



2022 Progress Report



A stylized, handwritten signature of Paul D. Ryan in white ink.

PAUL D. RYAN

*Former Speaker of the House & President
of the American Idea Foundation*

*Measuring Results
Expanding Opportunity
Improving Lives*

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A TIME FOR CHOOSING

SPEAKER SERIES





2022 Progress Report

When Speaker Paul Ryan left Congress in 2019, he made a commitment to advance evidence-based policies, programs, and ideas that expanded economic opportunities and allowed more people to realize the “American Idea,” which means the condition of your birth does not determine the outcome of your life. It’s why he created the American Idea Foundation (AIF).

Now in its third year, the Foundation has made great strides to raise awareness about locally-grown, data-driven models to fight poverty; to support these successful, evidence-based interventions with grant funding and institutional support; and to ensure the proper implementation of policies that were the hallmark of Speaker Ryan’s legislative career.

Over the past 12 months, through a series of in-person site visits, timely policy discussions, and direct financial support, the Foundation was able to use its unique position to advance ideas and organizations that are promoting economic opportunities and improving people’s lives.

The mission of the American Idea Foundation is to expand the “American Idea” by fighting poverty, expanding upward mobility, and deepening the use of evidence and data in decision-making. AIF does this by identifying groups and organizations around the country living this mission and supports their efforts in the following ways:

1. The Foundation provides direct funding, via annual grants, to front-line, community-led organizations so these groups can work with academic partners to validate their approaches through data and evidence.
 2. The Foundation brings policymakers and local leaders to these organizations and explains first-hand why these programs are working, what evidence validates their success, and how these solutions can be scaled and replicated in other parts of the country.
 3. The Foundation utilizes Speaker Ryan’s public profile to shine a light on programs, policies, and solutions with demonstrated track records of improving outcomes.
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Supporting Impactful Organizations, Promoting Evidence-Based Interventions

With polarization, partisanship, and cynicism on the rise in America, the American Idea Foundation believes that leaders have an obligation to strengthen civil society and support organizations making a tangible difference in people’s lives. After 20 years in Congress, Speaker Ryan knows the answers to all of America’s problems are not necessarily found in Washington, they are found in our neighborhoods and in our communities.

It is why, in early 2022, the Foundation conducted a comprehensive search to identify some of the most successful non-profit organizations across the country who are tackling issues ranging from recidivism, early childhood health care, financial literacy, and vocational and educational training. The Foundation then provided these groups with grant funding and is lending its expertise to help build their bases of evidence and strengthen their existing bodies of research.

As Paul said when announcing these grants:

“Our leaders need to champion groups who are fighting to make our communities better and stronger. These grants will help create repositories of data and grow bodies of evidence. They will help add academic rigor and analysis to the powerful stories these organizations are already telling. These grants will help promote innovative strategies and solutions with track records of success and hopefully, they will take some of the politics out of battling poverty.”



Following a roundtable on reducing recidivism, Ryan meets with community leaders & Bill Gaertner, the founder of Gatekeepers in Hagerstown, MD.



"Each of these groups are making a difference and with the American Idea Foundation's assistance, they will make a more profound impact in their individual communities.

Because of their work, more people will be able to realize their version of the American Dream and it's a privilege to partner with such amazing organizations."

Here are the groups receiving institutional support and financial resources from the American Idea Foundation in 2022.

1. Gatekeepers



Located in Hagerstown, Maryland, Gatekeepers is an organization that focuses on re-entry and reducing rates of re-offending and recidivism. Their mission is to motivate, empower, and encourage both current and ex-offenders through mentoring services by challenging them to make positive decisions and ultimately help facilitate the process of a successful transition back to their communities.

Formerly incarcerated individuals often do not have positive role models in their life to aid them in their efforts and this is where Gatekeepers comes in. Through their Business of Living program, the Gatekeepers team is dedicated to helping people overcome obstacles standing in their way to achieving success and reaching their life goals. Funds provided by the American Idea Foundation will allow Gatekeepers, working with academic researchers from the University of Notre Dame, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Business of Living program, which is now being utilized in correctional facilities across the country.

2. Corner to Corner



Ryan meets with the leadership of Corner to Corner and graduates of the Academy about promoting entrepreneurship and financial literacy.

Located in Nashville, Tennessee, Corner to Corner is a non-profit organization supporting the financial and educational futures of children and families by promoting entrepreneurship. One of their programs, The Academy, is a ten-week course that strives to equip underrepresented entrepreneurs with the tools they need to plan, launch, and grow their small business.

The Academy serves predominantly Black female entrepreneurs and aims to directly address the racial wealth gap in Nashville, all while creating a culture of business ownership. The goal of this program is to help these entrepreneurs take their businesses to the next step and ultimately create a pathway to self-sufficiency. Started in 2016, The Academy has graduated 500 entrepreneurs and has generated over \$13 million for the local economy in Nashville. Corner to Corner is currently conducting a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to measure the impact of The Academy and funds provided by the American Idea Foundation will be used to help advertise their mission to prospective participants and complete this trial.

3. Child First

Located in Connecticut and North Carolina, Child First is a home visitation program for low-income families with young children at high risk of emotional, behavioral, or developmental problems, or child maltreatment.

The program helps to protect children and families from the effects of chronic stress and trauma by fostering strong, nurturing, caregiver-child relationships and connecting families with needed services and supports.

Similar to the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visitation program (MIECHV), the Child First program has already established a strong base of evidence that supports their approach.



In South Carolina, Ryan meets with nurses and mothers who are participating and benefitting from Nurse Family Partnerships.



Because of their successes, the Child First program is looking to reach more families in-need by replicating its efforts in communities that currently lack access to these services. Funds provided by the American Idea Foundation will allow Child First to not only scale its services but also expand the measurements associated with the program's impact.

4. The Joseph Project



Started in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Joseph Project is a faith-based initiative that seeks to train men and women — often with criminal backgrounds — and find them jobs with Wisconsin businesses. Participants go through a weeklong life-skills training program and then are offered a chance to interview with companies looking to hire.

As part of its programming, the Joseph Project puts individuals through a vetting process; teaches them interview skills, financial literacy lessons, and conflict management techniques; and then links them with Wisconsin employers who are in need of quality workers.

Speaker Ryan has long been a believer in the Joseph Project's approach and funds from the Foundation will be used to help the organization expand their service offerings to more Wisconsinites in-need.

5. Merit America

A national program founded in 2018, Merit America works with major employers to build scalable pathways to upwardly mobile careers for Americans without college degrees. Merit America serves low-wage workers and recently out-of-work individuals who have at least a high school degree but no college degree and who are interested in making near-term job transitions but need additional assistance.

Merit America works by identifying family-sustaining careers, preparing learners for those careers, and placing graduates in those careers. Their approach builds on a large body of research indicating that increased wages generate significant additional monetary and non-monetary value for individuals, their families, the government, and employers even beyond the wage gains themselves. To date, Merit America has served over 2,000 learners and aims to reach more than 10,000 learners annually by 2024. American Idea Foundation funds will help Merit America scale further and deepen the analysis associated with their program.



At a site visit in Nashville, TN, graduates of Corner to Corner's Academy discuss how they're creating economic opportunities in their communities.

Lessons from the Frontlines

Beyond providing financial support, the American Idea Foundation feels strongly that bringing lawmakers, local leaders, and community partners to these front-line organizations is a unique value Speaker Ryan can add as these groups look to promote and scale their successful strategies. To give you a sense of these visits, we pulled a few highlights from last year.

1. The Herald-Mail: Former Speaker Ryan supports Business of Living program in Washington County, MD

In early October, joined by Democratic Congressman David Trone, Maryland Commerce Secretary Mike Gill, and other local officials, Ryan led a roundtable discussion with recent graduates and current participants of Gatekeepers' *Business of Living* program. The *Herald-Mail of Hagerstown* covered the visit, reporting in part:

"Through his foundation, Paul Ryan scours the nation, looking for effective programs that help people escape poverty. He thinks he's found one in Hagerstown.

"I am here for just a basic reason, to bring praise to what Bill (Gaertner, executive director of Gatekeepers) and all the folks at Gatekeepers have done and to bring some money to make sure that Gatekeepers stays successful," Ryan said during his visit to Hagerstown this week.



"I'm just here to see how Gatekeepers works and why it's so successful at getting people to stay out of prison once they've returned to the community," Ryan said before the luncheon. After retiring from politics, Ryan started the American Idea Foundation. Its goal is to invest in evidence-based programs that fight poverty and promote upward mobility, then replicate them around the nation....

Among other things, Gatekeepers has developed what Gaertner has dubbed the "Business of Living" program. It's a process designed to help formerly incarcerated people get on their feet and pursue their goals.

That program is taught inside Roxbury Correctional Institution and the Maryland Correctional Training Center south of Hagerstown as well as the Washington County Detention Center and the county Day Reporting Center....

Since mid-March, a digital version of the Gatekeepers Business of Living program, with videos, has been put onto tablets that are inside more than 250 correctional facilities around the nation. At the end of September, more than 1,200 inmates have completed the tablet version of the program, according to statistics from Gatekeepers....

Now the organization is working with the Wilson Sheehan Lab for Economic Opportunities at the University of Notre Dame to develop evidence-based data for Gatekeepers. A multi-year study will examine the Business of Living program's impact on the local recidivism rate."

2. Promoting Entrepreneurship & Economic Activity in Nashville



Small-business owner Kenya Adams shares the lessons she's learned through Corner to Corner's Academy with Paul Ryan.

This Fall, the American Idea Foundation traveled to Nashville TN to meet with the leaders of Corner to Corner, a community driven organization that promotes entrepreneurship, economic opportunities, and educational activities in areas that have experienced persistently high rates of poverty.

The focus of the visit was to discuss one of Corner to Corner's most impactful interventions, The Academy, a 10-week program providing aspiring business-owners with the skills necessary to plan, start, and grow their own companies. The Academy teaches participants the fundamentals of running a business covering topics like digital marketing, bookkeeping, and administration, and also brings in local subject-matter experts to help expand these future business-owners' bases of knowledge.

Along with representatives from the offices of Senator Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) and Governor Bill Lee (R-TN), Ryan learned more about The Academy, talked with program participants and recent graduates about why the approach is life-changing, and asked how policymakers can help foster entrepreneurship in historically under-capitalized communities.

Following the visit, Ryan said:

"It is impossible to visit Corner to Corner and not be inspired. The Academy is giving these aspiring entrepreneurs the confidence to succeed, the skills to get their businesses up and running, and the network to grow over the long-term. The enthusiasm, the passion, and the creativity possessed by graduates of The Academy was truly awesome to see.

"Corner to Corner has created this ecosystem of entrepreneurship that is community-led and growing with each graduating class of The Academy.... Students come to The Academy with a dream and Will, Shana, the instructors, and the alumni help make those dreams a reality by giving them the knowledge and assistance necessary to launch well-run businesses.

"The early evidence in support of this program is strong and I am hopeful Corner to Corner's approach continues to be validated through more research because it is changing lives and creating amazing success stories in the process."



The strategies being used by Corner to Corner, Gatekeepers, and all of the 2022 grant recipients are evidence-based and, with additional data supporting them, our hope is these programs can be scaled and replicated. Ultimately, promoting solutions with track records of success is how we can overcome partisan divides when it comes to fighting poverty and really make a difference in people's lives.

Advancing Policies & Programs that Expand Upward Mobility

The Foundation has continued to use Speaker Ryan's platform as a recent leader of the House of Representatives to lend a voice to the public policy challenges facing our nation. In particular, the Foundation has spent the last year focusing on those policies that expand economic opportunities and assist Americans in-need.

In November, along with more than a dozen scholars from the American Enterprise Institute, AIF President Paul Ryan authored a book entitled: *American Renewal: A Conservative Plan to Strengthen the Social Contract and Save the Country's Finances*. The book, which is similar in scope to Ryan's Path to Prosperity budgets, presents a sweeping set of policy proposals that together provide a road map to reform America's social safety net, the early childhood health care and K-12 education system, health and retirement security programs, the tax code, and our monetary system.

In explaining the rationale and aim of the book, Ryan said in the foreword:



Before a conversation with ex-offenders participating in Gatekeepers' Business of Living program, Ryan and local leaders share a moment of prayer.

"America emerged from the 20th century as the world's sole superpower, having achieved unprecedented strength and prosperity. Our constitutional republic created a miracle of human progress emulated throughout much of the world. Today, this great American triumph is facing enormous political and economic challenges, from without but also from within..."

"In this third decade of the 21st century, I believe America will face an infection point. Our fiscal policy is on a collision course with our monetary policy, and the economic devastation resulting from a debt and currency crisis could inflict enormous, possibly irreparable, damage..."

"The story of America is one of historic human accomplishment—but the future is not secured. The dollar's dominance as the world's reserve currency is in jeopardy of being displaced. Upward mobility is stalling—and in some cases reversing. The twin American ideas that the economic condition of one's birth does not determine the outcome of one's life and that each generation is better off than the past generation are no longer true for millions of Americans..."

"America is facing a fiscal crisis entirely of its own making. All of this is well-known. All of this was predictable. All of this is avoidable. But we are where we are. And, today, our politics are fundamentally unserious. That's the bad news."

"The good news is that these problems are solvable. And we are not helpless or powerless before them. The solutions to these monumental challenges are achievable: it's a matter of summoning the will..."

"This book is a joint effort at offering solutions to America's generational challenge. It is a plan to confront our main socioeconomic problems with specific, concrete, achievable policy solutions—ones that restore our social contract while avoiding a debt catastrophe. This needs to be done for us, and it especially needs to be done for future generations. The American idea needs defenders."

Beyond the book, the Foundation also held a series of public events and engagements to draw attention to policies, programs, and ideas that will spur economic opportunities. Speaking to students on college campuses from Boston to Fort Worth and from Knoxville to South Bend, Ryan continued to drive home the importance of using evidence and data as a tool to overcome rising partisanship and polarization. In policy conversations with legislators and industry leaders, the Foundation promoted ideas like fiscal responsibility, financial innovation and earned-wage access, tackling inflation, and finding consensus in times of divided government.

Paul will continue to speak out in favor of sensible solutions that help all Americans achieve their version of the American dream and his Foundation will continue supporting those organizations and initiatives making a tangible impact in people's lives.



"If we're going to preserve the American Idea, it's going to take all of us working together. Supporting organizations doing the hard but amazing work on the front-lines of our communities is incredibly valuable as leaders craft public policies to promote upward mobility.

"By focusing on evidence-based strategies with proven track records of success and by allocating resources based on results, not partisan preferences, I know we will make meaningful progress in the war on poverty. I'm grateful The American Idea Foundation can play a small role in this effort and bring attention to deserving interventions."

~ AIF President & Former House Speaker Paul Ryan

**To learn more about the American Idea Foundation,
please visit: www.AmericanIdeaFoundation.com**

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