

CHANGING THE DEBATE

USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR UNION BARGAINING, ORGANIZING & POLICY

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW CENTER



BACKGROUND

ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM

This publication was produced as part of Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency, a project of the National Economic Development & Law Center.

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NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND LAW CENTER

The National Economic Development and Law Center, established in 1969, is a non-profit public interest law and planning organization that specializes in community economic development. It works in collaboration with community organizations, private foundations, corporations and government agencies to build the human, social, and economic capacities of low-income communities and their residents. NEDLC helps to create both strong, sustainable community institutions that can act as "change agents," and an effective local infrastructure for their support.

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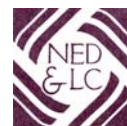


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EXISTING WAGE STANDARDS

WHAT KINDS OF WAGE FLOORS CURRENTLY EXIST FOR WORKERS?

The state and federal government set minimum wage floors for how much employers must pay their employees, including:

- **FEDERAL AND STATE MINIMUM WAGE POLICIES:** Minimum wage policies require all employers to pay all workers (with a few exemptions) at or above a particular wage level (California minimum wage is \$6.75 per hour).
- **LOCAL LIVING WAGE ORDINANCES:** Living Wage policies usually require employers who contract with a particular government (city, county or state) to pay employees a specific wage.
- **PREVAILING WAGE POLICIES:** The “Prevailing wage” is the median wage paid by local employers in a particular geographic location for a particular occupation. Prevailing wage policies govern construction contractors on public works projects who must pay their workers no less than the wage rate prevailing in the local area for the craft as determined by the Department of Industrial Relations.

WHAT OTHER GUIDELINES ARE USED FOR INCOME SUFFICIENCY, AND HOW ARE THEY USED?

There are a number of other guidelines used by government agencies that determine a family’s minimum standard of living, and hence their eligibility for public benefits and services if they are below that level:

- **FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL (FPL):** The Federal Poverty Level was developed over forty years ago. At the time, families spent about one-third of their incomes on food – as a result, to this day the FPL is based on the cost of food, times three. The FPL for a family of three is \$15,260 per year (compare: a full-time minimum wage job yields \$17,105 per year). The FPL (or a multiple of it) is used for eligibility for a wide variety of welfare, health care and food programs.
- **LOWER LIVING STANDARD INCOME LEVEL (LLSIL):** The LLSIL is determined by the U.S. Department of Labor and describes a “low-income individual.” The LLSIL is generally higher than the FPL, but still quite low. For example, in the Los Angeles area, the LLSIL for a two-person family is \$19,310 per year (the Federal Poverty Line is \$12,120 for two people). Local Workforce Investment Boards are required to adopt 70% of the LLSIL as a “floor” to determine who is eligible for job training (in the above example, 70% of the LLSIL for LA would be \$13,310). Generally, individuals whose incomes are above 70% of the LLSIL are not eligible for training at many WIBS. The effect of this policy is that many low-wage workers are not eligible for job training because their incomes are too high. Many WIBs have chosen a higher eligibility criteria, such as the Self-Sufficiency Standard.



WHY ARE THESE STANDARDS/GUIDELINES INSUFFICIENT?

The primary issue with existing wage standard and income sufficiency guidelines is that they generally do not take into account all the various costs associated with working families, such as transportation, child care, housing, and health care. As a result, they fail to address the needs of a growing workforce in our state: low-wage workers, whose wages may be above the poverty level, but below economic self-sufficiency.

For example, the Federal Poverty Line is not calculated to take into account the high costs of child care, health care and housing. Additionally – and surprisingly -- the minimum wage is not indexed to inflation; it can only be increased through a long administrative process. These low “floors” affect families in different ways: they allow employers to pay wages that are too low to support a family, or they create a situation where low-wage workers make too much money to qualify for temporary subsidies (child care, housing, etc), but they make too little money to buy those things themselves on the market. The result? Low-wage workers may become homeless when their work schedule is interrupted, they may live without health insurance, or put their children in less-than-desirable child care situations – all because our economic and governmental system is not set up to accommodate their needs.

There have been many efforts to change these income levels, because they set up a system where families are forced to live at substandard levels. The labor movement has repeatedly pushed to increase the minimum wage, and a number of national groups and academics have advocated to change the poverty level. Of the alternative options for changing these measures, the most comprehensive is the development of the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a measure of the basic costs required to support a family with a working parent or parents. The Standard calculates the costs of food, housing, transportation, child care, health care, miscellaneous costs, taxes and tax credits. It calculates these costs for 70 different family types, including costs for a single adult, a single parent with one, two or three children of various ages, and a two-parent household with one, two or three children of various ages. (See sample Self-Sufficiency Standard in the Appendix.)

The Standard calculates these costs for each county of California. Unlike the Federal Poverty Line, the Standard reflects different costs in different parts of the state. For example, housing costs in San Francisco are higher than housing costs in Bakersfield, and the Standard reflects that difference.

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a conservative estimate of a “bare-bones” budget. It reflects the amount of income required to live without subsidies of any kind, taking only the most necessary of expenses into consideration. The Standard does not include costs of restaurant food, movies, or even costs associated with saving money. It is important to remember: to reach the Self-Sufficiency Standard is only to break even¹

HOW IS THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD DIFFERENT FROM OTHER INCOME STANDARDS?

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is not a policy. It is an objective number that describes the amount of income required to live at a basic level. It is not in itself a mandate to pay a higher wage. However, the Standard has been used by labor unions and others to advocate for local Living Wage policies and increases in the minimum wage.

There are a variety of political factors that go into the decision to set income floors or guidelines, such as a “living wage” or minimum wage, one of which might be the actual cost of living in a particular community. We believe the Self-Sufficiency Standard should be used as a starting point for setting those standards. It is the best tool available for identifying a subsistence wage, which is the original intent of the minimum wage, living wage, and federal poverty level.

WHO CALCULATES THE SELF SUFFICIENCY STANDARD?

The Standard is calculated by Dr. Diana Pearce at the University of Washington, in conjunction with Wider Opportunities for Women and the National Economic Development & Law Center. In California, the Standard has been calculated in 1996 and 2000 and the 2003 Standard will be released December 9. The 2003 Self Sufficiency Standard will be available at www.nedlc.org/cfess.

¹ “A New Weapon for Unions: Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Negotiations, Organizing and Member Services,” Working for America Institute and Wider Opportunities for Women, by M. Golga and S. Shackelford, (2003).



WHO USES THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AND HOW DO THEY USE IT?

In California, the Self-Sufficiency Standard has been used by non-profit organizations, public agencies, foundations and legislators. In general, the uses of the Standard in California fall into five categories:

- **COUNSELING.** The Standard can be used with individuals who are making decisions about career training and education to understand how much income they will need to support their families. A number of community organizations and some local agencies around the country have begun to use an online self-sufficiency calculator that helps individuals look at the gap between their current income and what they need to earn to be economically self-sufficient, as well as ways to close that gap.
- **ELIGIBILITY.** The Standard has been used to widen the group of people eligible for a particular program. For example, Workforce Investment Boards use the Standard to allow people who are working at low-wage jobs to access training.
- **BENCHMARKING.** The Standard can be used to show how far particular clients or individuals progress as a result of going through a training or educational program or advancing along a career ladder.
- **EVALUATING PROGRAMS.** When programs give employers money to create jobs or train workers, we need a way to measure whether those employers are paying workers enough to make ends meet. The Standard can be used to evaluate this.
- **PRIORITY-SETTING AND POLICYMAKING.** Public agencies and foundations have used the Standard to determine the types of programs they will fund (e.g., putting public workforce funding into training programs that lead to a self-sufficiency wage job).

Since its initial calculation in 1996, the California Self-Sufficiency Standard has been used by the following people and agencies:

LEGISLATORS:

- In the past two years, two state bills have used the Self-Sufficiency Standard. AB 2386 (Keeley) would have extended time on welfare for people in community college programs that led to a self-sufficiency wage job. SJR 15 (Alarcón) urges the federal government to explore alternatives to the Federal Poverty Level, such as the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

PUBLIC AGENCIES:

- The California Department of Social Services
- The San Francisco Workforce Investment Board & Department of Human Services
- The Santa Cruz CalWORKs Welfare to Work program and One-Stop
- The City of Pasadena Foothill Workforce Investment Board
- The Sacramento Employment & Training Agency
- The Oakland Workforce Investment Board

ORGANIZATIONS & FOUNDATIONS:

- California Child Care Resource and Referral Network
- The Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Communities
- The United Way of the Bay Area
- Northern California Council for the Community
- Women at Work
- Women's Initiative for Self Employment

Around the country, the Self-Sufficiency Standard has been adopted by the States of **Connecticut** and **Illinois**, as well as the Workforce Investment Boards of **Chicago**, **Philadelphia** and **Washington, D.C.**

Most relevant to the discussion here, a number of labor unions around the country have pioneered the use the Self-Sufficiency Standard for bargaining and organizing:

- HERE Local 8 in Seattle, WA
- CWA Local 1180, SEIU Local 1199 and AFSCME DC 1707 in New York City
- UAW Region 9A, Justice for Janitors Local 531, SEIU Local 1199 and AFL-CIO in Connecticut

The effort represented by the creation of this curriculum marks the beginning of bringing the Self-Sufficiency Standard to the labor unions of California.



USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR BARGAINING

The Self-Sufficiency Standard has been used all over the country by labor unions to argue for higher wages. The following examples of strategic approaches are excerpted from research done by Wider Opportunities for Women and the Working for America Institute.²

USE THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD TO NEGOTIATE FOR HIGHER WAGES

CASE STUDY:

“Counteracting Employer’s Focus on ‘Market Wages’”
Communication Workers of America in New York City

CWA was bargaining with a nonprofit organization, and the employer presented them with “market wages” as a way to argue for the employer’s position on wage levels. CWA was able to reference the Self-Sufficiency Standard to give a different assessment of what it takes to live in New York. The Standard allowed the union to present another way of looking at wages, and counteract the employer’s emphasis on market wages.

The strong data and methodology of the Standard demonstrate that wages for many union employees are simply not high enough for families to meet their most basic needs. The Standard has been used by HERE Local 8 in Seattle, WA; CWA Local 1180, SEIU Local 1199 and AFSCME DC 1707 in New York City; and UAW Region 9A, Justice for Janitors Local 531, SEIU Local 1199 and AFL-CIO in Connecticut as a basis for negotiating higher wages for union employees through the collective bargaining process.

You can also use the components of the Self-Sufficiency Standard (individual costs of housing, child care, health care, transportation) to argue for higher wages, due to higher costs of living in your county. For example you can say “in our county, housing prices are skyrocketing; according to the Self-Sufficiency Standard, rents in our county for three-person families are \$X.” Or, you might argue: “Many of the parents in the union have small children. In our county, you have to pay (on average) \$X for child care.”

However, in order to use the Self-Sufficiency Standard in this way, you will have to learn a bit about the family composition of your union’s members. Here are some ideas...

² “A New Weapon for Unions: Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Negotiations, Organizing and Member Services,” Working for America Institute and Wider Opportunities for Women, by M. Golga and S. Shackelford, (2003).



TOOLS TO USE:

CHOOSING A SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE TO USE IN BARGAINING

The Self-Sufficiency Standard does not identify a single “self-sufficiency wage.” Rather, it identifies self-sufficiency wages for 70 different family types, ranging from a single adult to single parents to two parents with 0-3 children of all ages. In order to use it for bargaining, union negotiators can choose a single wage from a family type that is representative of the union’s membership. Here are some ideas to identify the best wage for your union:

1. Include a series of questions on your bargaining survey that ask union members about family size and ages of children. The questions should ask:

How many adults are in your family?
How many infants (under 2)?
Preschoolers (2-5 years)?
Schoolage children (6-12 years)?
Teenagers (13+)?

After you get the results in, determine the most common family size and composition in your union, and find its wage on the Self-Sufficiency Standard for your county – this is the wage you can use to bargain with as representative of the needs of the families in your union.

In the alternative, you may identify several different distinct groups of family types within your union (for example, you may have a large number of single adults with no children and a large number of single adults with children). In this case, you will have two self-sufficiency wages that will apply to a large portion of your union. In this case, you may want to point this out to the employer and negotiate with both numbers as “bookends.”

2. You may be able to find out the most common family size and composition from your union’s pension and benefits department. With this information, you can also choose the self-sufficiency wage(s) that are most representative of the needs of your union’s members and their families.

USE THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD TO NEGOTIATE FOR BETTER BENEFITS.

In addition to information about wages, the Self-Sufficiency Standard is a good place to start to argue for better benefits, or even new benefits.

TOOLS TO USE:

USING THE STANDARD TO INCREASE BENEFITS

Many of your members may have high child care or transportation expenses. If the employer won't budge on a higher wage, can you negotiate for better benefits in these areas? Although it's not a wage increase, increasing benefits would serve to bring your union member families closer to self-sufficiency by reducing their out-of-pocket costs.

First, you may need to learn (via a survey) how much your members are paying out of pocket for child care, transportation or health care. In the alternative, you can use the survey data about family size to determine this; if you have a "typical" family size in your union, find out the costs from the Self-Sufficiency Standard for that family size.

When you "change the debate" about wages and establishing that workers need higher wages for the long term, you may be able to introduce other types of benefits into the negotiation, including retirement plans, tuition reimbursement, skills upgrading, better access to the Earned Income Tax Credit, employer assistance with loans or housing.



USE THE STANDARD TO DEMONSTRATE THAT LOCATION MATTERS.

CASE STUDY:

“HIGHER WAGES IN HIGHERCOST AREAS”

SEIU State Council in Connecticut

Connecticut’s SEIU State Council used the Self-Sufficiency Standard in wage negotiations for dietary workers in Fairfield, CT. Because Fairfield has extremely high costs compared to its surrounding counties, SEIU used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to advocate for a higher wage for workers in Fairfield by demonstrating the elevated cost of living in Fairfield. It would be difficult to quantify the higher costs in Fairfield without the Self-Sufficiency Standard.

TOOLS TO USE:

IDENTIFYING REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN COST

Here’s a checklist to tackle this issue:

1. Do our union members live and/or work in different counties?
2. What are the different Self-Sufficiency Standards for the different counties?
3. Can we use the Standard to argue for higher wages for union members who live in higher cost counties?
4. Can we use the Standard to show that some of our members have higher costs of living, and use it to raise the floor for higher wages of *all* local members, regardless of what county they live in?

CHANGE THE MINDSET THAT “WAGES SHOULD ONLY INCREASE IN SMALL INCREMENTS”

CASE STUDY:

“SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE PROGRESSION”

Communications Workers of America, New York City

In New York City, CWA Local 1180 used the Self-Sufficiency Standard to demonstrate that wage progression needs to increase at a quicker rate than a mere 1-2% annually if families are going to truly move towards economic self-sufficiency. The Self-Sufficiency Standard provides a realistic benchmark for wages while also demonstrating how great the gap is between the current wage and economic self-sufficiency.

TOOLS TO USE:

USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD TO DEFINE RATE OF WAGE PROGRESSION

In California, the Self-Sufficiency Standard has been calculated for 1996, 2000 and 2003. Unsurprisingly, costs have risen exponentially in some areas of California:

- In San Francisco, basic household costs for a single adult rose by 70% between 1996 and 2003. Between 2000 and 2003, those costs increased by 23%.
- In Sacramento County, housing costs have increased by 51% since 2000.
- Since 2000, the cost of transportation to and from work has risen in every county except one.

To identify the increases in household costs for your county over the last 7 years, contact the CFESS project at 510-251-2600.



WHAT KINDS OF ISSUES MIGHT ARISE FROM USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD AT THE BARGAINING TABLE?

“There is a huge difference between the Self Sufficiency Standard and the base wage we are bargaining from. Doesn’t this just make union negotiators look bad because they are unlikely to get to the self sufficiency wage?”

The Self-Sufficiency Standard is bargaining tool for changing the debate, from talking about *what the employer can pay* to talking about *what workers need* to survive. In that sense, the Standard does not need to be an absolute goal for wage negotiations, but a way to nudge existing wages upward in the bargaining process.

Additionally, don’t forget the role of non-cash benefits. The Standard is a total accounting of all the costs required for working families to pay for basic needs. Some of these needs can be met with benefits (e.g. transportation, child care) that reduce families’ costs, thereby moving them towards economic self-sufficiency.

“The numbers in the Self-Sufficiency Standard aren’t exactly what our members pay for certain items – for example, our health care costs are much higher than the cost cited in the Standard.”

You can customize the numbers in the Standard to support your argument for higher wages. If your workers are paying larger out-of-pocket costs for health care than the figures in your county’s Standard, you can adjust the numbers and make a Self-Sufficiency Standard that applies to your membership. If you need assistance with this, contact CFESS at 510-251-2600.

USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR ORGANIZING

SEIU Local 1199, UAW Region 9A, Justice for Janitors Local 531 and HERE Local 217 in Connecticut use the Standard in organizing with prospective members.³

Why is the Self-Sufficiency Standard a useful tool in organizing? What can it tell prospective members?

- **It demonstrates the value of a union wage.** By using a neutral explanation of basic household costs like the Standard, union organizers can compare workers' current wages to general costs of living, as a way to demonstrate that even a full-time, minimum wage job that is *not* union won't get their families out of poverty.
- **It demonstrates the value of union benefits.** Organizers can use the Self Sufficiency Standard as a way to explain how union-acquired benefits like health insurance can help boost household incomes.

TOOLS TO USE:

USING THE STANDARD TO BRING NEW MEMBERS INTO YOUR UNION

At first, the Standard's usefulness in union organizing is clear -- it clearly states what every low-wage worker already knows: "I'm not making enough money." But how can the Standard be used to confront more challenging barriers to organizing? What follows are some potential organizing barriers, and ways that you can use the Standard to get around them.

1. Potential members may say...***"The Self Sufficiency wage is so high, I'll never get there. That's unrealistic for me."***

ANSWER: The Self-Sufficiency Standard can serve to help families understand "it's not their fault" that it's so hard to pay the bills; rather, that costs are rising and wages are not keeping up for many workers.

ANSWER: If the organizer can put union wages side by side with Self-Sufficiency Standard wages, it's a clear comparison.

ANSWER: If the union offers job training or is affiliated with skills upgrading programs, the organizer can talk about how starting out in a union job can provide a path to higher wage jobs, through the union's training programs.

³ Ibid.



2. Potential members may say... ***“But I’ll get fired if I join the union.”***

ANSWER: The Self-Sufficiency Standard is another way that organizers can try to talk about the idea of solidarity with other low-wage workers. The Standard lays out the basic costs that EVERYONE in a community has to pay. If every worker in a workplace is earning wages well below their Self-Sufficiency Standard, it may be easier for individuals to admit that they are struggling to make ends meet, because the Standard helps to show that “it’s not your fault.” The Standard can help universalize the problems that individual workers have by demonstrating that “everyone is in the same boat” with regard to rising household costs.

Union organizers can also do a general education campaign, using the Self-Sufficiency Standard to highlight how much it costs for community residents to live in that county. The education campaign can involve media outlets (newspaper, radio, TV) as well as smaller community gatherings. An education campaign like that can form the basis of a community coalition (see section VI), and can actually be targeted at prospective union members.

USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD FOR LOCAL POLICY CHANGE

All over the country, cities, counties, local departments and state agencies have adopted and use the Self-Sufficiency Standard to create access to benefits and job training for low-wage workers. Many work support and training programs have an eligibility level that is at or near the Federal Poverty Line, which serves to exclude people who are above poverty, but working at wages that are insufficient to pay for basic costs. By adopting the Self-Sufficiency Standard, public agencies can expand eligibility for services to include these workers.

CASE STUDY:

Publicly-Funded Job Training for Low-Wage Workers'

The San Francisco Workforce Investment Board

In the spring of 2003, the San Francisco Workforce Investment Board (SF WIB) adopted a precedent-setting new policy. The WIB allotted 10% of adult training dollars⁴ under the Workforce Investment Act to be used for training individuals who were above the poverty line (known as the LLSIL or Lower Living Standard Income Level) but below 75% of their family's Self Sufficiency Standard. This effectively opened up training resources to working poor San Franciscans.

In addition, the San Francisco Workforce Investment Board integrated the idea of "self-sufficiency" in their customized training policy. Customized training is a system whereby costs of the job training are shared between the WIB and employers. In the San Francisco policy, employers who participate in the program must make an effort to move trainees toward self-sufficiency, and eligibility for the training is inclusive of low-wage workers.

Counseling and Training for Low-Income People The Santa Cruz County Human Resources Agency

The federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) requires Local WIBs to define "self-sufficiency" as an eligibility criteria for people who are seeking intensive (counseling) services or job training. A number of WIBs define "self-sufficiency" as at or near the poverty level, which means that only people whose incomes are at or near the poverty level can qualify for job training. However, the Santa Cruz County One-Stop adopted the Self Sufficiency Standard as the eligibility criteria; as such, individuals who come in their doors whose incomes are below the Standard are eligible for intensive services and training.

⁴ Funding for this population is contingent on funding availability.



Other policy models using the Self Sufficiency Standard include:

- **State Law.** A number of bills have been introduced around the country that adopt the Self-Sufficiency Standard at the state level. In Connecticut, for example, the State legislature passed a bill requiring the state to calculate the Standard. In California, Senate Joint Resolution 15 (Alarcón) is currently in the California legislature, and is a resolution urging Congress to reexamine the Federal government’s use of the Federal Poverty Line.
- **State Administrative Agencies.** State agencies can adopt the Standard for their internal programs and practices, as well as to provide for its calculation (the state employment agency in Illinois has done this).
- **City & County Governments.** Local city councils or departments can adopt the Self-Sufficiency Standard or use it for a particular purpose. Currently, the San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women and the San Francisco Department of Children Youth and Families use the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a reference point in their policies and recommendations. Additionally, the city of Sonoma has adopted the Standard (and were the first to do so in the state).

TOOLS TO USE:

HOW TO DECIDE ON YOUR PUBLIC POLICY TARGET

As you begin the process of deciding on your policy proposal and plan of organizing and implementation, consider the following questions:

1. **What is the problem you are trying to solve?** This is important to articulate in a specific way before you begin. One example: “We want to increase funding available for low-wage workers in our county to get job training.”
2. **Are you asking the appropriate agency to solve the problem?** Are there political reasons to approach this or that public body (allies, etc)? What kind of control over finances or other public departments does your target agency have? Is it better to start at the bottom of an agency and work up to the top, or start at the top with a mandate to implement your plan?
3. **Who will be affected by the policy proposal?** How many people? What income levels? How much different will it make? You want to ask these questions in order to assess the cost of your proposal, as well as the importance of your idea to the community. How will you demonstrate the fiscal implications and, if your plan will cost money, argue that the spending is justified and needed?
4. **How can you use existing funding streams to do what you want to do?** Perhaps your idea is already encoded in a local regulation or board resolution, but isn’t being implemented. Look at existing programs to see if they can be “tweaked” in some way, rather than trying to create something entirely new.

Another reason to advocate for publicly-funded job training is to directly benefit union workers. Your union may also be in a position to connect your members to existing job training resources through the local workforce development system. Here are some ideas to make that a reality...

TOOLS TO USE:

CONNECTING UNION MEMBERS TO JOB TRAINING

Every community is governed by a local Workforce Investment Board that oversees publicly-funded job training. As a union leader, you can:

1. Find out from your WIB about job training opportunities and the eligibility criteria for accessing that training;
2. Disseminate information to members about job training opportunities through the WIB;
3. Work with the WIB to designate the union as a referral source to local One-Stop centers, and advocate to make sure your members get access to that training;
4. Make your union an actual One-Stop center in the WIA system.



USING THE STANDARD IN A UNION PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN

CASE STUDY:

“LEVERAGING SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN THE MEDIA”

Home Health Care Workers, Connecticut

Union members in Connecticut have also strategically used the Standard in the media to gain support for their wage negotiations. The State of Connecticut is the only state in the country that has officially adopted the Self-Sufficiency Standard as its measure of living costs in the state. Union members create messages that resonate with the media, informing the general public that the State of Connecticut has set the standard of living for the state based on the Self-Sufficiency Standard, and arguing that businesses should follow suit. Home health care workers in Connecticut used this strategy to gain public support for their wage negotiations in 2001 through wide media coverage on how the wages they were fighting for compared to the Standard.⁵

In organizing, bargaining, or public policy campaigns, unions will get the “biggest bang” out of the Standard by using it to drive the media campaign. Organizations around the country who have successfully worked with the Standard in the media know that reporters are interested in “how much does it REALLY cost to live here?”

The Self-Sufficiency Standard can be used to back up unions’ claims that workers are not making enough to make ends meet. The public may be ignorant about how much it takes to live in California, and need to be educated that unions are fighting for workers to live with dignity. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is the only income guideline that provides for life with dignity, allowing a worker to be independent of public income supports.

⁵ “A New Weapon for Unions: Using the Self-Sufficiency Standard in Negotiations, Organizing and Member Services,” Working for America Institute and Wider Opportunities for Women, by M. Golga and S. Shackelford, (2003).



TOOLS TO USE:

USING A "SYSTEMIC" PERSPECTIVE IN THE MEDIA

Douglas Gould & Co.

If you are working with the media, you may want to explore some of the research and tools available from Douglas Gould & Associates. This firm has done extensive public opinion research and found that the general public responds better to workers' issues when the issues are framed as "systemic" economic problems, rather than individual people's problems. The public tends to "pathologize" individual "hard luck" stories (e.g., "she is poor because she had too many kids; she should have stayed in school") rather than looking at the larger systemic economy (e.g., "people can't live on such a low wage). For the Douglas Gould complete guide on using a systemic perspective in the media, go to www.economythatworks.org.

HOW CAN COALITIONS HELP LABOR UNIONS WIN USING THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD?

CASE STUDY:

“WINNING THE SUPPORT OF ALLIES (AND MEMBERSHIP) FOR BARGAINING DEMANDS.”

Stamford Organizing Project, Connecticut

The Standard can be used to build coalitions of labor unions fighting for increased wages and benefits for their employees, to gain public support for collective bargaining and to build new networks of support with advocacy and non-profit organizations. In recent years, the Stamford Organizing Project, an effort led by the national AFL-CIO, used the Self-Sufficiency Standard as a mobilizing tool in its innovative approach of bringing a number of different unions together in a city-wide fight for increased wages and benefits.

Building coalitions. There are many, many types of organizations in California that already use the Self-Sufficiency Standard. Many of these groups are part of the CFESS (Californians for Family Economic Self-Sufficiency) network (go to www.nedlc.org/cfess for more information), but you will also be able to find organizations in your community who will support you. Some types of groups might include: job training and human services agencies, women’s groups, immigrant groups, welfare advocates, and others.

Coalition-building is especially important when bringing proposals to your local Workforce Investment Board for increasing access to job training or prioritizing self-sufficiency within the WIB. As one of only a few labor representatives, it is vital that your “WIB coalition” is broad enough to garner sufficient votes for passage. Using the county-based Self-Sufficiency Standard as a lead-in to your proposal can universalize the proposal as something that is good for the health of the entire community.



TOOLS TO USE:

ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN BUILDING A COMMUNITY COALITION

Your union may already be part of a community coalition that includes religious leaders and other community groups. How can you strengthen or add to your coalition?

1. **Brainstorm some unlikely allies.** When “strange bedfellows” come together, it draws attention and credibility to the issue. Are there particular issues where your union can ally with another organization or interest group that you don’t usually work with? An unusual ally may be high-wage employer who sees the Standard as a way to level the playing field with his competitors.

2. **Identify your opponents and how you will relate to them.** In building a coalition around the Standard, who will your opponents be? What types of compromises are you willing to make to get their support? Do you need their support to win?

Appendix

SAMPLE SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD

SELF-SUFFICIENCY STANDARD ALAMEDA COUNTY, CA 2003								
				<i>Adult +</i>				<i>2 Adults +</i>
			<i>Adult +</i>	<i>infant +</i>			<i>2 Adults +</i>	<i>preschooler +</i>
		<i>Adult +</i>	<i>preschooler +</i>	<i>schoolage +</i>		<i>2 Adults +</i>	<i>infant +</i>	<i>preschooler +</i>
<i>Monthly Costs</i>	<i>Adult</i>	<i>infant</i>	<i>Schoolage</i>	<i>teenager</i>	<i>2 Adults</i>	<i>schoolage</i>	<i>preschooler</i>	<i>teenager</i>
<i>Housing</i>	1132	1420	1420	1947	1132	1420	1420	1947
<i>Child Care</i>	0	758	1319	1158	0	400	1677	1838
<i>Food</i>	182	266	411	541	358	490	515	648
<i>Transportation</i>	60	60	60	60	120	120	120	120
<i>Health Care</i>	67	182	212	239	212	231	239	289
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	144	269	342	394	182	266	397	484
<i>Taxes</i>	352	579	745	937	294	432	843	1183
<i>Earned Income Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Child Care Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	(55)	(100)	(100)	0	(58)	(100)	(100)
<i>Child Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	(83)	(167)	(250)	0	(83)	(167)	(250)
<i>Self-Sufficiency Wage -Hourly</i>								
	\$11.00	\$19.29	\$24.10	\$27.99	\$6.53	\$9.14	\$14.05	\$17.50
					<i>per adult</i>	<i>per adult</i>	<i>per adult</i>	<i>per adult</i>
<i>-Monthly</i>	\$1,937	\$3,395	\$4,242	\$4,926	\$2,298	\$3,218	\$4,944	\$6,160
<i>-Annual</i>	\$23,240	\$40,736	\$50,907	\$59,114	\$27,581	\$38,611	\$59,328	\$73,918

Full Self-Sufficiency Standards for each county of California can be found at www.nedlc.org/cfess

