



**BASIC
INCOME
ALBERTA**

TOOL KIT #2

**How to Have
Conversations
about Basic Income
Across the Political
Spectrum**



How to Have Conversations about Basic Income Across the Political Spectrum

Basic Income is not a partisan idea. In fact, it has strong supporters across the political spectrum, from former Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to the current federal NDP leader, Member of Parliament Jagmeet Singh.

It aligns across parties, and is not ideologically-driven.

Some common reasons for Conservative support include:

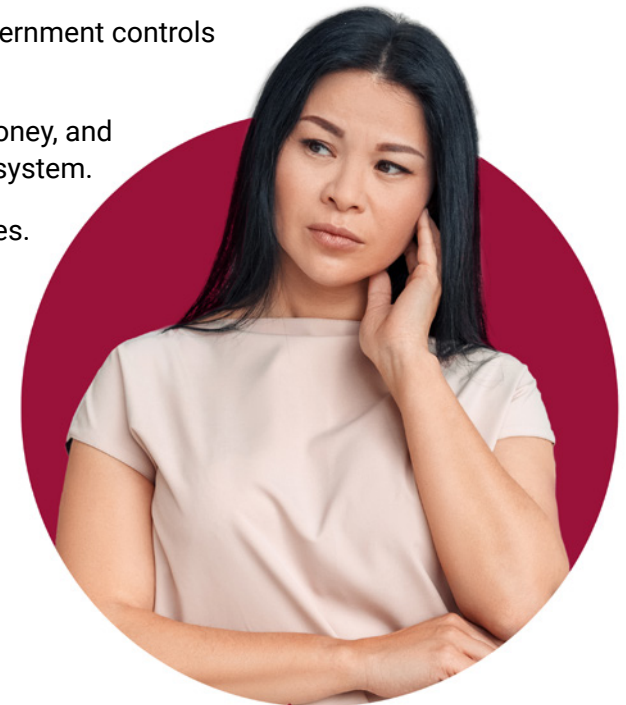
- A universal program means less bureaucracy and government oversight, and lower associated costs.
- Basic Income encourages entrepreneurship and innovation.
- It limits the need for, and reliance on, other social programs.
- It reduces the costs of poverty, and the amount the government spends on healthcare, housing, and justice systems.
- It offers freedom of choice, and supports opportunities for career advancement, like making it easier to retrain and find higher paying work.
- Basic Income provides economic stimulus to businesses, as more people have more money to spend. It is the free market in action.

On the other side of the political spectrum, here are some common reasons for Progressive support:

- A universal program destigmatizes people receiving government benefits and supports the dignity of all people.
- Basic Income creates a more equitable society, where everyone can meet their basic needs.
- Basic Income leads to better mental and physical health outcomes.
- It removes barriers for people experiencing systemic oppression, and allows for more equal access to opportunity.
- It creates more opportunities for people who are less valued in our current system (ie. artists, childcare workers, healthcare support staff, low-wage workers, etc.)
- Basic Income acknowledges that people add value to communities in ways that aren't tethered to employment (volunteers, stay-at-home parents, elder caregivers, etc.)

There are, however, some frequent objections and fears about basic income. Conservatives tend to worry that basic income will:

- Take money they earned through hard work, and give it to people who choose not to work.
- Disincentivize people from working.
- Enforce more government controls on people.
- Cost too much money, and be a drain on the system.
- Increase their taxes.



Progressives are frequently less critical of the movement, but some progressives are concerned that basic income will:

- Still not be a living wage, particularly in expensive cities, thereby not solving income inequality issues.
- Inadequately replace necessary and valuable social programs that people rely on, making them worse off than before.

Know Your Audience

When talking to people about basic income, it's helpful to address their interests and concerns based on their political leanings and world view. Talking to conservatives about enhancing the dignity of all people through basic income frequently isn't a compelling enough argument to assuage their fears or change their minds. Talking to progressives about limiting the need for other social programs can raise red flags, and may actually turn some progressives away from the idea.

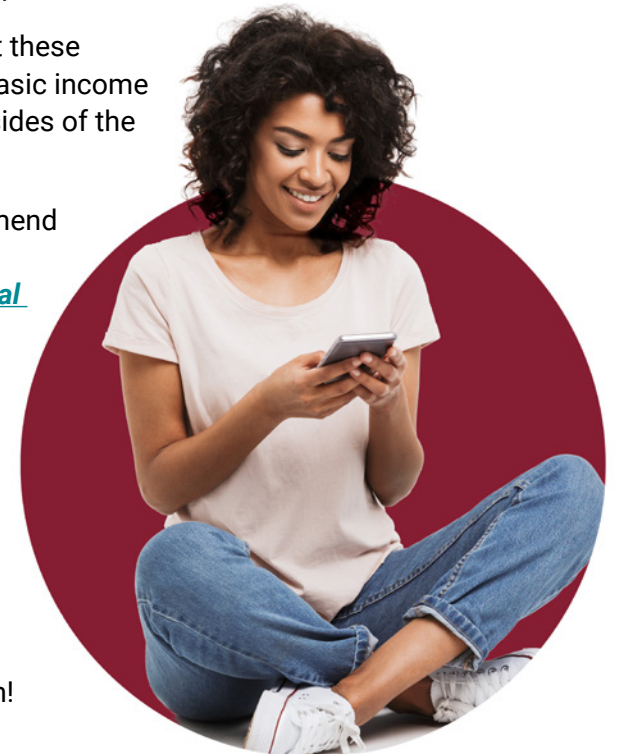
Both of these examples are valid arguments about why basic income is valuable, but when provided to the wrong audience, it can actually raise or reinforce negative attitudes or misconceptions.

Research shows us that it is more common for people with conservative viewpoints to be critical of basic income, in spite of the many solid pro-basic income arguments that may appeal to them. Progressives, on the other hand, are quite likely already in favour of the concept, and need little convincing. For this reason, we are focusing on conversations that will lead to greater interest and acceptance of basic income from a conservative viewpoint, in order to increase the groundswell of support for the idea.

It's absolutely vital that these conversations about basic income reach people on both sides of the political fence.

This is why we recommend contextualizing these discussions using [Moral Foundations Theory](#) to reach people using arguments and language that will be persuasive to them, tailored to their political identity.

What's **Moral Foundations Theory**?
It's super cool. Read on!



Moral Foundations Theory

Moral Foundations Theory explores how morality differs across cultures, and yet, has fundamental similarities. The six moral foundations are common to all cultures, and yet they're viewed differently across the political spectrum.

Here are the six moral frames, and how they connect to political affiliation:

Care vs. Harm — primarily a progressive foundation.

Fairness vs. Cheating — when framed around equity and human rights, it's primarily a progressive foundation, but significant swaths of conservatives are very concerned by issues of fairness vs. cheating.

Loyalty vs. Betrayal — concerns both ends of the political spectrum, but exhibits itself differently in each. Conservatives tend to define in-group in terms of people whose life experiences and identity are the same as theirs. Progressives tend to define in-group in terms of people whose values are a match, regardless of identity.

Authority vs. Subversion — primarily a conservative foundation.

Sanctity vs. Degradation — particularly relevant to conservatives, though does also appeal to some left-leaning folks as well.

Liberty vs. Oppression — a 'new' moral frame that has appeal on both sides of the political fence. Conservatives are more likely to speak to issues around personal liberty, and progressives are more likely to address systemic oppression.

Moral Foundations Theory in Action

So, based on these moral foundations, let's explore them in more detail as to how they relate to conversations about basic income.

Care vs. Harm — Use this kind of argument for talking to progressives. For example:

“Basic Income will better meet the needs of all Canadians, particularly those who fall through the cracks of our current system, like artists, gig workers, and people who lose their jobs due to automation.”



“Basic Income is poverty prevention. It makes sure everyone can put food on the table and a roof over their heads.”

Fairness vs. Cheating — When talking to conservatives, frame fairness vs. cheating within the context of individuals or specific groups:

“People who need help making ends meet should get that help, especially if it's due to job loss, or a situation beyond their control. But there should be controls put in place to make sure the system isn't abused.”



When talking to progressives, use arguments that frame fairness vs. cheating within the context of society as a whole (ie. equity and human rights):

“ Basic Income helps uphold the basic human rights of all Canadians. It provides people with dignity. It is an equalizer, it helps destigmatize poverty, and removes stress and shame around receiving government benefits.”

Loyalty vs. Betrayal – When talking to conservatives, frame the loyalty and betrayal arguments in ways that make it personal, with groups they can identify with:

“ Basic Income would be a huge help for people who’ve lost their job in the oil industry. Jobs are getting harder to find, and basic income could help people manage until they find another job, as there’s no guarantee these days that EI will last long enough to find new work.”

“For anybody who has an inconsistent income — like seasonal labourers, or people in the gig economy — basic income could really help because you’re not penalized for working, the way you are on EI or Income Support. That way, you can take work as it comes up, but you don’t have to worry as much if the jobs just aren’t there. Which in this economy, is a major relief.”

When talking to progressives, the loyalty/betrayal arguments can be broader and more collective, speaking to regional and national identity:

“As Canadians, we value our universal healthcare as a right for all citizens. Basic Income is an extension of that same belief: that we are all deserving of care, and that we all have equal worth. We need to make sure all our systems reflect that core Canadian value, and basic income would be a major step towards that.”

Authority vs. Subversion – Use this foundation when talking with conservatives by pointing to leaders they find trustworthy. For example:

“Basic Income really isn’t a partisan idea. Canadian conservatives like former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Senator Hugh Segal support basic income. In the US, conservative pundit David Frum, and Republican politicians like Marco Rubio and Paul Ryan, support basic income-like programs. Even tech billionaires like Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk are in favour of the idea. Most of these folks see it as a way to shrink government, to cut the costs of poverty, and to spur innovation.”

Sanctity vs. Degradation — Use this foundation with talking with conservatives, and/or people with strong religious ties. For example:

“It is immoral not to help our fellow humans when they are in need. Basic Income is noble, and it fulfils our moral responsibility to care for people who are suffering due to issues beyond their control — which could be any of us, at the end of the day.”

Liberty vs. Oppression — Use ‘liberty’ messaging when talking with conservatives. For example:

“Basic Income gives everyone the freedom to choose how they’re going to spend their money. It’s superior to programs like food stamps, for example, because people have the agency to make their own spending decisions, without a government dictating how they should do it. Everyone should have the power to do the right thing for their lives, and basic income allows people to do that unconditionally.”

When talking to progressives, there can be more of a focus on freeing people from oppression. For example:

“Systemic oppressions, like racism, sexism, ableism, and others, create barriers for people to get ahead. Basic Income provides resources to remove those barriers — or at least, to help people navigate around those barriers — so they can take the steps they need to in order to move forward in their lives.”



In Conclusion

There are excellent reasons for implementing a basic income, no matter your politics or worldview. By using the arguments that most closely align with the politics of those you’re speaking with, you’re able to be that much more persuasive and compelling, and more likely to get them onside. More advocates mean more voices championing this important idea — making it that much more likely for basic income to become a reality in Canada.

Check out Tool Kit #3 for the actions you can take to advocate for basic income!

Resources

Want to read more about moral foundations theory, and what people think about basic income across the political spectrum? Check out these links:

Moral Foundations Theory:

<https://conceptually.org/moral-foundations-theory>

<https://c4aa.org/2017/08/the-5-moral-foundations>

https://youtu.be/iOu_8yoqZoQ

<https://dividedwefall.com/2018/07/15/the-righteous-mind-moral-foundations-theory/>

Political and Worldview Arguments for Basic Income:

<https://theyee.ca/News/2019/11/07/Guaranteed-Income-Argument/>

<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/september-2020/a-bold-conservative-platform-would-include-universal-basic-income/>

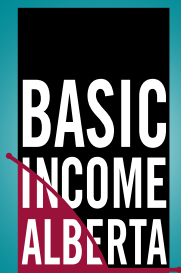
<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/08/why-arent-reformicons-pushing-a-guaranteed-basic-income/375600/>

<https://quillette.com/2019/11/20/why-ubi-ought-to-appeal-to-conservatives/>

<https://www.libertarianism.org/columns/libertarian-case-basic-income>

<https://medium.com/@dannypgreen/a-christian-case-for-universal-basic-income-835f4cb3e944>





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