

## Note From the Funder

*“Living wage laws are bad for the economy and result in lost jobs.”*

**T**hat statement is not true—but it is effective. And when it is repeated over and over again by conservative politicians, by well-compensated spokespeople, and in print, radio and television ads, it is even more effective.

We all know that mass communication is one of the most powerful tools in the modern world. Every major election and policy initiative drives that point home. And with new technologies developing almost daily, communication becomes faster, broader and even more important.

That’s why Tides Foundation is extremely pleased to announce the **Bridging the Economic Divide Media Project**. The project will address issues of media capacity, communications, and message framing among Bridging the Economic Divide grantee groups working on economic justice campaigns.

### Bridging the Economic Divide

Tides Foundation’s Bridging the Economic Divide (BED) Initiative started in 2000 as a donor collaborative to address the growing chasm between the poor and the wealthy in this country. Individual donors contributed to the fund, and began meeting twice a year to make collective decisions about funding priorities and grantmaking. Since its inception, BED has granted almost \$1.5 million to 45 organizations across the country, funding organizations working on economic justice issues.

Since the first living wage ordinance passed in 1994, the living wage movement has been successful in garnering media attention and public support. Broad coalitions of community, labor and faith-based organizations have been effective in convincing their communities and public officials that improving wages and benefits for thousands of low-wage workers makes good sense.

And other economic justice efforts, such as the Coalition of Immokalee Workers’ boycott of Taco Bell, has received national media attention and garnered support from many students and activists all over the country. Their “penny per pound” campaign is using a moral argument to encourage fast food companies to pay a slight increase in the price of tomatoes to ensure that tomato pickers earn a living wage.

But, as the movement has grown, so has its opposition.

This was never more evident than last November in Santa Monica, California. Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) spearheaded a challenge to an anti-living wage referendum sponsored by the local hotel industry. Victory looked assured until a last minute, multi-million dollar media blitz swayed the election. LAANE ultimately lost the election by a mere 700 votes. (That development is currently under public scrutiny due to the use of misleading slate mailers that falsely implied that prominent progressives were against the living wage law).

The Santa Monica election is a stark example of two massive challenges facing the economic justice movement: A well-funded, business-backed opposition, and effectively framing living wage issues in the context of the current economic downturn.

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## **BED Media Project**

Thanks to generous contributions from five BED donors, Tides has launched the Bridging the Economic Divide Media Project to address the specific media needs of the economic justice movement. The idea for a media project was conceived at the BED Donor Collaborative meeting in May 2002. Collaborative members were interested in the lessons that the living wage movement presented for using the media to frame a progressive economic message. In today's climate of economic insecurity, the economic justice movement needs to protect its gains and respond to the claims that living wage laws threaten small businesses and hurt local communities.

It is not enough to launch campaigns with the message that economic justice is fair and necessary. We must craft broad messages that speak to a diverse public. We must help local activists build knowledge and skills to deal with today's media outlets. We must train effective spokespeople and anticipate the well-connected and well-funded opposition.

This *Winning Wages Media Kit* is just one element designed to address these needs in the growing economic justice community. Plans are underway for follow-up trainings where activists will work with project consultant Robert Bray of the SPIN Project to hone their media engagement techniques.

## **A Broader Discussion, A Bigger Movement**

These trainings will provide a rare opportunity for activists from a variety of economic justice organizations to meet and discuss movement building and media strategy. Tides Foundation hopes that this Media Project will mark the beginning of a larger conversation—bringing together community organizations and funders around a broader economic justice agenda. We look forward to the relationships that will be built across strategies and constituencies, and hope that these relationships will become the foundation for a stronger movement that has the power to fundamentally increase our victories and improve collaborative efforts around economic justice organizing.

In these times of global economic and political crisis, we firmly believe that the economic justice movement has the potential to make concrete advances for low-wage workers, develop the leadership of some of the most disenfranchised people in our society, and offer a grand vision for a peaceful, democratic, and just world.

Yours in hopes of peace and justice,



Idelisse Malavé  
Executive Director  
Tides Foundation

## Note From the Author

Living wage is perhaps *the* winnable economic justice battle in America today. In fact, some would say it is one of the few big battles we are winning in a time of conservative control of federal and state governments, the unprecedented rise of corporate power and corporate dominance of the global economic landscape, and the increasing gap between the rich and poor.

That's not to say other economic justice battles on behalf of workers, unions and the poor aren't equally important. Still, with more than a 100 living wage victories around the country, and campaigns in the pipeline, it's clear the time for living wage has come.

Consider this statement from the Brennan Center for Justice, a contributor to this kit:

*"In the first phase over the past decade, the living wage movement has made dramatic progress. Ordinances requiring businesses that perform sub-contracted public services to pay decent wages and provide health benefits are now an established 'best practice.' For many advocates, the idea of a 'living wage' serves progressives much as 'family values' serves conservatives—as an emphasis on the core needs and values that bind our communities and that are threatened by our nation's eroding job and safety net standards."*

One of the hallmarks of the living wage movement has been the deep connection to grassroots communities. In the 10 years of living wage organizing, disparate communities have forged new coalitions informed by the grassroots perspective. Local advocacy groups, partnered with labor and other allies, supported by national resources and inspired by the stories of workers themselves, have championed the main message of living wage. This message is simple but bold and maybe even radical: *Those who work should not live in poverty.*

**"Winning Wages: A Media Kit for Successful Living Wage Strategies"** is to our knowledge the first "best practices" comprehensive resource for media and PR on living wage ever produced. It is designed for the grassroots activist in mind. Inside these pages you will find a bounty of information, experience and insight provided by activists in the field and by seasoned PR professionals serving the economic justice movement.

On a personal note, I remember growing up in a pro-labor family. My father was an active member of his union when he worked in open-pit copper mines in the deserts of southern Arizona. Often I would witness him and his co-workers talk about wages, working conditions, benefits and the power collective bargaining gave them to earn a respectable living and provide for their families. Like my dad, most of these workers were Latino.

The power of the voice of the worker still resonates in my ears and to this day informs my commitment to social justice. I've always sided with the underdog, particularly when it comes to economic justice issues. And living wage battles are all about lifting some of the most vulnerable—the working poor and people of color.

As a long-time communications professional I understand the power of the media to influence debate and affect policy. When we go forward to the media and seize the spotlight we not only grab the headlines but put a human face on the issue. We must spin our side of the story through compelling human interest drama, well-presented facts and research, effective media messages, and attention-getting media events,

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among other PR tactics.

I started the SPIN Project in 1997 to grow the capacity of grassroots activists to do more strategic and effective media advocacy. At the core of our work is the belief that communications should be central to our social justice campaigns, not viewed as an “add on” that we get to once everything else has been done. This kit offers models for doing better media work. It’s about growing capacity and media leadership.

This kit also contextualizes living wage into the broader perspective of economic justice. Although most of the material here is specific to living wage campaigns, we include additional thoughts and tactics that help us understand the deeper context. Raising wages to a decent, livable level is the goal. But ultimately it’s about much more than that. It’s about living in a society in which all share in prosperity. It’s about ending the pain and indignity of poverty. It’s about all of us reaping our investment in democracy. It’s about economic and social justice for all.

We hope this kit is a resource for you as you embark on a living wage battle, or any economic justice struggle. The insight offered here is transferable to many different kinds of fights. The time has come to spin for our lives, and for a living wage.



Robert Bray

## WHAT IS THE SPIN PROJECT?

*The SPIN Project provides technical media assistance to nonprofit public-interest organizations across the nation that want to influence debate, shape public opinion and garner positive media attention. SPIN offers public relations consulting, including comprehensive media training and intensive media strategizing and planning.*

SPIN stands for Strategic Press Information Network. We are growing the capacity of organizations to get their voices heard and do more effective media work on issues important to the future of our society. The project was created in January 1997. It is housed at the Independent Media Institute, a nonprofit organization located in San Francisco.

We believe the time is now for organizations to boldly engage the press and communicate their values and frame their issues. We want to help people make their voices heard. We seek a stronger democracy in which people can enhance the public discourse and actively participate and live to their full potential. This is what drives our work at the SPIN Project.

The SPIN Project works with a broad range of social policy, advocacy and grassroots organizations, all of which are work-

ing to strengthen both democracy and public participation. They typically focus on issues concerning civil rights, human rights, social justice and the environment. SPIN honors the multiracial, multicultural, diverse constituencies of the groups we train. We consistently work with people of a wide range of ages, sexual orientations, ethnicities and incomes.

We travel constantly, training and strategizing with organizations in the field. Annually, SPIN covers tens of thousands of miles, training hundreds of people as we travel from state to state. Our work has taken us from barrios to boardrooms, from Native American reservations to national activist conferences in major U.S. cities.

For more information contact us at:

SPIN Project  
Independent Media Institute  
77 Federal Street, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94107  
(415) 294-1420 ext. 309  
E-mail: [info@spinproject.org](mailto:info@spinproject.org)  
Visit our web site at: <http://www.spinproject.org>

# NAVIGATING THIS MEDIA KIT: BEST PRACTICES

## SECTIONS

*The kit is divided into seven sections, plus resources and contacts, so activists may pick and choose the information they need and build from the lessons of each section.*

**PART ONE:** “Introduction” (this section), sets the stage with words from the funder of this kit, the author, and a little bit about the kit itself.

**PART TWO:** “The Living Wage Big Picture,” presents an overview of living wage in the broader context of progressive economic justice; plus an updated list of living wage laws; and a piece that links living wage to our struggle to end racism and empower people of color.

**PART THREE:** “Media Basics,” provides elementary information media activists should grasp before launching major PR campaigns.

**PART FOUR:** “Framing and Messaging,” perhaps the core of the kit; focuses on honing messages, framing the issue (tactical spot framing and more in-depth framing analysis), delivering the message through effective messengers, living wage values, and the opposition.

**PART FIVE:** “Nuts and Bolts of Getting the Message Out” is a comprehensive survey of numerous PR tactics, ranging from press kits to pitching reporters to using the Internet to tracking coverage.

**PART SIX:** “Campaign Strategies” provides a media plan template for your campaign plus several case studies on typical and not-so-typical living wage fights. Media and legal strategies also covered.

**PART SEVEN:** “The Future of Living Wage” charts trends, spotlights youth, offers a case study on what to do after a campaign loss, and touches on “beyond living wage” strategies in a time of economic downturn.

**RESOURCES** points activists toward where to go for help and more information.

**CONTACTS** is a handy list of all contributors and numerous living wage and other “players.”

**ADDENDA & NOTES** is for future updates and activist notes. Note: Got information or a case study we should consider for this kit? Contact us at the SPIN Project (*previous page*).

In your hand is a kit containing “best practices” that will help you work better with the media.

## Special Notebook Format

**B**y packaging this information in a notebook we have ensured this media kit can be updated with new and additional pieces. Expect updates throughout the ongoing campaign for living wage. Also, you can customize this kit and make it a real “workbook” for your own campaign simply by adding items to the notebook.

Plus, the notebook format means you can take items out, such as the reporter intake form, the spokesperson tracking form and the many other models, and photocopy them for wider distribution and marking up.

Case studies, tip sheets, check lists, models and other pages help activists make the information real and practical for their own situations. Contributors share their experiences in the spirit of learning from others (and not reinventing the wheel!).

## What This Kit Is Not

This publication is not the living wage media “bible.” While fairly comprehensive, it’s not exhaustive—there’s always room for one more case study, one more model and example. This kit is also not the “Organizing 101” primer for living wage. Other groups have produced that kit, such as ACORN’s essential *Living Wage Campaigns—An Activist’s Guide to Building the Movement for Economic Justice* (see the *Resources* section).

This kit focuses on media. It is an activist-friendly, best practices kit that helps build a good foundation for growing your capacity for effective media.

## Who Is This Kit For, What Will It Teach You?

Engaging in progressive, proactive media work requires a significant commitment of an organization’s resources and a step up in its public profile. This is especially true for groups and activists in “campaign mode”: high-pressure, time-constrained media “war room” situations. This kit is designed to help national and grassroots organizations maximize their media potential.

This kit was prepared primarily with groups considering a living wage campaign in mind. However, its information and lessons are totally transferable to just about any social change effort.

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## ***Winning Wages: A Media Kit for Successful Living Wage Strategies* is for activists and organizations who:**

- Want to **integrate media work** into other campaign activities, including organizing, research, policy/advocacy/lobbying, fundraising and public education. We do not see media as standing outside those activities, but as integral to the overall campaign.
- Are considering a **living wage campaign**, or expanding or evolving their current living wage situation.
- Are not involved in a “classic” living wage ordinance campaign, but view media as an important component of their **broader economic justice efforts**.
- Can absorb intensified media scrutiny and responsibilities. We presume if you are embarking on significant living wage or other economic justice battles you **have the organizational infrastructure** and financial and staff resources to sustain such an effort. If not, you might want to focus on organizational development before engaging in proactive media work.
- Want to **work with the media**, not against it. Although opposition to living wage laws often comes in the form of editorial opinions by daily newspapers who want to protect their pro-business standing and advertising base—and despite the frustration this causes us—this kit is designed to give you resources and skills to engage the media in a fair and respectful manner. This kit is for those who believe in treating journalists with professional respect, and being a resource for, not an obstacle to, reporters.
- Get a “buzz” from spinning. If you understand how reporters do their jobs, how they think, what their editors demand, and how news is made, you can do a better job spinning your side’s message. **Spin is fun!**
- Have news to make. Do not waste reporters’ time with non-news. Have a story to tell and **be newsworthy**.
- Don’t have **a lot of money to spend** on expensive advertising campaigns, PR consultants, focus group/polling research and other costly activities. This does not mean those activities are not important. Indeed, they should strongly be considered and budgeted for if possible. But you won’t need a lot of money to do many of the tactics suggested in this kit. You will need some money and in several cases even significant financial resources, so plan accordingly.
- Believe media work **requires planning**. We suggest reality-based tactics here. We also present the rich range of possibilities. Ultimately, however, it is up to the activists to decide what is realistic and do-able for their campaign.
- Understand there is **no “magic silver bullet”** solution, frame, message or tactic. It is never possible to predict precisely what will work or not when it comes to PR. Even the best plans can flop. Don’t take it personally. Find what works for you and do it. ■

## Acknowledgements

**W**inning Wages: A Media Kit for Successful Living Wage Strategies is the result of years of experience and know-how from numerous leaders in the living wage movement. We are thankful to all the contributors to this kit for sharing their experiences so that others may learn. We are grateful to community activists for their perseverance and dedication.

Special thanks to Tides Foundation and its staff for making this effort possible. In particular, our deep appreciation goes to Sujin Lee, Tides Community Fellow; Ronald White, Philanthropic Services Director; Jane Lin, Philanthropic Services Assistant; Christopher Herrera, Communications Director; and Idelisse Malavé, Executive Director. Also, we offer warm gratitude to Sandra Davis, former Tides Foundation Community Fellow, who spearheaded the early stages of this project. Of course, this would not be possible without the generosity and leadership of the donors to Tides Foundation's Bridging Economic Divide Initiative. Thank you.

I would like to give special recognition to Max Toth, managing editor and project coordinator of this kit. Max, the ultimate multi-tasker, helped transform the project from a concept to something actually concrete. He kept it moving and organized and made certain the progressive mission stayed true to heart. Stephanie Syjuco expertly designed it to keep all the pieces together and accessible to activists.

This kit would not have happened without the involvement of various notable figures in the living wage movement. Jen Kern of ACORN is a pathfinder and true leader who shaped the direction of this effort immensely. Madeline Janis Aparicio of LAANE helped inspire the idea for this kit and gave it an important early boost. Contributors of case studies and essays all must be acknowledged. The talented staff of the Brennan Center played a significant role. And thanks to George Lakoff for offering his esteemed insight.

My colleagues at the SPIN Project, in particular Holly Minch, director, were always supportive and encouraging. Staff at the Independent Media Institute, in particular Don Hazen and Octavia Morgan, all pitched in.

But perhaps our greatest appreciation is offered to the low-income workers—the maids, the farm workers, the security agents, the clean-up crews, the day laborers—many of them people of color and all of whom want and deserve human dignity, a decent living wage and a way out of poverty. This kit is dedicated to them.

—Robert Bray

For more information contact us at:

### **SPIN Project**

Independent Media Institute  
77 Federal Street, 2nd Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94107

(415) 294-1420 ext. 309

E-mail: [info@spinproject.org](mailto:info@spinproject.org)

Visit our web site at: <http://www.spinproject.org>

