



Employer Handbook

Version 1.4 – February 2022

Introduction

When workers earn wages that enable them to provide for themselves and their families, everyone benefits. Businesses experience less turnover, fewer absences, and higher productivity. They can build brand loyalty among consumers who seek to align their personal values with their spending. The physical and mental health of workers improves, impacting them, their employer, and their family.

Through the Good Wages Initiative, employers in Marion County, IN (i.e., Indianapolis) who pay good wages are certified and promoted to job seekers and consumers. The Good Wages Initiative also supports employers who seek to qualify for certification.

The basis for what constitutes a good wage comes from the work of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership and Brookings in the 2018 report *Advancing Opportunity in Central Indiana*¹, which highlights that the good wage in Central Indiana is \$18/hour with employer-sponsored health insurance.

Our Vision

The Marion County economy thrives, with businesses able to employ needed talent and workers earning sustaining wages.

Our Mission

To certify and promote employers who pay good wages, and support employers interested in achieving certification.

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/advancing-opportunity-in-central-indiana/>

Approach

The Good Wages Initiative (GWI) endeavors to maintain a certification program that provides genuine benefits to employers, speaks to the needs of lower-wage workers, and altogether increases the number of well-paying jobs in Indianapolis.

In order to do so, GWI is committed to **listening to and learning from all stakeholders**: employers, employees, job seekers, consumers, community leaders, policy-makers, and others. All stakeholders are strongly encouraged to contact us with questions, concerns, and ideas, including employers who believe that they are very close to qualifying for certification. This feedback is critical for WI's work to remain relevant and have an impact.

Central to the work of GWI is the **celebration and promotion** of employers who pay sustaining wages. We will always look for novel ways to put certified employers in the spotlight and welcome ideas from stakeholders. At the same time, GWI will **never criticize** or call out employers who do not participate. We respect that every organization is unique and honor the decisions of leaders.

As you engage with the Good Wages Initiative, know that all information GWI obtains through applications and conversations with employers is kept confidential.

Thank you for taking the time to learn about the Good Wages Initiative.

Two Opportunities

The graphic provides basic information about being a **Certified or Committed employer**. The FAQs that follow contain comprehensive details.



**See FAQs for employee groups who may be excluded from the wage analysis*

FAQs on Good Wages Certification

What are the basic qualifications for certification?

Employers pay at least \$18/hour and offer health insurance. For exempt employees, the annual salary must be at least \$37,440, which equates to 40 hours/week at \$18/hour. See additional FAQs for information about employees who may be excluded and details regarding health insurance premiums.

How was this wage amount determined?

In December 2018, Brookings, together with the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership and other community leaders, published the report *Advancing Opportunity in Central Indiana*², which contained a comprehensive analysis of the area's economic trajectory and opportunities. Included in the report was a determination that \$18/hour can be considered Central Indiana's threshold for a good wage.

What kind of employer can be certified?

Certification is open to any Marion County employer regardless of size, industry, or structure. GWI seeks to certify an array of businesses, non-profit organizations, faith institutions, and government entities.

Can any employees be exempted from the wage and health insurance requirements?

Yes. The following may be exempted:

- a. employees working less than 30 hours/week *
- b. interns (with internship no longer than 5 months)
- c. temporary, project-based employees (no more than 4 months)
- d. apprentices**
- e. new hires during an introductory period of (no more than 90 days)

Employers with additional special circumstances are strongly encouraged to talk with GWI staff.

*In keeping with the spirit of the Good Wages Initiative, an employer may not qualify for certification if, within the 12 months preceding their application, full-time positions have been eliminated and replaced by part-time positions making under \$18/hour.

**Apprentices should be part of a qualifying apprenticeship program that a) provides industry-recognized training, b) includes mentoring, and c) results in a wage of \$18+/hour upon completion.

² <https://www.brookings.edu/research/advancing-opportunity-in-central-indiana/>

Are there any specifications for the health insurance?

There are no stipulations related to premiums, deductibles, coverages, or other details of the offered health insurance plan. The only requirement is that an employer must offer all full-time-employees (i.e., those working 30 or more hours per week) group health insurance.

If our business provides benefits like a 401k, free meals, or uniforms, can we get a “credit” against the wage requirement?

While these benefits certainly have value to employees, certification is based solely on actual wages and health insurance access, consistent with GWI’s focus on employees being able to cover their basic needs.

Can a business with tipped workers participate?

Yes. The compensation for tipped workers must meet or exceed the \$18/hour threshold when wages and tips are combined.

Must contracted workers meet the wage threshold?

If an employer’s workforce is 20% or more contractors (i.e., 1099 workers), then contractor wages are considered as part of the application. The minimum hourly wage for contractors is \$19.37/hour, which factors in the additional taxes (7.56%) contractors pay when working as contractors rather than employees.

What if we have a union or other collective bargaining agreement covering employees?

Good Wages Certification is compatible with collective bargaining agreements. At a minimum, such agreements would stipulate a wage floor of at least \$18.00/hour for employees working 30+hours/week.

In keeping the spirit of the Good Wages Initiative, applications for certification will not be considered during collective bargaining negotiations or when organizing activities are underway.

Can self-employed people be certified?

Not at this time. Entities with as few as two employees may apply.

What if my business has multiple locations?

All criteria apply to employees based from a company site in Marion County, IN, regardless of where employees physically live or work. If an employer has employees based elsewhere, such employees are not considered as part of the certification review. Please see [Appendix A](#) for examples.

We have employees who make less than the threshold and refuse wage increases because they impact benefits (e.g., SNAP, student loan payments). Would this disqualify us from certification?

Employers may choose to allow such employees to exempt themselves from a wage increase voluntarily. Employers should consult with legal counsel regarding such a policy, including what documentation to obtain from employees. Such employees can be excluded from an employee’s overall wage analysis for GWI certification.

What is the certification process?

Employers complete an online application in which they provide information such as the starting wages for workers and worker groups that require special consideration and/or exemption (interns, contractors, tipped workers, etc.). A non-refundable application fee is paid at that time. Next, GWI staff reviews the application and follows up with the applicant as necessary. On occasion, a handful of very brief interviews of workers may be conducted in order to ensure the integrity of the certification. GWI’s Certification Committee provides the final decision on applications based on the recommendation of staff. All information shared with GWI is considered confidential.

What are the application deadlines?

We are now accepting applications for Certified and Committed status on a rolling basis.

What is the application fee?

The fees for initial applications and subsequent 2-year renewals are as follows.

	Major (1000+ employees)	Large (250-999 employees)	Medium (75-249 employees)	Small (< 75 employees)
For-Profit Employers	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$500	\$250
Government Agencies	\$1,000	\$500	\$250	\$100
Non-Profit & Faith Employers	\$500	\$300	\$150	\$50

How will GWI promote certified businesses?

A high priority for the GWI team is making the certification status of employers recognizable by consumers and job seekers who can then consider this when spending money and seeking work. A significant portion of GWI’s budget is for strategic marketing targeting consumers and job seekers through various channels, which may include print advertising, digital advertising, billboards, events, earned media, etc. GWI’s website and social media will showcase certified employers. GWI will also work closely with career coaches and workforce development programs to equip them to guide job seekers toward certified employers.

Additionally, GWI will provide certified employers with tools and resources to support their self-promotion. Door signage, digital emblems, and templates for incorporating one's status as Good Wages Certified in job postings, product marketing, PR statements, and more will be part of the package provided to employers by GWI.

How long does certification last?

Certifications are good for two years. Toward the end of their certification period, an employer may recertify similarly to how they initially certified. Recertifications will be issued based on the most current wage threshold adopted by GWI. The GWI team will contact employers about upcoming certification expirations and any changes to criteria.

FAQs on Committed Status

How is “Committed” different than “Certified”?

Certified employers meet wage and health insurance criteria. They have completed the certification process, whereas **Committed employers intend to become certified** and are working through a Certification Plan they designed to raise wages and expand health insurance access. Committed employers confirm that they will meet certification criteria by March 31, 2024, or soon thereafter, and apply for Certified status at that time.

How does one receive status as Good Wages Committed?

It starts with an employer identifying what compensation and benefits practices do not meet the criteria for certification, and then developing a **Certification Plan** to raise wages (and expand health insurance access, if necessary) to the required levels by March 31, 2024, or soon thereafter. See **Appendix B** for a sample Certification Plan. An employer likely has additional details about how their plan will be fulfilled. These details do not need to be shared with GWI. *Note that the \$18/hour wage threshold may change during the period of one’s Certification Plan, which would require changes to the plan so that the end of the plan results in arriving at the new threshold.*

Next, the employer must make a **public declaration** of their intent to seek certification. The approach to this declaration is up to the employers. This communication strategy could include making an announcement via an internal newsletter and on social media channels, and issuing a press release.

Lastly, the **application fee** is paid and the **online application** is completed. The application includes providing a Certification Plan that includes the wage milestones they will achieve and confirmation of intent to apply for good wage certification by March 31, 2024 or soon thereafter. All information an employer shares with GWI is considered confidential.

Committed status is good for one year. For multi-year plans, GWI staff will review with employers their progress toward the annual milestones included in their Certification Plan, and the employer will pay the renewal fee (see table below).

Is there a deadline for applications?

To be included in the inaugural group of Committed employers, applications should be submitted by Oct. 29, 2021. Committed employers must have a certification plan that positions them to be Certified by March 31, 2024 or soon thereafter.

What fees are required?

This table shows the application and renewal fees for Committed status.

	Major (1000+ employees)	Large (250-999 employees)	Medium (75-249 employees)	Small (< 75 employees)
For-Profit Employers	\$1,000	\$500	\$375	\$200
Government Agencies	\$500	\$300	\$200	\$75
Non-Profit & Faith Employers	\$250	\$150	\$100	\$50

Does GWI provide any support to employers?

GWI will host panel discussions and/or workshops featuring compensation and benefits consultants, HR leaders, and/or CFOs to offer counsel on developing plans. As they are available, GWI will provide examples of Certification Plans and limited details of the strategy for achieving the plan (scrubbed for anonymity and shared with permission). GWI staff can also provide referrals to business finance experts and strategic HR consultants who can assist with planning.

What if the wage threshold changes during my plan period?

When we are aware of the upcoming adoption of a new goowage standard for Marion County, the Good Wages Initiative will contact all Certified employers, Committed employers, and those we know pursuing either path. The Good Wages Initiative will provide details about changes to certification and timelines for employers based on how they are part of the Good Wages Initiative.

Appendix A

Examples pertaining to the location of employer and employees

Example A: Goods For Life is a business headquartered in Chicago, IL, with a second office in Indianapolis/Marion County, Indiana where inside sales and customer service are based. The Indianapolis location has 50 inside sales and customer service employees, all of whom make at least \$18/hour and have access to employer-sponsored health insurance. Forty-five employees work from home. These remote employees include individuals living in Marion County and workers living as far away as Columbus, OH and Louisville, KY.

***OUTCOME:** The Indianapolis location of Goods For Life **would qualify** for certification since the wage and health insurance requirements are met for all employees based in Indianapolis, regardless of where they live.*

Example B: Design Plus is a business located in Indianapolis. The total workforce of 20 includes 3 executives and 5 graphic designers living in Marion County, and 12 graphic design professionals living elsewhere in the United States. All employees are eligible for health insurance. The executive's compensation exceeds \$18/hour. New designers who live in Central Indiana start at \$18/hour. The starting wage for designers elsewhere in the United States is based on the cost of living of where they live. Designers in Chicago start at more than \$18/hour; designers in Salinas, KS start at less than \$18/hour.

***OUTCOME:** Design Plus **would not qualify** for certification because some employees based out of Indianapolis make less than \$18/hour. Design Plus could qualify if it made \$18/hour the lowest wage regardless of where people lived.*

Example C: Tech Inc. is based in Indianapolis and has a second office in Tyler, TX. All employees have access to employer-sponsored health insurance. Employees based out of Indianapolis are paid at least \$18/hour; those based out of Tyler are paid at least \$15/hour.

***OUTCOME:** Tech Inc.'s Indianapolis location **would qualify** for certification because all Indianapolis-based employees make at least \$18/hour. The wages of the employees based in Tyler, TX are irrelevant.*

Appendix B

Sample Certification Plan of an employer who does not yet qualify for Certified status, but who is on a path to doing so, and wishes to have Committed status while on that journey. The employer's additional details on the implementation of their plan (e.g., financial plans) do not need to be shared with GWI.

The format of the plan is discretionary. What is important for GWI are the positions where wages must change (and how much), the timeline for the changes, and a statement about how the plans have been shared.

Good Wages Initiative					
SAMPLE Certification Plan					
Employer Name		Mighty Movers			
Position(s)	Current rate (or salary)	Ending rate (or salary)	Date expecting to hit/ exceed \$18/hour	# of employees impacted	Will add health insurance access (Yes or n/a)
Junior Movers	\$15.00	\$18.00	9/30/2023	10	n/a
Office Manager	\$36,550.00	\$37,440.00	9/30/2023	1	n/a
How has the intent to raise wages been shared with employees?	Mighty Movers has communicated our intent to be a certified Good Wages Employer by announcing this at our annual summer picnic (August 30, 2021), sharing the news on our Facebook and Instagram accounts (September 1-10, 2021), and sharing in an e-blast to customers and fans (September 1, 2021)				

Change Log

9/9/2021 – Version 1.3

- a. Replaced narrative-style Certification Plan with spreadsheet-style

9/9/2021 – Version 1.2

- a. Contractor minimum corrected to \$19.38.
- b. Initial deadline for applications changed to October 29, 2021.
- c. Clarification of necessary components of Certification Plan added (App. B).
- d. Change Log added.
- e. Inconsequential edits.