



# Doing Radical Things Right:

## Ethical Good Practice for Basic Income Experiments

Neil Howard<sup>[1]</sup>, Nicholas Langridge<sup>[1]</sup>, Vibhor Mathur,<sup>[1,3]</sup>  
Leah Hamilton<sup>[2]</sup>, David Westlake<sup>[3]</sup>, Nika Soon-Shiong,<sup>[4]</sup>  
Miriam Laker-Oketta<sup>[5]</sup>, Sarath Davala<sup>[6]</sup>, Aida Martinez Tinaut,<sup>[7]</sup>  
Bru Laín,<sup>[8]</sup> Virginia Morrow,<sup>[9]</sup> Maria Franchi<sup>[1]</sup>



[1] The Bath UBI Beacon (UBI Bath), University of Bath, UK, [2] Department of Social Work, Appalachian State University, USA  
[3] Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre (CASCADE), Cardiff University, UK, [4] Fund for Guaranteed Income, USA, [5] Give Directly, [6] India Network for Basic Income, [7] Independent researcher (Former member of the Office of the Pilot project to implement a UBI in Catalonia, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain), [8] Department of Sociology, Universitat de Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain, (Former member of the Office of the Pilot project to implement a UBI in Catalonia, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain), [9] UCL Social Research Institute, University College London, UK

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Series Editors:  
Aurelie Charles  
Asha Amirali

Corresponding author  
Nick Langridge  
Email: [nrl29@bath.ac.uk](mailto:nrl29@bath.ac.uk)

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### Abstract

Increasing calls for reform to welfare provision have seen growing support for basic income (BI) - the unconditional provision of cash transfers to all. As a result, recent years have seen an exponential increase in the number of pilot experiments of BI, across all parts of the world. However, to date, there has been little discussion of the ethical considerations of such experiments. This paper is the outcome of a workshop whereby BI pilots came together to discuss such ethical considerations, share case studies, and begin to formulate general principles to guide ethical BI experiments. The paper discusses the ethical considerations relevant to the various stages of a pilot experiment and concludes with some general principles: to do-no-harm, maintain respect, dignity, and agency; mitigate power inequalities, promote trust and transparency, and ensure substantive unconditionality. The paper hopes to stimulate discussions towards an ethical protocol for better practice in BI experiments and provide a useful resource to those working on, or interested in, BI research.

**Keywords:** basic income, research ethics, sustainable welfare, social policy

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# 1. Introduction: an overview of the state of basic income ethics

In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, and with the intensification of global economic, social, and ecological crises, policymakers around the world are beginning to recognise the inadequacies of traditional social protection systems. Faced with multiple challenges, these systems struggle with trade-offs on four grounds: First, through excluding those most in need and maintaining the existence of poverty traps, they are ineffective. Second, through the imposition of heavily prescriptive approaches which deploy burdensome conditionalities and eligibility criteria, requiring large, unwieldy bureaucracies, they are inefficient. Third, such conditionalities - and the bureaucracies which maintain them - have a tendency towards discrimination and dehumanisation and so are inimical to human dignity (Standing, 2017). Fourth, extant welfare systems are intertwined with economic growth, which is demonstrated to be incompatible with ecological sustainability and human wellbeing (Hickel and Kallis, 2020).

A growing number of academics, civil society groups, and policy actors are therefore calling for reform of systems of welfare provision, towards alternatives which increase resilience, promote the satisfaction of human needs, and comply with ecological limits. Such systems would be grounded in democratic participation and contextual specificity, be redistributive, and be decoupled from economic growth. The various bodies of literature concerned with such policies tend to coalesce around the goal of 'sustainable welfare' (Büchs et al., 2024).

Basic income (BI) - the provision of unconditional cash transfers to all - is an increasingly popular proposal within such discussions. It is the oldest and most cited policy in the degrowth literature (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022) and often considered central to the transition to more sustainable and just societies (Langridge, 2024). It is also advocated amongst technology entrepreneurs to counter labour disruptions caused by automation (Dermont and Weisstanner, 2020). BI's popularity increased in the fallout of the 2007-8 financial crisis and, latterly, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Supporters argue that BI would overcome the ineffectiveness of existing social protection systems by ensuring the inclusion of those most in need. By eliminating conditionality, it could reduce the need for costly and punitive bureaucratic structures, thereby reducing inefficiencies and increasing the autonomy and flexibility of individuals, enhancing human dignity (Weeks, 2011; Davala et al., 2015). Finally, if funded through progressive, redistributive sources, BI could help meet the needs of all without the need for further economic growth (Langridge, 2024).

While interest in BI has not yet resulted in a full, nationwide trial - limiting the study of some of the policy's wider, macroeconomic impacts - there has

been a dramatic increase in the number and geographical spread of more limited experiments, from micro-trials to larger-scale, state-backed interventions (Merrill et al., 2021). Inspired by the unconditional cash transfer (UCT) programmes of the 1990s onwards (Haushofer and Shapiro, 2016; DFID, 2019; Daalen et al., 2022), BI advocates began in the 2010s to design experiments to empirically test the impacts of the policy and build political support (Widerquist, 2018; Kilne, 2022). Today, there are well over 150 experiments<sup>[1]</sup> currently taking place around the world (Stanford BI Lab, n.d.). More and more experiments are also beginning to link cash to other supportive interventions like financial planning, access to welfare services, skilling, and community organising.

However, there has been little public discussion, and few academic publications, addressing the ethical considerations of BI experiments. The Cash Learning Partnership (CALP), a repository housing masses of grey literature on cash-based experiments, contains no entries which focus on the ethical 'how-to.' Similarly, two recent comprehensive books covering the many methodological, political, and communicative challenges associated with BI experiments do not once address ethics (Widerquist, 2018; Merrill et al., 2021). Consequently, there is no established best, or even good, practice guide for BI experiments and limited discussions on ethics within the literature. Given the dramatic increase in their number, and the fact that participants are often among society's most vulnerable, this is a problematic gap that this report aims to address.

The following section provides some background and introduces the authors of this report, all of whom have extensive experience in BI experimenting. Section 3 outlines the ethical challenges at each stage of a BI experiment and uses case studies to show how previous experiments have attempted to address them. Although there are no clear 'right or wrong' answers to the questions raised in this report, it is hoped that discussing the challenges and the experimenters' responses will spark further debate which can inform future interventions. Section 4 concludes with some emerging principles which intend to form the basis for more formal, good practice, ethical guidelines for BI experimental research. The report is therefore relevant to anyone working on, or interested in, BI and the experiments that explore it.

## 2. Background

The authors of this article have extensive experience working on welfare and social protection and have come to recognise the need for radical welfare reform. Given the challenge discussed above, the growing interest in BI's role as a possible alternative, and a commitment to action-research based evidence, the authors of this paper have dedicated extensive energy to the design, implementation, and evaluation of multiple BI experiments across Europe, Asia, Africa, and North America. Collectively, we have worked on over

[1] Torry (2023) argues that only projects testing a true basic income across a representative population and funded by tax revenue can be referred to as 'pilots'. Given financial, fiscal, and political limitations of research, testing a true BI is therefore a "practical impossibility" (Widerquist, 2018, p.37). As a result, the words 'experiment' and 'intervention' are preferred to 'pilot' throughout this report.

twenty different interventions, including the Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales evaluation<sup>[2]</sup>, the B-MINCOME<sup>[3]</sup> and Government of Catalunya experiments in Spain<sup>[4]</sup>, the Madhya Pradesh, WorkFREE<sup>[5]</sup>, and Basic Income and Care Project for Transgender Persons (TG-BI Project)<sup>[6]</sup> experiments in India; the CLARISSA programme<sup>[7]</sup> in Bangladesh; the HudsonUP<sup>[8]</sup>, Compton Pledge<sup>[9]</sup>, Long Beach Pledge<sup>[10]</sup>, In Her Hands<sup>[11]</sup>, Creatives Rebuild New York<sup>[12]</sup> and the City of St. Louis<sup>[13]</sup> experiments in the USA; along with a number of experiments implemented by the international non-governmental organisation (NGO) Give Directly across Africa, including in Malawi, Liberia, and Kenya.<sup>[14]</sup> We have worked on the fundraising, design, and implementation of BI experiments; conducted data collection, analysis, and evaluation; and led dissemination and advocacy activities. As a result, we have collectively faced a multitude of ethical challenges, both anticipated and unanticipated.

Many of the authors of this report have worked together, in different guises and configurations, for a number of years. Throughout this time, the ethical challenges associated with BI experiments have been a recurring subject of concern. Given that no good practice guidelines exist we have constantly felt like we are having to reinvent the wheel. Worse, the absence of ethical good practice creates a risk of malpractice and harm.

In response to these concerns, we organised a two-day workshop hosted by the UBI Bath<sup>[15]</sup> in July 2023 to coincide with the Research Ethics Association's (REA)<sup>[16]</sup> annual conference. During the workshop, we discussed the ethical challenges that emerge at each stage of a BI experiment and the means through which each of our respective experiments had attempted to mitigate them. We then used these experiences to formulate general principles for conducting ethical experimental research on BI.

Following the workshop, we presented our discussion and principles in a dedicated panel at the REA conference, which brought together representatives from academia, industry, and civil society. This report outlines the challenges discussed during the workshop and the principles which emerged.

[2] <https://www.gov.wales/basic-income-pilot-care-leavers-overview-scheme>

[3] <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/serveissocials/es/canal/projecte-pilot-b-mincome-combinant-una-renda-minima-garantida-i-politiques-socials-actives-en>

[4] [https://presidencia.gencat.cat/en/ambits\\_d\\_actuacio/renda-basica-universal/index.html](https://presidencia.gencat.cat/en/ambits_d_actuacio/renda-basica-universal/index.html)

[5] <https://www.work-free.net/>

[6] <https://www.anveshi.org.in/basic-income-care-project/>

[7] <https://www.ids.ac.uk/programme-and-centre/tackling-the-drivers-of-child-labour-and-children-in-modern-slavery-a-child-centred-approach/>

[8] <https://www.hudsonup.org/>

[9] <https://f4gi.org/app/uploads/2023/06/2023-Implementing-the-Compton-Pledge.pdf>

[10] <https://f4gi.org/pilot/long-beach-pledge/>

[11] <https://thegrofund.org/about-in-her-hands>

[12] <https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/participants/guaranteed-income-for-artists/>

[13] <https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/mayor/initiatives/gbi.cfm>

[14] <https://www.givedirectly.org/ubi/>

[15] <https://www.ubibath.ac.uk>

[16] <https://www.ethics-association.org/>



### 3. The journey of an ethical BI experiment

Our discussions led us to conceptualise BI experiments through the metaphor of a river (see figure 1). A river represents a journey, or flow, originating at a source (the initial idea, funding), moving through multiple, twisting, turning stages (intervention design, research design, recruitment, data collection and analysis, ongoing management and feedback to participants, etc.) before finally arriving at its destination (the publication and dissemination of findings, advocacy, and managing the ongoing legacy of the experiment).

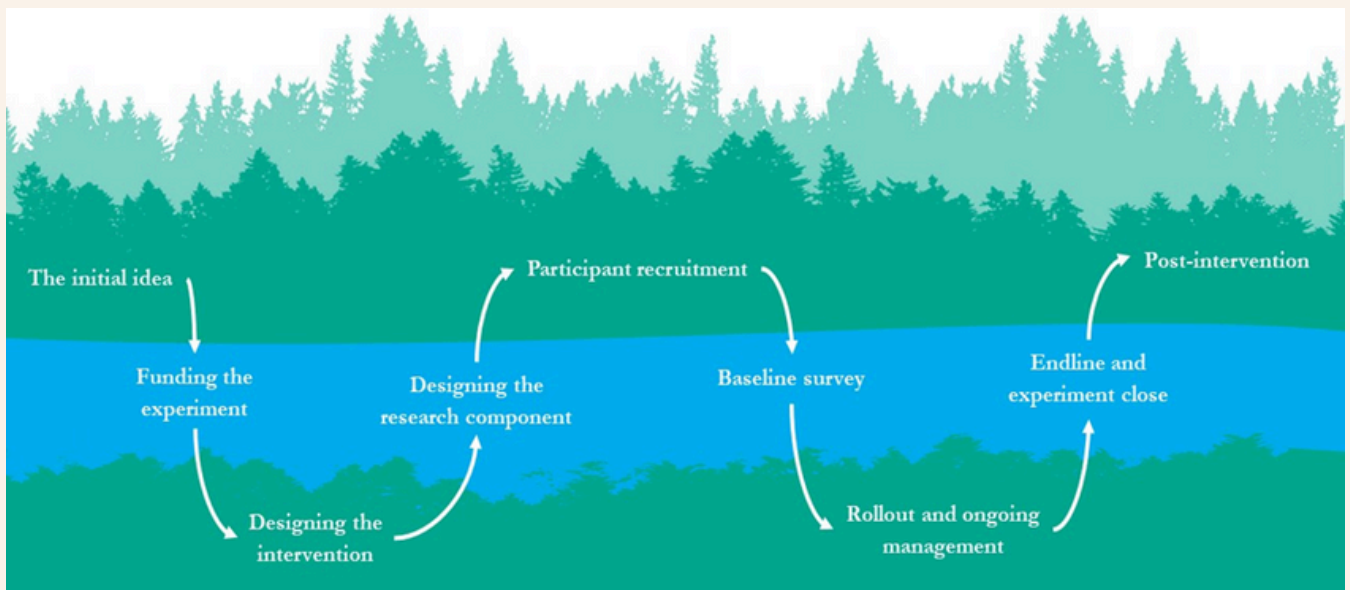


Figure 1: The ethics river of a BI experiment

During day one of our workshop, we identified nine distinct stages of a typical BI experiment. Each of these stages will not necessarily be present in every BI experiment nor will they necessarily occur in the same order, but they were generally agreed to be representative of a typical BI experiment. We therefore use these stages to walk readers along the rest of our ethical river journey. Each stage raises its own, specific ethical questions, considerations, and challenges. However, many of these will be present across multiple stages. At each stage, we first outline the relevant ethical considerations before sharing case studies of how the various experiments we have worked on sought to overcome them.

#### 3.1. The idea stage

The first stage of a BI experiment is having the initial idea to run one. The idea can come from grassroots movements and community groups, civil society organisations, state or national legislatures, researchers, or any combination of the above (Widerquist, 2018; L ain and Merrill, 2021; Merrill et al., 2021). Where the idea comes from matters, since different actors have different political goals and, thus, different research questions. The idea stage is



therefore the first point at which ethical considerations occur. These concern the overall purpose of conducting an experiment, the specific questions it hopes to answer, and the initial structure within which the intervention can be conceived and can evolve. A non-exhaustive selection of ethical considerations which occur at the idea stage is presented in Table 1.

<b>Table 1: Ethical considerations at the idea stage</b>
What is the aim of the experiment? Why is this aim justified?
Why is a pilot-style experiment necessary to achieve this aim?
Who decides the aim and purpose of the experiment?
Will the intervention include a research component?
How will the aim and study criteria be conveyed to participants?
Will participants have a role in shaping the experiment? And if so, what role will they have?

In our experience of BI experiments, the idea stage has looked different in different settings. However, as demonstrated through the case studies below, some common themes emerge.

The *In Her Hands project* - which serves more than 650 black women in Georgia, USA - began with community listening sessions in the Old Fourth Ward of Atlanta, Martin Luther King Jr.'s home neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is historically Black and its proximity to central Atlanta has attracted real estate investments, rising property values, and gentrification, creating economic precarity for long-term residents. Local non-profit, academic, and elected leaders formed the Economic Security Task Force,<sup>[17]</sup> which conducted a series of community listening sessions with residents seeking to understand the needs of community members. The answer was clear and resounding: "We need cash." In further listening sessions, leaders asked residents about the amount of money and the transfer method that would be most impactful, in addition to other open design questions. These community partnerships formed the basis of the *In Her Hands* intervention strategy and continue to inform the ongoing programme and evaluation.

[17] <https://www.econsecurityatl.org>

*Compton Pledge* was an experiment which provided \$300-600 to 800 low-income households in Compton, California between 2021 and 2023. The project followed the principle that programmes are most effective when local solution-makers lead the process from the outset. The office of Compton's Mayor, Aja Brown, selected more than 20 residents, religious leaders, educators, and heads of local non-profit organisations to form a Compton Pledge Community Advisory Council – guiding the experiment's design and implementation. The Council met frequently during the idea phase to determine the experiment's goals, how it could develop a new, inclusive model of service delivery for vulnerable residents, how and when participants would be paid, and how this should be communicated to residents in the city. In particular, the group worked closely with the Fund for Guaranteed Income (F4GI) to design a new payments platform, from the ground up, which was specific to the pledge and relevant to the local context.

The *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment, which provides cash transfers to all 18-year-olds leaving care in Wales, also began with a listening exercise conducted by the Welsh Government. Jane Hutt, the Minister for Social Justice, who is the minister responsible for the experiment, said the early development of the idea drew upon “learning from global basic income experiments and discussions with a variety of experts, including those who have experience of working closely with care experienced young people” (Hutt, 2022). This led the Welsh Government to arrive at the following principles on which the experiment was to be based:

- Taking part in the experiment should make no participant worse off;
- There should be no conditionality on income received;
- The same payment should be paid to everyone;
- The payment will not be altered midway through the experiment.

Ethical considerations at the idea stage included the selection of the target group (i.e. care leavers), the age at which to target the intervention, designing the amount of money, and considering how it may interact with eligibility for other services. The Welsh Government decided to make the scheme available to everyone in Wales who met the criteria to avoid location-based inequity (where people in one area receive the basic income but similar people in another do not). There were also no conditions placed on how participants could use the money, and each was offered a 'better off assessment' with a financial specialist before enrolling (Holland et al. 2024; Welsh Government 2023).

The *WorkFREE* experiment in Hyderabad, India emerged from academic and activist frustration with mainstream policy efforts to advance the 8th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on 'Decent Work for All', which focuses on 'saving' workers at the margins of global capitalism. As has been documented extensively on public platforms,<sup>[18]</sup> these efforts often

fail as they neglect to ask the affected people themselves what help they need and they also do not address the underlying structural conditions which push people into difficult working conditions in the first place. The scholar-activists behind the *WorkFREE* project had spent over a decade working with marginalised and exploited workers and these groups had overwhelmingly given them the message “if you want to help us, make sure we have enough money in our pockets and work with us in solidarity.” The team thus applied for and received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) to trial an alternative intervention that would do precisely this, combining BI with participatory forms of community organising to examine how and in what ways this combination might improve the lives and labour of poor workers at the margins of the global economy.

*Give Directly* was founded by a group of economic development students who were troubled by the power structures dominant within international development. Often, these see staff in Western agencies making decisions for people living in poverty, which typically translates into in-kind and conditional aid. The founders were attracted to the strong evidence base behind cash transfers and the rapid growth of mobile payments technology and therefore decided to experiment with trialling an alternative approach to development and charitable giving: providing unconditional cash directly to recipients. *Give Directly* has now worked in dozens of countries and has delivered hundreds of millions of dollars. In all cases, cash is given unconditionally, with the trust that recipients know best what they need and thus will prioritise what matters most to them.

### 3.2. Funding the experiment

Obtaining funding for a BI experiment also has ethical implications. The funding source matters because funding is never neutral and will always come with some form of embedded power relations. Funding typically comes with ideas, expectations, limitations, and, possibly, some form of direct control from the funding body.<sup>[19]</sup> Deciding on how to fund a BI experiment is therefore subject to a number of ethical questions, examples of which are outlined in Table 2.

**Table 2: Ethical considerations for funding an experiment**

What realistic funding sources are available for the project?

What criteria should be considered when deciding an appropriate funder? Is there a preference for public or private funds and if so, why?

[19] Indeed, this is one reason behind calls to diversify BI research beyond pilot experiments (Noguera and De Wispelaere, 2006; Langridge, 2024).

What are the potential funders' motivations for funding the project?
What stipulations or restrictions come with each funder?
Are there reputational or ethical risks associated with the funder?
What is the form of disbursement that the funder will expect to be used (for example, cryptocurrency funders wanting to give money using cryptocurrency and partner conversion providers)?
How reliable is the funding source – can the money for participant BIs be guaranteed for the entire duration of the proposed experiment?
Will participants have a role in shaping the experiment? And if so, what role will they have?
What impact may the funding for the BI have on potential participants' ability to avail themselves of other welfare schemes, for example where these are means tested?

There is no one, ethical way in which BI experiments should be funded. Equally, there is no single funding source that is completely free of ethical dilemmas. The examples below give some insight into how experiences and challenges can vary on a case-by-case basis.

The *Basic Income for Care Leavers* in Wales project benefits from funding provided by a devolved government. This confers the advantage of being (practically) guaranteed for the duration of the project, due to commitments being made by senior government ministers which would be politically difficult to reverse, and the likelihood of the governing party remaining in place for the duration. There are also various conventions and commitments from government to publish all findings and archive the data once the project has finished. However, government funding does not always guarantee stability, as demonstrated by the Ontario Basic Income Pilot, which was cancelled after 18 months following a change in government (Ferdosi et al., 2022). Furthermore, funding by government can lead to unhelpful intervention which can weaken experiments' more progressive and radical aims (Langridge, 2024).

The *WorkFREE* experiment received funding from the ERC, meaning that funds were ring-fenced and guaranteed for the duration of the project. Furthermore, researchers and participants had great freedom to decide what would be studied, and how, and what would be disseminated, and how. This gave freedom to the research team and implementing partner to adapt the design to the needs of participants and to shared political goals. Such freedom is a rare privilege in experimental research.

At one point during the lifecycle of the *WorkFREE* project, the team was offered substantial additional funding by a cryptocurrency firm to build a spin-off experiment using cryptocurrency. This was undoubtedly tempting, since the sums on offer could have enabled a doubling of the experiment population and thus seen thousands more poor people receive unconditional cash. Cryptocurrency BI is also a growing and under-researched field. However, after considerable due diligence on the potential funder, it became clear that the ethical dangers of accepting this funding were too great. Not only was the funder keen to shape the research, but it emerged that they could not guarantee the amount of funding required to provide potential recipients with certainty over the duration of the experiment. This introduced the great risk that the project could have been started, only to be interrupted as a result of funding collapse. As a consequence, this offer of funding was rejected by the *WorkFREE* team and the spin-off experiment never happened.

*HudsonUP*, a long-term experiment running in Hudson, New York in the USA, is primarily funded by a private philanthropic donor. The donor approached the Greater Hudson Promise Neighborhood (GHPN), a local non-profit organisation, to express interest in collaborating on a BI experiment. This avenue brings certain advantages. For example, there was not a long delay between ideation and execution, which can be the case with a government or grant-funded project. However, GHPN worked quickly to form a community advisory board of community members and local non-profit leaders to ensure that the program was not designed in a top-down manner. Furthermore, the research team has worked closely with GHPN and the donor's representatives, the Spark of Hudson, to ensure that the research framing and findings are fully independent of the funder.

The *Compton Pledge* in Compton, CA was also funded philanthropically, but included multiple foundations and private donors. In contrast, the *Long Beach Pledge* in Long Beach, CA – a neighbouring city to Compton – was funded using public money made available by the Long Beach Recovery Act, a plan to fund economic and public health initiatives for residents, workers and businesses critically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Publicly funded programmes often carry a higher reporting burden and may be subject to additional audits or specific stipulations, which can create higher administrative costs and additional interference with participants.

For example, concerns from public bodies regarding participant fraud can limit flexibility when it comes to the income verification process and so result in some potential participants being excluded due to a lack of appropriate documentation.

### 3.3. Designing the intervention

It is important to note that the design of a BI experiment is different to the design of the research component around that experiment, which studies the impact of the intervention according to specified research criteria. The design of the intervention involves critical practical-logistical questions like deciding the location, the target population, the use of control groups,<sup>[20]</sup> and the transfer size and delivery mechanism. It also involves working out the logistics for any additional, non-cash components, such as the community organising inherent to the *WorkFREE* or *CLARISSA* experiments, or the “active policies” built into *B-MINCOME*. Of course, the research component may inform the intervention design, but each is independent and comes with its own ethical challenges. Participants taking part in the experiment and receiving the cash and/or plus components may not, necessarily, also be part of the research component of the project. With this in mind, the design stage of a BI experiment includes a significant number of specific ethical considerations which are presented in Table 3.

<b>Table 3: Ethical considerations for experiment design</b>	
<b>Experiment location</b>	Why has the location been chosen over other potential options?
	What specific ethical considerations does this location present?
	What issues may arise between the selected locality and those in any control group/not selected? What are the potential long-term consequences?
<b>Target population</b>	How many people will be included in the study?

[20] Control groups are a controversial issue. While they can be useful to understand the contribution of BI to any changes and to advocate for the policy’s potential benefits, they can also exacerbate inter- and intra-community inequalities (Kinstler, 2024). The experiments discussed in this report take differing approaches to the use of a control.



<b>Target population</b>	Who will be included and excluded? How will this be decided? Will the experiment include everyone in the given location, or just target specific individuals / groups?
	How will this impact the economic and social relations within and between communities during and after the intervention? What are the shocks and negative consequences that such groups might be exposed to?
<b>Length of experiment</b>	How long will the intervention last?
	What are the ethical challenges associated with different lengths?
	Will support continue after the cash transfer has ended? What form will this take, and for how long will it last?
<b>Size of the cash transfer</b>	What is an appropriate BI amount and what is the appropriate frequency?
	How does this get decided and by whom?
	What challenges are associated with different levels and sizes, e.g. scalability, depth vs breadth of impact?
	Better-off calculations: How will it be ensured that the intervention does not lead to a loss of other benefits?
<b>Delivery of the cash</b>	How will the transfer be delivered (e.g., in cash, to a bank, or via mobile money)? What is an appropriate means for ensuring equal access?

<b>Delivery of the cash</b>	Who will be responsible for delivery?
	Will participants be ‘trained’ to use the technology necessary to access their BI?
<b>Plus components</b>	What additional components, beyond cash, will be included? How will this be decided?
	What are the ethical implications of including ‘plus’ components? E.g., the concern that cash alone is not enough or, in contrast, that adding additional components makes impact evaluation and, therefore, policy advocacy more difficult?
	Are plus components specific to local circumstances or more general (eg., financial literacy training)?
	Will the plus components and the BI also (eventually) be available to the control group, if applicable?

No two experiment designs are the same. Each has its own specific scope, challenges, and limitations, depending on geographical and socio-demographic contexts, funding sources, and research components, among other factors. The case studies below introduce some of the ethical challenges concerning the experimental design that each faced and how they attempted to address them.

The *Compton Pledge* delivered between \$300-600 a month to 800 low-income families. The design phase included recurring stakeholder meetings and roundtable discussions with the Compton Pledge Community Advisory Council<sup>[21]</sup> centred around clear decision points to determine how and when participants would be paid, language/messaging, and inclusivity concerns. The F4GI provided digital prototypes of the enrolment and payment process for stakeholders to give their input. Prototypes and mockups allowed members to contribute to the visual and user experience design of a new, custom payments platform. This process facilitated stakeholders’ direct input into technical aspects of design and implementation that often happen behind closed doors among administrators. The resulting feedback informed nearly every aspect of the implementation process. For example, Advisory

[21] The Advisory Council consisted of more than twenty local residents, religious leaders, educators, and heads of local non-profits.

Council members shared how existing welfare programs and economic systems leave residents with English-only application or instructions forms, hours spent in phone menus or waiting on hold, and long applications that require a photo ID, SSN, or ITIN number to be eligible. The F4GI team worked closely with the Advisory Council to redesign this process from the ground up. This included wordsmithing the language of invitation emails and the users' onboarding experience. The Pledge, designed with community-input, offered a 3-minute, 3-step enrolment flow with support for English and Spanish. The resulting onboarding process generated a 100% enrolment rate and a cash disbursement platform with live case management and multiple payment method options that participants could switch between at any time (Venmo, PayPal, Direct Deposit and a prepaid debit card that did not require SSN or ITIN).

The *B-MINCOME* experiment, implemented in Barcelona between 2017 and 2019, acknowledged not only the participants' need of cash, but also their professional and labour situation, and eventually, their employment prospects. Beyond a "passive policy" (the cash transfer in the form of a quasi-BI), the experiment also included four "active policies", one of which consisted of a programme of professional training and labour inclusion for 150 participants. Against previous municipal experiences of labour inclusion through conventional occupation plans designed "from above" by Barcelona Activa (the public occupational agency) in conjunction with private corporations, the *B-MINCOME's* occupational plans were "bottom-up", designed by social entities, NGOs, and neighbourhood associations who were leading the occupational diagnosis of their areas, identifying the potential labour areas to cover, and the content of training itineraries adapted to the various participants' skills and abilities. This ended up in a training programme of 340 hours and an occupational plan of one year (6 months longer than conventional ones and long enough to be entitled to receive unemployment benefits) adapted to the neighbourhoods' and residents' real necessities.

The *TG-BI Project* came about as part of a discussion between the India Network for Basic Income (INBI) and the Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies in Hyderabad, India. The twelve selected participants received an unconditional basic income for a period of twelve months. This was accompanied by a voluntary, monthly, day-long Care Workshop. The workshops were initially designed and conducted by the Program Coordinator and were a closed-door exercise, with all participants signing a confidentiality promise note to respect the privacy of the individual participants. This meant that no member would publish or post pictures of the workshop anywhere on social media. After two workshops, the participants decided themselves what would be included in future sessions and the programme was updated accordingly. Participants shared their personal experiences and life stories in the Care Workshops. The participants expressed the desire that their life stories be documented, and so the organisers are now in the process of working with participants to do just this.

The Welsh Government faced several challenging decisions when designing the *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment. The first concerned inclusion and ensuring that no care leavers missed out through logistical loopholes. For this reason, the project team chose to include all care leavers who reached the age of 18 during a 12-month period - the 'enrolment window'. An alternative design might have selected regions or locations in which to test the scheme, but this could have meant young people with similar characteristics - i.e. 18-year-old care leavers - receiving starkly different levels of support from the state. By running the experiment across the whole of Wales the Welsh Government avoided this potential inequity, though other (perhaps unavoidable) inequities still exist between young people on the scheme and those slightly too old or too young to take part.

The second concerned the size of the transfer, which was set at a comparable level to the real living wage at the time of the policy development. This decision was taken in part to avoid complications regarding BI's interaction with eligibility for other benefits. The cash transfer is therefore larger than in any other BI experiment to date. Those taking part, receive £1,600 per month (£1,280 after tax) for 2 years. However, the relatively large size of the transfers raised additional questions around scalability and sustainability. Critics have suggested the experiment is too expensive to become part of the usual offer for care leavers, and the evaluation will address questions of cost effectiveness.

Finally, the enrolment process, discussed in more detail below, was specifically designed to give all potential participants as much information as they needed to make an informed decision as to whether to participate in the experiment or not. This included offering a 'better off assessment' where young people spoke to a financial advisor (from the Citizens' Advice Bureau or similar) to determine whether they would actually be better off financially on the experiment, compared to other support they may be eligible for. This was important because in some theoretical scenarios, for example those who may be eligible for some disability or child benefits, it could be financially prudent not to take part and instead continue claiming their existing entitlement. The provision of ongoing financial advice to recipients was also a bespoke feature of the experiment, and an example of a 'basic income plus' policy design that can be found in other examples included herein.

The *WorkFREE* team chose to base their experiment in Hyderabad, India, as the city was already home to established BI and labour activist organisations which were well placed to support such an ethically, politically, and administratively complex project. In terms of deciding the participants with whom to work, the team considered occupations conventionally considered 'indecent' by authorities such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO). After consultation with national and international experts, the team decided to concentrate on waste collectors, which is considered a classic example of difficult, dangerous, and unambiguously 'dirty' work whose fundamental

social function is rarely recognised. Other 'indecent' occupations, such as sex work, were rejected due to the ethical and legal implications being too great to allow the project to operate within the given timeframe. The team then developed a set of criteria for selecting a location for the project - namely, urban slums, with relatively clear geographical boundaries, where the primary occupation of the residents was garbage collection, and which had an existing relationship of solidarity with a respected local civil society organisation (CSO). The final participant communities were then selected by the local CSO. The decision was taken to conduct a 'saturation study' whereby all members of the community received the BI. This was motivated by ethical considerations - i.e. not wanting to create inequalities within the communities - as well as research motivations - allowing the collective impacts of UBI to be studied.

The size of the transfer was selected according to two guiding principles: 1) that the amount should be large enough to make a meaningful difference to people's lives and 2) that it was small enough to be replicable and scalable by a government (Mathur et al. 2023). To this end, it was pegged to the Indian poverty line. The duration of the experiment (24 months, with 18 months of cash transfers) was decided based on findings from a previous Indian experiment in Madhya Pradesh (Davala et al., 2015). The findings suggested that 18-months was sufficient to overcome any teething issues and learning points and allowed the experiment to work through a full annual cycle of participants' health, festivals, economic cycles, etc.

The decision was taken for the money to be transferred electronically to participants' bank accounts to maintain transparency, and participants were given full support in the process of opening and operating bank accounts where necessary.

Maximising inclusivity was a shared goal of the case studies above. However, each attempted to meet this goal in a different way. *WorkFREE* chose to use a 'saturation study' - so including all members of the selected communities - whereas the *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment maximised inclusivity by using a wide timeframe for enrolment, i.e., those turning 18 over a 12-month period.

The case studies also demonstrate contrasting responses to similar ethical considerations regarding the experiment design. For example, the design decisions for *Compton Pledge* were taken from the bottom-up, whereas the *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment were taken top-down, largely due to funding constraints. This led to very different experiment designs. Furthermore, the *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment chose a large transfer amount, which, while providing for all the participants' needs, had a trade-off in terms of scalability. In contrast, *WorkFREE* chose a smaller transfer amount which may have had less impact on participants' lives

- poverty lines have been widely critiqued as being inadequate (Edward, 2006; Pogge, 2010; Woodward, 2010) – but allowed more people to be enrolled and increased the potential for scale-up. Such case studies demonstrate that there is no one, ethical way to design a BI experiment.

### 3.4. Designing the research component

Most BI experiments include a research component. This serves to not only further knowledge but also support advocacy - powerful, compelling results can help with lobbying and building political support. However, not every BI intervention has an associated research component. Some may be implemented solely for the perceived benefits to participants. The research design stage of a BI experiment should therefore be considered separately to the design of the experiment itself.

It should be noted that BI experiments are not an exception to more general ethical research principles (Boog et al, 2008; Brydon-Miller, 2008). All action-research involves ethical complexities. Table 4 presents some these complexities, considered specifically from the perspective of BI experiments.

<b>Table 4: Ethical considerations for the research component</b>	
<b>Research questions</b>	What is the research focus of the experiment? Why has this focus been selected? What are the potential repercussions?
	Who decides the research focus? Who decides the specific research questions?
	What ethical challenges do the questions pose? What boundaries will be set with regards to appropriate topics for study?
<b>The researchers</b>	Who will be conducting the research? Why have these people been selected?
	What are the ethical implications of the chosen researchers conducting the primary research?



<b>The researchers</b>	What biases or preconceptions do the researchers bring to the intervention?
<b>Research methods</b>	What methods will the research employ? Quantitative vs qualitative, comparative vs explanatory, targeted vs saturation?
	What impact will the selected methods have on the community? How onerous will the research component be? To what extent does an experimental intervention, including the provision of cash, give researchers the ‘right’ to intervene in participants’ lives?
	Will the research component require a control group? What are the ethical implications of this? For example, creating inequalities between communities or community members (see Kinstler, 2024). Should the control group be informed of the other arm of the intervention? If so, how?
<b>Research outputs</b>	What outputs will the research component produce?
	Who decides the outputs and what information is included?
	Will the participants themselves be involved in deciding/producing research outputs? Who receives credit for the research outputs?
	Will the participants themselves be involved in deciding/producing research outputs? Who receives credit for the research outputs?
<b>Duration</b>	Will the duration of the research match the length of the intervention? What are the ethical implications of this?

<b>Duration</b>	How often will participants be required to partake in the research? What time commitment will be expected?
	What long-term feedback will be provided to the participants, concerning the information they offered to the researchers?
<b>Data</b>	How and where will the research data be stored?
	Who will be the owner and controller of information?
	What can participants do to control or withdraw their information?
	To what extent (if any) will external actors, e.g., the media, have access to the data and/or participants? How much control will participants have about this?

The following case studies demonstrate how various experiments have attempted to navigate the ethical complexities of conducting research on BI experiments in different ways.

Community advisors are central to both the design and evaluation of both the *Compton Pledge* and the *In Her Hands* experiments. In full acknowledgment of the extractive and exploitative nature of past research practices, especially for Americans of colour, the *In Her Hands* research team committed to an approach that was both restorative and participant-centred, termed Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR). The principal investigator and research team met with community advisory groups early in the intervention to co-design the research questions. They then met again annually to co-interpret the findings.

All potential participants of the *In Her Hands* experiment were informed of the research process, including their absolute right not to participate or to discontinue at any time. Recipients were informed that their participation in the research project would have no bearing on their receipt of the cash transfers and their identity would be protected. Non-selected lottery entrants were invited to form a comparison group and answer bi-annual electronic surveys. The surveys are designed to allow respondents to skip any question they wish. Participants received \$20 (later raised to \$40) for completing each

survey and interview. This amount was carefully chosen to fairly compensate participants for their time without creating coercion.

A core objective of the *In Her Hands* evaluation is to build research capacity among students of colour and to de-centre white institutions and white researchers. The principal investigator partnered with a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) to engage doctoral students in collecting and collaboratively analysing qualitative interviews. By partnering with an HBCU, the team aims to not only provide meaningful, hands-on research experience to future scholars, but also to offer financial support to the institution and its students.

The *WorkFREE* experiment decided explicitly to avoid Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) on ethical grounds - believing it impossible to justify within-community exclusion and the potential tensions that may arise from it. This was a risky decision, since RCTs are very much the language of power and policymaking, and arguably rejecting an RCT design could limit the potential uptake of *WorkFREE* findings. To offset this, the *WorkFREE* team has embraced theory-based realist evaluation and employed a rich set of in-depth qualitative tools to generate thick, narrative data that can be triangulated against each other. This choice was also motivated by ethical and scientific reasons, with the goal of demonstrating the power of in-depth qualitative methods like ethnography (so often absent from BI research) in evaluating outcomes and causal pathways.

The *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* faced several constraints in terms of research design. A key limitation was that the intervention started before the research component, meaning that baseline data was more difficult to obtain and key decisions regarding implementation had already been made. Evaluating a pre-existing social policy limits the options for evaluation design and researchers must fit the study into the pre-existing circumstances. It was not possible, for example, to use randomisation because the policy on this had already been agreed. On the other hand, these constraints are common across social science evaluation, and not unique to BI experiments. The research team did, however, have considerable freedom to ensure ethical considerations shaped the design and delivery of the study. The group of care-experienced young people are central to the study and have the same status as the other expert advisory group. Being on an equal footing means their advice and guidance is taken seriously and they have enhanced the study in various ways. For instance, the group was consulted about the topics and questions used in surveys and interviews and endorsed the use of creative methods, which are designed to facilitate conversation and make the interview experience more enjoyable.

In the *TG-BI Project*, the decision was taken not to include an external evaluation since the experiment was very small and intended to build trust and open doors for future collaboration. However, it was later decided - at

the request of the participants themselves - that the team would help the participants document the entire process and what it meant to their lives.

Finally, in the experiments that *Give Directly* runs, the research component is separated from the intervention entirely, with evaluations conducted by independent researchers external to the organisation, in order to ensure that unconditionality is not interfered with by the research. The consent forms signed by recipients who agree to be study participants also assure them that while the results of the study will be shared with *Give Directly*, their identity as the source of data will not be disclosed to the organisation or to any third party.

In the case studies above, participant control was judged to be central to the research components, including from the very beginning. The case studies also highlight the importance of considering the research component at the same time as the intervention design and of having a post-intervention plan to protect participants.

### 3.5. Recruitment of participants

The next stage of a BI experiment is the choice and recruitment of the participants. Several different methods can be employed – such as lotteries, targeting, or community saturation – each with their own specific ethical considerations.

The method of recruitment depends upon the design of both the intervention itself and of the research component. This is another important reason for considering both these stages simultaneously. The factors affecting who will be invited to participate may include geographic and political contexts, socio-economic structures, funding requirements etc., as well as whether the intervention will be an RCT, a longitudinal study, or a saturation experiment. In all cases, several important ethical considerations are associated with the choice and recruitment of participants (Table 5).

It should be noted that many of the ethical considerations explored here are not specific to BI experiments but apply to social interventions more broadly. However, unlike other social experiments in which the intervention being trialled may have positive, negative, or neutral value to participants – and so justify having some participants in a control group - it is less easy to argue that cash – a fungible asset - would have any negative value to participants, particularly where those participants are poor. This creates additional ethical considerations when justifying the use of RCTs or other comparative designs for BI experiments.

**Table 5: Ethical considerations for participant recruitment**

<b>Randomisation/ lottery</b>	Does the use of random sampling/a lottery system have the potential to increase inequalities within communities, or cause friction between those chosen and those not?
	Open application vs application by invitation: What are the ethical implications of each approach? How can we ensure that everyone has access to the same information?
<b>Targetting</b>	How is the target group defined? Who defines the target group?
	How are the thresholds defining who is, and who is not included defined?
	Does targeting have the potential to cause intersectional inequalities? How is the selection of one socio-economic group justified over another?
	What will happen if a participant leaves/a new participant enters the target group during the intervention?
<b>Saturation</b>	Is saturation better at avoiding intra-community inequalities but instead creates inter-community inequality?
	Are saturation studies likely to increase inequalities, envy, or distrust between communities?
<b>Control groups</b>	Can a control group be justified?

<b>Control group</b>	Should the control group be aware of the experiment?
	Should the control group be reimbursed in some way? If so, how?
<b>Informing participants</b>	How is information about the existence and design of the experiment provided in a way which is clear and accessible to all potential participants? For example, sending out letters, posters, institutional advertising, phone calls, social worker campaigning, etc.?
	How do we ensure that the information is accessible to all potential participants, i.e., considering different languages, technology abilities, time schedules etc?
	Beyond purely informing, if enrolment requires an active individual application process, how can we ensure that the most vulnerable potential participants (nomads, migrants, homeless, etc.) do actually apply?
<b>Consent</b>	How will informed consent be gathered, particularly among underage, disabled, and substance-addicted individuals? How will ongoing consent be assured?
	How will it be ensured that participants do not feel compelled to take part? What challenges will it create if some members of the community, or target group, do not wish to be part of the research?
	Will participants need to consent to the research component in order to be part of the overall intervention?
	What challenges will it create if some members of the community, or target group, do not wish to be part of the research?



*Give Directly* employs a combination of targeting and saturation methods, depending on the situation. In rural areas, it often uses geographical saturation - whereby all residents of a geographic area are eligible for the cash transfers. However, when a donor's funding is intended for a specific target group, it will use demographic saturation. The organisation chooses this model both for ethical and research reasons - to avoid within-community exclusion and to explore community effects of a BI transfer. However, such an approach poses challenges for research design, since it makes individual-based RCTs impossible.

*WorkFREE* also committed to using community saturation methods. The experiment was designed to explore a particular social issue - indecent or exploitative work - and to explore an alternative, potentially more effective approach for addressing it. To this extent, the pool of potential participants was already pre-limited. The process of narrowing down the communities to take part in the project was led by a respected local advocacy organisation and supported by expert advisors. Then, once participant communities were finalised, the project team undertook an extensive, months-long process of trust building, information sharing, and informed consent gathering. This involved a mixture of community meetings and household visits, where information was shared about the project in terms accessible to community members and opportunities were offered for any questions or doubts to be raised. Consent was then taken in writing, but the research team made it a priority to re-seek consent at the outset of each research encounter. Researchers paid particular attention to demonstrating 'active and informed consent' by repeatedly offering participants the ability to refuse or reschedule participation in research activities. Given the extreme difference in structural power, researchers often had to 'perform' this consent by telling participants to go back to sleep or tend to other responsibilities that they would offer to sacrifice for research purposes.

The *Compton Pledge* had a clear directive to target low-income residents of the city. For both research and fairness reasons, the team agreed that the participants should be representative of the city population in terms of race, household size, gender, and formerly incarcerated or undocumented status. Nevertheless, accomplishing this goal posed some unique challenges, including recruiting for language diversity, overcoming scepticism about the experiment, building trust, and ensuring sensitive information, like questions about citizenship status, wouldn't be shared with police or immigration entities. Feedback from the Community Advisory Council helped inform and prepare the team for the problems recruiting a diverse population creates. To address these concerns, the implementation partner, F4GI, offered outreach and support in multiple languages. Invitations were sent by both email and SMS. F4GI also followed up each invitation with outreach calls, texts, and emails and provided around the clock hotline support for anyone confused or sceptical of the experiment. F4GI made it clear that information about

applicants would not be shared with any police or immigration services and assuaged other fears through recruiting a cohort of local ambassadors and organising a local media campaign that leveraged Facebook newsgroups, trusted news sources, and city-based service providers. As a result, the program successfully recruited 800 low-income residents who closely represented the demographics of the city.

The *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment also had a specific target group for participation. Care leavers have been the target group in relatively few experiments. In addition to the experiment in Wales they are also involved in experiments in California, Santa Clara. The rationale for choosing this group was that they are disadvantaged across several dimensions. In the Welsh experiment, care leavers turning 18 years of age were targeted because this is a significant point in their lives, being the end of their status as children and under the supervision of the state, and the point at which they are expected to become more independent. Although the support for care leavers in Wales has improved in recent years, it was thought the BI would be a way of helping young people navigate what can often be a difficult transition from care to adulthood. Many care leavers thrive during this period, but the group as a whole is underrepresented in higher education, more likely to be not in employment, education or training, and have lower levels of reported wellbeing. Some are vulnerable to various forms of exploitation, and problems with addiction are also relatively common, and therefore there are risks associated with providing a relatively large monthly payment to this group - as expressed by practitioners involved in the early stages of the study (Holland et al, 2024).

Another important consideration was the choice of comparator group(s). Using routinely collected administrative data for some of the comparisons is one way of sidestepping ethical concerns because it is pseudonymised and only accessed using secure data environments overseen by reputable organisations such as the Office for National Statistics. For other comparisons, the research team is collecting data via surveys from care leavers who reach the age of 18 in the year after the intervention period. The survey is designed to not focus on the BI itself (and therefore that this group is not receiving it) but instead focuses on how life is for the respondents. The results will feed into wider research about the experiences of this cohort.

In Barcelona, the city council was aware of the levels of vulnerability and social exclusion among potential participants of the *B-MINCOME* experiment. They therefore designed an information campaign regarding the very existence of the experiment. This included sending out more than 4,000 information letters and more than 1,500 phone calls. An information campaign was also conducted for the application process, through personal interviews with social workers and more than collective 400 information sessions in the neighbourhoods. Additionally, social entities, NGO's, and community centres of the experiment area were fully informed of the experiment's features

to give them the chance to become “official informants” of the project and its application procedure.

The *TG-BI Project* had to consider several ethical questions regarding recruitment. The application to the programme was based on self-selection and not based on the team verifying whether the applicants were truly transgender persons. The call for applications said that whoever considered oneself as a transgender person and lived within the boundaries of Hyderabad metropolis could apply. While money was available for twelve participants, sixty-five people applied. A public lottery was therefore conducted with prominent members of the transgender community present at the event.

### 3.6. Conducting baseline research

Baseline data should always be gathered prior to beginning a BI intervention, if the intervention includes a research component. This data is usually gathered through a survey, but could also come from data collected routinely, for example, through government databases, or even through qualitative methods. Given the potential for a BI to change the way people feel and behave, many researchers believe that baseline data should ideally be collected before they know they will receive it.

Baseline data provides detailed information on the lives of prospective participants, including the specific aspects which will be examined during the research. It will also provide information on the characteristics of the community in which the intervention is taking place, such as the demographic breakdown, infrastructure, etc. The purpose of the baseline is to identify the conditions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that exist prior to the intervention starting so as to enable calculation of its subsequent impact (Standing, 2021).

Gathering baseline data raises a number of ethical questions. These include the type of data to be gathered, the methods used to gather it, and the timing of any survey. Table 6 presents a more detailed list of considerations at this stage.

<b>Table 6: Ethical considerations when gathering baseline data</b>	
<b>What data?</b>	How much information should be provided to participants during the baseline?

<b>What data?</b>	<p>What is an appropriate amount of information to collect?          What is the appropriate depth of questioning? Should certain topics be avoided?</p>
<b>How?</b>	<p>How should the data be gathered? Is a survey appropriate or should other sources be utilised?</p>
	<p>What are the ethical implications of each collection method? For example, data protection when using pre-existing data, or raising expectations or causing confusion/mistrust through a survey.</p>
	<p>How is consent for the baseline obtained? Until what point do participants have the right to withdraw their data?</p>
	<p>How will the intervention ensure the personal details of the participants are protected?</p>
<b>When?</b>	<p>Should the baseline information be conducted before participants are aware of the intervention, in order to avoid skewing results through raised expectations or after enrolment, to avoid social desirability bias (see below)?</p>
	<p>Could the baseline survey be included as a part of the application process?</p>

Standing (2021) argues that baseline data should ideally be gathered before any of the potential participants know that they have been selected for the programme. However, collecting baseline data before informing participants of their acceptance into the programme presents its own, arguably larger, ethical concerns. The *Big:Leap* experiment in Los Angeles, California, received significant negative press in 2021 when a potential participant wrote about her experience applying for the programme (Fowler, 2021). In this instance, the

research team had chosen to incorporate a long baseline survey within the initial application process which included very personal questions, such as experiences with domestic violence. The applicant wrote that they felt motivated to give answers that they thought would improve their chances of being accepted, demonstrating a social desirability bias created when collecting baseline data before enrolment into an experiment. Not only does this undermine the credibility of the data collected, but also violates the unconditionality principle of basic income and presents issues related to power inequalities.

Similar issues presented themselves in the *CLARISSA* and *WorkFREE* experiments. Although participants were all encouraged to refuse to participate if they did not feel comfortable, the research teams subsequently learned that certain participants decided to participate anyway in the hope that doing so would increase the chances of the research team returning with a supportive community intervention. Given that the survey was time-consuming and, in the case of *CLARISSA*, that cash roll-out was severely delayed due to the donor, this raised significant questions about reciprocity, care for participants' time, and of course respondent frustration.

The *In Her Hands* project in Georgia has attempted to navigate these issues in two ways. Firstly, by incorporating administrative credit data that will allow researchers to compare treatment and control group financial circumstances prior to their application to the programme. For example, through Equifax, the research team is able to access the following data points for the years prior to application: 1) bank account ownership, 2) mortgage ownership/amount, 3) modelled wealth, 4) credit and debt, 5) credit score, 6) revolving/instalment/medical debt amounts, 7) new loan applications, 8) payment delinquencies/collections, and 9) number and amount of subprime loans. Secondly, the primary application to the programme includes basic demographics plus three baseline research questions not captured by administrative credit data: a one-question health screener ("In general, would you say your health is Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, or Poor?"), a similar one question screener for mental health, and one question related to difficulties paying bills ("In a typical month, how difficult is it for you to cover your expenses and pay all your bills?"). The additional questions include the following disclaimer: "The research team would like to ask you a few questions about your wellbeing. Answering these questions is optional and does not affect your eligibility or chances of being selected for the program." Combined with administrative credit data, these questions will allow the research team to control for most baseline differences between treatment and control groups in later survey responses. While imperfect, this procedure was designed to limit intrusiveness and mitigate the risks of both social desirability bias and impacts on respondents' outlook after learning of their inclusion or exclusion in the project.

### 3.7. Rollout and ongoing management – safeguarding and troubleshooting

BI experiments are generally front-loaded, with the bulk of the work concentrated in the early phases before any cash has been transferred. However, there are still many activities which need to be completed while the experiment is ongoing. From a research perspective, Standing (2021) recommends that further rounds of data collection are conducted every six months in order to identify changing behaviours and attitudes. Beyond this, the intervention itself will require ongoing management, including troubleshooting issues which will undoubtedly arise. While many of the ethical considerations arising at this stage will be specific to each experiment, some of the more general considerations are outlined in Table 7.

<b>Table 7: Ongoing ethical considerations</b>	
<b>Ongoing consent</b>	How is ongoing consent ensured?
	How to deal with changes to eligibility – i.e. the movement of participants in and out of study area, births, deaths etc.?
<b>Doubts and complaints</b>	What information and contact is available to participants during the intervention? For example, a helpline, regular visits etc.? Is there an official complaints procedure?
	Does the intervention have an ethics board in charge of responding to participants' doubts, complaints and protests? Who makes up this board? How are they affiliated to other team members?
<b>Safeguarding</b>	What level of additional support will be provided/available in cases where actual or potential harm is identified?
	How will conflict between safeguarding responsibility and maintaining the independence of any research component be dealt with?



<b>Unintended consequences</b>	How will unintended consequences be dealt with? For example, intrahousehold tensions, drink, drugs, abuse?
	Will the research component be adaptable to account for unexpected findings?
	Is there a procedure for dealing with early cancellation of the intervention?
<b>Comms and reporting</b>	How can results be reported so as to combat negative stereotypes?
	How will participants be involved in the dissemination of results and comms?
	What time commitments are required of participants regarding comms, media, and ongoing data collection?
	How can unnecessary intrusion be minimised - both from the implementing organisation and, potentially, the funder - in order to avoid interfering with participants' lives and influencing research results?

While the ongoing management of a BI experiment is unique to each, the case studies below outline some of the challenges faced and management tools used by the authors of this report.

Throughout the *B-MINCOME* experiment, several non-public meetings were organised for the participants that were taking part in the "active policies". The purpose was to evaluate the policies and for participants to share their perspectives. Some participants also recorded videos ("The voices of the basic income") which gave them the opportunity to directly express their feelings and convey their personal experiences of being involved. Obtaining ongoing participant feedback was an important tool for managing the intervention.

Evaluators of the *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* experiment intend to

develop a 'dark' logic model, along the same lines as those which have been developed in public health research (Bonell et al, 2015). This sets out any unintended negative consequences of the experiment and shows how they were brought about, using the realist-informed framework of programme theory. The model seeks to delineate how and why interventions work as they do, by setting out the components of the intervention, the mechanisms through which these cause the outcomes that are observed, and the contexts which facilitate these changes.

*WorkFREE* was required by its funder to develop an 'unexpected findings policy' that would codify a process for dealing with complex, ethical challenges arising from unexpected negative impacts or evidence of harm. This was developed collaboratively, within the project team, before training on the principles and protocols of reporting, safeguarding and data management was conducted for all implementation and research staff by the experiment's Ethics Advisor. The core principles of the policy were to take bespoke and situated decisions in each case, rooted in the underlying priority of participation and "participants' best interests". In each case, it was decided, the situation would be reported to the Research Manager and PI of the project, who would engage the Ethics Advisor, Ethics Committee, and project leadership team for local and global advice. A stark instance of this being put into practice occurred shortly before the initial rollout of the BI, when one of the five participating settlements in the project was razed and cleared by the City Corporation authorities. Overnight, a humanitarian emergency developed and the *WorkFREE* team had to make a series of decisions about how to respond, how to help, and how to adapt the research in ways that protected and supported those whose lives had been so brutally disrupted. Critically, the collaboration with a community-embedded, deeply trusted, and widely respected local organisation made navigating this crisis possible. In this sense, there is a strong case for the safeguarding function that on-the-ground community organisers can have in the context of a BI experiment.

The *CLARISSA* experiment in Bangladesh faced similar, state-caused challenges, this time coming from the donor, the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Having spent two years setting the experiment up, one week before the announcement of the cash transfers was to be made the funder called for an emergency pause. Despite the money for cash transfers being officially ring-fenced, Covid-19 and the budget cutting forced onto DFID by the UK government saw this fence blown over. The project team had to adapt quickly to seek alternative sources of funding and advocate upwards to prevent the experiment's cancellation, while the community organising team on the ground had to re-double their efforts to provide non-cash support to a, by-now, expectant community.

### 3.8. Endline research and close of the intervention

While a BI intervention may appear to end when the last cash transfer has been actioned, this is not the reality. Care must be taken to help participants transition back to 'normal' circumstances, which for many may involve a challenging life-shift and a budgetary reduction. Likewise, consideration will need to be given to facilitating the continuation of complementary activities that may have arisen during the intervention - for example, community activities that may have been part of the original design or may have emerged organically. Similarly, the research component will likely remain active beyond the final cash transfer. Often, an endline survey and/or qualitative methods are conducted at this point in order to determine and explain changes. With all this in mind, additional ethical considerations become relevant at this stage (see Table 8).

**Table 8: Ethical considerations at the end of the intervention**

How does the intervention help people make the transition back to regular life? What 'off-ramping' protocols are established? And by whom?

What (if any) ongoing support will be offered to participants - for example, help reconnecting to state infrastructure and welfare schemes?

When is the correct time to conduct the endline survey? How long after the intervention is it ethical for researchers to continue contacting participants? Do the research team have the right to assess participants' lives when they are no longer "participants"?

What considerations are given to the potential for scaling-up the intervention?

How is the breaking of relations handled? This relates to ensuring that personal boundaries between the experiment team and the participants are set and respected throughout the intervention.

In the *Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales* pilot the importance of exit strategies is heightened by the vulnerability of the cohort receiving the BI and the relatively large size of the transfer. There are risks that the young participants may adjust their spending habits and lifestyles to match the BI and find themselves unable to maintain them once the experiment ends.

Without careful planning, this could cause problems such as rent arrears and other debts, as well as negative impacts on mental health. The Welsh Government has therefore designed an exit plan which aims to mitigate these risks.

Given the economic vulnerability of *WorkFREE*'s participants, the end of the experiment and endline research was a concern from the beginning. The decision to engage an NGO with long-standing relationships with the communities in the implementation of the experiment was part of an attempt to ethically navigate the 'exit'. Additionally, as a UBI 'plus' experiment the intervention included relational community work which continued beyond the end of the cash transfers. 'Exit', therefore, was never a total withdrawal from participants' lives, but only the stopping of the cash. For the last four months of the experiment, participants were regularly reminded that the cash was stopping. However, the support from the partner NGO in accessing and engaging with other state welfare services continued. Further, the community organising work by the NGO culminated in the launch of the Hyderabad Garbage Collectors Collective to represent voices of the unorganised workers. It was also reiterated that the endline data collection exercises were intended to gather insights and not to "judge" participants' behaviour. It was also made clear that they were not part of a plan to extend the intervention, so as not to raise hopes. Those collecting the data were careful not to make any promises or claims about the future prospects of cash, and to maintain their positionality as mere researchers.

The *CLARISSA* project had a very similar, community-rooted off-ramping process. The two dozen community organisers that accompanied the rollout of cash with parallel relational interventions and community organising took care to hand over the activities they facilitated to community facilitators well in advance of departure. Likewise, the community health-camp that sprang up committed to continue post-experiment. Crucial considerations in all this were that people remained fully informed of the temporary nature of the experiment and that whatever could be continued would be.

In order to successfully offboard participants, *In Her Hands* surveyed recipients about what support they desired to transition out of the intervention. From this feedback, the staff launched GRO-ing Forward, a series of tools and webinars designed to support successful closure of the intervention. The website includes an FAQ document, a benefits cliff calculator, and a series of webinars around the topics of storytelling, financial coaching, career readiness, community development, emotional wellness, personal development, and small business development.

### 3.9. Post-intervention: dissemination, advocacy, follow-up.

Finally, the ethical responsibilities associated with a BI experiment go on long after the time the intervention and any research component has concluded.

This includes responding with care to any ongoing, adverse effects generated by the intervention; handling people's personal data; and 'doing justice' to the time invested and the results generated, including, critically, through dissemination, advocacy, and potential scale-up. Furthermore, the research team may decide to collect post-intervention, follow-up data months or even years after the payments have ended. The purpose of this is typically to analyse the long-term impacts of the experiment, whether any of the changes 'stuck' or whether things reverted back to the situation before the experiment (Standing, 2021). This is itself often ethically charged, since BI researchers are often asked whether they can demonstrate that a short-term experiment reduced dependency or poverty in ways that may have permanent effects.

Yet we must ask ourselves: is the goal of a BI experiment to demonstrate the efficacy of a temporary intervention or is it to build an evidence base for what might happen if a permanent policy were enacted? If the former, can we truly assume that hundreds of years of economic, gender, and racial exploitation can be overcome through 12-36 months of unconditional cash assistance? Furthermore, can such interventions change the structural reality of widening inequality and the increasing lack of decent, well-paid jobs under the present variant of capitalism? Likely not. In which case, we need to ask ourselves: what is the point of a follow-on study and whose interests does it serve? May it even be counter-productive in the long term? Table 9 outlines some of the specific ethical considerations applicable in the period following the end of the formal intervention.

### **Table 9: Ethical considerations post-intervention**

What longer-term, ongoing support will be available to participants? How long will this be available? Does this align with what participants were told prior to the intervention?

Will a follow-up round of data collection be undertaken? How will consent be obtained? While this may help uncover sleeper effects and increase understanding of what happens when the money stops, it creates ethical questions related to the right of researchers to contact participants, as discussed in Table 8.

What public communications, publications, advocacy, and media interaction will be undertaken? How may this affect participants, post-intervention? How will any dissemination activities ensure fair representation of participants' stories? Will participants retain ownership of their stories and experiences? Will participants be in control of what is published?

What purpose and whose goals are served in advocacy around experiment results and in conducting follow-on studies? Who decides and which agendas are involved?

How will data be stored? Who will have access to the data? Will the data be stored anonymously? How will personal consent data be stored?

In the case of the *WorkFREE* experiment, a decision was made to securely store all personal data with the implementing NGO in Hyderabad. This was a legal requirement and included both financial data around cash transactions and consent forms, each of which needed to be kept for a specified period in case of subsequent audit. Given the practicalities and sensitivities involved, these data were all initially recorded on paper and then digitised before being stored on encoded, enterprise-grade hardware. The *CLARISSA* programme in Bangladesh faced similar requirements and took similar action.

With regards to dissemination and advocacy, the political conditions in India influenced those involved in sharing *WorkFREE's* findings and their implications. The experiment came to an end in the lead up to the Indian General Election of 2024, during which time cash transfers and the possibility of introducing some form of BI were major topics of political discussion. This meant that multiple opportunities presented themselves for advocacy and influence, with the platform offered by the experiment and its findings vital for influencing decisions such as that by the Congress Party to include a BI in its manifesto. Of course, substantial prior work had laid the foundations for this possibility: the *WorkFREE* team had already spent years building relationships and generating interest both in the experiment and its potential social policy implications. This ensured that they were well positioned when the opportunities created by the election arose.

Crucially, the *WorkFREE* team had been explicit with all potential participants from the beginning of the experiment, including throughout the process of gathering informed consent, that their intention was to use the findings and



the legitimacy generated by the experiment for the purposes of political advocacy towards social security reform. This purpose was one that community members shared, given their precarious experience of insecurity, and there was general agreement that it was important for participant voices to be centred in eventual advocacy communications. One of the major consequences of this was the decision to communicate experiment findings as much as possible through testimony. This meant that experiment participants attended policy roundtables and shared their experiences and analyses directly with policymakers. It further meant that the documentary film which was made to share the experiment's findings featured experiment participants front and centre, telling the overall story of impact and transformation through individual case study narratives.

Participant narratives also feature strongly in the dissemination and advocacy emerging from the current wave of U.S experiments, including *In Her Hands* and *The Compton Pledge*, and from the wider movement that is being built around them. The *Economic Security Project (2023)*<sup>[22]</sup> is at the heart of this movement and it has produced a Storytelling Guide to support individuals and organisations to advance the case for BI by sharing experiment findings using the medium of real, human stories. The Guide is rooted in the recognition that humans are narrative animals and that we are moved by emotion, empathy, and connection more than by numbers and abstract data. Given this, the authors argue, experimenters need to work with participants to develop first-person testimonies that demonstrate the lived impact of receiving BI and thus illustrate its transformative potential. This, they suggest, is more powerful than third-person accounts, and is typically also more ethical. The Guide goes on to detail a replicable process for generating such stories, which begins with informed consent, prioritises authenticity, and proceeds in respect and collaboration.

*Give Directly* also places a heavy emphasis on respect and collaboration in its communications and advocacy. Recognising the troubled, often neo-colonial history of representation in international development,<sup>[23]</sup> *Give Directly* has appointed a Director of Recipients Advocacy whose remit is to work directly with experiment participants to ensure their wellbeing, support them to advocate for their interests after the end of the experiment, and ensure that they have a voice in shaping how their experiences are represented to wider audiences. *Give Directly* explicitly frame this move as against the 'poverty porn' that has historically characterised some of the development sector, and they detail six core principles guiding what they do: 1) get consent and make sure it's as informed as possible; 2) emphasise that receiving aid is not contingent on sharing one's story; 3) explain that a participant's story may be shared publicly across the internet; 4) identify who the participant is and where they live, as opposed to sharing unexplained, stock images; 5) show

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[22] <https://economicsecurityproject.org>

[23] <https://www.givedirectly.org/poverty-porn/>

audiences the real thing, and lots of it - in other words, allow participants to tell their own real stories in their own way; 6) centre the recipient, not the organisation. This, *Give Directly* emphasise, is fundamentally about dignity and respect for those involved as experiment participants.

The *B-MINCOME* experiment in Barcelona did not allow the press and media to contact participants without their previous and explicit consent. Given that the experiment was innovative within the Spanish and the Catalan context, it raised a lot of interest among some parts of the media, researchers, and social entities which were (and are still) interested in interviewing the participants. Once the experiment finished, participants' names and details were not publicised. However, during the implementation phase, those participants eager to be contacted by third parties were internally asked by their assigned social workers.

## 4. Conclusion and general principles

The ethical challenges involved in BI experiments are substantial. At every stage, from design, through set-up and implementation, to evaluation, follow-on and advocacy, the complex, human-centred nature of this work means that it always and everywhere raises important questions over what is the 'right' thing to do, the next best choice to make, or the careful way to proceed. Throughout this report, we have attempted to draw on our own diverse, lived experiences as architects and advocates of BI experiments to highlight the ethical questions posed by this work and to illustrate how we, with varying degrees of success, have attempted to answer them. The questions we raise throughout Chapter 3 are illustrative and non-exhaustive, and we are not of the opinion that one-size-fits-all answers will be available to any of them. We are, however, hopeful that fellow BI experimenters will find it useful to have this initial list to hand and that being able to look through what we have and have not done will help when working through the challenges raised by their own experiences.

This final section attempts to identify some of the core, guiding, ethical principles that apply to all BI experiments and can serve experimenters in orientating themselves and what they do. These principles aim to contribute to ongoing discussion rather than claim to be definitive. By and large, the emergent principles are similar to those guiding social and research work of any nature, and, in the end, are rooted in care.

### 4.1. Do-no-harm/do good

Within the research field, "the most fundamental ethical obligation of all...is the 'do no harm' principle" (Barrett and Carter 2010: 519), which holds that it is the researcher's paramount responsibility to avoid causing harm to anybody involved in the research process. This principle underpins ethical frameworks

governing disciplines as diverse as anthropology, medical science, and sociology. Typically, it also features in good practice guidelines for social workers and development practitioners (Anderson 1999) and can logically be taken as the starting point for the conduct of any ethical BI experiment.

Naturally, what constitutes harm in any given set of circumstances will vary by person and by context, which means that it is impossible to state with certainty that 'X' action will always cause 'Y' negative outcome (although we can often be reasonably confident). Given this, adhering to the do no harm principle will inevitably involve experimenters asking careful questions like: What is involved? What are the risks or costs? How do these compare to the anticipated benefits? What are potential unintended consequences? How can risks be mitigated and benefits promoted? Those involved in BI experiments need to be attentive to process - "going slow to go fast", as Kline helpfully puts it (2022: 24) - and to participation - involving stakeholders meaningfully so as to develop grounded, informed perspectives on what could go right and what might go wrong. This necessarily translates into developing rigorous, robust, participatory risk assessments and establishing mitigation strategies and risk management plans that are contextually informed and continually updated. It could also involve developing unexpected findings policies and putting in place ethical governance structures that support and oversee project implementation (Howard 2022; Iphofen 2011). Finally, following Christopher Barrett and Michael Carter's (2010) observations about the rules that tend to govern human subject research, it is important a) that all participants are fully informed about what the experiment may entail before freely deciding whether or not to participate, b) that any predictable harms are decisively outweighed by social gains, and c) that compensation be available to cover any damages incurred.

The other side of the coin of avoiding harm is the question of actively 'doing good'. Researchers and reformers from traditions as varied as the feminist, Marxist, and de-colonial all share the commitment to use their work not simply to shed light on the workings of the world but to bend those workings towards social justice (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, Zavala 2013). In the context of BI experiments, this commonly translates into the decision to use scarce human and financial resources to demonstrate how transformative BI can be in righting historical wrongs. In practice, this may mean working with individuals and communities who are socially and economically disadvantaged, who are victims of structural violence, and who suffer marginalisation or exclusion. It also points in the direction of reciprocity - what Seymour-Smith calls "perform[ing] some useful or valued service in return for the collaboration require[d]" (Seymour-Smith, 2007, cited in Robben & Sluka, 2007: 9).

## 4.2. Respect, dignity, agency

At the heart of any meaningful ethical guidance is care, and the importance of

caring for participants by following the Kantian imperative to treat all people as ends in themselves rather than as means to an end. We have elsewhere observed that the history of social experimental research, and indeed of social and development policy innovation, is littered with examples of dehumanisation, where participants were treated not as full persons entitled to respect, dignity and agency, but rather as impersonal tools used to prove a wider point (Howard 2022). In his seminal piece on The Ethics of New Development Economics, Stéphane Baele (2013: 25-6) refers to this as “instrumentalisation”, which he labels “a fundamental ethical issue...a moral wrong involving treating people as a means to an end”. We agree.

In order to avoid this, we believe that it is essential for BI experimenters to root what they do in respect, to honour each and every participant’s fundamental human dignity, and to do this in part by affording all participants meaningful space for the exercise of their agency. Approaching BI experiments in this way means, at a minimum, ensuring that experiments benefit participants and are relevant to their lives. It similarly involves ensuring that each and every participant has the time, space, and information necessary to offer their fully informed consent. A useful point of reference here is the Trust Code of Conduct for Equitable Research Partnerships<sup>[24]</sup> (TRUST, 2018). Pushing back against what it terms ‘ethics dumping’ by privileged experimenters in under-privileged settings, the code provides a robust framework for conducting research with fairness, respect, honesty, and care. It does this through a series of articles, each representing a principle for ethical research, which include emphasising the local relevance of research, co-ownership of that research, clear pathways for feedback around findings, formal knowledge transfer agreements, and established benefit sharing mechanisms. Each of these principles centre respect for persons as ends in themselves and we suggest that BI experimenters would do well to follow them.

### 4.3. Mitigating power inequalities

Power inequalities are the major obstacle to equitable research, as indeed they are to careful social change work. Mitigating them is therefore central to the guidance offered by The Trust Code, as it is to the guiding principles that we present here. BI experiments often take place across lines of privilege, with participants disadvantaged in some way, and commonly more so than experiment designers, researchers, implementers or advocates. Given this, experimenters need not only to be sensitive to these inequalities and their consequences, but to actively work to mitigate and overcome them, designing processes that foster inclusion, support meaningful participation, enable self-expression and agency, and push towards power-sharing. We emphasise this as a principle unto itself not only because it is important, but because power inequalities often work silently through established, unreflexive patterns of behaviour, for example around who speaks and in what order, whose voice is heard and how, and whose perspectives get

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[24] Formerly the global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings: <https://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/>

generalised as representative. These patterns then sediment into practices that recreate social reality and perpetuate exclusion, which means that disrupting them takes conscious, active, and deeply sensitive work. There are many guides out there for what this work may look like (e.g. Brown 2021, Kashtan 2014), but in the context of BI experiments it will necessarily include conscious, careful, pro-active measures that empower participants to co-create all aspects of the experiment, including the management, research, and subsequent communication of findings. It may also include using tools like community-based participatory action research to study the experiment and developing a cohort of participant communicators sharing narratives of impact

#### 4.4. Trust and transparency

The Trust Code is aptly named, since any endeavour advancing the values of fairness, respect, and care will require the cultivation and nurture of trust. And trust always requires honesty and transparency, for if people are to believe in and feel safe with each other, then they must feel confident that their needs matter and are included in decisions being taken which concern them. We believe that trust and transparency are essential for the conduct of ethical BI experiments, and as guiding principles they have a number of important practical implications:

- 1) Gaining fully informed consent is vital before and during the project. This requires comprehensive, open sharing of all relevant information with potential participants, continually checking that they understand and feel comfortable proceeding, and mitigating power inequalities such that all feel safe to question and to challenge.
- 2) Ensuring that experimenters stick to what was agreed or discuss openly and make decisions collectively if changes are subsequently required.
- 3) Being transparent about the project's purpose: Why is the experiment taking place? What are the goals and focus areas? What will be involved? How does any research component interact with the main intervention? Etc.
- 4) Being open about funding - with participants, staff, partners and the wider world.

An important point to note here is the need to be transparent about universality; whether the decision is to forego universality in favour of targeting, lotteries, or control groups, or whether universality is built into the intervention, for example, through saturation studies. Where universality is forgone, this must be clearly justified and any potential implications mitigated to avoid exacerbating inter- or intra-community inequalities. Being transparent about who is included and who is excluded, and why, is vital to avoid creating confusion and conflict.

## 4.5. Substantive unconditionality

Finally, and very much in line with the preceding guiding principles, we are convinced that ethical BI experiments have to ensure that participants experience substantive unconditionality. By this we mean that there are no 'hidden' or unintended conditions that form part of the experiment, which would go against the emancipatory principle of unconditionality underpinning most calls for basic income. Full unconditionality is not necessarily easy to achieve, because many funders, researchers and advocates will understandably expect that participants receiving BI will be available to respond to questions about impact. Likewise, participants themselves may feel compelled or duty-bound to 'reciprocate' by answering researchers' questions, or fearful that they could end up excluded from the experiment if they don't. Once more, the implications of this centre around the importance of ensuring fully informed consent, mitigating power inequalities, and establishing deep trust. This means ensuring that participants not only understand that they can say 'no' but really believe that it is safe for them to do so. For experimenters, that will likely require careful communication and a genuine willingness to let go of power.

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Overall, these principles are intended to start a conversation rather than finish it. We do not believe that this is the final word or that we have said all that is needed. There are likely principles that need to be added to this list and refinements that will strengthen it. No doubt, there are examples and applications that we have missed. Our hope is these pieces will emerge as BI experimenters and participants within those experiments take this important work forward.



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