Frequently Asked Questions

I'm an employer, should I set my wages to match the incomes in this model?

Not necessarily. The COL tool is household-oriented, and a person's wage is generally not determined by the composition of their household. A better use of the COL tool would be to get a sense of comparison between living costs in different areas of the state. If you have success offering $x wage in one county but struggle to hire at the same wage in a different county, the COL tool might give you an idea about how to adjust the wage to make your wages more competitive for in that area.

If you are interested in data to use for setting wages, the best source is Employment and Wages by Occupation from our website. That wage data is collected directly from North Dakota employers via survey and is therefore the better source for setting wages.

My household is (x) and I live in (x) county, why is the income you estimate lower/higher than mine?

The Cost of Living Tool estimates the income needed to cover the "basic needs" of life and uses simple inputs in to calculate that income (Food, Housing, Health Care, Transport, Child Care, Other Necessities, Taxes).

Actual households may require more/less income because real goods and services may be influenced by other economic factors in a given area (e.g. supply/demand of rental properties, the competitive prices (or lack thereof) of groceries, etc.).

In general, real incomes are likely to be higher than those modeled in the Cost of Living Tool because most people do not desire to work for wages that only meet their "basic needs."

I want to see (x) household and it's not available, why are there only 24 households in the tool?

We started with 24 unique households because it allowed us to model costs rather simply and effectively for the first version of the COL tool. We plan to explore updates (including the addition of different household combinations) that would make the tool more dynamic and usable in future versions.

Why does the data disappear when I select certain filters?

In our COL Tool, we have created defined households with specific parameters. Currently, we use 24 unique households in our modeling. Some households have qualities that are not available for other households. A prime example of this is the assumption that households with older working-aged adults (51+ years) do not have children. If you have set the filters to display data for a younger working-aged adult(s) household with children and then change the age filter to 51+ years, the data will disappear because the household does not exist in our model. Even though such households do exist in real life, our assumptions are intended to keep the modeling relatively simple.

If your data disappears, either click the "Revert" icon ↺ at the top of the dashboard or reset the filters to defaults in the following order: Age: 19-51, Marital Status: Single, Working Status: 1 FT Worker, and Number of Children: 0. After the filters are reset, make your new selections following the steps in order: (1) Age, (2) Marital Status, (3) Working Status, and (4) Number of Children.

Where does the data come from?

The data used to estimate costs in the COL tool comes from secondary sources. We used Minnesota's Cost of Living Study to guide our selection of data sources, and largely replicated the sources they used. Where possible and reasonable, we adjusted national and state data to better reflect the cost differences among North Dakota counties.

How often is the data updated?

The data is updated quarterly in February, May, August, and November. Using Consumer Price Index (CPI) data, the Cost of Living estimates are adjusted to the most recent quarter's dollars (where Q1 is January-March, Q2 is April-June, Q3 is July-September, and Q4 is October-December). The Cost of Living Tool is intended to reflect current costs, so past data is not retained on our website.

How can I download the data?

You can access the data from the North Dakota Cost of Living page, under "DATASET." From here, you can download the Excel file with data by all geographic areas used in the COL model.

How do I print the dashboard?

The best way to print the dashboard is to make your filter selections and then click on the "Download" icon ⬇ at the bottom of the dashboard. You will be able to download your dashboard view in different formats. We recommend downloading as a PDF if you want to print to a letter size. For Paper Size, select "Letter" and choose the orientation that you prefer. After you download, print a copy of the PDF.

We recommend that you do not print the dashboard directly from your internet browser. The data will not display correctly.

If you want to use an image from the dashboard in a presentation, we recommend downloading as an Image. You can print from the image file as you would a PDF, too, if you prefer that method.