



Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) Forum

Souris, PEI

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ORGANIZERS:

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PARTICIPANTS:

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1.0 Goal and Objectives of the Forum

Forum Goal

- *to strengthen our plan for a BIG pilot project and to explore ways in which people can become involved.*

Forum Objectives

- *to present information about BIG*
- *to hear from people what they think of the idea of BIG & what kind of benefit they think it may have to their communities*
- *to identify concerns/fears would be around BIG*
- *to gather ideas about how to promote the idea/increase understanding/engage people in their communities*

2.0 Presentation of Information on Basic Income Guarantee

The organizers presented a power point as an introduction to BIG and a video revealing some of the painful aspect of poverty in PEI. The review of Basic Income Guarantee included the following:

- the level of poverty in PEI--what it looks like
- the cost of poverty in PEI
- that BIG PEI would ensure that each and every Prince Edward Islander would receive enough income to meet basic needs
- that BIG has been in operation in many parts of the world, including for five years in Manitoba
- that Basic Income Guarantee works
- that BIG is the best way to invest in people in PEI
- the cost of BIG is not great considering the how much it costs the system when people do not have basic needs met
- that BIG can be administered through the tax system
- that a BIG PEI pilot program is necessary to get it started

3.0 Group Discussions

Participants in small groups identified the following : how BIG would benefit the community; their own questions about BIG; and how to build support in the community for BIG. The following is a summary of their discussion:

3.1 How could BIG benefit the community?

- Social justice!
- Health would improve greatly – mental, physical, spiritual
- People would be more likely to stay in the community
- Jobs will be created
- Kids would do better in school – fewer drop-outs and more post-secondary options feasible
- Decreased costs to the health care system
- Lower justice costs
- Save money on hospital and prison costs
- Improve health outcomes
- Improve dignity and self-esteem for Islanders
- Improve housing quality
- Enable people to “give” again – participate in the life of their community
- People can be included again in society!
- Improve education
 - Lessen stress
- Decrease crime rates

- Less division between classes (economic)
- Stimulate the economy – locally, nationally, and internationally
- Lessen political interference (eg. MLA's being called on to find jobs for constituents)
- More equity
- More independence and freedom
- Enable families to stay together and live on PEI – not head out west for work – families reunite after long separations
- Shares general wealth
- Energy and resources put into food banks and other charities could be focused elsewhere
- It gives people choices
- Better overall health – physical, mental spiritual;
- More control – if you have choices, you feel in control of your own life
- A livable incomes gives people hope
- People would be able to save for their retirement
- Benefits for future children, grandchildren.

3.2 How do we build support for BIG in the community?

- Compare lobster fishers pre-EI to now – tell the general public about the improvement to income that have occurred due to EI support
- Make the business case for BIG
- Earn the support of the more wealthy people in the public service and other sectors, get them onside with BIG
- Get the endorsement of a powerful group like the Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce
- Show what is happening right now on PEI is not sustainable
- Have more public conversations like this
- Make BIG a political issue – for the 65% who earn below \$30,000 /yr. and for everyone, regardless of personal income situation
- Speak to the Deputy Minister's Group that has been tasked with looking into BIG
- Approach neighbours, friends, family and talk about BIG (spread the word)
- Educate ourselves about the issue and benefits
- Talk to our politicians
- Write letters to the editor (Guardian)

- Plan your work – work your plan
- Make connections between communities – PEI and elsewhere
- Make connections between groups – churches, labour, seniors, women’s groups, etc.
- Have well-laid out and clear explanations
- Tie BIG in with our income tax system – simple, bureaucracy already established
- Explain that more money to those in poverty results in increased dignity and spending within communities
- Make a strong connection to better health within communities with BIG
- Lobby to have BIG as an election issue
- Lobby local MLA’s for support
- Stick together – form a constituency
- Small groups of people CAN have a big (BIG) voice!
- Put information out to the people, to the public
- Get the message out that this (BIG) will work for everyone
- Bring pastoral energy in (churches) and make this a social justice issue
- Get leadership to join us in our fight.

3.3 Questions / concerns about BIG?

- How much will it cost?
- What is the business case? Can we demonstrate the “multiplier effect?” need to hit the \$\$ first
- How will a study population be selected? How many would qualify? Would it be based on income taxes? Is it really a good idea to offer BIG to only a small population on the Island, or to the whole population?
- Can we demonstrate that it worked in 4 jurisdictions worldwide?
- It could help stabilize the seasonal workforce, like lobster fishery, farming, forestry?
- Do we need a pilot project of participants? Perhaps better to consider the whole Island as a pilot for BIG?
- Need to ensure evaluation and sustainability

- Research what has worked elsewhere – how did they implement? What worked, what didn't, and why?
- Could we be a national example, with all of PEI in an initial pilot? Less divisive of Island communities
- Can we increase PEI's personal tax exemption level? Currently the lowest in Canada
- When would we implement BIG?
- How would payments be made? Monthly?
- What would be the age and eligibility requirements?
- How would the pilot be administered?
- Need to ensure the process is transparent and fair
- Need more information on details
- How will civil servants be handled?
- Is the PEI government even close to really considering it (BIG)?
- How will government hear from us?
- How do we keep this moving?
- How can we be the voice to have government hear us?

4.0 **Evaluation**

The following are the responses of the participants. (The number of time a comment is repeated is indicated with asterisks)

This evening, I liked... the input from people attending; all positive support for BIG; the power point presentation**; meeting new people; the passion of the people; new ideas I heard; interesting discussion; the group discussions of the three questions****; sharing our experiences and concerns; the people; the idea of BIG***; the hand-out; that you came to our community; the room; the three leaders; the feed-back from each group; the idea of BIG for everyone; very good open discussion of ideas; the openness of the discussions; well presented information; the format of the meeting; everything running on time; not letting anyone dominate the discussion; lots of understanding and enthusiasm; the open forum concept; a lot of the ideas discussed

This evening I learned... BIG has functioned in other countries****; active support from the wide community; more about BIG****; that people are hopeful; we need more answers to our questions about BIG; how to spell guarantee!! That BIG has been tried in Manitoba; some thoughts of what BIG would look like; I need more information; that I am not alone; if BIG comes to PEI, it will be through the efforts of the grassroots people; that the on-going issue of poverty on PEI can finally begin to change (Some of us have lived this in our work life constantly and were the “lone voice” in the wilderness); I will keep up with your work and spread the word; something about how BIG could work; theirs is great diversity of opinion; it’s a difficult problem; the concept of BIG as a solution to poverty issues; great objectives; was reminded of how desperately pervasive poverty remains on a personal level.

I would like to know more about... information from other countries***; more about the tax system; the nuts and bolts of it****; how to get it out there to political parties or the rich to get them behind BIG; how we get to keep our voices going; how BIG will be presented and followed up with government; who would qualify; how I can sell this program; the strategy for getting politicians on-side—most MPs & MLAs know nothing about the reality of poverty; the business case (# of people, \$\$ cost, \$\$ in benefits).

For another time... get support from more groups; be sure everyone talks in the small groups** (Michelle Jay did a great job of helping this to happen); go around the circle to make sure everyone gets a chance; present the possibility of all of PEI being a pilot (don’t want to divide the community)****; plan actions & strategies to get BIG implemented; discuss spreading the BIG idea; have more time on the three questions; have some plan for action, not just talk about it; actions speak louder than words; explain BIG right up-front at the start of the meeting—I had to wait 30 minutes before I had some understanding; get more people involved—strength comes in numbers; invite the local MP & MLA, not to confront, but to get them on-side **; have minutes of previous meetings.