

WORKERS AND COVID-19

NETGAIN PARTNERSHIP



LONG-TERM STRATEGIES ARE NECESSARY TO PROTECT OUR ESSENTIAL WORKERS

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, employers' failure to provide basic workplace protections and benefits to gig-economy contractors and employees had already undermined the financial security and health of individuals and families across the nation. As people who work in Amazon warehouses, stock grocery shelves, deliver packages, and other frontline workers confront life or death in the workplace, lack of basic protections is all the more stunning. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos' wealth, for example, has grown by \$24 billion as frontline Amazon workers protesting for protective equipment, hazard pay, and expanded sick leave have been fired in retaliation. The CARES Act provides some short-term support for essential workers at Amazon as well as other frontline companies, including Uber, Lyft, Postmates, and Instacart, but thousands are still fighting for workers compensation, health care benefits, and sick pay. In addition, many companies that did offer some hazard pay during the first months of the pandemic – including Amazon, Kroger, and Starbucks – have started to end these benefits, despite the pandemic's continued toll.

As of June, the COVID-19 pandemic has made Jeff Bezos \$35 billion richer. While Bezos's wealth skyrockets, Amazon warehouse workers make a mere \$15/hr to work during the pandemic.

WHY IT MATTERS

As billionaire executives continue to consolidate and increase their own wealth, often profiting from the pandemic, frontline workers are denied the basic rights and support needed to provide for their families and survive in our economy. Workers must be able to organize and demand a living wage, safe working conditions, and equitable workplace protections during the COVID-19 crisis and long-after. No one should have to suffer dire health consequences for working in unprotected spaces with limited pay and lack of benefits to recover from injury or hazardous exposure. Digital advocacy strategies, like organizing employee walk-outs or demanding the creation of employer generation hardship funders, are needed to craft durable protections for workers.

TOP INTERVENTIONS

COVID-19 has put the lives and the livelihood of big tech's workers and contractors in an even more precarious position, when wages and benefits for working people were already shamefully weak. Companies have an obligation to provide the equipment, benefits, and wages that ensure their employees are working in safe and secure conditions. At the most basic level, this includes providing personal protective equipment, hazard pay, and expanded sick leave for employees and contractors during the pandemic. All workers should also receive robust benefits and wages that allow them to fully support themselves and their families. Federal and local governments should also extend unemployment benefits and basic worker protections to contractors to provide them with support.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Working people are unionizing, organizing and joining together to shift power and improve their workplace. As states undergo the process of reopening businesses and lifting stay-at-home orders with no end to the pandemic in sight, this work has taken on renewed urgency.

Coworker.org invests in the digital organizing power of workers by hosting and promoting worked-organized [campaigns](#) across sectors that demand protections like hazard pay, personal protective equipment, and fair wages and paid leave. Gig workers have faced increased surveillance and weakened protections while their services have become even more indispensable, and **Gig Worker Rising** [educates and supports](#) workers of color as they take on billion dollar corporations for better wages and working conditions. Amazon's profits have skyrocketed during the pandemic, yet it continues to deny its workers fair wages and basic protections. **Awood Center** builds [East African worker power](#) to push back against Amazon's inhumane work conditions and insist that they prioritize workers' health and safety. In the face of Amazon's ever-increasing threat to our democracy and economy, **Athena Coalition** shepherds individuals affected by Amazon's [dangerous practices and organizes](#) to get solutions from the company and from public policy.

MORE INFORMATION

The [NetGain Partnership](#) is a philanthropic collaboration between the Ford Foundation, Knight Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Mozilla Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Omidyar Network and Wallace Global Fund that seeks to advance the public interest in the digital age. NetGain works hand-in-hand with the nation's leading philanthropic organizations to address our most pressing challenges at the intersection of technology and digital society. As COVID-19 rages on, NetGain is deeply concerned about the impact of the pandemic on technology and society, especially as the crisis exacerbates economic and social inequities across the world and challenges our democratic institutions. There is a significant need for funders and civil society organizations to access critical information to help them understand the current and future impacts of COVID-19 on society and the unique role that technology and the internet are playing as the crisis continues.

ABOUT NETGAIN

To learn more about NetGain's work or hear their latest briefing series on top technological challenges and harms that have emerged as a result of COVID-19 and actionable responses from civil society to address them, please visit:

<https://www.netgainpartnership.org/events/covid19/broadband-access-in-the-us>

For funders who are interested in the specific policy proposals outlined in this one-pager or have questions, please visit <https://mediademocracyfund.org/>

ABOUT MEDIA DEMOCRACY FUND

Media Democracy Fund (MDF) works at the crossroads of digital technology and social justice and is the leading convener between public interest grantees, funders and allies in the broadband fight, as well as the larger digital rights field.