

Case Study: Domestic Workers United Research Project

Method Used

Survey

Background on Organization and Issue

Since 2000, Domestic Workers United (DWU), a community-based organization of 4000 nannies, housekeepers, and elder caregivers, has organized for power and fair labor standards, building a movement for change. In 2010, DWU's efforts culminated in a historic victory: New York became the first state in the nation to pass a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

This new law represents a momentous advance for New York's 200,000 domestic workers who have historically been excluded from state and federal labor laws. These workers will now be protected by new, basic labor standards. Despite these gains, the final version of the law did not include five critical benefits: paid sick days; paid personal days; paid vacation days; advance notice of termination; and severance pay.

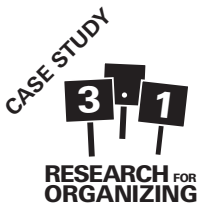
Instead of passing these five benefits into law, the New York State Legislature commissioned the NYS Department of Labor (DOL) to complete a study on the feasibility of domestic workers' collectively bargaining for these benefits. As domestic workers are currently excluded from collective-bargaining laws, DWU wanted to document the need for the inclusion of domestic workers in collective bargaining laws and explore which models of collective bargaining would function best in this industry. DWU partnered with the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project to conduct this research.

Below is a description of the DWU Collective Bargaining Research Project, based on the Participatory Action Research guiding framework (see Tool 2.1 and 2.2).

WHAT....

Were the Organizing Goals connected to this research?

- To increase workplace standards for domestic workers.
- To secure paid sick, vacation, personal days and notice of termination and severance pay for domestic workers.
- To end the exclusion of domestic workers from the State Labor Relations Act, the law that governs collective bargaining.
- To build the power of domestic workers.
- Overall questions did DWU want to answer through their research?
- What benefits are domestic workers in NYC receiving from their employers?
- How do domestic workers fare in negotiating with their employers to secure benefits?
- What challenges do domestic workers face when attempting to negotiate the terms of their employment?
- Which models of collective bargaining would enable domestic workers to gain additional workplace rights and benefits?
- What are the particular challenges domestic workers will face in collective bargaining?
- Information did DWU need to collect to answer these research questions?
- The types and amounts of benefits that domestic workers currently receive.



- The number or percentage of domestic workers in NYC that currently have the benefits that were excluded from the Bill of Rights.
- The types of agreements domestic workers have with their employers.
- Stories from domestic workers about how they negotiate with their employers to secure benefits.
- Stories from employers about how they negotiate with their domestic workers to set terms of employment.
- Models of collective bargaining in other industries that could work for privately employed domestic workers.

WHY....

Is this research useful or important for DWU?

- Internally: The research was used to educate DWU members about collective bargaining and to strengthen DWU's base building and leadership development efforts. It also gave domestic workers and employers the opportunity to tell their stories.
- Externally: It was used to influence the Department of Labor's feasibility study and to educate other elected officials and policy makers about collective bargaining for domestic workers. It was also used to collect new data about the industry.

WHO...

Are the Stakeholders in this Issue?

The stakeholders included the 200,000 domestic workers in the U.S. and millions more across the country; the employers of domestic workers; and other low-wage and excluded workers that could benefit from the gains made by domestic workers.

Is DWU trying to influence?

The New York State Legislature; the NYS Department of Labor, the NYS Governor.

HOW...

Did DWU gather information (what methods did they use)?

DWU decided that they wanted hard numbers to make the case to the DOL and legislature that domestic workers were in need of collective standards. DWU members conducted 500 surveys with domestic workers in order to collect information about the types and levels of benefits domestic workers receive and to document the ability of domestic workers to negotiate with their employers for benefits. DWU also conducted a few in depth interviews with workers and employers in order to have some additional stories that could support and flesh out the survey data.

How Research Supported DWU's Organizing Efforts

The report was released and submitted to the Department of Labor the week prior to the DOL's deadline to complete their feasibility study. DWU and CDP held a policy briefing to release the report where domestic workers, employers, elected officials and allies presented on the research findings and DWU's recommendations. When the DOL released its feasibility study and presented it to the NYS legislature, it included many of DWU's recommendations, and concluded that Domestic Workers should be included in the right to collectively bargaining.