

Helping Elected Officials Improve the Lives of Children & Youth

The Opportunity

Youth Impact Assessments (YIAs)—much like environmental and fiscal impact assessments—offer a fresh strategy to assess the effects of proposed policies on young people and begin to improve local conditions for kids. Children are affected by nearly every policy decision, but they are rarely considered when government officials make those decisions. By answering a structured set of questions, YIAs* provide essential data and evidence so elected and other government officials can understand—before they take action—how proposed policies affect the lives of the children and youth they represent.

As an elected official, you can benefit from using youth impact assessments in three ways:

1. Better understand and be more connected to the children and families you serve;
2. Ensure you have the information you need to improve daily life for families in your community, especially those who struggle most; and
3. Listen to and work with youth most affected by policy proposals to center their lived experience and use it to inform your decisions.

This fact sheet outlines how elected and other government officials can start using YIAs and provides examples of places using them today.

* We use the term youth impact assessment in this fact sheet, but similar terms—including child impact assessment and child impact statement—are sometimes used to mean the same thing.

“We’ve made huge strides in valuing children. Ten years ago, kids’ issues were sidelined. Now, children come up on every issue our board considers. Now, what’s good for children is part of our culture in everything we do. It’s now normal.”

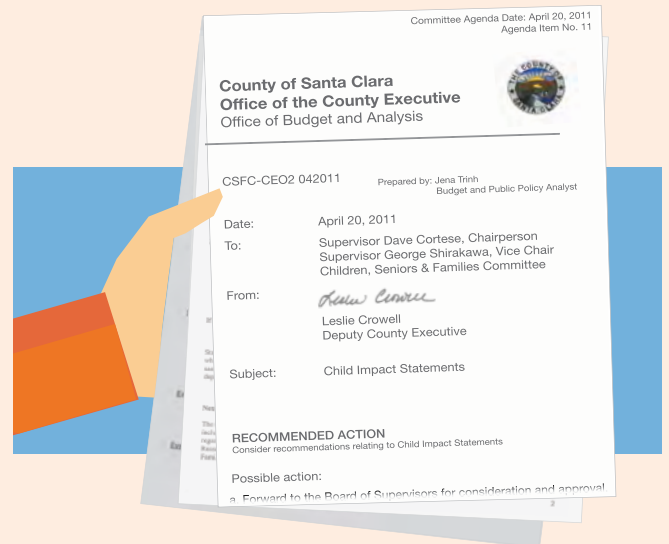
Staff, Office of Santa Clara County
Supervisor Cortese

YIAs IN ACTION

Officials in Santa Clara County, California Champion Use of YIAs

Santa Clara County, California, provides a strong example of how a county elected official initiated the use of what they call child impact statements and built support for requiring them. Established by the [County Board of Supervisors in 2011](#) and based on a motion by then-County Commissioner Cortese, child impact statements are still used today. Stakeholders in the county have noted that child impact statements resulted in greater attention to the needs of children and a shift in the culture of decision-making toward considering young people when any proposal is reviewed.

Importantly, other child-focused elements already in place in Santa Clara County helped pave the way for the implementation of child impact statements and reinforce their use. These include a county child bill of rights, an annual data report on children, and a children’s policy agenda. Child impact statements, in turn, helped spur the use of an additional tool: a children’s budget.



More About Youth Impact Assessments

Like environmental, fiscal, and racial equity impact assessments, YIAs use a [structured set of questions](#) to identify both the benefits and potential harms of a proposed policy, program, or practice on young people. They provide valuable data and evidence for policymakers as they work to address the needs of children and youth.

Youth impact assessments are especially useful in analyzing proposals that policymakers may not think affect youth but, in fact, impact their lives every day—like those related to transportation, housing, and parks.

History of Impact Assessments for Children and Youth

While fairly new in the U.S., for many years government entities across [Europe](#), [Canada](#), and other parts of the world have been implementing similar assessments—often called child rights impact assessments (CRIAs). They have become a routine part of government officials’ efforts to uphold the rights of children and youth when making decisions.

In the U.S., two government entities have used YIAs: 1) Santa Clara County, California, where they were introduced about ten years ago and are still in use today; and 2) Shelby County and the city of Memphis, Tennessee, which used them for a few years but no longer do.

More recently, led by nonprofit organizations across the U.S., several local communities that are part of the [StriveTogether](#) network have begun to use YIAs.

“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

Why Youth Impact Assessments?

Not only do YIAs lift up otherwise hidden implications of a proposed policy, but they also help create a culture within government to consistently consider children and youth in decision-making. This attention, in turn, can result in making communities work better for kids and families—especially at this time when so many continue to suffer from the consequences of the pandemic.

Youth impact assessments can be particularly helpful to government officials in understanding impacts on groups of young people who may be disproportionately affected, such as youth of color and other marginalized populations. YIAs’ value is greatest when used in conjunction with other strategies focused on prioritizing young people—such as children’s policy agendas, youth councils, children’s budgets, and children’s bills of rights.

Incorporating YIAs into Government Operations

Government entities are especially well suited to initiate and carry out impact assessments. They are accustomed to conducting similar analyses—such as health, environmental, racial equity, and other impact assessments. Plus, elected and other government officials are more likely to trust and use work that is done “in house.” And YIAs’ adoption by governments can ensure young people’s interests continue to be front and center, despite shifting priorities associated with new elections and government staffing changes.



How to Get Started Using Impact Assessments

1. Authorize the use of YIAs.

A mayor, a member of a city council or county board, or a local government administrative officer can initiate use of impact assessments by passing legislation or a resolution or by executive action. A state legislature or governor also can require the use of YIAs. Similarly, at the federal level, the President or Congress can require their use.

2. Design the process for implementing YIAs within government.

- **Decide when to use YIAs.** Impact assessments can be applied to every proposed policy or used more selectively, for example, by a particular agency or in a high-priority policy area. It might make sense to start with a more targeted use of YIAs to build a successful process for using them and to learn what resources are needed for wider application. You can get a jump start and leverage existing resources if you add a few questions related to young people to the questions you already ask in other assessments—whether racial equity impact assessments, or fiscal, health, or environmental impact assessments.
- **Decide where YIAs should “live” within government.** Consider first where policy research is already being conducted—for example, a legislative analyst’s office, a youth council, or an equity office. In some cases, it might make sense to create a new office—for example, a Commissioner for Children and Youth.
- **Provide sufficient staffing resources.** This includes dedicated staff to coordinate the process, conduct research, and write and distribute the YIAs. Staff responsible for YIAs will need access to training and relevant data sources, especially data that shed light on disparities in impacts on youth by race, income, or other factors.
- **Create a consistent process for conducting YIAs.** This includes the use of standardized questions, methods to gather community input—especially from youth—and systematic ways to share the findings with relevant decision-makers and the public.



YIAs IN ACTION

Government Officials in Scotland Use YIAs as They Consider All Policies

Scotland has used child rights impact assessments (CRIAs) to identify the impact of proposed policies on children and youth since 2005. The office of Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People supports government officials as they develop CRIAs. In addition, Scotland requires the engagement of youth in developing CRIAs.

In 2014, Scotland’s Parliament, the Commissioner, and other stakeholders made it a priority to use impact assessments, and—through legislation—Scotland updated the model to address both the rights and well-being of children, calling them “child rights and wellbeing impact assessments” (CRWIAs). The Scottish Government is committed to do CRWIAs whenever they put forward a piece of legislation or significant policy change, addressing a wide range of issues. For example, there have been several recent [CRWIAs on the impact of COVID-19-related policies](#) on children and youth.

While the use of CRWIAs has been voluntary, Scottish policymakers are working to make their use a requirement—a change expected to take effect by the end of 2022. The Scottish government provides [guidance and support](#) to government agencies implementing CRWIAs and publishes CRWIAs [online](#) so the public can view them on a regular basis. Recently, the Commissioner’s office published a [youth-informed guide](#) to support young people in this effort.



3. Engage youth in developing YIAs right from the start.

Young people—particularly those most affected by the proposed policies—provide a vital voice to inform YIAs because they understand their own needs and environments best. Elected and government officials in many communities are looking for authentic ways to give youth a voice in civic matters. Incorporating young people’s feedback to help inform real-time policy decisions is a powerful way to give youth councils and other youth engagement efforts a meaningful role. See [Youth Engagement: A Key Ingredient for Effective Youth Impact Assessments](#) for additional ways to incorporate youth input in YIAs.

4. Put the YIA to use in the most effective way.

One way is to have the analyses accompany legislative proposals and to provide sufficient time for policymakers to review them before acting on policy proposals. Choosing the most suitable format for presenting YIA findings will make them most useful. In some cases, a two-page summary is most effective; in other cases, a longer, well-designed analysis may be most helpful to the relevant decision-makers.

In Closing

Youth impact assessments offer a fresh approach to helping decision-makers improve conditions for young people by putting their interests front and center. Impact assessments also enable elected and government officials to be better informed and more connected with the children and families they represent.

For Further Information

[Youth Impact Assessments: Putting Kids Front and Center in Policy Decisions](#)

[Using Child Impact Assessments in Your Community or State: A Starter Guide](#)

[YIA Tools for Local Communities & States](#)

Contact Kids Impact Initiative at info@kidsimpact.org

“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

Kids Impact Initiative

www.kidsimpact.org

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