



# How to Use the *Fairness Value* to Talk about Work and Labor

## WorkShift Toolkit

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### **What Is a *Value*?**

*Values* help us explain why an issue is important and why we need to work together to solve it. When we talk about values in our communications, we're connecting with the things people already care about and hope for. This makes values a compelling way to help people see that we need to make big changes and that we can.

### **What Do We Mean by *Fairness*?**

*Fairness* is a powerful value that helps build support for redesigning work systems and the economy. It focuses people on the distribution of opportunities, resources, and power and makes it easier to talk about equity without using the word “equity.” Fairness also shifts thinking toward how the economy should work and what we can do together to create change.

See our report, [Claiming Contested Values](#), for more on how *Fairness* works across issues.

# Three Powerful Variants of *Fairness*

Fair Opportunities and Resources	Fair Returns	Fair Distribution of Power
<b>Use for:</b> Calling for equitable access to opportunities and resources	<b>Use for:</b> Making the case that all workers, paid and unpaid, should benefit from their contributions	<b>Use for:</b> Challenging the outside influence of corporate power in the workplace
<b>Key idea:</b> Everyone needs access to good jobs, whatever their starting place.	<b>Key idea:</b> We all contribute. The economy should work for us in return.	<b>Key idea:</b> Workers need power when it comes to how work is designed
<b>Why it works:</b> Conveys the importance of equity without having to use the word	<b>Why it works:</b> Turns the distribution of wealth into an ethical question; increases support for unions and collective action	<b>Why it works:</b> Strengthens understanding that the economy is designed; shows how corporate profit-seeking exploits workers
Example: <i>"Fairness means everyone has opportunities for good jobs with good pay—no matter their race, zip code, or background."</i>	Example: <i>"All of us contribute—through jobs, volunteering, or caring for family and neighbors. The economy should work for us, like we work for it. Instead, it's rigged to reward a wealthy few."</i>	Example: <i>"If we believe in fairness, workers need a say in how work gets done, not just corporations and the wealthy few."</i>

## Using Fairness of Opportunity and Resources in Three Moves

STEP 1	<p><b>Lead with <i>Fairness</i></b></p> <p><b>Start with what we believe.</b> Appeal to fairness by saying everyone should have opportunities for good jobs, with the support they need, whatever their starting place.</p> <p>Example: <i>"Fairness means everyone has access to good jobs with good pay, regardless of where they started."</i></p>
STEP 2	<p><b>Explain What's Unfair</b></p> <p><b>Explain how inequities come from policy decisions and system design.</b> Point out systematic patterns of unfairness. Show how the system is designed to benefit a wealthy few.</p> <p>Example: <i>"For decades, corporations and the wealthy few have shaped policies that make it harder for some people to access opportunities, while rigging the system to make it harder for workers to organize."</i></p>

### STEP 3







#### Point to Solutions

**Show how policies and systems can create fairness.** Make it clear we can redesign our economy and workplaces through new laws and policies.

Example:

*“We need to redesign our economic policies so everyone has the fair opportunities and support they need to do well, at work and beyond.”*

### Quick Tips

-  **Don't just assert “it's unfair”**—explain what *fairness* looks like.
-  **Show how systems and policies create unfairness**—follow *Fairness* with an explanation.
-  **Choose the variant of *Fairness* strategically**—consider your focus and audience.
-  **Talk about the economy, not just workplaces**—level up to the economy to open doors for bigger changes.
-  **Include unpaid work**—caregiving and community work count as valuable contributions.
-  **Always include collective solutions**—prevent fatalism by offering a vision of what we can do together.