What Is a Voter-Approved Children's Fund?

A voter-approved children's fund refers to local public revenue that is dedicated to children's services in an election by the voters. These types of funds also are called

- local dedicated funds,
- Children's Services Councils (in Florida),
- Children's Services Funds (in Missouri),
- Strong Start (San Miguel County, CO) or Right Start (Summit County, CO),
- Best Starts for Kids (King County, WA),
- Early Childhood Millage (in Kent County, MI), or
- simply children's funds.

These funds support a variety of programs and services for children and youth including

- prenatal and infant health and development services;
- child care and early education programs;
- after-school and summer programs;
- youth mentorship, leadership, and career supports;
- mental health, behavioral health, and wellness support; and
- other programs and services typically provided outside of core school-day hours.

Voter-approved children's funds do not support the general operating budget for K-12 public schools since school districts typically receive funding from other designated local, state, and federal sources.

What Types of Public Revenue Do Voter-Approved Children's Funds Use?

Communities can support a voter-approved children's fund with

- sales taxes,
- property taxes,
- income taxes or taxes on high-income earners,
- hotel/lodging taxes,
- marijuana taxes,
- other taxes, and
- by setting aside existing revenue from a locality's general fund.

Who Creates These Children's Funds?

Establishing a children's fund requires a broad coalition with representatives from the groups below:

- advocates, including parents and other advocates for children and youth;
- business leaders, including small business owners;
- intermediaries, such as existing nonprofit hubs, early childhood collaboratives, and organizations that support direct-service providers;
- local funders, including foundations or other philanthropic groups; and
- policymakers, such as mayors, county commissioners, school board members, and other elected and appointed government officials.
Why Are Voter-Approved Children’s Funds Important Options to Pay for Programs and Services for Children and Youth?

**They’re local**: Federal and state funding is crucial to support programs and services for kids but currently isn’t meeting the specific needs of many communities. By contrast, communities can tailor the local funding from a voter-approved children’s fund to respond to its specific needs and support critical services while also providing flexibility for innovation.

**They’re dedicated**: When voters approve a children’s fund they elect to dedicate revenue for a specific purpose (in this case children and youth), which provides sustained funding that cannot be cut or reassigned to another use. This allows children’s funds to focus on long-term impacts and to build a resilient and diverse network of programs and providers.

**They’re public**: Because these funds are created from public dollars by voters, voter-approved children’s funds are accountable to the people who live and work in the community. They have a layer of transparency and accountability that builds public awareness and support. No fund that has returned to the ballot for reauthorization has failed to achieve renewal.

How Common Are Voter-Approved Children’s Funds?

There are nearly 50 voter-approved children’s funds nationwide, located in diverse communities around the country. Together, these funds raised $1.21 billion in 2021. Explore them all in our interactive map at childrensfundingproject.org/local-dedicated-funds.

How Has Local Dedicated Funding for Children and Youth Evolved Over Time?

1946: Pinellas County, FL, establishes the first children’s fund in the country.

1986: Florida’s Juvenile Welfare Services Act gives every county in the state the ability to create its own voter-approved children’s fund.


1991: California creates its first fund in San Francisco.

1993: Missouri passes the Community Children’s Services Tax, allowing counties to pass a voter-approved property tax for kids.

2000–2015: Cities and counties across the country create 19 new voter-approved children’s funds.

2016–2022: Cities and counties across the country create 18 new voter-approved children’s funds.

How Can My Community Establish a Voter-Approved Children’s Fund?

Creating a voter-approved children’s fund takes 12–24 months of planning, coalition building, coordinated decision-making, and campaigning. The process includes six critical steps:

1. **Start with a Strong Foundation**: Set communitywide goals for kids and identify the amount of revenue you will need.

2. **Chart Your Course**: Determine the fund’s purpose and identify a pathway to the ballot.

3. **Build and Engage Your Coalition**: Build a diverse coalition of advocates, policymakers, local funders, business leaders, and intermediaries.

4. **Craft Your Ballot Measure**: Plan how your community will allocate and administer the money.

5. **Build a Strong Campaign Infrastructure**: Fundraise and hire a team.

6. **Communicate with the Public and Engage Voters**: Develop effective messages and get out the vote!

For more information about how we can help your community create a voter-approved children’s fund contact us at childrensfundingproject.org/contact-us or e-mail Allie Farrell, partnerships coordinator, at allie@childrensfundingproject.org.