

Madison Mayor Rhodes-Conway: City launches guaranteed income research program to support low-income families

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Applications opened today for the [Madison Forward Fund](#): a **guaranteed income pilot** that will give 155 families in Madison \$500 per month for one year. The program is a collaboration between the City of Madison and [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income](#), a national network of mayors advocating for an income floor in their communities and beyond. The application is available **June 21 - July 3** and can be completed online at [MadisonForwardFund.wisc.edu](#) .

The guaranteed income comes with **no strings attached**, meaning that families can spend it on whatever they need, when they need it. Flexible guaranteed income programs like the Madison Forward Fund hold promise to support families in Madison that are struggling to make ends meet, especially in the context of high inflation.

“We know that monthly cash aid can help families access healthy food, buy school supplies, or even get a better job,” said Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway. “A guaranteed income can also improve the mental and physical health of recipients. Piloting this program in Madison not only helps Madison families, it helps build the case for a national guaranteed income program.”

Any family is eligible to apply as long as they have a [household income less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Line](#), have at least one child under the age of 18 living in the household, and are permanent residents of the City of Madison. The online application will be open from June 21 – July 3. Families will be notified of their selection into the program mid-July and the first payments are expected to begin in late summer.

[Emerging research](#) suggests that when parents are provided direct cash assistance, they are better able to take care of their families. Instead of worrying about how to budget limited resources, participating families can rely on a stable source of income and focus on [meeting their goals to thrive](#). Guaranteed income programs also [help families face rising costs and inflation](#), rather than contribute to it, as some critics suggest.

“Poverty is not a personal failure, and eliminating poverty is a community responsibility. Madisonians deserve financial stability, and guaranteed income is about supporting family economic stability,” says Madison Common Council Vice President Jael Currie, who represents Madison’s District 16 and also is a member of the Madison Forward Fund Task Force.

Walter Williams is the Chair of the Madison Forward Fund Task Force and CEO of Think and Grow, LLC. “I got involved because I recognized that the pandemic exposed several weak points in our system and it’s important to respond by strengthening those areas. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs suggests that if a person’s physiological needs such as shelter and food are met, the individual can shift their mental focus to other areas of their lives in an attempt to become the best person they can be. As a mental health therapist, a part of my job is to help others become the best version of themselves and I see this program being a start to that endeavor,” said Williams.

“Madison is entering this space at a critical time, when residents are facing not only

the lingering economic effects of the pandemic but also struggling against rising inflation,” said former Stockton Mayor and **Mayors for a Guaranteed Income** Founder, Michael Tubbs. “Providing the stability of a guaranteed income will help the selected families in the short term, and help us level up to the end goal of providing an income floor to all who need it.”

“This guaranteed income program is important because every person has the right to basic human needs, such as food, housing, healthcare, and financial stability. We are all equally worthy of these basic human needs,” said Blake Roberts Crall, Program Manager for the Madison Forward Fund. “The program supplements, rather than replaces, the existing social safety net, providing families with a basic level of financial security, and the autonomy and flexibility to manage their finances in the way that is best for their own needs. I hope this pilot can inform future policies and how we think about welfare in America.”

All eligible applicants will be entered into a pool from which 155 families will be randomly selected to receive the guaranteed income. These recipients will also have the option to participate in the **important research component**, where they will be compensated for their time taking surveys. A separate pool of applicants who are not selected to receive monthly payments will also be invited to take these surveys for which they will also receive compensation. This data will be collected and analyzed by the Center for Guaranteed Income Research at the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Social Policy & Practice with support from the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University Wisconsin-Madison in hopes of building the evidence base around the efficacy of guaranteed income programs.

“We at the **Institute for Research on Poverty** are excited to be part of this innovative program and to be able to collaborate with the City of Madison, Mayors for a Guaranteed Income, the Center for Guaranteed Income Research, and the other partners in the project,” said Katherine Magnuson, IRP Director and Vilas Distinguished Professor of Social Work at UW-Madison. “As social science researchers, we are eager to learn what impact unrestricted cash aid can have for families in our community, and to share those findings with affected communities,

policymakers and legislators, and other researchers across the country.”

The Madison Forward Fund is providing \$930,000 in direct cash assistance to Madison families. This initiative is funded entirely by generous private donors including Mayors for a Guaranteed

Income, UW Health, CUNA Mutual Foundation, Roots & Wings Foundation, Madison Gas & Electric Foundation, the TASC Family Foundation, American Family Insurance Dreams Foundation, Alliant Energy Foundation, PRL Keystone Foundation, and Wisconsin Department of Health Services. No City tax dollars are being used to support the Madison Forward Fund.