

*Basic Income as a Poverty Prevention Strategy:  
Building A New Movement  
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Fighting poverty in the present, and for the future, is an important goal for all of us. Historically, the Welfare Rights movement in the US and its successor organizations in Massachusetts and nationally recognized that the best way end poverty would be to bring meaningful income to people directly, and without all the regulations and conditions imposed by the welfare state. This meant creating a movement and policies to replace all the categories ruling "welfare." And it also assumed that those most affected by poverty would play leadership roles in that movement.

For Martin Luther King and founders the Welfare Rights Movement the fullest way to fight poverty was a Guaranteed Income for all citizens. Martin Luther King wrote in 1967:

*"I am now convinced that the simplest solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income....The contemporary tendency in our society is to base our distribution on scarcity, which has vanished, and to compress our abundance into the overfed mouths of the middle and upper classes until they gag with superfluity. If democracy is to have breadth of meaning, it is necessary to adjust this inequity.*

Today there is a movement of people around the world and the US to, again, bring the demand for a Universal Basic Income back to the front of activism and policy.

In February, 2015, North American Basic Income Guarantee (NABIG) held a congress in New York City. The theme was "Building a Movement for Basic Income". As part of this Diane Dujon and I worked to bring national Welfare Rights veterans to the table, not just as individual speakers but in an effort to make sure that people with lived experience with poverty and anti-poverty organizing would join and help lead the emerging movement. (Local anti-poverty people in Massachusetts helped with funding to get people there).

The results were powerful. When speakers like Willie Baptist, Marian Kramer, Diane Dujon and other long time welfare rights activists spoke about the links between Welfare Rights and Basic Income, the audience of mostly white professional advocates and academics took notice. Conversations were lively and practical. The point was less to put forward models for how a universal income grant could be funded and implemented, and more engage in strategic thinking about how to build a broad based movement that demanded out Basic Income for All.

The result after three days of lively talk and sharing stories from the US, Canada and parts of Europe, was a call to build a movement and to bring the voices of local anti-poverty activists into full engagement with the movement.

A report of the conference can be found on the NABIG website, [usbig.net](http://usbig.net), which also provides an update of latest organizing effort around Basic Income, relevant bibliography.

Currently local and state groups are forming around the country to help bring Basic Income into a range of progressive conversations and strategies.