

WHAT IS THE BRIDGE PROJECT IN MILWAUKEE?

Bridge Project in Milwaukee is a groundbreaking initiative offering unconditional cash transfers to support mothers and their babies. 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. The Bridge Project got its start in New York in 2021 and expanded to Milwaukee in 2024 through a partnership with the Zilber Family Foundation, making Milwaukee the first location outside New York State to offer the program.

Today, the Bridge Project supports more than 4,450 mothers across 14 states. In Milwaukee, 122 mothers are benefiting from direct cash payments for a total of three years.

WHY WAS THE BRIDGE PROJECT CREATED?

The Bridge Project was founded by the [Monarch Foundation](#), which has long supported nonprofits across New York City serving families and infants. When the pandemic hit, it became clear that flexible cash resources were the fastest way to get people help. The Bridge Project was born from that insight, giving mothers direct financial support to ease their burden and empower decisions like pursuing education or spending time with their newborns. Building on its success in New York, the Zilber Family Foundation helped fund the program's expansion to Milwaukee.

WHY MILWAUKEE?

In Zilber Family Foundation priority neighborhoods, 44% of children are living in poverty. In Wisconsin, roughly [1 in 8 children](#) – about 12% – live below the poverty line.

Zilber Family Foundation is honored to continue funding the Bridge Project in Milwaukee for a second cohort of families, in service of its mission to increase access to social and economic opportunity.

HOW DOES THE BRIDGE PROJECT WORK?

Eligible pregnant individuals receive a twice 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.

HOW DO MOTHERS APPLY?

Applications will be available online beginning October 1, 2026. 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 bridgeproject.org/apply.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR COHORT 2 OF THE BRIDGE PROJECT IN MILWAUKEE?

Applications will be available online on the Bridge Project website beginning October 1, 2026. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis and will remain open until all program slots have been filled.

Eligible participants are selected through a randomized selection process and must:

- Be 18 years or older
- Be 23 weeks pregnant or less
- Live in the City of Milwaukee.
- Have an annual household income of less than \$39,000 USD

The program is open citywide; however, some funding is designated to prioritize eligible participants living in specific neighborhoods and ZIP codes: 53204, 53205, 53206, 53208, 53215 or 53218.

WHY ARE SOME ZIP CODES AND NEIGHBORHOODS BEING PRIORITIZED?

The expansion of the Bridge Project is made possible through private funding from the Zilber Family Foundation and the Yabuki Family Foundation. In alignment with their philanthropic efforts, those groups are targeting their support to mothers with a residency in 53204, 53205, 53206, 53208, 53215 or 53218, with priority given to residents of the Lindsay Heights, Clarke Square, Layton Boulevard West, Washington Park, Walker's Square/Muskego Way and Silver Spring neighborhoods.

WHEN WILL PAYMENTS BE DISTRIBUTED?

With applications being reviewed on a rolling basis, payment start dates vary from mother to mother. Each mother's funds begin based on when her application is accepted – not on a fixed schedule shared across the cohort. The Bridge Project will work with accepted mothers to facilitate their first payment as part of the program.

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 generational effects.

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WHAT IS THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE STRUCTURE?

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, aiming to provide a foundation for a prosperous future.

- Program participants will receive:
- A \$1,125 one-time prenatal stipend
- \$750/month for the first 15 months
- \$375/month for the remaining 21 months

HOW IS COHORT 2 OF THE BRIDGE PROJECT IN MILWAUKEE BEING FUNDED?

The Bridge Project represents a pioneering public-private partnership in Milwaukee, made possible through generous support from the Zilber Family Foundation (\$3,137,000), the Yabuki Family Foundation (\$100,000), the City of Milwaukee (\$300,000), the Monarch Foundation and the Bridge and other donors. Together, these partners are empowering pregnant women through unconditional cash support while helping Milwaukee serve as a model for communities nationwide and demonstrate the positive impacts of direct cash assistance on family stability and community health.

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 autonomy and flexibility not found in traditional benefit programs.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

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

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE BRIDGE PROJECT HAD IN OTHER CITIES?

Research from the Bridge Project's New York cohorts found a 63% increase in access to childcare among moms receiving cash, compared to no change for moms who didn't receive cash, underscoring how meaningful even modest financial flexibility can be during a baby's earliest, most critical days.

Since launching in 2021, the Bridge Project has catalyzed more than \$20 million in public funding for mother and infant cash programs in New York alone – evidence that the model doesn't just help individual families, it's shifting how cities and states think about supporting them. The program has since expanded well beyond New York to a total of 14 states nationwide, into Connecticut, Boston, and the Appalachian region of Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia, with more recent launches in Tennessee, Massachusetts, and New Jersey.

Across every city, the story is consistent: unrestricted cash gives mothers the flexibility to make the calls that matter most for their families – whether that's paying for safe, reliable childcare so they can keep working, covering a car repair so they don't lose a job, or simply having a cushion so an unexpected expense doesn't become a crisis.

HOW DO YOU MEASURE THE PROJECT'S SUCCESS?

Cohort 1 of the Bridge Project in Milwaukee delivered real, measurable results for Milwaukee families: after one year in the program, participants saw a 67% decrease in housing instability, a 33% reduction in food insecurity, and 28% began new job training or education programs. 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. We already know cash at scale is successful – the expanded Child Tax Credit in 2021 slashed child poverty by nearly half. The question isn't does it work, it's clear it does. The question now is how to structure it so it works best, which is what the Bridge Project is doing with multiple cohorts.

WHAT'S THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF THE PROJECT?

The Bridge Project and Zilber Family Foundation believes every baby in this country deserves to be cared for, with the hope that one day there will be some version of this program across the U.S. The expanded Child Tax Credit is seen as a crucial start. At the core of this program is the reality that it's much easier to prevent harm in the first place than try to undo it after the fact – those first years of a baby's life are akin to building a house. One can only adjust so much in the early stages, but once the house is built it's very difficult to make changes to the foundation.