and the cost for war with Iraq, the country is predicting a 10-year budget deficit of \$1.2 trillion.[37]

Citation

Andresky Fraser, Jill. White Collar Sweat Shop: The Deterioration of Work and Its Rewards in Corporate America. W. W. Norton Company: New York, NY 2001

Bernstein, Jared; Boushey, Heather; and Mishel, Lawrence. The State of Working America 2002-03. ILR Press: Ithaca, NY 2003

Bosworth, Brian and Choitz, Victoria. Held Back: How Student Aid Programs Fail Working Adults. Futureworks: Belmont, Massachusetts 2002

House Budget Committee www.house.gov/budget

Kaiser Family Foundation www.kff.org

Mykyta, Laryssa; Sklar, Holly; and Wefald, Susan. Raise The Floor: Wages and Policies That Work For All Of Us. Ms. Foundation For Women: New York, NY 2001

National Conference of State Legislatures www.ncsl.org

Smith, Whitney; Spence, Robin; Van Kleunen, Andy; and Wittner, Jenny. Skills Training Works: Examining The Evidence. The Workforce Alliance: Washington, DC 2002

The Commonwealth Fund www.cmwf.org

US Bureau of Labor Statistics www.bls.gov

US Census Bureau. Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 1999 http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/child/ppl-168.html

US Office of Management and Budget www.whitehouse.gov/omb

[1] The Joyce Foundation, "Job Training and Education: A Pocket Guide for Policymakers," February 2003.

[2] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, http://www.bls.gov

[3] Laryssa Mykyta, Holly Sklar and Susan Wefald, Raise The Floor: Wages and Policies That Work For All Of Us, Ms. Foundation For Women, 2001, pp.9-10.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid, p.51.

[8] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, op.cit.

[9] Jill Andresky Fraser, White Collar Sweat Shop: The Deterioration of Work and Its Rewards in Corporate America, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, p.68.

[10] Jared Bernstein, Heather Boushey and Lawrence Mishel, The State of Working America: 2002-03, ILR Press, 2003, p.42.

[11] Ibid, p.52.

[12] Ibid, p.54.

[13] Ibid, p.95.

[14] Ibid, p.101.

[15] Fraser, op.cit., pp.71-72.

[16] Ibid,, p.60.

[17] Ibid., p.65.

[18] Kaiser Family Foundation, http://www.kff.org

[19] U.S. Census Bureau, Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 1999, http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/child/ppl-168.html

[20] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, op.cit.

[21] The Commonwealth Fund, http://www.cmwf.org

[22] Ibid.

[23] Mykyta, op.cit., pp.136-137.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p.140.

[26] U.S. Census Bureau, op.cit.

[27] Fraser, op.cit., pp.43, 46-47, 55.

[28] Brian Bosworth and Victoria Choitz, Held Back: How Student Aid Programs Fail Working Adults, Futureworks, 2002, pp.4-8.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Whitney Smith, Robin Spence, Andy Van Kleunen and Jenny Wittner, Skills Training Works: Examining the Evidence, The Workforce Alliance, 2002, pp.1-2.

[32] Ibid.

[33] The Joyce Foundation, op.cit., p.3.

[34] National Conference of State Legislatures, http://www.ncsl.org

[35] Office of Management and Budget, http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb

[36] U.S. House of Representatives Budget Committee, http://www.house.gov/budget

[37] Congressional Budget Office, http://www.cbo.gov

When it comes to media coverage of issues affecting low-wage workers, quality is as important as quantity. The ability of these stories to advance advocacy goals—and the potency of messages that may be embedded in them—often depends largely on the frames that reporters use to depict what low-wage workers experience.

An analysis of how a story is framed involves looking carefully at a story's content, and seeing how reporters connect low-wage worker stories or profiles to the archetypes and stories that already exist within people's minds. By identifying frames, you will be able to determine some of the underlying messages about low-wage workers that the media is inadvertently sending.

How Frames Work: The "Rat Bites" Stories

To understand how frames work to convey a message in a story, consider this example provided by the 2000 Media Research Action project. Three examples of news stories were written about a fictitious situation. Each story uses a different frame to explain events. When looking at these examples, notice how each article frames the issues differently—leading readers to different conclusions about who is responsible for the problem presented, and what actions or solutions are needed to rectify it. Play the frame game here.

How Frames Affect Stories on Low-Wage Workers

Our research shows that most stories about poverty and low-wage work undercut support for systemic reforms that would help solve those problems. We have found that most stories follow these problematic patterns:

- Stories about individuals who fail to get a decent paying job or support their families financially lead people to focus on individual reasons for that failure, such as drug use, bad marriages, dropping out of school, teen childbirth, etc.
- Stories about individuals who "make it" reinforce the problematic notion that anyone can make it if they try hard enough.
- Stories about government incompetence and how various government policies have made matters worse can lead many readers to conclude that government should not play a role in solving the problems of poverty and low-wage work.
- Stories about poverty also run head long into the obstacle of the strongly held view that poverty is part of the "natural order."

Reporters and editors want to use compelling personal stories to open a window on social issues. They are not likely to change because many believe that such stories increase their audiences.

But in order to promote systemic reforms, we first need stories that address systemic failings. But such stories can only result from advocates helping reporters to shift the frame away from individuals and toward the larger system of work in America. For example, reporters can focus on:

- The restaurant owner and her employment practices, rather than the struggling waitress.
- The employer that offers no benefits, rather than the employee who can't find healthcare for his sick child.
- A city planner who is trying to create good jobs, rather than the people who are unemployed.
- The job trainer, rather than the people who attend her classes.

When the media does focus on "real people," the emphasis should be on groups or classes rather than individuals. Janitors or healthcare workers are excellent groups because the public understands the necessity of these workers.

Examples of Frames

Real examples of how framing in the media helps and hinders systemic reform in America can be found as close as your morning newspaper. The following articles are examples of how story framing can help and hinder advocacy efforts and messages.

Story #1: "Poverty's burden falls heavily on men, too; Writer's Loyola speech challenges stereotypes"

The following article from the *Times-Picayune* focuses on a speech by Jason DeParle, a *New York Times* reporter who wants to raise awareness of the situation of so-called deadbeat dads. The article provides details about Angela Jobe, a woman who spent eight years on welfare and then worked as a nurse's aid, barely making ends meet. According to the article, she went without food more often than she could count. The article has a poverty/sympathy frame; the reader feels sorry for Jobe, but solutions that address public policies are not offered. In fact, the only cause for poverty that is mentioned is growing up without a father.

The vision that DeParle describes of so-called "deadbeat dads" as "wounded sons, guys who had been abandoned by their own fathers" also sets up the ineffective sympathy frame.

The full story follows below

February 18, 2005

Poverty's burden falls heavily on men, too; Writer's Loyola speech challenges stereotypes

By Gwen Filosa, Staff writer

Historically, lawmakers and social activists have focused on the plight of poor single women, most often the only caregivers to the children in their lives.

But the so-called "deadbeat dads" might be the most neglected group in the nation when it comes to easing people out of poverty, a New York Times reporter who has covered the subject for decades said Thursday.

"I experienced them more as wounded sons, guys who had been abandoned by their own fathers," said Jason DeParle, whose recent book "American Dream" tracks a trio of women as they leave the welfare rolls for jobs. "I sensed more of a desire for them to make better lives than often we give them credit for."

Although DeParle spent years tracking women as their welfare benefits evaporated, it was a man in the family who emerged as a figure of redemption. "American Dream" chronicles the welfare-to-work movement during the late 1990s, including the story of a drug-dealing pimp who became a pizza delivery man content to raise his baby son.

"The men are who we're going to be spending more time on as journalists and policymakers," said DeParle, in a talk at Loyola University Law School on Thursday.

DeParle, a former *Times-Picayune* reporter and expert on poverty and the social policy that addresses it, appeared at a lecture Thursday sponsored by the law school's Gillis Long Poverty Law Center.

He shared the stage with Sister Helen Prejean, the longtime death penalty opponent whose books "Dead Man Walking" and recently "The Death of Innocents" casts capital punishment as an error-ridden and immoral practice that unfairly targets the poor and people of color.

DeParle, who now lives in Washington, D.C., found that even a woman such as Angela Jobe, considered a success story by many factors, barely broke even as a nurse's aide.

Jobe spent eight years on welfare before joining the millions of recipients who lost their benefits and were sent off to work by government reforms. She made $3,400 more a year as a gainfully employed citizen than what she received while on welfare.

But that didn't account for work expenses, such as transportation, child care and the fact that she lost her health-care benefits, DeParle said.

"She came out about even," DeParle said. "She certainly didn't get very far for all her hard work."

Jobe had her lights shut off three time in three years and "went without food more often than I could count," said DeParle, who tracked Jobe and her two cousins.

Jobe loved her job caring for nursing home patients, despite the difficult conditions that included lifting people out of beds and dealing with dirty bedpans. But the work paid little, DeParle said, and her children considered her job a cause of their mother's absence, not inspiration to follow in her footsteps.

Today, Jobe earns about $10.50 an hour at the nursing home. DeParle described her as a "4-foot-11 woman with a 7-foot-2 voice" who would challenge him with the occasional, "Did you really go to college?" wisecrack.

Jobe, who disliked the classroom but was talented and capable enough to learn on the job, also grew up without a father figure in her household.

When pressed to answer why she liked her job at the nursing home so much, Jobe confided in DeParle that she felt guilty about not having been there to care for her father.

Story #2: "Eskimos Seek to Recast Global Warming as a Rights Issue"

The following *New York Times* article focuses on global warming as a rights issue and is well-framed. The piece does not open with an individual Inuit who is struggling to survive because of the shrinking northern icescape; instead the piece deals with how the Inuit are seeking a ruling that the U.S. is threatening their existence by contributing substantially to global warming.

The article deals with the shift in the debate over human-caused climate change, and says, "Representatives of poor countries and communities —from the Arctic fringes to the atolls of the tropics to the flanks of the Himalayas—say they are imperiled by rising temperatures and seas through no fault of their own. They are casting the issue as no longer simply an environmental problem but as an assault on their basic human rights."

The article explains that if the Inuit obtain the declaration they are seeking—that the U.S. is threatening their existence—the country will be more vulnerable to lawsuits akin to those filed against the tobacco companies over the past several years.

The reporter focuses on systemic issues and policies like U.S. opposition to the Kyoto treaty, instead of leading the reader to sympathize with the Inuit people without knowing what can be done to help them.

The full story follows below

The New York Times

December 15, 2004

Eskimos Seek to Recast Global Warming as a Rights Issue

By ANDREW C. REVKIN

The Eskimos, or Inuit, about 155,000 seal-hunting peoples scattered around the Arctic, plan to seek a ruling from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that the United States, by contributing substantially to global warming, is threatening their existence.

The Inuit plan is part of a broader shift in the debate over human-caused climate change evident among participants in the 10th round of international talks taking place in Buenos Aires aimed at averting dangerous human interference with the climate system.

Inuit leaders said they planned to announce the effort at the climate meeting today.

Representatives of poor countries and communities—from the Arctic fringes to the atolls of the tropics to the flanks of the Himalayas—say they are imperiled by rising temperatures and seas through no fault of their own. They are casting the issue as no longer simply an environmental problem but as an assault on their basic human rights.

The commission, an investigative arm of the Organization of American States, has no enforcement powers. But a declaration that the United States has violated the Inuit's rights could create the foundation for an eventual lawsuit, either against the United States in an international court or against American companies in federal court, said a number of legal experts, including some aligned with industry.

Such a petition could have decent prospects now that industrial countries, including the United States, have concluded in recent reports and studies that warming linked to heat-trapping smokestack and tailpipe emissions is contributing to big environmental changes in the Arctic, a number of experts said.

Last month, an assessment of Arctic climate change by 300 scientists for the eight countries with Arctic territory, including the United States, concluded that "human influences" are now the dominant factor.

Inuit representatives attending the conference said in telephone interviews that after studying the matter for several years with the help of environmental lawyers they would this spring begin the lengthy process of filing a petition by collecting videotaped statements from elders and hunters about the effects they were experiencing from the shrinking northern icescape.

The lawyers, at EarthJustice, a nonprofit San Francisco law firm, and the Center for International Environmental Law, in Washington, said the Inter-American Commission, which has a record of treating environmental degradation as a human rights matter, provides the best chance of success. The Inuit have standing in the Organization of American States through Canada.

Sheila Watt-Cloutier, the elected chairwoman of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference, the quasi-governmental group recognized by the United Nations as representing the Inuit, said the biggest fear was not that warming would kill individuals but that it would be the final blow to a sturdy but suffering culture.

"We've had to struggle as a people to keep afloat, to keep our indigenous wisdom and traditions," she said. "We're an adaptable people, but adaptability has its limits.

"Something is bound to give, and it's starting to give in the Arctic, and we're giving that early warning signal to the rest of the world."

If the Inuit effort succeeds, it could lead to an eventual stream of litigation, somewhat akin to lawsuits against tobacco companies, legal experts said.

The two-week convention, which ends Friday, is the latest session on two climate treaties: the 1992 framework convention on climate change and the Kyoto Protocol, an addendum that takes effect in February and for the first time requires most industrialized countries to curb such emissions.

The United States has signed both pacts and is bound by the 1992 treaty, which requires no emissions cuts. But the Bush administration opposes the mandatory Kyoto treaty, saying it could harm the economy and unfairly excuses big developing countries from obligations.

That situation makes the United States particularly vulnerable to such suits, environmental lawyers said.

By embracing the first treaty and signing the second, it has acknowledged that climate change is a problem to be avoided; but by subsequently rejecting the Kyoto pact, the lawyers said, it has not shown a commitment to stemming its emissions, which constitute a fourth of the global total.

The American delegation at the Buenos Aires conference declined to comment on Tuesday on the petition or the arguments behind it. "Until the Inuit have presented a complaint, we are not responding to that issue," a State Department official said. "When they do, we will look at what they have to say, consider it and then respond."

Christopher C. Horner, a lawyer for the Cooler Heads Coalition, an industry-financed group opposed to cutting the emissions, said the chances of success of such lawsuits had risen lately.

From his standpoint, he said, "The planets are aligned very poorly."

Delegates who flew to the conference from the Arctic's far-flung communities, where retreating sea ice imperils traditional seal hunts, said they planned to meet in Buenos Aires with representatives from small-island nations that could eventually be swamped by rising seas, swelled by meltwater from shrinking glaciers and Arctic ice sheets.

Enele S. Sopoaga, the ambassador to the United Nations from Tuvalu, a 15-foot-high nation of wave-pounded atolls halfway between Australia and Hawaii, said he still saw legal efforts as a last resort.

Tuvalu had threatened to sue the United States two years ago in the International Court of Justice, but held off for a variety of reasons.

Larry Rohter contributed reporting from Buenos Aires for this article.

Story #3: "Op-ed: Tax credit excludes too many"

In this *Desert News* op-ed, Karen Crompton, executive director of Voices for Utah Children, does not argue from the sympathy frame, identifying an individual who the reader can feel sorry for. Rather, she calls on the president to include the millions of hard-working taxpaying families in the increased child tax credit.   She refers to teacher's aides, home health workers, and the 200,000 men and women on active duty in the military.   Crompton uses the "problem, solution, action" format instead of just leaving the reader to throw up his or her hands in frustration at the lack of a solution. She also talks about values that resonate with readers and policymakers like fairness and equality.

The full story follows below

July 18, 2003

Op-ed: Tax credit excludes too many

By Karen Crompton, executive director of Voices for Utah Children

President Bush signed the $350 billion tax cut in May, saying, "This tax bill will make it easier for moms and dads to save for their children's education, and that's vitally important for the future of this country."

But he failed to mention one crucial detail—the tax cut excluded millions of hard-working, taxpaying families from the increased child tax credit.

The first of 25 million families will receive checks from the government as a part of the newly increased $1,000 child tax credit at the end of July. At the same time, however, families of nearly 12 million children will receive absolutely nothing. That's 157,000 children right here in Utah. So while some families find themselves with an extra $400 or $800 to spend on new clothes for their kids or back-to-school supplies, millions of other children will be left behind. And when those 12 million kids wonder why they're not treated the same as their classmates, what do we tell them? Life's not fair?

Opponents of giving tax relief to working families have tried to mislead the public about who these excluded families are. The truth is that they're people who work hard, pay taxes and struggle to make ends meet in order to raise their children right. They earn between $10,500 and $26,625 per year. Among others, they're teacher's aides and home health workers—and perhaps most galling, they are more than 200,000 men and women on active duty in the U.S. military. Many of them are enlisted soldiers currently risking their lives on the front lines in Iraq. Sen. John McCain, upon learning of this omission, said, "I don't understand how you left enlisted men and women out of this tax package. I don't get it."

When news reports shined the spotlight on the 12 million excluded children, the Senate responded quickly to correct the error. Led by Sens. Blanche Lincoln, a Democrat, and Olympia Snowe, a Republican, the Senate voted 94-2 to pass a bill that would allow these families to receive checks just like their better-off neighbors. Republican leadership in the House of Representatives, however, openly disdained the idea of including these children and cynically used the public uproar to pass another set of massive tax breaks. Now the House and Senate are at loggerheads and 12 million children are caught in a political game of chicken. And the only person who can forge a compromise is Bush.

The White House has said repeatedly that the president wants to right the wrong and include these families. According to White House spokesman Ari

Fleischer, the president believes that "what the Senate has done is the right thing to do" and "wants to make certain that this does not get slowed down, bogged down." If Bush truly cares about the 12 million children left behind and believes that all working families should get tax relief, then he must call the congressional leadership into the Oval Office to make it happen.

One thing is certain; What happens in the next few weeks will say a lot about this president's principles and priorities. Families of 12 million kids are waiting to see what he does, wondering whether fairness and equality are deeply held values or merely political buzzwords. By the time those children go back to school in September, we'll know the answer.

Ways Advocates Can Help Set the Frame

Obviously, advocates cannot control how the media operates, or what stories reporters choose to pursue, but they can and should try. And changing the way reporters cover low-wage workers will be a challenging task that will require the media to shift their attention to another subject—that of the U.S. economy and whether it is meeting the needs of all American families. Low-wage workers must ultimately become a part of a much larger story, rather than the story itself.

But reporters are also interested in presenting solutions to the problems that low-wage workers face, and advocates are often the ones that can help lead them in the right direction. Along these lines, advocates can pitch different stories that focus on systemic, rather than personal issues. They can also educate reporters—many of whom may be sympathetic to the issues that low-wage workers face—about how the nature of their coverage encourages or undermines public understanding and action.

A good resource for advocates is an article, written from the point of view of a journalist, on how news stories are framed. The piece is by Mary Sanchez, the minority affairs reporter at the *Kansas City Star*, and can be found at

http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=58&aid=78812

According to its website, the Poynter Institute is a school for journalists, future journalists, and teachers of journalists. The Institute stands for a journalism that informs citizens and enlightens public discourse. As a financially independent, nonprofit organization, The Poynter Institute is beholden to no interest except its own mission: to help journalists seek and achieve excellence.

For more information, please visit www.poynter.org.

An Analysis of Successful Framing: The Maine Center for Economic Policy's Report on Access to Education and Jobs

The Maine Center for Economic Policy (MECEP) released a report on October 12, 2004 called "Access to Education and Good Jobs: The Way Life Should Be in Maine" and successfully obtained well-framed news coverage in both the *Morning Sentinel* and *Portland Press Herald*. Maine's report was released at the same time as the national report "Working Hard, Falling Short," and Maine's accomplishments provide a useful example of how to successfully frame messages on low-wage workers.

Research for the Ford Foundation's "Economy That Works For All" project has revealed that past media coverage on low-wage workers has been anecdotal and has included many stories of individuals struggling to make ends meet in dead-end jobs. These stories have been framed in a way that evokes sympathy, but they are not effective as a means for policy change. Rather, research has revealed that effective messages have the following characteristics:

- they describe the economy as a system which can be influenced by policy changes
- they discuss broad trends in the economy and stories that provide a rationale for policy change
- they connect all sectors of the economy in an interdependent relationship, so that people understand the contributions of low-wage workers
- they often include values like responsible planning, opportunity, stewardship, and community
- they avoid frames dominated by sympathy, poverty, disparities, class warfare or partisanship
- they convey that we all have a stake in making a difference on the issue of low-wage work
- they include solutions which match the size of the problem so that people are not overwhelmed by a sense that the problem is unmanageable

"Working Hard, Falling Short" received widespread media coverage in important news outlets from the *Associated Press* and *New York Times* to Public Radio International and CBS radio. However, some stories were not framed in the most effective ways. For example, a piece in the *Baltimore Daily Record* evokes a sympathy frame by describing the problems of an 18-year-old wife and mother of two small children who knows she can't get a job with decent benefits since she did not finish high school and does not have a general equivalency diploma. Similarly, an article from the *Flint Journal* evokes a sympathy frame by describing how a family of four—who earns slightly more than the income level deemed "working poor"—gets by.

In contrast to the *Baltimore Daily Record* and the *Flint Journal*, the press coverage in Maine was consistently well-framed. Instead of a focus on personal stories, which evoke a sympathy frame, the emphasis was placed on systemic problems within the economy. An article from the *Morning Sentinel* discusses broad trends such as the lower quality of service-industry jobs, compared to the manufacturing jobs they replaced. The piece quotes Brandon Roberts as saying, "This is a structural problem, evolving over many years. This is an issue reflective of the changing nature of our economy and international competition. Increasingly, we need workers that have higher levels of education and skills." The piece describes solutions like raising the minimum wage, increasing access to higher education, and other economic development and work support solutions.

Another article in Maine ran in the *Portland Press Herald* and is also framed with a focus on the economy as opposed to personal stories. The piece leads with the observation that "Maine could break a boom-and-bust cycle that has plagued it for decades by finding ways to better educate and train its workforce, a new study concludes." The piece mentions how "Access to Education and Good Jobs: The Way Life Should Be in Maine" argues that Maine needs a new strategy to deal with a continuing decline of good-paying manufacturing jobs and its large proportion of low-wage workers. Suggested solutions include making education and training more accessible and affordable, expanding programs that make it easier for workers to get an education, and adopting laws that could lead to higher pay and better benefits for workers.

It is worth noting how headlines from the news coverage help to frame stories. This headline in the *Portland Press Herald* is extremely well framed:

"Educate, and jobs will come." The *Morning Sentinel* headline is also well framed: "Maine lags in job quality." In contrast, the headline in the *Baltimore Daily Record* says, "Report details struggles of the working poor" which helps set up a sympathy frame.

The Maine Center for Economic Policy made good strategic decisions in how they framed the report and their pitch to the media to focus on the economy as a system, instead of focusing on personal anecdotes. The first page of the Maine report says, "The boom-bust economic cycle is fed by attitudes that say, 'The economy is out of our control, there's nothing we can do about it, just enjoy the good times and grit your teeth through the bad.' We argue for a different posture. We argue that Maine can undertake a systematic investment effort to raise education and income levels over the long term, and to get the state off of the up-down roller coaster ride." Lisa Pohlmann, co-author of "Access to Education and Good Jobs: The Way Life Should Be in Maine" said they made a conscious decision based on available research to focus on systemic causes and solutions, as opposed to an individual family struggling to make ends meet. She said, "We started down that road, but decided to steer our messages toward a systems perspective."

Reporters often—but not in all cases—want to tell a personal story, and these personal anecdotes can be told within effectively framed stories, as long as the personal story is not the lead, since stories are framed within the first several paragraphs. The focus ought to be on the system and the solutions, not the individuals and the problems.

Maine's report and press release are effective because:

- The economy is characterized as a system that can be influenced; in other words, this is a problem that has a solution. Both the report and press release focus on changing public policy in three areas: creating education and training programs that are accessible, affordable, and relevant; using employment practices to encourage education and economic stability; and raising the wages of Maine workers through tax, income and benefit strategies.
- The release describes national trends and multiple solutions. It is not too crisis-focused. Lisa Pohlmann is quoted as saying, "The answer does not lie in any one sector or program. Education and training providers, economic development programs, employers, and policymakers all have a role in helping low-income working families succeed and contribute to a Maine that has long-term stability and success."
- The materials are not dominated by sympathy, poverty, disparities, class warfare, or partisanship.
- The release conveys that we all have a stake in making a difference on this issue. "Too many Maine workers are struggling to get by, which hurts their families and hurts our economic prospects as a state." It's not just "their" problem.

According to Ed Hatcher, president of The Hatcher Group—the organization which successfully obtained media coverage across the nation for *Working Hard, Falling Short*—when the study was pitched nationally, the key points emphasized were:

- more than 1 in 4 people had difficulty surviving financially
- too many jobs pay poor wages and provide no benefits
- American workers are poorly prepared and supported to move into better paying jobs

The *Working Hard, Falling Short* press release says that greater national and state-level attention is needed to address the problems confronting low-income working families, including access to need-based college scholarships, job training, and subsidized child care. The release also mentions that the prevalence of low-income, low-skill workers is particularly alarming given the increasing demands the nation's economy is putting on higher-skilled workers. It says, "As a country, we must act now to ensure that our investments generate enough skilled workers to keep the economy thriving. Doing so will lead to an increased tax base, in effect a return on our investment, and reduce the costs imposed by low wages and poverty."

Pitching the study with these points is much more effective than offering reporters the results of the study, along with individuals who are struggling to get by, since this would lead directly to stories that evoke the sympathy frame. The emphasis on generating enough skilled workers to keep the economy thriving sets up a more effective frame.

In conclusion, the way advocates frame a pitch to reporters will have an impact on how the news coverage is framed. Advocates should avoid messages that will lead to a sympathy frame, and instead focus messages in a way that will lead reporters to more effective frames that focus on building jobs and the economy for the long-term, investing in education and job training, and encouraging investment in industries with good jobs that support families and strengthen communities. Frames should focus on jobs and the economy instead of the poor or working poor; frames should include "all of us" rather than "them"; and frames should focus on jobs that pay well enough rather than people working hard enough. Recommended frames also include systemic failures rather than individual failures, public solutions rather than private solutions, planning and investing in the economy instead of a hands off approach to the free market system, and fairness instead of a sympathy story. More information on effective framing can be found in this toolkit's situation analysis.

Advocate's Guide to Editorial Board Meetings

An editorial board meeting is usually a face-to-face meeting between an advocate and key members of the staff of a newspaper who write editorials. These are the key decision-makers at the newspaper, and convincing them of your point of view is very important so that they will write about your issue with the right frame. Editorial board meetings are sometimes open to beat reporters, depending on the newspaper. Usually editorial board meetings last for about an hour.

Preparing For an Editorial Board Meeting

Make sure you have your messages ready in a "problem, solution, action" format, and that you are framing your issue in a way that will resonate.

As an advocate, be aware of levels of thinking that resonate with the public. George Lakoff's research for the Frameworks Institute has identified three levels of thinking:

Level One thinking encompasses big ideas and values like justice, fairness, family, equality and opportunity.

Level Two thinking is made up of issue groups like women's rights, the environment, child welfare, and work.

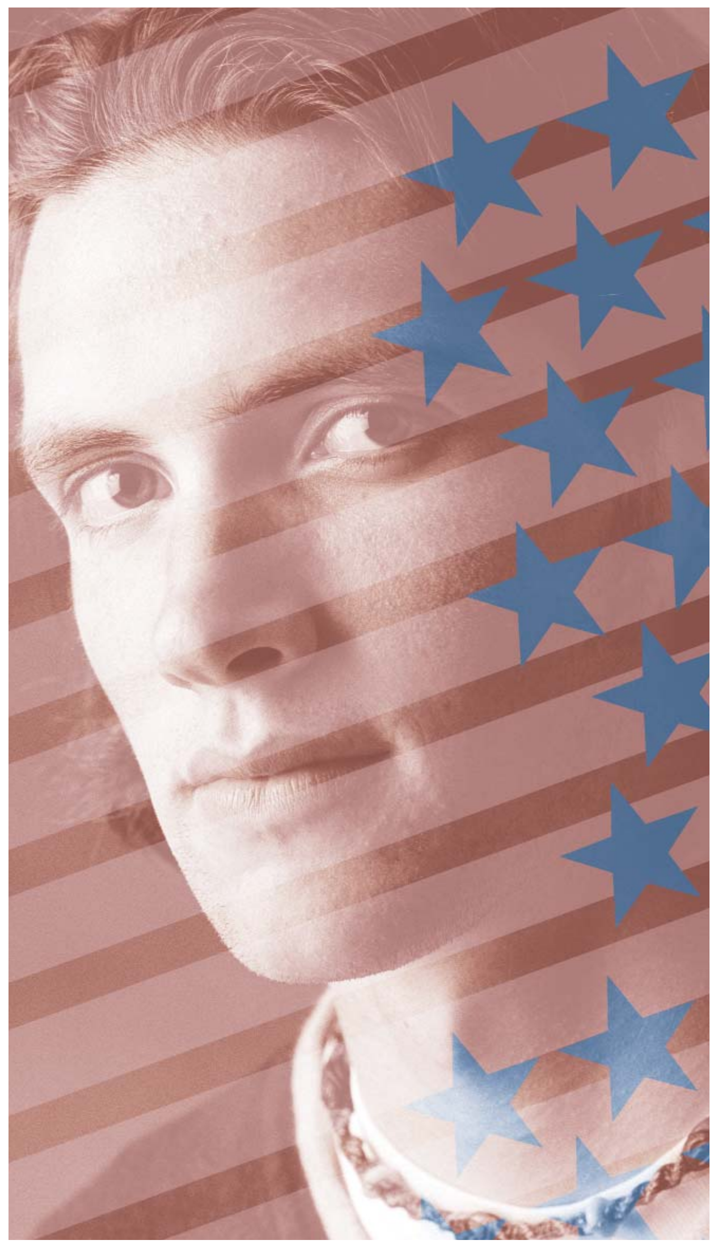
Level Three thinking entails specific policies and practices like treatment of women by the Taliban, saving rainforests, daycare quality, and minimum wage.

So, if you start out talking about the minimum wage laws and statistics showing how it differs across the nation or how certain European nations take a fairer approach, you won't be as effective as if you open the conversation with a big idea, then go to a specific topic.

Setting Up The Editorial Board Meeting

You should set up an editorial board meeting when there is a news hook relevant to your work. For example, if you're working on minimum wage issues and legislation to raise the minimum wage in your state is proposed, you should jump on the opportunity to set up an editorial board meeting.

Contact the editorial page editor of the newspaper via email or phone suggesting an editorial board meeting and tying it into the news of the day. If you are not able to reach the editorial board editor directly, often the people in his or her office are the ones who schedule the meetings anyway, and they will be able to help you. If you send an email, follow it up with a phone call the next day. Make sure that all of your outreach efforts and materials—phone calls, faxes, and emails—are framed in the most effective way possible, and be concise.



Sample email:

Dear XXXX,

Ted Smith, President of Living Wage for All, would like to meet with the Editorial Board of the City Star. As you know, the state legislature is considering raising the minimum wage and Ted can discuss how a higher wage will strengthen the community. Please let me know if the editorial board is available to meet with Ted. Thank you for your consideration.

Sharon Lewis
Douglas Gould & Co., Inc.
914-833-7093

Editorial Memo

Editorial memos tell newspaper staff why they should comment on your issue and provide them with a brief analysis. Below is a sample editorial memo on Social Security and children that was prepared for the National Center for Children in Poverty.

TO: Editorial Writer/Columnist

FROM: Calvin Fortenberry and Ivette Zamora

DATE: February 24, 2005

RE: What Social Security Means to Children and Families

Although Social Security is the single largest program that provides support to children, the debate over the privatization of Social Security has focused almost entirely on changes in benefits for retirees. The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) discusses this issue in a policy brief, attached here and available at their website: www.nccp.org, that outlines the role that Social Security plays in protecting children in the United States.

Written and researched by NCCP's Acting Deputy Director, the brief highlights the vital protections Social Security provides to children and families. For use by columnists and editorial writers, it provides background on the role of Social Security in relationship to children. It also poses questions that policymakers should consider as the debate over Social Security intensifies.

Children as beneficiaries of Social Security:

One in 15 recipients of Social Security is a child under the age of 18.

3.1 million children under the age of 18 receive benefits because a parent died, retired, or can no longer work because of a disability.

An additional 2.2 million children live in households where at least one adult is receiving Social Security benefits.

On average, Social Security comprises 43% of total income for the families of child beneficiaries.

The Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance program—informally called Social Security—was designed, according to President Franklin Roosevelt, to assure "the security of men, women, and children of the nation against hazards and vicissitudes of life." The NCCP brief is a resource for information on the potential risks of changes to the Social Security program for children.

Advocate's Guide to Desk-side Briefings

A desk-side briefing is an in-person meeting with a reporter to pitch a story idea or spokesperson who is close by and ready for an interview, or available by phone.

What to bring:

You should have written materials with you that you can drop off in case key journalists are not available when you arrive in the newsroom. You should have several press kits and business cards. If news on your issue just broke, be sure to have a press release with you.

Press Kit Contents:

Your press kit should include a media advisory or press release if applicable, a bio of your key spokesperson, a fact sheet explaining your issue, and a fact sheet or pamphlet on your organization.

Advantages of Desk-side Briefings:

- You will have personal, one-on-one face time with journalists.
- You can provide journalists with more detailed pitches than you would be able to deliver via email or phone.
- You will likely get an immediate response at a desk-side briefing, unlike when you pitch via email or by phone.

Disadvantages of Desk-side Briefings:

- Advocates and reporters may feel uncomfortable if it feels more like door to door sales or soliciting. You can avoid this by arriving earlier in the day, when journalists are not on deadline and may be more open to hearing your pitch. And don't forget that you have something valuable to offer the reporter, a fresh perspective on a timely issue.
- Scheduling desk-side briefings can be challenging, so plan ahead and work around the reporters' schedules. Be friendly, flexible, and willing to come back at a more convenient time, if the reporter is too busy to speak with you.

The following guide to placing an op-ed is adapted from a publication of the Communications Consortium Media Center entitled "Strategic Communications for Nonprofits."

Placing an Op-Ed: What Editors Want

Editors usually have some very concrete requirements for selection. Timeliness is an important consideration. Even if your op-ed does not break new ground, you may be able to find a news hook: a holiday, an anniversary, an election, an upcoming conference, a report, a vote in Congress, or pending action by local or state government. Editors want opinion pages to be relevant to ongoing events. If properly crafted, your op-ed can help achieve this goal.

The author's byline can make a huge difference. Having the article signed by a local or national expert, your group's president, a member of the clergy, or a well-known politician could enhance its prospects of being printed.

Editors also tend to look for the following:

- A provocative idea on any subject
- An opinion on a current issue that is controversial, unexpected, authoritative, or newsworthy
- A call to arms on a neglected subject
- Bite and wit on a current issue

With the above criteria in mind, you should pay attention to current events and look for an angle that is provocative and new. Op-ed pages rarely run announcements of events, status reports, or the blatant promotion of organizations or obscure causes. Most editors see this as a section for sharp opinion, advocacy, denunciations, controversy, and surprise.

Investigating Submission Requirements

Call the newspaper first to confirm the name of the editorial page or op-ed editor and to ask about criteria for submissions. Larger papers including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have recorded messages that explain how to submit an op-ed, as well as the process by which you will be notified if a submission has been accepted or declined. Most large publications want an exclusive op-ed, so decide where you would most like your op-ed to appear, and send it there first. If it is not accepted for publication, you can go to your second choice newspaper, but it's a bad idea to send your op-ed to more than one newspaper at a time.

Some newspapers accept op-eds by fax—but ask first. You should also ask about the approval process. In most cases, the newspaper will call you to clarify some of the facts only when they have decided to print your piece.

Getting Started with Writing

The first step in writing an op-ed is to think through what message you want to deliver. What is your goal—to recruit volunteers, start a grassroots campaign, sustain or increase public funding, pass new legislation, or educate opinion leaders and the public?

Defining the goal will help you determine which audience you need to reach: the "thinking-talking" public, local or national policymakers, or specific groups such as voters, teachers, healthcare professionals, or senior citizens. Defining the audience will also help you determine which outlet the op-ed is best suited for: your local daily or weekly paper, a professional journal, a state or regional paper like the *Denver Post* or *Boston Globe*, or the much more competitive national papers such as the *New York Times* or *USA Today*.

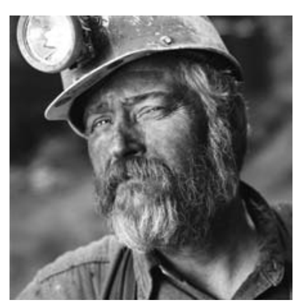
Here are ten helpful hints to consider when writing the op-ed:

- Try to reduce your point to a single sentence. For example: "A healthy economy requires a healthy workforce." See if your sentence passes the "wow" test or the "hmm" test; if not, the point needs sharpening.
- Any point worth making will have to be defended. Muster your best three or four supporting arguments, and state each one in a single paragraph. Be as specific as possible.
- Avoid starting sentences with "There are." Use the active voice rather than the passive voice.

- Raise your opponents' best arguments, and challenge them with countervailing facts, withering irony, condescension, or whatever is appropriate, but address them.
- Ask yourself what's the minimum background information a reader absolutely has to have in order to grasp this point? Write two paragraphs that summarize this information.
- Imagine your target reader browsing through the newspaper on a workday morning, rushing to find something interesting. What kind of statement might catch this person's attention? If you can raise questions, surprise, intrigue, or baffle your reader into getting past the first paragraph, you stand a chance the editor will let you put the entire op-ed in the paper.
- Now, write the piece. Draft about a thousand words (four double-spaced pages) maximum. Re-state your key points in the final paragraph.
- Cut out half a page. Eliminate repetition. Trim words, not ideas. Check every word and see what you can eliminate. Convert passive verbs to active ones. Give the piece to someone else and ask that person to review it. If re-writing or cutting is required, you want to do it yourself, rather than leave it to the discretion of the newspaper editor.
- Your final piece should be no more than 750 words. Do not forget to include your name, title, and affiliation at the end. Remember, whether this op-ed was intended as a single action or as the first phase of a multifaceted media campaign, you are on your way.
- Submit the piece with a short cover letter that includes your name and phone number. You will be notified if your article is accepted for publication. Calling and badgering the op-ed staff may not help and could hurt you. Be patient. It can take weeks for even a time-sensitive op-ed to appear. Stay ready to update and revise in the hours before publication.

If your op-ed is rejected, revise it and try another publication. Or try again in a few weeks or months on another topic. Do not despair. Your piece may have arrived during a very busy week with lots of competition. Often it is just a matter of your op-ed being in the right place at the right time.

If your piece is printed, make copies and send them to colleagues, elected officials, funders, reporters, and others who can help move your issue. Be sure to post a link to the op-ed on your organization's website. This can be an excellent way of getting your exact message to key influentials and helping to frame the debate. An op-ed can serve as a springboard to talk show appearances, panel discussions, an[illegible]tunities.



The following sample email pitch accompanies the sample advisory and sample script. This e-mail was written for the release of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, a measurement of how much money it truly takes to get by in a particular city or state. This measurement is more realistic than the federal government's poverty line because it takes more factors into account.

E-mails are usually the best means of communicating with reporters.

Sample email pitch

Subject line: New data shows increasing gap between rich and poor in our city, even with minimum wage hike

Dear X,
Despite the increase in the state minimum wage for 2005, there is a growing gap between rich and poor in our city. The very survival of the city's low-wage workers—workers who are necessary to the livelihood of the city—is threatened. In order to be self-sufficient, the minimum amount needed for a family of three with no frills whatsoever is $48,995 per year. That's $25.50 per hour based on a 40-hour week. As of January 1, the minimum wage in our state will be just $6.00 per hour.

The federally defined minimum income needed for this same family of three is $15,670. There is a serious defect in the system, a defect that is addressed by the Self-Sufficiency Standard, set to be released this Tuesday. The Standard is calculated for 70 different family types in various geographic areas.

Please join Jane Smith, executive director of the Jane Smith Foundation, a major funder of health and human services in this state, State Senator Elizabeth Gonzales, and John Doe of John Doe Corporation, as they release and discuss the Self-Sufficiency Standard at an audio news conference, Tuesday, December 14, 2004, at 10:00A.M. EST. The conference is accessible from your desk.

To register and receive the call-in number, please reply to this email or call me at 914-833-7093.

I hope you can join the call. Thank you for your consideration.

Joan Grangenois-Thomas
Media Coordinator
Douglas Gould & Co., Inc.
914-833-7093-v
jthomas@douglasgould.com

The sample media advisory below was created to help adovates from the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency project introduce a new Self-Sufficiency Standard in their city. It is accompanied in this kit by a sample email pitch and a sample script for an audio news conference on the same topic.

Emails are the best means of communicating with most reporters, but some will request a fax. Creating an advisory like the one below is useful for reporters who want faxes.

Sample Media Advisory

Your logo here

MEDIA ADVISORY: For Immediate Release — Contact: Your Name Here

December 10, 2004 — Your Phone Number Here

NO BIRTHDAY OR CHRISTMAS GIFTS THIS YEAR:

EVEN WITH NEW MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE

A Single Parent of 2 Children Must Earn At Least $48.9K to Survive in (the City)

WHAT: Audio news conference: State senator, national business leader, health and human services organization join with Career Advancement Now to brief the media and answer questions on what today's working family has to earn to live and work [name of city]. The press conference will be accessible by telephone from your newsroom desk.

WHO: Elizabeth Gonzales, State Senator

Jane Smith, Executive Director of the Jane Smith Foundation, a major funder of health and human services

John Doe of the John Doe Corporation

Jennifer Thomas, Executive Director, Career Advancement Now, an organization working to advance low-income women's careers.

WHEN: December 14, 2004 at 10:00am EST

To register for the audio news conference, please contact Joan Grangenois-Thomas at 914-833-7093 or JThomas@douglasgould.com

WHY: The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates a bare-bones budget of costs that a working family in our city faces. There is a vast difference between the $15,670 that the federal government believes a family of three can live on and the reality of the situation in our city. The Self-Sufficiency Standard provides a realistic measure of economic circumstances, and it can be used for more effective policy planning that gives working families the necessary tools to become self-sufficient.

To obtain media copies of The Self-Sufficiency Standard, please call Saran Shim at (914) 833-7093.

###

A sample script follows for an audio news conference. This script accompanies the sample advisory and email pitch.

An audio news conference is a press conference that reporters participate in over the phone. They dial a toll-free number and listen to speakers from the convenience of their newsroom desks. Speakers present their case for about 4-5 minutes, and then reporters have an opportunity to ask questions. This is a cost effective way to get news to reporters across the nation without holding a live press event.

This script was written for the release of the Self-Sufficiency Standard, a measurement of how much money it truly takes to get by. This measurement is more realistic than the federal government's poverty line because it takes more factors into account.

The script, which could be modified for different cities across the country, includes brief presentations from advocates, a business person, and a local government official.

Following the audio news conference, advocates can use the script as a resource for reporters, who can either access a digital recording (if you choose to order one) or a transcript, which you can post on your website.

Sample Script for Audio News Conference on the Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard

Jane Smith: Good morning, I'm Jane Smith, Executive Director of the Jane Smith Foundation. We are a major funder of health and human services in this state. I am pleased to be here today along with State Senator Elizabeth Gonzales, Mr. John Doe of John Doe Corporation, and Jennifer Thomas, executive director of Career Advancement Now, an organization working to advance low-income women's careers. We're glad that you could join us for what is a very important press conference on the standard of living of our working families here in our state.

Today we're releasing the Self-Sufficiency Standard for our city. The Self-Sufficiency Standard calculates a bare-bones budget of costs that a working family here faces. It includes costs for housing, child care, food, transportation, healthcare, miscellaneous expenses such as clothing, shoes, telephone, and federal, state, and local taxes. The result is a measure that is neither luxurious—or even comfortable—nor so low that it cannot adequately provide for a family. Many items that are NOT included in the standard, that most of us take for granted, are gifts for the kids at Christmas, a meal at a fast food restaurant, an occasional ride in a taxi, or a breakfast on the go from the local market. The standard is calculated for 70 different family types in different geographic areas.

As you will see, there is vast difference between the $15,670 that the federal government believes a family of three can live on and the reality of the situation here. The truth is, the figure needed for a family of three ranges from a low of $48,995 to a high of $77,957. The one-size fits-all approach taken by the federal government in determining adequate family income fails to document what working families truly need to make ends meet.

Living expenses have consistently been going up; housing costs have skyrocketed in the range of 19 to 40%, and healthcare costs, as we all know, have been climbing consistently year after year.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard provides a realistic measure of economic circumstances, and it can be utilized for policy planning in order to build bridges to economic self-sufficiency. Policies and proposals that are designed with this economic reality in mind will provide working families with the tools necessary to become self-sufficient over the long-term. The standard provides information about the way work supports, such as Medicaid, Food Stamps, and child care assistance, can help a family make ends meet in the short term while adults acquire the skills and experience necessary to advance to better paying jobs. Understanding the Self-Sufficiency Standard is the first step toward implementing policies that will benefit our working families and advance them into economic situations that create self-sufficiency and independence.

To talk further about the policy implications of the Self-Sufficiency Standard is State Senator Elizabeth Gonzales. We're pleased to have her with us today to discuss the Self-Sufficiency Standard. Senator, welcome.

Senator: I'm pleased to be here today to discuss with you the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The information provided by the standard is vital for policymakers. It provides us with an accurate picture of what it takes for a family to get by. If you ask any of our residents, they'll tell you that $15,670 per year is not enough for one person to live on, let alone a family of three.

It is important that we recognize exactly what the Self-Sufficiency Standard is really saying. It's an accurate account of what it takes for a family of three to get by here. It is important to highlight that we're talking about getting by, not living comfortably. Unfortunately, there is a wide gap between a working family's actual budget and economic self-sufficiency.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard released today takes a realistic measure of the economic situation in our city. By doing so, policymakers have data in hand for the purposes of advancing policy that will foster opportunity and economic success down the road. Without a grasp on the reality of the situation facing our working families, we cannot provide effective solutions.

The findings of the Self-Sufficiency Standard demonstrate the essential role of work supports for our families. As it stands now, a single parent with two children earning the current minimum wage of $5.15 per hour can only meet 25% of their basic expenses if they do not receive any work supports. If they receive Food Stamps, Child Care Assistance, and Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus, 49% of their basic expenses are covered. If they have all of these supports and a housing subsidy, that covers 84% of their basic expenses. But even families who receive all available work supports are not able to meet their basic expenses. The Self-Sufficiency Standard gives us a more clear picture as to the economic situation of our working families here in our City.

From a public policy standpoint, the Self-Sufficiency Standard demonstrates the importance of addressing wages, work supports, and education and training. While I'm proud that the legislature was able to get a minimum wage increase through recently, we have much more work to do in the realm of work supports and training. Because even with the higher state minimum wage, our state's working families will still not be able to make ends meet without work supports. Work supports provide our families with the ability to further advance their training. Childcare credits and healthcare subsidies present opportunities for growth in the workplace that will in the end better provide economic independence. If we simply raise the minimum wage and fail to provide supports that will allow for growth, then all we're doing is perpetuating the economic crisis faced by our working families by increasing wages to pay for other costs.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard demonstrates how important work supports are for our working families. Without them, we leave people swimming way over their heads with no life-raft in sight. We need to begin to focus our efforts on economic realities and not one-size-fits-all standards. The increase in the minimum wage is one area where we have made a difference against powerful odds, but that action alone will not bring our working families to self-sufficiency. We need to make sure they have the tools necessary and access to the programs available that will facilitate economic prosperity for all working families. I hope my fellow policymakers at all levels of government take a close look at the Self-Sufficiency figures for our residents. The Standard is an excellent resource for legislators as we work to find ways to facilitate economic self-sufficiency for our working families.

Jane Smith: Thank you Senator. As you can see the Self-Sufficiency Standard has major implications for policy. Now we are joined by Mr. John Doe of Doe Corporation, Inc. We're pleased to have you with us.

John Doe: Thank you for having me today and thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Self-Sufficiency Standard and its implications for our workforce and employers. As you can image, productivity is directly related to the ability of our workforce to maintain a certain level of commitment to the business they are working for. By highlighting the gap that exists between self-sufficiency, as detailed by the Standard, and the reality of the economic situation that working families face, we can see where work supports provide an opportunity for career advancement and eventual economic independence.

Small companies in particular are faced with difficult economic realities in their own right. Because of the limitations that small companies face when it comes to providing benefits, employees are in situations where they have to shoulder responsibilities, such as child care, on their own. This presents a two-fold problem. One, employees either have to meet the expenses of childcare themselves or two, employees are forced to lose wage-earning time in order to meet those demands. As a result, employers and employees are faced with economic losses, from loss of time on the job or loss of income in order to finance necessities such as childcare. Work supports like federal or state childcare subsidies allow for employees to continue to work and gain wages, and for small businesses to remain competitive. At the same time, the ability to work and produce results for employers often leads to career advancement, opportunity for growth, and increased wages. The very same benefits that can be achieved by employees translate into benefits for employers by facilitating increased productivity and economic growth for the company.

This is not to say, however, that companies that are in a position to provide resources above salary to employees should expect policymakers to offer those supports through subsidies. If the Self-Sufficiency Standard shows employers anything, it's that low-wage work cannot sustain a family in our state. It is incumbent upon employers to bear some responsibility for the economic self-sufficiency of their employees. The very same benefits to small businesses that subsidized work supports facilitate can be found through the willingness of larger and more profitable businesses to supply them privately. That is to say, if you're a large company, with the resources to provide benefits such as childcare allotments or healthcare benefits, your bottom line can only be enhanced by doing so. With company supports in place, employees have the ability to devote more attention and time to their job, resulting in increased productivity.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard shows that employers have several options in order to move their employees to economic self-sufficiency. They can either raise wages or they can provide benefits. If you look at the key findings of the Executive Summary of the Standard you'll see that without subsidies for food stamps, healthcare, and childcare assistance, a single parent with two children needs to make $23.44 per hour to be economically self-sufficient. With work supports, however, a wage-earner can be economically self-sufficient at a pay rate of $11 per hour.

In order to promote employer-based work supports, policymakers need to step in and support employers who do. It benefits all involved—employers, employees, and policymakers—to facilitate work supports so that economic independence can exist and the economy works for all the citizens and businesses of our state.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard highlights a problem for everyone—working families, employers, and policymakers. It should serve as a catalyst for policy changes that will provide benefits for all players in the economy. Businesses have a responsibility for the standard of living of their workforce. If able and willing to accept that responsibility, they put themselves in a position to benefit not only their employees but also their bottom line. For businesses that don't have the ability to support the economic self-sufficiency of their employees, policymakers must work in partnership with them to develop that responsibility.

Jane Smith: All excellent points. Thank you very much John. Now I would like to introduce to you Jennifer Thomas, executive director of Career Advancement Now, an organization working to advance low-income women's careers. She is going to addresses the implications for policy changes that the Self-Sufficiency Standard points out.

Jennifer: I want to thank each of you for your insight into the challenges facing working families. As we are all clearly aware by now, the Self-Sufficiency Standard has clear implications for policymaking, and demands we pay attention to what we're currently doing and what needs to be done to support our workforce.

A family that works hard, but makes less than a self-sufficient income will be forced to make difficult and often unhealthy decisions. Whether it is hunger, living in overcrowded and unsanitary housing, using substandard childcare, or going without health insurance, these are the issues that are faced by low-wage workers who do not have the means to make ends meet.

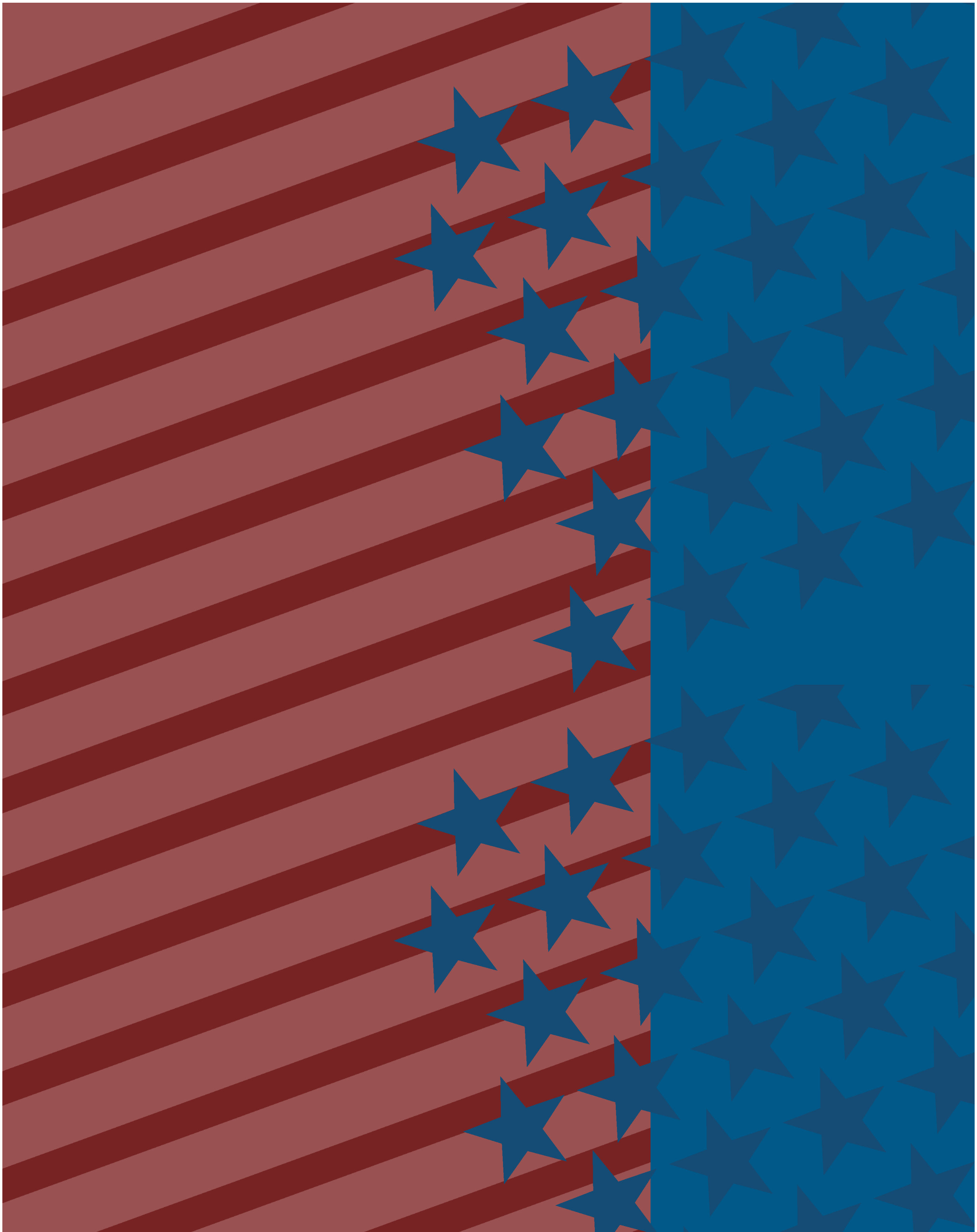
What the Self-Sufficiency Standard does is demonstrate the necessity of addressing wages, work supports, and education and training. Policymakers and employers must work together to allow working families to meet basic expenses. We need to take a three-tiered approach of increasing wages and expanding access to both work supports and education and training.

We must increase access to work supports for low-wage earners, including assistance for housing, healthcare and childcare, but especially for the Earned Income Tax Credit. Almost a quarter of a million city residents qualify for the federal and state EITC, but they do not file, and that must change.

We need to strengthen federal and state policies so that adult literacy programs, job training, and community colleges can serve more working adults. As we know, economic independence increases with increases in skills. Support for literacy and training programs will pay dividends for not only those gaining access to such programs, but for individual businesses and for the economy as a whole.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard clearly demonstrates that we have much to do when it comes to supporting our working families and creating an economy that works for us all. We need to work in concert to increase wages and expand access to work supports and education and training to create a productive society for everyone.

Jane Smith: Thank you very much Jennifer and to all of our speakers. Now we'd like to open it up for questions.



For an Economy that Works for All
A toolkit for advocates of low-wage workers