Playing Our Part: The Role of Funders in Financing Children's Services

Over the past decade, the sustainability of services and supports for vulnerable children and families in cities and counties nationwide has been challenged by the uncertainty of state and federal grants. Localities are increasingly shouldering the task of ensuring sufficient, well-manage, and sustainable financial support for critical children’s programs and services. Local philanthropists are well-positioned to supply the “glue” that deepens and improves existing services for vulnerable children and families and to incubate innovative new, local approaches. They should not, however, be expected to fund direct services on the ground singlehandedly. This is where locally generated dedicated children’s funds can reinforce philanthropic investments.

The Children’s Funding Project was established to track, document and provide technical assistance to communities employing strategies to more effectively leverage and manage existing local funding sources or to generate new revenues. Through this work the organization has identified four levers that lead to success in sustaining local children’s funding. Below are action steps that funders can take to support localities in pulling each of these key levers.

How can funders most effectively support comprehensive financing of children’s services?

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<th>Lever</th>
<th>How funders can help</th>
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<tr>
<td>FIND</td>
<td>Commission a fiscal map to identify and clarify existing public and private funds and their purpose. Convene a budget-holders advisory group to conduct a fiscal map for coordinated decision-making.</td>
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<td>ALIGN</td>
<td>Commission the development of a strategic financing plan (guided by the fiscal map) to fill gaps and eliminate redundancies. Convene partnership meetings to align programs and funding and create a master plan for children and youth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>GENERATE</td>
<td>Fund the coalition-building, polling, messaging, and public education required to successfully establish a local dedicated children’s fund via ballot measure. Convene other funders to support a collective approach to establishing a local dedicated children’s fund.</td>
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<td>ACTIVATE</td>
<td>Support continuous quality improvement efforts to ensure program outcomes. Commission evaluations to study the effectiveness of public investments.</td>
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Learn more about supporting new locally generated funds on the ip side of this page!
GENERATE: At the forefront of localities effectively leveraging local children’s funding are jurisdictions that are making the case directly to the voters for generating new funds. Cities and counties across the nation are asking voters to pass ballot initiatives that levy taxes to create dedicated local children’s funds. A dedicated fund is a pool of funds obtained by the government that is intentionally set up to provide funding for a specific purpose; our focus is on funds set up to benefit youth services and programs. These funds provide stable, long-term investments in building strong infrastructure to support children and youth.

Potential for Success

Locally-generated children’s funds have immense potential to provide stable and sus...o children’s programs. Everyone – local funders, policymakers, providers and the public – plays a role in incubating the success of campaigns to establish such a fund, and the payout can be tremendous.

Local Funder Spotlight: Community Foundation of Broward County

If you are a local private philanthropist, it is important to understand the legalities, regulations and limitations as w...on investment inherent in supporting a children’s fund. The Community Foundation of Broward County (Florida) played a critical role in leveraging philanthropic dollars to support the development of a local dedicated children’s fund.

A public children’s fund affords local philanthropists the opportunity to leverage innovative efforts and invest their dollars into system-, evidence- and capacity-building rather than paying for direct services year after year. After decades of more traditional grant-making, the Community Foundation of Broward County grew increasingly interested in investing more of their dollars into sustainable, capacity-building efforts that would close the growing gap between kids from wealthy and low-income families.

To make this shift in how its dollars were used, the Community Foundation recognized it had to invest in supporting the children’s fund via ballot measure. While foundations cannot earmark grants to directly influence ballot measures, they can pursue a range of activities that support intermediaries and backbone organizations in their efforts to mobilize public will around support for children’s programs and provide nonpartisan education to the public on key issues. Additionally, the Foundation’s board voted to change its by-laws so that they could more actively engage in building the case for reauthorization of the Children’s Services Council tax levy, which would generate $70 million annually for Broward County kids.

This ballot initiative received over 76 percent voter support for the locally-controlled, dedicated children’s fund. As a result of this funding effort 150,000 kids receive services and supports to be healthier and more socially connected, and the broader community is equipped with advocacy strategies that are aligned with a forward-thinking investment approach and community-wide vision for Broward County children and youth.

The Children’s Funding Project is a social impact organization that uses strategic financing to close equity and opportunity gaps for children. We provide research, coaching, and facilitation to state and local leaders on leveraging existing funding, generating new revenue, and administering funds. We believe that all children deserve a stake in the budget: what gets budgeted, gets done. Founded in 2018 by Elizabeth Gaines, one of the country’s leading experts on child and youth financing, the Children’s Funding Project is a non-profit based in Washington, DC.

Interested in championing the development of a dedicated local children’s fund in your community? Contact Elizabeth Gaines at Elizabeth@childrensfundingproject.org

https://www.childrensfundingproject.org | @FundOurKids

October 2019