

2014 CCCR national summit case studies

Living Wage from the Employer's View: Implementation Guidelines for Small—Medium Size Businesses

Institution Carleton University

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Background

The Living Wage working group of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction has been involved in strong engagement of the Hamilton community around implementing a living wage. The Living Wage project involves a partnership of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, a community-based organization, and McMaster University's Degroote School of Business, in a collective effort towards reducing poverty in the City of Hamilton.

At this point, large public institutions have been involved in discussions about becoming living wage employers, including the City of Hamilton, the Hamilton District School Board and McMaster University. The Living Wage working group is also planning to engage small and medium sized employers in this discussion over the next year. One of the components necessary for engagement is the development of Human Resource and practical guidelines for employers to implement a living wage in their workplace.

Research objective

The research aimed to obtain employees' perceptions and experiences regarding a living wage, including how it might impact their employment, including performance and satisfaction and more generally, their quality of life. The results of this project will enable the Living Wage working group in Hamilton and across Canada to conduct more effective and directed discussions with employers on implementing a living wage.

The Living Wage project is expected to create an employer movement in Hamilton, which in turn is expected to result in tangible benefits to workers with low wages. It is expected that this project will result in guidelines for implementing an hourly wage that allows for full participation in society for living wage workers. This knowledge will be applicable and transferable to communities across Canada.

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Research design and methodology

The first phase of the research project was to develop a partnership with a university and involve a graduate student from McMaster University's (a local university) Business School. This student was expected to have experience in Human Resources, which will assist in the development of material for potential living wage employers. In addition, the first phase involved conducting a literature review.

The proposed second phase of this project is to carry out a complementary survey for employees. This survey will focus on employees' perceptions and experiences with a living wage and the perceived impact it would have on their employment (including both performance and satisfaction) and quality of life. This survey will be constructed and implemented in both on-line and paper forms to maximize recruitment.

This project expects to interview at least 300 people whose incomes are either below the living wage or just above the living wage. This anonymous employee survey will be distributed directly to workers. Workers don't need to provide any confidential or personal information related to their identities. This survey does not contain specific selection based on age, gender or ethnicity. As an incentive to complete the survey, we are going to provide lottery tickets to participants. The lottery ticket will be paid out to each respondent upon completion of the survey.

The research will be coordinated by a doctoral student in the DeGroot School of Business, carried out with the assistance of several research assistants, and overseen by the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the McMaster Community Poverty Initiative. The results are currently being tabulated and a report is being written.

A third aspect of the research involved MSW students from Carleton University, involved in a MSW research course where they engage in community based research while interviewing various stakeholders involved in the Living Wage Movement. They developed an on-line survey that was live for two months. They invited members of Vibrant Communities to participate in the survey and 36 individuals did so. The students additionally interviewed four living wage advocates involved in living wage campaigns at different stages of development and activity.

They compiled a list of best practices for conducting living wage campaigns that they have disseminated widely.

Lessons-learned

The involvement of champions, which are those well-known anchor organizations in the community who lend their support has been a key factor in being able to convince other individuals and organizations within the community that the living wage is a viable concept. The Degroote School of Business has delegates of the living wage who speak the same corporate language and have similar values and culture. In addition, the Degroote School of Business has lent its knowledge to the creation of a literature review, and its business credentials to authenticating the case for the living wage movement in the perspective of other employers.

Individuals who are able to cross boundaries between the campus and community are an important element in building effective partnerships. As explored in this research project, community-campus relationships have both their strengths and challenges; having an individual(s) who has influence and understanding in both contexts can help influence decisions with greater authority, make the right connections, and tailor the work to best suit the needs of all partners. Examples of these individuals in the living wage project include an employee who has gone from a community organization to a paid position at McMaster University, and the business Ph.D. student who is leading the literature review for the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

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Domains of research excellence

Community relevance

The idea for the project came from the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable who feel that it is relevant to the community. There is a great deal of poverty in Hamilton and this is their way to address this problem.

Equitable participation

This project is all about community first. The Poverty Reduction Hub which funded and oversaw this project is co-lead by a community and a campus partner. All of the decision making and work is equitably divided. Finally, this project demonstrates a very innovative model of collaboration between university and community.

Action and change

As a result of this community campus partnership and the research being conducted, the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable plans to use the information gained to effect change in living wage policy and legislation. The information will be used to provide learning opportunities for employers in the community to hear about the impact a living wage can have on employment.

As well, this project has seen an increase in small-medium for-profit employers in Hamilton that are committed to paying a Living Wage, and their assistance in facilitating conversation about the living wage in the media for community awareness.

Conclusion

A completed literature review was the basis for creating the interview guide, which elicits new and useful information from ten employers on the living wage. A handbook about Human Resource and practical guidelines based on the survey results will inform employers how to implement a living wage in their workplace and provides evidence in support of a living wage policy. Finally best practices in advocating for a living wage were collected and disseminated on various web sites and in presentations to Vibrant Communities members and Living Wage advocates (see links to project reports). A journal article from this research was submitted to a journal for publication: Best Practices for Implementing a Living Wage Policy in Canada was submitted in October, 2014 to the Inaugural issue the Engages Scholar Journal at the University of Saskatchewan.

Links

http://prezi.com/6occneghymco/living-wage-for-caswe-may-2014/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

<http://www.livingwagecanada.ca/index.php/blog/living-wage-leaders-gathering-2014/>

http://vibrantcanada.ca/blogs/liz-weaver/living-wage-canada-seeding-movement?__hstc=29428640.472c74d3b23396714f9607444e42b1fb.1414077360445.1414077639517.1414078308238.4&__hssc=29428640.4.1414078308238&__hsfp=2726371218

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPVt2asfzPA>