



Raising the Floor Discussion Guide

About Raising the Floor:

In spring 2020, a global pandemic sent the city of Chelsea, Massachusetts, spiraling into chaos. Chelsea's frontline workers risked their lives to help others, while its essential workers' incomes dropped to zero overnight. Hundreds of citizens waited in blocks-long lines to pick up food at a makeshift distribution center. Chelsea quickly became a COVID hot spot, and the governor was forced to call in the National Guard to distribute food boxes throughout the city.

City leaders, overwhelmed by the high costs of feeding a city and humbled by their own lack of expertise to do so efficiently, came together in a desperate moment with a simple but inspired idea: give people money and let them spend it however they see fit. It was the beginning of CHELSEA EATS, the largest basic income pilot in American history: one that gave 2000 individuals and families direct payments of up to \$400 a month with no strings attached.

RAISING THE FLOOR is the moving narrative of a majority Latinx community coming together to feed neighbors and strangers during an unprecedented public health crisis. It is the inspiring story of a group of local leaders whose sense of helplessness and concern led to bold policy innovation. The research findings from the Chelsea pilot offer lessons that resonate beyond one Massachusetts city and make a compelling case for reconsidering public policies around poverty and inequality in post-pandemic America.

To learn more about the impact of the Chelsea EATS pilot, see the website with research findings reports and more, [here](#).

Classroom Discussion Guide - Grades 6-12:

Below are questions you can use to guide a classroom discussion. This Curriculum / Discussion Guide is designed for middle to high school aged students. For adult learners and guides for community event conversations, go to the next session.

1. In the film, during food distribution a fourteen year old boy came to get a box of food because his mom couldn't come. The staff asked the director of the foodbank, Gladys Vega, if they should give him a box. Gladys said, "Yes, we don't deny people the food. We don't make rules, because you don't know what his reality is."
 - a. What do you think about this idea of not making rules about who gets food or support?
 - b. Have you ever experienced a situation where the rules or paperwork or other required things got in the way of you being able to do something that was important to you?
 - i. Describe that experience.
 - ii. How did that feel?
2. The idea of TRUST came up over and over in the film. The city council was concerned about giving cash to people, instead of food, out of concern or distrust that people were going to spend the money on things other than food and necessities.
 - a. What do you think about the idea of giving money to people and trusting that they know best what to spend their money on?
 - i. What did you think about this idea before watching the film?
 - ii. Did your thinking change at all after watching the film?
 - b. Are there people or institutions (school / teachers, police, parents, store owners) that you come into contact with who you feel don't trust you?
 - i. How does that impact you?
 - ii. What would your interactions look like with that person or institution if they trusted you?
3. Which characters / people in the film stood out for you, or that you felt like you could relate to?
 - a. What about them made an impact on you?
 - b. What would you want to say to that person if you saw them?
4. Imagine that Congress has passed federal basic income legislation and all people living in the United States will now be receiving a monthly income (if it helps to think of a number you can use \$1,000 per person per month as reference).
 - a. What do you think will happen to the economy?
 - b. What would happen to you and your family? Your neighborhood or community?
 - c. What do you think workers will do?

Community Event, Adult Education Guide:

Trust, Deservedness and Shifting Narratives:

1. There are three main values that basic income advocates talk about when discussing basic income. These values are: Trust, Deservedness, and Human Dignity. Do you think the Chelsea EATS program exemplified any of these values? What are some examples?
2. During the pandemic, we saw a national narrative push to honor and appreciate those who were considered 'essential workers', specifically, those who needed to continue working through the pandemic in order to support supply chains and distribution of goods so everyone had basic needs covered during lockdown. Much of the community in Chelsea were and continue to be essential workers as they support the port and transportation systems that supplies much of greater New England with goods. And yet, they couldn't put food on their tables after just a few days of the pandemic.
 - a. What do you think about the idea that, even pre-pandemic, people in Chelsea couldn't "work their way out of poverty", or have enough to cover household costs for any amount of time if there is a disruption to their work?
 - b. Do you think people who work formal jobs should be able to cover their basic needs, for themselves and their families? Do you think people who work formal jobs should be able to do more than cover their basic needs - like take a vacation, put money away in their savings for a rainy day, buy a home in their community?
 - i. What are ways that our government or society might decide to change our systems or laws in order to work for working people?
3. There are millions of hours spent every day in the United States by people doing "unpaid" work. This includes caring for children or elderly, volunteering in their community, supporting a neighbor by doing chores, and more.
 - a. Do you think people who do unpaid work (care for children or elders, volunteer at schools, etc.) should be able to cover their basic needs, for themselves and their families? Do you think people who do unpaid work should be able to do more than cover their basic needs - like take a vacation, put money away in their savings for a rainy day, buy a home in their community?

Latin Culture and Communities

1. A trope that has been pervasive in mainstream media is that undocumented and immigrant families put a strain on our economy through the use of our social safety net. In this film, many of these working individuals and families were unable to access these services even when faced with a global pandemic.
 - a. What purpose do you think this false idea of immigrants serves in our society?
 - b. What were some parts of the film you thought best disrupted this idea?
2. What surprised you or challenged your own ideas of the role of Latino community members play in our economy and our society?

COVID-19, Basic Income and the Social Safety Net

Basic Income:

During the pandemic, there were cash disbursements in the form of stimulus checks, extra unemployment payments, and the Child Tax Credit (monthly child checks). These disbursements were automatic for most people and did not require people to prove that they needed it (ie. that they didn't meet certain income thresholds). These monthly disbursements start to resemble a basic income.

Basic income is a direct cash transfer program that provides a regular stipend to meet the basic needs of the recipients. The recipients can spend the cash on whatever they choose, no strings attached. Basic income is an umbrella term that applies to the various kinds of monthly cash transfer programs. [[Learn more here.](#)]

1. Should there have been restrictions on who received these cash disbursements during the pandemic?
 - a. Why or why not?
 - i. Do you feel there shouldn't be restrictions on these kinds of disbursements in "normal" times?
 - b. If you think there should have been restrictions, which conditions would you have set on receiving the checks? (income thresholds, race/age/gender requirements, having a job/ not having a job, etc).
 - i. What would be the process for identifying who meets the conditions and should receive the money?
 - ii. What would that mean to the amount of time it would take for people who do qualify and need it to receive it?
 - iii. If stimulus checks had been restricted to certain people, and a process would have been in place for people to raise their hand and say they needed it, what would that have meant for you? Your family? Your neighbors?
 - c. The Chelsea EATS program did not require any level of immigration or citizenship status. What does it mean to have the program open to all people of the community?
2. In the film, the city manager said that he didn't want to talk about the Chelsea EATS cash debit cards program and universal basic income, because it has political connotations. That said, the program was, essentially, a basic income. Basic income is a direct cash transfer program that provides a regular stipend to meet the basic needs of the recipients. The recipients can spend the cash on whatever they choose, no strings attached. Basic income is an umbrella term that applies to the various kinds of monthly cash transfer programs. [[Learn more here.](#)]
 - a. If someone asked you what basic income was, what would you tell them?

- b. The Chelsea EATS program is one of more than 100 basic income pilot programs that have launched across the country. The nonprofits and city and state governments that administer these pilots are joining a growing number of grassroots activists in pushing for direct cash payments as a necessary component of the social safety net. What are your thoughts on having a basic income program as part of national policy?
 - i. Are there any things that would need to be included in this policy to make it fair or just?

Social Safety Net:

1. Many people have talked about problems with our current social safety net (SNAP, TANF, housing vouchers, etc.). Do you believe the story of the Chelsea EATS program uncovered any cracks in our current systems for helping people meet their basic needs? If so, what do you think it showed?

Economics

1. In the film, a multiplier effect is described where the government is investing in people and that investment is multiplying into larger dollars as people spend at local businesses. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as *trickle up economics* because financial investment is focused on people at the bottom or middle and then those dollars are flowing towards people at the top.
 - a. What were your thoughts as you watched this part of the film?
 - b. How effective do you think this strategy is for a nation's financial wellbeing?
 - c. Is this strategy more or less effective than trickle down economics - for example - bailing out banks during the 2008 housing crash, or giving large tax breaks to corporations so they can grow their company?
2. Imagine that Congress has passed federal basic income legislation and all people living in the United States will now be receiving a monthly income (if it helps to think of a number you can use \$1,000 per person per month as reference).
 - a. What do you think will happen to the economy?
 - b. What would happen to you and your family? Your neighborhood or community?
 - c. What do you think workers will do?
3. In the film, the Chelsea EATS program saved the city overhead and labor costs by shifting funding from creating a food pantry to a city issued debit card and safe-guarded the city budget from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. If the United States were to try to implement this on a national scale do you think there would be a way to fund it? If so, where would Congress get the funding? (Think about new tax revenue streams, redistribution of funds, etc.)

Take Action

Basic income sign on letter:

- Would you sign your name on an open letter to Congress to show your support for basic income? Open Letter: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/basicincomeletter>

Get involved or learn more:

- Income Movement form for staying informed, learning more, or taking action: https://actionnetwork.org/forms/im-interested-in-basic-income?source=direct_link&

Learn More:

Raising the Floor Film

Film News:

- [Raising the Floor](#)

Basic Income Education

Common Arguments Against Basic Income:

- [2 Page Handout](#)
- [Social Media Graphics](#)
- [Video](#)

Basic Income Terminology:

- [2 Page Handout](#)
- [Social Media Graphics](#)
- [Video](#)

Historical Supporters of Basic Income

- [2 Page Handout](#)
- [Social Media Graphics](#)
- [Video](#)

Trailblazing Guaranteed Income Programs

- [2 Page Handout](#)
- [Social Media Graphics](#)
- [Video](#)

Join the Movement

Learn More about the Movement and how to get involved:

- [Interest Form](#)