



Building Economic Power Through Story:

A storytelling guide
for guaranteed income advocates



Economic
Security
Project



Guaranteed Income
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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Introduction

Dear Community members,

Everyone in the Guaranteed Income Community of Practice has a powerful story to tell. By telling our stories about the impact of a guaranteed income, we can help shape the world we want – a world in which everyone has the freedom and stability to thrive. We can spread the word about the importance of economic stability, and get people excited to join us in advancing this vision.

We all know that poverty is a failing of our systems, not our people. Through well-told narratives, we can fundamentally shift the idea that people who face financial insecurity have failed personally, and bring to life the idea that systemic racism and barriers to opportunity have been built into our economy and our laws. Because many of the inequalities we face can be traced back to harmful narratives that shape our views of who is deserving, changing those narratives can lay the groundwork for deep structural change to rebalance who receives support and who has power in our economy.

This storytelling guide, prepared specifically for the Guaranteed Income Community of Practice, is an opportunity to learn how to tell your own story and to gather stories from others in your community, so that you can be the drivers of policy change to build the world we want. Whether it is by telling your story and sharing your truth at a community event, in media coverage, or at a legislative hearing, you have the power to shape the narrative around guaranteed income. You can challenge the deeply held beliefs in our society that are responsible for the historic inequality and systemic racism that we still

grapple with today. You can help push for policies that address the needs of all Americans, rather than the wealthy few, and help build an economy that works for all of us.

This guide is ready to meet you wherever you are in your storytelling journey with the best practices, key messages, and resources you need to create a compelling story that you're comfortable sharing, one that resonates with the audiences we need to reach. We hope you are inspired by this guide and take the time to share it with others. We look forward to reading and hearing your stories as we build economic power together.

Sincerely,

Madeline Neighly

Dr. Aisha Nyandoro

Harish I. Patel



WHY STORIES MATTER FOR GUARANTEED INCOME

Stories make your message memorable and your cause compelling. They help entice your target audiences to join your efforts. The human brain is [wired for stories](#). Without stories, people are less likely to pay attention, and therefore less likely to believe in the ideas we are selling. That's why we must weave storytelling into our communications as early and often as possible.

Stories also expand our understanding of what is socially, economically, and politically possible. They can help undo the [deeply held cultural beliefs](#) that stand in the way of economic progress for our communities, including:

- Viewing poverty as a result of personal irresponsibility or moral failure; and wealth as self-made, stemming from the “bootstraps” myth;
- Tying one’s personhood or worth to productivity and financial worth;
- Racist or sexist assumptions around family structure and reproductive choices that deny respect and dignity – particularly towards women, Black and Indigenous people, and other people of color.

Advancing our movement for guaranteed income requires that we build narrative power that counters such racist tropes and harmful narratives and, instead, uplifts our values – such as agency, human dignity, resilience, security, and collective prosperity. When we tell and amplify stories that make visible broader, underlying systems - such as capitalism, racism, sexism etc. - we make it easier for people to understand the consequences of the status quo.

Storytelling can also bring our solutions to life, and make vivid the impact of these solutions on the lives of recipients. Guaranteed income recipients are the leaders who are pushing us all to reimagine what is possible by sharing their stories, truth, and courage with the world. By centering the experiences of guaranteed income recipients and really listening, we align our communications, research, advocacy and investments with what those closest to the problem are experiencing and truly need. It is crucial that guaranteed income recipients and advocates become champions of their own stories, to build new narratives and win policies so we all have access to the resources we need to live a life of dignity.

ABOUT ECONOMIC SECURITY PROJECT AND THE GUARANTEED INCOME COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Economic Security Project (ESP) advocates for ideas that build economic power for all Americans. Our team disburses grants, runs issue campaigns, develops creative interventions and research products, and convenes the field to advance our issues and turn bold ideas into reality.

The Guaranteed Income Community of Practice (GICP) convenes policy experts, advocates, culture makers, researchers, leaders, funders, practitioners, and elected officials to learn and collaborate in the maturing arena of unconditional cash programs. We believe that a guaranteed income provides solid ground on which families can build healthy lives, with the space to set goals and make unconstrained choices — an opportunity all people deserve.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is a tool to help build a storytelling culture among guaranteed income advocates, integrate stories in our everyday work, and support guaranteed income recipients in telling stories that position them as advocates and leaders of GI policies. In this guide, you will find an

overview of key messaging, best practices, resources, and checklists to prepare for ethical and effective storytelling in a variety of settings. While this guide is intended to be used as a foundational document for your storytelling practices, we invite you to adapt the guide to suit the needs of your organizations and communities.



Key Messages

Key messages are core to any successful communication, whether sharing stories or developing collateral materials. Key messages are the main points you always want to convey, regardless of your chosen platform, to inspire action. Through storytelling, you can bring key messages to life. The more a story captures our attention and engages us, the more likely we will absorb the message. As elements from our stories are repeated over time, and the values within them become common sense, we can achieve narrative change.

Below you will find messages to incorporate into your storytelling around guaranteed income. These messages are not a script to be memorized and shared verbatim, but rather provide a consistent framework to talk about the guaranteed income movement, while still honoring everyone's unique perspective and experience.

What We're Fighting For: The Values and Vision for Guaranteed Income

- **A guaranteed income is a way to plant seeds of economic opportunity for all Americans.** We must trust and respect the agency of people to decide how and on what terms they build their lives, provide for their families, and contribute to society.
- **Guaranteed income is essential for supporting work in all its forms,** including volunteering, taking care of our families, giving back to our community, focusing on self-care, or any other unrecognized labor.
- **We can, and must change how, and for whom, the economy works.** Our society is wealthy enough to ensure that each of us can make ends meet. Everyone should

reap the benefits of their labor and of their contributions to communities and the economy—especially Black, Indigenous, and immigrant communities, whose labor is often undervalued and exploited.

What We're Fighting Against: The Problem Guaranteed Income Helps Solve

- **Poverty is a failing of our systems, not our people.** We must fundamentally shift the idea that people who face financial insecurity failed because of a personal shortcoming. Systemic racism and barriers to opportunity were built into our economy and our laws.
- **Many of the inequalities we face are perpetuated by harmful narratives that shape our views of who is deserving.** We need a new economy that respects and values our differences, instead of a system that ranks us into a hierarchy of deservingness. We should equip people with the power to be the authors of their own lives.
- **Across America, too many people living on the brink are being forced to make impossible choices.** Nobody should have to choose between paying bills or putting food on the table, or between working an extra job or being able to spend time with their family.

The Solution: Why Guaranteed Income and Our Vision for a New Economy

- **A guaranteed income creates an income floor**, which is critical for strengthening community resilience, for smoothing moments of transition, and for building economic security at all times.
- **Direct, recurring, and unconditional cash payments are effective because cash can move quickly and reliably.** People who are struggling in an uncertain economy know better than anyone else where they need financial assistance, and unconditional cash allows recipients to make critical life decisions unhindered.
- **A guaranteed income offers solid pathways to opportunity.** Whereas people without guaranteed income must struggle with economic uncertainty, at danger of having their life derailed by an unexpected expense, guaranteed income recipients are in a better position to navigate that uncertainty and invest in their education, family or housing, thus building a foundation for a successful and healthy life.

Call to Action: An Economy that Works for All of Us

- **It's time for policies that address the needs of all Americans**, rather than the wealthy few. We can build an economy that works for all of us.
- **We must fix an economic system that leaves everyday people one emergency away from crisis.** Policymakers must take note of what our families are able to accomplish with the breathing room that cash affords.
- **We must shift away from focusing on individual responsibility and embrace our collective prosperity.** We can rewrite policies to ensure that we all have access to the resources we need to live a life of dignity.

Cash Policy Talking Points

The following is intended as general guidance when communicating with the public, not as a strict directive. If you have a reason to use a term that this document suggests you avoid, we encourage you to take into account the intention of the guidance and to speak to your audience in the way you think is most effective.

Language we encourage	vs. language we want to avoid
<p>Social contract</p> <p><i>This term emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between people and their government, with responsibilities and rewards shared across society.</i></p>	<p>vs. Social safety net</p> <p><i>This term only describes programs to help people experiencing hardship, which others may not view as a benefit for themselves.</i></p>
<p>Cash, guaranteed income program, policy, or intervention</p> <p><i>These terms position guaranteed income as an undertaking requiring community input, or as a specialized solution to a problem.</i></p>	<p>vs. Cash, guaranteed income support or relief</p> <p><i>These terms make cash programs seem like a temporary emergency measure, instead of a reliable system that people should always expect from their government.</i></p>
<p>Cash, guaranteed income gives families financial tools, freedom, creates opportunities, or allows people to afford things to help them work and care for loved ones</p> <p><i>These expressions preserve the agency of the person receiving cash, acknowledging and appreciating their hard work. It also names their aspirations.</i></p>	<p>vs. <u>Only</u> saying that cash, guaranteed income fights poverty</p> <p><i>We build on anti-poverty framing, adding language that speaks to shared values or identities, like work or family. Message testing shows this can help build support for programs. People may be poor, but they still consider themselves to be hardworking and family-oriented first.</i></p>
<p>A participant in a guaranteed income program</p> <p><i>This term also recognizes the agency of the individual, suggesting that they are not a passive spender, but an active author and problem solver in their lives.</i></p>	<p>vs. A recipient of guaranteed income</p> <p><i>This term may be factually correct, but it emphasizes the passive receiving of cash, not the active use of it to improve one's life.</i></p>

Key phrases to remember

Guaranteed income is **more than a check** it's...

This expression emphasizes the non-material aspects of receiving no-strings-attached cash: relief from stress, more time spent with family, confidence in being able to provide, pride in contributing to one's community, etc. Talking about cash in this way allows for more storytelling, and often makes more of an impression on listeners than just statistics.

Guaranteed income is a part of creating **an economy that works for everyone.**

This expression implies that the current system disproportionately works for the wealthy and powerful, without favoring any particular ideology that could distract from the policy conversation.

Frequently Asked Q&A

THE ECONOMIC REALITY

64% of Americans are living paycheck-to-paycheck. Working people face a tough job market, and now they no longer have the direct cash and bargaining power they could rely on during the pandemic. Meanwhile, powerful corporate monopolies have been allowed to grow in power, squeezing workers and consumers, and overriding the will of voters. The result: regular people are one emergency expense away from calamity. How do we restore economic power and stability to regular families? In part, through a simple and proven tool: cash.

WHY GUARANTEED INCOME?

Cash is the currency of urgency – it's what we use to provide food and housing for ourselves and our families, to pay for childcare, to get to and from work, to buy what we need. Cash offers the freedom to make choices, and the resources to create stability. When that cash is provided monthly, income volatility can be reduced, creating a stable foundation on which to build.

“Cash is the currency of urgency.”

IS THIS BASICALLY A UBI?

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is meant to go to everyone and provide enough money to cover all basic needs, whereas a guaranteed income is meant to establish an income floor that no one can

fall below. A guaranteed income can be implemented through the tax code through expanding existing policies like the Child Tax Credit (CTC), and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Both the CTC and EITC have state and federal versions, and limitations on payment eligibility, amount, and frequency. Guaranteed income is not meant to be a replacement for wages and can also be targeted to those who need it most. UBI proponents work hand-in-hand with guaranteed income supporters to create an economy that works for all.

WON'T GIVING PEOPLE MONEY JUST STOP THEM FROM WORKING?

In practice, people have not stopped working as a result of guaranteed income. Research on several cash transfer initiatives over decades has shown that there is no negative effect on the labor market, and in fact the most recent research out of the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED) shows participants found full-time work at [double the rate](#) of non-participants.

Additional data out of [Alaska](#), which has had a guaranteed income in the form of the Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) for over 45 years, shows that cash did not stop people from working.

And most proposals for a guaranteed income are rather modest – *could you quit your job for \$6,000 a year?*

BUT DIDN'T PEOPLE WORK LESS DURING THE PANDEMIC BECAUSE OF CHECKS THEY RECEIVED?

Dubbed the “The Great Renegotiation,” 33 million Americans *quit their jobs* since the spring of 2021. But the story doesn't end when workers quit one job—we have to look at what they go on to do.

According to [a study](#) by Washington University in St. Louis and Appalachian State University, there was zero effect on recipient employment rates during the six months of expanded CTC payments. In fact, during this time period, overall unemployment dropped 33%, from 5.9% in June 2021 to 3.9% in December 2021.

This could be attributed to the alleviation of constant financial strain, which according to [a study from SEED](#), generates increased bandwidth for goal-setting and risk-taking, which can manifest in the form of enrolling in professional training, or actively searching for a job.

According to the [Brookings Institution](#), CTC parents were 1.3x more likely to start new professional training while receiving the credit; 1.7x more likely to stop using short-term payday

loans; and twice as likely to stop selling their blood plasma.

Targeted payments like the Child Tax Credit strengthens the labor market by providing parents with the resources they need to care for their children so they can go back to work, pick up hours, and keep their jobs.

More broadly, cash rebalances power between working people and their employers, allowing them to choose to find a better job, enroll in training, or negotiate better wages and working conditions. Guaranteed income allows people to find the work they are best suited for, not drop out of the workforce altogether.

WON'T PEOPLE JUST WASTE THE MONEY ON FRIVOLOUS PURCHASES?

A great deal of research shows that participants in cash transfer programs overwhelmingly use the money on their basic needs – housing, utilities, food, unexpected medical costs or other financial emergencies. Paternalistic requirements—such as strict income, eligibility, or spending requirements, involving red tape and mountains of paperwork—only serve to dissuade potential participants. We have a disappointing history in our country of believing that people facing financial challenges can't be trusted to make their own choices, which goes against the ideals of

freedom and dignity that this country is founded upon.

“Aside from the material impact, this money buys *time*.”

Data collected from over [30 guaranteed income pilots](#) show that the majority of money was spent on retail sales, food, transportation, and housing. 91% of families with incomes under \$35k reported spending expanded [CTC checks](#) on basics, like food, rent, utilities, clothing, and education. Spending can also include celebrations, vacations, or gifts, which can make some people uncomfortable. We believe that everyone is entitled to joy; being able to afford more than just the bare necessities allows people to be fully present in their lives and in the lives of others.

Aside from the material impact, this money buys *time*. This is more than just a check, it has been demonstrated to improve [mental health outcomes](#), relieve stress, and result in more time [spent together with family](#).

IS THIS A TECH INDUSTRY IDEA?

The concept has been around as long as America. Founding Father Thomas Paine was supportive of a guaranteed income, as was Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr - who advocated for it in his final

manuscript, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community*. Johnnie Tillmon and the National Welfare Rights Organization [pushed MLK to support this idea](#), and called for a guaranteed income to support the unpaid caregiving labor of mothers. It also has historical bipartisan backers in libertarian Milton Friedman and Republican Richard Nixon.

HOW WILL WE PAY FOR IT?

Guaranteed income programs can -- and have-- been paid for in a number of possible ways. We can bring tax rates on the wealthiest and corporations to their 20th-century historical averages, and ensure that capital gains are taxed at or above income from work. For pilots, funding can come from philanthropic sources, public dollars, or a mix of both.

ISN'T THIS UNFAIRLY CHANGING THE TAX CODE TO BENEFIT THE POOR?

Our existing tax code and legal system already favors corporate interests and the wealthiest Americans, through [deductions and loopholes](#) that only they can access. Guaranteed income helps

create a tax code that works for everyone, not just for multimillionaires and billionaires.

DIDN'T CHECKS DURING THE PANDEMIC CAUSE INFLATION?

[A letter](#) signed by over 200 economists said the expanded monthly refundable CTC, at under 0.4% of GDP, was too small to meaningfully increase inflation. Long-term cost-of-living increases have more to do with [corporate pricing power](#), and the consolidated state of our economy that keeps out competition.

WITH A DIVIDED CONGRESS, HOW CAN WE PASS CASH POLICIES?

While the federal government is the biggest player in providing cash tax credits, state governments play a critical role. State legislatures can create or expand their state CTC and/or EITC amounts, or expand eligibility to ensure the biggest impact for the maximum number of families. [Over thirty states](#) have created, expanded, or demonstrated interest in creating or expanding CTC/EITC programs. These initiatives can build momentum for permanent, expanded, monthly federal programs, while making a huge difference for the people of these states

Storytelling Best Practices

Nothing is, perhaps, more powerful and moving than a compelling story. Some of the [benefits of storytelling](#) for change include:

- **Empathy:** [Scientific research](#) shows that stories help stimulate neurological centers of the brain that help us feel more care and concern for other people's feelings and experiences.
- **Cooperation:** Hearing a [character-driven story releases oxytocin](#), which has been shown to move us towards cooperation. Stories allow us to see the ways our lives are similar to each other, and encourage us to work together.
- **Showing (not telling):** Stories allow us to show vividly how guaranteed income supports essential work in all its forms, and to bring to life the challenges everyday Americans across the country are facing. Stories help us envision how the actions of policy makers will benefit our communities. Stories help convey the details of your efforts in a way that draws in your audiences and holds their attention.
- **Clarity:** Stories help cut through the noise to get at the heart of an issue. By bringing the stories of guaranteed income recipients and our collective advocacy to life, stories clarify how you approach problems and work toward solutions.
- **Memorable resonance:** Stories help us remember. When we hear powerful stories (instead of only data or statistics), our brain releases [chemicals that help us to remember what we hear](#).

STORY ELEMENTS:

A story recounts a series of events that can ultimately teach a lesson, entertain, or inspire an audience. Here are key elements that make up a story:

NARRATIVE ARC:

All stories have a narrative arc to provide structure and dictate progress. Typically this includes a beginning, where you are introduced to the main character(s), setting and problem; a middle, where conflict arises and ultimately escalates to a climax; and an end, where struggle subsides until (ideally) the main conflict is resolved (more on this below) and the main character(s) have changed in some fundamental way.

Marshall Ganz, a researcher and lecturer on organizing and leadership, translates this story arc in his “Public Narrative” framework using challenge, choice, and outcome when developing a story:

- **Challenge:** Name the challenge and why it was so difficult
- **Choice:** Explain the choice made and how it felt
- **Outcome:** Share the outcome of your choice and the lesson learned

We recognize that real-life stories do not always fit neatly into a three-part structure, nor do they necessarily have happy endings. What’s important is that you identify an arc that works best for your story and that can easily guide the audience to understand how inequalities – rooted in racism, justified by outdated economic ideas, and maintained by a wealthy few – have left us all less secure and resilient, and why guaranteed income is a solution to build economic power for all.

Here’s our recommendation on how to generate a powerful story that takes your audiences on a journey with a beginning, middle, and end.

BEGINNING

- **Set the Scene:** Who are the protagonist(s) – in other words who is the story about? What do the protagonist(s) care about? What is their hope or vision for the future? For guaranteed income stories, protagonists likely will be community members fighting for change or recipients who are striving to care for themselves, their families and communities.
- **Inciting Incident:** What happens to begin the action of the story? For example, is it the beginning of a guaranteed income cohort? The first time a recipient receives guaranteed income? Or when a recipient encounters a

crisis that shows the need for a solution like guaranteed income?

- **Goal:** What are the protagonist(s) trying to accomplish? For example, to take care of themselves or loved ones, handle basic needs, or plan for a thriving future?

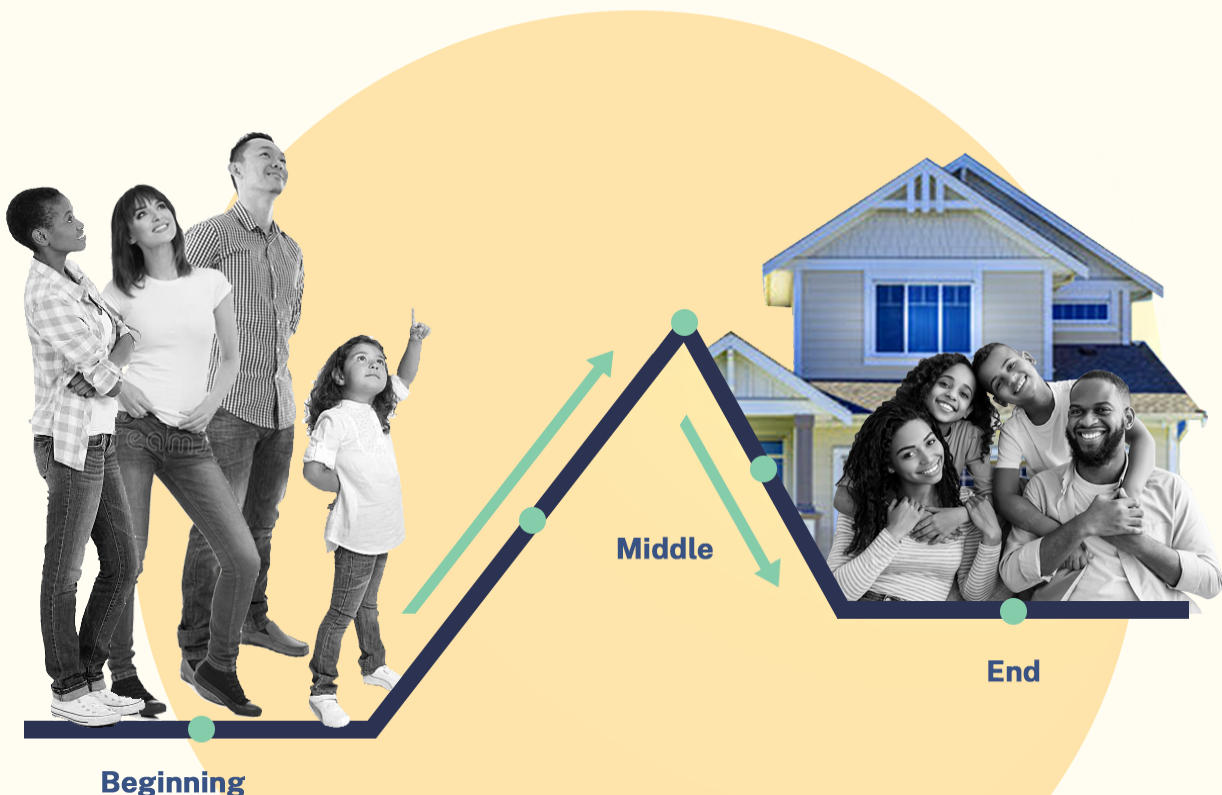
MIDDLE

- **Challenges:** Tell us about the challenges the protagonist(s) encounters as they work to accomplish their goal. Being honest about the challenges makes for a relatable story and gives others hope as they learn about efforts to overcome the challenges that many of your audiences face.

- **Role of GICP members:** How do you help to overcome the challenges? Show how an organization's work or guaranteed income pilot addressed the problem(s).

END

- **Transformation and impact:** How did guaranteed income transform members and/or the community? What was the impact or outcome of the protagonist's journey?
- **Lesson:** What did the protagonist(s) learn from the journey?
- **Action:** Make sure to end stories with a clear call to action. What do you need your audiences to do to make transformation possible for every community?



CHARACTERS:

Your characters are what move the story along and provide a vehicle for the audience to understand and view what happens. The story could have one main character or an ensemble (see “heroful stories” section on the next page). While a story can have abstract characters, such as the weather, poverty, or racism, best practice tells us that it’s best to focus your story on human characters. For example, if we make “poverty” the antagonist of our story, we can be left feeling powerless to overcome it. Instead, we should name specific actors, leaders and decision-makers who have the power to address the root causes of poverty as antagonists who have the potential to become heroes by doing the right thing – championing guaranteed income.

A compelling and effective story should show the complexity of people’s character, the range of emotions they experience, the scope of their ambitions, and the richness of their relationships. Sharing the breadth and range of people who experience poverty is a way to destigmatize people in poverty, humanize the issue, and build empathy. When filling in the details of the character, also think about what elements speak to their values. For example, you can talk about how the individual has taken care of their community or worked hard in their own way. It

should be clear very soon what those characters’ values are without you having to list them.

Finally, pay attention to the diversity of storytellers you work with in your outreach efforts to foster a more inclusive storytelling culture in your organization or community. Consider diversity not just in race or ethnicity, but in other aspects such as age, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, ability, location (rural versus urban).

Storytelling tip:

Cultivate stories from a GI recipient’s own perspective (1st person point of view) over telling the story about them (3rd person point of view).

PLOT:

The plot consists of the events that take place in the story. Whether it be dealing with unemployment, graduating from college, or opening a small business, these events challenge the characters and drive the outcome of the story. These individual stories should connect to the roots of injustice in our economic system, such as wealth in too few hands, structural racism, and a history of community disinvestment. Setting up

the problem as a threat to our values can help illustrate how a guaranteed income can be a solution.

Storytelling tip:

Show the multitude of ways that GI recipients are empowered with choice and security through unconditional cash support, and how they are the experts on what they need to successfully navigate their lives.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?

The following elements help to create compelling stories.

→ **Length and format:**

- ◆ Before sharing a particular story, find out how much time or space is available, and in what format(s) the story will be shared – a blog, video, live-testimony, rally, news story, etc. A good practice is to have storytellers prepare both a condensed and full version of their story. Attention spans are short, so in general, aim for a short story.

→ **'Heroic' stories:**

- ◆ To combat the narrative of American hyper-individualism, we want to share stories that celebrate the power of collective action and shared prosperity. There are many heroes working to realize our vision for a new economy and a just world. Recognize all the voices involved, and weave them in to demonstrate how family, community, and workers show up for each other.

→ **The right messenger for the audience:**

- ◆ Who is your audience? What do they care about? What is preventing them from supporting your efforts? An effective story considers the audience's values, understanding and motivation. Testifying at Congress to ambivalent and busy policymakers will require a different approach than sharing a story at an energetic rally of progressive activists, so identify storytellers who match the target audience.
- ◆ Most often, your audiences need to hear directly from community members or community leaders whom they trust. But if your goal is to replicate an effective lawmaking model, then your audience may

want to hear from a policy maker who champions effective legislation.

→ **World building:**

- ◆ To underscore how GICP is dedicated to building an economy that works for everyone, incorporate details of the protagonist's life and setting, whether it be their place of residence, family structure, lineage or educational background. Painting a vivid picture is key to helping people understand how our current economy is holding people back and what solutions exist, particularly for audiences who may not understand the reality of navigating public assistance or the unfair barriers to opportunity that stand in the way of too many Americans. Consider the following:
 - ◆ Be specific and authentic: Why are you sharing the story? What are specific details about the story that can bring an experience to life?
 - ◆ Be vivid and emotional: What happened? Can it be pictured in the mind's eye? How does it feel?
- ◆ Show vulnerability: Share a moment of tension or conflict and show how these moments were resolved to demonstrate the real-life difficulties of tackling a long-term and



formidable challenge. Tell us how the journey made your protagonist feel to help audiences relate emotionally, and understand your story better through human connection.

- **Systems-level thinking:** We must hold responsible the decision makers who maintain harmful systems that fail everyday Americans, rather than focusing on the behavior of those harmed by these systems. Our stories must call out systemic barriers and ideally the specific people – individuals and groups – whose action or inaction upholds the status quo.
- **A call to action:** To give your story impact, end with an actionable step or a new insight. Have a strong call to action - such as a specific policy ask - that shows how we can fix an economic system that keeps power in the hands of the wealthy few at the cost of leaving

everyday people one emergency away from crisis. You can also invite your audience to reflect, learn more and join the growing movement for guaranteed income in an accessible, tangible way.

TYPES OF STORIES

The different formats and opportunities to tell stories continue to expand everyday. Here are some ways you can think about incorporating stories around guaranteed income and cash-based programs:

- **Live storytelling events:** Live storytelling events are great opportunities to educate a diverse group of people in three to five minutes in an approachable venue. Coach GI recipients to tell their own story at a themed event such as The Moth, TedX or other locally-run series in your community. Consider hosting your own storytelling showcase featuring a selection of your most interested and engaging storytellers.
- **Panels/conferences/testimonies at briefings:** To reach policymakers, experts, and others who are not as familiar with the policy path to a guaranteed income, submit workshops and sessions about guaranteed income, economic inequality, and asset-building to convenings

and conferences that can change the narrative around guaranteed income. Invite GI recipients to speak directly at these events to frame the narrative on their own terms. GI recipients can also share their experiences at legislative hearings on specific policies.

- **Personal essays:** Support GI recipients in crafting personal essays about their experiences to submit to magazines or digital publications that feature long-form first-person narratives. Keep in mind the identity of the writer and of the target audience when selecting an ideal venue.
- **Blog posts:** Share text-based or multimedia stories as guest posts on your organization's blog or another outlet's blog. You can create a series and invite people to subscribe for more installments.
- **Publications:** Whether it be to a magazine, textbook, or anthology, consider pitching guaranteed income stories that can be preserved and contribute to our collective historic knowledge.
- **Op-eds:** Submit op-eds either written by a GI recipient, or that incorporate anecdotes about GI recipients, to promote the benefits of GI and the need for a new American economy. Seek out mainstream, national, local or niche outlets that have well-read opinion sections.

- **Documentaries:** Tell a longer, multi-layered story by following an individual or group in a GI pilot program over the course of their experience.. This could be original to your organization, or in partnership with a news outlet.
- **Podcasts:** Podcasts are an increasingly popular way for people to learn and appreciate stories. Pitch a GI recipient or GICP member to a podcast focused on human interest stories, like *This American Life*; on the economy, like *Planet Money*; or on politics or popular news, like *In the Thick* or *1A*.
- **Earned media/radio/TV interviews:** Securing TV, radio or print interviews in media can help introduce the GI movement to new audiences and provide recipients with a larger platform to share their lived experiences.
- **Social media:** Share short videos like Reels or TikToks, quote cards, illustrations and multimedia versions of a GI recipient's personal story. Adding an effective hashtag, branding and even paid ads will make it easier to track the spread and engagement with these stories over time and across channels.

A STRATEGIC STORY EXAMPLE

[Front and Center](#) is a groundbreaking series of op-eds — published by Ms. and created in partnership with the [Magnolia Mother's Trust](#) — that puts front and center the voices of Black women who are affected in tangible ways by economic policies that are too often discussed only in abstract terms.. The series highlights the success of Springboard to Opportunities' Magnolia Mother's Trust, which this year will give \$1,000 per month for 12 months to 100 families headed by Black women living in federally subsidized housing.

[This example of powerful storytelling](#) captures and engages audiences using the best practices and tips found throughout this guide.

“One day I hope we have a national program because there are so many hardworking people who are still living in poverty and they really need that extra help.”

Best Practices Used

- Incorporates systems-level thinking to show that “hard work” doesn’t always solve the financial hardships people are enduring, especially in the face of the pandemic and inflation. Catrina says, “... there are so many hardworking people who are still living in poverty and they just really need that extra help.”
- Offers a call to action: Catrina calls for a national program similar to Magnolia Mother’s Trust. “One day I hope we have a national program like the trust...”
- Only uses Catrina’s first name to protect her safety and identity.
- Uses key messages: Magnolia’s Mother’s Trust believes that a minimum wage simply does not provide enough income to support a family, and Catrina addresses this by sharing her personal experience making minimum wage and still struggling with healthcare and other financial needs.

ETHICAL AND DECOLONIZED STORYTELLING

Because stories are powerful, they have long been used to oppress marginalized communities and take away their power and their rights. An ethical and decolonized approach to storytelling

or story gathering framework championed by [Resonance Communications](#) ensures that the voices of those communities, and of all the individuals, organizations, and communities involved, are heard, respected, and centered. Reclaiming storytelling for ourselves is part of our bigger fight for justice and dignity. A decolonized storytelling framework shows that storytelling is a human craft that belongs to all of us.

Ethical storytelling is storytelling that is responsible to the storyteller, or the person whose story we are telling. Ethical stories empower people, bring communities together, and challenge the limited and negative stories that get told about immigrants, people of color, LGBTIQ+ people, women, working people, and others who have long been forced to society’s margins.

The following questions can guide you and the community in gathering and telling ethical stories through your owned media channels.

- Is the story responsible to the storyteller? Is the protagonist telling the story on their own terms? In other words, is the story being told directly by the protagonist or in their words?

- Are you suspending preconceived ideas about what you want the story to say?
- Are you asking open-ended and not leading questions?
- Do you have permission to name the protagonist and their community?
- Are you sharing a story that is sourced directly from the community you are working with/presenting to?
- Have you shared and received final approval for the story from the protagonist and others featured in the story including approval of where the story may be presented or published? In the case of minors, have we received permission from the young person's parent or guardian?
- Are you giving different stories the opportunity to be heard rather than recycling stories from people and organizations who have had more opportunity than others to be amplified?
- Is the storyteller being compensated for the time they spend to share their story?
- Will the storyteller have the opportunity to benefit from the public distribution of their story in addition to you/your organization? Can

the storyteller share the piece directly with their target audiences, use it for fundraising, publish it on their own communications channels, etc.? *Note: If this is not possible, make sure to let the storyteller know before they consent to sharing and participating.*

Lifting up community members' stories through ethical and decolonized storytelling helps challenge the harmful narratives that may exist about a community. This kind of storytelling can also help to ensure that community leaders and residents are empowered in sharing their stories.



Gathering and telling stories

Below, we've compiled tools and resources to organize and prepare guaranteed income storytellers to create a plan for different storytelling formats with intentionality and respect, and to anticipate any issues that could arise during the process or the aftermath of the experience. You can duplicate and modify the documents to fit your needs.

- [GI Recipient Story Capture and Protocol](#)
- [Setting Up a Story Bank](#)
- [Journalist Guide on a Guaranteed Income](#)
- [Checklist: Storytelling for the press](#)

GI RECIPIENT STORY CAPTURE + PROTOCOL

Instructions: Use this form to capture stories from guaranteed income recipients participating in pilots or projects.

CHECKLIST FOR GATHERING AND DISTRIBUTING STORY

Prepping for the Interview

- Ask the storyteller to sign and return the media release form. You can also do this at the interview if needed—just make sure you have consent before proceeding with the interview.
- Confirm and schedule the interview.
- If additional people are attending, confirm the subject is comfortable with the people sitting in on the call.
- Confirm stipend.
- If not providing a stipend, be clear with the individual and confirm that they still want to move forward with telling their story.
- If providing a stipend, communicate how and when that will reach the individual.

- Share storytellers bill of rights via email with the subject 2-3 days in advance, providing context (to be provided) as to why we use this framework.

Beginning the Interview

- Review the storyteller's bill of rights, and check if the individual has any questions.
- Confirm the individual is comfortable with proceeding with the interview and that sharing their story will not affect their ability to receive the guaranteed income.
- Describe Economic Security Project and the Guaranteed Income Community of Practice.
- Share why you are speaking to this person, why you are interested in their story, how the writing and approvals process works, and how their story will be used.
- Clarify whether the interview will be recorded for internal purposes or external purposes. Ask if the subject is comfortable with this.
 - If yes, thank them and proceed. If no, stop recording or call them directly.

Drafting the Story

- Request a selection of photos from the subject. Photos can feature the individual and people they mention in their interview.
- Confirm if the storyteller prefers using their full name, just their first name, or an alias.
- Share the story draft with the storyteller and provide space for edits/feedback to the story.
- Anytime the story is used—i.e. posted on a website or social media, or quoted from—notify the individual and make sure you already have their consent

Interview Questions

1. Identifier information: Name, city/zip, age, occupation, preferred gender identifier, amount of stipend received, timeframe of participation in program, etc.
 2. What are the most important roles you play in your life?
 3. What experiences and people have shaped who you are today?
 4. What do you love about your community?
 5. Who do you consider the most important people in your life? Do you have children?
6. What are their ages? What do you love about them?
 6. What are you most passionate about? What motivates or drives you?
 7. What are the challenges and opportunities you face in achieving your dream?
 8. How did you learn about the [insert name of pilot] program?
 9. How would you describe your financial situation before receiving guaranteed income?
 10. What could securing a permanent guaranteed income make possible for your community's future?
 11. What does guaranteed income make possible for you that wasn't possible before?
 12. How has guaranteed income changed your relationship with your family? How has it changed you personally?
 13. How did you/have you been able to use guaranteed income to support yourself and/or your family and improve your life?
 14. What is the most important thing you want people to know about a guaranteed income?

SETTING UP A STORY BANK

A story bank is an active database to organize the stories you've collected, so you're more prepared to incorporate them when speaking to the press, presenting at events or launching a campaign. Here are the things to consider as you set up your story bank:

1. Whose stories need telling around guaranteed income?
2. What are the themes you need to bring to life the urgency of supporting GI policies through personal stories?
3. Draft a "concept brief" to capture these key considerations that will guide the rest of your work building out the story bank. This doesn't have to be in-depth; even just a paragraph or two will suffice. It should outline ways that the stories could factor into your work.
4. Build the habit of capturing stories:
 - a. Whenever you hear a good story, even if it's just a small, incomplete one, capture it where you are. Keep a paper and pen handy, type it into your phone, or leave yourself a voicemail.
 - b. Use existing touch points to collect stories: cohort or staff meetings, texts and social media posts, and event follow-up emails and phone calls.
 - c. Familiarize your staff with what makes a good story. Storytelling is a muscle and a culture that needs to be developed across the organization. Invest in training and practice sessions.
5. Hold each other accountable for capturing and using stories as part of your daily work. Designate a storytelling captain responsible for making sure the team is hitting its story capture and telling goals, keeping the story bank organized, and ensuring the stories are compelling and are addressing the key GI themes and helping challenge misconceptions.
6. Create a system for keeping stories organized and easily accessible. It doesn't have to be complex – the more user-friendly the better. Build it with tweaking in mind, and if possible, within a system that you're already using on a daily basis. It can be a simple spreadsheet that links to stories in Google Drive (or another filing system), or you can set it up on your CRM system, Sharepoint, Dropbox, etc.

- a. Here is a [sample storybank spreadsheet](#) with categories we have proposed for general storytelling, media and events. You can modify this to make it as simple or comprehensive as you need. We recommend one person being in charge of this document to keep it updated and handy.
- b. Make sure to keep the information accurate and ask storytellers to confirm details like contact information, social media handles and any changes in their desire to be included.

JOURNALIST GUIDE ON A GUARANTEED INCOME

These tips and guidelines for journalists can help educate the media on how to cover the guaranteed income landscape and stories of guaranteed income recipients. Share this guide with editors and producers you have established friendly relationships with to support them in countering dominant narratives that stigmatize people in poverty, reinforce racial stereotypes, and undermine support for systemic solutions like a guaranteed income.

- **Trace the history of systemic injustice and connect individual stories to systemic injustice rather than blaming individuals.**
Telling the story of how our economic systems came about as a result of racism, discrimination, disinvestment, and a history of exclusion shows how economic inequality is a product of design. Show how and why systems oppress Black and brown people, women, people who don't inherit wealth, and ultimately all of us.
- **Explicitly connect racial and economic justice** to help people see that in order to address poverty, we have to tackle both.
- **Place the humanity of people at the center and focus on their agency** when referring to working people and families, and guaranteed income recipients. Show both the economic and non-economic ways people contribute to their communities.
- **Define economic bad actors by what they do, not simply who they are.** Be specific about the actions they take that hurt everyday people and our economy.
- **Speak directly to a diversity of stakeholders,** advocates, and those with lived experiences of poverty – not only decision makers or policy champions.

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- **Consider the setting when telling stories of guaranteed income recipients.** Place them in settings that present them in a powerful light, rather than as marginalized and disadvantaged people, which perpetuates stereotypes.
 - **Offer well-rounded portraits of people in poverty from every group and social background.** Show the complexity of people's characters, the range of emotions they experience, the scope of their ambitions, and the richness of their relationships. Sharing the breadth and range of people who experience poverty is a way to destigmatize people in poverty, humanize poverty, and build empathy.
 - **Ensure that the photos used with stories do not inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes** or exclude and harm communities through a limited depiction of who they are.
 - **Examine the ways guaranteed income and cash policy intersects with other systems and institutions** such as welfare programs, public health, and violence prevention. Show how GI supplements rather than supplants these programs.

CONCLUSION

Storytelling helps bring your work and research to life by allowing audiences to learn from another person's experience. The more our stories capture attention and engage our audiences, the more likely people are to join us in our belief that a guaranteed income provides solid ground on which families can build healthy lives, set goals, and make unconstrained choices—an opportunity all people deserve.

By using this guide, you will be able to share stories in a way that is ethical, engaging, and inclusive. We encourage you to refer to this guide as you begin your storytelling journeys and to reach out to press@economicsecurityproject.org if you have any questions. We want to express our gratitude to the GICP advisory committee for their support and also recognize our co-convening member organizations, Springboard Opportunities, Stanford Basic Income Lab, Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, University of Pennsylvania's Center for Guaranteed Income Research, and Asset Funders Network.



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- **Medium:** [The Power of Narrative in Economic Policy](#), by Jhumpa Bhattacharya and Anne Price, Insight Center for Community Economic Development
- [Why All Guaranteed Income is Narrative Work: Best Practices for Centering Dignity, Race, and Gender in Cash-Based Programs](#), Insight Center. December 2021
- [Comms and Storytelling Guide](#), Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, 2021
- [Building a Narrative Strategy for Economic Justice](#), BROKE Project, 2022

Downloadable Resources

- [Media Release Form](#)
- [Bill of Rights for Storytelling](#) (Adapted from [Immigrant Rising Storytellers Bills of Rights](#))
- [Storytelling Checklists For Events And Public Speaking Engagements](#)
- [Press Interview Checklist](#)

MEDIA RELEASE FORM

Instructions: Please share the form below for storytellers to sign prior to disseminating their stories across digital, media, or social platforms.

I, _____, authorize **[insert name]**, to use my stories, images, photo(s), and/or video(s) as part of its work to advocate for guaranteed income. This includes, but is not limited to, social media, website purposes, email, exhibits, news and presentations. I also understand that this material may be used in diverse settings within an unrestricted geographic area.

Full Name:

Participant Signature:

Date:

BILL OF RIGHTS FOR STORYTELLING

We believe in the power of stories to shape our future, which is why we want everyone involved to be informed about the opportunities and risks that come with storytelling. As a reminder, GICP members and GI recipients are not expected to be able to share all the key messages around GI or represent the entire field in their own story.

The Bill of Rights for Storytellers is an essential part of cultivating an ethical storytelling practice. We recommend sharing the bill of rights via email to story sharers 2-3 days prior to their interviews or events, and briefly reviewing it with them before they begin. Make sure to document in your process who has reviewed and agreed to the terms and share how you as the interviewer will also be held accountable to your agreements.

When sharing or being asked to share my story, I have the right to:

- Choose when, where, how and if to tell my story based on the request, without any negative impact on my relationship with GICP staff or participation in a guaranteed income program
- Ask for training and guidance before and after accepting invitations, referrals, etc.
 - Ask who the audience is, how the story will be used, and purpose of having my story told
 - Ask for safety and physical security in an open environment when I speak
 - Answer only questions that I am comfortable with *Note: When speaking to journalists, if you do not feel comfortable answering a specific question, you can pivot to provide a response to the significant point you want to make*
 - Use discretion in order to protect myself, my loved ones and our personal information
 - Be recognized and identified as I choose
 - Build my own brand and promote myself
 - Ask for editing rights over my story and how I am identified *Note: When speaking to journalists, you may not get access to their story before publication, but you do have the right to request a correction if you are misquoted or information is inaccurately written*
 - Share any and all aspects of my story

- Not be expected to represent experiences that are not my own

Ask that my story not be shared without my explicit consent *Note: When speaking with a reporter, it is safest to assume that anything you say in the interview could be used for the piece. Check in with a GICP member if you have questions about this.*

- Ask for fair compensation. Note: reporters are not allowed to offer compensation but organizations that are requesting your time may have an option for compensating you for your time.
- Opt out at any time

When asking people to share their stories, I promise to:

- Encourage and promote a wide spectrum of experiences and stories
- Ask about availability and comfortability to establish healthy boundaries and create room for storytellers to step away
- Frame stories from a position of strength not victimization
- Be transparent about why people are being asked to share their stories as well as any expectations and goals for their story sharing

- Request prior approval from storytellers before sharing their personal information and stories, and before referring to a third party
- Provide training in public speaking and/or interviews
- Hold others, particularly media, accountable for sharing stories with accuracy and respect for storytellers
- Assess and share any potential risks or safety concerns in advance
- Respect storytellers' right to say no or opt out at any point
- If possible, send the storyteller a draft of the story to review
- Provide a link to see the finished story upon its publication or release by our organization or the outlet
- Create ways to receive feedback and suggestions for nurturing story sharers' mental health and well being
- Provide ample support before, during, and after the story sharing process
- Encourage opportunities for healing through the story sharing process

STORYTELLING CHECKLISTS FOR EVENTS AND PUBLIC SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Prep

- Ensure speaking engagement/event participation aligns with guaranteed income narrative goals, looking at the event theme, messaging, sponsors, invited speakers, and location.
- Determine if there is an available and ready GI recipient/storyteller for the event by checking your storybank and/or consulting with relevant staff.
- Share key information for the storyteller including event location, time, presentation time available, any requests for materials if needed, links to the event website and past speakers/storytellers, timing, and other relevant details. Review the Bill of Rights for Storytellers with the individual.
- Schedule practice time with the storyteller beforehand to review their story, highlight key messaging/calls to action, confirm any changes or edits needed, and provide feedback. Determine if any research or data should be included in the story that they may want to reference.
- Coordinate any accommodations needed for the GI recipient/storyteller such as translators, transportation or childcare to participate.

After the event

- Keep track of completed events/speaking engagements in the story bank. Can add a tab linking to details.
- Share videos (if available) of the final story with the GI recipient/storyteller.
- Debrief after the story presentation/performance and assess whether the event helped further the guaranteed income platform.
- Look for opportunities to promote the story via email, website and social media.

PRESS INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

- Analyze the media request to determine whether it aligns with goals, looking at past coverage from the outlet or reporter.
- Follow up with the reporter and confirm the request's deadline, story angle, topics to discuss, distribution, length of the story etc.
- Preview for the reporter what the general ground rules are for the interview, and note that specifics for each spokesperson can be discussed once they are confirmed.
- Determine if there is an available and ready GI recipient/storyteller.
- Check out your story bank as reference to identify the best individual(s).
- Share the request with an appropriate staff member/contact.
- With the spokesperson:
 - Review the Bill of Rights for Storytellers
 - Confirm ground rules. For example: Are they comfortable inviting a reporter to their home or workplace? Are there specific topics/subjects they don't want to discuss? What other clear boundaries should be set before agreeing to be interviewed? The spokesperson should feel empowered during the interview process to decline a request or decline to answer questions they deem as inappropriate, invasive, or irrelevant to the story.
- Confirm the interviewee availability with the reporter.
- Set ground rules as articulated by the spokesperson. Will the reporter abide by these rules? If so:
- Confirm interview time, date, location, method (virtual/phone/in-person) and GI recipient/storyteller for the reporter.
- Ask for a list of questions or topics the reporter plans to discuss. You may need to talk through the piece with them to learn what kinds of questions will be asked.

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- Coordinate any accommodations needed such as translators, transportation or childcare for the GI recipient/storyteller
 - Prepare a briefing document with the questions/topics likely to be raised during the interview, for the spokesperson to review.

After the interview

- Track progress of approved media requests in the story bank. You can also indicate if the story was published and add a link if possible.
- Save reporter information in excel or press database for future reference
- Share the final story with the GI recipient/storyteller when complete.
- Debrief how the final story furthered key messaging and representation around guaranteed income.
- Look for opportunities to share the story via email, website and social media