The FPL is meant to identify what it would cost a family of a specific size to meet its basic needs. Think of your group as a family that lives together in a household. (The size of your group will be the size of your household.) Make a list of what your basic needs are. Use the [Cost-of-Living Calculations](https://www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2017-08/teaching-tolerance-cost-of-living.pdf) sheet to record your work. Start with housing and food. What else is essential for your household? This may not be as clear-cut as you think at first. For example, is a car essential? A cell phone? Health insurance? The members of your group will have to come to agreement about what you need and what you can live without. Find out how much these essentials cost in your community. To find the cost of housing, for example, look at rental notices, keeping in mind that you need to decide how many rooms your household needs. To find the cost of food, make a shopping list of what your family would need for a week, then go to a supermarket and price the items (you should be able to do this online) You might assign different items to different people to price. When each person has gathered his or her data, reconvene. Calculate the monthly costs of basic needs for your family [or “your family group]. Write them on the sheet on which you have listed the items. Add up the monthly costs, and then multiply by 12 to find out the amount of money a family of your size would need in order to survive in your community.

Compare your group’s cost of basic needs in your community with the FPL’s poverty level for 2018. What do you notice?

Find out what the federal minimum wage is. (*Note: If students need a starting point, suggest the*[*Department of Labor*](http://www.dol.gov/whd/flsa)*site.)* Calculate the annual income of someone who works full time (40 hours a week) at a minimum-wage job. Remember to take off for income tax (use 15%). How does this annual income compare with the federal poverty rate? How does it compare with the cost of basic needs in your community?

Look back at your household’s expenses. Try making ends meet in two ways. First, what can you cut from your list? For example, could you live in a smaller apartment? Could you do without health insurance? Could you buy less expensive food? As you make the cuts, think about how your life would be without the items that you had considered basic needs. List some of the effects these cuts would have on your quality of life. Then try another approach: Figure out what hourly wage someone would need to earn in order to meet her basic needs in your community.