# YOUTH IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:
## Putting Kids Front and Center in Policy Decisions

**kidsimpact**
ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

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## What is a youth impact assessment?

A youth impact assessment (YIA) is a strategy to prioritize the consideration of children's needs when elected and government officials make policy decisions.

- It is a structured set of questions designed to uncover both the expected and unintended consequences of a proposed policy, program, or practice on kids.

- It provides a methodical and consistent way for policymakers to understand the effects of a proposed policy on young people and to incorporate the results of the YIA into their decision-making.

- Youth impact assessments and child impact assessments refer to the same strategy but may be labeled to best suit individual communities.

## Why youth impact assessments?

Children are affected by nearly every policy decision elected officials and staff in government make. But these impacts on children are rarely considered. Impact assessments are a time-tested tool to achieve a variety of goals:

- Ensure children's needs are taken into account when policy decisions are made;

- Hold policymakers accountable for kids' well-being; and

- Highlight and address racial inequities facing young people in proposed policies.

> *"Ten years ago, kids' issues were sidelined. Now, children come up on every issue our (county) board considers. Since using impact assessments, what's good for children has become part of our culture."*
>
> Staff, Office of Supervisor Cortese, Santa Clara County, California

## What difference have youth impact assessments made?

Impact assessments focused on youth have had promising results in other countries, although—except for Santa Clara County, California, where they have been used for ten years—they have rarely been used in the U.S. Results from similar strategies, like environmental and health impact assessments, also show how YIAs could benefit kids in the U.S. For example:

- As the province of New Brunswick, Canada considered where to locate a new center for children with complex needs, an impact assessment resulted in changing the location first proposed to one nearer to where the children in need and their families lived.

- An impact assessment of the consequences of increasing funds for alternative programs to prison in Wisconsin found that the added funding would likely reduce crime, strengthen families, and improve public health across the state. As a result of the assessment, the state increased the number of prison alternative programs from 7 to 34, with bi-partisan support.

> *"We have been able to show government staff how these assessments help staff do their job better. Once people in agencies see how these assessments can save time, embarrassment, and money, and be better for children, they want to incorporate them into their work."*
>
> Staff of New Zealand Office of the Children's Commissioner

- In San Francisco, California, an impact assessment of a plan to demolish a 360-unit rent-controlled apartment complex found that the demolition would harm children and their families in multiple ways. As a result of the assessment, the proposal was revised and instead called for replacing the units, continuing leases for existing tenants, and other enhancements.

## What policies are best suited for youth impact assessments?

Youth impact assessments can focus on policies in any priority area—whether housing, education, environment, broadband, health, community planning, transportation, or social services. Or they can be used for most decisions elected officials make. Youth impact assessments can be applied at any level of government—school district, city, county, state, federal, and others.

## What information do youth impact assessments collect?

The questions in a YIA identify the positive and negative impacts of a proposed policy on children and youth as well as actions needed to minimize harm from the proposal on kids. They also identify how a proposal could disproportionately affect certain groups of young people, such as children of color, children in low-income families, children with disabilities, LGBTQ+ youth, children living in rural areas, and children in foster care. This template provides an example of questions to include.

## How can youth impact assessments help advance racial equity?

By asking specific questions about a proposed policy's impact on children of color and their families and on the underlying structures that define their day-to-day lives, YIAs can spotlight how a proposal disproportionately affects children and youth of color and point to appropriate corrective actions.

## Who should conduct youth impact assessments?

Youth impact assessments that are authorized and directed by elected or government officials have a more official status as well as government leadership buy-in. The analysis can be conducted by a research or budget office within government with input from leaders in affected communities, including youth, themselves. Well-respected independent entities, like a university or community foundation, can also perform the analysis. This Decisions Roadmap takes you step by step through designing a YIA.

## How to get started?

1. Follow the steps in Using Child Impact Assessments in Your Community or State: A Starter Guide with relevant organizations, coalitions, and youth.

2. Work with one or more elected or government officials who have decision-making authority to authorize YIAs and champion their use.

3. Activate your coalition to help design the initiative and make sure the findings are used.

## For Further Information

Report: Child Impact Assessments—A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children

Child Impact Assessments (CIAs): Sample Tools

Contact Kids Impact Initiative at info@kidsimpact.org

## Kids Impact Initiative

www.kidsimpact.org