



Child
Friendly
Cities
Initiative

unicef 
for every child

BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR EVERY CHILD





EVERY CHILD. EVERY VOICE. EVERY CITY.

Across the U.S., UNICEF USA's Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) municipal partners are working to build communities where children and young people are safe, heard, and supported—and where their needs and rights shape local decision-making. These cities not only improve outcomes for children locally, but also serve as real-world proof points, demonstrating what child-centered governance can look like across the country.

“I am so excited to start this work with such amazing partners. So much of what we do as a city impacts young people, both now and as they grow into adulthood. There is tremendous power in hearing from them and ensuring we are meeting their needs.”

— Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, City Manager, City of Boulder

WHAT IS A CHILD FRIENDLY CITY?

A Child Friendly City is a city or community where children's voices, needs, priorities, and rights are prioritized—not an afterthought, but as a core part of how decisions are made, policies are designed, and resources are distributed.

Is your city child-friendly?

- ☐ Do children feel safe?
- ☐ Can they access a doctor when needed?
- ☐ Do adults listen when they speak?
- ☐ Do they feel like they get their fair share?



**In a Child Friendly City,
children feel:**

SAFE

in their communities

HEARD

by the adults in their lives

WELCOME

in public spaces

EMPOWERED

to access the support and
opportunities they need to thrive

"I've always been someone who wanted to share my opinions and who thought I can make a change in the world. This was a way that I thought I could connect with my community, make a real change within my home and my community for my peers, and speak up and be heard."

— Andie, Decatur CFCI
Teen Leadership Team

WHY CFCI? WHY NOW?

The U.S. is one of the wealthiest nations in the world,

yet 1 in 6 children
live in poverty

and millions grow up in neighborhoods with limited access to safe parks, quality schools, or healthy food.

Local governments are in a unique position to shift this reality—and **young people want to be part of the solution.**

Nearly 9 in 10

young people say it's important for elected officials to **prioritize their opinions.**

Yet 91%

feel people in power **don't really care what young people have to say**, and 73% say their opinions don't matter to elected officials.

More than half (54%)

feel excluded from the political process, even as 48% say leaders can best support them by trying to understand their views on political and social issues.

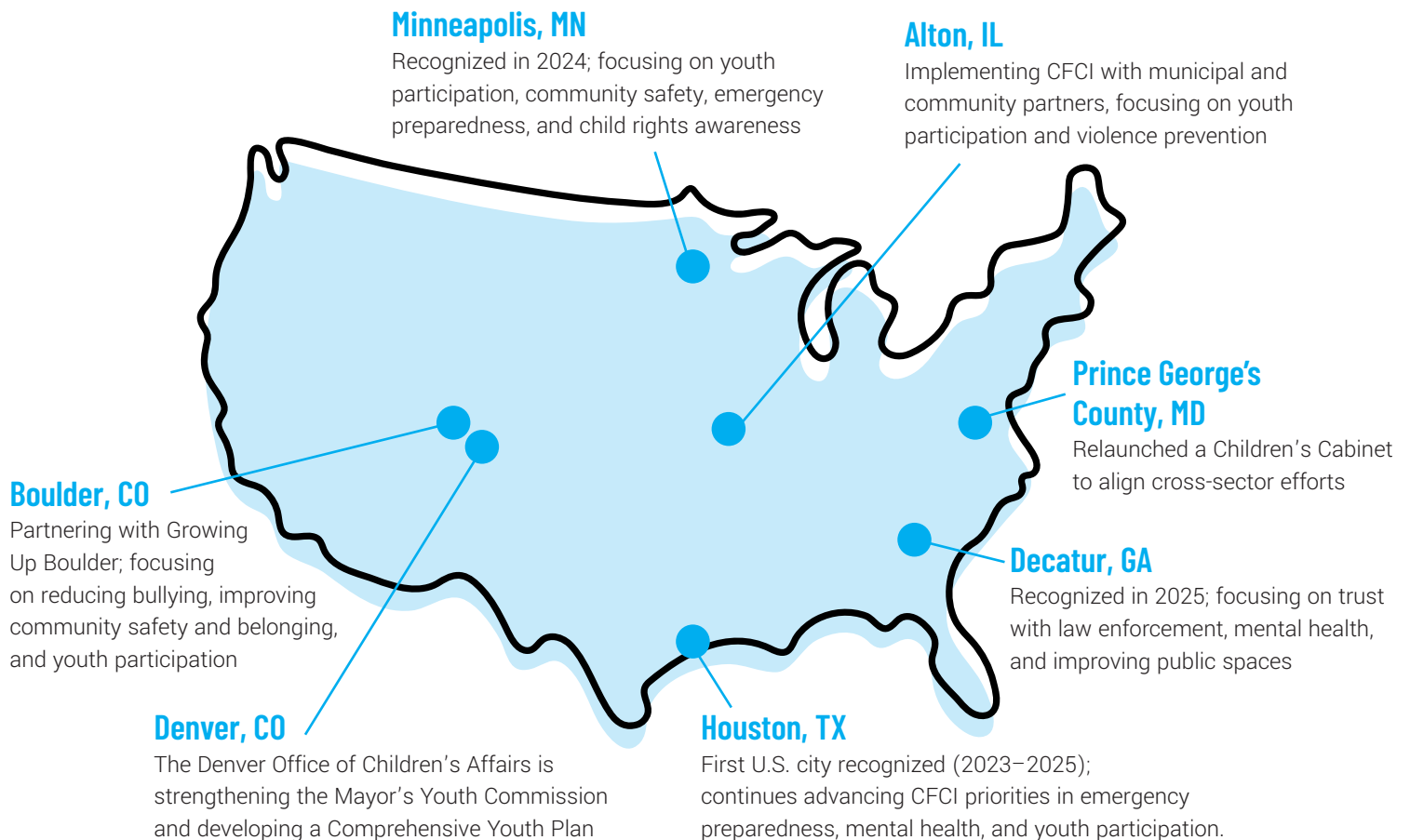
**Local governments are ready for solutions—
but many lack a clear, coordinated approach
to prioritize children in decision-making.**

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative offers a practical governance framework to help communities take action **for and with children**, and to build more equitable, accountable systems where all children can thrive.

GLOBAL EXPERIENCE, U.S. IMPACT

Since its launch in 1996, CFCI has reached **30+ million children** across **3,500+ cities** in more than 40 countries.

UNICEF USA launched CFCI in the U.S. in 2020. Today, it reaches over **1 million children** in a growing cohort of communities:



THE CFCL FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION:

GOALS AND STRATEGIES TO
REALIZE MEASURABLE RESULTS

5 Goal Areas:

Cities assess conditions and set goals around five key goal areas that impact children's well-being:



Safety and Inclusion



Children's Participation



Equitable Social Services



Safe Living Environments



Play and Leisure



Measurable Results:

CFCI tracks progress in two key ways:

- **Outcomes for Children:**
Improvements in children's daily lives and well-being, based on local priorities.
- **Systemic Changes:**
Stronger policies, governance structures, and community partnerships that sustain progress and embed child-centered approaches into local government.

Strategies for Child-Centered Governance:

Cities implement strategies to establish mechanisms for inclusion and accountability to achieve results and build lasting change for children. Strategies include:

- **Children's Budgets**
- **Child Impact Statements**
- **Youth Councils**
- **Children's Cabinets**
- **Youth Ombudsman Offices**

THE 3-YEAR JOURNEY TOWARD RECOGNITION

CFCI is a **transformative, three-year cycle** that embeds equity and children's rights into local governance.

The Six-Step Process:

1. **Joining CFCI**

Start with an exploratory conversation—assess readiness, align on values, sign an MOU, and onboarding.

2. **Stakeholder Engagement**

Build an executive committee and inclusive youth participation mechanism.

3. **Situation Analysis**

Collect and analyze data and insights through community conversations and research.

4. **Local Action Plan**

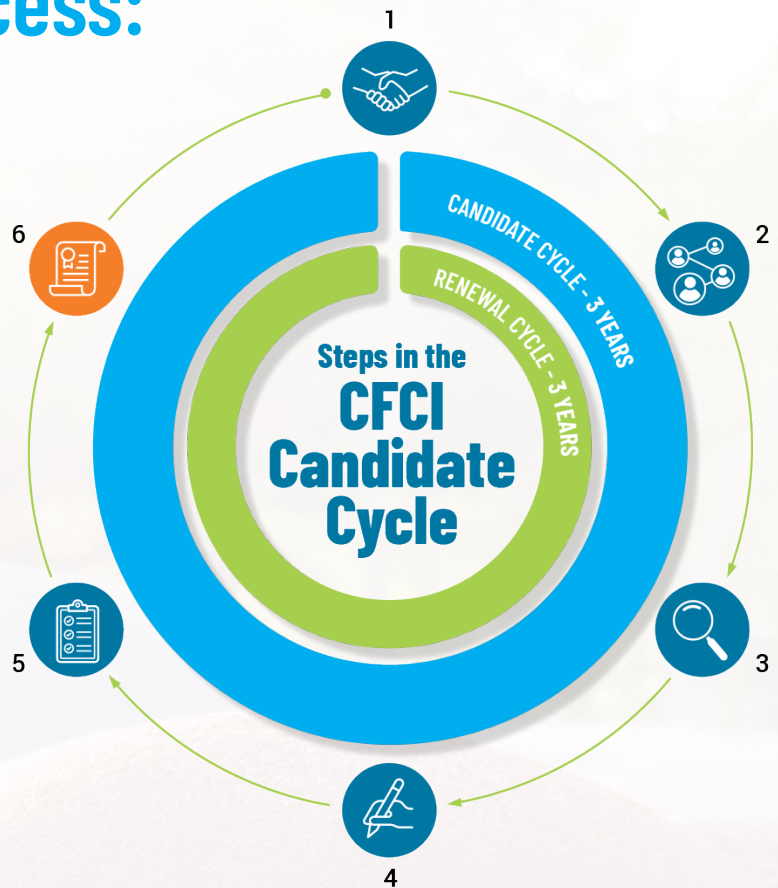
Set goals, timelines, and strategies that respond to youth-identified priorities.

5. **Implementation**

Execute the plan with cross-sector collaboration.

6. **Evaluation & Recognition**

An external evaluation confirms progress and earns the city official UNICEF CFCI recognition.



Cities can renew their commitment after the initial cycle to sustain, expand, and deepen their impact and further institutionalize their child-centered governance efforts.



“Minneapolis is committed to helping children thrive across the city. Being recognized as a Child Friendly City in 2024 by UNICEF USA reflects our commitment to improving the lives of youth. That is why we are renewing our partnership with UNICEF USA to develop a second CFCI Local Action Plan.

This renewed initiative will integrate various priorities related to children and youth services in the city, uniting our efforts under a common objective. Together, we aim to reinforce our commitment to our young community members and their families.”

**— Heidi Ritchie,
Deputy Commissioner,
Minneapolis Health Department**

**— Ann DeGroot,
Executive Director, Minneapolis
Youth Coordinating Board**

READY TO LEARN MORE?

We're excited to work with communities that share our mission. UNICEF USA forms new CFCI partnerships at set times, based on how ready a community is and how well the partnership fits with our goals.

Contact: CFCI@unicefusa.org

Website: unicefusa.org/CFCI

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