

TABLE FACILITATOR'S NOTES

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1. Participant Information

Participants were from the following areas:

- East Side
- Ward 3 (two participants)
- Lower Town

Also, two participants were from Minneapolis but had ties to workers in St. Paul

The main concerns that brought them here was the same for all participants: The need for a higher wage for lower-income people; the hardships such people are encountering; and the urgency of putting the wage into effect.

2. Opportunities or Challenges

The participants noted that they all had something to say about opportunities, not so much about challenges.

There was consensus that the \$15 minimum wage should be put into place as soon as possible. There was also consensus that there should be no exemptions whatsoever. In fact, there was no disagreement on any issue—One participants commented that “we’ve made your (Nic’s) job easy!”

(I find this regrettable. We learn more from people who disagree with us than those who agree, and I did not sense that the participants came away knowing much more than they did when they came. I agree with one of the later speakers that Citizens’ League could make more of an effort to bring in people with different views, such as restaurant owners. It’s a complicated issue, and all sides, ideally, should be represented.)

Some specific issues that were brought up:

- There is a lot of fear about adverse effects of a \$15 minimum wage, but it has worked elsewhere and has been shown to create few problems.
- Some business owners benefit from wages staying low.
- The increased minimum wage would benefit the economy by giving workers more money to invest in the community.

- A common scare tactic is that increased wages would result in lower benefits, such as health insurance. There was skepticism regarding whether that was, in fact, an issue.

Much of the discussion centered around application to small businesses rather than large ones. The view was that large businesses, such as Target, could handle the increase more readily than small businesses could. Participants therefore felt that the increased wage should be established immediately for large businesses, and more time given to small businesses.

3. Moving Forward

St. Paul should accelerate its schedule to conform with Minneapolis's implementation timeframe. In addition to the fairness issue—why should workers in one city make more than those across the river?—the participants felt that this could prevent people from leaving the St. Paul labor market for higher wages in Minneapolis.

One person who has a disability pointed out that there is currently an exemption for such people, and there should be none when the new wage goes into effect.

A U of M employee discussed students being treated unfairly because of low wages and that it is particularly imperative that they be included rather than exempted.

As noted, the participants believe there should be *no* exemptions and that large companies should be required to pay the increased wage immediately, small businesses over time.

The overall response: GET MOVING!

4. Summary

It was a good group in that everyone spoke up and seemed comfortable with the process. And while they all favored the minimum wage, they presented different perspectives as to why the wage is so important.

One participant asked me questions about when the results of this and related efforts would be completed and whether they would be available to the public. I could not answer the first question and tentatively answered the second (“I would assume they will be available to the public—Contact Citizens’ League.”) I suggest that you discuss the timeline in the introduction to future sessions.

On the positive side, there was great consensus and no conflict. On the negative side, there was great consensus and no conflict.