

Income Movement Foundation: Building Coalitions to Support the Basic Income Movement in the United States¹

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Abstract

The Income Movement Foundation (IM) has as its mission making basic income a reality in the United States by 2030. IM organizes grassroots energy into people-powered events and direct action, creates and makes available information and tools about basic income, and promotes coalition building across organizations that work for social and economic justice. IM believes in partnerships in the truest sense of the word and does not bring a “what’s in it for us” attitude to movement building.

Introduction

The Income Movement Foundation (IM) has as its mission making basic income a reality in the United States by 2030. To achieve this goal, IM develops grassroots support and organizational coalitions that help make the issue of direct cash payments be high stakes for politicians. This process of people-centered policy design and building coalitions with like-minded organizations is what characterizes IM’s niche in the UBI ecosystem. IM organizes grassroots energy into people-powered events and direct action, creates and makes available information and tools about basic income, and promotes coalition building across organizations that work for social and economic justice.

IM conceives of its work having three pillars: grassroots advocacy, thought leadership, and politics/developing public policies. *Collaboration* is critical for the movement: Without collaboration and high-level strategic coordination across basic income organizations that lead in work for specific pillars, opportunities for higher impact initiatives can be lost, slowing momentum building.

This paper seeks to encourage a discussion of how IM’s experience in the United States may be relevant in other countries.

Founding and Operational Mode

In September of 2019, Stacey Rutland – together with James Felton Keith, Diane Pagen, Dylan Enright, and Fund For Humanity – planned the first Basic Income March in New York City. Rutland and Enright were in the early stages of forming a non-profit organization focused on supporting and expanding the thriving grassroots basic income community. The Basic Income March was an opportunity to better understand the current makeup of the grassroots community, specifically

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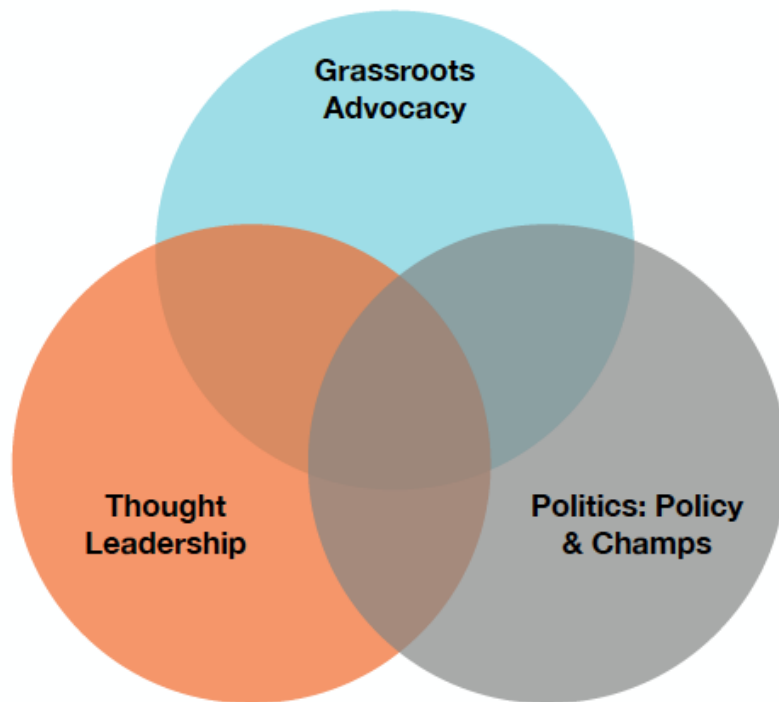
² Stacey Rutland is the Founder of the Income Movement Foundation (<https://www.incomemovementfoundation.org>), and Peter Knight is the Coordinator of the Sufficiency4Sustainability Network (<https://www.sufficiency4sustainability.org>)

if it existed solely as part of the rising Andrew Yang Presidential Campaign, or if it had legs beyond the candidate. Their vision and goal was movement building, and energy beyond a campaign would be necessary to build that. Within weeks, the first Basic Income March grew to 30 cities across the globe, and it became clear that many of the most ardent marchers were not exclusively supporters of Yang's campaign. From this, Rutland established Income Movement (IM) in the Fall of 2019, with Enright as close advisor. The goal was to bring together long-term supporters of basic income with the growing Yang Gang and provide events, actions, and community building opportunities to continue to build the momentum that the campaign had inspired and drive it towards a permanent federal basic income by 2030.

At the heart of Income Movement's philosophy is the idea of building partnerships. IM does not see volunteers, organizations, or thought leaders as specific to its organization: rather, they are part of the larger basic income movement. IM strives to serve as an Ecosystem Coordinator for the basic income movement, guiding a national agenda that offers the flexibility and opportunity to scale for the interests and needs of local communities. Local organizers determine the work in their communities that are specific and relevant to their region. And IM connects people and organizations to each other around shared work. Through regular meetings with grassroots organizers and consistent educational events and advocacy opportunities, they connect people and organizations with each other and help eliminate redundant actions or efforts: they believe every donor dollar and organizer hour should go towards movement building and disseminating the idea of basic income.

IM brings grassroots organizers together with basic income leaders and policy experts to design programs, policies and initiatives so that all community members have a stake in driving things forward. This work has brought together leaders and organizers across the community together, including the co-author of this paper, Peter Knight, Coordinator of the Sufficiency4Sustainability Network, working together with IM on key initiatives.

In their vision for movement building, IM draws from the best practices of the past: the three pillars they recognize as critical to success include grassroots advocacy, thought leadership, and politics/developing public policies. While they are pillars, and leadership within each may live in independent organizations within the basic income ecosystem, they should not be siloed. They are best viewed as a Venn diagram.



Collaboration is critical for the movement: Without collaboration and high-level strategic coordination across basic income organizations across the specific pillars, opportunities for higher impact initiatives can be lost, slowing momentum building. Separation of organizations across grassroots and policy is important for effectiveness in the grassroots advocacy and politics pillars. There is often a (healthy) tension between the goals or strategy of what the people want and what policy advocates or politicians are willing or able to pass. Collaboration means finding strategic moments where, together, more significant progress across the movement can occur.

IM is a non-partisan and seeks to grow the basic income movement across the nation.

Examples of IM Activities

Here are some examples of how IM applies its mode of operation.

Basic Income March

IM organizes the annual Basic Income March as a way to celebrate the growth of the movement, highlight mounting support for Basic Income, and inspire the community in the next phase of work necessary to continue to grow and have impact. This yearly Fall event is an opportunity for citizens around the country (and the world!) to publicly show up in the streets of their town or city and advocate for Basic Income. This year's March takes place on September 25 (see <https://www.basicincomemarch.com>).

100 Mayors Campaign

The fight for guaranteed income must happen at all levels of government. Grassroots can have a huge impact on local leaders, who can in turn influence elected officials at the state and federal

level. From this truth, the 100 Mayors for Guaranteed Income Campaign was born as a partnership between Mayors for a Guaranteed Income and IM. As of August 5, 2021, 56 mayors from cities large, medium, and small across the US had joined MGI, and there were active grassroots campaigns underway in 40 more cities to get additional mayors on board.

The campaign is designed for constituents across the country to petition and call their Mayors, urging them to support guaranteed income. Local residents can write letters to the editors of local newspapers or coordinate with organizations or small businesses to help Mayors understand their community's desire for a guaranteed income and access other resources from the Campaign's website. IM works closely with organizers in different ways, tailoring their outreach and communication plans with their communities and their mayors for high impact (see <https://sites.google.com/incomemovement.com/100mayorsin100days/home?authuser=0>).

Covid-19 Congressional Action

IM'S work is to respond consistently to the economic needs of the basic income community, whenever possible. So, when COVID-19 struck, causing unprecedented suffering for our people and our economy, IM came up with the COVID Action Plan. The goal of the COVID Action Plan is to empower people to pressure Congress to pass emergency and recovery Basic Income legislation to provide monthly payments to the people for the duration of the crisis. From sending letters to participating in car parades or delivering petition signatures to Congresspeople, they have harnessed the energy of grassroots to urge their elected officials to support direct cash payments whenever possible. IM built a website to house all actions, and invited other basic income organizations to join in support of the effort, including Fund for Humanity, Economic Security Project, Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, Humanity Forward, and Humanity First Movement (see <https://www.bailoutthepeople.com>).

State of the Movement Zoom Sessions and Clubhouse sessions

Opportunities for the grassroots community to come together and engage with each other and with the latest ideas and information is key to movement building. IM sees it as their job to support and facilitate regular meetings and events towards this end, hosting weekly or bi-weekly virtual State of the Movement meetings where IM staff and activists from partner organizations discuss programs and campaigns and coordinate actions and events with grassroots activists. IM also supports regular Clubhouse events and discussions to continue to nurture and grow engagement with the idea of basic income across a variety of platforms.

IM As a Possible Model for Other Countries

IM was founded at an inflection point in US history, building on the momentum of Andrew Yang's primary campaign for President and connecting Covid-19 relief and recovery policy to the idea direct cash policy. But its mode of operation – based on collaborative movement building, thought leadership, and grassroots advocacy – may prove useful in other countries. This paper seeks to encourage a discussion of how IM's experience may be relevant in other settings. outside the United States.