

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children An Action Brief for Cities, Counties, and States

This action brief is the next step in [Kids Impact Initiative's](#) work to support the U.S. children's advocacy field. It advances our chief goal of elevating and promoting action that holds policymakers more accountable for children's well-being.

[Our first report](#) identified multiple ways to strengthen accountability for how policies affect children at every level of government. Based on additional research and interviews, this action brief promotes an accountability strategy we believe is especially promising: child impact assessments.

Although used widely and successfully in other fields, child impact assessments have not yet been put to work in the U.S. to achieve shared goals for children. Our brief concludes this is an especially ripe time to increase their use in the U.S. And it provides examples of where they are being used along with tips for getting started.

Covid-19 Update

While most of the research and writing of this brief predates the coronavirus pandemic, its focus on accountability for children has taken on even greater urgency as governments develop pandemic recovery plans. Though it will be challenging for most governments to fully implement child impact assessments immediately, Phase I can be applied now. In fact, simple applications of impact assessments can keep kids' needs front and center as governments and institutions reinvent themselves during the recovery. See our [COVID-19 action memo](#) to get started.

“Poisoned water in Flint is an egregious example of how we disregard children and their promise. If kid-focused measures like child impact assessments had been in place, maybe our crisis could have been prevented.”

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha,
Flint pediatrician & whistleblower

What Is a Child Impact Assessment?

A child impact assessment is a data and analytic tool—combined with awareness-building, training, and a structured reporting process—that summarizes the potential effects on children's well-being of any proposed or existing law, policy, program, or practice. For example, if county officials are considering closing a public hospital, a child impact assessment can surface whether there are other pediatric facilities nearby where parents in the community can take their sick child. Or if a change is proposed in a city bus route, city officials would consider how the proposed new route affects students who use the bus to get to and from school and after-school activities.

Much like environmental impact assessments and fiscal impact assessments, child impact assessments apply to children a well-tested process used to advance priorities society considers important. Child impact assessments can focus policymakers' attention on shared goals for kids and analyze the implications of a proposal in relation to those goals.

To produce a child impact assessment, staff in government agencies or outside entities use a template to answer very basic questions which are designed to uncover the ways in which a proposal is good for children or could harm them. Child impact assessments can be used to guide decision-making at the city, county, state, or federal government levels—and by school boards and other public entities whose decisions have major impacts on kids' lives.



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For the complete action brief and resources for further information, visit www.kidsimpact.org.

 **kidsimpact**
ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

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What Have Child Impact Assessments Accomplished?

Examples from other countries and several U.S. communities paint a picture of how child impact assessments can improve the situation for children in the U.S. They can achieve the following:

- Enable better-informed government decision-making, resulting in choices that support children’s healthy development and a more effective use of tax dollars;
- Shift our culture so children become a higher priority and are routinely considered when important policy decisions are made; and
- Help leaders outside of government keep a spotlight on kids’ needs and hold policymakers accountable.



When parents make decisions, such as changing jobs or buying a home, they ask themselves, ‘Is this good for our children?’ Through child impact assessments, public officials can do the same thing. They should always be asking, ‘Is it good for our children?’”

Dana Bunnett, Director,
Kids in Common, Santa Clara, California



Child Impact Assessments - Missing Piece in a Broad Strategy for Kids

Child impact assessments have the greatest positive impact when part of a broader, integrated strategy that also includes the following:

- A widely-embraced, clear agenda for children—whether expressed as goals, rights, or commitments;
- A children’s budget analyzing how government funds are spent in relation to kids’ needs;
- A structure in government responsible for promoting kids’ well-being—whether a children’s commissioner, children’s ombudsman/advocate, or children’s cabinet;
- Independent advocacy and oversight through nonprofit organizations and/or independent commissions; and
- Regular reports to the public that are easy to find and understand.

When this missing piece is added to the mix, it can increase the impact of these existing structures and activities and even inspire adding effective new ones. (See Case Study: Santa Clara, County, California, in the action brief.) [\[link\]](#)

How to Get Started Using Child Impact Assessments

The full action brief describes step-by-step how to develop, implement, and use child impact assessments. It lays out three main approaches:

- **Government Leads:** A government entity at the city, county, state, or federal level decides to conduct child impact assessments. Elected officials include them in the city or county charter or other laws that shape government operations. (See Case Study: Shelby County/Memphis, Tennessee, and Case Study: Santa Clara County, California, in the action brief.) [\[link\]](#)
- **Independent/Quasi-Independent Entity Leads:** An official entity focused on children, such as a children’s commissioner, ombudsman, or advocate leads and implements a child impact assessment initiative. This model can also be led by a philanthropic organization or consortium of nongovernmental entities, working in partnership with government. (See Case Study: Shelby County/Memphis, Tennessee, and Case Study: Santa Clara County, California, in the action brief.) [\[link\]](#)
- **Outside Advocate Leads:** Nonprofit child advocacy organizations lead and work with their legislature, council, or executive branch of government. Alternatively, advocates can conduct independent child impact assessments as a way to build awareness among stakeholders and policymakers and lay groundwork for future incorporation by government.

SUMMARY CHECKLIST: Key Ingredients for Success Using Child Impact Assessments



✓ STRATEGY

Be part of a broad strategy to make sure children can reach their full potential.

✓ SUPPORT

Have a diverse base of support across sectors.

✓ DECISION-MAKING

Be hard-wired into decision-making.

✓ YOUTH INPUT

Include youth input and independent oversight.

✓ EQUITY

Make equity a priority.

✓ RESOURCES

Ensure adequate staff, resources, and ongoing technical support.

✓ REPORTING

Report regularly and transparently to decision-makers and the public.

✓ IMPROVEMENT

Build in evaluation & continuous improvement.

IMPACT

Leadership to Make Child Impacts a Focus in the U.S.

Virtually every sector of society has an important role to play in asking this core question of all key policy decisions: “Is it good for our children?” The action brief describes specific roles for each of the following groups to spread the use of child impact assessments—along with a starter list of specific networks and organizations that are well-positioned to accelerate this work and share lessons learned:

- Government;
- Philanthropy;
- Youth;
- Parents and other adults;
- Business;
- Media;
- School boards and other public boards whose decisions affect children;
- Advocacy organizations and independent commissions; and
- Children’s cabinets and ombudsmen/advocates.



Philanthropy is uniquely positioned to bring government and community partners together to plan how to provide answers about child impacts. As child impact assessments are implemented, philanthropy can continue to serve as a neutral convener and also provide financial support to ensure governments, independent/quasi-independent entities, and child advocacy organizations have the capacity to do a good job.

LOOKING AHEAD

As a country, we measure and are accountable for what we consider important, including the strength of our economy, our military, and our environmental protections. We now have the know-how to do the same for our children. Child impact assessments are a powerful place to start.

By adopting accountability measures such as these, we believe it can become a reality that policymakers routinely consider what’s best for children when they make decisions. Kids Impact Initiative stands ready to be a thought partner and resource in the work ahead.