

Elevating the voice of Lyft and Uber drivers to shape policy

THE NEED

Seattle has a long history of innovative policy making to support workers across the economic spectrum—from pioneering the \$15 minimum wage for all hourly employees, to secure scheduling protections for retail and food service employees, and minimum wage protections for domestic workers. But because Uber and Lyft (referred to as Transportation Network Companies, or TNCs) classify drivers as independent contractors, these workers are not protected by Seattle’s labor standards or similar protections established by federal and state law.

Absent these basic protections, many TNC drivers experience poor working conditions such as low pay rates, a lack of transparency, and constantly changing job requirements. The City of Seattle sought to establish a minimum pay standard for Uber and Lyft drivers in Seattle that ensures they make at least the equivalent of the Seattle large employer minimum wage plus reasonable expenses.

OUR APPROACH

Over four months, a City workgroup collaborated to connect with the driver community through a variety of methods including one-on-one driver intercept interviews, roundtable discussions, focus groups, a telephone town hall, and an online survey. To understand drivers’ perspectives on their values, motivations, needs, and challenges, an equitable approach was designed that optimized the opportunity to participate while still gaining deep insights. Outreach methods centered on how best to hear from drivers without impacting their working time, particularly during peak earning hours.

THE RESULTS

Four key themes emerged from the outreach, which resulted in participation or responses from 10,447 Uber and Lyft drivers: Drivers need higher, fairer pay; Driver flexibility is valued, but is not without constraint; Driver pay is inconsistent and unpredictable; and Drivers need a safety net.

These learnings, as well as findings from a City-commissioned academic TNC-driver wage study, helped to guide the City’s pay standard legislation as well as inform rulemaking and implementation practices for other components of the Fare Share legislation related to worker protections. On September 29th, 2020, City Council unanimously passed legislation making Seattle the second City in the country to guarantee a minimum compensation threshold to drivers.

READ MORE

TNC Driver Outreach and Engagement Final Report, City of Seattle, August 2020:

<https://durkan.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2020/08/Final-Outreach-Report.pdf>

Bloomberg Cities: <https://bloombergcities.medium.com/informing-a-wage-policy-for-uber-and-lyft-drivers-with-research-on-their-lived-experiences-cb4e0eae210>

DEPARTMENT

PARTNERS

Dept. of Neighborhoods

Finance &
Administrative Services

Office of Immigrant &
Refugee Affairs

Office of Labor
Standards

PROJECT

DURATION

December 2019 - March
2020

IMPACT

Second city in the nation
to guarantee a minimum
wage.

KEY DEPARTMENT

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