

Playing Our Part: The Role of Intermediaries in Financing Children's Services





Part of our four part series: Policymakers | **Intermediaries** | Funders | Business Leaders

Intermediaries support the provision of services by other organizations rather than providing direct services themselves. From that vantage point, child- and youth-focused intermediaries often see the need for a comprehensive community approach to funding more clearly than other organizations. Intermediaries can see the 'bigger picture' of the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and opportunities in their communities and are well positioned to identify and coordinate activities to provide all children and youth with equitable access to quality programs and services that meet their needs. Typical activities of intermediaries include communications, quality improvement, data collection, trainings, strategic planning, fundraising and evaluation.

These activities require resources, and fundraising for them can be draining and distracting, and often the last thing that funders are willing to support. Across the nation intermediaries are leading efforts to increase the sustained investment in critical children's programs and services in their communities. Unfortunately, the funding too often becomes a patchwork of what they are able to draw in and is subject to the rules governing the particular funding source, not the specific needs of the community.

Children's Funding Project was established to track, document and provide technical assistance to communities employing strategies to more effectively leverage existing funding sources or to generate new revenues. Through this work the organization has identified four key tasks essential to the most successful and sustained local children's funding efforts:

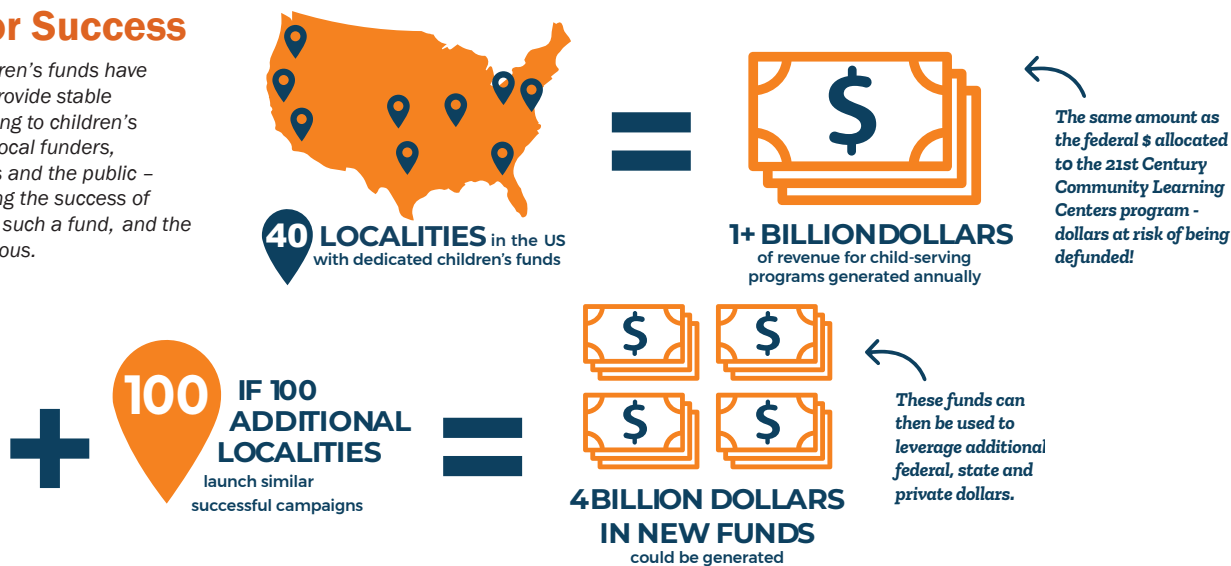
How can intermediaries most effectively support comprehensive financing of children's services?

Lever	How intermediaries can help
 <p>FIND</p> <p>Develop the capacity to rigorously identify, track, analyze and forecast funding sources and funding needs for services that support children and youth.</p>	<p>Make the case for city/county work on children's fiscal mapping as a regular practice and collaborate with local government to put infrastructure in place for regular collection of fiscal data.</p> <p>Facilitate the use of graduate students or AmeriCorps VISTAs to provide staff support for fiscal mapping.</p> <p>Host sessions to facilitate agreement on common language to be used across siloes in the map.</p> <p>Assist with communication and translation of results of fiscal mapping to ensure accessibility of how investments are impacting shared outcomes.</p>
 <p>ALIGN</p> <p>Address gaps and overlaps in the existing funding landscape; Local government and private funders must be prepared to make adjustments in how funding is allocated, managed and accounted for within agencies.</p>	<p>Convene budget holders and recipients of funding streams focused on similar goals and outcomes.</p> <p>Coordinate and encourage alignment of funding streams that serve a common purpose.</p> <p>Facilitate the development of a master plan to align investments with shared goals.</p> <p>Lead a process to align RFPs, develop MOUs across different funding streams, ask for waivers, etc.</p>
 <p>GENERATE</p> <p>Assess need, explore feasibility, facilitate community engagement, launch a campaign and plan the administration of new locally-generated funds to address gaps in meeting the needs of all children and youth.</p>	<p>Provide an assessment of needs and gaps in local child- and youth-serving systems.</p> <p>Research revenue generation options.</p> <p>Build a diverse coalition of supporters of generating new local revenue.</p> <p>Support the campaign by setting up a campaign committee, identifying staffing needs, and supporting public engagement and education.</p>
 <p>ACTIVATE</p> <p>Adopt measures to ensure maximum impact of funds.</p>	<p>Act as a hub of data collection and synthesis, and provide narrative context through a broad view of the field.</p> <p>Set up pay for success projects.</p> <p>Manage evaluations, advocate for changes to infrastructure based on their results, and lead continuous quality improvement efforts.</p> <p>Support scaling and development of programs that use evidence-based practices.</p>

GENERATE: At the forefront of localities effectively leveraging local children’s funding are jurisdictions that are making the case directly to the voters for generating new funds. Cities and counties across the nation are asking voters to pass ballot initiatives that levy taxes to create dedicated local children’s funds. A dedicated fund is a pool of funds obtained by the government that is intentionally set up to provide funding for a specific purpose; our focus is on funds set up to benefit youth services and programs. These funds provide stable, long-term investments in building strong infrastructure to support children and youth.

Potential for Success

Locally-generated children’s funds have immense potential to provide stable and sustainable financing to children’s programs. Everyone – local funders, policymakers, providers and the public – plays a role in incubating the success of campaigns to establish such a fund, and the payout can be tremendous.



Local Intermediary Spotlight:

[The Community and Children's Resource Board](#) (CCRB) was created in 1997 as the intermediary in St. Charles County, Missouri, tasked with improving local children's mental and behavioral health services. Originally named 'the Children and Family Services Authority,' the CCRB spent its first six years administering a \$7.1 million federal grant for services for children with serious mental health conditions. As they anticipated this grant's end in 2005, it was evident to CCRB members that continuing the system of services supported by the grant would require a stable, dedicated funding stream.

The state of Missouri enables counties to create a local dedicated fund for children's mental health services through a one-fourth of a cent or less sales tax, levied via ballot initiative. St. Charles County was on of the first counties to pursue this funding stream and failed twice (in 2000 and 2002) before passing a one-eighth of a cent

sales tax with 52 percent of the vote in November 2004.

Convincing the highly tax-averse population of St. Charles to levy an additional one-eighth of a cent sales tax required careful messaging and extensive evidence of the need for such a fund. In 2000, the CCRB began conducting a biennial needs assessment that provided information on program strengths and on service needs, availability and cost. This assessment contributed to the development of a comprehensive financing system in St. Charles County, named the Community Children’s Services Fund, by highlighting the gaps in existing mental and behavioral health resources created by a recent population increase and dwindling state and federal funding.

Thanks at least in part to the Community Children’s Services Fund, St. Charles County has experienced dramatic drops in out-of-school suspensions, juvenile justice involvement, school drop-out rates, births to teen parents and violent youth deaths, and has moved up from 70th to 1st in state rankings of counties by child well-being.

(Missouri Kids Count)

“ This is a very conservative area, not quick to generate new taxes. But they care for those in the community that are in need. We were able to make the case in three parts: 1) our county was the fastest growing county in the state; 2) we have the highest percentage of the population under 18; and 3) recent cuts to the Department of Mental Health have strained our local budget for mental health services...We then framed our message around the increase in needy kids, and the reduction of mental health monies as outlined in the community needs assessment.

- Bruce Sowatsky, Executive Director of the CCRB

Children's Funding Project is a social impact organization that uses strategic financing to close equity and opportunity gaps for children. We provide research, coaching, and facilitation to state and local leaders on leveraging existing funding, generating new revenue, and administering funds. We believe that all children deserve a stake in the budget: what gets budgeted, gets done. Founded in 2018 by Elizabeth Gaines, one of the country's leading experts on child and youth financing, Children's Funding Project is a non-profit based in Washington, DC.

Interested in championing the development of a dedicated local children’s fund in your community? Contact Elizabeth Gaines at Elizabeth@childrensfundingproject.org