# What is The Bridge Project Appalachia?

The Bridge Project (TBP) Appalachia is a groundbreaking initiative offering unconditional cash transfers to support 500 mothers and their babies in Appalachia. Aimed at empowering pregnant individuals by providing financial stability, it is part of a broader effort to address child poverty and promote long-term well-being. TBP currently operates in three states to address high child poverty rates and is expanding to Appalachia in January 2025.

## Why was The Bridge Project created?

The Bridge Project was developed by the Monarch Foundation, whose Principal Holly Fogle was raised in Guernsey County, Ohio. The Monarch Foundation supported numerous nonprofits across New York City, aiding families and infants. When the pandemic began, it was evident that people needed immediate help, and that organizations couldn't respond fast enough. It became clear that flexible resources — in the form of cash — were the fastest and most efficient way to get them that help. Efforts to launch The Bridge Project were accelerated. This initiative aims to relieve mothers' financial burdens while setting up their babies for long-term success, empowering them to make life-enhancing decisions such as pursuing education or spending valuable time with their newborns. Building on the program's success in New York, the program is now expanding to Appalachia.

# Why is The Bridge Project coming to Appalachia?

The Appalachian region has long faced high rates of poverty, poor health outcomes, and food insecurity, due in large part to systemic disinvestment in the area. Over 19% of children live in poverty across the Appalachian region. Nearly one in six Appalachian children are food insecure. Sadly, the infant mortality rate in Appalachia is 16% higher than the national average and over 9% of babies born in the region have a low birth weight. The Bridge Project is excited to contribute to the great work already being done in the region to alleviate poverty and support families by social service providers, community-based organizations, and government agencies.

# How does The Bridge Project work?

Eligible pregnant individuals receive a monthly cash transfer to be spent flexibly to cover basic needs and expenses. This support is provided with no strings attached, allowing families to allocate the funds as they see best for their circumstances.

## Who is eligible for The Bridge Project in Appalachia?

The program targets pregnant individuals, focusing on those experiencing financial hardships. Specific eligibility criteria include income below a certain threshold. Eligible program participants will be selected by lottery. Applicants must meet all of the criteria listed below to be accepted:

- Live in the ARC-designated Appalachian Counties within the States of Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia
- Be 18 years or older
- Be 14 weeks pregnant or less
- Have an annual household income of less than \$44,000

## How do mothers apply?

Applications will be available online beginning January 8, 2025. Applications are reviewed for eligibility on a rolling basis. Applications will remain open until all program slots have been filled. Eligible program participants will be selected by lottery. To apply, visit **www.bridgeproject.org/apply**.

## Why cash?

Cash is simple, flexible and empowering. Unrestricted cash assistance recognizes mothers' right to make their own financial decisions. Additionally, cash allows mothers the freedom to spend on essentials like food, rent, or childcare without restrictions. This approach challenges the stigma that marginalized groups can't manage their finances, promoting autonomy and dignity by trusting them to know what's best for their families.

## Why babies?

Decades of research shows how important the first 1,000 days of a baby's life are in setting a foundation for the rest of their life, which leads to better social and economic opportunities. The Bridge Project aims to take a preventative approach, providing support early on to set up success. In providing mothers with unrestricted cash for the first three years of their child's life, The Bridge Project helps provide a stable start to life - which can have positive lifelong and even multi generational effects.

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)'s footprint spans 423 across 13 states. TBP will be onboarding families from ARC-designated counties which include all of West Virginia and parts of Kentucky and Ohio. A full list of counties can be viewed here: <a href="https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-counties-served-by-arc/">https://www.arc.gov/appalachian-counties-served-by-arc/</a>

## Why focus on a baby's first three years?

Support during the first 1,000 days of life has the potential to allow an entire generation to separate from the toxic stresses of poverty, break intergenerational cycles, and provide the environment to allow children to grow into healthy adults-physically, financially, and mentally.

# What is the structure of the financial assistance?

Participants receive between \$375 and \$750 monthly, with durations and amounts tailored to ensure critical support during a child's first three years of life. Program participants will receive:

- \$1,125 one-time, upfront prenatal stipend
- \$750 per month for the first 15 months of program participation
- \$375 per month for the remaining 21 months of program participation

## Can participants spend the money on anything?

Yes, recipients can use the funds to meet any of their needs or priorities, from rent and utilities to childcare and educational expenses, offering flexibility not found in traditional benefit programs.

# What impact has The Bridge Project had in other locations?

Early data from The Bridge Project's New York cohorts has shown that with the unconditional cash transfers, moms were better able to afford child care and build up emergency savings. Longer-term research found the payments increased organization and harmony within the household — which is critical in stabilizing a baby's earliest days and helping to prevent lifelong harm and benefit society at large.

Previous cohorts of The Bridge Project have demonstrated that unrestricted cash can even have a positive impact on employment. The flexibility of a cash safety net allows mothers to take an hour off work for an interview without needing to stress about paying the bills that month, so they can pursue better opportunities for their families and themselves. The response to The Bridge Project has been resoundingly positive. Participants have used their unrestricted cash to pay for things like safe strollers, childcare, and rent for stable housing.

# Are you conducting research on your Appalachia cohort?

Yes. As part of our expansion to the Appalachian region, The Bridge Project is launching a first-of-its-kind research study to better understand the impacts of direct cash on maternal and infant health, nutrition, housing security, and other areas. In addition to the 500 Appalachian residents onboarded into the "high cash" participant group (the participants referenced elsewhere in this document), an additional 750 residents will be onboarded into a "low cash" participant group where they will receive compensation for completing research surveys and interviews. The findings from this study will help inform state and federal policy adoption.

## How is The Bridge Project Appalachia funded?

The program is supported through generous funding from The Monarch Foundation, whose Principal Holly Fogle, is a native of Guernsey County, Ohio. Holly's experience growing up at the end of a dirt lane on a farm in Appalachia has inspired her philanthropy and she is excited to bring The Bridge Project to her home community.

## How can I get involved or support the program?

To get involved with The Bridge Project Appalachia and learn more about how you can support or participate, visit www.bridgeproject.org or contact us at info@bridgeproject.org.

# What is the ultimate goal of the program?

The Bridge Project believes that in the richest country in the world, no child should be born into poverty. Every baby deserves to be born in a stable, safe, and healthy household. Our aim is that one day there will be a version of this program accessible to every low-income pregnant individual across the United States.