

BLOG POST

BIG TAKEAWAYS FROM THE BIG CONFERENCE

Summer Hsu | July 2025



Before the Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) Conference, I didn't really know what to expect. I had a vague, pessimistic assumption that it would be a bunch of men talking about rules in unintelligible political jargon. So I was pleasantly surprised when I walked into the conference room. The crowd was made up of both men and women, of all ages. A woman sat by the stage, gently rocking her baby. A young family in matching yellow shirts chuckled as the dad fumbled with his selfie stick. The atmosphere wasn't as intimidating as I thought.

The energy and motivation was palpable - everyone in that room seemed determined to change the world (or at least learn about what it takes to make change, like me). They weren't just eager and idealistic, though. They were realistic. Many talked about data collected over the years, and pilot participants of guaranteed income programs were invited to share what worked, as well as what aspects of the programs could be improved.

The speakers weren't all focused on the same thing. Some talked about how universal basic income could give people the freedom to pursue an education, or a career in art. Others shared how guaranteed income can provide immigrants or previously incarcerated people stability in life. Still others talked about narrowing the gender pay gap, and freeing women who stay with abusive partners because of their lack of economic independence.

For context, guaranteed income is a direct cash payment given regularly to individuals, with no restrictions on how it can be used. It's different from traditional welfare programs because it doesn't require people to prove they're working or searching for a job, and it doesn't limit spending to certain items. Universal basic income is similar but distributed to everyone regardless of income, with the idea that everyone deserves enough to cover basic needs.

At first, all these ideas seemed slightly random and disconnected. One man campaigned for steering our world towards a society that's not job-based. How was that connected to closing economic disparities and building racial equity? As the day went on, however, I started focusing on the similarities rather than the differences of each topic. That's when I realized that each topic shared two common themes: human dignity and freedom. Guaranteed income isn't just about money - it's about allowing everyone the same chance to live the life they want. Nobody deserves less than another, and guaranteed income can be used as a tool to level the playing field.

I left the BIG Conference more optimistic for the future. My idea of the future had always been gloomy: irreversible climate change, permanent social inequalities, political polarization, and instability in general. But the dedication and persistence of people at the conference, as well as how they planned to achieve their

goals, assured me that there's hope for the years ahead. Of course, the world won't be magically fixed by a few people, but knowing that there are people committed to solving major problems in society is both comforting and inspiring.