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#### **Publication Date**

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
IRVINE

Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration: A Case Study of

Basic Income

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Urban and Regional Planning

by

Mackenzie Daly

Thesis Committee:  
Associate Professor Nicholls, Chair  
Assistant Professor Alejandra Reyes  
Assistant Professor Hun Kim

2022



## **DEDICATION**

To

My sisters and my mother who have provided me with unconditional love, support, joy, and laughter throughout this process and the challenges of graduate school.

My mentor Raymond Rocco who has never wavered in his belief or encouragement of me.

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## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my profound gratitude to my incredible committee, whom this thesis would not have been possible. I am profoundly appreciative of the kindness, support, and labor.

## **Abstract of Thesis**

Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration: A Case Study of Basic Income

by

Mackenzie Daly

Master of Arts in Urban and Regional Planning

University of California, Irvine, 2022

Dr. Walter Nicholls, Chair

The research investigates the relationship and genealogy of neoliberalism to basic income. Using neoliberal theory, the study analyzes the impacts of basic income on the already neoliberal welfare system using a recent basic income experiment, the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration, as a case study. The data collected consists of interviews, newspaper articles, social media posts, and web searches. The findings show that while basic income has material benefits, the demonstration structure is neoliberal. It is essential to analyze the basic income demonstration in Stockton to understand the role of neoliberalism in basic income and prospective policy implications.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Basic income in the United States is an old idea but has recently resurfaced and gained a lot of traction among policymakers and public officials. Various basic income models include universal basic income, partial income, full income, and negative tax. Regardless of the type of basic income, all forms have similar goals to alleviate or eliminate poverty by providing an income floor. However, universal basic income (UBI) is among the more prominent forms of basic income being studied. Within UBI, there are various subcategories such as basic income (BI), guaranteed income (GI), and negative income tax (NIT).

Experiments and trials for basic income are scarce, but there have been several trials especially recent. Given the nature of the goal of basic income, trials and experiments occur in areas where the population makeup tends to be low income. More recently, the city of Stockton completed an 18-month basic income experiment. Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED), an 18-month basic income experiment, was recently conducted in Stockton, California. The program is “mayor-led” and fiscally sponsored by the Reinvent Stockton Foundation. The primary funder is a nonprofit social welfare organization, the Economic Security Project. The Economic Security Project was created in 2016 by Chris Hughes, co-founder of Facebook. The advisory board for SEED is comprised of 5 individuals from different sectors:

Michael Tubbs: former Mayor of Stockton, current special advisor for economic mobility and opportunity for Governor Gavin Newsom

Natalie Foster: Co-Founder and President of the Economic Security Project

Taylor Jo Isenberg: Executive Director of the Economic Security Project

Michael Miller: Executive Director of the San Joaquin County Human Services Agency



Dr. Ines Ruiz-Huston: Director of Intercultural Student Success at the University of the Pacific

The program was first announced back in October of 2017 and began transferring funds in 2019. The demonstration was an 18-month trial and provided \$500 prepaid debit cards to 125 Stockton families.

The overall objective of this thesis project is to understand the rationale behind the SEED pilot program and its impacts on community members and affiliated stakeholders. The goal of the thesis is to take a qualitative approach to further analyze and examine the basic income experiment in Stockton in the context of neoliberalism. SEED is an intriguing case study in understanding basic income in the context of neoliberalism, given the demonstration is the first private-public basic income trial to launch in the United States.

Basic income has not been widely tested, especially in the United States. SEED is the first income experiment in the United States to be spearheaded by a mayor. The objective of Stockton as a case study is to gain insight into the relationship between welfare reform and analyze the intentions of programs versus outcomes and lived experiences. The Stockton experiment has the potential to provide narratives and first-hand experiences regarding the idea of basic income, which will provide insight into how it may impact people on a macro level if implemented policy wide.

The research uses three guiding questions:

1. What was the rationale driving the lead stakeholders behind SEED?
2. How was the program set up in terms of goals, participants, and evaluations?
3. What were the consequences for participants?

Thus, it is vital to understand the full scope of the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration to understand how it relates to welfare reform under neoliberalism.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Basic Income*

Some of the earliest arguments in favor of basic income in a cash economy date back to the early 18 and 19th centuries (Widerquist 2019). The underlying motive for implementing programs was rooted in addressing economic injustices. Basic income as a tool to address inequality and promote freedom was also the argument behind neoliberal economist Milton Friedman's Negative Income Tax (NIT). According to Friedman (2002), NIT operates as a social policy to redistribute money to the poor. The redistribution would increase economic freedom, which enables political freedom and consequently addresses inequality.

Similarly, a civil rights activist, Martin Luther King Junior, believed that economic equality could be achieved through basic income. In his book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos Or Community?* King states, "I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective—the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income (171).

Correspondingly, basic income is studied to understand freedom, equality, and socio-economic inequalities. According to Bidadanure (2019), the underlying idea is that unconditional cash transfers will be a method for people to exercise their freedoms, specifically in relation to participating in the market. Moreover, participation in the market is correlated to equality. This underlying motive for confronting equality and freedom has served as the premise for studying basic income. These studies aim to analyze how cash payments affect vulnerable communities in contemporary times. More recently, scholars such as Pateman (2004) and Birnbaum (2016) discuss basic income's function for society as providing all members with an income floor with no conditions. The recipients are free to use the money in whichever way they

see fit. Similarly, Straubhar (2017) states universal basic income “flows independent of personal employment circumstances, relationship attitudes”(2). Typically, basic income acts as an income floor or safety net but is not sufficient to subsidize all living expenses (Pateman 2003).

Interestingly, over the period of roughly ten years (1968-1970), the United States Government conducted 4 NIT experiments: 1) The New Jersey Graduated Work Incentive Experiment (NJ), 2) The Rural Income-Maintenance Experiment (RIME), 3) The Seattle/Denver Income-Maintenance Experiments (SIME/DIME), and 4) The Gary, Indiana Experiment (Gary). The researchers wanted to answer these questions: would there be a significant decrease in labor if there was an income floor, how burdensome would the program be, and is it infeasible. The findings from these studies showed a 1-4% decrease in employment compared to the control group. However, as (Moffitt 1979) points out, the findings on work-effort response were the center of discussion among scholars meaning that there was minimal discussion regarding the positive outcomes pertaining to the quality of life. More recently, there have been several basic income experiments globally, such as in Finland and Kenya. Finland's experiment took place in 2017 and provided 2,000 residents with a stipend of \$645 a month. The objectives of this experiment were to assess the relationship between basic income and participation in the labor market (Ortiz 2018). The preliminary findings showed that the stipend had no significant impact on employment. However, the experiment came to a halt a year later because the government did not want to continue funding the program (Kela).

The experiment in Kenya also began in 2017 and is funded by a non-profit organization based out of New York, GiveDirectly. The organization provides a monthly unconditional cash transfer of \$23 to roughly 200 villages. According to Ortiz (2018), the overall goal is to assess the impacts of basic income on social relationships.

Several scholars have proposed varying policies regarding a basic income. Parijs, Philippe, and Vanderborght (2017) discuss the policy proposals that have been published in regard to implementation. Two of the more contemporary and abstract policy proposals come from Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) and Stern and Kravitz (2016). The plan proposed by Parijs and Vanderborght is written in their publications and provides a partial basic income of \$1,163 a month to “fiscal residents”. The funding would come from income taxes and not replace any current welfare programs. The objectives of this plan are to promote equality and freedom via basic income. The plan by Stern and Kravitz comes from their book, *Raising the Floor: How A Universal Basic Income Can Renew Our Economy and Rebuild the American Dream*, which proposes to pay a monthly cash transfer of at least \$1,000 to adults over the age of 18. The funding for this plan is contingent on the reallocation of over 125 welfare programs. The goals of this plan are to stimulate the economy by providing an income floor.

Moreover, the consensus among scholars of basic income is a replace proposal is more feasible. The argument for the replace emphasizes the credibility and viability when taking into account that the cost of maintaining basic income on top of the current welfare system would be almost double (Parolin and Sloland 2019).

Proponents of basic income argue that providing people with an income floor will result in a slew of benefits, including poverty reduction, crime reduction (Dorsett 2020), and, more recently, combatting the possible outcomes of automation (Miller 2021). However, some challenges come with programs like basic income.

The main concerns regarding basic income proposals are the overall feasibility of cost and a decrease in labor supply. Implementing a “universal” basic income is highly unlikely for two reasons. First, the basic income programs and experiments that have occurred are not

universal in distribution. According to Dorsett (2020), many programs don't have the financial wherewithal to provide the entire population with an income floor, thus making the idea of a universal basic income unlikely, considering it has not been tried. Similarly, as Hoynes and Rothstein (2019) state, the cost of a universal basic income, at a policy level, would be at least \$3 trillion.

Moreover, there are additional concerns regarding labor, wages, and educational attainment. Suppose basic income were to operate as a financial floor. In that case, some economists believe that labor supply would decrease, resulting in increased wages for people who do participate in the labor force (Rothstein 2010). Hoynes and Rothstein (2019) elaborate and state, “UBI may lead to increased human capital investments by young people and adults. There is extensive evidence that credit constraints are binding on many students and lead to reduced educational attainment”. In other words, basic income removes material challenges which they describe as constraints, thus creating the opportunity for investment in education, employment, and additional training resulting in an increase in overall income due to the financial floor provided in combination with the increased wages from the opportunity created.

### *Neoliberalism and Welfare Reform*

It is important to note the difference between the experiment objectives and the intentions of the public demand for basic income. The dominant narrative surrounding the utility of basic income was rooted in aspirations of equality. Proponents of basic income emphasized the importance of combating income inequality. However, this narrative changed toward the end of the 1960s with the NIT experiments carried out from 1968 to 1980 were rooted in market-centered ideals. This shift is important to consider when situating it in a historical analysis of the rise of neoliberalism.

The 1970s was an important time in economic history as it marked the shift to a new form of capitalism. The transition was from embedded liberalism or regulated capitalism (for the sake of pedagogy, I will be using the term embedded liberalism) to neoliberal capitalism or neoliberalism, which had tremendous impacts on the welfare system.

It was not until the mid-1940s, in response to the great depression, that the government decided to provide public goods. This era is known as embedded liberalism. This resulted in the introduction of social benefits such as unemployment insurance, housing subsidies, and social security. As Harvey (2011) discusses, the market was regulated, and there was an emphasis that the state should focus on the welfare of its citizens and intervene in the market if necessary. Additionally, there was a low degree of income inequality during this period, which remained relatively fixed (Kotz, McDonough, and McMahon, 2019).

In the late 1970s or early 1980s, deregulation and privatization of the market and public sphere began to occur, thus the birth of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a political ideology that favors the free market and deregulation of the market in praxis. Neoliberalism was created in response to government intervention in markets during the period of embedded liberalism (Harvey 2011). During this time period, political ideology also shifted from centering on people to centering on the free market. Given the ongoing deregulation and privatization of goods, many forms of social support and basic necessities became commodities. The impacts of neoliberalism have resulted in a significant asymmetrical redistribution of economic, social, and political power.

With these economic shifts also came the neo-liberalization of welfare which marks a critical turning point. The new form of welfare embodies the same transition as in the economy, which was the removal of state support or the state providing a buffer and instead orienting itself

to adhere to market principles. The welfare state transformed into an apparatus committed to contributing to the market rather than maintaining guardrails to protect vulnerable populations (Schram 2018).

This shift can be attributed to neoliberal ideals and the praxis of deregulation and privatization. Forms of social welfare that existed in the 1960s and 1970s provided aid to people in need rather than specific services. Interestingly the services provided by welfare operate again using market ideals. Welfare has shifted dramatically since the 1980s to focus on a neoliberal regime of market-centered values (Schram et al. 2010). Welfare used to operate as assistance to people experiencing hardship but has quickly become a “welfare-to-work” that focuses on reincorporating people into the workforce, centering on the needs of the economy. Welfare now operates using a market-centered philosophy.

The critical component of this shift is that the boundaries between state, market and society are obscured. As Schram (2018) states, “Neoliberalism disseminates economic rationality to be the touchstone not just for the market but for civil society and the state as well”(308). This marketization of public goods, social services, and basic necessities results in a transference of responsibility from the state to the people.

The proposed research for this thesis builds on what previous scholars have discussed and aims to provide narratives and vignettes regarding the lived experience of individuals as well as gain an understanding of rationale and implementation under neoliberalism. At its core, basic income provides an unconditional financial floor to community members, which has the potential to radically alter the socio-economic fabric of society. However, as discussed earlier, the new change to neoliberalism has shifted agendas to center market values. Thus, it is imperative to provide an analysis of SEEDs implementation, rationale, and outcomes. The



research investigates the relationship and genealogy of neoliberalism and basic income. Using neoliberal theory to analyze basic income is critical given the possible impacts of basic income on the already neoliberalized welfare system. It will assist in providing contextual analysis of the relationship between the increase in interest in basic income and current events.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The research uses a comprehensive approach to understanding basic income through analysis of newspaper articles, Facebook data, Instagram data, Website searches, and analysis, as well as semi-structured interviews. Each data source provides information pertinent to constructing a narrative of where basic income in Stockton originated, how it was implemented, and assesses its consequences.

### *Newspaper Articles*

Newspaper articles were obtained using an online database to search for newspaper articles published between 2016 and 2020 using three main boolean operators:

1. *"Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration" and "community" and "recipient" or "participant."*
2. *"basic income" or "universal income" or "guaranteed income" and "Stockton" and "empower."*
3. *"Basic income" or "universal basic income" or "guaranteed income" and "Stockton."*

Roughly 50 articles were retrieved. All of the data from newspaper articles are publicly available. Data from newspaper articles was then put into an excel sheet and organized accordingly. The data contains information such as article title, article summary, date published, authors, keywords, critical claims pertaining to basic income, attitudes associated with claims, and affiliation of the author. The purpose of organizing the newspaper data is to understand commentary and sentiments regarding basic income and SEED. The newspaper articles provide specific information about the issue, such as a contextual understanding of the socio-political environment and geographic comparisons. Additionally, the interpretation and analysis of the

articles can serve as secondary data.

### *Facebook*

Facebook information was pulled from the former mayor, Michael Tubbs, public figure page. Information includes posts written by Michael Tubbs and any comments from individuals on those posts. The years searched were 2016-2020.

Posts written by Tubbs were put into an excel sheet containing the following information:

*Key word(s)*

*Post information:*

*Date of Facebook post*

*Content of the Facebook post*

*Total number of reactions to the author's Facebook post*

*Author of the Facebook post*

*Link to Facebook post*

*Comment information:*

*Total number of comments on the author's Facebook post*

*Content of the Comments on the author's Facebook post*

*Attitudes of comment*

*Number of Reactions and specifications per comment*

This information aims to understand the sentiments of individuals regarding basic income and specifically the basic income trial in Stockton (SEED). Attitudes of comments were scaled as follows -1 = Anti-basic income, 0 = Neutral, 1 = Pro-basic income. Attitudes were determined through content analysis (i.e., analyzing if comments used pejorative language, affirmative language, or impartial language). The importance of including reactions and specifications is to

understand perceptions of the SEED and basic income. Comments will be analyzed using the specification and rated in attitude accordingly. The utility of Facebook provides a better understanding of the sentiments and feelings toward basic income and SEED. Additionally, the data collected provides insight into key actors in the community.

### *Instagram Data*

Instagram data was retrieved from the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstrations account. The data retrieved was from April 2018 to September 2020. The data collected was a description of the images in 28 posts and a collection of the comments left on the posts. The data was used to understand the rationale and objectives of the demonstration.

### *Web Searches*

The web searches performed were on relevant organizations, including Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration, Economic Security Project, Reinvent Stockton Foundation, Hopewell Fund, Arabella Advisors, and Start Small LLC. Data from these websites was used to gather contact information and critical documents. The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration website collected data regarding information about donors, board members, researchers, participants, and key data sources. Data collected from the Economic Security Project web page was key actors, affiliation with SEED, and general background for context purposes. Information obtained from the Reinvent Stockton Foundation were key actors and overall mission. Lastly, data regarding Reinvent Stockton Foundation fiscal sponsorship was collected from Start Small LLC.

### *Interviews*

The semi-structured interviews serve to provide a qualitative understanding of individual

experiences with SEED. The interviewees were selected by using data published through newspaper articles and on the SEED website, as well as through referrals. Outreach was performed for over 20 individuals affiliated with SEED. The original goal was to interview ten individuals, five participants of SEED, and five interviews with community members or stakeholders. However, only one individual responded and was interviewed. The individual was a Stockton resident who was actively engaged in local community organizations. The outreach to interviewees was sent via email invitation to participate in the research. The email provided an introduction, research purpose, and details regarding their participation.

The one interview lasted 60 minutes. Recording and transcription occurred with the consent of the participant. The recordings and transcriptions were stored securely and confidentially in a locked file on the researcher's computer. All information gathered remains confidential. Pseudonyms were used in all notes, interview transcripts, and publications to protect the anonymity of the participant.

The overall objective of the interviews with participants was to understand their perceptions related to the demonstration. While only one interview was conducted, sufficient data was collected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the demonstration.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### *Stockton as a Case*

Stockton is a large city of roughly 300,000 people and is located in Northern California, less than 100 miles from the major tech hub Silicon Valley. However, the demographics of the residents in Stockton are vastly different compared to many of the surrounding areas. The city of Stockton has a lower median household income and educational attainment and higher unemployment levels than the state overall. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, the median household income is \$59,504, which is more than \$20,000 less than California's median income. The majority of Stockton residents' educational attainment is a high school diploma. Less than 20% of residents 25 years or older have earned a bachelor's degree.

The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration is an interesting case to examine for several reasons. First, SEED is the first mayor-led income experiment in the United States. This is particularly interesting because we see an elected official creating a private organization to test basic income in an attempt to address the city's needs. Secondly, the city of Stockton has a complex history of overspending resulting in the cutting of social services and welfare programs.

In tandem with this data, the labor force of Stockton is made up predominantly of individuals who have “lower average skill levels.” Most Stockton residents hold Office & Administrative Support Occupations, Sales & Related Occupations, or Material Moving Occupations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The first jobs are categorized as requiring “lower average skills” and are typically associated with less pay which can make having basic needs met, especially when accounting for the cost of housing increase specific to Stockton.

## *Bankruptcy*

As discussed previously, Stockton's bankruptcy plays an important role in perpetuating the preexisting condition of precarity. However, it is important to provide more context and details regarding the series of events leading up to the bankruptcy and after to get a better understanding of the importance of neoliberalism. The explanation for the bankruptcy is attributed to multiple factors. Evans, Kosenko, and Polyakov (2012) mentioned that there was no specific decision or group to blame for the bankruptcy. Instead, the result was ten years of overspending and relying on speculative markets by leadership. In other words, the city engaged in overspending due to the optimism that the housing market would not crash, and the property taxes would contribute to the general fund (Davidson and Ward 2013; Davidson 2020). It was a series of three major events that led to the economic downturn for Stockton.

The first was the financial crisis and housing collapse in 2008. In the early 2000s, all of America was experiencing a housing boom and economic growth as a result. The median cost of a home increased steadily, and by 2007 the median house was almost four times what it was in 2001. However, after the housing burst home, values dropped back down to the price they were in 2001. This is important because this resulted in significant declines in the city's property and sales tax revenues (Miller 2012). Property taxes were roughly 25% of the city revenue.

Second, according to Katherine Miller (2012), a former member of the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, the bankruptcy was a result of the hopeful overpromising of unsustainable compensation from the city. Miller stated that the city provided its employees generous labor contracts, which were “exploited” by the workers, thus driving up pension costs, which would cost the city more money. The overpromising resulted from the economic growth seen in Stockton from the housing boom in the mid to early 2000s. Since the city was on an

upward trajectory, it began to offer exceedingly generous labor agreements for city employees. These agreements meant an increase in the city budget, and there was little to no concern regarding market volatility. Thus, resulting in a \$417 million liability (Christine 2012).

Last, bonds in 2007 to lower the city's interest rates contributed to the ongoing city budget deficit. In 2007, about five years prior to the bankruptcy filing, the city attempted to establish alternatives to counteract the costs of the labor agreements. The objective was to lower the interest payments. The initial undertaking was roughly 125 million dollars and will now cost almost, if not more than double. The city was left with the ultimate decision to cut pension benefits significantly to fulfill its obligation to debtors. Interestingly, the investment bank that sold the city these bonds withheld the full truth regarding the return on investment and ended up only further contributing to the city's debt. The investment bank is now no longer running, but the city still owes millions.

In response, this city worked on a bankruptcy exit plan which resulted in a significant labor force decrease. According to Miller (2012), the labor force decrease resulted in “25 percent fewer police officers thirty percent fewer firefighters and forty-three percent fewer non-safety public employees this has resulted in huge cuts and services to the residents of Stockton.... cut our employees pay between nine and twenty-two percent we cut our employees and retirees medical costs by thirty percent, and we suspended pay raises and benefits in union contracts” (0:46).

The city's general fund now goes to pay back loans rather than provide public services for the community, such as public safety or education. Moreover, the city has already been downgraded by credit rating agencies, which will severely restrict its borrowing ability. Former city employees who were promised health care and other pension benefits will most likely not



see any of them. This is important to note, given the position of vulnerability Stockton has been placed in. The interest rates and debt owed from the bonds almost doubled from 16.8 million dollars to 30.2 million dollars in 2020. This vulnerability positioned Stockton as an ideal municipality for testing basic income.

More importantly, this series of events is categorically a time of crisis, specifically the years following the bust of the housing market. The historical context that precipitated the crisis allowed other parties to intervene and use the city as a testing ground. As stated by Nik Theodore (2019), “[o]ne key to the durability of neoliberalism in the face of its internal contradictions and its demonstrably destructive societal and ecological effects have been the remarkable ability of like-minded policymakers to exploit crisis conditions, including those of their own making” (2). These forms of austerity reform shift the attention from governments' support of corporate interest and transfer it onto welfare spending. The exploitation of the housing and economic crash in 2008 could arguably serve as a critical foundation for promoting neoliberal agendas such as the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration.

### *Implementation*

This section will discuss the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED) implementation process, the basic income demonstration led by Michael Tubbs. The purpose is to highlight stakeholders, actors, key events, and procedures. Implementation from the impetus is crucial in understanding the origin and initiation of the demonstration (i.e., SEED).

Michael Tubbs is one of the key stakeholders in the demonstration. Tubbs was born and raised in Stockton and had strong ties to the community. After interning in the Building Opportunities for Leadership and Development (BOLD) program at the White House, he

returned to Stockton after his cousin was murdered. This tragic incident reframed the way he conceptualized his definition of success as returning to Stockton to help the community and the poverty and crime in Stockton to help the city “reach its full potential”(Mayor Michael Tubbs, City of Stockton 2016).

When he returned, he decided the best way to enact this change was through the city council. During his time as a council member for District 6, he created a community coalition called Reinvent South Stockton Coalition (RSSC). The coalition was created to address the persistent issues in Stockton, such as poverty, public safety, and job creation (Latona 2017). In 2015, Tubbs announced he was running for Mayor of Stockton. His motivation for running for mayor was the same as for starting RSSC. He states, "I'm running to revitalize our neighborhoods, attract good-paying jobs, increase safety through community policing, and bring innovation into our civic life and the local economy. I am running because I am confident that together we can reinvent Stockton" (Tubbs n.d.). Moreover, Tubbs's interest in basic income was in part due to his own experience in Stockton and studying Dr. Martin Luther King in college. He states “coming from a background with poverty, where we worked ourselves up ... to the lower-middle class, and just seeing how hard my mother worked and how the issues we were facing weren't because of her efforts, it was something structural”(Musulin 2020). In his experience, he realized the difficulties in trying to work his way to a livable wage without any support and saw it as a systemic issue.

SEED launched in 2017 with the support of the Reinvent Stockton Foundation and Economic Security Project. Reinvent Stockton Foundation (RSF) was paramount to the launch and implementation of SEED. RSF is a 501c(3) founded in 2017 by Michael Tubbs. The organization's mission is to "expand opportunity and build hope by attracting resources into

Stockton and investing in [the] city's people.” RSF aims to cultivate and establish new opportunities for Stockton residents through garnering resources for the city and investing in its people. To achieve this, the Foundation implemented three programs between 2018 and 2020. The first was Stockton Scholars, a program founded by Michael Tubbs to provide scholarships to Stockton students. The intended goal of the Stockton Scholars is “to raise a total of \$100 million over the next five years to expand the program city-wide and ensure that the cost of tuition and fees does not prevent students in the city from pursuing higher education” (Candid 2018). The second was the Stockton Service Corps, launched in 2019 by Tubbs as well. Stockton Service Corp is a partnership with the state of California and AmeriCorps to provide resources specific to students. Stockton Service Corps is a cradle-to-career (c2c) initiative that provides students with services and support to increase persistence retention and create a community impact (Lopez 2019). The third program, Stockton Strong, was launched in March of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The program was created by Tubbs and Lange Lunato with the goal of providing residents with information and resources pertaining to COVID relief (Dickman 2020).

RSF served as the fiscal sponsor of SEED. Fiscal sponsorship operates by non-profit organizations providing projects with their legal and tax-exempt status so long as the project is in tandem with the nonprofit's mission. According to the rules of Fiscal Sponsorship, donations for SEED were sent to Reinvent Stockton Foundation with specific documentation stating the money is for SEED. From there, Reinvent Stockton Foundation sent the money to SEED. There is no documentation outlining whether or not the foundation kept 10% for service fees, which is standard practice for fiscal sponsors.

At the time of SEED, the board of directors for RSF were:

Prudence Carter, Dean of Graduate School of Education at Berkeley

Michael Duffy, President/CEO of Financial Center Credit Union

Eddie Kislinger, Commercial Real Estate Investor, Lyricist, and Former Music Business Attorney

Cindy Foster, Community Advocate, and Nurse

Natalie Orfanos, Director of Communications and Special Projects A.G. Spanos Companies

Christy Wise, Poet

Moses Zapien, President, and CEO of Community Foundation of San Joaquin

Christie Marchese, Founder, and CEO of Picture Motion

Geri Yang-Johnson, Vice President & Community Relations Senior Consultant Wells Fargo

Lang Lunato, Executive Director RSF

The board of directors (with the exception of Prudence Carter) are all donors to RSF. Figure 1 shows the board of directors and their affiliation with RSF and its programs. Natalie Orfanos's company has donated \$1 million to Stockton Scholars. Interestingly, Orfanos has been documented as the spokesperson for the founder of the company. Considering her role in the company (A.G. Spanos) and her position as spokesperson, she may have influenced or informed the donations given to RSF. Another organization that donated to Stockton Scholars is the Michael P. Duffy Family Foundation, created by Michael Duffy. The donation amount is unknown, but the Foundation is listed as a donor on the Stockton Scholars webpage. There is not much data on Christy Wise, Prudence Carter, Eddie Kislinger, Cindy Foster, Christie Marchese, or Geri Yang-Johnson. Seemingly, these individuals have virtually no affiliation with RSF aside from being on the board and listed as donors on the reports.

Moreover, there is a strong relationship between Moses Zapien, Michael Duffy, and Cindy Foster. All three are associated with the Community Foundation of San Joaquin. Zapien serves as the CEO and is the president, Foster is on the board, and Duffy's foundation (Michael P. Duffy Family Foundation) is listed as one of the advised funds for the Community Foundation of San Joaquin. One of the board members, Lange Lunato, had heavy involvement with RSF and all of its programs. Lunato was the co-founder of Stockton Scholars, coordinated the launch of the Stockton Service Corporation and Stockton Strong, and led fundraising efforts for SEED. Moreover, Lunato is a long-term friend of Tubbs, and they met in high school. Lunato resigned from his position as executive director of RSF in November of 2020 because of an investigation pertaining to criminal charges in August of 2020. The investigation was based on a conflict of interest between his position at RSF and working for Stockton Unified School District. According to a regional news site, 209 Times, Lunato was leveraging his position as the executive director of RSF to funnel scholarships to schools he selected. This violated California Government code 1090, which states that public officers or employees are prohibited from participating in making government contracts in which they have a financial interest in. (209 Times 2020).

**Board of Directors and Affiliation with Reinvent Stockton Initiatives**

	RSF	SEED	Stockton Scholars	Stockton Service Corps	Stockton Strong
Prudence Carter	B	U	U	U	U
Michael Duffy	B,D	U	D <sup>1*</sup>	U	D <sup>2*</sup>
Eddie Kislinger	D,B	U	U	U	U
Cindy Foster	U	U	U	U	U
Natalie Orfanos	ED, B	U	ED <sup>3*</sup>	U	U
Christy Wise	D, B	U	U	U	U
Moses Zapien	D,B	U	U	U	U
Christie Marchese	D, B	U	U	U	U
Geri Yang-Johnson	D, B	U	U	U	U
Lang Lunato	FD	F	CF	Launch	Launch

Key	
D	Donor
B	Board
U	Unknown
FD	Founding Director
CF	Co founder
CC	Commite Chair
ESD	Employer = Fiscal Sponsor
ED	Employer Donor
P	Partner

1 Michael P. Duffy Family Foundation (amount: unknown)  
 2 Michael P. Duffy Family Foundation (amount: \$1 million)  
 3 A.G Spanos (amount: at least \$1 million)

Figure 1

As mentioned previously, the Economic Security Project was an essential part of the launch of the demonstration by providing the foundational funds for SEED. ESP's goal is to provide “economic power” given the precarity of the labor market and increasing wealth inequality which they aim to address through a guaranteed income. On the website, ESP states, “we’ve identified two fights we think we can win: a guaranteed income that would provide an income floor for all Americans and anti-monopoly action to rein in the unprecedented concentration of corporate power”(“Who We Are” n.d.). ESP was established in 2016 and is a project of the Hopewell Fund, a 501(c)(3) which provides “donors and social entrepreneurs” with resources to launch “innovative social change projects”(“Who We Are” n.d.).The company that manages the operations of Hopewell is the managed by Arabella Advisors, a for-profit company

whose mission is “been to help our clients use philanthropic resources more effectively, efficiently, and equitably to accomplish their impact goals” (“A Note On Our Work” n.d.).

While ESP is a project of the Hopewell Fund, the organization was established by Natalie Foster and Chris Hughes. Hughes's background in economics is extensive. According to the ESP website, he is a Senior Fellow at the Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy at The New School, senior advisor to the Macroeconomic Analysis team at the Roosevelt Institute, holds a master's degree in economics and is the co-founder of Facebook. Hughes is also a primary funder of ESP. Foster has an extensive background in technology. She is a fellow for the Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative and co-founder of Rebuild the Dream. Aspen Institute Future of Work Initiative aims to reimagine the workplace and empower workers. Its mission is to promote equitable policies across all levels of government and strive to “activate [community] leaders” to have these conversations. Foster also serves on the advisory board of SEED.

Both Hughes and Foster have a vested interest in guaranteed income. In an interview with both Hughes and Foster, they were asked how they became interested in basic income. Hughes attributes his interest to the rapid change in his financial status. Hughes's upbringing was modest, and he stated that his life drastically changed when he co-founded Facebook and was perplexed by the newfound wealth and privilege Facebook afforded him. The reason for his involvement and interest in basic income was it “is the most effective way that I can pay it forward. How can I make sure that the kinds of opportunities that I got are given to every other American” (KCET 2017). For Hughes, his experience provided him with insight into how inequitable the economic system is, informing his praxis. For Foster, her career in technology is what initially got her involved in basic income. She stated, “I've spent my working life and social change and technology thinking about how technology shifts the way we can connect as social movements,

and I spent the last few years of that really thinking about the future of work and what that will mean for people” (KCET 2017)

The impetus for SEED was set in motion in 2017. The earliest documentation regarding the initiation of the project comes retroactively from an interview with Michael Tubbs in 2019. In this interview, Tubbs is asked to discuss the program and provides a vignette describing a meeting in 2017 with Natalie Foster. According to the interview, in 2017, Tubbs was approached by Foster at a conference on the topic of job loss and the future of automation (Lopez n.d.). Tubbs recounted that Foster approached him and stated that ESP was “looking for mayors to test out basic income... and looking for a mayor to pilot with” (Pfeiffer n.d.). Given that the conference was on automation, Tubbs made sure to tell Foster that his approach to basic income did not center on automation. Tubbs agreed to pilot a basic income program because there was already a task force in place studying basic income. While the task force was not named in the interview, Tubbs had already created RSSC, a community coalition to alleviate poverty in Stockton.

In an interview with Michael Tubbs and Chris Hughes, Hughes was asked why ESP decided to partner with Tubbs to launch SEED. He stated that ESPs projects are to provide support for a new generation of “leaders” who enact unconventional approaches to people's problems. Hughes states the objective of the ESPs project, specifically SEED, was to “start a whole conversation about how our economy should work how the economy of Stockton should work how the economy of California should work and how the economy in general in the United States should work ... the fundamental foundation or the cornerstone of that conversation is the simple idea that if you're working in some way in America if you're doing something to improve your life or the lives of others in your community you should not live in poverty and we know



how to lift people out of it it's a lot simpler than you think cash can do it and we just have to build the political will and cultivate more leaders like mayor Tubbs” (KCET 2017).

### *Rationale*

The guaranteed income pilot in Stockton was implemented on the basis of several things. The primary motivator for basic income appears to be to assist community members who live in poverty, provide a financial floor given the fears around automation and prospective job loss, empower residents, and revitalize the socio-economic fabric of Stockton. This section will discuss the rationales found in the data collected.

### *Austerity*

Since the conception of seed, the main goal or objective or primary driving force behind the rationale has been to address the economic disparities among Stockton residents. The definition of what that means has changed as the project grew. Instead, the specification of what the demonstration focused on shifted from general income inequality in Stockton to poverty.

In the beginning phase of the demonstration (roughly 2017-2018), narratives concerning the motives for implementing a basic income program in Stockton centered on the needs of community members due to rising income inequality. For almost two years, the rationale or response to “Why Stockton?” The demonstration's website stated, “we are a city with a challenging past – and a promising future...major shifts in our economy, persistent wage stagnation, and rising inequality have made it increasingly difficult for hardworking residents to

make ends meet”. This quote was found both on the homepage and in the frequently asked questions section from October of 2017 to June of 2019.

Moreover, in Tubbs's first year as mayor, the office received regular calls from community members asking for assistance with rent and other basic needs (Remington 2017). The disequilibrium between labor and wages among Stockton residents cited the type of work many residents perform such as 14-hour days yet receive compensation that is insufficient when trying to survive (Shapiro 2018). Congruently, when the demonstration was first announced on Facebook, Stockton residents shared their hardships and voiced their appreciation for the program.

One resident, Caroline Coleman, expressed the complexities and shortcomings of the current forms of social support in obtaining basic needs. She states, "I know a family for whom \$500 a month would make the difference between being homeless or not. Even working full time they can't afford rent. Less and less landlords will take Section 8 vouchers". While the current forms of social support provide limited vouchers for housing, it is futile if landlords do not accept them. Similarly, another resident, Debra Garza Yescas, shared a vignette implying how her life may have been different if she had the additional support of an income floor. Yescas says "I wish this idea would be around being a single mother with 4 daughters. It would save me from a lot of hardship in reference to basic necessities that I couldn't afford with my income after rent and utilities I was broke. I made decisions that I'm not proud of that will follow me for the rest of my life that affects me getting employed. When you have no one to turn to for financial help to buy the bare necessities for 4 daughters called for desperate measures...". These personal accounts highlight the deficiency in social support. Beyond social support, the rise in the cost of living also has presented serious challenges for residents such as Bridgette Rochelle. Rochelle

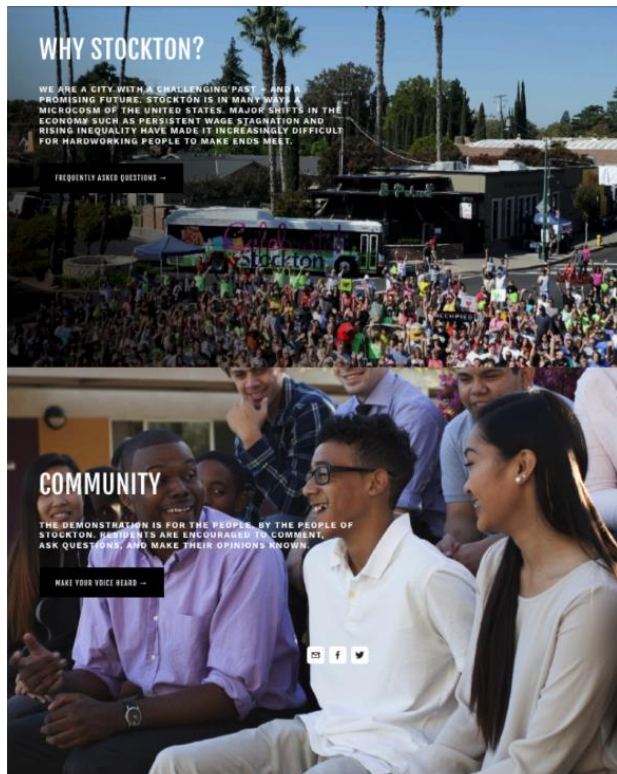
states, “i make a living wage, but since the rent has been going up because of the bay area people coming in and driving it up.. I don't even make a survival wage anymore...”. These accounts, while anecdotal, provide intimate context to the inequality’s residents experience and evidentiary support for the initial SEED objective.

These stories and experiences were widely shared by many Stockton residents, as Tubbs witnessed during his first year as mayor. As such, he felt compelled to take action. Tubbs stated, “I feel that as mayor it’s my responsibility to do all I could to begin figuring out what's the best way to make sure that folks in our community have a real economic floor” (Harnett n.d.). The presumed intention was to improve the living conditions of residents who were unable to make ends meet.

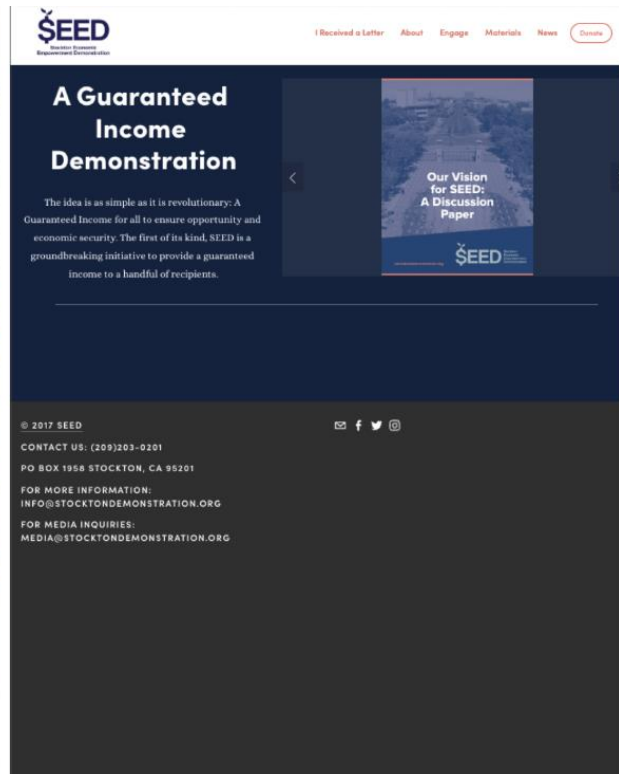
The same day Tubbs announced the launch of SEED, Natalie Foster, the Economic Security Project co-chair and advisor to SEED, wrote an article explaining the intention of the ESPs grant. Foster states, “Our goal in providing this grant is to explore and learn from the impact of these cash transfers — and the economic security they provide — in the lives of Stockton residents...the Stockton demonstration will also tell the stories (good, bad, and everything in between) about the experience of individuals and communities when they receive a guaranteed income”(Foster 2017). The intended goal for ESP at this time was to understand the impact of an income floor for Stockton residents.

Though the initial rationale mentioned by stakeholders (such as Tubbs and Foster) for the demonstration centered on the lives and wellbeing of community members, these stakeholders shifted the discussion to focus on improving the city itself through alleviation of poverty. This shift is first seen through the restructuring of SEEDs website in January of 2019 to remove verbiage directed to community impact. Instead of adding language that focuses on the

demonstration. The first homepage of SEED stated, “The demonstration is for the people, by the people of Stockton. Residents are encouraged to comment, ask questions, and make their opinions known” (SEED 2017) and included images of community members and the city itself. In the revision of 2019, the webpage completely removed all wording indicating that the demonstration was for Stockton residents. Instead, the content added focused on the novelty of SEED by stating it was the “first of its kind” and “a groundbreaking initiative”. Images portraying the relationship between SEED and Stockton were removed and replaced with news articles. Moreover, the website removed the initial objective of providing support to meet and meet community members to SEED “aims to test a simple, yet innovative, solution to poverty and inequality” (SEED 2019). Figure 2 shows a side-by-side of the homepage of SEED to provide a visual understanding of these important alterations. In any case, considering the shift in rationale it is also important to note that income inequality and poverty are not necessarily mutually exclusive as income inequality is one facet of poverty.



(Accessed through Wayback's calendar entry of 20 October 2017)



(Accessed through Wayback's calendar entry of 1 January 2019)

Figure 2

Notably, the modified rationale focused on large-scale impact. Information published by newspaper articles highlights the need for basic income as a means to provide additional assistance for austere living conditions, defined as poverty and income volatility. The demonstration frames basic income as a solution to poverty. Many of the articles provided historical context regarding the tumultuous history of Stockton and the economic demographics of the population. In multiple interviews and newspaper articles, Tubbs and others pointed out that nearly 1 in every 4 Stockton residents is at or below the poverty line and the striking fact that nearly half of Americans do not have enough money to cover a \$400 emergency (Sprague 2017; Musulin 2020). That being said, the information from newspaper articles discussed the relationship between poverty and basic income, while focusing on poverty generally as well as discussing the basic income destination in Stockton. Most articles are macro-level involving

Stockton. The discourse in newspaper articles displayed the demonstration in Stockton as a paragon for nationwide initiatives to address the issue of poverty. One article states that the ambition of SEED is to “inform meaningful change to our country’s growing crisis of poverty and lack of economic mobility” (University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice 2018). The information in the articles framed basic income as a potential policy solution to poverty using Stockton as an example to cultivate “a body of evidence” to make the basic income attainable (Cournoyer 2018).

Conversely, the objective of “addressing poverty” via basic income was complex and indirect. While the common narrative regarding the purpose of the demonstration was to address poverty, there was very little explanation regarding the methodology for measuring Seeds’ impact on poverty in Stockton. Instead, the focus of the outcomes or findings was on employment and stabilized income. In other words, SEED’s impact on “poverty” was speculative through the analysis of impacts on residents – it was measured not via the cash transfers but through the outcome of the cash transfers. Moreover, these findings further demonstrate the shift in objective or rationale – SEED was not exclusively about providing individuals or families with a sufficient financial floor but rather providing them with a stipend that was more of a security net.

As of 2018, the SEED website states that the objective of the demonstration was to provide an “innovative solution to poverty and inequality” (“SEED” n.d.). Tubbs acknowledges that many of the people who live in poverty are employed yet their work is precarious, and wages are not symmetrical to the standard of living. In discussing the need for an income floor he states, “In our economic structure, the people who work the hardest often make the least” (Weller 2018). He also addresses the neoliberal schemas around social welfare that it makes

people lazy and essentially implies that people who make the least work extremely hard and that the work they do implies the inability to be lazy. In the discussion paper posted on the SEED website, there are several quotes stating that poverty and income volatility mitigation is the primary rationale behind the demonstration. On page one of the paper, it states, “SEED seeks to confront, address, and humanize some of the most pressing and pernicious problems our country faces: inequality, income volatility, and poverty” (“Our Vision for SEED: A Discussion Paper,” n.d., 1). The text then goes on to describe the economic demographics of Stockton stating statistics such as Stockton ranking 18 in the nation for child poverty and 25% of residents living in poverty. Throughout the document, the authors state “We are motivated to test a guaranteed income in Stockton because we believe it is one of the most effective tools to combat poverty” (“Our Vision for SEED: A Discussion Paper,” n.d., 4) The reason is for SEED basic income serves to be supplemental to the additional support rather than replacive. There is an understanding that basic needs are not being met and there are problems that may arise that status quo forms of social support do not address.

While poverty seems to be the predominant rationale for implementing basic income, it is also important to note that key players in the demonstration have stated that it is also important to provide a basic income to the middle class as well (KCET 2017; Weller 2018). When looking at the methodology of the SEEDs plan, researchers used the median household income of Stockton (\$46,033) to select participants rather than the poverty level. According to San Joaquin County (the county for Stockton), the poverty line for the median household size is \$21,330. Figure 2 is a rendered map of the demonstration neighborhoods chosen for the selection process. Forty-three neighborhoods were chosen and only a handful are at or below the poverty level

indicated by the darkest purple.

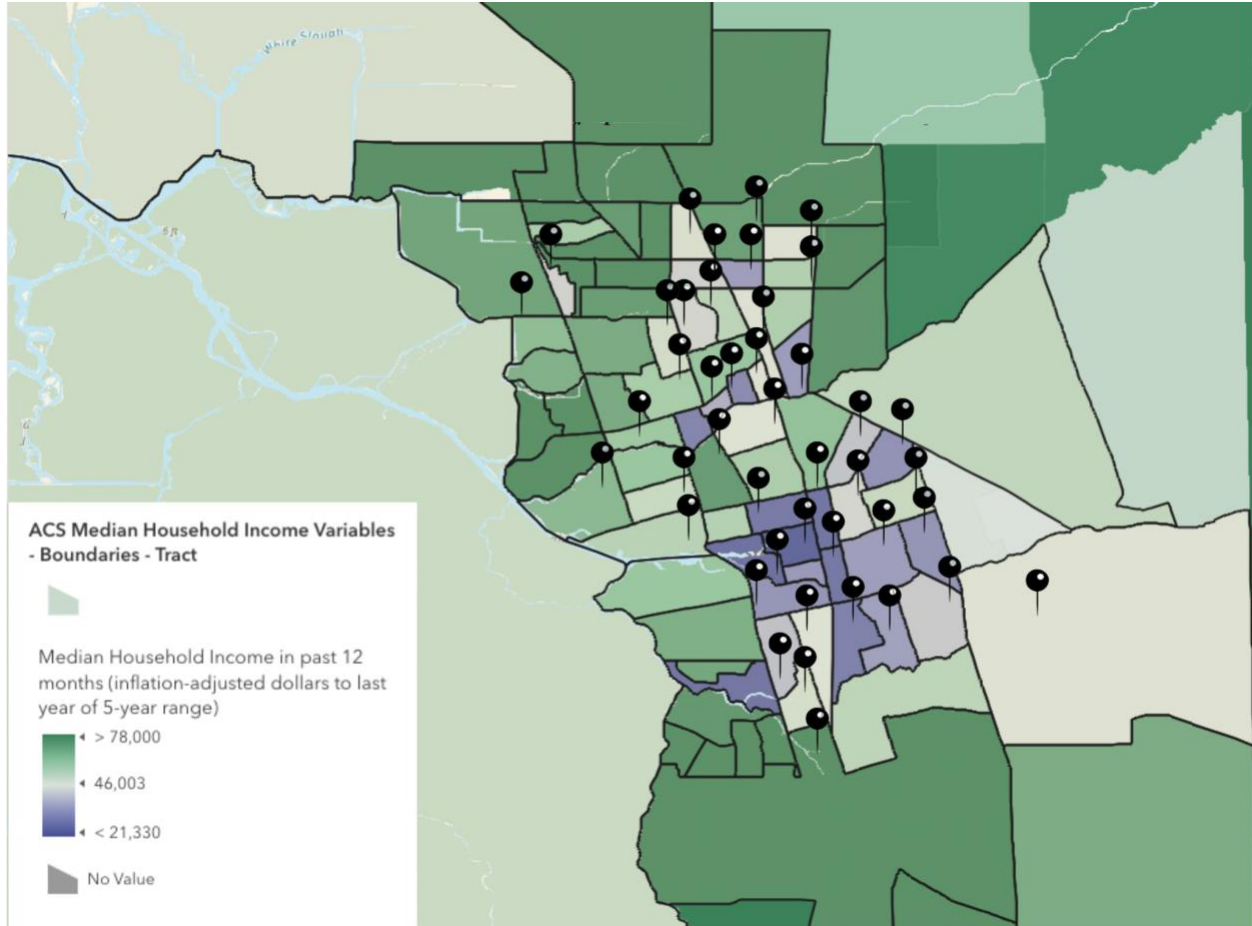


Figure 3

### Automation and Employment

Another common theme throughout the findings regarding the implementation of seed and its objectives was discussion around poverty-centered automation due to the looming threat of job loss automation. While this is not the primary objective of the project, it is still something stakeholders, community members, and the mainstream discussed – the need for basic income given technological advancements and the threat of job loss. That being said it is also important



to note that automation and basic income both stimulate economic growth. Conversations around automation were virtually the same across the board, as automation penetrates the job market individuals are at risk for job loss. Given the labor makeup of Stockton, the city is at disproportionate risk for major job loss which would potentially perpetuate the economic disparities of the city.

Automation as part of the rationale for SEED emphasized the economic impact given the demographic makeup of the city and its geographic proximity to the major tech hub Silicon Valley. One article states Stockton was an ideal place, “given [the city’s] proximity to Silicon Valley and the eagerness of the state’s tech titans to fund the experiment as they grapple with how to prepare for job losses that could come with automation and artificial intelligence” (Beam 2021). The labor force of Stockton is made up predominantly by individuals who have “lower average skill levels”. The majority of Stockton residents work in fields that are at risk for replacement due to automation. According to a report by Brookings, production, food service, transportation, administrative, maintenance, construction, and agriculture were the fields most susceptible to automation. This is important to note considering that nearly half of Stockton residents work within those fields (United States Census Bureau n.d.). The susceptibility to automation could result in significant job loss in Stockton thus supporting the need for basic income due to income loss (Cournoyer 2018).

In support of this community members shared their concerns regarding automation as the foundation of support for SEED on Facebook. One commenter, Lisa Brotherton, expressed her support by stating, “I’m so glad to know you are preparing for the future. Automation will create a new economy.” Allyson Aranda, a Stockton resident, shared her gratitude for SEED as well, emphasizing the need for supplemental income due to potential job loss. She states “Thank you

for this. I'm looking forward to hearing the stories of how the SEED program affects these recipients! I don't know if UBI is going to be the long-term solution, but America needs to do \*something\* - technology and automation will cost us so many jobs in the near future." These claims highlight the overwhelming concern regarding the way in which automation will impact the quotidian lives of Stocktonians and emphasize the importance of being proactive one way in which it is being addressed is via basic income programs such as SEED.

Although many individuals expressed the importance of additional social support via basic income, there were also displays of opposition typically associated with fear of labor devaluation. Several commenters voiced their concerns surrounding the impacts of automation and basic income on the valuation of labor – that providing people with a basic income in tandem with automation will only further perpetuate the devaluation of labor. Other comments in opposition to basic income were concerned that it will impact the workforce and de-incentivize people to work.

Notably, there was a significant amount of discussion justifying SEED given the looming threat of automation from SEEDs stakeholders. One of the primary funders for SEED, the Economic Security Project, website states “automation, globalization, and financialization are changing the nature of work, and these shifts require us to rethink how to create economic opportunity for all. Now is the time to think seriously about how expanding unconditional cash could work, how to pay for it, and what the political path might be to make it a reality”. In interviews on the topic of SEED, Chris Hughes and Natalie Foster, have stated their interest in basic income is due to the technological advancements rapidly altering the nature of work. While Foster and Hughes have long been advocating for basic income as a safeguard against automation, Tubbs's view of automation and basic income has been variable. While he agrees

that the potential pitfalls of automation will have tremendous impacts on the economy, he states that basic income does not need to wait until automation radically changes the workforce to make an impact on people's lives. At the beginning of SEED Tubbs stated that basic income is not a response to automation or the threat of technology replacing jobs; instead, it is a response to the fact that many people who are employed are unable to afford to meet their basic needs (O'Donovan 2017). Even when he first met with Foster and discussed implementing SEED he stated he did not look at basic income from an automation lens. Notably, his views on automation and its relationship to basic income wavered throughout the demonstration. Nearly two years after his launch of SEED Tubbs was quoted as saying that his interest in basic income is in part due to "the looming threat of automation and displacement" (Crane 2018).

Interestingly, a discussion paper on the SEED website it lists automation as a factor for implementing SEED, by outlining statistics stating the projected displacement of workers due to automation and the way to address the possible outcomes of job loss is through social support avenues such as SEED. Otherwise, the possibility exists of increasing poverty rates for Stocktonians. More importantly, the paper states that "Stockton residents are already beginning to feel the sting [from automation]". This statement from SEED is perplexing given the initial narrative promoted by Tubbs that automation is not the reason for basic income.

While the common theme has been around using basic income as a way to "safeguard" against job loss due to automation the relationship is not direct. Basic income is intended to serve as a safety net resulting in alternative forms of labor that they might not currently pursue. The safeguard lies within the outcomes of the cash transfers to individuals. In other words, individuals will still need to contribute to the labor force but the outcomes of basic income

increase innovation and “incentivize more entrepreneurship” (Radio 2018). Basic income alone is not a safeguard against the threat of job loss.

### Socioeconomic Growth

Another rationale for the Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration was to create a revitalization and new image for the city itself. According to major stakeholders’ poverty is the main issue in Stockton and all of the other issues “stem from that”. Meaning that losses of unemployment or lack of housing are all a result of poverty. This in combination with the city's history of overspending and financial crises created an image of Stockton as a place people try to “escape”. While many city officials prior to Tubbs tried to invest in the city to get it up and running or put it back on the map, Tubbs took a new approach to the issue and decided to implement private-private partnerships to reinvent Stockton, SEED.

The main change was the shift in the way the city invested its resources. Historically, Stockton attempted to regenerate the economy by providing such as healthcare or pensions to draw people to the city. Other methods included creating physical infrastructures to create a grandiose appearance of the city. However, Tubbs noticed that those approaches weren't working and instead implemented a groundbreaking idea of investing in the city through its people. The hope of investing in community members would be that it would help Stockton get back on track. Tubbs states “I envision Stockton...as a leader in the best practices from around the country.... I want Stockton to be a well-developed network of community partners, a place where our schools are some of the best and where our economy sets the standard in both how to deal with changes in automation and opportunities for our youth” (Bowers 2018). The course to achieve this goal was through the novelty of the nature of basic income which is the nation's first city-led basic income project.

Notably, a lot of the discussion around basic income in Stockton addresses the positive impact it would have on the city using historical context to provide background and context as to why this demonstration would help the city flourish. Kornfield 2021 states "Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration [SEED] program as a potential cure for a shooting gallery of city problems". The discussion is around the economy and creating a new economy or reforming the current one via basic income. One article states that basic income offers "a brighter socio-economic future...advocates argue the cash transfers will result in substantial savings in areas like incarceration, homelessness services, emergency-room health care"(Van Pelt 2020).

Similarly, one newspaper article cites the implementation of SEED as an avenue to create a "new economy of better-paying jobs and find ways to encourage work" (Lopez 2018). In tandem with this, the narratives from the SEED website highlight the positive economic outcomes from recipients centering stories around employment and education. According to the website, SEED reduced income volatility and enabled individuals to make payments on their debt, increased full-time employment, and increased their overall productivity. Moreover, the discussion around mental health and wellbeing in the findings section also centered on economic impacts. They state that basic income decreased mental health challenges such as anxiety and depression which in turn increased individuals' financial capacity or risk-taking and goal setting. In other words, SEED was implemented to revitalize the economy to transform Stockton and progress the city.

Moreover, it is important to discuss the framing of the issues in Stockton. While there was some discussion regarding the financial crisis that occurred in Stockton, the framing of the city's issues was ultimately attributed to the issue of poverty. A common quote given from stakeholders is that the objective of basic income is to "prove to supporters and skeptics alike

that poverty results from a lack of cash, not character” (“SEED” n.d.; Shapiro and Loya 2019; What Works Cities 2020). As discussed previously one of the primary objectives of SEED was to address poverty, yet the framing of the issue lacks systemic accountability and portrays the city of Stockton as devoid of cause. This reframing is important to note because the perceptions of the city's issues are not so much caused by the city's history but rather by the issue of poverty. This is further supported by the transfer of labor from the city to its people via SEED. Proving a financial floor leads to increased employment and productivity which are indicated as measures of success in combating the city's issues.

The discussion around investing in the city's people essentially objectifies (per Foucauldian definition) community members as an extension of the municipality. They serve as economic tools to rebuild and reinvent Stockton. The tactics used to create city growth are congruent with neoliberal practices and neoliberal governmentality as discussed by Schram et. al., where they explain the shifts in welfare and how welfare serves as a tool to promote an agenda.

## Empowerment

The discourse around empowerment for Stocktonians was also used as a justification for basic income. The primary argument is that basic income would cultivate a sense of empowerment among residents. The framing of the definition of empowerment centers neoliberal rhetoric around self-reliance, resiliency, and freedom all defined by market ideologies such as increased financial wellbeing and increased employment. Empowerment, in the context of SEED, was defined as increased participation in the market.

Empowerment discourse regarding the rationale for SEED was almost synonymous with previous conversations around basic income regarding the freedom and agency it provides. As stated on the SEED website, SEED hopes to empower people financially through economic agency (Morpeth 2019). The common narrative around empowerment was recipients experienced empowerment through addressing their needs independently due to financial security. By removing material barriers through the safety net of SEED individuals forged their own resilience and opportunity through economic action such as gaining full-time employment. Similar to this sentiment another article quotes a Stockton resident and states: “it is a great opportunity for those recipients to have that extra income to make them feel empowered and have a successful future to look forward to” (Hernandez 2018). Empowerment in this sense is linked to financial security.

Moreover, empowerment was discussed in a way that created a narrative of self-reliance and resilience and made issues of poverty an individual one. The common discourse surrounding financial empowerment entailed that individuals were given an income that could be used at their own discretion but the ultimate goal was to break the cycle of poverty (Canto 2022). One article states “[Tubbs] hopes by guaranteeing people a small measure of financial stability for 18 months the pilot scheme can empower them to climb out of poverty”. In other words, since the city is providing a safety net it is now the community members' individual responsibility to address and combat their own experience with poverty. The city is not accountable for this issue which is inherently systemic. Here the underlying idea is to assist the residents temporarily until they are no longer dependent on basic income or more subliminally social support.

Notably, based on these findings the demonstrations discussion around empowerment did not center the individual's sense of feeling empowered but rather focused on the positive

outcomes for the city through an emphasis on market mechanisms like employment and pulling oneself out of poverty. Empowerment in relation to the recipients was discussed as financial empowerment to take risks that they otherwise would not have taken which then forged “freedom”. Financial empowerment according to these discussions results in “freedom” to choose. This correlation is in tandem with Friedman's rationale regarding negative income tax, which was inherently neoliberal and emphasized market values.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This last section addresses some of the shortcomings of the basic income demonstration in Stockton. I then provide a summary of the key findings and an analysis of the implications of this study to better understand our knowledge of UBI in the context of advanced neoliberalism.

### *Lack of Transparency and Accountability*

The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration was a policy experiment with major public potential. SEED was created by private partnerships between the Reinvent Stockton Foundation and the Economic Security Project. The former was controlled by former Michael Tubbs and the latter was controlled by technology executives. Given that the demonstration is a private policy experiment, there is virtually no accountability to the community or to address the deficiency of the system. Additionally, accountability was evaded vis-à-vis the lack of transparency in messaging and structure.

A common theme throughout the findings was lack of transparency relating to the circulation of information. Discussion around the topic was massively inconsistent. One of the biggest inconsistencies was the lack of clarification regarding the nature of the basic income trial. On the SEEDs website, they state that it is the first mayor-led income trial, yet the funding is entirely private and thus eliminating accountability of Tubbs. While the project claims that it was community-centered and involved community input the explanation regarding the methodologies used was nonexistent in the data. In other words, it is unclear if community members were truly involved and how they defined community members. In the interview with a Stockton resident, there was also a disconnect between what SEED was and its implementation and the community on the involvement process. The interviewee stated that they first heard

about the demonstration in 2020 during COVID-19 when community members were exchanging social support resources. However, by then participants had already been selected.

Moreover, there was very little information regarding the selection process and when to participate. From the Instagram data, there were three posts discussing the disbursement process, the first one being in August of 2018, and only one post on Facebook. From the Facebook posts, there were multiple comments across the Tubbs posts inquiring about participation and involvement. The overwhelming majority were in regard to the selection process and who would be selected and how. There was never any response from Tubbs or other SEED members. Some comments even brought up the lack of information about how to get involved on the SEED website. Moreover, while Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration claims to be a non-profit organization it was registered as a Limited Liability Company (LLC) on December 28, 2020. Obtaining information about the demonstration given its LLCs is effectible inviable. There is no way of knowing how much the demonstration received or where the money is going or what is actually being done and they're able to change the narrative and their objectives however they please

Paradoxical messaging was also a common theme, specifically in the newspapers and web searches. The rationale for the basic income demonstration changed throughout the findings. The motivations stated by stakeholders, such as Tubbs, were not consistent and there was no explanation regarding why the rationale changed. The discussion surrounding the demonstration often made surface-level statements regarding empowering residents or supporting residents but the inherent outcomes proved that the demonstration was an effort to use neoliberal practices to benefit the city of Stockton.

Furthermore, the fiscal sponsorship perpetuates the issue of transparency given the lack of uncertainty regarding the financial situation for SEED. They had received at least \$1.25 million in funding before disbursement and an additional \$5 million. There were 125 recipients of the demonstration who received \$500 a month which equals \$6,000 a year per recipient totaling \$1.5 million for the two years the program ran. How much the demonstration received is unknown and the overall financial breakdown is also unclear.

### *Neoliberal Implications*

The basis of the demonstration's foundation is inherently neoliberal as it is a private policy experiment. The demonstration was privately funded by major tech donors, such as Chris Hughes and Jack Dorsey who created Facebook and Snapchat respectively, and the demonstration was led by Michael Tubbs who was acting as the director of his non-profit (RSF) not as mayor. This private-private partnership is imperative in maintaining and sustaining neoliberal ideology. As discussed by Schram et al. (2009) nonprofits and private agencies advance the projects of neoliberalism and the project “emphasizes the constructive and intentional application of market principles” (742). Under neoliberalism, private agencies and nonprofits serve as a tool to promote ideology and practices. The Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration falls into this category thus creating complacency in the current system and it does not address the systemic issues.

Notably, the situation and prefix to basic income which is the failings of the state as a result of neoliberalism. SEED was implemented initially to address income inequality but then shifted its focus to poverty. Moreover, it does not address the shortcomings or failings of the system but rather operates to surrender to it by providing a superficial solution. Notably, the

current system is not sufficient enough in offering support to those in need. As such if the intention of basic income on a large scale is to be implemented via policy, the logical approach would be in tandem with Murray's proposal of replacing the current welfare system in some regard to subsidize basic income. In other words, basic income is a response to and emphasizes systemic problems perpetuated by poor social support from the government, providing supplementary funding to social welfare programs would be irrational.

The demonstration itself is exemplary in highlighting the fact that the current system is not sufficient enough in providing support. The project emphasizes poverty and inequality and concern for these issues being exacerbated at the hand of automation. Thus the solution is to provide basic income as a safeguard because the current system is not competent enough to do so. As a result, basic income pushes neoliberal ideologies forward. As Friedman states, the cause of poverty is due to the lack of capitalism. With basic income and seen with the SEED results people become their own venture capitalists through cultivating self-reliance and increased risk-taking. All of which benefit hegemony and neoliberalism.

The demonstration maintained an asymmetrical distribution of power between themselves and the community members. Notably, the income demonstration was portrayed as unconditional (as per the status quo of basic income) yet there were several conditions that needed to be met. Recipients were required to be at or below the median income level for the city of Stockton, had to engage in interviews and participate in focus groups for research purposes, and allow access to their spending patterns. The way scholars have discussed basic income is unconditional implying no requirements yet the demonstration had multiple criteria for participants thus the money was not unconditional. Given these requirements, there is an asymmetrical distribution of power given the needs of the recipients the additional financial

compensation was critical for them to have their basic needs met.

Moreover, none of the findings stayed a change in poverty among the residents were the recipients however the people who benefited the most arguably are Michael Tubbs and the funders Towards the end of the demonstration and currently Tubbs now works for the state of California and has since recently moved to Los Angeles and started a nationwide project to implement basic income. This is particularly interesting when considering the way that officials use community members as a way to climb the sociopolitical ladder. While the intention is difficult to prove it is an important fact to consider especially given his rhetoric around his success being tied to helping Stockton. Again not so much about the community members but rather the city as a physical space.

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