

Guaranteed income (GI) is recurring cash payments to a targeted, often historically disadvantaged group of people, with no strings attached. GI is meant to serve as an income floor and ensure that individuals who receive it are able to meet their minimum basic needs.¹ This also means GI would be phased out at higher income levels, differentiating GI from Universal Basic Income (UBI), which emphasizes regular cash payment to all members of a society regardless of income or need.



THE BASICS

The idea of GI is not a new one; many political philosophers since at least the 1500s have proposed a form of universal or guaranteed income as a helpful tool to create a thriving polity.² Like the housing-first model, GI is a “cash-first” model. These types of models assume that the first thing humans need to thrive is stability. Once you provide individuals with stability (which means they do not need to worry about their essential needs of shelter, food, and clean water being met), they are able to thrive. GI policies prioritize people over productivity, but also realize that people are more productive when they have stability and can plan for the future, rather than worrying about the next meal or rent payment.

MORE ON GI

Guaranteed income is not meant to replace other benefits such as Medicaid or SNAP, but rather work in concert to create a more holistic set of benefits. GI can provide stability to individuals who may go in and out of eligibility requirements for other benefits programs, which is a frequent problem we’ve witnessed Springboard residents face. Many assistance programs phase out at relatively low incomes, and many individuals are forced to choose between their assistance benefits and pursuing higher-paying jobs or taking on more hours. Engaging with residents who live in affordable housing communities in Mississippi has further illustrated the challenges residents have to navigate to access often meager benefits.

Since 2018, Springboard has been operating The Magnolia Mother’s Trust (MMT), an initiative that provides low-income Black mothers in Jackson, Mississippi, with \$1,000 a month for 12 months. Since the initial pilot in 2018, the program has grown to support hundreds of mothers in getting cash assistance; the program has been observed to increase feelings of self-worth and confidence and allows mothers to pay for unexpected expenses, buy food, and create savings. Our most recent study showed that MMT had lasting impacts on parent-child relationships and children’s mental health.

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Annette’s Story

Annette, a mother who worked in the cafeteria at her child’s school, did not get paid during the summer months when school was closed. Receiving a guaranteed income provided a base of support for her and her two children during those months. With her basic needs covered, she was also able to afford to take some college courses and work toward her elementary education degree, putting her closer to the goals she has for herself and her family.



Sherika's Story

Sherika was working as a home health aide, a job that she loved, when she had a new baby. The job included no paid leave, and she could not find affordable childcare for her newborn. The Magnolia Mother's Trust allowed her to take time off to care for her new baby and make space for her children without worrying that they would not be able to meet their basic needs.

Reimagining What's Possible

Both the Child Tax Credit and Economic Stimulus payments during the COVID-19 pandemic showed the promise of unrestricted cash. This program faced critics in the legislature, but the payments were incredibly beneficial for American households who were struggling. These experiments, now over, show the potential for cash influx to alleviate stress surrounding basic needs³

Our work and others across the country demonstrate the successful impact that GI can have on families and communities. They are a helpful guide for GI programming and increased stability for low-income families around the state and country.

For more information about Springboard to Opportunities' policy agenda, please visit springboardto.org/policy-priorities

1 Building Economic Power Through Story. Economic Security Project. <https://economicsecurityproject.org/resource/storytelling-guide/>

2 A Short History of the Basic Income Idea. Basic Income Earth Network. <https://basicincome.org/history/>

3 DeParle, J. (2021, June 2). Stimulus Checks Substantially Reduced Hardship, Study Shows. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/02/us/politics/stimulus-checks-economic-hardship.html>