



Last Vote to First Dollar Toolkit

# Operationalizing a New Fund

Setting Up Your New Voter-Approved Children's Fund for Success

November 2024

**CHILDREN'**   
FUNDING PROJECT

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### Authors

Marina M. Mendoza, senior manager of early childhood impact, Children's Funding Project  
Olivia Allen, co-founder and vice president of strategy and advocacy, Children's Funding Project  
Kristen Loschert, communications director, Children's Funding Project

### Co-authors

Emma McCarthy, strategy and programs advisor, MetrixIQ  
Emmy Liss, founder, Emmy Liss Strategies

### Editors

Kristen Loschert, communications director, Children's Funding Project  
Julie Nicholson, vice president of implementation and impact, Children's Funding Project

### Designer

Keisha Rivera, Kuroko Creative

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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

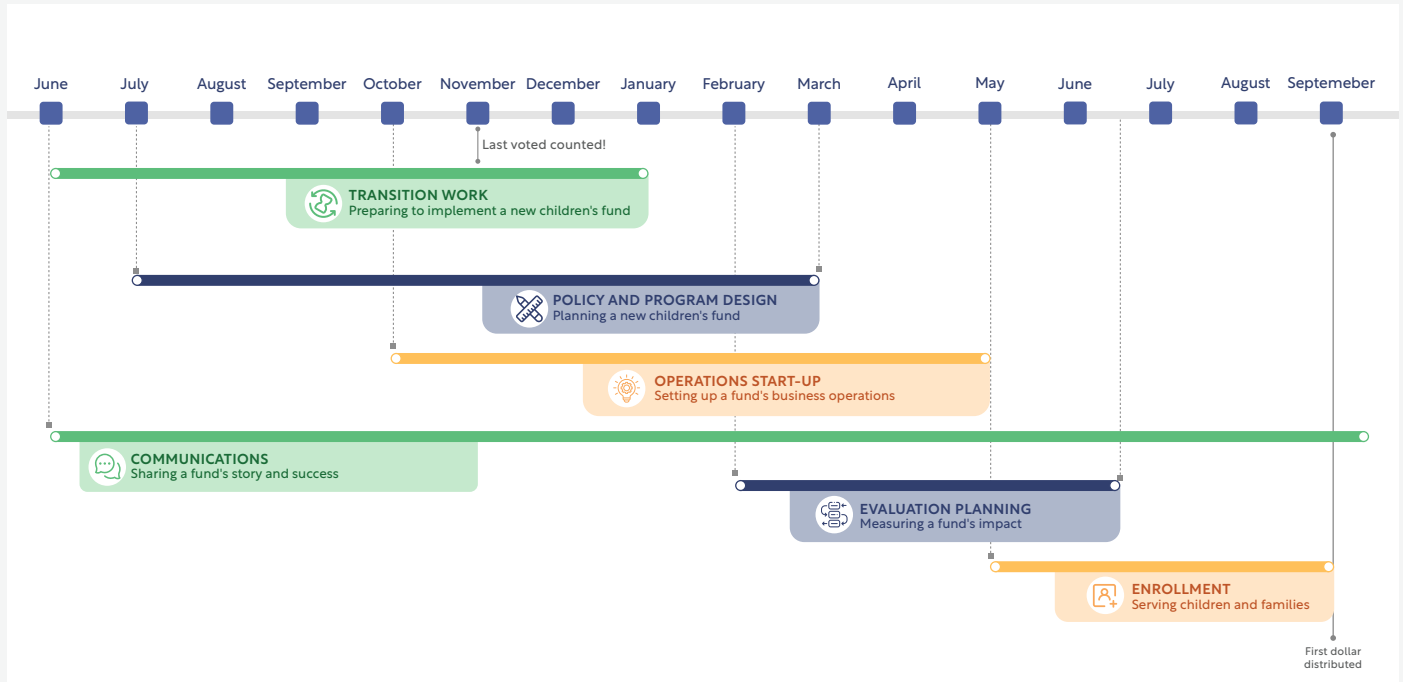
and objectives with the focus on children, based on solid community data and input, that provides the foundation for success,” says Cindy Arenberg Seltzer, who has served as the president/CEO of the Children’s Services Council of Broward County, FL, since 2000. We hope to continue building additional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



# 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.



## 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 \(Miami-Dade County, FL\)](#)

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](http://childrensfundingproject.org)

