



Last Vote to First Dollar Toolkit

## Evaluation and Impact

Creating an Evaluation Program That Will Lead to Results

November 2024

**CHILDREN'**   
FUNDING PROJECT

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## Last Vote to First Dollar Toolkit

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## Introduction

Congratulations! The final votes have been tallied, and the members of your community have approved your measure to create a new [voter-approved children's fund](#). This is an exciting time for you and your community. Admittedly, though, shifting from a successful campaign to the process of establishing and activating your new children's fund may feel daunting. Fortunately, you are not alone. This toolkit offers resources, guidance, and advice for equitably implementing a voter-approved children's fund—starting after the final winning vote on election night through the distribution of the first fund dollar. This guide can support the transition teams and interim founding staff members tasked with launching new voter-approved children's funds. Initially, this toolkit will address four main areas—(1) program and policy design, (2) operations, (3) communications, and (4) evaluation and impact—but we hope to add additional guidance over time.

Establishing a voter-approved children's fund involves deeply engaging with the democratic process, building a strong and diverse coalition of support, and addressing the needs brought about by systemic inequities within communities. While local children's funds do not fully finance cradle-to-career systems on their own, they offer the flexibility and infrastructure communities need to maximize multiple funding sources and fill some of the gaps left by insufficient federal and state funding.

Once voter-approved children's funds win at the ballot, they face an intense implementation period. That intensity stems from the relatively short timeframes to launch a new fund and the sheer volume of work needed to get money into the community. The timeframe for distributing the first dollar can range anywhere from nine to 18 months. In that timeframe, children's funds need to create the systems and infrastructure necessary to administer funding effectively and equitably. That can include creating new agencies or independent nonprofit organizations, building fiscal and technological infrastructure, creating governing boards, and so much more.

In some cases, existing organizations or government agencies administer newly approved children's funds. These types of situations don't require a community to create an entirely new organization; however, even an existing organization may still face challenges if asked to dramatically expand an existing program or adopt the task of administering significant new dollars. For instance, [Agenda for Children in New Orleans](#) had

to scale its budget from \$6 million (\$3 million in local revenue and \$3 million in state matching funding) for the City Seats child care program to about \$42 million after voters approved a new local tax to expand the program. The new local tax revenue increased the City Seats budget by \$21 million and was also eligible for [an additional \\$21 million in matching funds from the state](#) of Louisiana. While Agenda for Children had existing infrastructure for administering the program funds, it needed to scale six times more than the original budget!

Voter-approved children's funds also are often under a unique amount of public scrutiny during the set up and implementation processes. It takes an enormous amount of public education and attention to pass an initiative on the ballot, and that attention does not always fade after a campaign wins. In some cases, scrutiny will intensify, particularly when well-funded opposition existed during the campaign or when voters are particularly concerned about accountability for government spending. Being in the public limelight can exacerbate any challenges and pitfalls you may encounter during implementation. However, it also can rally continued enthusiasm for your fund's work and ensure the creation of a fair, equitable, community-centered program.

**“A document like this implementation toolkit can help establish goals and objectives with the focus on children, based on solid community data and input, that provides the foundation for success.”**

– **Cindy Arenberg Seltzer**, president/CEO, Children's Services Council of Broward County

Children's Funding Project created this toolkit in direct response to requests for support from the communities transitioning from campaign to implementation mode, including members of our [ballot measure cohort](#) and [voter-approved children's fund community of practice](#). We created this resource through collaboration with leaders of established voter-approved children's funds and the experts who have supported them through the most pressing implementation challenges. “A document like this implementation toolkit can help establish goals

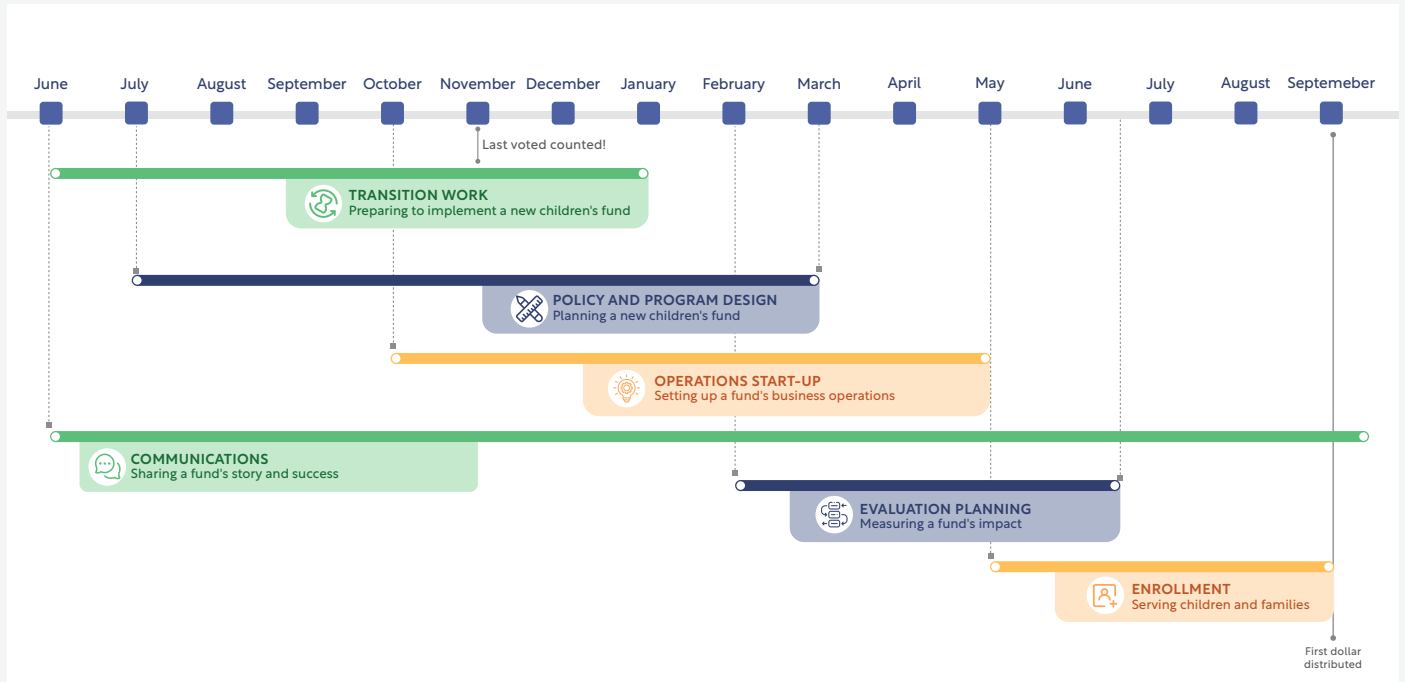
and objectives with the focus on children, based on solid community data and input, that provides the foundation for success,” says Cindy Arenberg Seltzer, who has served as the president/CEO of the Children’s Services Council of Broward County, FL, since 2000. We hope to continue building additional resources for this toolkit as we learn more about the needs new voter-approved children’s funds face as they establish their programs.

## Timeline for Implementing a Children’s Fund

This timeline reflects the accelerated timeframe many of you may face if your fund aligns with a November ballot measure election. The timeline would be different if your ballot measure initiative takes place during a different time of year. Others may have up to 18 months to implement their fund before distributing the first dollar for direct services. In those cases, the timeline is expanded.

- Transition Work (eight months): Starts five months before election night through four to six months after winning
- Policy and Program Design (eight to 10 months): Starts four months before election night through four to six months after winning
- Operations Start-Up (seven to eight months): Starts one month before election night through five to six months after winning
- Communications (ongoing): Consistent from pre- to post-election and through the first dollar distributed
- Evaluation Planning (five to six months): Starts two or three months after election night and lasts about five to six months

**Figure 1: Timeline for Implementing a Children’s Fund**





# Creating an Evaluation Program That Will Lead to Results

## Section 1: Evaluation and Impact Overview

Successful ballot measures use evidence-based messages to bolster their campaign promises. After the ballot measure wins, voters expect the new program to show similar results to those promised during the campaign. But evaluation means more than tracking campaign promises. It is necessary for reporting progress to oversight and governing entities, measuring the fund's effectiveness, and remaining accountable to the goals and vision of the fund's purpose.

As your team launches your new fund, evaluation may not feel like a pressing need. However, if left unattended for too long, it will lead to missed opportunities to collect vital data, poor data quality, and potential gridlock with legal issues related to data sharing agreements. Paying attention to your fund's evaluation and impact needs during the start-up phase is essential, especially if the fund has a sunset provision within seven or fewer years. No matter when the program sunsets, a solid evaluation plan will ensure that your fund collects initial impact metrics that you can use as evidence of success for a future reauthorization campaign.

Communications and evaluation teams should establish a strong relationship early. This relationship is critical to ensure that your fund communicates evaluation results to voters. The communications team also will help you establish realistic expectations about the timeframe for the community to see the program's results. Getting impact results takes time, so make sure that short-term and intermediate metrics show the fund's success.

Ultimately, voters will expect to see that their tax dollars are making the effective changes they wanted to see by creating the children's fund in the first place.

## Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

### WHAT DATA AND INFORMATION DO GOVERNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY ENTITIES REQUIRE?

Many times, reporting requirements will be outlined in the documents that established your fund. Focus on the data and information that you need for reporting purposes and then work toward other goals that may come from a newly made strategic plan. Also, consider how frequently you need to report so that you can set up the data collection strategy to accommodate these deadlines.

### WHAT TYPE OF EVALUATION DO YOU NEED TO CONDUCT?

New funds will need to consider which types of evaluation (such as [process, program, formative, and summative/outcome](#)) are essential for delivering on their campaign promises. Depending on the maturity, budget, and goals of the fund, one or more of these evaluations may be appropriate. Prioritize the questions you need to answer both to the oversight board and the public. If you have access to evaluators in your area, consulting with them will help determine the best evaluation type to use. Initially, you only need enough information and understanding of the evaluation processes to write a request for proposals from potential evaluators. Once you have proposals, you and preferably a committee can determine the best evaluation design for the fund's needs.



### HOW WILL YOU EVALUATE WHETHER OR NOT THE FUND'S PROGRAMS AND SERVICES REACH THE INTENDED POPULATION?

Many voter-approved children's funds are created to fill a need in the community that may result from underlying systemic inequities in funding or processes. A goal of the fund may be to target populations who have limited access to the services the fund intends to support. If this is the case, the evaluation can serve as a way to reveal the sources of inequities and also test effective strategies to reduce those inequities for individuals furthest from resources. Creating a research agenda for the evaluation that includes ways to understand if services and programs are reaching the desired population can help expose hidden barriers that exist.

### WHO ARE THE KEY PARTNERS YOU NEED, ESPECIALLY FOR DATA SHARING?

Building relationships with key data partners is essential to starting an evaluation program. Conducting an evaluation solely using the data and information from administrative processes is impossible. Data sharing agreements between partners and other organizations, like the public school district, can take months to years to finalize. A best practice for evaluation is to have a third-party evaluator, so the ability to share data is critical!

Be mindful that the taxing authority entity may have data sharing requirements that could affect the data sharing agreements with other organizations. Exploring and knowing local and state data sharing laws will help move the process forward.

## WHAT APPROVAL AND DATA INFRASTRUCTURE ARE NEEDED FOR EACH TYPE OF EVALUATION STUDY?

Having the proper infrastructure and technology to conduct your evaluation will ensure that your evaluator collects data ethically and securely. Many evaluations will require approval from an Institutional Review Board. Even if approval is not required, as is typical with program evaluations and needs assessments, receiving a formal waiver from the Institutional Review Board is still a good idea. Through surveys and other data collection methods, you may be handling sensitive and confidential data, so there needs to be proper data infrastructure that can protect and secure the data. The infrastructure can be a simple spreadsheet or a complex database, but either way, there should be a way to transfer the data to partners securely through data sharing agreements.

### Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- The fund must establish a budget line item for sufficient funding to achieve the evaluation goals. If there is insufficient funding, external funding should be sought to supplement it.
- Waiting until the program has fully launched before pursuing an evaluation will lead to missed opportunities to gather important information.
- Not building relationships early enough with universities, public schools, and providers will result in low participation in the evaluation process and data that does not represent the program participants.
- Failing to partner and collaborate with the communications team to ensure that public audiences can access the program's results can lead to a loss of trust and credibility for the fund.

## Section 4: Action Step, Resources, and Case Study

### ACTION STEP: SET UP A LONGITUDINAL STUDY.

A promise often made during a campaign is that children's services and programs, particularly early childhood education, will lead to better high school graduation rates. While graduation results will be 13-15 years in the future, your program needs to collect data while the participants are in your program. If your fund has made long-term promises or has long-term goals, you do not want to miss important opportunities to gather data while children are participating in programs supported by your children's fund. It is helpful to think ahead because you can also ask for permission from families to follow them long term and potentially recruit them for studies later. Read about Denver Preschool Program's longitudinal evaluation in the case study on the next page.



### Resources and Tools: Example Longitudinal Evaluations

#### *DPP and High School Outcomes: An Examination of College Readiness Indicators*

Denver Preschool Program evaluation completed by NORC at the University of Chicago and School of Education and Human Development at University of Colorado, Denver (Denver, CO)

#### *Impact Study of Prekindergarten for San Antonio*

Pre-K 4 SA long-term impact study by the Urban Education Institute at the University of Texas at San Antonio (San Antonio, TX)



## Case Study: Denver Preschool Program

Denver Preschool Program in Colorado is a targeted universal preschool program that serves Denver 4-year-olds in their last year of preschool before kindergarten and qualifying 3-year-olds, with priority given to families experiencing financial hardships. Denver Preschool Program was established in 2006 and has built a longitudinal dataset that starts with the first cohort of students from the 2007–2008 school year. Those students are now post-high school, and there are continued efforts to follow participants after high school to see if there are further program benefits during young adulthood. The value of the longitudinal dataset is that it shows time-over-time trends and is used for evidence-based decision-making and improving program policy.

Part of the longitudinal evaluation's success is that it is explicitly identified as one of the program's core functions in the contract with the City of Denver. Making evaluation an essential component of a voter-approved children's fund ensures sufficient financial resources are given to support evaluation projects. This fiscal structure allows program leaders to consistently contract with researchers and universities to conduct annual program evaluations and maintain longitudinal studies without relying on external philanthropy or grant funding.

Notably, the data makes it easier to communicate how Denver Preschool Program impacts children who participate. The program can show that its students are more likely to read at grade level, miss fewer days of school, and less likely to repeat a year of school. This data has also been critical for reauthorization campaigns and reporting to oversight boards and the city council.

Photo Credit: Denver Preschool Program

Children's Funding Project is a nonprofit social impact organization that helps communities, states, and Native nations expand equitable opportunities for children and youth through strategic public financing. [childrensfundingproject.org](https://childrensfundingproject.org)



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