

MAY 2024

# A Window of Opportunity to Frame the Guaranteed Income Narrative

Narrative and Messaging Guidance to Defend Guaranteed Income in Your Community

## INTRODUCTION

*This resource serves as a supplement to narrative and messaging findings conducted in 2023 to help build a broader supportive audience for guaranteed income (GI). These findings show how to engage a wider range of stakeholders by 1.) identifying groups that could be supportive or persuaded and 2.) crafting the messages and messengers that would prove most effective.*

## SUMMARY OF STATISTICAL FINDINGS

Polling in 2023 from Economic Security Project (ESP) and Mayors for a Guaranteed Income (MGI) shows that a majority of Americans support GI.

[ESP research](#) finds that 56% of voters are supportive of a GI and [MGI research](#) finds that 64% of voters are supportive of a GI.

ESP polling shows pockets of support across party lines for GI including key voting blocs:

- Strong support from Democrats at 75%.
- A majority of Independents support GI (53%) with Independents under 50 years of age showing strong support, at 70%.
- Some Republicans show openings for support, with Republicans under 50 years of age showing support at 54%, and

non-college Republicans showing support at 48%.

- Strong support from Black voters at 83%.
- Strong support from Latino voters at 74%.

## NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE

Communications should center on human storytellers who have participated in or observed the benefits of GI and can give tangible examples. In addition to participants, strong storytellers could be employers, childcare providers, physicians, etc. who can attest to the impact of GI they have seen. This reinforces the *who* of GI. It's not "program participants," it is families, grandparents, people facing medical crises, business owners, etc. A values-based message about human impact can persuade an audience; whereas leading with the policy construct,

program eligibility description, or data alone will not draw in new support. Tapping into these universal feelings of economic precarity, caring for loved ones, or a desire to improve one's life helps audiences understand and support GI.

### Tips for Building Narratives:

- Be specific about the impact. GI helped families fix a water heater, pay off a credit card bill from the pandemic, cover the cost of surgery, or, care for elderly family members.
- The GI program itself is not the story—its impact on specific people and communities is.
- Pairing stories with data creatives effective communications. Buttress personal narratives with key data points around economic stability and broader community benefits.
- Platform additional strong messengers, like non-participant validators who can speak to the benefits of GI for broader community outcomes.
- The strongest stories are local—they are about people and issues in your community and state.

**“An effective communications strategy will be hyperlocal.”**

### MESSAGING GUIDANCE

An effective communications strategy will be hyperlocal and take each state, city, and unique

audience into consideration. Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all communication strategy for GI.

### DEFINING GUARANTEED INCOME

To the broader American public, GI is still largely undefined and can be understood in diverse ways. There isn't shared clarity around the who, what, and where of GI. Communications are critical to ensure GI/anti-GI sentiment isn't exclusively partisan and can speak to families across the aisle.

- Define guaranteed income for the public before it is defined by a politically motivated opposition.
- The term “guaranteed income” engenders the most support for cash policies.
- “Guaranteed income” as a frame performs far better in research than “income floor,” “basic income,” “universal basic income,” or language around adjacent concepts, such as “unrestricted cash,” or “anti-poverty program.”

### VALUES-BASED MESSAGING THAT RESONATES

**Families Experience a Shared Sense of Economic Precarity and Lack of Economic Mobility**

- While families struggle to afford necessities, GI supports people to meet their needs.

- While family finances feel unpredictable and costs are rising, GI helps combat instability and steadies our families.
- Wages have not increased enough to cover the rising costs of everyday goods like groceries, gas, and school lunches. Guaranteed Income will help families afford what they need.

### **Guaranteed Income Promotes Interconnectedness and Benefits for the Whole Community**

This concept goes hand-in-hand with the innate understanding that family care can also require support, and is respected as necessary work for a thriving community.

- Families can remain strong and better themselves with the support of a GI.
- As parents care for children, older loved ones, or people with disabilities, GI allows families to focus on their caregiving responsibilities without fear of financial doom and economic hardship.

### **Guaranteed Income Enables Personal Advancement and Initiative**

GI can support individuals striving for a better future. Emphasizing this generates a sense of hope and optimism connected to GI.

- As young people enter the workforce, parents return to work, or people switch careers, guaranteed income helps people

attain advanced education and job certifications.

- An entrepreneur can start small businesses because of the freedom and flexibility that guaranteed income supports.
- Guaranteed income can help people finish college, care for an elderly relative, or start a business. When people have what they need, individuals can get ahead, families are stronger, and communities are resilient.

### **Specifics From Pilot Programs Help Calm Concerns and Reduce Skepticism**

Details such as: how much money people received every month, in what ways they spent the money (groceries, bills), and by what means (pre-loaded debit cards vs. cash) provide context to help people see guaranteed income as effective. Furthermore, speaking to the impacts of GI on workforce participation, and their presence in rural communities helps counter common misconceptions around guaranteed income deterring work or only being for people who live in cities.

- [Research](#) shows that the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration did not decrease workforce participation. At the end of the pilot, individuals participating in the program were employed at a higher rate than the control group.

- Pilots have successfully run in small and rural communities (ex. [Project Resilience](#) in Ulster County, NY, and [In Her Hands](#) in Terrell, Randolph, and Clay Counties in Georgia), showing that guaranteed income can help people across the country, no matter where they live.

## The Pros and Cons of Talking About the Pandemic

The fact that the financial pain experienced during the pandemic was “no one’s fault” and an “unexpected, unforeseen emergency” can be useful in helping people understand the need for GI. However, many individuals will conflate forms of GI (stimulus checks, the Child Tax Credit) with different pandemic-era programs that they may think were misused or administered poorly.

- During the pandemic the government helped people afford food, healthcare, and the basics for their kids, and avoid foreclosure and eviction. Now that help has ended, many people are again struggling to afford the basics. guaranteed income can help.

## Guaranteed Income Helps People During Unexpected Emergencies

Many people can relate to being pushed into debt or being tight on cash after an emergency, like paying for repairs when a car won't start, or affording a loved one's trip to the Emergency Room.

- People know best how to spend their own money because they know what they and their families need most. People can use their guaranteed income to help pay utility bills, medical bills, pay for child care, or get to work.

**“Communications should elevate strong messengers who can build trust and buy-in with the audience.”**

## MESSENGERS

For explaining an issue as undefined as guaranteed income, messengers are equally as critical as the message. Communications should elevate strong messengers who can build trust and buy-in with the audience.

- Ideal messengers include pilot participants, nonpolitical faith leaders, small business owners, education/healthcare leaders, well-respected community leaders, and hyper-local leaders small-town mayors such that they are not viewed as “pushing an agenda”
- A story of a non-GI participant who was skeptical about the use and benefit of GI and moved to support it is valuable: (i.e. a business owner who thought a GI would mean people didn't show up to work validates peoples' fears while telling them

a story that redeems their faith in the worker who continued to show up reliably)

'freeloaders' will commit more crimes and abuse drugs.

## ANTI-GUARANTEED INCOME TALKING POINTS

It's important to acknowledge attacks on GI when they arise. It is helpful to position these attacks as part of a broader racist political campaign, which can diffuse the intensity and specificity of the attack on "GI" as a standalone issue. The same faction propping up the fight against GI is behind fights to villainize immigrants, librarians, trans people, and even widely-supported workforce protections, such as child labor laws.

Those opposed to GI posit that GI programs:

- disincentivize work and promote increased dependency on government handouts, at the expense of individual responsibility, self-sufficiency, and economic advancement.
- would exacerbate the nation's current labor shortage, by discouraging work, and wreak economic havoc.
- is unaffordable; GI would drive up deficits and place an undue burden on hardworking taxpayers.
- is the same as universal basic income and available to everyone.
- are an experiment popping up in American cities, handing our money to urban populations at the expense of hardworking taxpayers.
- will weaken social bonds and increase social ills in turn. Without jobs, they say

## POWER-MAPPING QUESTIONS TO BUILD YOUR CAMPAIGN

Every communications challenge is unique and requires analysis. Here are suggested questions to align on when deciding how your state and/or coalition will respond to threats on GI as well as leverage communications when running a campaign.

### → Political Identity

- ◆ Are you situated in a locality where this bill does not have a chance of passing?
- ◆ Is this simply a positive opportunity for you to shore up support?
- ◆ Is this an offensive pro-GI legislative win, or a defensive strategy?

### → Base of Support

- ◆ Is your base of support wide, deep, or narrow?
- ◆ What are the pros/cons of shoring up support/outcry around an anti-GI bill in your type of locality?
- ◆ Is there a better use of your capacity towards offensive efforts?
- ◆ Do you have the support of a local base-building organization(s) that can provide turnout if you "go big"?

- ◆ Do you have access to local guaranteed income participants who have been well-trained to share their stories and can connect to local people?
  - ◆ Do you have legislators/public officials/messengers to feature in your media efforts?
  - ◆ Have you identified a spokesperson, and do you have adequate prep materials created to support that person?
- Level of Threat
- ◆ Is this a “messaging bill”– i.e. just a highly partisan bill that a legislator wants to get press around, but it has a small chance of passing?
  - ◆ Or, is this a true legislative effort that has a likelihood of passing in your state?
- Assessment of the Legislative Process
- ◆ For example, in Mississippi, an anti-GI bill was killed in committee; Do you have an understanding of what may occur in your state legislature?
  - ◆ Can you navigate and intervene in the process to decrease the likelihood of it passing?
- Infrastructure for a Successful Response
- ◆ Have you coalesced affected organizations in our area to ensure alignment?
  - ◆ Have you ensured that one organization isn’t going loud, while another has decided to stay quiet? Understanding this helps ensure

message discipline and coordination.

- ◆ If you maintain a quiet media presence, do we gain an organizing opportunity to better set ourselves up for success?

## CONCLUSION

A majority of Americans would support guaranteed income—they just don’t know it yet. Intentional narrative and messaging strategies, implemented by strong messengers are needed to reach them. By emphasizing local, human stories with tangible impacts, communicators can design narratives primed for persuasion. Messaging that speaks to universal values and real-life examples from pilot programs will allow communicators to navigate the evolving discourse surrounding GI and counter anti-GI talking points. Implementing these communications practices will help foster a more informed and supportive environment conducive to advancing guaranteed income.

## FURTHER RESOURCES:

- [Rapid Response Media training](#)
- [Giving Great Media Interviews training](#)
- [Guaranteed Income Community of Practice Resource Page](#)
- Slide Show: [A Window of Opportunity to Frame the Guaranteed Income Narrative](#)
- Point of contact for further information:
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