

Summary of the Living Wage Initiative Strategic Revision Engagement Process

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Introduction:

From May to August 2016, Vibrant Communities Calgary (VCC) hired an individual to complete a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process to inform a revision of VCC's Living Wage Initiative. The Living Wage Initiative is inclusive of maintaining Calgary's Living Wage calculator, administering communication of Calgary's Living Wage rate including notification of annual increases, advocating for policy change that supports a Living Wage and finally, coordinating the Living Wage Leader Program.

VCC's Living Wage Initiative has been a pillar program of the organization since very early on. It has been a tangible and unique service provided to Calgary's poverty reduction advocates, progressive businesses and policy-makers for nearly a decade. The Initiative was at its most active in 2008 when the now-defunct Living Wage Action Team advocated to Calgary City Council to adopt a Living Wage ordinance. Unfortunately, council voted down the notice of motion with a final vote of 8 to 7. Since then, efforts have been focused at times on growing the Living Wage Leader program, generating communication and promotional materials and significantly adapting the Living Wage calculation to align with the National Living Wage Framework. VCC's focus shifted significantly beginning January 2015 with the exciting mandate to guide the implementation of Enough For All, Calgary's poverty reduction strategy.

Summary of Final Report:

After 8 years of activity related to the Living Wage Initiative, VCC felt it was necessary to pause the Initiative in its entirety to allow for a comprehensive review of the program. The review, including a stakeholder survey and interview process, environmental and policy scan plus review of best practices in other jurisdictions would be essential to inform a strategic refresh of the Initiative, including the Living Wage Leader Program. The survey to Living Wage Leaders was distributed in June and responses were collected for several weeks. 18 Living Wage Leaders completed the survey. Additionally, interviews were carried out with 10 stakeholders, including members of VCC's Board of Directors, former members of the Living Wage Action Team, VCC staff members and community volunteers. The following is a summary of findings from these engagement opportunities:

Key Survey and Interview Findings
Living Wage Leaders Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- VCC could do a much better job at promoting the Living Wage Leader Program and participating employers- VCC could do a much better job at communicating the Living Wage Initiative to the public- Communication and promotional materials would be highly beneficial for Living Wage Leaders to promote their certification in the program, to share the concept of a Living Wage with other employers, colleagues and customers- VCC could do a better job of communicating increases of the Living Wage to Living Wage Leaders- The calculator is not always applicable to the circumstances of employees

Key Survey and Interview Findings

Stakeholder Interviews

- The Living Wage Initiative is a very important part of poverty reduction
- The Living Wage Initiative ties in well with other Enough For All-related activities, including the evolving Business Leaders Forum, Community Economic Development, and minimum wage advocacy to the provincial government

Based on the survey and interview findings, the environmental and policy scan and review of best practices elsewhere (Living Wage for Families BC, Living Wage Hamilton and Ontario Living Wage Network and Living Wage Foundation – UK) the author of the report developed three key recommendations. They are as follows:

1. Improved communication
 - a. Revamped website housing all Living Wage Initiative content; LWL application and directory, calculator, promotional toolkit for LWLs, research, resources, information materials
 - b. Increasing social media presence
 - c. Distributing a quarterly e-newsletter
 - d. LWL promotion to general public and between businesses
 - e. Annual LW Event
2. Multi-phase certification process for Living Wage Leaders
 - a. Improved clarity and accountability in certification of new LWLs
 - b. Increased support and annual verification that existing LWLs continue to meet certification criteria
3. Broadening program (or creating a new program) that recognizes inclusive business practices as a means of complete compensation that have a significant impact on the quality of life of employees
 - a. Considering deductions in a living wage paid by individual businesses based on additional forms of compensation e.g., benefits, subsidized transit, child care, deductions on goods and services * Vibrant Communities Calgary used to manage a “Vibrant Employer” Program and Award that celebrated progressive businesses. The program has not been in effect for 6+ years

Next Steps:

VCC is immensely grateful for the work of our summer student and for the generosity of time, wisdom and honesty of survey respondents and interviewees. The engagement process is now complete and VCC’s plan is now to review the report and associated recommendations for alignment with 1) Enough For All, Calgary’s poverty reduction strategy, 2) strategic partnerships, and 3) available resources. VCC continues to investigate opportunities for re-instating a Living Wage Initiative that brings the greatest value to partners and participants.