



# FUNDING THE NEXT GENERATION

## GETTING STARTED ON THE PATH TO DEDICATED LOCAL FUNDING FOR YOUNG CHILDREN Ideas for First 5 Commissions

Laying the groundwork for a campaign to create dedicated funding for the children of your county is an important first step and will serve you well regardless of how quickly you proceed or what type of success you achieve. It is impossible to anticipate every opportunity you will have, or every barrier you will encounter, or how long it will take to ensure ongoing funding to meet all the needs. Sometimes a first success comes in two years, sometimes a decade. And ultimately, there is not just one goal because the work is never over. Celebrate early successes. Just know they always reveal the next steps that need to be taken. Whatever the outcome, your organization will be stronger and better able to influence public policy and budgets on behalf of vulnerable children.

### 1. Prepare your Commission for a new type of work.

- KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO
  - Build a consensus vision within the Commission and its close network for a long-term county-wide agenda for young children.
- STRUCTURE THE COMMISSION TO WORK EFFECTIVELY TOWARD YOUR VISION
  - Assign staff to monitor the county budget, engage the community, and communicate with the public.
  - Engage Commissioners in this work.
- DEVELOP NEW SKILLS
  - Cultivate the expertise of staff and Commissioners in messaging, speaking, negotiating, and political analysis.
  - Recruit new Commissioners, staff, and consultants with needed expertise if necessary.
  - Help parent leaders in your network develop their political, communication and policy expertise.

**Why?** We do not have skills, nor are we organized to win political battles. Our vision is often too short-term and too narrow. People are not inspired to join you unless you have an inspiring vision and can communicate that vision.

### 2. Research key foundational information.

- KNOW WHAT YOUR VISION COSTS
  - If you have not already done so, assess the current well-being and challenges of your young child population.
  - Calculate the costs of your dreams – i.e., universal home visiting, preschool for all, etc. – Don't undersell what it will take or over-promise for too little money.
  - Analyze (or advocate to have your county analyze) what is currently being spent on young children so you can identify the gaps that must be filled.
- IDENTIFY OPTIONS FOR LOCAL REVENUE
  - Research potential sources of local funding – de-mystify the options. There is a desire on the part of our critics to make this seem more complicated than it is.

- Research the legal options for local revenue measures
- KNOW WHO HAS THE POWER TO MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN
  - Do a power map of county with your Commission and key allies so you can focus your efforts strategically.

**Why?** You must be armed with basic information from the outset, or you will not be able to make your case effectively.

### **3. Increase your focus and attention on the broader public.**

- KNOW WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS.
  - Conduct a public opinion poll about priorities, effective messages, and attitudes toward various revenue options.
  - If you are able, also conduct focus groups – formally or informally with the general public.
- CREATE TOOLS AIMED AT COMMUNICATING WITH THE PUBLIC.
  - Expand your mailing/e-mail lists as broadly as possible.
  - Develop some form of digital communication to an ever-expanding list.
  - Consider an occasional educational mailing to a targeted electorate.
  - Develop other public education tools – PSA's, posters,

**Why?** We speak in jargon and live in bubble. Too often our circle of communication is limited to county officials, a network of providers, and experts. Ultimately the public will decide whether our measures reflect their priorities and can pass.

### **4. Strengthen the network of support for young children in your county.**

- MAKE OUTREACH (AND LISTENING) AN ONGOING PART OF YOUR WORK.
  - Join forces with the racial and ethnically diverse groups fighting for equity and social justice – support their issues and understand how they frame issues related to young children. Integrate this perspective into the First 5 vision.
  - Make presentations periodically to civic, religious, labor, and business groups about the needs of young children. Make sure brain development is second nature to them.
  - Conduct informal focus groups and surveys with parents and providers to understand what they are motivated to support.
  - Reach out to folks and organizations with money long before the “ask.”
  - Meet with opponents and skeptics about government support for children's programs – work to neutralize their negative perspectives.

**Why?** It takes a village to achieve success and there are many more allies than we often realize. They need to be informed and mobilized. And you need to be open to their priorities and framing.

### **5. Build the political capital of First 5 within the county.**

- BE VISIBLE IN GOVERNMENT VENUES
  - Monitor and testify in county budget hearings – it can be a simple message; just be there.
  - Request informational hearings by the Board of Supervisors on issues of importance to families with young children.
  - Learn to bring crowds (especially kids) to public meetings, particularly the Board of Supervisors. This will be very influential. Elected officials never forget a large crowd – they may forget what you say, but not how many people attended.

- Use drama and personal testimony at the Board meetings to give powerful emotional appeals.
- CULTIVATE THE PRESS, for instance:
  - Don't be shy about getting quoted in the media. Be aggressive – call reporters when you have something to say about newsworthy issues.
  - Hone your media skills – press events, guest editorials, letters to the editor, meetings with reporters and editorial boards.
- HELP OTHERS WITH RELATED CAUSES
  - Support related campaigns of others (housing, education, mental health). They will become long-term friends and allies.
- IT'S ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS –
  - Cultivate relationships with key decision-makers and key people in positions. Also, tell them when you are disappointed in them.
  - Cultivate relationships with the directors and key staff of county departments that could find the resources in their budgets or grants to fund your priorities (e.g., MHSA dollars) – human services, public health, economic development, housing, libraries
- IF POSSIBLE, DEVELOP A POLITICAL CHAMPION
  - Congratulate politicians whenever appropriate. Search for one or more political champions and keep them close – coffees, meetings, regular e-mails, etc.
- BUILD YOUR POLITICAL HARDBALL SKILLS

**WHY?** You have to be in the game in order to win. An ounce of public visibility (e.g., a quote in the press) is worth a pound of influence.

## **6. Work toward early successes and communicate about them widely and loudly when they happen.**

- BUDGET POLICIES THAT BENEFIT KIDS, for instance:
  - Getting federal and state dollars allocated to children and youth such as ARP
  - Preventing budget cuts that would hurt children's programs
  - Getting increases in General Fund allocations for children – even modest ones are a success.
- NEW STRUCTURES IN GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH
  - Task forces on children's issues
  - Youth Commissions
  - Offices/departments for children and youth
- POLICY RESOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH
  - Get your vision for children approved by the Board of Supervisors as official county policy.
  - Create and get passed a Children's Bill of Rights.
  - Support or initiative policies re: more family housing, collaboration with schools, health equity, parent empowerment.
  - Fight for a policy or action that responds to a community crisis.
- SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMISSION, for instance:
  - Visible well-attended events such as conferences, summits
  - Publications with new information and recommendations

**Why?** Success builds success. You want people to think of you as a winner.

**IF YOU ARE A SMALL COUNTY**, don't be overwhelmed by the possibilities listed above. Just pick a few things to do in the coming year. Here are some places to start:

- Work with your commission to identify your highest programmatic aspirations (e.g., a new family resource center); calculate the cost.
- Meet with members of the Board of Supervisors and heads of public health and human services to share goal and cost.
- Connect with your local newspaper (or write op-ed) about importance of early care and education and the benefits of your highest priority (or what is likely to be lost when funding decreases).
- Get involved in the county budget process – attend some hearings and public meetings. If appropriate, testify on your agreed-upon funding priority.
- Reach out to 3 potential new allies in the county to talk about importance of early care and education, First 5, and your highest priorities – community/civic association, seniors' group, church, teachers association, business association, social justice organization.