

# **Universal Basic Employment & Opportunity**

## ***Summary of Work***

### **Introduction**

Universal Basic Employment & Opportunity (UBE) is a public policy initiative with the mission to demonstrate that a federal jobs guarantee policy can eliminate poverty and be a stop-payment on its many symptoms. A job guarantee, an idea that first gained prominence in the 1940's with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Second Bill of Rights and is now being championed today by voices like Dr. Darrick Hamilton of The New School, Senator Cory Booker, and Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York and Bonnie Watson of New Jersey and many others, is a government program that would provide a good job to every person who wants one. This policy solution matters because it dignifies historically low-wage work, restores agency back to the millions of Americans that have been repeatedly failed by economic systems, reinvigorates a local tax base, and closes the racial wealth gap. This solution matters in Cleveland because far too many residents, neighborhoods, and stories have been anchored by the weight of poverty.

Cleveland has been considered one of the poorest and most inequitable cities in the United States for many years. The symptoms of poverty show up in residents' quality of life and the broader community in myriad ways – in health, in education, in public safety, in economic mobility, in business vitality, and so on. UBE is a solution that reconfigures existing resources to form a real, functional safety net that supports residents' economic mobility and dignity, while addressing poverty. UBE's pilot in Cleveland – which the funds requested from the City of Cleveland would help enable – is a critical proof point to build additional momentum for jobs guarantee policy, and support reorientation of existing resources at the federal, state and local levels.

Work works – UBE is the people-centered movement to show how work that pays a living wage can work for all.

### **Organizational Growth**

UBE was founded in 2022 by Devin H. Cotten, a community and economic development practitioner that has spent the majority of his career serving Cleveland's most underserved neighborhoods. In addition to Devin, UBE is supported by a 14-member advisory committee of subject matter experts from government, philanthropy, community development, and business. In 2024 UBE joined the United Way of Greater Cleveland as a social innovation partner to complete the development of the nation's first jobs guarantee pilot.

Over the course of the past 18-months, UBE has grown from an idea to a fully developed strategy. In 2023, UBE completed a human-centered design process that engaged 40 of the

most proximate voices to the problem as co-creators of the strategy and pilot design. Concurrently, UBE cultivated local and national supporters, catalyzed local philanthropic resources, and engaged with all four levels of government.

### **Centering Cleveland Voices**

UBE's human-centered design process brought 20 Cleveland business partners and 20 Black women residents into the design and development of this policy solution. Over the course of six facilitated sessions, led by Black-woman owned firm Monique Inc., UBE was able to gather direct feedback from Clevelanders on the efficacy, operations, measurements of success, and wraparound supports needed to develop a successful pilot. This critical feedback helps to ensure that the pilot and policy solution being developed moving forward has the authentic voices of Clevelanders guiding its future. Access to report can be found [here](#).

### **Jobs Guarantee Pilot**

UBE's jobs guarantee pilot, with the target launch in the first quarter of 2026, is designed to subsidize employment and ensure a \$50,000 salary for 100 Clevelanders at local Main Street and small businesses for 36-months. The aim of the pilot is to demonstrate that a jobs guarantee policy generates benefits both to individuals directly supported, and to place, and business.

The pilot works by UBE/UWGC providing small businesses in a dedicated neighborhood with the capital and technical assistance needed to hire or elevate a predetermined number of individuals to the proposed income of \$50,000. UBE/UWGC subsidizes the entirety of the participants salaries, while the employers cover their benefits (medical, retirement, paid leave, etc.). *Example:* ABC Bakery has 5 employees participating in the pilot. That small business would receive \$250,000 annually from UBE/UWGC – distributed in quarter payments of \$62,500. Even if the participants of the pilot are existing employees, UBE will subsidize their full salary. The wages the employer was previously spending on salaries will then be redirected to cover the cost of the required benefits. Over the course of three years evaluators will measure how the wage subsidy reduced the symptoms of poverty and improved the lives of the participants, at the small business, and in the neighborhood.

### **Preparing Cleveland to End Poverty Investment**

The next iteration of UBE and its work prepares Cleveland to be a catalyst for change and carry out the nation's first jobs guarantee pilot. Launching this pilot, that will immediately elevate 100 of the most vulnerable Clevelanders and their families out poverty and reduce the symptoms of poverty that plague neighborhood business, is a significant undertaking. The \$600,000 investment from Cleveland City Council will assist UBE and the City to 1.

catalyze leveraged resources, 2. lay additional groundwork to influence policy change and 3. set up the pilot, while also having seismic impact on residents and neighborhoods today.

### ***1. Catalyze Leveraged Resources***

To raise the \$21 million needed to deploy a full pilot for 100 Clevelanders over 36-months, UBE will need to engage a diverse set of funding partners from inside the region and across the nation. Local, national, and corporate philanthropy, private donors, and venture forward investors will all play a role in raising the full capital. For some of these investors, this will be their first time investing in Cleveland. The resources invested by Council will provide UBE with the capacity to cultivate these new funding partners to invest in this project and other solutions. Additionally, an investment from Council provides others with the confidence to know that this solution has the requisite buy-in to achieve all of its goals.

### ***2. Influence Policy Change***

City governments do not administer social safety net programs that are designed to alleviate poverty, but they do deal with their effectiveness in neighborhoods, schools, policing, home prices, and more. UBE is a policy solution to put the ability to combat poverty back in the hands of cities. This investment provides UBE with the resources to retain an evaluation team with the national pedigree needed to truly influence state and federal policy, and build out a communications and advocacy strategy. The jobs guarantee pilot will produce research findings, when leveraged with UBE's existing and future relationships at the county, state, and federal level, will be an advocacy tool to change policy that drives more agency back to cities.

### ***3. Set up the pilot***

The jobs guarantee pilot will truly be a citywide effort. These resources from Council will help to prepare neighborhood businesses, nonprofits, social workers, and other service providers to be able to play their role in helping to ensure the safety and efficacy of the pilot and its participants. Technical assistance in the areas of human resources, navigating the public benefits system, family support, and more will ensure partners are equipped to share and report data, assist participating individuals and their families, and provide support to businesses.

### **Today's Benefit**

The long-term impacts of the pilot through research, advocacy, investment, and policy change are important, but the immediate impact of this pilot cannot be understated. The \$600,000 investment made by Council will catalyze a \$15 million in direct investment into the hands of Cleveland residents. That is a 25:1 return in addition to the multitude of qualitative ways 100 residents and their families, local businesses, a neighborhood will be

changed forever. In addition to the wages, the City will receive additional benefit via payroll, income, and sales taxes. UBE is a strategy to reimagine a new future, with the ability transform the lives of so many Clevelanders today.

## **Appendix**

### **Activities to be Supported**

- Retain research partner with the experience and qualifications of influencing state and federal policy that will design and administer evaluation components of the pilot.
- Develop and sign memorandums of understanding with Cleveland small businesses that will employ pilot participants and receive salary subsidy from the UBE/United Way of Greater Cleveland for pilot.
- Provide technical assistants and support to Cleveland small businesses to ensure they have the requisite capacity needed to participate in the pilot. Technical assistance includes, but not limited to, data collection and reporting process, personnel training, human resource and personnel management procedures, etc.
- Develop and sign memorandums of understanding with Cleveland nonprofit organizations that will provide supportive services to the pilot and its participants.
- Provide technical assistants and support to Cleveland nonprofits to ensure they have the requisite capacity needed to participate in the pilot. Technical assistance includes, but not limited to, data collection and reporting software, personnel training, program design, etc.
- Develop procedures and risk assessment with Cuyahoga County Jobs and Family Services and State of Ohio Jobs and Family Services to ensure UBE, or designated partners, can provide necessary support to pilot participants ending or restarting the use of public benefits like (SNAP/EBT, housing choice voucher, daycare voucher, Medicaid, etc.)
- Develop fundraising and advocacy strategy in partnership with United Way of Greater Cleveland to cultivate the necessary resources to administer the full jobs guarantee pilot.

**Universal Basic Employment & Opportunity: Preparing Cleveland to End Poverty (2-year)**

<b>Line Item</b>	<b>Budget Total</b>	<b>Request of Cleveland City Council</b>	<b>Budget Narrative</b>
<b>Project Administration &amp; Personnel</b>			
Project Administration	\$ 560,359.84	\$ 560,359.84	These funds will be used for salaries and benefits to project personnel over two-years paid via fiscal sponsor United Way of Greater Cleveland
Equipment + Support	\$ 11,000.00	\$ -	These funds will be used to provide required equipment and technology to UBE staff members (laptop, monitor, mouse, requisite computer software, etc.) along with professional development supports (i.e. training, convenings, etc.)
Fiscal Sponsor Admin Fee	\$ 37,500.00	\$ -	These funds will be paid to United Way of Greater Cleveland to serve as fiscal sponsor for UBE and pilot. Fiscal agent fee is 7.5% of revenue
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 608,859.84</b>	<b>\$ 560,359.84</b>	
<b>Fund Development</b>			
Funding Partners Cultivation	\$ 25,000.00	\$ -	These funds will be used to facilitate opportunities for engagement with funding partners. Uses of resources include meetings, travel (gas, airfare, lodging, etc.),
Funders Briefing	\$ 75,000.00		These funds will be used to host a funder briefing. This briefing will summit several funding partners to Cleveland for the pilot.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 100,000.00</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	
<b>Partnership Development</b>			
Pilot Small Business Support	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 19,820.08	These funds will be used to develop partnerships, supports, and MOUs with the small businesses for the pilot. UBE will contract with lawyers, HR consultants, and other subject matter experts to provide operational expertise.
Pilot Participant Support	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 19,820.08	These funds will be used to develop partnerships, supports, and MOUs with organizations to provide supports during the pilot. These supports include social work, financial, and interpersonal.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 100,000.00</b>	<b>\$ 39,640.16</b>	
<b>Research, Evaluation, &amp; Advocacy</b>			
Research Partner	\$ 75,000.00		These funds will be used to contract with Economic Mobility Corporation to serve as the research and evaluation partner for the pilot. Their services for this grant will include designing the research question and study, providing strategic oversight, technical assistance.
Research Technology	\$ 15,000.00	\$ -	These funds will be used to source and subsidize research technology needed for the partnering businesses and pilot participants.
Strategic Communication Materials	\$ 15,500.00		These funds will be used to develop marketing and research materials to cultivate strategic partners for the development of the pilot.
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 105,500.00</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	
<b>Budget Total</b>	<b>\$ 914,359.84</b>	<b>\$ 600,000.00</b>	