

# Voter-Approved Children's Funds

## Funding Our Kids 101

February 2023 | Children and Youth

### What Is a Voter-Approved Children's Fund?

A voter-approved children's fund refers to local public revenue that is dedicated to children's services in an election by the voters. These types of funds also are called

- local dedicated funds,
- Children's Services Councils (in Florida),
- Children's Services Funds (in Missouri),
- Strong Start (San Miguel County, CO) or Right Start (Summit County, CO),
- Best Starts for Kids (King County, WA),
- Early Childhood Millage (in Kent County, MI), or
- simply children's funds.

These funds support a variety of programs and services for children and youth including

- prenatal and infant health and development services;
- child care and early education programs;
- after-school and summer programs;
- youth mentorship, leadership, and career supports;
- mental health, behavioral health, and wellness support; and
- other programs and services typically provided outside of core school-day hours.

Voter-approved children's funds do not support the general operating budget for K-12 public schools since school districts typically receive funding from other designated local, state, and federal sources.



### What Types of Public Revenue Do Voter-Approved Children's Funds Use?

Communities can support a voter-approved children's fund with

- sales taxes,
- property taxes,
- income taxes or taxes on high-income earners,
- hotel/lodging taxes,
- marijuana taxes,
- **other taxes**, and
- by setting aside existing revenue from a locality's general fund.

### Who Creates These Children's Funds?

Establishing a children's fund requires a broad coalition with representatives from the groups below:

- advocates, including parents and other advocates for children and youth;
- **business leaders**, including small business owners;
- **intermediaries**, such as existing nonprofit hubs, early childhood collaboratives, and organizations that support direct-service providers;
- **local funders**, including foundations or other philanthropic groups; and
- **policymakers**, such as mayors, county commissioners, school board members, and other elected and appointed government officials.

## Why Are Voter-Approved Children's Funds Important Options to Pay for Programs and Services for Children and Youth?

**They're local:** Federal and state funding is crucial to support programs and services for kids but currently isn't meeting the specific needs of many communities. By contrast, communities can tailor the *local* funding from a voter-approved children's fund to respond to its specific needs and support critical services while also providing flexibility for innovation.

**They're dedicated:** When voters approve a children's fund they elect to dedicate revenue for a specific purpose (in this case children and youth), which provides sustained funding that cannot be cut or reassigned to another use. This allows children's funds to focus on long-term impacts and to build a resilient and diverse network of programs and providers.

**They're public:** Because these funds are created from public dollars by voters, voter-approved children's funds are accountable to the people who live and work in the community. They have a layer of transparency and accountability that builds public awareness and support. No fund that has returned to the ballot for reauthorization has failed to achieve renewal.

## How Common Are Voter-Approved Children's Funds?

There are 50 voter-approved children's funds nationwide, located in diverse communities around the country. Together, these funds raise \$1.5 billion annually for infants, toddlers, children, and youth. Explore them all in our interactive map at [childrensfundingproject.org/our-work/fiscal-mapping](https://childrensfundingproject.org/our-work/fiscal-mapping).

## How Has Local Dedicated Funding for Children and Youth Evolved Over Time?

1946: Pinellas County, FL, establishes the first children's fund in the country.

1986: Florida's Juvenile Welfare Services Act gives every county in the state the ability to create its own voter-approved children's fund.

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

1990: Seattle, WA, and Aspen, CO, establish children's funds—the first children's funds outside of Florida.

1991: California creates its first fund in San Francisco.

1993: Missouri passes the Community Children's Services Tax, allowing counties to pass a voter-approved property tax for kids.

2000–2015: Cities and counties across the country create 19 new voter-approved children's funds.

2016–2022: Cities and counties across the country create 18 new voter-approved children's funds.

## How Can My Community Establish a Voter-Approved Children's Fund?

Creating a voter-approved children's fund takes 12–24 months of planning, coalition building, coordinated decision-making, and campaigning. The process includes [six critical steps](#):

- 1. Start with a Strong Foundation:** Set communitywide goals for kids and identify the amount of revenue you will need.
- 2. Chart Your Course:** Determine the fund's purpose and identify a pathway to the ballot.
- 3. Build and Engage Your Coalition:** Build a diverse coalition of advocates, policymakers, local funders, business leaders, and intermediaries.
- 4. Craft Your Ballot Measure:** Plan how your community will allocate and administer the money.
- 5. Build a Strong Campaign Infrastructure:** Fundraise and hire a team.
- 6. Communicate with the Public and Engage Voters:** Develop effective messages and get out the vote!

For more information about how we can help your community create a voter-approved children's fund contact us at [childrensfundingproject.org/contact-us](https://childrensfundingproject.org/contact-us) or e-mail Allie Farrell, partnerships coordinator, at [allie@childrensfundingproject.org](mailto:allie@childrensfundingproject.org).