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CHILD IMPACT STATEMENTS

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

Child-Centered Governance Research-to-Policy Brief Series



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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, budgets, programs, or other government decisions may affect children and families, even when the primary issue is not focused on children. They can focus on specific groups of children or the broader child population within a community. Child impact statements can identify potential benefits and risks, suggest ways to enhance positive impacts and mitigate harms, and outline plans for monitoring impact over time, helping decision-makers prioritize the best interests of children. Modeled on established practices, such as environmental and fiscal impact statements, they may be used as a standalone process or integrated into existing decision-making tools. When routinely integrated into government decision-making, child impact statements help policymakers achieve their objectives while ensuring children remain central to policies, budgets, and other decisions that shape their lives.

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.[1,2]
- 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.[1,3] 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.[4] 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.[5] 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.[4]

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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 in government, not an administrative burden, requiring buy-in from policymakers and community leaders.[6]

Policy and Expectations: A review of effective usage of child impact statements points to the value of 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 statements 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.[6,7]

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.[7] 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, though not required, can strengthen the effectiveness of child impact statements.[7,8] 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.[8] As part of a government-led process, in practice, this can include using youth-friendly tools or structured consultations to gather input that informs the overall analysis.

Additional resources: A child-friendly Child Impact Statement Toolkit, developed by young people in partnership with UNICEF USA and Kids Impact Initiative, can support youth engagement in community decision-making.

Capacity and Support for Implementation: Child impact statements can be completed by a wide range of individuals within government or in collaboration with partners, but having the right resources and support in place enhances their effectiveness.[6] 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.[9]

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 tin the U.S. and around the world, including government-led process and child- and community-led approaches:

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.

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.

Colorado – Youth and Community-Led Child Impact Analysis: The Rocky Mountain Partnership, a cross-sectoral partnership of private sector, non-profits, and government entities and leaders, developed a community and economic impact assessment, drawing on child and youth impact statement approaches, 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 to educate voters on the impacts of the measure. Using this information, the measure passed with 57 percent of the vote and now raises $17.7 million annually. Success came after seven failed attempts over 22 years. 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.

To support implementation, cities can draw on resources such as the suite of tools available through Kids Impact Initiative, which are designed to support government-led child impact statement possesses here.

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WHAT TO EXPECT FROM UNICEF USA:

UNICEF USA partners with government leaders, youth and key stakeholders to advance child-centered governance-supporting communities to strengthen how decisions affecting children are made so that policies and systems consistently uphold children's rights and improve their well-being.

What's next: UNICEF USA will continue to roll out additional tools, guidance, research, and peer learning opportunities to support municipalities at different stages of their journey.

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: *Children's Budgets • Youth Councils • Child Impact Statements • Youth Ombuds Offices • Children's Cabinets*

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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.

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