



Transformative Cash

A Playbook for Building a Guaranteed Income
Program for Those Experiencing Homelessness



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On Behalf Of

Denver Basic Income Project

Welcome Letter

Thank you for your interest in exploring a guaranteed income program to help community members currently experiencing homelessness. We are excited that you want to join this powerful movement and continue to demonstrate the transformative power of cash.

Many Americans are struggling with poverty, unemployment, mental health issues, addiction, and other challenges that make it extremely difficult to get back on their feet. According to the latest data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), over 770,000 Americans reported experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2024, marking a record high number and an 18% increase from 2023. A guaranteed income program aims to provide reliable cash assistance to give people the stability, time, and resources they need to secure housing, food, healthcare, employment, and other basic needs.

Studies, including our own, have shown that guaranteed income programs can effectively lift people out of homelessness and poverty when implemented thoughtfully. Cash assistance empowers recipients to make their own choices about what they need most. It treats them with dignity and trusts that they know best how to improve their situation.

We've created this playbook to share best practices and hard-earned knowledge gleaned while launching and running the Denver Basic Income Project, the first-of-its-kind pilot at scale to serve those experiencing homelessness. There were many twists and turns on our journey, and the culture we collectively built—driven by fundamental values of trust and respect—is what helped us navigate through.

We hope our learnings can help other communities launch a program that can be part of this truly life-changing work. While the pathway to building and launching an authentic, community-responsive, cash-based program to benefit our neighbors experiencing homelessness isn't easy, it is more than worth it. Get ready to be part of true transformation.

Sincerely,
The Denver Basic Income Project Team | Mark Donovan, Maria Sierra, & Gwen Battis

Acknowledgements

The Denver Basic Income Project would like to acknowledge the incredible work and commitment of our board of directors, prior task group members, former fiscal sponsor, Impact Charitable, past and present project staff, our 19 Community Based Organizations, Denver City Council Members and Mayors Hancock and Johnston, our research partner at the University of Denver Center for Housing and Homelessness Research, and supporting contractors, including Aid Kit, Mission Spark and All In Consulting. We would like to thank our funders for their critical resource investments that we were able to distribute to over 840 participants as efficiently as possible.

Finally, we would most like to thank our participants—who have shared their stories, championed the project every step of the way, and have helped change the narrative on what it means to experience homelessness. They are our purpose for existing and inspiration to continue. Many are now friends and colleagues and we will walk beside one another in propelling this work forward.

Authors

This playbook was a combined effort between Denver Basic Income Project staff and project implementation consultants. We would specifically like to recognize the contributions of Kara Penn and Benjamin Swift, from [Mission Spark](#), and Gwen Battis, our Project Manager and communications expert.

Intentions

We created this playbook in the spirit of sharing as many learnings and tools as possible, and to further the Guaranteed Income movement. Cash is transformational in the hands of people experiencing homelessness and we hope more communities will launch similar efforts. We approach this playbook as an exploration of our project's design, implementation and evaluation, while sharing the insights and resources that helped us to successfully execute. The playbook should not be construed as legal advice, and any tools or policies shared should be updated to reflect the needs of your organization or project.



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Quick Guide: Links to Tools by Section

This Quick Guide is meant to help you navigate through our library of resources and tools with ease. All links listed below point to resources, policies, toolkits, and templates created by the Denver Basic Income Project team that we felt would be most useful to you.

Note: There are several other links throughout this playbook. Any links not listed here link directly to a website or other publicly available page. This guide is meant to help you navigate through DBIP-owned documents that we have copied and in some cases, templated for you to use within your own work.

Section I. Design

- [DBIP Guiding Principles Screening Tool](#)
- [Mission / Values / Land / Culture / Agreements of Denver Basic Income Project](#)
- [Implementation Team Overview](#)
- [Advisory Board Handbook](#)
- [Thought Partner Alliance Overview](#)
- [DBIP Theory of Change](#)
- [CBO Training Manual](#)
- [Overview of Benefits Impact](#)
- [Application Instructions](#)
- [DBIP Random Sampling Process](#)
- [CBO Expected Time Commitment](#)
- [Participant Consent Form - English](#)
- [Participant Consent Form - Spanish](#)
- [CBO Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#)
- [Attachment A: Operational Guidelines](#)
- [Attachment B: Scope of Work](#)
- [Attachment C: Confidentiality Agreement](#)
- [Attachment D: Pause, Termination, and Appeal Process](#)

- [Participant Bereavement Policy](#)
- [Information Management Policy](#)
- [Grievance Reporting Policy](#)

Section II. Implementation

- [CBO Application Intake Planning Template](#)
- [DBIP Phone + Debit Card Policy: Hard Launch](#)
- [CBO Communications Toolkit](#)
- [DBIP Fact Sheet - 2022](#)
- [CBO Press Release Template](#)
- [DBIP Year One Talking Points - Internal](#)
- [Consent to Participate in Research](#)

Section III. Fundraising

- [Example Needs Statement](#)

Section IV. Research

- [DBIP Longform Survey](#)
- [DBIP Biweekly Surveys](#)
- [DBIP Interview Protocol](#)

Section V. Communications

- [Participant Storytelling Bill of Rights](#)



Introduction

About the Denver Basic Income Project

The Denver Basic Income Project serves individuals and families experiencing homelessness by examining the impact of a guaranteed income to encourage a healthier society centered around human thriving. The project has pioneered a transformative approach to tackling homelessness and poverty through direct cash transfers. We are the first and largest project at this scale in the United States studying the impact of a guaranteed income for those experiencing homelessness. We have deployed over \$10.8M to more than 840 of our unhoused neighbors.

Guaranteed income and unconditional cash transfers have been studied for decades, and the consensus is clear: a guaranteed income strategy empowers individuals, giving them the financial autonomy to enhance their living conditions and catalyze economic stability, housing security, and overall well-being ([Jain Family Institute 2021](#), 11-12). When given trust, hope, and a financial foundation, we invest in people and their ability to succeed. By providing cash with no strings attached, we support self-determination and dignity.

What is Guaranteed Income?

Guaranteed income (GI), sometimes called guaranteed basic income or basic income, is a recurring cash payment provided to individuals or households with no strings attached. Though definitions vary, the related idea of universal basic income (UBI), is both unconditional and untargeted, while guaranteed income differs in that it is usually targeted, typically by income level. While GI programs may limit transfer recipients based on certain criteria, this targeting is different from conditionality, or imposing behavioral stipulations on participants ([Jain Family Institute 2021](#), 5-8). GI programs across the country have proven to be powerful and immediate ways to reduce wealth inequality and build economies that work for everyone. For further reading, consider the following resources: [Jain Family Institute 2021](#), [Stanford Basic Income in Cities 2018](#).

Why We Created This Playbook

The team that created and launched the Denver Basic Income Project learned many lessons throughout the development and implementation of the program. Some lessons we learned the hard way, and others were informed by the unwavering generosity of those who have built guaranteed income projects before us. As the first program that specifically serves people experiencing homelessness at a scale that allows for valid and reliable research findings, we have developed specialized knowledge on partnering with the community, engaged those who have or are actively experiencing homelessness, and received feedback on what has worked and what could be improved. The purpose of this playbook is to share that knowledge to help other communities jump start their efforts.

How Will This Playbook Help?

Conceptually, providing direct cash assistance is a simple idea. Based on our direct experience, creating an effective and sustainable program takes careful planning, responsive execution, and unwavering dedication. The playbook aims to help readers get to the point of action quickly. As such, we focus on sharing our approach, lessons learned, and tools, policies and procedures that could accelerate the work.

We offer content, ideas and tools for the following five areas:

1. [Design](#)
2. [Implementation](#)
3. [Fundraising](#)
4. [Research](#)
5. [Communication](#)

We hope this playbook is of use in helping get your guaranteed income project off the ground.

For questions or inquiries about working with us as a consulting partner, please reach out to us at hello@denverbasicincomeproject.org.



Process at a Glance

We recognize that we share a lot of information and ideas within this playbook. Here is a generalized overview of the process you might engage in as you build out your guaranteed income program or project. Many of these activities and phases overlap each other, and may be iterative in nature, but this lays out the steps in a rough chronological order. Following this overview, we delve into a level of detail that we hope will help you launch.

1) Assess Community Needs and Resources

- Understand the current scope, scale and contributing factors to the issue your project will help address.
- Build on existing research and resources.
- Conduct surveys, focus groups and interviews to understand the economic status and needs of residents.
- Identify existing social support programs, resources, and potential funding sources.

2) Secure Initial Funding

- This does not need to be enough funding to fund the work, but to help support staff, contractors and community members engaged in design and feasibility work.

3) Build Authentic Partnerships

- Engage local government officials, community leaders, businesses, and nonprofits in discussions about guaranteed income.
- Form a task force or committee to oversee the implementation process and ensure diverse perspectives are represented, including participants and funders.
 - Create the Vision, Mission and Values of the program.
 - Develop a robust culture and associated commitments.
 - Identify DEI values and goals.

4) Design the Guaranteed Income Program

- Determine eligibility criteria based on income levels, age, residency, or other relevant factors.
- Decide on the amount and frequency of guaranteed income payments.
- Consider pilot programs or phased implementations to test feasibility and gather data.

5) Partner with Community-Based Organizations

- Align around project goals.
- Communicate what is expected of Community Based Organization partners.
- Establish binding agreements and policies.
- Develop a compensation model.

6) Secure Program Funding

- Explore funding options such as public-private partnerships, grants, philanthropic donations, or reallocate existing budgets.
- Establish fund development infrastructure for tracking funding and reporting.
- Create a transparent budget outlining income sources and expenses related to the guaranteed income program.

7) Develop Evaluation Approach and Systems

- Create an Evaluation Plan.
 - Process
 - Outcomes
- Monitor the program's impact on housing, poverty levels, employment rates, healthcare access, and other key metrics.
- Collect feedback from recipients and stakeholders to make adjustments and improvements as needed.
- Conduct regular evaluations and assessments of the guaranteed income program's effectiveness and sustainability.

8) Develop Outreach and Communication Strategies

- Educate the community about guaranteed income concepts, benefits, and how the program will operate.
- Use various communication channels such as social media, community meetings, and local media to reach different demographics.
- Set up systems for application, verification, and distribution of guaranteed income payments.



9) Identify Impacts to benefits

- Consider and document potential impacts to SSI and disability benefits at state and national levels.
- Prepare educational materials for potential participants so they can address any concerns about impacts to benefits.
- Proactively reach out to benefits offices to clarify and coordinate.

10) Launch and Implement

- Establish policies and procedures.
- Ensure infrastructure is in place to support program implementation.
- Determine application process.
- Determine and enact a fair selection process.
- Enroll participants.
- Distribute funds in a timely and reliable way.
- Build authentic relationships and connections with participants over time.
- Demonstrate care, respect and kindness.
 - For example, celebrate birthdays with a card or note; create opportunities for participants to gather together with staff, and more.
- Troubleshoot problems participants are experiencing and serve as a liaison between Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and participants as needed.

11) Continue or Scale Beyond the Initial Time Period

- Consider expanding the program based on positive outcomes, additional funding opportunities, and community support.
- Provide support services.
 - Offer referrals to financial literacy training, job placement assistance, healthcare resources, and other support services to complement guaranteed income payments.
 - Collaborate with local organizations and agencies to address specific needs within the community.
- Advocate for policy changes
 - Use data and success stories from the guaranteed income program to advocate for broader policy changes at the local, regional, or national levels.
 - Build alliances with other guaranteed income advocates and organizations to amplify advocacy efforts.

12) Celebrate Achievements and Foster Community Engagement

- Recognize and celebrate milestones and successes of the guaranteed income program.
- Continue engaging with the community through feedback mechanisms, town hall meetings, and participatory decision-making processes.

Think Big

The Denver Basic Income Project (DBIP) stands as a testament to the transformative power of bold, innovative thinking. As the largest guaranteed income (GI) pilot in the United States targeting individuals experiencing homelessness, we have proven that ambitious goals yield impactful results.

Stats We're Proud Of

- Since its inception, DBIP has distributed **\$10.8 million** to over **840 individuals and families experiencing homelessness** in Denver.
- While participation in the project's research component is not mandatory, nearly **92% of program participants opted to join the study**. This exceptionally high opt-in rate is an initial indication that the trust is placed in participants to make this choice leads to reciprocal trust and an opportunity for positive engagement.
- After just ten months in the project, approximately **45% of all participants found housing** in the form of a home or apartment they rent or own.

But our story doesn't end with these successes. These achievements are only the beginning of what's possible. Guaranteed income challenges conventional approaches to poverty and homelessness, inspiring systemic change. We encourage other pilots to dream boldly, design programs uniquely suited to their communities, and pursue ambitious, transformative goals.

Guaranteed income is more than financial support—it's a belief in human dignity and potential. **When we think big, the possibilities are limitless.**



Section I. Design

Overview of Our Approach to Design

We applied an iterative approach to the design of the Denver Basic Income Project, beginning first with developing authentic relationships, discovering more about the infrastructure and supports to those experiencing homelessness in Denver, uncovering useful data about homelessness that could inform the project, and looking to other guaranteed income projects and research to inform our efforts.

We can't stress enough how important it is to include individuals who have strong expertise and experience working with the local population of people experiencing homelessness. They should have firsthand knowledge of the barriers faced, local landscape, and services available. This should include people who provide services and also those with lived experience of being homeless in the specific community for which your program is designed.

Setting the Foundations

At the outset, it was important to understand the community's current situation and resources.

The idea for the Denver Basic Income Project was conceived in 2020, early in the COVID-19 pandemic, and the project was founded in 2021. The project started by taking stock of the existing state of homelessness in Denver, what the contributing factors were, and gathering supportive resources. This meant looking at previous studies and assessing existing income and homelessness data in the Denver area, as well as connecting closely with those individuals who had deep knowledge of the issue of homelessness in Denver.

We found that in Denver there were specific contributors to the growing issue of homelessness—certainly the pandemic, but also a recent closure of a network of drug treatment facilities, rapidly increasing housing costs, a lack of affordable housing, a minimum wage not keeping pace with the cost of living, and more.

During this stage, we also established our legal status and fiscal sponsorship model. We vetted several potential fiscal sponsors and chose a Denver-based organization, Impact Charitable, for their experience in supporting cash-based programs in other domains.

This initial stage was also formative in determining key aspects of the program and program administration. During this stage, we built the administrative team, debated the program's launch timeline, and weighed unconditional participant selection against the risks of providing cash to individuals facing substance use or severe mental health challenges. Please review our [inclusion criteria brief](#) for more information. We also considered questions of how the program would be led (community vs. expert led— we chose a hybrid model).

As you might imagine, these decisions were difficult to make, and required lots of input. While the project team was eager to act quickly to support those facing homelessness, we recognized the importance of taking the time to be thoughtful, informed, and transparent. It was essential to fully understand the rationale behind our choices, even knowing that not everyone would agree with them. We trusted and invested in the process to ensure our decisions aligned with the project's mission and values. When we got it wrong, we took accountability, learned from the experience, and adjusted based on new insights and feedback.

In the words of Maya Angelou, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.”

It was also during this first stage of the program that we established a relationship with the [University of Denver Center for Housing and Homelessness Research](#), to ensure the design of the program would be informed by critical evaluation questions that could help further the knowledge around the effectiveness of guaranteed income for those experiencing homelessness.

Denver Basic Income Project established two rounds of iteration before committing to our “hard launch” at scale. The purpose of these two “soft launch” pilots was to assess the effectiveness of implementation and our approach. The first pilot study cohort (SL 1.0) was designed to test the program's structure and assumptions. From August 2021 to July 2022, 11 individuals received 12 monthly payments in partnership with two community-based organizations. Participants reported numerous positive outcomes, including meeting basic needs, covering higher costs, reducing stress, gaining choice and freedom, improving family dynamics, restoring faith, and investing in themselves and their families.



Based on SL 1.0 implementation findings, leadership decided that the project would benefit from additional time to strengthen the organizational structure, add additional capacity, and better engage those with lived experience in the decision-making and design process. From October 2021 to June 2022, the project focused on building additional capacity and applying the lessons learned from SL 1.0.

A Task Group was established with significant responsibilities to advise, design, and oversee the project's implementation. This group included diverse voices, such as individuals with lived experience of homelessness, leaders from communities of color most affected by homelessness, and representatives from community-based organizations serving unhoused individuals. The group developed supportive agreements, defined organizational culture, and worked on the structure and governance model for both short- and long-term goals. A project implementation plan was created, and meetings began with a reading of the project's mission, vision, values, culture statements, and a land acknowledgment to ensure a shared focus on our commitments. These statements are outlined later in this section.

In July 2022, the second pilot study cohort (SL 2.0) launched with 28 participants and eight partner organizations. Monthly payments were made to three groups (\$6,500 upfront, then \$500 thereafter; \$1,000 per month) and continued through June 2023. SL 2.0 built on learnings from SL 1.0, enhancing partner capacity and programming. [Qualitative findings](#) showed improvements in housing access, motivation, financial security, thriving, and decision-making agency. Authentic partnerships were key to success, with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) providing critical community knowledge, housing pathways, and support during application and enrollment. We will elaborate on the program's support for CBOs later in the playbook.

Guiding Principles, Centering People with Lived Experience, and Defining Culture

A pivotal decision point arose for the project between Soft Launch 1.0 before proceeding to 2.0. As the advisory board and fiscal sponsor were established, the group confronted challenging questions about white supremacy in program design, including how to integrate lived experience into decision-making and create a safe, supportive culture.

These were difficult questions to work through, but we intentionally decided to slow the project down to ensure we addressed them.

We recognize that discussing the systemic dynamics contributing to homelessness can be uncomfortable, but we strongly encourage collaborative efforts to engage in these conversations with intention. Bringing in a facilitator can create a safe space for these discussions, ensuring they are authentic, uphold human dignity, and avoid being performative. While challenging, these conversations had a profound impact on our project, its community, participants, and working culture.

Over 30 interviews were conducted by a third party to gather input from many perspectives, safely and confidentially. Individuals interviewed included partner CBOs, staff members, board members, initial participants, funders, and more. This work formed the foundations for the culture the advisory board identified as critical to project success.

This required those eager to push ahead with implementation and the program's hard launch to slow down and ensure the work was grounded in equity, centered on human dignity and respect, and guided by a clear, shared understanding of how we would collaborate to deliver the program.

This work was critical to the next stages of intense development and implementation of the program, the Hard Launch. Our guiding principles saw us through the making of many decisions, informed policies and procedures, and the relationships we built. They served as a way of communicating to others what the project was about and what we stood for, and attracted like-minded individuals to the work.

During this process, we also thought a lot about the language we use. We use terms like "people experiencing homelessness," or "individuals who are unhoused" instead of "the unhoused" or "the homeless." It is a more person-centered and respectful way of addressing people experiencing homelessness. This phrasing emphasizes their humanity and avoids reducing them to their housing status. It reflects a conscious shift in language to focus on people first, rather than defining them by their circumstances.

We invite readers to review all of our [guiding principles](#) for the project and learn more about our shared values and culture commitments.

You can also view the [screening tool](#) we used to ensure we kept in alignment with these principles.



Serving People Experiencing Homelessness

The Denver Basic Income Project is unique in that it focuses on benefiting individuals experiencing homelessness. We wanted to be knowledgeable and sensitive to the unique challenges unhoused individuals face, and the unique capabilities they possess. Based on research, consulting those with lived experience, and the input of service providers to Denver's unhoused community, as well as our implementation experience, here is what we came to understand.

Challenges to Navigate

Some of the specific challenges of serving individuals experiencing homelessness include:

Access to Resources: Many individuals who are unhoused face barriers in accessing essential services like healthcare, mental health support, substance abuse treatment, and social services. These barriers may include lack of transportation, limited availability of services, or a lack of awareness about where to seek help.

“One of the biggest struggles for me was finding like a bathroom or someplace to wash up....It took a toll on me emotionally.”

- Jolene, DBIP Participant

Connectivity: The ability to access services or supportive relationships through a mobile phone with an adequate plan, as well as affording transportation to reach services, employment, and housing options, affects many people experiencing homelessness and limits their ability to leverage the resources and connections they need.

Mental Health Issues: A significant number of individuals experiencing homelessness struggle with mental health disorders, complicating their ability to seek and maintain housing or effectively use available services. The stigma surrounding mental illness further exacerbates these challenges.

Substance Abuse: Substance use disorders affect many individuals who are unhoused, often creating a cycle of addiction or relapse. This can make it difficult for them to engage with support services or achieve stable housing.

Documentation and Identification: Many people who are unhoused lack proper identification, which is often necessary to access services, secure housing, or apply for jobs.

Without ID, it becomes difficult to navigate bureaucratic processes.

Loss of Trust: Individuals experiencing homelessness often have negative experiences with authorities, social services, or the healthcare system, leading to mistrust. This can make them hesitant to seek help or engage with available services.

Housing Shortages: In Denver, there is simply not enough affordable housing or shelter space to meet the demand. Even when individuals are ready to transition out of homelessness, the lack of available housing remains a significant obstacle.

Legal and Bureaucratic Barriers: Navigating legal and bureaucratic systems can be overwhelming for individuals without stable housing. Issues like criminal records, fines, or child custody matters can complicate their ability to secure necessary services or housing.

Health Issues: People who are unhoused often suffer from chronic health problems worsened by their living conditions. Without stable housing, managing these issues becomes challenging, leading to further deterioration of both physical and mental health.

Safety Concerns: Individuals who are unhoused face a higher risk of experiencing violence and other safety threats, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

Lack of Coordination: Service providers often operate in silos, resulting in fragmented and inefficient services. This lack of coordination makes it harder for individuals experiencing homelessness to access comprehensive support.

Stigma and Discrimination: Individuals experiencing homelessness frequently face stigma and discrimination, both from society at large and, at times, from service providers. This can alienate them and deter them from seeking assistance, impacting their sense of dignity and self-worth.

Banking and Access to Funds: Many people who are unhoused are unbanked and lack secure ways to store cash or save money. Carrying cash becomes a safety risk, compounding their financial instability.

Cultural and Language Barriers: For individuals experiencing homelessness from diverse backgrounds, cultural differences and language barriers can hinder access to services. Service providers may not always be equipped to meet their unique needs.

Policy and Funding Limitations: Services for people who are unhoused are often underfunded and subject to political or policy changes. This leads to inconsistent support, making it difficult for individuals to receive continuous assistance.





Strengths to Build On

Individuals experiencing homelessness often develop a range of unique skills and capabilities as a result of their experiences. While homelessness is a challenging situation, the resilience and resourcefulness it fosters can lead to valuable strengths:

Resilience: Living without stable housing requires incredible mental and emotional strength. People who are unhoused often develop a strong sense of resilience, allowing them to adapt and persevere in the face of adversity.

Resourcefulness: Individuals who are unhoused frequently become highly resourceful, finding creative solutions to meet their basic needs with limited resources. This can include skills in repurposing materials, identifying free or low-cost services, and navigating complex social systems.

Survival Skills: The ability to survive in harsh and unpredictable environments requires a unique set of skills, such as finding safe places to sleep, securing food and water, and protecting oneself from harm. These survival skills demonstrate quick thinking and adaptability.

Empathy and Compassion: Many individuals experiencing homelessness develop deep empathy and compassion, both for others in similar situations and for people in need more generally. Their experiences often make them more understanding and nonjudgmental.

Community Building: Despite the transient nature of homelessness, many individuals who are unhoused excel at building and maintaining supportive communities. They often share resources, provide emotional support, and look out for one another.



After losing his job due to a work-related accident, DBIP participant Mark Gaskin found himself homeless and in a dire mental state. With the help of program funds, Mark was able to pay off his car and purchase a trailer.

“DBIP has made life a whole lot easier,” he says, acknowledging that although life isn’t perfect, it is far better than it was before the program’s assistance.

Negotiation and Communication Skills: Navigating life without stable housing often involves interacting with a wide range of people, including service providers, law enforcement, others experiencing homelessness, and the public. This requires strong communication and negotiation skills.

Adaptability: The ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances is a key survival skill for people who are unhoused. This adaptability can be an asset in various work environments, particularly those that require flexibility and quick problem-solving.

Time Management: Individuals experiencing homelessness often need to manage their time effectively to access services, secure food and shelter, and attend appointments. This ability to juggle multiple priorities can translate into strong organizational skills.

Self-Reliance: Many people who are unhoused develop a high degree of self-reliance, as they often must take care of their needs independently. This can lead to strong decision-making abilities and a sense of autonomy.

Financial Management: Despite limited resources, individuals experiencing homelessness often develop a keen sense of budgeting and financial management, making the most of the little they have. This can include managing small amounts of money, bartering, or saving for essential items.

Awareness and Alertness: Living without stable shelter requires heightened awareness of one’s surroundings for safety and opportunity. This vigilance can translate into strong observational skills and the ability to notice details that others might overlook.

Creativity and Innovation: Many individuals who are unhoused demonstrate creativity and innovation in their daily lives, from finding unique ways to stay warm or dry to creating art or music with found objects.

Networking and Relationship-Building: People experiencing homelessness often rely on networks of support, including other individuals who are unhoused, advocates, and service providers. Building and maintaining these relationships requires strong interpersonal skills.

Understanding of Systems and Bureaucracy: Through their interactions with various social services, many individuals who are unhoused develop a deep understanding of bureaucratic systems, which can be a valuable skill in navigating complex institutions.

These capabilities and skills are often underappreciated in mainstream society but can be incredibly valuable in various contexts, from employment to community engagement. Denver Basic Income Project found such incredible advocates, system navigators, and skilled storytellers among the participants of the program.



People Shaping the Work

Denver Basic Income Project centers in lived experience and values diverse perspectives. Diverse perspectives and inclusive spaces were critical in creating and implementing the program, including individuals with lived experience with homelessness, advocacy organization staff, community members, and service providers.



Perspectives encompassing different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and abilities, were all valued and sought in the formation and implementation of the project. This created a need for honest, authentic dialogue in safe ways and spaces. We benefited from having a skilled facilitator who helped support the foundations for our work together, even if we didn't always do it well or "right." Our supportive guidelines and culture commitments (shared earlier) helped us navigate difficult conversations and moments in the project.

Project Structure

The structure of the Denver Basic Income Project was such that we had an implementation team (staff, consultants, research teams, and fiscal sponsor) focused on rolling out the project; an advisory board that informed and approved project design, budget, implementation strategy, and policies; the fiscal sponsor who held funding and overall responsibility for the work; and the Thought Partner Alliance, which was a committed group of community members, CBOS, and experts who shared their ideas and helped troubleshoot.

Here are materials we used that might help to support the formation of your implementation structure:

- [Implementation Team Overview](#)
- [Advisory Board Handbook](#)
- [Thought Partner Alliance Overview](#)

Project Design for Impact

This section outlines the Denver Basic Income Project's approach to program design and assessing the impact of direct cash transfers on individuals experiencing homelessness. It covers the theory of change guiding the project, the reasoning behind the length of time cash payments would be received, the amount of cash transfers, the number of participants selected in the program, the role of CBOs in enrollment and support, and the participant selection process.

Denver Basic Impact Project Theory of Change

In designing the project, we were focused on desired outcomes at the outset, which tied to our research approach. Was direct cash making a difference in unhoused people's lives in the ways we anticipated? What were the mechanisms that would deliver those changes, at least theoretically and as informed by studying other guaranteed income pilots? With the University of Denver Center for Housing and Homelessness Research (CHHR), we developed a theory of change to link actions and outcomes. Access the Theory of Change PDF [here](#).





Length of Program

In determining the program's length and cash amounts, we considered three key factors: the size of the cash transfer (discussed in the next section), the number of participants, and the program's duration. With limited funding, each factor involved its own set of benefits and tradeoffs.

Before deciding on the program's length, we explored critical questions about its impact goals for participants and the broader Denver community. These questions focused on direct effects, such as improving financial stability and access to housing for participants, as well as long-term community benefits like reduced healthcare needs, fewer emergency room visits, and lower incarceration rates. We prioritized thoughtful discussion and careful consideration before making these decisions.

The Denver Basic Income Project ultimately based the program's duration on research into timeframes that had shown lasting results for individuals receiving guaranteed income. However, given that the project was serving individuals experiencing homelessness, predicting the necessary duration was challenging. There were also concerns about a potential "cliff effect" when the program ended.

Thanks to significant fundraising and initial positive results, the project was extended by eight months beyond the originally planned 12 months in 2024.

Looking back, we recognized the value of providing cash support for a longer duration. If given the chance, we would prioritize enrolling a smaller but still substantial group of participants in a program lasting at least three years. This extended timeline would not only enhance the randomized controlled trial aspect by allowing us to track the impact of direct cash transfers over a longer period but also offer greater benefits to participants. Recovering from the traumas of homelessness often takes much more than a year, and participants identified the reliability of monthly cash payments as a critical source of stability. A longer program duration would also deepen our relationships with participants, enabling us to better understand the complexities of their journeys toward stability.



How We Decided on Cash Transfer Amounts

We considered the cash transfer amounts in concert with our decisions about program length and numbers of participants.

We ultimately decided to establish three groups to compare the impacts of direct cash.

- **Group A:** This group was provided **\$1,000 a month**. This amount was decided when looking at the low-end of housing costs when we started this project in Winter 2021.
- **Group B:** This group received **\$6,500 upfront, then \$500 each month after**. This amount was decided to mirror [a project in Canada](#) where participants were given \$6,500 (CAN). We decided to include \$500 a month for the subsequent 11 months so both groups would receive \$12,000 during the 12 month project.
- **Group C:** This group received **\$50 per month**, serving as an active comparison group to measure outcomes against the other two groups. This amount ensured that all participants received some benefit from the program, aligning with our values. It also enabled us to analyze the impacts of both small and large cash transfers. However, the choice to provide payments to all participants limited the ability to make stronger statistical comparisons that a non-active control group (receiving no cash transfer) might have offered.



Impact to Benefits

It is critical to consider how providing participants with direct cash payments may impact their benefits and to communicate this potential impact, along with guidance on navigating it, to them. We created [this document](#) to summarize how benefits might be affected, encouraged participants to review it closely, and advised them to contact their benefits providers to check for any potential changes. While this approach may not be the dominant perspective in nonprofit and service provider contexts, we believe it is essential to empower participants with the information needed to make their own decisions, rather than prescribing how they should handle their taxes and benefit impacts.

To seek a benefits exemption for any cash-based program you are building, connect with your state's Department of Human Services to determine if they are familiar with guaranteed income projects and whether an exemption system is already established for other municipalities. Engaging with the national community of partners can also be a valuable early step.

We successfully obtained a TANF exemption for our program (SNAP benefits and Medicaid were waived, but SNAP alone was not). However, despite the state issuing a memo to the relevant organizations, many eligibility workers within these organizations were unfamiliar with the rule.

We met directly with eligibility teams over Zoom to explain these rules to them, which was helpful in ensuring that participants didn't lose the benefits they were due. Having a member of our team with a background as a service provider was essential to navigating these systems, thanks to their connections and institutional knowledge.

Program Design and Selection Process

The Denver Basic Income Project worked with [AidKit](#), a software company that helps governments and nonprofits deliver cash benefits, for the application process and cash disbursement processes. CBOs screened potential participants and helped them submit applications, with guidance from these [application instructions](#). Potential participants had many questions during the application process, which were fielded by the CBOs that served as their direct points of contact.

Random Selection Process

Participants were selected through a stratified random sampling process conducted by our partners at the University of Denver Center for Housing and Homelessness Research. Read how this sampling method worked [here](#).

Program Eligibility for Participants

- Must be connected with one of the partner service providers (CBOs) based in the city of Denver.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness, meaning they are without fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, which include:
 - Living in motels, hotels, camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations;
 - Sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason (e.g. being “doubled up” or “couch surfing”);
 - Living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings;
 - Living in emergency shelters or transitional shelters;
 - People whose nighttime residence is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as regular sleeping accommodations.
- Individuals who do not have severe and unaddressed mental health or substance misuse needs.
 - The project uses the BASIS-24 screener to assess for severe mental health, alcohol or substance use challenges. If a participant scores the maximum on the BASIS-24 and reports that they are not receiving treatment, then they will not be eligible for the project. You can find more information on the BASIS-24 [here](#).
- Individuals who are 18 years old and older.



Why We Partnered With CBOs for Enrollment and Administration

The Denver Basic Income Project partnered with nineteen Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) as trusted allies to enroll participants and serve as their points of contact throughout the program's duration. CBOs were compensated with a flat fee, plus additional payments per application and enrollment. Organizations supporting a larger number of participants received more financial resources to account for the increased workload.

During the enrollment phase, these partners communicated with individuals experiencing housing insecurity within their networks about the Denver Basic Income Project. The trusted relationships these partners held were crucial in building confidence in a program that, for many potential participants, seemed “too good to be true.”

Collaborating with nineteen nonprofit partners—each with unique focuses and communities—also allowed us to assemble an applicant pool representative of the city's homeless population. This ensured participants could be randomly selected without the need to statistically adjust for certain demographics. Each CBO was compensated according to the following model.

During the administration of the program, CBO partners served as central points of contact for participants. When participants lost the cell phones provided by the program, became unreachable, or experienced issues receiving funds, CBO partners leveraged their relationships and deep experience with Denver's unhoused population to find effective solutions.

Lessons Learned from Partnering with CBOs

- In preparation for the program's hard launch, we created and updated a manual for CBOs to reference throughout the program. This ensured consistent information was shared, even in the fast-paced environment. Here is the [version](#) we developed during the extension of our project in 2024.
- It is critical to allocate time to orient CBOs to the program's values. First, it is essential to align partners on the goals and philosophies of guaranteed income. Provide them with materials (even homework!) about the history and research behind guaranteed income, and discuss the importance of adopting a non-patriarchal approach in this work. From our experience, **it is vital to challenge partners to explore and understand the history and principles of guaranteed income**, as the concept of “no strings attached” funding is uncommon in the nonprofit world. It is equally important for CBOs to be aware of the guaranteed income projects taking place across the country and globally. We believe the philosophies underpinning guaranteed income have the potential to “trickle up” and transform how CBOs operate and deliver services for other programs. However, this transformation is possible only if CBOs are deeply invested in these foundational principles.
- Interactive, in-person training sessions are also essential to prepare CBO partners for the details of program administration, such as replacing lost cell phones or payment cards. Ensuring that CBO staff fully understand these procedures from the outset will save time and effort in the long run.
- **“If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.”** This sentiment resonated with us, especially as we rushed to launch the program without a fully developed CBO manual. It wasn't until the second year that we created this essential resource, which underscored the value of taking time to develop key materials before launch to avoid challenges later on.
- We would recommend **six months preparation** time when working with multiple CBO partners. Some of the CBOs we partnered with experienced rapid staff turnover, which created challenges for maintaining program continuity. Spending more time with CBOs before the launch would allow them to build capacity and institutional knowledge, ensuring smoother transitions and better program outcomes.
- Finally, include staff members with long-term experience and connections within CBOs as part of your program team. These individuals bring critical insights into navigating the systems that individuals experiencing homelessness interact with daily, along with valuable relationships with service providers. Their expertise is instrumental in ensuring the program's success.



Time Commitment for CBO Partners

Please review the [CBO time commitment](#) for additional information on estimated time commitments.

- **Training**
 - We recommend 3-4 trainings on the Aidkit platform facilitated by project staff. 1-2 of these sessions should be specific to platform navigation. The remaining 1-2 training sessions should include nuances specific to project procedures and expectations, for a total of approximately four to five hours of training. In our initial launch, we had two required trainings but found that to be inadequate.
- **Outreach**
 - It was the responsibility of CBOs to create their applicant list. This can be completed as the CBO deems appropriate and to connect with those selected to apply. The time to compile and connect may vary by CBO.
- **Applications**
 - Each application took 15-20 minutes to complete alongside the participating applicant.

- **Enrollment**
 - We learned from Soft Launch 1.0 and 2.0 that it takes 20-45 minutes to enroll each applicant.
- **Research**
 - At enrollment, CBO staff invited participants to consent to research participation and engage in a research survey. Participants sometimes needed assistance with clarifying questions on the survey. However, the survey is considered “self-administered.”
 - The self-administered long-form baseline surveys took participants about 20-60 minutes to complete. CHHR staff were on-site to administer surveys for folks who requested assistance.
 - There were instances where the CHHR staff reached out to CBOs about getting in contact with someone if we had a hard time making contact.

Policies and Procedures

This section outlines the policies and procedures that guided the project in its partnership with CBOs, the fiscal sponsor, and participants. These guidelines ensured effective onboarding, support, and compensation for CBOs, while maintaining the integrity and transparency of the program.

They include items like participant consent, data management, grievance reporting, and the roles and responsibilities of all partners involved in the project.

CBO Agreements

The project implementation team supported CBOs through orientations on the project, key documents like the participant consent form and CBO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), training on the AidKit platform and evaluation processes, facilitation of a CBO cohort, guidance on benefits for applicants, and technical assistance with the AidKit platform.

More detail is provided in the next graphic.

CBO Agreements

Training

The project conducted training to onboard all partner CBOs informing them of processes relating to:

- Application
- Enrollment
- Research
- Ongoing program support
- Review of all policies and legal documents (MOU and consent)

Training was recorded and all supplemental resources associated with the topics listed above were available to all partnering CBOs/staff for reference at any time.

Support

The project had an experienced CBO Liaison to support CBOs, who acted as a point of contact for each CBO to provide technical assistance and support for any questions, concerns, or issues that arose. This liaison had thorough working knowledge of services provided by CBOs.

Our CBO Liaison offered office hours during the application and enrollment periods to answer questions and provide support around all aspects of the process.



Policies

The project utilized a set of policies that helped to ensure the integrity of the program:

Participant Consent Form ([English](#) version and [Spanish](#) version)

CBO Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):

Establishes a collaboration between the parties to support the implementation of the direct cash assistance program, and includes four attachments, listed below.

Attachment A: Operational Guidelines:

Outlines procedures for direct communication with program participants, payment protocols, and reporting requirements to ensure participant protection and program integrity. They also address misconduct, child abuse reporting, and policies for preventing discrimination and harassment.

Attachment B: Scope of Work:

Outlines the key roles and responsibilities of each implementing partner in the program.

Attachment C: Confidentiality

Agreement:

Outlines the obligations to which CBO partners agree, including the protection of applicant information and the obligation to report any breaches.

Attachment D: Pause, Termination, and

Appeal Process:

Details the conditions under which payments may be paused or ended and the process for participants to challenge termination decisions.

Participant Bereavement Policy:

Outlines the procedures and support mechanisms in place for handling the death of a participant in the project.

Information Management Policy:

Establishes guidelines and procedures for the secure storage, accessibility, and transparency of information related to the project. This policy seeks to ensure that all relevant project files are kept in an secure, organized and accessible manner, while maintaining the necessary protocols to protect sensitive information.

Grievance Reporting Policy:

Provides a clear, accessible, safe and confidential process for individuals connected to the project to address any concerns or issues that may arise within the project without fear of reprisal or punishment.

Compensation

The project compensated CBOs for the following:

Each CBO received a one-time stipend in the amount of \$750, paid upon the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), \$30 per completed application, and \$150 per enrollee.

Acceptance of this one-time stipend denoted a shared agreement to the above details.

For reference, here is the [expected time commitment](#) for CBOs again.



CBO Compensation Model

	One-time Stipend	Per Application	Per Enrollee
CBO	\$750	\$30	\$150

For example, if CBO A processed **400 applications** to the project and **enrolled 150**, they would be compensated **\$32,250** ($\$750 + [400 \times 30] + [150 \times 150]$).



Section II. Implementation

Visual Timeline of the Denver Basic Income Project

This section outlines the process for implementing the program, including our approach to participant communication and engagement, as well as the critical roles played by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).

The implementation process is divided into four key phases, each designed to guide CBOs through the various stages of the project, from preparation to ongoing participant support.

While this approach reflects our experience working with 19 diverse CBOs, it is important to note that it represents just one of many possible structures for administering a guaranteed income (GI) program.

This section also includes policies and protocols, materials used for media interactions, reflections on lessons learned, and consent forms.





Denver Basic Income Project Roles with Participants

While CBOs served as the primary points of contact for applications, enrollment, and participants' specific needs during the 12 months of payments, project staff also took a customer service-focused approach to build relationships with participants. This was an opportunity to put our values into action.

We established direct communication channels using Grasshopper for calls and texts, and hello@denverbasicincomeproject.org for email inquiries. These channels were actively managed with a goal of responding to all inquiries within 24 hours, or sooner when possible.

We learned the importance of securely storing ongoing notes about interactions with participants in a way that authorized personnel could access. This allowed us to build on past communications and address participants' needs effectively. Notes were kept in AidKit as part of each participant's file.

As the program progressed, we created opportunities for participant engagement, such as a day at the Denver Botanic Gardens for participants and their families/guests, which included lunch and a chance to share experiences.

To center our work on the experiences of individuals experiencing homelessness and engage participants in program design and revisions, the Denver Basic Income Project partnered with [Listen4Good](#) (L4G). L4G was a strong fit for the project due to shared values. Their approach is guided by “a commitment to equity and a desire to deepen the impact of the social sector by centering and uplifting community voices.”

L4G provided coaching and tools that supported participant engagement, enabling continuous improvement and adjustments to our work. In essence, this partnership allowed us to use a trusted process and platform to gather, interpret, and respond to feedback from our community.

You can read more about [participant feedback](#) on our website.

Implementation Phases with CBOs

The following content outlines CBO-specific program implementation action items and timelines across four phases. It is shared as one example of how to implement a guaranteed income project in partnership with trusted organizations. We worked with 19 diverse CBOs, each with unique strengths, service models, community relationships, and challenges. This approach allowed us to streamline, outline, and standardize the work.

For this playbook, we have removed specific names, email addresses, and phone numbers, but at the time of launch, all relevant contact information was included. Dates have also been generalized to make the timeline more adaptable for your use. We recognize there are other models and approaches for delivering cash-based programs and maintaining relationships over the course of a project. This content represents just one method.

This section was written for CBOs and is addressed directly to them, so in this context, “you” refers to the lead CBO representative.

Project Phases for CBOs

There are four phases to program implementation for CBOs:

- 1. Preparation and Training**
- 2. Application Intake**
- 3. Enrollment Notification and Intake**
 - There are four payment cycles participants can be enrolled in, with the goal to enroll as many as possible by the end of the second enrollment cycle
 - Payments begin the day after the closing of each enrollment cycle
- 4. Ongoing Point of Contact** for enrolled participants (for the duration of the program)

See detailed checklist for CBOs in each phase below.

Phase 1: Preparation & Training

- Schedule/participate in a one-on-one onboarding meeting with the CBO Liaison to review questions about program implementation.
 - Identify how many eligible applicants your CBO currently serves.
 - Identify how many additional applicants you may have the capacity to serve as the point of contact throughout the program, if any.
- Develop a list of potential eligible applicants from your CBO to whom you will outreach to for applications.
- Review program policies and procedures.
- Review and sign Launch MOU between your CBO and the project organizers.
 - Request meeting with project staff should you have additional questions or wish to discuss further.



Phase 1: Preparation & Training

- Identify your application intake staffing approach.
 - Identify all CBO staff or volunteers who will be participating.
 - Identify and begin to request what additional assistance you would like to request from project application intake workers.
 - Identify days and windows of time within the application window that applicants will be able to complete their application on-site at your CBO or alternatively on location if doing street-based outreach.
- Application Intake Action Plan
 - Complete the project-provided [application intake planning template](#) by making a copy and meeting with project staff to discuss your plan and dates.
- Save dates and accept calendar invites for all participating CBO staff to attend application and enrollment trainings.

Week 1

- Continue with active recruitment of potential applicants and communicate with them your application intake approach.
- RSVP for project overview and application trainings. You will receive calendar invites from the community liaison.

- The research partner will contact CBOs about dropping off lockboxes for storing surveys and long-form surveys for completion by participants.
- Submit all names, emails and phone numbers of application screeners from your CBO who will be taking applications no later than the end of this week.

Week 2

- Actively communicate with potential applicants so they will have the opportunity to apply for the project and understand what the process and timeline will be.
- All CBO representatives who will support project implementation should attend trainings about the project, the evaluation process, and the AidKit platform for application and enrollment.
 - [DATE] 10am-12pm– Project Overview
 - [DATE] 10am-12pm–Outreach and Application Training
 - [DATE] 10am-12pm – Project Evaluation and Enrollment Training
- Address any final staffing or communication needs to support application intake, which begins on week 3.

Phase 2: Application Intake

Week 3

- Application period officially begins on week 3 [DATE] and ends on week 6 [DATE].
- Week 3 [DATE]: Optional technical assistance session on application technology and process.

Week 4

- Application intake continues.
- Week 4 [DATE]: Optional technical assistance session on application technology and process.
- Participate in CBO support and learning cohort.
- Begin planning for enrollment intake.
 - CBO completes enrollment plan Rusing project-provided template or alternative method shared with project organizers.
 - CBO requests support with enrollment intake needed from project enrollment intake staff, and dates needed, to CBO Liaison.
 - If applicable, enrollment will also need to be coordinated with the evaluation team lead representative.

Week 5

- Application intake continues.
- Begin preparing for enrollment staffing.
- Participate in CBO support and learning cohort.

Week 6

- CBO wraps up application process—application is open through week 6.
- CBOs receive debit cards & project-sponsored phones via mail (separate shipments).
- CBOs store debit cards and project-sponsored phones securely, as this is a contractual CBO obligation.
- **LAST DAY OF APPLICATION INTAKE: week 6 [DATE] at 5PM.**





Phase 3: Enrollment Notification & Enrollment Intake

Week 7 through Week 12

- Begin implementing enrollment plan created during the application phase.
- CBO shares with project organizers which staff will be responsible for contacting their applicants about enrollment assignment, and the deadline by which they will attempt initial contact. This should also be shared with applicants as well, during the application phase, so they know when to expect communication and from whom.
- CBOs will receive a list of all of their participants and their group assignments (if they were randomly selected to enroll) by week 6 [DATE] for whom they will be the point of contact.
- CBO staff should initiate contact with all applicants who were randomized for enrollment for whom they are the point of contact to initiate enrollment.
 - CBOs have up to three weeks to make contact with an applicant. If the applicant cannot be reached, DBIP's research partner will assign a new applicant to enroll from the waitlist and the prior applicant will lose their spot in the program.

- Enrollment period is open – those who are ready to enroll, if they do so by week 8, they will receive their first payments on [DATE] during week 8.
- Once you are in contact with an applicant who has the option to enroll, the applicant should receive a time frame in which you determine for them to decide whether they would like to enroll in the program.
 - During this time, the applicant should have their questions answered and the opportunity to explore how Denver Basic Income Project funds might impact their benefit.
- Once the applicant chooses to enroll, CBO staff (or project staff member) will support the completion of the enrollment process and provide debit card and phone (if they choose not to use their own phone).

Week 12 - Week 21

- Continue to enroll participants until all who choose to enroll are successfully enrolled and receiving payments.
- The goal is to enroll at least 80% of your participants by week 12, [DATE] to ensure payments are being received before the end of the year.

Phase 4: Serve as Point of Contact for Participants

During the full duration of program enrollment (12 months from the payment start date), your CBO-designated staff person(s) will serve as the first point of contact for any needs that come up during the program period. This includes helping participants replace lost phones and debit cards, and helping to refer any issues to Denver Basic Income Project points of contact.

You may also be providing additional case management and services within the scope of your CBO's programming, but such programming is not a requirement of project participation.

Resources for Enrolling Participants

- Initial Application for individual to apply.
- List of items that selected participants should bring to enroll.
- Once selected, the enrollment form that was completed in AidKit.
- The [Participant Consent Form](#) (previously linked) communicates important information and considerations about participating in the program and receiving cash payments.
 - Key considerations of the form to discuss with potential applicants:

- Benefits impacts
- Phones (options to get smart phone or cellular service reimbursement; replacement policy)
- Research commitments
- Confidentiality
- How/when you receive money
- Who to contact if you have issues getting money
- Policy in the case that a participant is incarcerated
- Policy in the case of participant death; bereavement policy
- Policy regarding if a participant can designate funds to go to someone else
- Reasons to terminate:
 - Participant knowingly misrepresents identity or program eligibility to project staff
 - Participant commits or threatens violence against any project or CBO staff
 - If a participant passes away during the program, remaining cash payments are not transferable to others
 - If project determines that the participant's involvement has caused harm to others, as outlined in the process for [Attachment D: Pause, Termination, and Appeal](#) (previously linked)
- Policy regarding alcohol, substance abuse, or mental health issues



Research and Cell Phone Protocols

To ensure consistent communication with participants, and because program surveys were sent via text message, all participants were provided with a free cell phone and service plan for the duration of the program. Participants who preferred to use their own phones received a monthly stipend to cover their carrier costs.

See [here](#) for the full phone (and debit card) policy. Below are some FAQs we created to address common questions from our CBO partners.

What is the replacement policy for phones?

Each participant is eligible for one replacement phone. Any additional replacements must be covered by the participant in accordance with our phone policy. More details can be found in the [Participant Consent Form](#) (linked previously).

How will lost or stolen phones be replaced for participants?

Participants can visit the community-based organization that enrolled them in the program to have a new phone issued and activated. CBO staff should report lost or stolen phones to the project phone lead as soon as possible using a dedicated phone replacement email address.

The report should include the participant's first and last initials and the associated phone number.

Each CBO will have a supply of extra phones. Replacement phones will be activated and issued by CBOs on a monthly basis, around the 10th of each month. The project phone lead will collaborate with CBO staff to track devices, activate new phones, and resolve any other phone-related issues. When a CBO's stock of extra phones is down to two or fewer, they should contact the project phone lead to request additional phones.

Media: Supporting CBOs in Internal and External Communications

External Communications Resources

A key aspect of guaranteed income projects is challenging the often paternalistic narratives in the U.S. about poverty, homelessness, meritocracy, and worthiness in receiving cash transfers.

Therefore, it was essential for us to provide stakeholders and CBOs with training and resources to help them effectively communicate the logic, goals, and successes of our guaranteed income project.

The below was included in a [communication toolkit](#) provided to CBOs to support their conversations with potential participants. A [fact sheet](#), [press release template](#), and [year one talking points](#) document were also provided to participating CBOs.

Talking Points for Potential Applicants to the Project

The following content was shared on a [postcard](#) we distributed to potential applicants that you may find helpful for adapting to your needs.

How do I apply?

- **If they are currently connected with your CBO:** I'd be happy to help you apply. Let me first make sure you are eligible.
- **If they are not connected with your CBO:** Thank you for your interest in the Denver Basic Income Project. At this time, we are assisting current clients with applying for the program, but please fill out the interest form on the website. This will help the team at the Denver Basic Income Project connect you with the best organization to assist with your application. It's possible you'll be connected with us, but you'll be notified by phone call, text, or email which organization you've been matched with.

When will I hear back on whether I can apply?

The interest form will be open for ten days. You will hear from the Denver Basic Income Project each Friday over the course of four weeks with updates on whether they have found an organization who can help you with your application.

Is there a waitlist?

Approximately 800 individuals will be enrolled into the project. Those who are not selected will be added to a waitlist.

Is anyone eligible?

The project is accessible to anyone, and all qualified applicants may apply regardless of race, color, religion, gender, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, disability, age, or veteran status. Individuals are eligible to receive cash assistance if they are connected with one of the community-based organizations participating in the Denver Basic Income Project, are experiencing homelessness, do not have severe, unaddressed mental health or substance use needs, and are 18 years old or older.



Talking Points for Potential Applicants to the Project

What am I invited to do if I participate?

At enrollment, participants will be invited to consent to participate in research activities that will take place during the 12-month project. Activities include surveys every six months and short bi-weekly text surveys that will ask about health and well-being, housing stability, and financial well-being. Participants may also be invited to complete interviews to share their experience with Denver Basic Income Project.

How can I participate in the research if I don't have a phone?

Participants who do not have cell phones will be provided with one.

Will I lose other benefits if I receive this cash payment?

There is a potential that a participant's benefits may be impacted by participating in the program. We encourage you to speak to your CBO contact to understand any potential impacts.

Can I work while receiving payments?

Participants can most certainly be employed or become employed during the time of the project participation.

How to Handle Sensitive Cases

There are several situations that might be sensitive to the project and require action. In the project's consent form, our organization outlines specific terms that could result in program termination:

- If you knowingly misrepresent your identity or program eligibility to project staff.
- If you commit violence or threaten project staff (including community-based organization staff). Each staff member determines when threats need to be reported, and an independent panel reviews reported acts or threats before deciding on termination.
- If you die during the period of receiving cash payments through the Denver Basic Income Project, remaining payments are non-transferable.
- If the Denver Basic Income Project, including staff and volunteers, determines that your participation has caused harm to others. Harm is evaluated through the Pause, Termination, and Appeal process.

The project established an independent review panel to handle sensitive cases. From these meetings, the team developed policies such as the Bereavement Policy and the Pause, Termination, and Appeal Policy. Each intervention began with outreach to the participants involved to gather more information.

The following section highlights lessons we learned while implementing the Denver Basic Income Project.

A key principle in addressing sensitive cases was collecting data from multiple sources before making decisions. Having project staff with experience in social services or the criminal justice system—such as social work or human services professionals—proved invaluable. These team members brought the skills and knowledge needed to respond appropriately to complex situations. Final decisions for certain cases included pausing payments, terminating participation, or referring cases to other agencies or service providers better equipped to help.

Recommendations, Bright Ideas, Lessons Learned

The following section attempts to share some of the lessons we learned along the way in implementing the Denver Basic Income Project.

Design

During the design of the project, we learned some important lessons:

- It's important to secure a budget for early infrastructure. People should be compensated for their time, including participating community members. We provided a stipend for participation on the task group.
- While it's important to build up program awareness and support from key stakeholders, consider an external communications timeline for when it is right to go public with the work, as well as attaching a flexible timeline.
- A lot of decisions need to be made that inform design – more than we ever conceived of, and it is hard to anticipate them all, so try to give yourself some time to make those decisions in community-informed ways
- Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good. Perfection will be paralyzing in a project that can be relatively complex, especially when hoping to deploy critical resources to people who need them now. Create greater space and time to address areas of critical importance – like who will be selected and how.



- Iterate – take smaller risks, learn and improve upon your prior approach. In short, make small bets first, before going all in.
- Have fresh eyes read through policies and procedures for clarity and unintended consequences.
- Who is involved with the project will shift and change over time – keeping good records of decisions made and their rationale, and having a process for onboarding new people, is really important for maintaining momentum.

Mid Project Check-In

Following the completion of Soft Launch 1.0 and the start of planning for Soft Launch 2.0, Denver Basic Income Project paused to reflect on the current state of the project. Partnering with a third party consultant, the project was able to learn more about what had been built to date, and how, as well as incorporate those learnings into the future. We'd like to share some of those findings here. These findings were vulnerable points for us, that all those involved worked very deeply to remedy.

• **Reasons Some Partners Stepped Back**

- Some individuals and organizations withdrew due to unsustainable time demands, unclear roles and responsibilities, poor communication, unacknowledged power dynamics, experiences of white supremacist norms, and perceptions of tokenism toward people of color and those with lived experience.

• **Structural Findings**

- Structural findings indicated that project visibility and fundraising outpaced the supporting infrastructure, with sometimes poorly defined roles in project implementation and management compared to other partners.
- Institutional roles were sometimes unclear, contracts sometimes misaligned with project values, and critical roles were overburdened, creating gaps.
- There were issues with power dynamics, unclear advisory board responsibilities, and under-engaged lived experience groups, highlighting a need for better centering community perspectives and clearer distinctions between community-led and community-informed approaches.

• **Process Findings**

- The Core Team showed strong passion and commitment but faced challenges with trust and role clarity.
- The project's public visibility brought increased scrutiny, while unresolved tensions, inconsistent communication, and unclear leadership roles created mixed results.
- Timeline pressures accelerated engagement processes, causing friction between established practices and transformative approaches.

• **Cultural and White Supremacy Culture Considerations**

- Considerations around white supremacy emphasize that without intentional cultural definition, dominant norms often prevail, especially under pressure.
- Rapid decision-making and a lack of transparency can erode trust, reflecting characteristics of white supremacy culture such as perfectionism, urgency, defensiveness, prioritizing quantity over quality, paternalism, and a fear of conflict.
- These norms can hinder the integration of diverse cultural standards and create barriers to fostering an environment where all perspectives are valued and heard.

• **Lessons Learned**

- Establish strong working norms, values, and culture early on. These serve as a guiding framework and help build trust among diverse participants.
- Acknowledge and address white supremacy culture. Take dedicated time to reflect and make conscious choices about methods of working. Create safe spaces to discuss concerns collectively.
- Slow down to go fast. Address foundational issues immediately to prevent larger problems from derailing the project.



Project Launch & Implementation

- Providing training, clear communications, detailed calendar invites, comprehensive policies and procedures, and a well-defined launch timeline helps partners execute effectively.
- Designate a specific team member as the primary point of contact for organizations (like CBOs) assisting with participant implementation. This ensures partners know exactly where to turn for support.
- Ensure each implementing partner develops a customized launch plan tailored to their organization and designates a clear lead for its execution.
- Build a community among implementation partners by holding regular meetings and input sessions that bring representatives together.
- Acknowledge and celebrate progress during application and enrollment. This work can be demanding, and recognition is vital for maintaining motivation and morale. Celebrating small milestones helps reduce stress, fosters a positive experience, and encourages continued engagement.
- Providing real-time data dashboards (which we created using AidKit) can be incredibly powerful. One of our dashboards displayed real-time data on applicants during enrollment and included exportable monthly data on housing status and other research-related elements.
- Avoid outsourcing all participant relationships solely to CBOs. We found that building direct connections with participants helped them feel respected and valued. This approach also boosted staff motivation, as it allowed them to see the direct impacts of their work and connect on a human level. Participants became the face of the project, shared their stories, and championed the Denver Basic Income Project with funders and policymakers.
- Establish ongoing systems and best practices to monitor card balances and phone usage. Our team routinely checked for phones with zero usage and cards with unusually high balances that showed little to no activity. When such cases arose, we reached out to participants and informed their CBO contact to address the situation.

Project Completion

- Communicate to participants, CBOs, staff, and other partners clear guidelines for sun-setting processes, including final payment dates, what happens next, future program initiatives (if any), etc.
- Identify whether or not participants want to stay connected to the project at all.
- Create a communications plan to share messaging with the media and the broader public about the pilot's closure and what comes next.



Consent Forms

- The [Participant Consent Form](#) (previously linked) contains important information and considerations about participating in the program and receiving cash payments over a 12-month period to participants.
- The [Consent to Participate in Research](#) form informs potential participants about the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, compensation, and voluntary nature of the research linked to the program, and seeks their permission to participate.

"I'm gonna do something good with it [the funds]. I'm gonna invest in myself [...] That's the best thing I felt to do."

-Lorinda Gill (pictured) in a podcast interview for [Elevated Denver](#)



Section III. Fundraising

This topic is one of the most challenging aspects of any project, and fundraising for the Denver Basic Income Project (DBIP) was no exception. Every funding environment is unique. In Denver, our City Council was supportive, local funders embraced the concept, homelessness was a pressing issue for the city, and our founder contributed personal resources to get things started.

We've identified key strategies and approaches that contributed to our success in Denver, which may be helpful in similar contexts. We also share tools and content we developed to meet specific funder needs. Our success relied on a combination of factors: a powerful vision, compelling pitch, personal investment, continuous networking, community engagement, and unwavering belief in the project's universal benefits.

Start with Momentum

- Leading with a significant personal investment of \$500,000 was pivotal in gaining early traction. This demonstrated our team's deep commitment to the project's success and sent a strong signal to potential funders, helping us secure additional support.

- Early investments, whether personal or institutional, provide the foundation to show seriousness and encourage others to follow suit. Funders are more likely to commit when they see your personal stake in the project. In our case, the founder provided seed capital, but this could also come from a group of aligned individuals or local foundations.
- With \$500,000 committed, we approached The Colorado Trust, which agreed in our first meeting to match or even double that amount.
- Identify your most likely supporter and secure their backing first, then use their commitment to approach the next tier of potential partners.

Fundraising Tip:
Demonstrate unwavering confidence in the project's potential to create real change.

Continuous Networking and Building Relationships

Building and maintaining strong relationships is at the heart of successful fundraising.

- From the beginning, we prioritized consistent networking with local government, community organizations, and philanthropic circles. Establishing connections with key leaders—whether through formal introductions or community engagement—was instrumental to our success.
- Investing time in building relationships cannot be overstated. Regular contact with potential and existing funders is essential, as is fostering genuine, long-term partnerships. Networking is not a one-time effort; it requires sustained engagement.
- Early in the process, we focused on how the project could help potential partners, rather than immediately making an ask. We prioritized finding alignment and shared goals, which helped build trust and collaboration.

A guiding question:

Can your knowledge and expertise help the potential partner achieve their goals?

Demonstrate Commitment and Confidence

Here are additional lessons and approaches we found effective in showing commitment and confidence:

- Show unwavering confidence in the project's potential to create real change. Lead fundraisers should be prepared with talking points to address objections, such as concerns about the project being too new or risky. We countered these objections by highlighting quantifiable successes of other guaranteed income projects, such as improved housing stability, reduced emergency service use, and better financial well-being among participants.
- Establish your team as experts in the field. Stay current on developments in the movement and offer periodic briefings—not only on your work but also on the broader guaranteed income movement. Larger funders appreciated understanding how their local investments fit into the national picture.
- Have a clear North Star and a compelling long-term vision. Funders look for confidence and clarity. Articulate a clear pathway to success, grounded in the project's theory of change and real-world results.



Craft a Compelling Case

Your needs statement and project pitch should demonstrate a strong understanding of the project's potential benefits to the entire community.

- One key strategy we used was emphasizing that guaranteed income is not just about supporting individuals—it's about driving systemic change and benefiting the broader community. Guaranteed income promotes housing stability, reduces reliance on public services, and improves overall well-being for participants and their communities.
- We strengthened our case by presenting compelling data and real-world outcomes, including findings from the Denver Basic Income Project's initial pilot and first year. Whenever possible, use local examples and data to highlight the project's community-wide impact and reinforce its relevance to potential funders.

Read our [Example Needs Statement here](#).

Leverage Early Successes

DBIP was fortunate to receive support from major funders, including the City and County of Denver and private foundations. These early successes helped build momentum. For example, The Colorado Trust reinvested millions after seeing the initial results. Use the reinvestment of key funders as a strong indicator of the project's long-term viability, which can reassure new funders about the project's sustainability and future potential.

Regular Progress Updates

Regular updates are essential for maintaining funder interest and trust.

- As the project advances, provide funders with consistent and detailed updates on the impact of their contributions. This should include formal reports, progress on key milestones, and, most importantly, participant stories.
- Sharing success stories from participants fosters an emotional connection and keeps funders engaged long-term.
- Additionally, tailor updates to your audience—some funders may prefer data-driven reports, while others respond better to qualitative, narrative-focused updates.
- Be transparent about both successes and challenges. Establishing and maintaining trust is crucial.

- When something goes wrong—and it will—how you handle it can determine future funding opportunities. Learn from mistakes and share these lessons and any pivots with your funders.
- Our funders were surprised by how open we were about internal challenges during the first soft launch. This level of transparency deepened their trust and confidence in our team.

Community-Building Events

Building relationships between funders and the project team is just as critical as securing initial commitments.

- One of our most effective strategies was hosting in-person community-building events. These events allowed funders to meet participants, connect with the team, and engage with other funders. Such gatherings strengthened the project's community, built trust, and gave funders a direct connection to the impact of their support.
- Spending time nurturing these relationships is invaluable. Bringing funders into the community and showing them firsthand how their contributions make a difference helps solidify long-term partnerships that sustain the project into the future.

Overcoming Common Barriers

Finally, be prepared to address common barriers, such as concerns about long-term commitments or perceived risks.

- We found that providing data from DBIP's first-year evaluations helped us alleviate these concerns. By demonstrating reduced homelessness, improved financial well-being, and other positive outcomes, we confidently addressed questions about sustainability and impact.
- While small donations are valuable, significant investments from key funders are essential for achieving long-term progress.
- Show that the project is universally beneficial—not just for the participants, but for the community as a whole.

By utilizing personal investment, local champions, engaging with elected officials, committing to sustained networking, clear communication, and consistent updates, we were able to build strong, lasting relationships with funders. These elements, coupled with community-building events and data-backed confidence in the project, were essential to our fundraising success. It wasn't easy to do, but it was worth it!



Section IV.

Research

From the outset, the Denver Basic Income Project was envisioned as a way to answer critical questions and contribute to the growing body of knowledge on guaranteed income and its impacts. Research was integrated into the budget from the beginning. While much research has been conducted on cash transfer programs for other populations—such as individuals facing major health challenges like cancer or those living in poverty—our goal was specific: to evaluate the use of guaranteed income for individuals who are unhoused. How might cash payments impact those experiencing homelessness?

This section outlines our research approach, tools, and results. It is not intended as a how-to guide for establishing university partnerships, navigating IRB reviews, developing research protocols, or creating reporting frameworks. Evaluating both the process and outcomes of the project while simultaneously launching and managing a program is a complex undertaking.

From the beginning, there was a tension between designing the program as a research initiative and designing it as a practical intervention. The reality is that it had to be both. However, the program itself—and its direct impact on participants—always took precedence.

We adopted a “people first” approach, ensuring that our research protocols treated participants with dignity and respect and involved only reasonable asks. Participation in the project was kept separate from participation in the research, giving individuals the choice to opt into the research protocol as part of a dedicated informed consent process. The vast majority—over 92%—chose to participate, often citing a desire to help others understand the impact of cash assistance.

The results so far are both motivating and thought-provoking, raising additional important questions. While all three groups are finding housing at high rates, those receiving larger payments are achieving better outcomes in full-time employment, bill payment, and housing stability beyond the ten-month mark.

The Denver Basic Income Project and its accompanying research represent a groundbreaking approach to addressing homelessness. Continuing this work will further advance our understanding of guaranteed income as a tool to support often-overlooked members of our community in Denver.

Primer on Research Terms

The Denver Basic Income Project uses several research terms to evaluate the impact of guaranteed income on unhoused individuals. Here’s a guide to help:

Intervention Research

This type of research studies the effects of a specific program or action designed to solve a problem or improve a situation. For example, giving people guaranteed income is an “intervention” to see how it affects housing stability, health, or well-being.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a way to figure out if a program is working as planned. It looks at the outcomes (results) and the process (how the program is run) to decide if the program is helpful, needs improvement, or should be expanded.

Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT)

An RCT is a type of research where people are randomly placed into two or more groups to compare outcomes.

- **One group** gets the intervention (like guaranteed income).
- **Other groups** don’t, so researchers can see the difference the intervention makes.

Random assignment helps ensure that the results are fair and not influenced by bias.

Control Group vs. Comparison Group

- **Control Group:** A group that does not receive the intervention. Researchers use it to compare against the group that does receive the intervention.
- **Comparison Group:** A group that doesn’t get the full intervention but might get something else.

Both groups help researchers understand the true effect of the intervention.



Primer on Research Terms

Statistical Significance vs. Clinical/Practice Significance

- **Statistical Significance:** When research results are not likely due to chance. It tells us that the intervention likely caused the change.
- **Clinical or Practice Significance:** Focuses on whether the change is meaningful in real life. For example, even if a program improves mental health scores slightly (statistical significance), the question is whether it improves someone's daily life in a noticeable way.

Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods Approach

- **Quantitative:** Research that uses numbers and data, like measuring income or the number of nights spent in stable housing.
- **Qualitative:** Research that uses interviews, stories, or observations to understand people's experiences and feelings.
- **Mixed Methods:** Combines both quantitative and qualitative research to get a fuller picture. For example, it might measure how many people found stable housing (quantitative) and also ask participants how their lives changed (qualitative). Our project research used a mixed methods approach.

Research Questions

In partnership with University of Denver's Center on Housing and Homelessness Research, the following research questions were posed:

Housing

1. Do people who are unhoused and receive a guaranteed basic income experience improved housing stability compared to a randomized control group of people who are unhoused?

Financial Well-Being

1. Do people who are unhoused and receive a guaranteed basic income experience improved financial well-being compared to a randomized control group of people who are unhoused?
2. Do people who are unhoused and receive a guaranteed basic income experience improved workforce involvement compared to a randomized control group of people who are unhoused?

Physical and Psychological Health

1. Do people who are unhoused and receive a guaranteed basic income experience improved physical and psychological health compared to a randomized control group of people who are unhoused?

Family and Social Networks

1. Do people who are unhoused and receive a guaranteed basic income experience improved interpersonal relationships, family dynamics, social support, and social cohesion compared to a control group of people who are unhoused?
2. Do people who are unhoused with children receiving a guaranteed basic income report improved child well-being compared to a randomized control group of people who are unhoused with children?

Public Service Interactions

1. How does the receipt of a guaranteed basic income impact public service interactions for people who are unhoused compared to a randomized control group of people who are unhoused and do not receive a guaranteed basic income?

Experience and Impact

1. Are there differences in outcomes between people who are unhoused and receive a lump sum cash transfer compared to people who are unhoused and receive 12 equal cash transfers?
2. What do the stories and narratives of people who are unhoused and participating in DBIP tell us about the experience and impact of receiving a guaranteed basic income?



Program and Process

1. What do the stories and narratives of people who are unhoused and participating in DBIP tell us about the process of receiving a guaranteed basic income?
2. What are the critical program elements to successfully delivering a guaranteed basic income to people experiencing homelessness?

We adopted a broad lens when examining outcomes potentially associated with guaranteed income, given the novelty of this approach and the limited research on guaranteed income and homelessness. Since we didn't know how guaranteed income might impact participants, we assessed a wide range of outcomes.

For future designs or ongoing analyses, we would likely simplify our focus.

Research Methods & Selection Criteria

Significant effort went into designing the research methods, including decisions on how data would be collected, which tools would be used, and how the data would be analyzed. In collaboration with the research team, the project also determined the payment groups for comparative purposes, as detailed earlier in this playbook. For more detailed information, refer to the [Overview of Research Methods](#).

While we briefly addressed selection criteria earlier in the playbook, it's important to emphasize it again here, as it plays a crucial role in the evaluation design process.

The Denver Basic Income Project (DBIP) prioritized an inclusive recruitment approach, aiming to make the program accessible to as many people experiencing homelessness as possible. However, specific inclusion criteria were established:

- Participants must be 18 or older, reside in Denver, be connected to a DBIP partner organization, and meet DBIP's definition of homelessness.
- Participants must demonstrate that substance use and psychosis will not interfere with their ability to engage in the program.

To develop this screening process, DBIP consulted experts in substance use and mental health. The domains of substance abuse and psychosis are measured using items from the [Basis-24](#), a validated screening instrument that provides a global mental health score between 0 (no difficulty/symptoms never present) to 4 (extreme difficulty/symptoms always present). The idea to use the Basis-24 was recommended by professional experts in the field of substance use and mental health. Please review our [brief on Inclusion Criteria](#) for more information on the Basis-24, how it was selected, what threshold was used, and pros and cons of its use.

Research Tools, Compensation & Lessons Learned

We also want to share the surveys and tools we used to collect information from participants. Each participant who completed the surveys and interviews were compensated for their time, separately from their monthly cash payments. 92% of enrollees opted into participating in the research. It was not required to participate, but instead a choice participants made at the outset.

Research tools and compensation for completion included:

- [Longform Survey](#) – This survey was administered at the start of the project, after six months of payments, and at 12 months, following the completion of the final payment. It was designed to capture more detailed information on the impact of the program as it pertained to the research questions above. Participants received \$30 for each completed survey.
- [Biweekly Survey](#) – This survey was sent via text message to each participant who opted into the research, and measured point of time changes. Participants received \$5 for each completed survey.

- [Interview Protocol & Script](#) – This tool details a semi-structured interview protocol delivered at 2-month and 12-month timepoints, with separate interview protocols for treatment and control group participants. Interviews took an estimated 60-90 minutes to complete. Participants received \$40 for each completed interview.

Lessons Learned

Research Design:

- We engaged in many inquiries during the study which lengthened our research tools.
- Our research design met Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards for ethics, informed consent and option to decline research activities.
- Qualitative insights were essential to understanding the quantitative data we received.
- There was a necessary tension between research and program designs to best support participants.

Lessons Learned:

- Randomization was essential for comparing outcomes effectively and validly.
- A mixed-methods approach was key to understanding the complexities of participant experiences.



- Balancing research design with ethical considerations was challenging but important:
 - We chose an active comparison group over a "Treatment As Usual" group to prioritize participants' well-being.
 - From the start, we committed to doing what was best for participants, even if it complicated the research.
 - We ensured that all participants received some form of compensation, as we believed it was unethical to leave anyone completely uncompensated.

Research Tool Design

Our Experiences:

- Piloting the surveys showed that the initial quantitative survey was too long, which risked participant fatigue and incomplete responses.
- We did not consult enough with individuals with lived experience of homelessness when designing the survey, which may have impacted the cultural relevance and sensitivity of the questions.
- Some of the standardized quantitative measures used were not validated for people experiencing homelessness, potentially affecting the reliability of the results.

Lessons Learned:

- Testing tools beforehand helps identify and fix issues, like shortening surveys to keep them user-friendly.
- Engaging individuals with lived experience during the design phase ensures surveys are trauma-informed and culturally appropriate.
- Standardized measures need to be carefully reviewed or adapted to fit the unique experiences of the population being studied.

Implementation of Research Methods

Our Experiences:

- Community Based Organizations (CBOs) played a crucial role in participant enrollment and administering surveys, but it took time to build trust and explain key aspects like the randomized design and compensation.
- AidKit streamlined survey delivery and compensation, reducing errors by consolidating tasks. However, it sometimes slowed issue resolution due to added communication layers.
- We offered in-person surveys during the second phase of data collection, but participants preferred electronic surveys, prompting a shift to electronic-only surveys.

Lessons Learned:

- Phones were crucial for maintaining contact with participants and for encouraging survey responses.
- Building strong relationships with community partners is essential for successful participant engagement and depends on clear communication about the research purpose, methods, and compensation.
- Centralizing survey delivery and compensation through one platform reduces errors, but processes should account for possible delays when working with third-party systems.
- Adapting to participant preferences, such as offering electronic surveys, can improve participation rates and overall experience.

By reflecting on these experiences, we improved our design, tools and methods to better serve participants and achieve reliable results.

Research Reporting

CHHR analyzed the data and wrote summary reports of findings at the end of Soft Launch 1.0, Soft Launch 2.0, at the midpoint of Hard Launch, and at the completion of Hard Launch. They shared both quantitative and qualitative findings. You can access all research reports on our [website under the research tab.](#)

Publishing findings in peer-reviewed journals remains a cornerstone of disseminating rigorous research. These papers validate the study's methodologies and conclusions through expert evaluation, contributing to the academic and scientific discourse. This was important to us from the beginning.

Scientific research often progresses at a slower pace than the evolving demands of policy and public interest, creating a tension between rigor and responsiveness. We certainly experienced this tension. Often we needed to make strategic, funding, and communication decisions based on interim data.

Beyond academic journals, it's critical to communicate findings to broader audiences through clear, accessible reports with nuanced discussion of findings. This includes branding and formatting reports to make them visually appealing and easy to understand, enabling policymakers, practitioners, and the public to engage with the results.

Engaging participants in the process of interpreting findings before public dissemination was a powerful step. This approach allowed for deeper insights and ensured that participant voices were respected and integrated into the analysis. It also reinforced trust and transparency, aligning with ethical research practices.



Section V. Communications

Why External Communications Matter

How we communicate about guaranteed income is critical to the success of current pilots and policy efforts in our communities. Strategic communication is the backbone of a successful guaranteed income pilot. Building a strong case for a guaranteed income program helps bring in and align stakeholders and partners, as well as garner government and community support. The messages embodied within and outside of a project have the transformative power to shift public perception, build strong coalitions, and inspire real action.



Here are the steps our organization found helpful when developing our initial communications strategy:

- **What do we want to communicate?**
 - We deliberately took the time to align with our internal values and included staff and partners in these discussions. Developing a clear set of values and messages that feel true to the program's mission helps all internal and external communicators execute the program's brand with clarity and minimize misconceptions. We found that the clearer we were upfront about what we wanted to convey, the less backtracking we had to do later regarding the project's mission.
- **Why are we communicating it?**
 - Ask yourself and your team why this particular message is central to your mission and what goals you are achieving by communicating it.
- **Who are we trying to reach?**
 - We invested effort in stakeholder and target audience mapping during the early stages of communications development. Understanding the local community's perceptions and beliefs around guaranteed income (GI), and identifying the target audience, is crucial when developing key messages.
- **Where are we communicating these messages?**
 - Our organization has found success disseminating our key messages via our social media channels, email campaigns, and in media interviews.
 - Determine where the target audience can be reached and develop a strategy based on the specific platform or medium.
- **How will we know we're successful?**
 - Setting clear goals and objectives at the start of the program is essential for measuring the success of a communication strategy. Key metrics might include website traffic, social media analytics, monetary donations, media inquiries, positive media placements, and media engagements.
 - For example, while an article in a major media outlet might be exciting, it's less successful if the facts are incorrect or the key messages are unclear. A thorough and accurate article in a smaller publication could have a greater impact.
 - We also learned that goals and objectives may evolve over time, so revisiting and updating them periodically is important.

Narrative Change Best Practices

When building a new guaranteed income (GI) pilot, effective communication methods are crucial for the program's success and can significantly influence its reputation and subsequent path to policy adoption.

The Denver Basic Income Project's narrative change efforts were founded on the premise of elevating participants' stories. We discovered that sharing personal stories of transformation brought our pilot to life, transforming abstract concepts into real, relatable experiences.

Whether it's someone paying off debt, caring for a loved one, or starting a small business, these stories demonstrate the tangible difference GI can make. They resonate on a personal level, helping others in the community understand the true impact of guaranteed income and fostering broader support for local programs.



One of the main goals of narrative change is challenging existing stereotypes or misconceptions. Our culture holds so many harmful deeply-rooted beliefs about financial precarity and who is deserving of help. The Economic Security Project outlines a list of deeply held cultural beliefs that make communicating about direct cash and guaranteed income more difficult:

- Viewing poverty as a result of personal irresponsibility or moral failure.
- The myth that wealth is solely attained through individual effort.
- Linking one's worth to productivity or financial success.
- Prejudice and discrimination based on any personal life choices.
- The belief that "trickle-down" economics is effective or the "bootstraps" myth.
- The notion that welfare, shelters, and government benefits alone are sufficient to lift people out of poverty.
- The idea that some individuals are more deserving of assistance than others.

Since our pilot focused on individuals and families experiencing homelessness, we encountered harmful stereotypes about this population and the reasons for their circumstances. Challenging these misconceptions required strategic messaging that combined participant stories with project research. This approach led to earned media articles, like [this one](#) which integrated messaging from our [Year One Talking Points](#) (previously linked) with participant narratives and data to create a compelling narrative.

Surveying our community through social media and other communication channels helped us identify prevalent beliefs about guaranteed income (GI) and perceptions of homelessness in Denver. Common tropes included statements like, "GI is just a handout that creates dependency," or "guaranteed income disincentivizes work, and unhoused people are lazy."

To address these directly, we shared participant stories repeatedly on our website and social media, highlighting individuals with full-time jobs who still couldn't afford rent in Denver. We paired these stories with employment data showing increased employment rates among participants receiving larger GI payments. Over time, we observed a gradual shift in audience perceptions and a reduction in these misconceptions.

We found it useful to evaluate our environment both physically and culturally, and identify where tensions lie in belief systems. Then, we utilized the incredible experiences of our participants and data to help sway opinion.

Participant Storytelling Guide

Gathering stories from your participants is arguably the most important piece of a guaranteed income pilot's communications strategy. It's also something that can feel extractive or exploitative to a participant, if not done with respect, dignity, and mutual trust. This storytelling guide provides a framework for crafting ethical and effective narratives that honor the lived experiences of GI participants, challenge deeply rooted beliefs around economic inequality, and ultimately build support for GI initiatives in communities.

Why Participant Stories Matter

Stories possess the remarkable ability to make the mission of any GI initiative unforgettable and compelling, and they are equally as important for a program pilot as they are for participants. Folks with lived experience play a special role as the ultimate agents of change, teaching the rest of us about how exactly GI as an intervention is impacting their lives.

One of our participants, Jarun, shared how payments helped him more comfortably pay his bills and spend more time with his family in a [Business Insider article](#) (see below).





Cultivating a trusting relationship with participant storytellers is of the utmost importance in this process. That's why we developed our [Participant Storytelling Bill of Rights](#) to educate participant storytellers on their rights when speaking about their experiences to your organization or to press, since engaging in such a public way can feel scary or threatening to many.

There are a multitude of ways participants might feel comfortable sharing their experiences, and it is the responsibility of pilot managers to accommodate these needs and preferences to create a safe environment to share what might be an incredible vulnerability. Our project has connected participants with journalists for one-on-one interviews, and found that explaining the interview process in advance and even joining them in the interview was helpful in making the participant feel comfortable and supported. We'll discuss more on varying levels of media coverage later, but for now - vetting journalists and news outlets before connecting them with participants was essential for us.

Aside from press, we shared participant stories on our website and social media pages, primarily. See the Denver Basic Income Project's [Participant Story Bank](#) on our website for inspiration on how to build a home for an ever-growing database of experiences. As our collection built, more and more participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with our audience. We've also found that utilizing storytelling in almost all email communications to our community and funders, impact and grant reports, and applications for future funding opportunities has resulted in success. Everyone interested in this work wants to hear from participants themselves, about how pilots are changing their lives. That's the key to success.

Media Relations

Media partners can be a powerful tool to help initiatives amplify messaging and inform the community, and we used various tools and tactics to effectively execute our media relations strategy.

We implemented tools including Google Alerts to send daily updates about guaranteed income and our specific pilot. Depending on resources, it might be useful to have a daily or regular internal newsletter.

Early in the project, we created a media list, including contact information of those who regularly cover guaranteed income programs and adjacent topics. We updated this list regularly as we became aware of new reporters or job changes.

If the budget allows, media distribution services like Cision or MuckRack can be valuable for researching, cataloging, and monitoring journalists to collaborate with. We relied on our communications consultants to make use of these tools.

Communication Planning

In advance of public announcements, we created a communication plan that included:

- A living document with key messages about the organization including background, program stats, FAQs, hot topics and a targeted call to action.
- One designated staff member or volunteer to serve as the media point of contact
 - Provide spokesperson with regular media training to ensure they feel prepared and confident prior to interviews.
 - Create a list of other potential spokespeople who are willing and interested in speaking with the media, in case the primary is unavailable for interviews. This can include board members, CBOs or participants.

- An organizational media relations policy, including:
 - What happens if the media ask to be connected to a participant or begin asking participants questions within your organization.
 - This is up to the organization and internal privacy policies and comfort levels.
- Information where an interested reporter can learn more.
 - Based on your comfort level, consider providing your organization's website, fact sheet, contact information.
 - Refer media to your initiative's website and your initiative's communication staff member or consultant.

Should media arrive on-site at an event you are hosting, like an in-person application or enrollment intake opportunity, or a community event, and you do not desire or have the capacity to answer questions, we recommend handing out a fact sheet or FAQs document to provide information. If you have a communications lead, you can also refer to that individual for further follow-up.



Dealing with Negative Press

The Denver Basic Income Project encountered a small amount of negative press alongside numerous positive stories and news pieces. It's essential for any pilot or program to anticipate this reality.

Negative media coverage can be disappointing and stressful, but while we cannot control how the media reports, we can take steps to mitigate its impact and protect the initiative's reputation.

Preparation is key. Providing factual, clear materials—such as press releases, fact sheets, and web pages—can help deter misinformation before it arises.

Before responding to a journalist regarding a negative story, evaluate whether the details reported are factual and accurate. If inaccuracies are present, it's appropriate to request a correction. However, if the story simply doesn't meet expectations, treat it as an opportunity to refine messaging and move forward.

When managing media coverage, avoid striving for perfection at the expense of progress. While we don't subscribe to the idea that "all press is good press," we recognize that news cycles are brief, mistakes happen, and part of media relations involves relinquishing some control.

Communication Materials Samples and Supportive Resources

- [Building Economic Power Through Story: A Storytelling Guide for Guaranteed Income Advocates; Economic Security Project](#)
- [A Window of Opportunity to Frame the Guaranteed Income Narrative; Economic Security Project](#)

Examples of Media Coverage

From written news pieces to videos, editorials, and podcasts, different formats may better align with a guaranteed income program. Our participants have been front and center in most media coverage, and we also always encourage journalists to reference our research reports in their pieces. The Denver Basic Income Project [media page](#) provides an idea of which outlets and what types of coverage our pilot received.



The Latest News

Denver gave people without housing \$12,000. Here's what happened a year later

CNN | July 29, 2024

The Denver Basic Income Project gave over 800 unhoused Coloradans up to \$12,000 over the past year with no strings attached. 12 months later, with a funding proposal up for renewal, CNN's Meena Duerson examines the pilot's impact and what may happen to the participants if funding runs out.



A Native American participant in DBIP says direct cash finally gave her "room to breathe"

Business Insider | November 4, 2023

A Native American woman experiencing homelessness said payments from the Denver Basic Income Project allowed her to pay her bills and attend college.



How Denver's universal basic income experiment helped Moriah Rodriguez

Axios | January 29, 2024

Upon facing eviction and suffering a car accident, Moriah's life changed when she started receiving basic income payments.

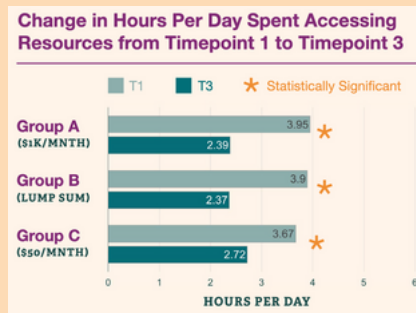
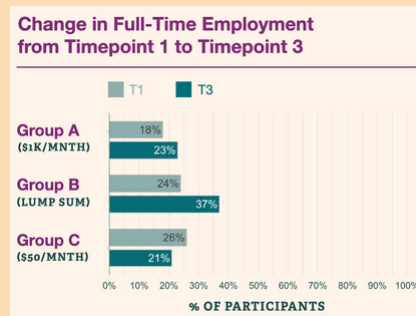
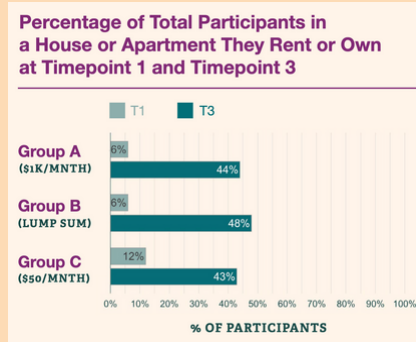


Closing Thoughts

Denver Basic Income Project was successful at delivering guaranteed income to over 840 individuals experiencing homelessness. We have heard through our participants and learned through the findings of our research partner, that this income has led to transformational results in many participants' lives. This is work worthy of pursuit, and we are glad you are exploring this path for your community. We leave you with several inspiring findings that emerged from the project:

- All payment groups showed significant improvements in housing outcomes, including a remarkable increase in home rent and ownership, and decrease in nights spent unsheltered.
- Participants reported positive shifts in financial wellbeing, with an increase in financial stability and a greater ability to pay bills and reduced reliance on emergency assistance.
- Additional data analysis reveals that DBIP participation is tied to substantial cost savings in public spending and a large reduction in public service utilization, including emergency room visits, hospital nights, and jail stays.

In short, guaranteed income for individuals experiencing homelessness, over a one year period, showed important positive individual and societal outcomes.



Additional Resources

Guaranteed Income Resource Links

- [Scott Santens' UBI Guide](#)
- [Karl Widerquist - Research & Writing on UBI](#)
- [Guaranteed Income Community of Practice Resource Page](#)
- [Mayor's for Guaranteed Income Resource Page](#)
- [Visualizing Basic Income Research](#)
- [Stanford Basic Income Lab - Experiments Lab](#)
- [Income Movement - Community GBI Pilot Tracker](#)
- [Basic Income Earth Network](#)
- [Jain Family Institute Toolkit on Guaranteed Income for Pilots in the U.S.](#)
- [Income Movement Pilot Toolkit](#)
- [Chapin Hall Cash Transfer Policy Toolkit](#)
- [Key Decision List For Designing Direct Cash Programs](#)

• [Cash in Colorado: A Landscape Analysis of Colorado Direct Cash Transfers](#)

• [Returning Citizen Stimulus \(RCS\) Implementation Guide](#)

Impact Reports and Research Findings

- [Denver Basic Income Project Research](#)
- [New Leaf Project Impact Report](#)
- [PNAS - Peer Reviewed Journal](#)
- [Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration Preliminary Analysis](#)
- [Magnolia Mother's Trust 2021-22 Evaluation Report](#)
- [Miracle Money 2021 Program Evaluation](#)
- [Research at Give Directly](#)



We Want to Hear From You

Thank you for exploring the Denver Basic Income Project's Playbook. We hope it has been a valuable resource in your journey to design and implement guaranteed income programs. Your insights can help us improve and inspire others to join this transformative movement.

We'd love to learn:

- How did you use this Playbook?
- What sections or tools were most helpful?
- Are there areas we could clarify or expand on?
- How has this resource influenced your work?

Please take a moment to share your feedback by [taking this short survey](#) or email us at hello@denverbasicincomeproject.org.

Your input is invaluable in shaping the next steps of this shared mission to build equity and opportunity through guaranteed income.

Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to explore the *Transformative Cash* Playbook and for investing your energy in building a future where guaranteed income creates stability and dignity for all. Your commitment to this work is inspiring, and we're honored to support your journey.

To stay connected and learn more about our latest updates, initiatives, and insights, we invite you to sign up for email updates on our [website](#).

Together, we can lower barriers and create pathways to stability and dignity for those most in need.

Partner with Us to Transform Lives Through Guaranteed Income

The Denver Basic Income Project (DBIP) invites you to leverage our expertise in designing and implementing transformative guaranteed income programs. With proven success in delivering financial stability to over 800 unhoused individuals, our comprehensive Playbook is just the beginning.

For organizations seeking tailored support, DBIP offers consulting services to guide you through:

- **Program Design:** Crafting participant-centered, impactful pilots.
- **Implementation & Operations:** Ensuring seamless processes from enrollment to evaluation.
- **Fundraising & Advocacy:** Building compelling cases to secure funding.
- **Research & Insights:** Driving credibility through rigorous evaluation.
- **Strategic Communications:** Shaping narratives that garner support and trust.

Take the first step: schedule a [free 30-minute exploratory call](#) to discuss your vision and discover how we can help you build lasting impact in your community.

Contact us at hello@denverbasicincomeproject.org or visit www.denverbasicincomeproject.org/playbook to learn more.