

Ready to work wages should be at least \$20 an hour

Our city needs to set a wage floor for employers involved with SA Ready to Work at no...

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Updated May. 25, 2022 10:01 PM



The city must hold providers in the SA Ready to Work program accountable for results.

Josie Norris / San Antonio Express-News

San Antonio voters approved an opportunity that no other city in our country has created. It's the opportunity to lift thousands of families out of poverty and,

at the same time, address decades of economic inequity. [SA Ready to Work](#) was launched with much excitement earlier this month, but it will take our collective responsibility to make sure it succeeds.

In 2020, COPS/Metro proposed the concept to city of San Antonio officials of a locally funded workforce development program using redirected existing dedicated taxes, then conducted a massive get-out-the-vote campaign in support. The residents of [San Antonio responded with a resounding 77 percent](#) voter approval. With the passage of this initiative, our city officials were given a golden opportunity to change the decades-long economic narrative from that of a low-wage town to a high-skill, high-wage city.

Wages matter. Our city needs to set a wage floor for employers that want to receive publicly funded highly trained program graduates at no less than \$20 per hour.

Starting wages in our city for beginning workers [need to be better than \\$15 per hour](#). Do we really think folks will enroll in full-time education training programs when the endgame pays what some fast-food entry-level jobs pay now? During the height of the pandemic, we heard unemployed members of our institutions tell us they didn't want handouts, and that what they need is an opportunity and training for good jobs. Good jobs that pay a living wage and include benefits. The people of San Antonio expect wages that will change San Antonio's economic narrative, not sustain it.

COPS/Metro worked with Mayor Ron Nirenberg, City Council and city staff, and proposed working with [Project Quest](#), recognized as the most successful workforce development model in the country. We worked to ensure that key elements of the Quest approach were an integral part of SA Ready to Work. This included providing wraparound services for participants, emergency funds for special needs, expanded eligibility terms to make the program more inclusive, limiting the number of staff needed to manage the program, and contracting evidence-based providers with the expertise to deliver high-quality services with proven outcomes.

Now the job of the city of San Antonio, moving forward, is to hold providers accountable for results. Reporting to the public is essential; it must be transparent, timely and accurate. However, this will be difficult because the contractors who received the largest share of grants for Ready to Work services have many subcontractors.

While COPS/Metro will continue to fight for higher wages as the program's endgame, we commit to holding 500 house meetings throughout the city to spread the word about SA Ready to Work. And city staff must also commit to being flexible to make any necessary course corrections as the program evolves.

SA Ready to Work is a golden opportunity for thousands in our communities. It will take our collective support to make sure it works. COPS/Metro leaders will do our part to make it happen, but the city must do its part, too.

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