



Coalition Canada
basic income
revenu de base

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ONTARIO BASIC INCOME NETWORK
RESEAU ONTARIEN DE REVENU DE BASE

The Case for Basic Income for the Arts

2020

**THE CASE
FOR BASIC
INCOME
SERIES**

Case for Basic Income for the Arts

SUMMARY

In July 2020, artists, writers, technicians and performers wrote an open letter calling on Prime Minister Trudeau to create a permanent basic income guarantee. In the letter, signed and endorsed by many of the largest arts and culture organizations in Canada and many prominent talents calls on the government to think outside the box and implement a “basic income program that guarantees an income floor to anyone in need.” The pandemic’s wrath on lives has been swift. Millions are still out of work, venues shuttered, and livelihoods lost. In this new precarious reality, poverty can become a reality for all of us, abruptly, without warning. In the pandemic’s wake, Canada can rise from the disease, hardships, and ruptures in social behavior with a basic income. This brief includes the open letter and a number of the other materials created for the case for basic income for the arts campaign.

ABOUT BASIC INCOME

Basic income means different things to different people. The Case for Basic Income series defines basic income as an income-tested and targeted unconditional cash transfer from governments to individuals to enable everyone in Canada to meet their basic needs, participate in society, and live in dignity, regardless of work status.

Some Case project teams make more detailed recommendations about the principles to guide the design of a basic income program in Canada.

ABOUT THE CASE FOR BI SERIES

The Case for Basic Income series explores the impacts of a basic income program for various communities and policy areas across Canada. Each Case has been developed collaboratively by subject matter experts and basic income advocates to consider the distinct issues and concerns between the Case topic and income insecurity - and the difference that basic income might make.

Every Case is unique in both function and form and is guided by its authors and contributors.

On Basic Income

A poem by George Elliott Clarke, 2020

The economy's an abyss whose bottom is a grave,
And each tightrope walker wobbles as a mere wage-slave.
And those who freefall, screaming, screeching, as they go,
Clutching for handholds or toeholds, only hope to slow,
Their plummet to a crashing or a smashing that'll whack
Wallet and skull, household and heart, for debt's the crack—
The airy nothing through which poor and jobless catapult—
Down, down, down, to either suicide or homicide result.

Capitalism insists each citizen's alone
To bargain with Fate and to barter blood and bone—
To work the best deal each can despite lay-off
Or disease, bankruptcy or injury, and to play off
Labourer against labourer, to suffer or succeed,
As individuals, whatever shall be the collective need.
But yet a contradiction is ever starkly evident:
Businesses can't sell products to customers indigent.

No matter how rich the rich, the people own greater riches—
For our tax dollars are ours to fulfill all our wishes.
Why not weave ourselves a mass, protective web
To catch all who tumble, whether the poor or pleb,
Off the high-wire of capitalist high-jinks and low-down tricks,
The badly frayed ropes and the greasy balancing sticks.
Why not grant ourselves—because the people's money's ours—
Platforms to stand on, cushions to land on, fail-safe moors?

Time to paraphrase the bards John Lennon and Yoko Ono!
Basic Income is ours; we can have it; purely pro bono—
If we want it. We can have it if we want it—just like health care,
U.I., the baby bonus, public transit, public schools, welfare....
There's no end to what we can do to improve our lives
Against all odds, if we'll stand as one against capitalist thieves.
Basic Income is the price of bottom-line social equality:
So that all can ascend—escaping Poverty's gravity.

George Elliott Clarke was the 4th Poet Laureate of Toronto (2012-2015) and the 7th Parliamentary/ Canadian Poet Laureate (2016-2017). He has published 26 poetry "works" since 1983, not including 3 books in Chinese, Italian and Romanian. He is a pioneering scholar of African-Canadian literature at the University of Toronto and has taught at Duke, UBC, McGill and Harvard. He is a 7th generation Afro-Metis of Nova Scotia. Visit his [website](#) to read more.

A Public Letter from the Arts Community for a Basic Income Guarantee

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Deputy Minister Freeland, Minister Morneau and Minister Guilbeault:

We represent tens of thousands of artists, writers, technicians, and performers from many backgrounds and regions across Canada. Our voices are united; we call upon the Government of Canada to ensure the financial well-being of all residents by implementing a permanent Basic Income Guarantee.

The pandemic's wrath on lives has been swift. Millions are still out of work. Those whose financial situation was not previously precarious find themselves sinking into financial quicksand, their lives instantly upended through no fault of their own. The arts, culture, heritage, tourism, and creative industries have been deeply affected: productions have been canceled, venues shuttered, and livelihoods lost. In these unprecedented times, millions of Canadians, including those in the arts and culture sector, exist in a precarious reality. In this new reality, we are all vulnerable to unexpected changes in circumstances and unexpected hardships. Poverty can become a reality for all of us, abruptly, without warning.

Financial insecurity and the cracks in our health- and social-support systems have been

highlighted by the pandemic, but they were always present. Structural inequalities disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalized communities, making it more likely for people with disabilities, LGBTQ2+, Black, Indigenous, people of colour, refugees and immigrants, women, single mothers and others to slip into systemic cycles of poverty and poor health.

Many support programs have been eroded during the last few decades, with federal, provincial and territorial income assistance and disability support systems consistently failing to provide economic dignity or meet basic human needs. Furthermore, employment-insurance programs have not adapted to the realities of the gig economy or the self-employed, and a large proportion of workers do not meet their required criteria, which is often based on full-time work. If workers do qualify, they often face barriers to re-entering the labour force in the form of reduced support when short-term employment opportunities arise.

The gig economy is undermining decades of worker protections. As participants, many arts- and-culture-sector workers are subject to precarious short-term contracts, without access to benefits, paid sick leave, or even employment insurance. Today, the world of

general labour is looking a lot like the way art labour has looked for decades. We write to express our collective concern regarding the precarious state of labour that is in urgent need of reform and redress.

Canada is at a crossroads. The government can continue to look the other way, allowing our most vulnerable to fall through the cracks of a systematically broken social safety net and perpetuate a history of economic insecurity, anxiety and fear. Or, we can take this opportunity to bring about much-needed change and make a meaningful difference that will lead to a brighter future. Establishing a Basic Income Guarantee will help to create a healthier, more equitable social safety system that provides financial support, elevating people and ensuring that no one is left behind.

We commend your leadership and the work of the Government of Canada in implementing and extending the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and other measures, including support for the arts, sports, and cultural sectors. However, too many are still being left behind, held back by barriers beyond their control. A Basic Income Guarantee would build on your existing programs, including CERB, and provide financial security to meet people's basic needs and allow them to participate in society, living with dignity regardless of their work status.

As stakeholders of the arts and culture sector, we ask you to give Canadians the chance not only to survive, but to live.

Towards this:

- We, the undersigned, are calling upon the Government of Canada to honour its commitment to poverty reduction and instate a Basic Income Guarantee to make a historic investment in a better tomorrow;
- We call upon the Government of Canada to hereby reduce the inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic: to remove the financial obstacles faced by our most vulnerable, to alleviate gender-based poverty, and to address the economic inequality based in persistent racism and colonialism;
- We call upon the Government of Canada to implement a universally accessible and unconditional basic income program that guarantees an income floor to anyone in need.

In the pandemic's wake, the arts communities, versatile and adaptable, are evolving in new and exciting ways. Artists, writers, technicians, and performers will continue to create and to inspire the world around them. Their creation of novel forms of digital culture, music and performance art, online entertainment, movies, literary works, arts and crafts will allow people to weather times of solitude, hardship, and ruptures in social behaviour and contribute to their overall well-being.

We envision a Basic Income Guarantee that ensures financial stability without eroding the existing federal support for arts and culture programs. Unconditional access to a basic income will support the remarkable creative

capacity of individuals and provide employment opportunities, bold visions and community inspiration.

Great challenges are often the catalyst to transform societies and our ways of being – the challenges we face today are no exception. We require a Basic Income Guarantee. The opportunity for change is here and now.

Sincerely,

Craig Berggold – Media artist / Team leader,
Case for Basic Income and the Arts, Ontario
Basic Income Network

Zainub Verjee – Laureate 2020 Governor
General's Award in Visual and Media Arts for
Outstanding Contribution

Clayton Windatt – Independent artist /
curator

See the full list of signatories [here](#).

SEE ALSO

- **Humans of Basic Income** is an ongoing portrait series by Jessie Golem featuring the residents of Ontario who were part of the prematurely cancelled Basic Income Pilot Project and their stories. See the portrait series at the **Humans of Basic Income website**.
- The **Toronto Arts Council's** statement of support for a federal basic income guarantee, which you can read [here](#).