



Advance Guaranteed Income Now

Recommendations from Creatives Rebuild New York's Guaranteed Income for Artists Working Group

Context

[Creatives Rebuild New York's](#) (CRNY) Guaranteed Income program was one of several initiatives launched during the pandemic to provide unrestricted cash to artists. Several of these were structured as pilots or programs that explicitly sought to align with the goals and principles of the larger Guaranteed Income movement, while others were simply seeking to disburse emergency cash to artists as quickly and efficiently as possible (e.g. Artists Relief). What these initiatives shared is that they departed from the artistic merit-based and project-restricted funding approaches that have dominated support for artists to instead provide unrestricted funds based on financial need.

While the pandemic created a sense of urgency and released public and private funds at unprecedented

rates, the economic challenges that artists face are structural and ongoing. If anything, the pandemic revealed the extent to which artists share the experience of precarity with others in our society who fall through cracks of our economy and social safety net. Artist advocates are increasingly recognizing the need and opportunity to align with larger movements for economic justice in order to influence the systems that shape artists' ability to meet their basic needs and thrive. This includes [efforts](#) to expand and improve social insurance programs, extend benefits and protections to freelancers and other nontraditional workers, and support worker organizing and collective power building. Likewise, many economic justice movements, including GI, are increasingly seeing artists not only as

valuable partners for their creative skills, but also as constituents and stakeholders in their own right.

As a policy arena that has great potential to impact millions of low income artists, as well as conditions for cultural equity and vitality overall, guaranteed income has continued to attract interest from the arts sector even now that the peak crisis phase of the pandemic has passed. CRNY and others who have run GI for artist programs are fielding inquiries from others in the sector who are interested in guaranteed income and looking for guidance on how best to engage with the movement and apply the principles and practices in their work. The GI field, for its part, has expressed interest in continuing to include artists in the work going forward as a core constituency and as creative partners. This document's intention is to harness and direct the interest from both artist advocates and GI leaders towards collaborative actions that will be most strategic for advancing the guaranteed income movement's goals.

Working Group Process

To process what has been learned to date and align around strategic opportunities for moving forward, CRNY convened two conversations with peer administrators of programs providing unrestricted cash to artists. In the first conversation (August 2023) program administrators reflected on their experiences running unrestricted cash programs and shared the lessons they have learned that could inform future efforts. The second conversation (November 2023) situated artist-related GI work in context of the larger GI movement to consider strategic opportunities for artist allies to help advance the movement and further integrate GI values into the arts sector. The second conversation also included members of the larger GI field who have expressed interest in artists as collaborators and/or an important constituency for GI.

This document synthesizes and builds on the group's discussions, identifying five areas where strategically aligned action between the GI and arts sectors can help advance the GI movement's goals:

1. Challenge harmful narratives about work and deservingness
2. Build a base of artists who support guaranteed income
3. Focus on public policy wins
4. Match new pilots with movement priorities
5. Don't wait! Integrate GI values into arts funding now

Some of these are already in motion, spearheaded by CRNY and its partners, members of the working group, or others in the field, while others are in early stages of conceptualization. All require more research, consultation, design, and funding to refine the strategy and identify appropriate partners for implementation. This document is an invitation for artist advocates and guaranteed income movement leaders to see the possibilities for ongoing collaboration—there is great potential and much to be done.

Strategic Opportunities

1. Challenge harmful narratives around work and deservingness

There is consensus among GI movement leaders that the primary barriers to GI policy are our dominant cultural norms, beliefs and values around work, poverty, and basic human deservingness. Narratives around poverty in the U.S. have long focused on personal responsibility, rather than the systemic factors that limit economic mobility. Welfare reform has tied deservingness and worth to paid work rather than valuing other types of

social contributions or people's inherent humanity. Assumptions that poor people will waste cash, so they must meet conditions to get it and be carefully monitored on how they use it, are embedded in the design of social insurance programs. These narratives run so deep in our culture that even some would-be recipients of GI are wary of getting a "hand-out" or participating in a program that they believe gives "free money to low lifes." In fact, GI income research consistently proves people use extra cash for basic necessities, education, or caring for family and that it bolsters employment, community, and wellbeing.

Many in the movement believe it is critical to develop coordinated and research-based narrative strategies to counter these pervasive and toxic beliefs and promote a different set of values and vision for the future based on caring, freedom, trust, and solidarity. And many are excited about collaborating with artists in this work—both for their creative skills, such as storytelling, visioning, or cultural organizing, and because many artists embody a different way of thinking about work, life purpose, and societal contribution. For example, many artists claim that identity despite making their income in other ways and regardless of their creative output. Artists contribute to society and our "common wealth" in significant ways that are often not valued or remunerated by the market. However, the working group cautioned that while artists exemplify a type of person that is not currently valued by our society, and thereby can help spark an important conversation about expanding the social contract to those who are left out, it is important not to imply that artists are particularly deserving or valuable, which reinforces unhelpful hierarchies of deservingness based on work and identity.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- **Artists, narrative experts and GI movement leaders**—Develop a research based, multi-year campaign to shift public perceptions around deservingness and work
- **GI researchers**—Collect stories about the impact financial stability has on creativity and the presence of artists across all GI programs
- **Artist intermediaries and GI movement leaders**—Identify and support artists, cultural organizers, narrative strategists who have relevant skill sets to partner with GI policy advocates on narrative and organizing campaigns

2. Build a base of artists who support Guaranteed Income

Permanent GI policy has high rates of public support (one recent poll put it at 55% of likely voters), but the national movement has so far been largely driven by an organized group of "grass tops" practitioners—pilot administrators, academic researchers, policy experts, funders, and professionals in the anti-poverty space. This has led to substantial progress, but movement leaders know it will take a wider base of grassroots support to create a new "common sense" and push through permanent policy, while withstanding increasing challenges from the opposition. This means organizing participants in GI programs and others who would benefit directly from GI policy, as well as galvanizing a larger public who shares a vision for the kind of society a stronger social safety net would create. An important aspect of organizing is helping people with a direct experience of poverty, including

artists, develop their political consciousness and translate that into a desire and capacity for collective action.

Artists are over three times as likely than other workers to be self-employed, and many are also low income. Our social safety net, while still insufficient for those that qualify, is structured around traditional employment, which means many artists fall through the cracks. Historically the arts sector has not been particularly visible in anti-poverty work, including GI, although this is changing. Artists and artist advocates should be organized to become effective advocates around economic policies that impact them, in their local contexts and beyond. Artists who have participated in GI programs are an obvious constituency to start with, however there is also potential to work through other organizations and networks that have deep relationships with a base of artists—mutual aid networks, artist intermediaries, labor unions, and community-based arts organizations. Political education and training can help artists deepen their systemic analysis, see themselves in solidarity with others who share their conditions, and see GI as a solution for their concerns. Acting collectively, artists and artist advocates can be a powerful constituency to be reckoned with.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- **Artist intermediaries, GI movement leaders**—Develop a political education curriculum around GI that can be used widely, and encourage other movements to integrate and adapt it as a module in their own trainings
- **Artist intermediaries, policy coalitions, pilot leads**—Use curriculum to organize and engage artists and others in strategic localities

- **Policy coalitions, GI movement leaders**—Develop tools and information to help artists and other constituencies engage in particular legislative campaigns

3. Focus on public policy wins

The movement is making a concerted strategic shift “[from pilots to policy](#).” Pilots have conclusively [demonstrated](#) the potential of GI to reduce poverty and change lives. Now it is time to align around and resource fights for public policies that can distribute cash at larger scales and be building blocks for federal policy. Advocates consider [state level policies](#) to be particularly important, whether it is by expanding and improving state tax credits, developing new publicly run GI programs, or influencing the implementation of other public benefit programs (such as TANF or HUD) to bring their practices more into alignment with GI principles and values. While federal policy is still the ultimate goal, these intermediate policy and program changes can build the infrastructure for cash distribution, rebuild public trust in government, and demonstrate the impact of unrestricted cash benefits at scale.

Arts funders and other artists advocates who care about seeing GI become a reality should get involved in and support campaigns for public policy change in their state or locality. Some states have begun to build [cash coalitions](#)—groups that include GI advocates as well as other grassroots organizations interested in cash based policies—to develop coordinated policy and advocacy campaigns. Artists and artist advocates could participate in these coalitions, bringing the interests of artists to the table and being a conduit for information on opportunities

for political engagement back to the arts sector. Artist advocates might also work with GI leaders to advance specific policy agendas through targeted organizing and narrative campaigns. Mobilizing a strong and organized grassroots base is understood to be critical to achieving legislative wins.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- **GI advocates and policymakers**—recruit GI recipients, including artists, to participate in state [cash coalitions](#)
- **Arts sector and GI stakeholders**—build strategic alliances between place-based arts entities (public agencies, community based orgs) and place-based guaranteed income advocates
- **Funders**—support legislative campaigns around local and state safety net policies, including narrative and base-building work

4. Match new pilots with movement priorities

GI pilots have been the most visible and galvanizing tool of the movement to date, and there are now at least 130 running nationwide. Pilots, as they are understood in the GI space, are temporary initiatives designed to gather research to inform policy design or achieve advocacy and organizing goals. Due to the efforts to date, we now have a robust body of evidence proving that unrestricted cash works to alleviate poverty and yields many other positive benefits for employment, wellbeing, and community. In addition, because of the federal relief programs, we also know how such a policy could be implemented at a federal scale. In light of this, GI advocates are encouraging a shift of resources

and energy away from pilots except insofar as they advance the goal of achieving permanent policy. Toward that end, new pilots should be selectively chosen and strategically designed to challenge entrenched narratives around work and deservingness, organize critical constituencies, or answer [outstanding research questions](#) in order to advance policy and program reforms.

Our working group reckoned with the possibility that artist-focused pilots may be of limited value for advancing GI policy, and sometimes even counterproductive. GI is by definition not work-dependent, so artists below an income threshold will automatically be eligible. Moreover, some worry that targeting pilots based on profession may reinforce narratives that tie deservingness to work or other identities deemed more socially valuable. From an advocacy perspective, focusing on artists is unlikely to help GI become more appealing to policymakers or a wider public, and might even create backlash in some contexts. Therefore, additional artist-focused pilots should be done if and only if they will advance movement goals and not hinder them. As an alternative to doing an artist-focused pilot, arts funders and organizations interested in GI can invest in the other strategies identified in this document while integrating GI values into their programs on an ongoing basis. This is discussed more in the next section.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- **GI movement leaders**—determine if, where, and how artist-focused pilots might advance movement goals (ie., generating necessary data, activating a constituency, or challenging narratives)

STRATEGIC ACTIONS (CONTINUED):

- **Funders**—proactively reach out to movement leaders in order to understand and align funding and other actions with movement priorities
- **Artists-focused GI pilots**—provide support (ie., technical assistance, toolkits) for new artist-focused GI pilots at inception to ensure that they are designed in alignment with movement goals, GI best practices, and lessons learned from from artist-pilots to date
- **GI movement leaders + funders**—fund and amplify existing community-based entities and networks who embody GI values and practices (e.g. mutual aid networks, lending circles, etc)

5. Don't wait! Integrate GI values into artist funding now

Arts funders can best help advance GI movement goals by supporting prior recommendations. However, arts funders can also help normalize and elevate GI values by embodying them in their own work. Currently, the dominant way arts philanthropy supports artists is in direct contrast to the values and principles that the GI movement is trying to promote. Most funding programs support project costs but not general living expenses or even indirect project costs, like research. Grants often have onerous application and reporting requirements, even for small amounts, and may come with strings attached like working with particular institutions, participating in a cohort, or technical assistance that the artist does not want or need. Fellowships and awards are often unrestricted, but these are almost exclusively merit-based and one off.

Even recipients of generous fellowships often report anxiety about their financial situation after the award period ends. As Laura Zabel from Springboard for the Arts argues, “it isn’t that we shouldn’t have fellowship programs or awards. But these aren’t a sustainable way to make a living and need to be supplements to a more holistic infrastructure for sustainable support. Can you imagine any other field suggesting to its practitioners that they should try to win an award every year as a way to make their living?”

Artist-focused GI programs and pandemic emergency relief efforts (such as Artists Relief) proved that it is possible for philanthropy to disburse funds quickly in accordance with Guaranteed Income principles: unrestricted, based on need, and without onerous application or reporting requirements or the need to produce new work. These programs also proved the impact that such funds have on artists’ ability to meet their basic needs and invest in their creative process. These practices should be continued and expanded within the field. What this looks like will depend on the context and resources available, but funders might provide monthly stipends to artists that are community anchors, seed revolving loan funds that artists can draw on to cover emergencies or smooth inconsistent income flows, or remove restrictions and stipulations on grants. Funders and arts organizations might also continue to have dedicated programs that provide unrestricted funding to low-income artists based on need. Unlike pilots, which are designed to be experimental and temporary for the purpose of gathering data or case making, these programs would reflect a long-term commitment based on what we know works. Finally, funders should continue to advocate locally and nationally for economic justice policies (like GI) that will create the systems artists need to thrive.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS:

- **Arts funders**—convert funding for artists to no strings attached payments provided based on need not perceived artistic merit
- **Arts funders**—Invest in and advocate for GI and other economic justice policies and infrastructure that will benefit artists broadly
- **Artist-focused pilots and movement leaders**—create communications materials and educational resources to help arts funders understand GI principles and how they can integrate them into their work, including but not limited to a dedicated GI program.
- **Funder associations/organizers (Grantmakers in the Arts, Asset Funders Network)**—create opportunities for arts funders to connect with and learn from other entities that are integrating GI principles and practices into their work
- **Arts sector actors**—Challenge arts sector narratives and practices within the arts sector that are counterproductive for the movement (e.g., emphasizing artists' worthiness based on work output or economic contribution)

Conclusion

A national GI policy has the potential to revolutionize the cultural sector, creating an unprecedented degree of economic security for artists in the United States and surpassing anything that could be realized by private philanthropy alone. Moreover, artists are a significant—and often overlooked—constituency for anti-poverty work that can bring valuable creative skills and people power to the GI movement.

The working group's recommendations focus on five places where greater strategic alignment between the GI and arts sectors can help advance efforts to achieve GI policy: addressing harmful narratives around work and deservingness, building a base of artists that support guaranteed income, aligning energy and resources around achieving public policy wins, matching new pilots with movement priorities, and integrating GI values into artist funding.

To delve deeper into these opportunities and explore others will require sustained cross-sector dialogue and collaborative action. It is essential, therefore, to continue and expand the relationship-building work that has already begun between artist advocates and the GI movement. Specifically, we encourage:

- Artists and artist advocates to continue to participate in GI-related networks (such as the

[Guaranteed Income Community of Practice](#)) and gatherings (such as the [Basic Income Guarantee Conference](#)), and to join state cash coalitions

- Funders to support cross-sector gatherings and conversations at local, state, and national levels
- GI movement leaders to continue to see artists as a key constituency for GI policy, and proactively include them in organizing efforts and policy design

As a time-limited initiative that will close in December 2024, CRNY recognizes that the next phase of this work will necessarily be carried forward by others. CRNY will allocate \$100,000 in its final year to seed some of these recommendations, and will continue to use its platform and networks to galvanize and connect funders, government officials, cultural leaders, artists and organizers around moving this work forward.

For more information, or if you are interested in partnering to advance any of these strategic recommendations, please visit creativesrebuildny.org or contact:

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Creatives Rebuild New York (CRNY) is a three-year, \$125 million initiative that provides guaranteed income and employment opportunities to artists across New York State. Fiscally sponsored by Tides Center, CRNY represents a \$125 million funding commitment, anchored by \$115 million from the Mellon Foundation and \$5 million each from the Ford Foundation and Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF). Learn more at creativesrebuildny.org.