

THE CITY

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CAMPAIGN 2021

Dianne Morales Staff Implosion Highlights Mayoral Campaign Pay Disparities

BY ANN CHOI AND SAMANTHA MALDONADO | MAY 27, 2021, 7:27PM EDT



Mayoral candidate Dianne Morales | Ben Fract

Before they become the boss of the city's more than 320,000 municipal workers, mayoral candidates must first manage another group: their campaign staff.

Progressive Democrat Dianne Morales suffered a painful reminder of that this week with the departures of three senior staffers and an advisor.

That was followed by what unnamed Morales staff members charge was the firing of four employees elected to leadership positions in a newly formed Mayorales Union, shortly before an all-staff meeting where the union was to present demands.

Now the union has launched a work stoppage. Discontent over an allegedly toxic environment fueled the upheaval. So did pay and benefits: an analysis by THE CITY found that Morales has spent an average of a little over \$5,300 per worker or consultant.

How much candidates pay their employees varies widely, their Campaign Finance Board filings reveal.

Of the eight candidates who raised enough money to qualify to participate in this month's Democratic primary debate, Maya Wiley has spent the largest share of her total funds on staff — investing \$1.2 million, or 21% of her total funds. Eric Adams has put out the smallest percentage, less than \$400,000 out of his total of more than \$10 million, or about 3%.

Morales, who's raised the least of any major candidate, has spent 5% of her funds on staff, excluding consultants, amounting to \$245,000 through May 17. That's the second lowest total, behind Kathryn Garcia, who has spent \$197,000, or about 4% of her total funds.

Most mayoral candidates spend more on consultants than staff

Share of total funds raised spent for campaign workers or consultants as of May 17, 2021

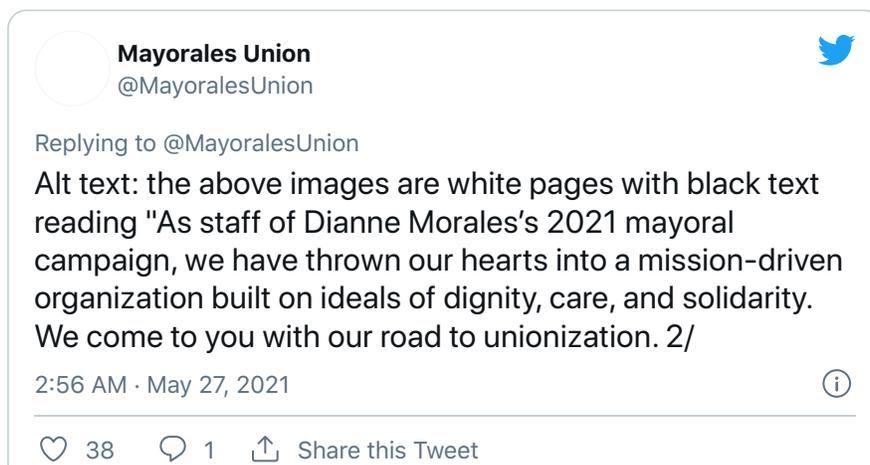
Candidate	Wages (%)	Consulting (%)	Total raised
Maya Wiley	21%	9%	\$5,879,088
Shaun Donovan	11%	15%	\$4,554,861
Scott Stringer	8%	8%	\$9,895,458
Andrew Yang	6%	10%	\$9,489,392
Dianne Morales	5%	6%	\$4,493,383
Raymond McGuire	5%	37%	\$11,736,786
Kathryn Garcia	4%	11%	\$5,579,383
Eric Adams	3%	5%	\$10,376,213

Table: Ann Choi THE CITY • Source: [NYC Campaign Finance Board](#) • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Unionization Efforts Grow

On Wednesday, anonymous Morales staff members announced an effort to unionize to secure “democratically decided leadership and structure and fair compensation.”

“Our team is ready to coordinate with Dianne as soon as she agrees to our demands and respects our workers, workers who devoted their lives and risked their livelihoods in order to build a dignified movement in New York City,” they declared via the Mayorales Union Twitter account.



In a [statement](#) Thursday that extolled her staff’s unionization, Morales said the campaign “made further adjustments” to the team.

Appearing on Inside City Hall on Spectrum News NY1 Thursday evening, Morales said, “I made some staffing decisions and staffing changes, as independent from any kind of union organizing efforts.”

She added that she’s on top of managing her staff situation and that her remaining team is hard at work. “New Yorkers understand multitasking, they understand managing crisis and dealing with different things at the same time,” she said. “This is a reflection of what I would do as mayor.”

In a smooth contrast to the rocky situation with the Morales campaign, THE CITY revealed last week that a candidate for city comptroller, Councilmember Brad Lander, [recognized a union of his campaign staff](#), part of the Campaign Workers Guild. The staffers finalized a contract.

Growing interest among campaign workers in organizing for better pay, benefits and working conditions comes as pro-worker candidates try to balance their visions for the city with the scrappy realities of mounting what are often insurgent campaigns.

“How candidates treat their workers absolutely matters, and that is especially true for candidates who espouse progressive values,” said Meg Reilly, president of Campaign Workers Guild. “The irony is not lost on us when people who work tirelessly to elect candidates who run on pro-worker platforms are not awarded the very protections their bosses advocate for.”

A statement Thursday afternoon from Morales campaign Queens borough organizer Farudh Emiel Majid called on the candidate to suspend her campaign — saying staff in Queens went without pay for three weeks and endured “racially loaded attacks” while having minimal operational support.

“I am advocating for remaining funds to be used towards sufficiently paying staff members for at least 30 days beyond their contracted end date of June 22, including staff members who have been wrongfully terminated,” Emiel Majid said.

Obscure Details

Every Democratic mayoral campaign except Ray McGuire’s is accepting public matching funds and must detail expenditures to justify receiving the taxpayer money. But how well the candidates’ employees are paid remains largely obscure.

Candidates are not required to disclose the number of staffers or the hours they worked. Some campaigns rely heavily on consulting firms, paying lump sums instead of salary.

So THE CITY asked campaigns to specify how many workers they employ. Teams working with Wiley, Adams, Morales, Donovan and Garcia provided details. McGuire, Scott Stringer and Andrew Yang did not.

The Donovan campaign paid the most per staff worker, \$37,600, followed by Wiley (\$23,600), Adams (\$19,000) and Garcia (\$18,000).

The former head of the federal Office of Management and Budget under President Barack Obama, Donovan “knows budget and payroll are more than dollars and cents,” said Jeremy Edwards, a spokesperson for the mayoral hopeful. “It’s a statement of your values.”

Unlike other campaigns that provided staff figures to THE CITY, Morales’ campaign lumped together staff and consultants, saying it has 100 combined. With \$534,000 in spending combined, that’s an average of \$5,340 per worker or consultant.

Making it harder to scrutinize how much Morales is actually paying, her

campaign routes funds through the payroll platform Gusto, which obscures the identities of those compensated and how much each made.

Unlike under federal election laws, the city does not require campaigns to submit itemized reports when they submit a lump-sum payment to a payroll company. A campaign finance watchdog said that's a concern.

"If you want to know how much a campaign is paying their employees because you care about whether they're receiving decent wages, you can't get that if they only report it to a payroll company," said Andrew Mayersohn, a researcher for the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics.

Morales' campaign depends more than any other on public dollars under the city's 8-to-1 matching program for eligible local contributions, receiving more than \$3.6 million in public funds — four times as much as her campaign got from private donors.

Seeking Benefits

Morales is also coming under criticism for not providing health benefits to campaign workers. The campaigns of Wiley, Donovan, McGuire, Garcia and Adams offer health coverage, according to spokespeople.

Paid time off, sick or vacation days, health insurance and setting caps on working hours can be integral to retaining staff but rarely offered in political campaigns, where calendars get frenzied and work hours epic as the June 22 primary approaches.

Lander's campaign staff working on his comptroller bid recently secured a contract guaranteeing paid sick leave and payments toward health insurance.

If campaigns don't offer those benefits, "What does that say about you as a candidate?" asked Reilly of the Campaign Workers Guild. "As voters, those practices should raise serious questions about the candidates asking for support."

Muddying the compensation field is the use of consultants.

McGuire, who is not beholden to the public campaign financing system, has raised nearly \$12 million in private funds. He's ponied up \$4.4 million for consulting firms, far more than the \$565,000 he's spent on staff workers.

Consultants can provide specialized expertise on media, polling, opposition research and more — at a premium price that burns through campaign cash quickly.

Na'ilah Amaru, a political strategist who has served in both consultant and staff roles on campaigns, noted that there can be "a significant pay gap" between what consultants receive and what campaign staff get.

Candidates can be faced with tough decisions between relying on consulting firms that typically pay competitive wages and benefits to employees and hiring full-time staff and paying for such compensation themselves.

"It may be the financially and ethically better decision for you to hire a firm than to hire employees for whom you can't afford to adequately pay a living wage," said Andrew Barnhill, an associate professor of NYU Wagner School of Public Service.

"If you're going to hire staff, you need to take care of them."