

Putting Kids Front and Center in Policy Decisions

What is a youth impact assessment?

A youth impact assessment—much like a health, environmental, and racial equity impact assessment—identifies the expected and unintended consequences for youth of a proposed policy, program, or practice. Youth impact assessments (YIAs) provide a methodical way for policymakers and community leaders to understand proposals' effects on young people. Policymakers can then incorporate the results of impact assessments into their decision-making.

A youth impact assessment consists of a short set of questions whose answers are provided by nonprofits or government using publicly available data. Impact assessments can be carried out at any level of government—city, county, school district, state, federal, and others. Ideally, youth impact assessments are carried out routinely on proposed new policies. Sometimes, community leaders try out their use on a small scale before urging government officials to conduct them consistently.

The value of youth impact assessments is greatest when used in conjunction with other strategies that prioritize young people—such as children's policy agendas, youth councils, children's budgets, and children's bills of rights.

“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

Why youth impact assessments?

Children and youth are affected by nearly every policy decision. Yet, the consequences for young people are rarely considered. Youth impact assessments can change this. They:

- Give decision-makers information to best meet the needs of their youngest constituents.
- Create a culture within government to consistently consider children and youth in decision-making.
- Help policymakers address racial inequities facing young people.
- Provide an avenue for youth to have a meaningful voice in policies that affect them.

What questions do youth impact assessments answer?

YIAs answer the following [questions](#):

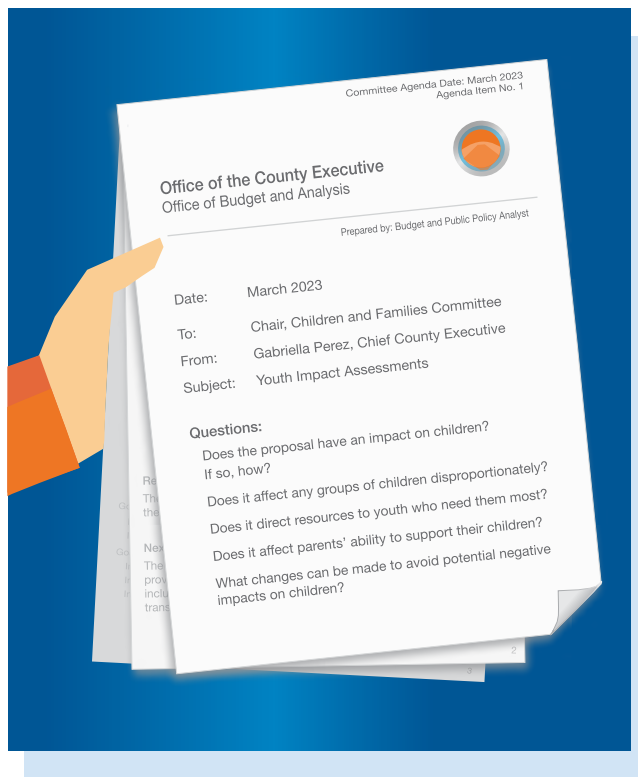
1. Is the proposed policy or program good or bad for children and youth?
2. What will be the impact of the proposal on young people?
3. What will be the impact of the proposal on children of color and other groups of marginalized youth?
4. What do young people think about how the proposed policy will affect their lives?
5. How can the proposal be modified to support young people's well-being?

The appropriate length of assessments depends on the audience. For example, in certain communities, decision-makers may prefer short responses to a [few key questions](#). In other communities, decision-makers may want a more [in-depth analysis](#) to inform their actions.

Who should conduct youth impact assessments?

Youth impact assessments work best when they are authorized and implemented by [elected or other government officials](#). Officials are more inclined to trust and buy into analyses they have asked for and that their staff have produced. As a result, they are more likely to use the findings as they make policy choices. In addition, government entities tend to have staff performing similar analyses—typically in an existing research or budget office.

Community-based and other nonprofit organizations also have critical roles to play. The examples in this fact sheet include how two community-based organizations successfully piloted the use of YIAs. Performing impact assessments outside government—whether by a nonprofit organization, foundation, or university—can be the first step toward working with government officials to implement them within government.



What policies are best suited for youth impact assessments?

- Youth impact assessments are especially valuable in analyzing proposals that policymakers may not think affect youth but, in fact, affect their lives every day. Examples include decisions related to transportation, housing, parks, broadband, and the environment.
- Impact assessments are also helpful in determining whether proposals meant to improve kids' lives actually meet the most urgent needs—for example, ensuring that youth of color are well served by the proposal.

How can youth impact assessments help advance racial equity?

By answering specific questions about a proposed policy's impact on children of color, YIAs can help decision-makers address disparities in children's well-being as they consider new policies. And with more communities now carrying out [racial equity impact assessments](#) (REIAs), there is an opportunity to include a few questions focused on young people and inform better policymaking as a result.

How can youth impact assessments promote youth engagement?

Increasingly, communities recognize the value of involving young people in decisions that affect their lives. And they are looking for meaningful ways to do so. [Every impact assessment](#) should include feedback from youth. Youth impact assessments can be a particularly meaningful activity for local youth councils and other youth groups focused on making a difference for themselves and their communities.

In addition, with training and support, young people can conduct their own impact assessments of policies or programs they care most about. They then can share their assessments, including their recommendations, with decision-makers.

Youth impact assessments making a difference



YIAs in Santa Clara County, California Focus Decision-Making on Kids

Impact assessments for children and youth have been used in [Santa Clara County](#) for more than a decade. Called child impact statements, they were established in 2011 when one member of the county board of supervisors got support from the board for a [resolution](#) to begin using them. Now, an impact assessment is completed on every proposal a county agency sends to the county board. The use of youth impact assessments—alongside a children’s agenda, a children’s bill of rights, and a children’s budget—has resulted in a culture change in county government to consistently focus on the needs of children in decision-making.



YIA Helps Pass New Funding for Under-Resourced School District in Colorado

Rocky Mountain Partnership (RMP)—a local organization in the metropolitan area north of Denver, Colorado—developed a youth impact assessment in-house to help pass a November 2022 ballot measure to fund one of the most under-resourced school districts in the state. The creation of a youth-focused coalition was also critical to the effort. The data and information collected for the impact assessment provided the [talking points](#) for youth and community members to educate their community about the measure. As a result of these and related efforts, the measure passed with 57 percent of the vote—raising \$17.7 million annually. This success came after seven unsuccessful attempts over a 22-year period to pass a similar tax to support local schools.



Leaders in Fresno, California Use YIA to Incorporate Views of Young People in Digital Equity Reforms

In 2022, Fresno’s Coalition for Digital Inclusion (FCDI)—facilitated by the nonprofit organization Fresno Cradle to Career (C2C)—conducted a [youth impact assessment](#) to help advance its work to promote digital equity and literacy. The impact assessment analyzed Fresno C2C’s own proposal to use American Rescue Plan funding for these purposes. The impact assessment showed that the proposal would have a significant positive effect for local youth—especially low-income youth of color and their families. In addition, it uncovered the need to better understand from young people the challenges they face regarding technology. In response, Fresno C2C conducted a survey of more than 900 12- to 17-year-olds countywide. The results, available in both [Spanish](#) and [English](#), are the basis for the [changes](#) FCDI is promoting to achieve digital equity.

“The youth impact assessment served as a catalyst for change, enabling our Civic Influencers and Community Coalition to craft a compelling narrative that resonated with voters. The Coalition used the impact assessment to amplify the voices of young people and families and successfully persuaded voters to pass a school funding measure that had faced defeat seven previous times. This remarkable victory will infuse tens of millions of dollars each year into one of Colorado’s most underserved school districts.”

Lisandra Gonzales
CEO, Rocky Mountain Partnership

For other examples of youth impact assessments making a difference, please visit [Impact Assessments in Action](#).

How to get started

- ▶ Use this [checklist](#) to plan how you will use a youth impact statement.
- ▶ Identify and recruit partner organizations to design and advocate for using YIAs.
- ▶ Decide whether government or an outside organization will complete the assessment.

The resources in [Tools to Get Started](#) can help as you move ahead.

For further information

[Youth Impact Assessments](#)

Contact Kids Impact Initiative at info@kidsimpact.org



“The youth impact assessment we completed in Fresno highlighted internet access and digital literacy needs and challenges and provided our leaders the specificity needed to understand how current policies and practices are affecting kids.”

Linda Gleason, Executive Director,
Fresno Cradle to Career Partnership

Kids Impact Initiative

www.kidsimpact.org

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