



**2024 CERTIFIED COMMUNITY ACTION PROFESSIONAL**  
**INDEPENDENT WRITING ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION**

*by*

Kaden Phillips

*IT Systems Coordinator*

Mid-Iowa Community Action



**Question 1**

Community Action's "Body of Knowledge" outlines the following vision and values: "Poverty can be eliminated by creating an environment that encourages opportunities for everyone", "Serving the best interests of the poor is in the best interest of all people", and "The misery of poverty must be addressed and alleviated – poverty is unacceptable, painful and far-reaching, easing the misery of poverty is good, right and essential in an affluent society, community action identifies and addresses the causes of poverty, community action removes obstacles, fills gaps and confronts the causes/conditions of poverty."

There are several ways that providing a guaranteed income would create an environment that encourages opportunities for everyone. People in abusive relationships could afford to escape instead of remaining in a harmful environment due to the fear of the loss of financial stability the relationship provides. Those who are one car repair, medical bill, or failed appliance away from debt could rely on this income to reduce the impact unforeseen financial burdens present. Families experiencing a natural disaster or job loss would have a safety net to land in when facing unexpected expenses or the loss of a wage. Workers in industries that are becoming automated could weather a change in their job security and could have an opportunity to afford education more easily in another career path.

With a guaranteed and hopefully unconditional supplement of cash at a regular interval, people in poverty can better cover their basic needs. The resource "Guaranteed Income: A Primer for Funders, 2022" shows that direct cash payments during the COVID-19 crisis had "nine out of 10 low-income families using funds to pay for basic necessities like food, clothing, rent, and utilities (Parolin et al., 2021)."

Guaranteed income serves the best interest of everyone. Opportunities for higher education for people currently in the workforce, or for children of lower income families, are an important

pathway out of poverty. The Aspen Institute's publication "Two-Generation Playbook" states "Investments in high-quality early childhood education yield a 7-10 percent per year return on investment based on increased school and career achievement and reduced social costs."

The ability to choose how to spend additional income opens opportunities for growth. Being able to invest more on a better car leads to less car repair debt. Money that would have been set aside for repairs can be used elsewhere. Reliable transportation leads to a reliable workforce, supporting local economies and contributing to the stability and growth of the job market. What is good for people in poverty is also beneficial for everyone – an excellent example is in alleviating mental health and stress. Mental health improvements due to reduction in financial stress will improve people's ability to remain focused on achieving their goals, whether or not they are in poverty.

There are few areas of modern civic life that are not impacted by providing guaranteed income. As stated in "Guaranteed Income: A Primer for Funders, 2022", income during unexpected crisis "demonstrates convincing impacts on economic insecurity, income, assets, physical and mental health, food insecurity, poverty, economic and gender inequalities, housing mobility, crime, early child development, and children's school achievement, employment, and earnings in adulthood."

Poverty is unacceptable and easing the impact of poverty is achievable, with sustained guaranteed income. According to *Next Generation Evidence Strategies for More Equitable Social Impact*, the expansion of existing unrestricted cash programs during the COVID-19 pandemic "...dramatically reduced poverty for as many as 13 million people in the early months of the pandemic. This evidence reinforced the importance and efficiency of direct cash in helping families both survive a crisis and thrive over the long term when they have the ability to save. Nearly 8 million people slipped into poverty when the cash assistance ended." While this shows that possibly 5 million people did step outside of the threshold for poverty, it also shows

that sustained efforts are needed to truly see the full impact of what a guaranteed income could accomplish.

Community action is called to fill gaps and confront the causes and conditions of poverty. The spaces left between programs like Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can be readily filled with providing a guaranteed income.

## **Question 2**

Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are tasked to not only directly serve low-income and impoverished communities, but to also act as a glue for other partner programs. There are many different public and private pilot programs running at any given time. Community Action can serve as a participant in this space, providing referral information for people who are already taking part in our own programs as well as for those who need resources outside our network. The reality is, universal basic income would not solve all the problems associated with poverty. Community Action's role as a convener and partner would be necessary to continue to build enduring economic stability for families.

At the individual or family level, there is an opportunity for CAAs to take on the task of running a pilot program themselves, either through state tax credit pilots or through philanthropic donation. The Guaranteed Income Community of Practice's 2023 "Guaranteed Income Blueprint" suggests that "In order to lead the way to guaranteed income policies, we must first begin to create policies that facilitate direct cash distribution. Such policies include State Tax Credits and Publicly Run Pilots." This foundational work would directly support the families that we serve. The programs that we offer already target a population that would benefit greatly from a guaranteed income, making Community Action uniquely positioned to run such a program.

The benefits and improvements individuals and families will experience can be used as a demonstration project to illustrate potential community impact. Spark Policy Institute and ORS Impact's publication *When Collective Impact Has an Impact* emphasizes the extent of the work that is needed to see actual community level and structural systems change. "Collective impact initiatives are distinct from other forms of collaboration in their cross-sector composition and their implementation of the five conditions of collective impact:" common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. CAAs are uniquely positioned to meet all five collective impact conditions, working throughout and within states to support systems change.

As a network, we have several models that are already in place to help us engage in the work. An example is Results Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA). ROMA provides us a common language and toolset to report on family, agency, and community goal achievement, and we can use the ROMA cycle to improve existing systems. ROMA is already a well-regarded and accepted method of performance management and is in place at agencies to support CSBG work, which means it is a ready framework that provides tools to move us from family level to systems change.

To engage in community-level change, we must change the narrative around poverty and guaranteed income programs. Economic Security Project's publication "A Window of Opportunity to Frame the Guaranteed Income Narrative" is a playbook for increasing trust and reducing concerns around pilot programs using "details such as: how much money people received every month, in what ways they spent the money...speaking to the impacts of GI on workforce participation, and their presence in rural communities helps counter common misconceptions around guaranteed income deterring work." Additionally, qualitative data – story-telling pieces – can illustrate the impact at the individual level and act as a form of education for the public at large as well as elected officials. Community action is often called upon to tell our

story, and this advocacy role extends to guaranteed income programs as well. There are many misconceptions around people in poverty that we work to dispel every day.

Through using existing networks, resources, and tools, community action is well-positioned to support guaranteed income pilots both at the family and community levels.