Last Vote to First Dollar Toolkit

Implementing a New Voter-Approved Children's Fund

Policy and Program Design, Operations, Communications, and Evaluation Planning

November 2024

CHILDREN'S FUNDING PROJECT

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Cover Photo Credit: Children's Services Council of Broward County

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

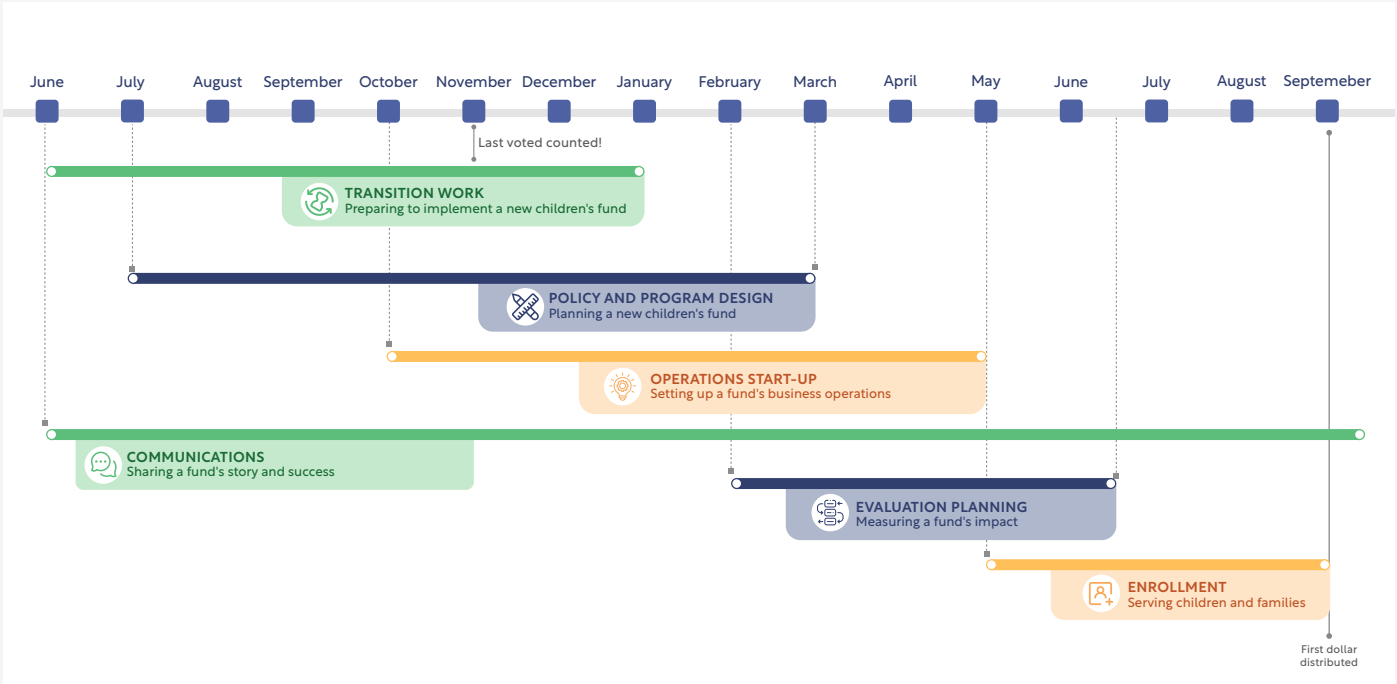
and objectives with the focus on children, based on solid community data and input, that provides the foundation for success," says Cindy Arenberg Seltzer, who has served as the president/CEO of the Children's Services Council of Broward County, FL, since 2000. We hope to continue building additional 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
- 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



Planning a New Voter-Approved Children's Fund

Section 1: Policy and Program Design Overview

The success of children's funds nationwide demonstrates that voters support making investments in children. Communities and elected officials are proposing and winning with ideas that resonate with their community members. However, good ideas alone aren't enough—local leaders need a clear strategy and implementation plan for their goals. Planning is crucial but challenging, especially with time constraints and the pressure to show impact quickly. Maintaining voter confidence is essential, and voters often want a say in the planning process or to know that their interests are represented.

Strong planning and policy design should begin well before a ballot measure is approved. Community leaders can design robust, inclusive, and decisive processes in advance, which will enable the implementation teams to start their work immediately after the election. While additional planning will be needed after a measure passes, the groundwork laid beforehand is vital for the initiative's success.

This section outlines the steps leaders should take for structuring and running effective planning processes, both before and after bringing their proposed children's fund to the ballot.

Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

WHAT LEVEL OF PLANNING NEEDS TO HAPPEN BEFORE A MEASURE REACHES THE BALLOT?

In most cases, community leaders need to meet a minimum threshold of planning before presenting an idea for a new children's fund to voters. This includes addressing key questions such as the purpose of the children's fund, the amount of money needed, and anticipated outcomes. Additional details, like the anticipated number of children a fund will serve, increase voter support and require early work. Leaders should start by outlining the essential elements of the programs the proposed children's fund will support, deciding what they must finalize before the election and what they can plan later. For example, the National Institute for Early Education Research has a helpful framework for planning a new city preschool program.

WHO WILL LEAD THE PLANNING PROCESS?

If an existing agency or organization will administer the approved funds, it is wise for that team to lead planning for implementation. If the ballot measure creates a new entity, then an established organization or team—such as a municipal agency, executive staff, or a local nonprofit—may be best suited to manage the planning process. In cases without a clear leader for the planning process, the group advocating for a ballot measure will need to convene a team or committee that operates separately but in parallel to the campaign team.

WHO WILL BE INVOLVED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS?

Inclusive planning processes lead to better outcomes. Engaged community members, whose feedback shapes plans for what the fund will support, are more likely to champion the fund at the ballot box and sustain it long term.

To design an inclusive planning process, community leaders should consider the following questions:

- Who will the initiative impact the most?
- Whose voices have been historically underrepresented among the individuals and groups most impacted? For example, child care providers are affected by new early childhood education investments, yet they have historically lacked access to policymaking processes. Similarly, youth programs and services have not always authentically included youth voices in program or policy design, so engaging youth in the process and adopting a youth bill of rights to help guide the planning work can go a long way.
- How can you maximize community engagement in the planning process? Consider your meeting times; offer virtual and in-person opportunities to provide input; and provide translation services and other supports like child care, stipends, or meals.
- Can the planning team compensate participants for providing input?
- Does the group of community members selected to represent the community during the planning process reflect the community? Do you need to use surveys to maximize the range of perspectives gathered?
- Does your community require healing, trust building, or acknowledgment of past harm before it can begin an inclusive planning process?

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THE PLANNING PROCESS?

Good planning starts before the ballot measure passes, but funding during that period is often limited. The planning process requires resources to support staff or consultants, compensate community members for their participation, and gather feedback from the community through surveys or focus groups. If the ballot measure intends to expand a program, the existing program can dedicate staff time and internal resources to drive the planning work. Local nonprofit partners can also contribute capacity, even without leading the planning effort. Many can raise philanthropic dollars for planning processes; small discretionary grants go a long way to support planning activities.

WHAT KIND OF PLANNING PROCESS DOES THE TRANSITION TEAM NEED TO SET UP AFTER THE BALLOT MEASURE PASSES, AND WHAT GROUNDWORK CAN HAPPEN IN ADVANCE?

Once a ballot measure is approved, leaders must swiftly transition to implementation. If possible, leaders should recruit a transition team before Election Day and determine who will lead implementation once voters approve the ballot measure. If the transition team is different from the planning team, a handoff is essential to ensure continuity. The planning team may still serve as an advisory group on unresolved decisions.

Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- There will always be tension between thoughtful, inclusive planning and timeline pressure. Leaders should challenge those assumptions without losing the urgency to act to create plans that will support a strong implementation process.
- Trying to make everyone happy will never make anyone happy. But you can take meaningful steps to make the implementation process inclusive and build collective understanding about how the process will unfold.
- Even with good implementation plans, the ballot measure may fail. Often, the planning will still prove to be worthwhile since it requires planners to create concrete action steps for implementing solutions in their communities.

Section 4: Action Step and Case Study

ACTION STEP: CREATE A BROAD COALITION AND ENGAGE COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS WHO WILL BE IMPACTED BY THE PROGRAM YOUR CHILDREN'S FUND WILL SUPPORT.

Effective planning processes include a diverse group of community members and leaders and involve them in meaningful and authentic ways. For example, community members can serve as organizers and champions as the measure goes to the ballot.

Photo Credit: Preschool for All

Case Study: Preschool for All

Multnomah County, OR, secured new revenue in 2020 with the passage of a new personal income tax on high-earners to support **universal preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds in the county**, following a robust planning effort rooted in years of grassroots and community work. In 2018, Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson established the Preschool for All Task Force, including county government, community leaders, and the Parent Accountability Council—a group formed in 2014 to represent the voices of parents of color. The task force addressed challenges like limited access to preschool programs, especially for more marginalized families; a shortage of early childhood educators, exacerbated by poor compensation; a shortage of preschool facilities; and a lack of connected systems to address these issues. After issuing a 2019 report, the task force developed the **Preschool for All Plan** and launched a ballot measure campaign in 2020.

Simultaneously, Universal Preschool Now, led by a broad coalition of community groups, had also developed a plan for a new tax to fund preschool. The two groups merged to bring one proposal forward for voters' consideration. Since the measure's passage, Multnomah County is implementing a preschool program that will grow to universal by 2030 and is designed with an equity focus to support the needs of children and child care professionals—now nationally recognized as an example of practical **community-based policy work**.

Photo Credit: Preschool for All

Section 5: Action Step and Case Study

ACTION STEP: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF KEY MOMENTS IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS TO JUMP-START PLANNING EFFORTS.

In policymaking, there is always a question of whether now is the right time to move an initiative forward. Effective planners leverage key moments when public and political attention are focused on an issue to drive new strategies forward. These moments can be unexpected, such as following a failed vote or stalled legislation, but the key is to recognize them and use whatever opportunities present themselves to motivate action.

Case Study: Allegheny County Department of Children's Initiatives

In 2018, an Allegheny County, PA, ballot measure to increase property taxes for a range of child well-being programs narrowly failed despite significant voter support. However, local leaders remained determined to address gaps in early care and education, out-of-school time programs, and community health.

Soon after the failed ballot vote, Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald convened the Allegheny County Children's Fund Working Group. (County Executive Fitzgerald had supported the overall concept of dedicated funding for early learning and out-of-school time programs, but opposed funding a department through the revenue increases proposed in the original tax measure.) The Children's Fund Working Group was tasked with gathering additional data and input from the community to identify a path forward for the children's fund. The group included policymakers, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, educators, representatives from the public school system, providers of child care and out-of-school time programs, representatives from institutions of higher education, and members of faith-based organizations. The group conducted a six-month planning process, organized six community meetings, and launched a bilingual survey to gather input. The group's 2019 report recommended creating a new **Department of Children's Initiatives** with a $20 million budget.

County Executive Fitzgerald's 2021 budget proposal included very modest funding to establish the new department. The launch of the department, plus the clarity of the working group's plan, laid the foundation for subsequent investment. When the new County Executive Sara Innamorato came into office in 2024 she had a focus on children and families. One of her first acts was to **allocate an additional $500,000 to the department to expand child care options**. Although the department is not yet funded at the full amount recommended by the working group, there has been major progress toward additional investments. As of October 2024, the County Executive **proposed an additional $5 million** to bolster the investment in child care subsidies.

Photo Credit: The Allegheny County PN-3 Collaborative

Developing a Governance and Administrative Structure

Section 1: Governance and Administration Overview

Setting up the governance and administration for a new children's fund takes time, negotiation, and coordination. You'll need good leadership and effective staff, just as you did during your campaign. These strong decision-making bodies will create a foundation that puts the fund on the right foot.

Though governance and administration vary dramatically across voter-approved children's funds, most funds include four entities: oversight, governance, administration, and advisory bodies.

1. **Oversight entities** provide accountability, receive and review final audits and reports, and ensure adherence to local laws. In many places, the body responsible for oversight also has jurisdiction over local laws and revenue/taxing authority, such as city councils or county commissions.
2. **Governing bodies** have the authority to approve or deny budgets, strategic plans, policies, and staff leadership. These are often boards made up of directors who are appointed by oversight entities or defined through the ballot measure process.
3. **Administering organizations** are responsible for managing the fund's day-to-day operations and distributing the tax revenue within the parameters set by governance structures and/or the advice of an advisory board.
4. **Advisory boards** make suggestions, recommendations, and guidance based on community values and priorities. Some localities may give the advisory board governing authority.

Depending on each community, these may be separate entities or entities that take on more than one of these roles. With any structure, these bodies will have to work in tandem efficiently to ensure there are no delays in the implementation and delivery of services.

Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

ARE THERE EXISTING OVERSIGHT, GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION, OR ADVISORY REQUIREMENTS WITHIN STATE LAW OR THE LANGUAGE OF THE ORDINANCE THAT CREATED YOUR FUND?

If there are existing requirements in state law or the ordinance, you may not have flexibility with the structure of your governing organization. Knowing what is already in place and defined by these laws and ordinances will help guide the roles and responsibilities of each oversight, administration, and governance entity. The oversight entity—the body with jurisdiction over local revenue decisions—will likely be determined through existing laws or the ordinance's language.

WHICH ORGANIZATION WILL ADMINISTER THE FUND?

It will be critical to decide which organization will take on the day-to-day responsibilities of the children's fund. Depending on your community's existing resources and relationships, the fund may be administered by a local government department or agency, an existing nonprofit, or a new organization. Tapping into existing entities could allow for efficiency via shared staff, shared priorities, and the use of existing technology. However, not all communities have an existing entity capable of absorbing the task of administering significant new funding. You may decide that a new, independent nonprofit will administer your programs, allowing for more flexibility and independence to meet the community's needs. Your community should consider the following key questions:

- Have any existing organizations expressed an interest in administering the new children's fund?
- Are there any existing organizations with the capacity and infrastructure to manage the new children's fund?
- Is there an existing entity with complementary programs that could absorb the responsibility for launching new or expanding existing programs (where applicable)?

HOW WILL THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND/OR ADVISORY BOARDS BE SELECTED AND APPOINTED?

Boards of directors and advisory boards provide governance and direction and assist with strategic planning and policymaking. There should be a robust process for recruiting and selecting the most qualified and knowledgeable board members and advisors. Ideally, the boards will reflect the diversity of the community in which the fund operates. This may mean inviting parents, providers, and youth to serve on the boards when they've been historically excluded. Each board member needs the ability to engage authentically and have equal decision-

making authority when applicable. Be sure to have a straightforward selection process, bylaws, and handbooks for each entity to follow. If the board or advisory group serves a government-led organization, it will be essential to understand if there are regulations for how the boards of government-funded entities are selected or appointed and what types of decisions they have the authority to make.

HOW DOES THE REVENUE PASS FROM THE TAXING AUTHORITY TO THE ADMINISTERING ORGANIZATION?

The entity that is responsible for collecting the tax dollars for your children's fund may be separate from the organization administering your fund. In these cases, it is vital to understand how the revenue will flow to the administering organization. Often, complex contracts are put in place to move the funding from the taxing authority to the administering organization. There are also some cases where the money must first go to an **intermediary** before it gets to the administering organization. In any event, it is crucial to align the work across the various entities involved and have clear reporting requirements for the money being transferred.

HOW WILL DECISIONS BE MADE IN THE INTERIM BEFORE THE FUND HIRES AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/CEO?

It's important to set up the structure and infrastructure for your programs as soon as possible. It is unlikely, however, that an executive director will be hired by the time major implementation decisions are needed. A process in the interim will be critical to launch the children's fund with the fewest delays. One way to expedite action is to empower the governing board (board of directors or an advisory board) to make strategic and policy design decisions until the fund hires an executive director. It may also be worthwhile for the board members to hire a lower-level position to keep work moving while they search for their inaugural executive hires.

Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- A sufficient budget for administration and staffing is necessary for the fund to have the capacity needed to take on the large volume of work that needs to be done. An insufficient budget could lead to high turnover rates or low-quality programs.
- Lack of clarity regarding the roles of the administration, governing, and advisory boards during the start-up phase causes unnecessary roadblocks and challenges and delays critical decisions.
- The process of creating new agencies and programs is susceptible to power and political struggles and, if left unchecked, will play an outsized role in developing a governance and administration structure.
- If there are no processes for interim decision-making, not hiring an executive director/CEO in a timely manner will delay the program's launch.

Section 4: Action Step and Resources

ACTION STEP: DETERMINE THE STRUCTURE THAT WILL ESTABLISH THE OVERSIGHT, GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION, AND ADVISORY BODIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEWLY CREATED CHILDREN'S FUND.

Every community will differ in how it structures the various entities needed to run the newly established children's fund. In many cases, the fund's ballot measure or ordinance may determine some or all of the structure. This can motivate a team to outline the fund's structure before the election so that the structure can be codified when the ballot measure passes. When creating the structure, it's essential to understand the relationships and unique community context in which the fund will exist to ensure that all governing entities can collaborate productively. Ideally, there will be checks and balances among the entities so that no one part of the overall structure has unbalanced power or influence.

Resources and Tools: Governance and Administration Flow Charts

Denver Preschool Program (Denver, CO)

Preschool for All (Multnomah County, OR)

New Orleans City Seats (New Orleans, LA)

Section 5: Action Step and Resources

ACTION STEP: DEVELOP GOVERNING DOCUMENTS AND GUIDELINES.

Developing strong documentation on roles and responsibilities for the governing board can help guide the first board members during the first year of the fund.

Resources and Tools: Board Handbooks and Governing Principles

Cincinnati Preschool Promise Governing Principles (Cincinnati, OH)

Building a Program Budget Designed to Maximize Direct Spending on Services

Section 1: Budget Overview

As part of charting the course for a children's fund ballot measure, your fund's planning team should have assessed how much revenue your ballot initiative would generate from its proposed taxes. From that estimate, there was likely an outline of the possible uses of that revenue for the new program(s) the fund will support. If that is available, transition teams should use that outline to start building a budget. Ideally, this process is also part of a larger strategic public financing plan for the community. At a minimum, Children's Funding Project suggests that your community create a cost model to account for the true cost of delivering the program(s) your fund will support. The cost model also will allow the transition team to estimate the cost implications of different program characteristics and policy requirements. Be specific about the cost model components; the better you estimate costs upfront, the better you can manage the budget. Most children's funds aim to allocate the largest expenditures to direct services for the target participants.

A basic budget for a voter-approved children's fund typically includes line items for administration, marketing and outreach, customer services (if not included in administrative costs), funding the primary purpose of the fund (e.g., tuition assistance, program quality initiatives, workforce supports, or grantmaking), evaluation, and other contracting services. Established rules and regulations may dictate these categories, so it's essential to understand the legal requirements outlined in the ballot measure, ordinance, charter, and any other founding documents.

The budget will fluctuate based on the program's maturity. In the first year, plan for underspending in categories such as direct services. Many funds do not operate to their full budget until the second or third year. As you create your budget, it will be vital to know what happens to the funding that is not spent. Additionally, the budget team should identify strategies to address expected underspending and communicate those plans to oversight entities.

Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

WHAT IS THE FISCAL YEAR FOR THE FUND?

Defining the fiscal year will help the budget process run efficiently. If an existing entity or government office is going to administer the fund, the fiscal year is likely already established. However, if your community creates a new, independent nonprofit, there may not be an established budgetary year. There are many ways to define the starting date for a fiscal year: the first day of the calendar year, the first day of the school year, the anniversary of the day your program initially started, or the first day of a calendar quarter (January 1, April 1, July 1, or October 1). For independent organizations, consider aligning to an established fiscal year for either the oversight or the taxing authority. This will help synchronize the whole budget cycle and will make it easier for reporting and auditing processes.

HOW WILL THE TAXING AUTHORITY DISTRIBUTE THE FUND'S TAX REVENUE?

To make a budget, you will need to understand how the public revenue will be distributed to the administering entity once the taxing authority has collected it. One important factor to understand is whether revenue is distributed based on forecasts the taxing authority estimates it will collect or actual revenue collected.

If tax revenue is collected and then distributed, your initial budget cycle and implementation may be delayed until the tax revenue is released. You may need to look to philanthropic dollars to start the implementation process to ensure a smooth transition once the tax revenue is available.

If the tax revenue distributed to your fund is based on forecasts, you likely will not have a delay in receiving the tax dollars. While that is certainly an advantage, it adds some volatility to the budget since forecast estimates can vary from the actual tax revenue collected. Be sure to build a reconciliation process to resolve any discrepancies between the forecasted and actual tax revenue.

DOES YOUR BUDGET ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT FUNDING TO CONDUCT ACTIVITIES TO REACH POPULATIONS THAT MAY FACE BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE FUND'S PROGRAMS?

It will take some time for programs that the fund supports to reach full enrollment. During this time period, you can reallocate the budget that will eventually go to direct services to activities that will

increase participation in the fund's programs. For example, if you intend to reach families in a particular area, you can pay for community ambassadors who can attend community events and help families become aware of the program.

HOW WILL THE BUDGET BE MONITORED?

Monitoring the budget will be essential to the fund's sustainability. Determine who will review the budget and how often. In many cases, this will be a special committee from your governing board. There may be limits to certain budget categories, like a cap on administrative costs, based on the ballot language or ordinance, so it will be essential to monitor your budget based on those limitations. Keep a close eye on the budget to understand seasonal fluctuations in expenses so you can pivot if there are areas of overspending or underspending that you need to address.

WILL YOU HAVE A RESERVE OR RAINY DAY FUND?

Reserves or rainy day funds are standard practice for nonprofit organizations and may not be as relevant to government-led organizations. Reserves are good for taxes that may fluctuate year to year, such as sales or targeted excise taxes (such as taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages, nicotine, or alcohol). If you can have reserve funding, be sure to write a reserves policy in the governing or oversight handbook. The policy should include a target amount, a plan to fund the target amount, and rules around how to use the reserves. When the reserve policy is created, work with your communications team to ensure a clear and concise way to communicate the policy to public audiences.

Photo Credit: First Steps Kent

Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- A prohibitively small portion of the budget is allocated for indirect and administrative costs, which leads to an overburdened staff that cannot handle the volume of work needed to manage a voter-approved children's fund.
- If the budget does not provide sufficient funding for marketing, outreach, and customer services, program participation will remain low, and the fund will experience persistent underspending.
- Insufficient investments in one-time expenses (such as a data system or website) may have long-term consequences that hinder the program's efficiency, such as difficulty learning about or accessing the program.

Section 4: Action Step and Case Study

ACTION STEP: ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ADMINISTRATIVE AND INDIRECT COSTS WILL BE HIGHER IN THE PROGRAM'S EARLY YEARS OR AFTER A REAUTHORIZATION YEAR, AND FACTOR THAT INTO YOUR BUDGET.

A strong, healthy program acknowledges that the first few years are growth years. Consequently, a larger percentage of the programmatic budget will go toward administrative expenses rather than direct services during the first few years of the program. Similarly, when your program goes through a reauthorization period it may experience higher administrative costs as it focuses on promoting the success and impact of the fund and determines how to expand programming (if the reauthorization includes a tax increase). For an example of how a fund can manage this, read the case study about First Steps Kent on the next page.

Section 5: Action Step and Resources

ACTION STEP: CREATE A BUDGET TOOL TO TRACK PRESENT AND FUTURE ALLOCATIONS.

Resources and Tools: Funding Models

Denver Preschool Program Financial Model (Denver, CO)

Case Study: First Steps Kent

First Steps Kent was founded in 2008 as a step along a **multidecade journey** to develop a comprehensive system of support for young children in Kent County, MI. Then in 2018, and again in 2024, Kent County voters approved the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage to provide "dedicated and sustainable public funding for programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age five across the community," according to First Steps Kent. **First Steps Kent** now acts as the administrator for the Early Childhood Millage, which is a .25 mill property tax that generates approximately $8 million annually (as of 2024). This funding supports community-based organizations that provide about 30 different early childhood programs including prenatal support, home visiting programs, play and learn groups, intensive therapy for children dealing with behavioral health issues, and books for families to read at home, among other initiatives. First Steps Kent does not run these programs directly. Instead, community-based organizations submit their program proposals to First Steps Kent and then First Steps Kent coordinates the review process. A group of nine individuals—including Kent County commissioners and administrative staff, a First Steps Kent commissioner, an early childhood expert, and four parents—review proposals and select the programs to fund using millage dollars.

The millage must be renewed every six years, and that process comes with new budget considerations. For instance, expenses for evaluation increased during the reauthorization year because of the need to share the fund's successes and impact with the community. First Steps Kent used its evaluation to help the Yes! Ready by Five campaign inform the public about how the funding from the Early Childhood Millage tax dollars supports early childhood programs in Kent County. Ultimately, the community supported the fund's 2024 reauthorization at the same millage rate, voting 59% to 41% to extend the fund for another six years.

Once voters reauthorized the millage, First Steps Kent needed to draft a new contract with Kent County and a new budget to administer the renewed millage dollars. Even though the mill rate stayed the same, and subsequently kept the fund's total budget the same, the budget categories differed slightly from those in the fund's original budget. The new budget called for an increase for evaluation, data infrastructure, and data management that came with a mature program where the evaluation and data needs had become more robust over time. First Steps Kent also needed to increase the funding for administering its Ready by Five programs, which also had grown since the previous authorization.

First Steps Kent demonstrates how voter-approved children's funds can adjust and refine their budgets to respond to changing community needs and to support long-term growth and development.

Photo Credit: First Steps Kent

Executing Effective Contracts to Support Your Fund's Operations

Section 1: Contracts Overview

Contracting is not the most glamorous part of implementing a new voter-approved children's fund, but it is a significant part of the initial implementation work. The administering entity will primarily be responsible for creating and executing the contracts. Typically, it is necessary to establish contracts with the entity responsible for tax collection to release revenue to the children's fund to spend. Other contracts and agreements include applications from families who will participate in your program and agreements with the providers who will serve those families. Public funds should not be distributed into the community without a signed contract or agreement. The first dollar distributed—and every dollar thereafter—should be traceable since it connects to some type of agreement.

Family and provider agreements have special considerations because these documents will be public facing. While it is inevitable that you will have to update the terms of these agreements over time, it is good to have solid versions before you distribute them publicly. It is also good to limit updates to once per year so that families and providers can easily find and review these documents without accidentally applying to the program with an outdated version.

With so many contracts that you need to create, it is wise to find an attorney for the fund to help support the drafting and execution process. It is essential to know how contracts will work with other agreements, especially the laws that established your children's fund. You do not want inconsistencies, inaccuracies, or vague language. This could lead to lengthy legal challenges that will derail the implementation process.

Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR DRAFTING, REVIEWING, AND FINALIZING CONTRACTS?

A major role for the interim staff of the administering organization will be identifying someone to work with lawyers to manage the contract processes. As the fund matures, you can build capacity for your fund's executive and senior leadership staff members to draft, review, and finalize contracts for the organization. In the beginning, you will likely be creating templates for contracts that can be edited for each specific vendor or consultant. To reduce overly complex procurement and contracting processes, consider making a procurement policies and decision matrix to outline clear standards for different levels of procurements. For any level of contract, you must identify the threshold for the contract amount, procurement method, signature authority, and the role of the governing entity, like a board of directors. Small contracts under a determined threshold may be at staff discretion and only need a director level signing authority while large contracts may need a signature from both the executive director and board of directors chairperson. Establishing these policies will help reduce any delays in fully executing a contract.

WHAT WORK SHOULD BE HANDLED INTERNALLY VERSUS WHAT WORK SHOULD BE DELEGATED TO AN EXTERNAL CONTRACTOR?

Especially in the first few years, you will need to find external help to launch your new fund simply because of the large volume of work that needs to be completed. Identifying those roles and responsibilities can help create efficiencies. Consider using consultants who can serve as both work partners and coaches, especially for work you initially plan to delegate to a contractor, but hope eventually to manage with in-house staff members. This will help build the knowledge and capacity of the staff members of your fund's newly formed administrative entity.

HOW WILL YOU FIND THE MOST DIVERSE AND QUALIFIED VENDORS AND PARTNERS FOR YOUR PROGRAMS?

Recognize that most default contracting and procurement processes, such as requests for proposals and bidding processes, typically favor vendors with the most resources since they are the ones who can most easily apply for the contracts. A process that is heavily weighted toward well-resourced vendors likely misses opportunities to work with small community-based nonprofits, organizations that can provide culturally specific services, and other qualified vendors. Regularly audit the contract and procurement processes to make sure that they are not overly cumbersome or unintentionally disenfranchise diverse vendors. If you are experiencing a small pool of candidates for the requests for proposals or the bidding process, consider collaborating with the community to learn how you can reduce barriers to applying to your fund's contracting and procurement processes.

Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- The fund does not retain a lawyer in a timely manner, which may delay critical contracts and the overall implementation process.
- The procurement process is overly complicated and prevents the program from launching in a timely manner.
- Too many program participants, providers, and consultants require contracts, which increases the burden of distributing agreements and obtaining signatures, thereby slowing down program operations.

Section 4: Action Step and Resources

ACTION STEP: DEVELOP VENDOR, FAMILY, AND PROVIDER CONTRACTS AND AGREEMENTS.

Resources and Tools: Operating Agreements

Cincinnati Preschool Promise operating agreement (Cincinnati, OH)

Children's Services Council Palm Beach County (FL) examples of various funding opportunities for the community

Building the Technology Tools Designed to Elevate Your Voter-Approved Children's Fund

Section 1: Technology Overview

In today's connected world, it's incredibly important that you launch your program with the correct technology tools in place. Technology touches almost everything we do. Whether it's a website to inform the public about your fund, an online application to participate in programs supported by the fund, financial tools for paying providers and vendors, or a robust database for capturing program metrics, few programs can grow and succeed without investing in technology.

Technology comes with some risks that your team will need to mitigate. A rushed or haphazard approach can lead to serious consequences for the fund and its participants. If the public believes the implementation process has been sloppy, you will lose the voters' trust. Often, sensitive data is handled as part of application and payment information. Consequently, it is essential to reduce risks, particularly ones that lead to data breaches. Adding technology infrastructure to your initial implementation tasks can help reduce vulnerabilities and ensure your program functions effectively.

Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

FROM A TECHNOLOGY STANDPOINT, WHAT IS THE EXPECTED USER EXPERIENCE FOR FAMILIES, PARTNERS, PROVIDERS, AND THE COMMUNITY?

These days, almost everyone spends time learning and engaging with organizations through technology. At the very least your fund should have a dedicated website that provides basic information about the goals, services, board, staff, and history of your fund, as well as any information required to comply with government transparency laws (e.g., budgets or financial reports, board meeting minutes). You may also want to build an online application for parents or providers, host a resource library, create a provider locator service, have a dashboard to show the fund's impact, or establish a social media presence. While you may not be able to accomplish all these in the first few years, establishing a vision for user experience can help center your fund's work on the families and providers you will serve so that the tools and products you provide through technology will be both useful and used.

WHO WILL BUILD AND MAINTAIN YOUR TECHNOLOGY TOOLS?

It can be hard to develop in-house technical expertise and skill sets depending on how quickly you can hire new staff members and how competitive your job openings are in the local market. You may want to administer your program via a custom database and custom web tools, but you might not have the budget for those approaches in the early years of your fund's program. In this case, your in-house staff can refine and administer a commercial off-the-shelf solution or product. Additionally, you may find that most of your technical development needs will come in sporadic bursts, which will allow you to outsource technical development to an external consultant. If you do outsource your technology functions, you will want staff members to manage relationships with technical vendors and dedicate themselves to becoming expert users of the technical tools your vendors and consultants produce.

IS THE TECHNOLOGY ACCESSIBLE TO ALL FAMILIES, ESPECIALLY FAMILIES WITH LIMITED RESOURCES?

Even though technology is seemingly ubiquitous, the reality is that a digital divide exists and some families and providers do not have access or have limited access to technology tools and internet services. When deciding what information and resources to make available online or what tools to provide, consider alternatives for those who experience limited or no access to technology. This may mean making it easier to use a smartphone to fill in an application, for instance, or simply allowing prospective program participants and providers to pick up and complete paper applications and agreements and mail them to a P.O. Box or physical office.

Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- Your technology budget does not support the development of robust tools necessary for program success. This can lead to cumbersome and over-complicated application processes that can deter families and providers from participating.
- Technology requirements are not clearly defined before development work begins. Consequently, your technology team cannot provide the resources and support you need on time and within budget.
- You don't have an experienced project manager to manage the various technology vendors, which can result in project delays or a technology design that does not consider specific program needs.

Section 4: Action Step and Resources

ACTION STEP: BUILD A PUBLIC FACING WEBSITE TO PROMOTE YOUR PROGRAM.

These days, most people use the internet to learn about new programs, businesses, and organizations. You will need a website so community members and potential program participants know what you offer and how to access your services. Voter-approved children's funds that administer programs also use their websites as portals to additional tools such as a search tool for finding child care or an application for accessing the program. You'll want to think strategically about what additional features you include on your website.

Resources and Tools: Example Websites

- Cincinnati Preschool Promise (Cincinnati, OH)
- Denver Preschool Program (Denver, CO)
- First Steps Kent (Kent County, MI)
- Pre-K 4 SA (San Antonio, TX)
- The Children's Trust (Miami-Dade County, FL)

Photo Credit: Children's Services Council of Broward County

Sharing Your New Fund's Story and Success

Section 1: Communications Overview

Successful ballot measure campaigns require an intense focus on communications. It's one of the key elements that contributed to your victory! But the need for thoughtful and strategic communications about your voter-approved children's fund does not end after Election Day. After the final votes are counted, it's time to plan how you will communicate about the implementation phase of your new fund.

Once the victory celebration ends, attention on your fund—and support for it—easily can fade if no one hears about your progress and impact. Consequently, it is important to communicate with your local leaders and community members about the implementation process and your fund's continued activity to nurture their ongoing support, especially if your fund faces a future reauthorization vote. Sharing your implementation plan, goals, progress toward key milestones, initial successes, and long-term impact builds excitement about your fund and the positive contributions it will make in your community. It also introduces you to the families and community-based providers who will benefit directly from your fund's work.

Communicating about your fund's implementation also promotes transparency and sets realistic expectations for the timeline of activities. This builds trust with your local community members and leaders, highlights your fund's accountability to taxpayers, and shows that you are using public revenue responsibly and as intended by the voters who approved your initiative.

Most importantly, communicating proactively about your fund's work allows you to control your message and your fund's story—because if you don't control it someone else will.

Section 2: Key Questions to Answer

WHO ARE THE PRIMARY AUDIENCES YOU NEED TO REACH WITH YOUR COMMUNICATIONS?

Effective communication starts by identifying the groups and/or individuals you need to inform about your fund's progress and the program(s) it will support. Most likely that will include multiple audiences. Some of those audiences will be internal audiences like your city or county council members and staff members at local government agencies. Other audiences will be external audiences including prospective program participants, families, service providers, campaign supporters, and members of your broader community.

WHAT DOES EACH OF THOSE AUDIENCES NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR PROGRAM AND FUND'S PROGRESS?

Do not assume that your audiences understand all aspects of your fund simply because you won your ballot measure campaign. A key part of your implementation communications will focus on educating your various audiences about the purpose, goals, value, and progress of your new fund and the program(s) it will support. At this stage, it's important to think about the needs, questions, and concerns each audience has and use that to inform your communications.

HOW FREQUENTLY DOES EACH AUDIENCE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU?

You probably will communicate with your various audiences at different times. For instance, your fund's ordinance or other founding documents may dictate how frequently you communicate with your fund's oversight or governance body like your city council. By contrast, you probably have greater flexibility to determine when to share updates with your broader community. Whatever timeline you choose, make sure to communicate with all your audiences regularly to keep them informed and engaged with your fund's progress.

WHO ARE THE BEST MESSENGERS TO DELIVER INFORMATION TO EACH AUDIENCE AND DO THEY REFLECT THE DIFFERENT POPULATIONS REPRESENTED IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

For each audience you need to reach, identify the individuals and groups best suited to connect with that audience. This will ensure that audience members receive information about your fund from a messenger they trust. Possible messengers might include your program staff or fund leadership, elected county or city leaders, noteworthy community members, potential program providers, or prospective family participants. Successful messengers from your ballot measure campaign also can serve as initial messengers for your new fund during the implementation stage.

When selecting your messengers, make sure to choose individuals who represent the different populations who live and work in your community, including groups whose voices or perspectives historically have

been overlooked or underrepresented. Additionally, make sure your messengers provide information in different formats that are accessible to their intended audience(s). This could include presenting information in written, audio, and visual formats; using messengers who are fluent in the community's commonly spoken languages; and making sign language interpreters, video captioning and narration, and braille materials available.

WHAT COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS WILL YOU USE TO REACH YOUR AUDIENCES?

Your communications plan should use a variety of methods to share information about your new fund. Start with a website, social media accounts, and an email marketing tool. Then, depending on your budget, consider using paid advertising on TV, radio, print, or online or direct mail flyers to promote your fund's program(s). Think about the role that earned media—TV and newspaper/magazine stories—can play in your communications outreach too. You also can share your fund's work at public community events. Surveying your audiences and testing different communications channels can help identify the sources your audiences use the most.

Section 3: Potential Problems/Pitfalls to Avoid

- The implementation team does not include a communications professional. Consequently, the fund does not create a plan to share news about its progress and successes, and community members forget about the fund, pull back support, and/or do not participate in programs.
- The fund does not establish a clear brand identity and consistent messaging. Spokespeople and outreach materials send mixed or conflicting messages that confuse community members about the fund's purpose and activities.
- The fund does not prepare for addressing lingering opposition that carries over from the campaign and/or new opposition that surfaces during the implementation phase.
- The implementation team commits to unrealistic communications activities that it does not have the time, capacity, expertise, or budget to support and execute successfully.

Section 4: Action Step and Case Study

ACTION STEP: MAKE COMMUNICATIONS AN EQUAL PARTNER WITH YOUR PROGRAM, POLICY RELATIONS, FISCAL, EVALUATION, AND ADMINISTRATION TEAMS.

To communicate effectively about your fund, your communications team must understand your fund's programs, operations, and goals. Your communications experts also need access to the key information your audiences need to know and the tools to get that information to the appropriate recipients. That means aligning your communications team with your fund's other internal teams, allowing your communications professional(s) to partner with the specialists leading that work, and including communications representatives in your fund's overall planning and implementation activities.

For example, communications and program teams should collaborate on the rollout of program announcements, the framing of information for potential service providers, and the distribution of registration details for families interested in enrolling in new programs. Similarly, your evaluators can equip your communications experts with data about your fund's performance that they can use to showcase your fund's impact and reinforce its value in the community.

Remember, effective communication requires time and resources just like your fund's other operations. Positioning your communications functions as an integral part of your work ensures that your fund has the tools and expertise it needs to communicate effectively with your community and local leaders. Read the case study about Denver Preschool Program on the next page to see how one voter-approved children's fund integrates communications with its other functions.

Photo Credit: Best Starts for Kids

Case Study: Denver Preschool Program

Colorado's **Denver Preschool Program** is a successful, long-standing, targeted universal preschool program funded by a dedicated city sales tax. The program, which began in 2006, is available to all Denver 4-year-olds and qualifying 3-year-olds, with priority given to families experiencing financial hardships. As part of its contract with the City of Denver, Denver Preschool Program identifies communications as one of its core functions. This includes educating the community about the value of early childhood education generally as well as communicating about specific program initiatives and successes, sharing recruitment information with potential preschool providers, and communicating enrollment strategies for prospective families, among other topics. Prioritizing communications as an essential operation ensures that Denver Preschool Program has the financial resources to support its outreach efforts. "It allows us to do the work that we need to do," says Irene Bonham, vice president of communications at Denver Preschool Program. "Because what's the point of having a program like [Denver Preschool Program] if people don't enroll, if people don't participate—and they're not going to if they don't know about it, so we have to talk about it."

Photo Credit: Denver Preschool Program

Section 5: Action Step and Case Study

ACTION STEP: ESTABLISH THE MESSAGING, LANGUAGE, VOICE, AND TONE YOU WILL USE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR FUND'S WORK AND KEEP THOSE ELEMENTS CONSISTENT ACROSS ALL YOUR COMMUNICATIONS.

During your ballot measure campaign, your campaign manager probably emphasized the importance of message discipline and using the same language and themes to describe your initiative across your campaign materials. That advice remains equally important as you implement your fund. Your messaging and word choice define your fund's brand and the image you convey to your various audiences. Being consistent shows that your fund has a clear sense of purpose and that all members of the implementation team are working toward the same goals. Make sure your core messages are clear and easy to understand. Shorter is better in this case! Meanwhile, using strengths-based and human-based language can counter misconceptions and stereotypes some community members may have about your fund's purpose and/or the populations it will serve. Successful messaging requires understanding your audiences' values and motivations so you can tailor your messages to emphasize the aspects of your program that resonate with distinct groups. Polling, community meetings, and an advisory committee can provide helpful input about the messages that speak to different audiences. Read the case study on the next page to learn how Best Starts for Kids created its messaging.

Case Study: Best Starts for Kids

Since its inception in 2015, **Best Starts for Kids in King County, WA**, has supported more than 500,000 children, youth, and families; partnered with more than 500 organizations; and launched more than 570 community-led programs to support the county's children. When Best Starts for Kids developed its core language and messaging, the fund's implementation team did not want to portray the fund as an effort focused solely on prevention and intervention. Instead, the team wanted to focus on promoting well-being. This guiding philosophy helped the team distill Best Starts for Kids' purpose down to a simple clear message: "to support every baby born or child raised in King County to reach adulthood happy, healthy, safe, and thriving." The words "happy, healthy, safe, and thriving" became the mantra and frame for all communications. As a result, all **messaging** intentionally avoided deficit language—words like disadvantaged and underserved—and used uplifting and empowering language focused on health and well-being. **The fund's style guide** also included guidance for capturing empowering community photos and selecting images that reflected the fund's messaging themes. The implementation team then collected feedback about its messaging through community conversations to ensure the messages resonated with the fund's various audiences and reflected their needs and perspectives.

"Rather than explain Best Starts in terms of outcomes, or preventing crisis, we framed the goals of the initiative in a straightforward, and positive way," explains Sheila Ater Capestany, division director of the Children, Youth, and Young Adults division with King County Department of Community and Human Services. "Our tagline—Happy, Healthy, Safe, and Thriving—is a great example of this approach. It describes our goals for King County children and young people in relatable language. And we see its effectiveness as community members, subject matter experts, and our county executive all repeat this tagline and our messages. The strength of the positive message helped us build a foundation for our work and continues to support our approach to this day,"

Photo Credit: Best Starts for Kids

Section 6: Action Step and Case Study

ACTION STEP: INCORPORATE RESPONSES TO EXISTING AND POTENTIAL OPPOSITION INTO YOUR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN.

Even if your fund's campaign won by a landslide victory, skepticism and distrust can surface as community members wait to see their tax dollars at work. Consequently, it is important to identify lingering, new, and potential opposition to your fund and prepare responses to those concerns as part of your implementation communications. Maintaining strong community connections provides valuable feedback about your fund's work and can uncover opposition, critiques, and the reasons behind them. These community connections also will help you distinguish between pressing concerns about your fund that require an immediate response and minor criticisms you can monitor. Also, do not assume that all community members understand the history and evolution of your fund. Countering opposition may mean educating or reminding your audiences about the reasons your fund operates a certain way and reaffirming your ultimate vision and goals. Other responses may include clarifying misinformation or misrepresentation of information, reframing a critique, or acknowledging a critique as a limitation but one that does not diminish the importance of your initiative. Communicate facts clearly and accurately and when activities don't transpire as intended explain why. Often, critics simply need more information to better understand the benefits and intentions of your effort or want reassurance that the initiative is fulfilling its promises. To see an example, read the Pre-K 4 SA case study on the next page.

Case Study: Pre-K 4 SA

In 2012, voters in San Antonio, TX, levied a ⅛ cent sales tax to establish a citywide early childhood education program called **Pre-K 4 SA**. The program offers free preschool, meals, and transportation for qualifying children, as well as a grant program and job training for teachers. Initially, opponents of Pre-K 4 SA criticized the program's cost. The implementation team countered this criticism in several ways. First, the team highlighted the broader benefits and reach of the fund's dollars. In addition to providing preschool to the 2,000 children served in Pre-K 4 SA's centers, the fund also supports children in other programs through its grants and professional development services for teachers. Next, Pre-K 4 SA acknowledged that it provides a high-quality program and that high-quality services cost money. Finally, Pre-K 4 SA analyzed its costs in comparison to other preschool programs to show that its program costs less money than some lower-quality programs. The messaging worked, and **in 2020 73% of voters reauthorized the sales tax that funds Pre-K 4 SA**. "Program leaders need to walk toward the danger," says Sarah Baray, CEO of Pre-K 4 SA. "Critics' concerns can be based in either lack of understanding or misinformation. Communication between program leaders and critics builds capacity for voters to speak from an informed perspective and raise legitimate concerns that, once addressed, lead to program growth."

Photo Credit: Pre-K 4 SA

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)

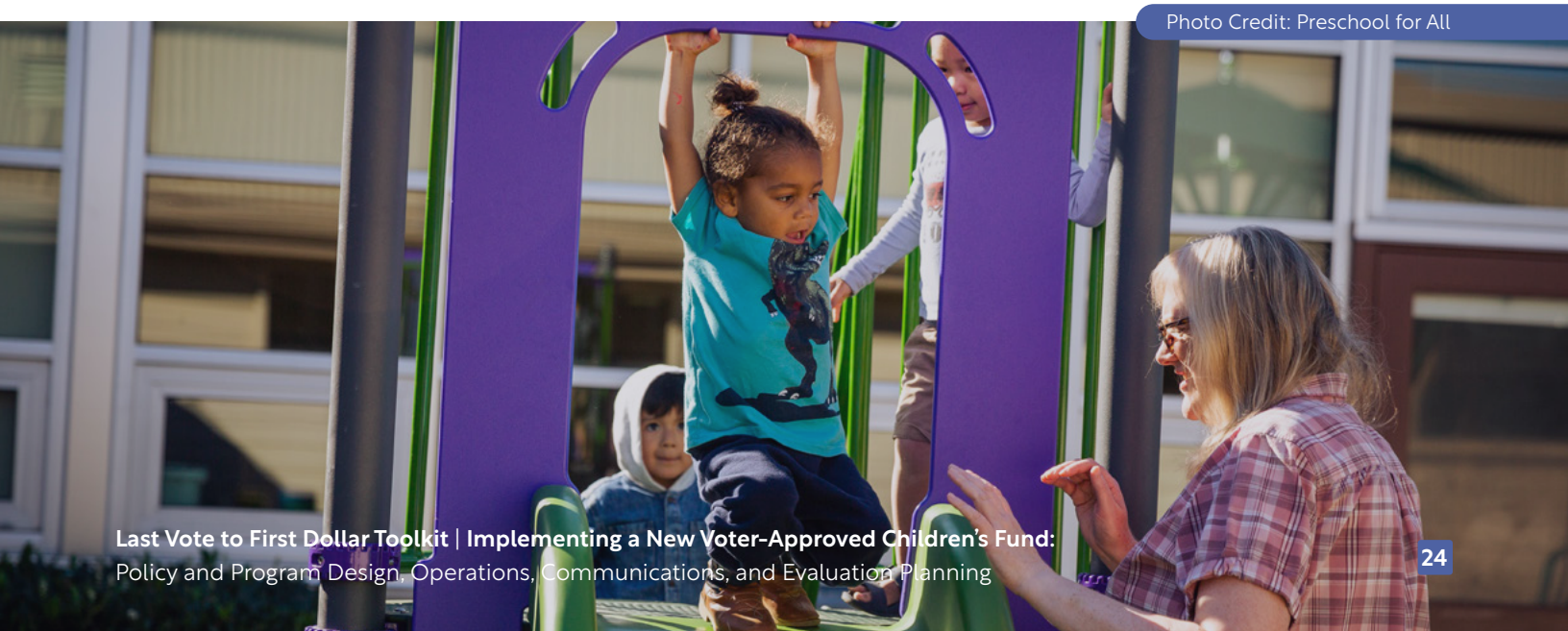


Photo Credit: Preschool for All

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