



for every child

# CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS

## Ensuring Children's Needs Are Prioritized in Local Decision-Making

*Child-Centered Governance Research-to-Policy Brief Series*



©MARISOLAVITTA

**Child impact statements help policymakers consider the impacts of proposed policies on children and families, ensuring that local decision-making considers their best interests. This policy brief highlights how child impact statements work, their benefits for child-centered governance and for young people themselves, and key considerations for cities, counties and states seeking to strengthen local decision-making to advance child well-being.**

---

## **CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS AT A GLANCE**

Many policy and budgetary decisions affect children and families, even when not explicitly focused on them. When governments intentionally consider children in decision-making, policies can strengthen families, promote equity, and support thriving, healthy communities.

**Child impact statements** are practical tools that assess how policies, legislation or programs may affect children and families. They can focus on specific groups of children or the broader child population within a community. By identifying potential benefits and risks, suggesting ways to enhance positive impacts and mitigate harms, and outlining plans for monitoring impact over time, child impact statements help decision-makers prioritize the best interests of children. Modeled on established practices, such as environmental and fiscal impact statements, child impact statements help policymakers achieve their objectives while ensuring children remain central to decision-making.

---

## **IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES**

Emerging evidence from case studies indicates that child impact statements can help ensure that children's well-being is considered in policymaking. **By systematically analyzing potential effects on children, these statements can make children more visible, guide resource allocation and support more effective policies and programs.**

- **Effective Resource Allocation and Greater Efficiency:** Case studies suggest that child impact statements can help municipalities make resource decisions that are more strategic, equitable and responsive.<sup>1,2</sup>
  - **Preventing Harm:** Case studies have shown that the use of child impact statements can lead to concrete changes in policies and programs that reduce the risk of harm to children.<sup>1,3</sup> By providing a structured framework for assessing potential risks to children before policies are implemented, child impact statements encourage adjustments that mitigate harm and enhance protections.<sup>4</sup> This proactive approach allows governments to anticipate unintended consequences, modify policies and implement safeguards to prevent negative impacts.
  - **Promoting Child Well-Being:** Existing evidence suggests that by making children's needs more visible, child impact statements can support policies that not only prevent harm, but also actively advance child well-being.<sup>5</sup> When used effectively, child impact statements can lead to better-designed programming that is responsive to children's needs.
  - **Improved Transparency and Trust:** Child impact statements clarify how policies and budgets affect children and young people's lives. The process of completing and sharing child impact statements can foster increased public trust by demonstrating that children's needs are being considered. Case studies show that this transparency also helps create a culture of accountability and reinforces the legitimacy of decisions affecting children.<sup>4</sup>
-

**Child impact statements can help ensure that policymakers consider the full range of children’s experiences. By drawing attention to the needs of different populations of children, especially those whose voices are heard less often, the statements support more responsive and inclusive decision-making.**

---

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Child impact statements can be powerful tools for improving policymaking. When integrated thoughtfully into decision-making, they provide actionable insights, increase transparency and help leaders make more informed and effective decisions. Emerging research suggests child impact statements are most effective when embraced as a valuable component of the deliberative process, not an administrative burden, requiring buy-in from policymakers and community leaders.<sup>6</sup>

**Policy and Expectations:** A review of effective usage of child impact statements points to the need for a formal mandate that defines when and under what circumstances they are required. A mandate ensures that statements are completed consistently and meaningfully shape decision-making. Experts indicate that using child impact statements in strategic and high priority areas is often the most effective way to begin. For example, legislatures can establish a standard child impact statement and a mechanism to request such statement on proposed legislation. When used, it is important that the analysis be substantive, not simply a box-checking exercise, and focused where it can have the greatest impact.<sup>6,7</sup>

**Timing and Integration into Decision-Making:** Research suggests that child impact statements are most effective when conducted early in the policy process, before key decisions are finalized.<sup>7</sup> Early integration allows policymakers to anticipate potential impacts, identify risks and adjust proposals to better support children’s well-being.

**Meaningful Youth and Community Engagement:** Youth and community perspectives are critical to the effectiveness of child impact statements.<sup>7,8</sup> Children and young people are uniquely positioned to identify how policies may affect their lives. Their input can spark fresh ideas or new ways of approaching challenges and reveal blind spots that adults may overlook. Proactively incorporating mechanisms for meaningful engagement can help ensure these perspectives are considered.<sup>8</sup>

**Capacity and Support for Implementation:** Child impact statements can be completed by a wide range of individuals, but having the right resources and support in place enhances their effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> While it can be helpful to consult experts in child wellbeing, it is not necessary to be a specialist to complete a statement. Providing guidance, templates, data resources, and access to technical support ensures that anyone conducting child impact statements can do so in a meaningful way that informs decision-making.

**Transparency:** The value of child impact statements depends significantly on their visibility. When statements are shared, they can foster public trust and increase accountability. Making child impact statements publicly accessible allows civil society and communities – including children and youth – to engage with policymaking and advocate for better outcomes. Transparency ensures that child impact statements serve their intended role as tools for both improved policy and stronger accountability.<sup>9</sup>

## CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS IN PRACTICE

The use of child impact statements remains limited in the United States, but a growing number of government leaders and advocacy campaigns have put them into practice. Below are examples of how child impact statements have been used to enhance well-being for children in the U.S. and around the world:

**Santa Clara County (CA):** In 2011, following advocacy efforts from child-focused organizations, the County Board of Supervisors required child impact statements for all Board transmittals, making children’s well-being a consistent consideration in local governance. The practice has contributed to a cultural shift in which children’s needs are routinely factored into decision-making across agencies and has supported broader investments in initiatives, including the County’s Children’s Budget and an updated Bill of Rights for Children and Youth. Learn more [here](#).

**Colorado:** The Rocky Mountain Partnership developed a community and economic impact assessment to support a 2022 ballot measure funding one of the state’s most under-resourced schools. The assessment provided youth and community members with data and talking points to educate voters on the measure, which passed with 57 percent of the vote and now raises \$17.7 million annually. The success came after seven failed attempts over 22 years. Learn more [here](#).

**The Netherlands:** The Netherlands’ Child Rights Impact Statement framework ensures that all laws, policies and regulations systematically consider children’s rights and well-being from inception to implementation. The process includes preliminary checks to determine whether a proposal might affect children. If so, a full impact statement is then required. It also has mechanisms to incorporate children’s perspectives and requirements to justify any decisions that do not prioritize children. This framework has helped strengthen national child protection guidelines and youth justice responses, and leaders credit it with preventing negative impacts on children. Learn more [here](#).

## GETTING STARTED

Interested in using child impact statements in your community? One practical first step is to **understand what similar mechanisms already exist** in your city, county or state. These could include environmental impact statements, fiscal impact statements, equity impact assessments or other policy review processes. Even if these tools are not focused on children, they offer valuable lessons on what works, what doesn’t and how review mechanisms can influence decision-making.

Communities can start small. **Embedding questions about children’s well-being into existing review processes, using mini-impact assessments for specific projects, or piloting child impact statements in one policy area or specific policy or program** are all good places to start. Consider focusing early analyses on areas where there is existing data on child well-being, which can help identify potential gaps, risks or opportunities without requiring extensive new data collection.

Child impact statements can be a helpful tool for youth councils and advisory bodies. Sharing child impact statement tools with these groups can provide a **structured way for young people to weigh in on relevant policies**, ensuring their perspectives are incorporated from the outset. To learn more about how child impact statements can be used to inform decision-making, check out the suite of resources available at [Kids Impact Initiative](#).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Child and Youth Friendly Governance Project for conducting the literature review and the many experts who generously shared their time and insights through key informant interviews for this research-to-policy series.

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM UNICEF USA:

UNICEF USA is partnering with national leaders in child-centered governance to build a network of municipalities committed to centering children and their rights in policymaking and decision-making. Child-centered governance structures are the core infrastructure to move that forward. Stay tuned for more tools, guidance, peer-learning and research to support municipalities in their journeys to creating communities for every child.

Sign up for our [Communities for Every Child newsletter](#) to stay informed about research, advocacy and child-friendly governance initiatives.

Learn more in our full *Child-Centered Governance Research-to-Policy Brief series*: [Child Friendly Budgeting](#) • [Youth Councils](#) • [Child Impact Statements](#) • [Youth Ombuds Offices](#) • [Children's Cabinets](#)

## CITATIONS

1. Kids Impact Initiative. Using Child Impact Assessments in Your Community or State: A Starter Guide. Los Angeles, CA: Kids Impact Initiative; 2021. Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://kidsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/cia-dstarter-guide-final.pdf>
2. Payne, L. *Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA): A Review of Comparative Practice Across the UK*. London, UK: UNICEF UK; 2017. Accessed September 17, 2025. [https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Unicef-UK-CRIA-comparative-review\\_FOR-PUBLICATION.pdf](https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Unicef-UK-CRIA-comparative-review_FOR-PUBLICATION.pdf)
3. De Kinderombudsman. *Kinderombudsman lanceert Kinderrechtentoets: vaste plek voor kinderrechten in wetten en regels* [Kinderombudsman launches Children's Rights Test: A permanent place for children's rights in laws and regulations]. De Kinderombudsman. December 10, 2024. Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://www.kinderombudsman.nl/nieuws/kinderombudsman-lanceert-kinderrechtentoets-vaste-plek-voor-kinderrechten-in-wetten-en>
4. Committee on the Rights of the Child. General Comment No. 19 (2016) on Public Budgeting for the Realization of Children's Rights (Art. 4), U.N. Doc. CRC/C/GC/19. 2016. Accessed September 16, 2025. [https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/838730/files/CRC\\_C\\_GC\\_19-EN.pdf](https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/838730/files/CRC_C_GC_19-EN.pdf)
5. European Network of Ombudspersons for Children. *ENOC Synthesis Report on Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)*. Strasbourg, France: ENOC; 2020. Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://enoc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ENOC-Synthesis-Report-on-CRIA-FV.pdf>
6. Hanna, K., Mason, N. *Putting Children at the Center of Policy Development*. Washington, DC: First Focus on Children; 2010. Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Putting-Children-at-the-Center-of-Policy-Development.pdf>
7. Payne, L. Child Rights Impact Assessments as a policy improvement tool. *Int J Hum Rights*. 2019; 23(3):387-404. [doi:10.1080/13642987.2018.1558989](https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1558989)
8. Kids Impact Initiative. *Youth Engagement: A Key Ingredient for Effective Impact Assessments* [fact sheet]. March 2024. Accessed September 24, 2025. <https://kidsimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/yia-factsheet-3-youth-engagement-final.pdf>
9. UNICEF; European Commission. *EU-UNICEF Child Rights Toolkit: Integrating Child Rights in Development Cooperation*. UNICEF; 2014. Accessed September 17, 2025. <https://www.unicef.org/bih/media/726/file/EU-UNICEF%20Child%Rights%20Toolkit%20.pdf>

.....

Over eight decades, **the United Nations Children's Fund** (UNICEF) has built an unprecedented global support system for the world's children. UNICEF relentlessly works day in and day out to deliver the essentials that give every child an equitable chance in life: health care and immunizations, safe water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more. UNICEF USA advances the global mission of UNICEF by rallying the American public to support the world's most vulnerable children. Together, we have helped save and meaningfully improve more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization. For more information, visit [unicefusa.org](https://unicefusa.org).