CHILD-CENTERED GOVERNANCE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Purpose: This self-assessment supports local governments committed to strengthening local decision-making to improve outcomes for children and ensure young people have meaningful opportunities to participate.

Local governments may use the assessment to reflect and take stock of existing child-centered governance structures, understand how they function, and identify meaningful next steps aligned with your community's capacity, priorities and local context.

We encourage you to complete this assessment collaboratively with relevant government, youth, and community stakeholders to help drive collective action.

This document provides an overview of the full assessment so you can read through all of the questions in advance. **When you are ready to complete and submit the assessment, please use this online form.** Your responses will be sent both to your team and to UNICEF USA. Submitted assessments help inform ongoing resource development, identify emerging trends and promising practices across communities, and connect local leaders with relevant tools, peer learning opportunities, and future engagement opportunities aligned with your interests and priorities.

This assessment should be used alongside the accompanying Child-Centered Governance Functionality Scale, which provides definitions and illustrative examples to help cities reflect on how their governance structures are currently functioning in practice. The scale is referenced in Section 2 of this assessment. It is intended as a learning resource and reflection guide rather than a scored or validated assessment.

The scale includes three distinct dimensions—Core Functionality, Youth Participation, and Inclusion, which should be considered separately when assessing each structure.

For those just getting started, we encourage you to visit our website to learn more about how you can strengthen child-centered governance in your community.

Please note that this tool is currently in a beta phase. Feedback from early partners will directly inform refinements to the assessment and help shape future resources, engagement opportunities, and learning pathways for cities.

We appreciate your interest and look forward to learning from your community's experience!

1 CONTACT INFORMATION

Please provide contact information for the individual(s) who should serve as the primary focal point for UNICEF USA going forward.

Name:
City:
Title:
Organization/Department:
Email Address:

2 CHILD-CENTERED GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES: STATUS AND FUNCTIONALITY

Below are brief descriptions of the five governance structures that are components of child-centered governance. Establishing these structures is an important step, but how they function in practice makes all the difference.

To support reflection, UNICEF USA has developed a **Child-Centered Governance Functionality Scale.** The scale outlines different stages of development to support cities in assessing how well their existing child-centered governance structures are currently functioning and where there may be opportunities to strengthen them over time.

Using the scale, please assess each of your existing structures across three dimensions. These dimensions are assessed independently and may be at different stages of development for the same structure**:**

- **Core Functionality:** how well the structure is established, resourced, and influencing decisions, including how it is sustained over time.
- **Youth Participation:** the extent to which young people meaningfully shape the structure, whether through direct participation or other forms of engagement appropriate to the structure's purpose.
- **Inclusion:** how well children and young people of all backgrounds— including those furthest from opportunity—are intentionally considered and included.

Please read through the structure descriptions and review the functionality scale, then **check the box next to each structure that currently exists or is in development** in your community and:

1. Indicate whether it **exists or is in development**.
2. Note its **codification status** — whether it has a formal mandate (e.g., executive action, policy, resolution, ordinance, or other formal mechanism), or whether there are plans to codify it.
3. **Briefly describe the structure** and, for existing structures, where it falls on each of the three scale dimensions and why. Note that you do not need to meet every element within a stage to select it; choose the stage that best reflects overall practice. For structures still in development, describe the structure and your plans rather than placing it on the scale.

You may wish to reference any recent progress, existing barriers, or planned efforts to strengthen, improve, or adapt the structure over time. Where relevant, you can provide links to websites, data, or other publications.

☐Children's Budgets: The local or state government has a comprehensive understanding of public spending for children and provides visibility into child-related allocations within the local or state budget. This may include producing a public facing document demonstrating how funds are spent on children or highlighting child- and youth-related expenditures in the broader budget. The effort may be completed internally or carried out in collaboration with a nonprofit, research institution, or other external partner, but it must be owned or formally endorsed by the local or state government. This process may be completed annually or at other established intervals. Children's budgets are used to identify investment gaps, inform planning and resource allocation, and strengthen equitable investment in children over time.

Planned or Existing?

Codification Status:

Brief Description and Functionality Scale Assessment (if applicable):

☐Youth Ombuds Office: The local or state government has a designated, independent individual or office responsible for investigating complaints or emerging threats to the well-being of children. This office is empowered to receive and investigate complaints or concerns related to the child well-being, welfare, or access to services. This office may serve specific populations—such as youth in foster care, juvenile justice, or early childhood systems—and has the authority to enforce corrective action. The literature suggests that a broad mandate can strengthen an ombuds office's ability to identify and address systemic issues affecting children across government.

Planned or Existing?

Codification Status:

Brief Description and Functionality Scale Assessment (if applicable):

☐Child Impact Statement: The local or state government uses a formal or informal process to consider how a policy, budget decision, or other action may affect children and youth, even if the primary issue is not focused on children. This could be a child-focused question, checklist, form, or standard practice used by a legislative body, departments or decision-makers to assess potential impacts on child well-being. This process may be embedded within another decision-making process, such as an Equity Impact Assessment, provided it explicitly requires consideration of potential impacts on children and youth. The intent of Child Impact Statements is that they are routinely integrated into government decision-making and inform policies, budgets, and other actions affecting children and youth.

Planned or Existing?

Codification Status:

Brief Description and Functionality Scale Assessment (if applicable):

☐Youth Council: The local or state government provides a structured, ongoing opportunity for youth to engage with local government. This may take the form of a youth council, advisory board, youth commissions, or another formal body, regardless of what it is called. These groups may focus on educating youth about how local government works, gathering their perspectives on community issues, or offering input into local or state government programs, services, policies, legislation, or budgets. At a minimum, the group is convened by the local or state government and regularly connects young people to civic life and local leadership. Preliminary evidence suggests that these structures are most effective when youth have input on formal decision-making.

Planned or Existing?

Codification Status:

Brief Description and Functionality Scale Assessment (if applicable):

☐Children's Cabinet: The local or state government has an established group that brings together leaders from multiple departments or agencies that serve children and youth to coordinate planning, programs, or investments. This group is focused on improving services and outcomes for children and families through cross-departmental collaboration. While the group may also include community partners and/or youth, it is government-led or facilitated. Preliminary evidence suggests Children's Cabinets are strengthened when cross-government planning and decision making are informed by the perspectives of children and young people through appropriate participation mechanisms.

Planned or Existing?

Codification Status:

Brief Description and Functionality Scale Assessment (if applicable):

Child-centered governance structures are mutually reinforcing and can become stronger when they function together. For example, a youth council may use child impact statements to inform recommendations to the local legislature, or an ombuds' findings may help shape the priorities of a Children's Cabinet. These structures, however, may be at different stages of development and do not need to be implemented simultaneously to be effective.

Please describe whether and how your local government's existing child-centered governance structures are coordinated. Consider how information, insights, or decision-making authority flow across structures and where stronger alignment could improve impact.

3 ENABLING FACTORS

Building strong child-centered governance structures takes time, political will, and sustained infrastructure. This work does not exist in a vacuum. Understanding and reflecting on your community's local context—including priorities, leadership support, partnerships, and available data—can help clarify what is feasible now and what may be longer-term opportunities.

The questions below are intended to surface key enabling conditions that may support or constrain your local government's child-centered governance efforts. Your responses will help inform realistic next steps and potential pathways for support or partnership.

1. What are the most pressing issues currently affecting children and youth in your local government? How have these issues been identified (e.g., community input, data analysis, recent events)? Please share links to any publicly available data that has informed this.

2. To what extent have elected or senior local government leaders articulated children and youth as a priority for your community? Consider formal and informal expressions of support (e.g., public statements, resolutions, campaign priorities, or internal directives).

3. Does your local government have articulated goals, outcomes, or a shared vision for children and youth? That may be through a standalone plan, public agenda, or integration into a broader community-wide strategic plan or departmental strategies (e.g., sustainability, transportation, housing)? If so, briefly describe and share links to any publicly available resources.

4. Are there existing community-wide strategies, action plans, or initiatives focused on children and youth? If so, how coordinated are these efforts across departments or sectors?

5. What data or evidence does the local government regularly use to understand child and youth well-being? Is that data disaggregated (e.g., by age, race, ethnicity, income or geography) and is it shared publicly, such as through a dashboard or a State of the City's Children report?

6. How does the local government currently partner with community-based organizations, service providers, advocates, or other civil society actors on issues affecting children and youth? Describe the overall strength and nature of these relationships.

4 IDENTIFYING NEXT STEPS

The purpose of this self-assessment is not only to reflect on current practices, but also to help cities identify potential next steps. Based on your reflections above, please indicate whether there are particular child-centered governance structures your local government may be interested in adopting or strengthening over the next 1–3 years to clarify priorities and inform potential areas for support or partnership.

If helpful, you may also indicate:

- The **current stage of development** for the structure.
- The **stage your local government hopes to reach** over the next 1–3 years.

5 FEEDBACK ON THE TOOL

This assessment tool is currently in a **beta phase**. Feedback from early partners will directly inform improvements to both the tool and future engagement opportunities. Please share any feedback about:

- Clarity of the questions
- Usefulness of the functionality scale

- Any information that was difficult to provide
- Additional topics or tools that would be helpful for cities exploring child-centered governance

NEXT STEPS:

STAY CONNECTED

If you would like to receive updates about learning exchanges, research, and resources related to child-centered governance, we encourage you to sign up for UNICEF USA's Communities for Every Child newsletter here.

SUBMIT YOUR ASSESSMENT

We encourage communities to complete and submit your assessment using this online form. A copy of your responses will be shared with UNICEF USA. Completed assessments help us better understand local priorities, identify promising practices, and shape future resources and peer learning opportunities for communities working to advance child-centered governance.

By submitting the form, you are indicating that you are open to hearing from a member of the UNICEF USA team and to receiving targeted resources and opportunities that align with your interests and priorities.

QUESTIONS?

Please reach out to the UNICEF USA Municipal Partnerships team at cfci@unicefusa.org with any questions.