

Prenatal-to-Three County Leader Toolkit



**The National Collaborative
for Infants & Toddlers**



PRENATAL-TO-THREE COUNTY LEADER TOOLKIT

Investing in the development of children from the prenatal phase to age three (PN-3) is critical to the healthy development of our youngest children and sets the foundation for the economic, social and educational growth of a county. This toolkit contains resources and strategies to build awareness, demonstrate commitment and bolster supports for infants and toddlers at the county level and includes the following components:

- **Community Engagement Tips:** These tips lay the groundwork for building a diverse PN-3 network of advocates across industries to amplify PN-3 issues and create a groundswell of support.
- **Building Awareness Talking Points:** This resource helps guide county officials when speaking to elected officials, media, influential community members and other key advocates in the county when building a case to support PN-3 initiatives.
- **Next Steps Talking Points:** As PN-3 leaders begin to lead efforts and implement policies, programs or initiatives, counties can use these talking points to guide conversations with local media, other elected officials and community members to describe the significance of PN-3 support and highlight opportunities for next steps.
- **Open Letter:** This letter encourages influential community members and key advocates to vocalize their support of PN-3 programs and policies. To demonstrate local support of PN-3 solutions, this letter can be shared with influential organizations and customized to include relevant countywide data and signatures from supporters throughout the county.
- **Press Release Template:** At critical benchmarks for county PN-3 announcements, counties can use this template to share the news with the local media to demonstrate backing and momentum for advancing and strengthening local policies and programs that support the healthy development of infants and toddlers.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TIPS TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR PN-3 SOLUTIONS

Successful county PN-3 efforts help communities create better education, health, social and economic outcomes that increase revenue and reduce the need for costly, less effective interventions later in life. These tips guide counties in rallying a diverse network of advocates who can help to build local support for PN-3 policies and amplify the early childhood needs of the county.

1. Identify Key Stakeholders and Influencers

Early childhood development affects all residents. Everyone has an important role to play in advancing policies, programs and systems that better support infants, toddlers and their families. Consider engaging the following community stakeholders to leverage local networks and boost support for PN-3 issues:

- Health Professionals
- Faith Leaders
- Educators (including Special Education Professionals)
- Law Enforcement Officials
- Corporate & Business Professionals
- Parents & Caregivers
- Child Care/After School & Out of School Professionals
- Mental Health & Social Service Professionals
- Philanthropic Community

As you begin to assemble a network of engaged county leaders, consider reconvening these key stakeholders to identify ways in which your community can make an impact on infants and toddlers. For more information on how county leaders can support the needs of infants, toddlers and their families please visit The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) website at www.thencit.org.

2. Know Your Issues

Stay informed of local, state and national trends in early childhood development. Counties can work with their state and local agencies to identify and use data to build their case. For more information and helpful research on how you can make the case for infants and toddlers, please visit The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) website at www.thencit.org/make-the-case.

3. Develop Outreach Strategies

Once you have identified key influencers and stakeholders, develop dedicated engagement strategies and tailor them to each audience. Prioritize outreach activities and encourage project leads to build in planning for marketing engagement across all PN-3 efforts to generate and increase interest. To do this successfully, start by identifying what different stakeholders have to gain by participating and promoting different aspects of PN-3 work. For example, business leaders might be most interested in understanding how support for infants and toddlers translates into a more productive workforce. Meanwhile, educators may be more interested in understanding how your efforts will contribute to kindergarten readiness or the development of foundational social-emotional skills.

4. Determine Effective Strategies for Demonstrating County-Wide Support

There are several ways to demonstrate strong support for PN-3 policies and programs at the county level. For example, you could convene a Prenatal-to-Three (PN-3) Stakeholder Group. Consider the vision for young children in your community and assemble a diverse, cross-sector leadership team who can be the driving force for the well-being of infants and toddlers in your county. Collaborative stakeholder groups are an effective first step because they establish a set of early childhood champions who can help to serve as a leading coordinating body for local initiatives. By leveraging their expertise, they can help to identify community assets and deficits, set priorities, build the case for early investments and push towards the intended results.

Your community could also identify ceremonial ways to recognize and honor its commitment to PN-3 policies and programs. Non-binding resolutions, pledges of support, and public declarations of commitment to the PN-3 policies and programs are all different types of symbolic gestures that can help to build awareness around this particular issue area, educate decision-makers, create new champions and serve as a catalyst for kicking off or enhancing prenatal-to-three efforts in your county.

5. Build Strategic Partnerships

Creating alliances and forging partnerships among individuals and organizations is a critical component of successful community engagement. Effective partnerships present opportunities for sharing ideas, collaborating and achieving broader outcomes.

Consider pursuing partnerships based upon an organization's ability to reach stakeholders and advance efforts throughout the community. In early childhood development, a partner could:

- Share social media content on the benefits of focusing on the early years;
- Present at county council or board meetings to share how infant and toddler programs and policies benefit their organization's mission and the broader community;
- Host a community event or town hall to provide residents and stakeholders with more information on what expanding PN-3 supports means for the county;
- Organize visits to hospitals, pediatric offices, home-based child care programs and child care centers to show county leaders how quality PN-3 supports impact children and families;
- Leverage their networks and invite researchers, pediatricians, nurses or leaders from neighboring counties who are pursuing similar PN-3 policies to share their successes; and
- Sign an open letter (see enclosed sample).

It is important to remember that supporting your county's young children and families is the collective responsibility of many stakeholders. Consider building strategic partnerships with a variety of community organizations, such as:

- Teachers Unions
- Local employers and businesses
- Chambers of Commerce
- Parent-teacher associations
- Sports teams and associations
- Faith-based youth groups
- Pediatric and other medical groups



6. Leverage your County's Communications Vehicles

Engage your Public Information Officer (PIO) (if your county has one) and leverage local communications channels to share your message. Here are a few examples of local communication avenues to pursue:

Listserve and newsletters: These channels provide an opportunity to reach a targeted population. Most listserve managers and newsletter editors are open to including your information - you just may need to provide them with clear and compelling content. If you are promoting a community event or webinar to share more information about your PN-3 efforts, be sure to communicate all relevant event and contact information including time, date and place. Below are organizations that may have existing listserve and newsletters:

- K-12 schools and school districts
- Health and Education departments at area universities and community colleges
- Recreation centers and after-school care programs
- Local child care programs
- Neighborhood parenting group

Media: Local press outlets are a great channel for spreading the word about PN-3 efforts. Consider promoting events or county council/board meetings where PN-3 issues will be discussed in local community papers.

- Use the **Building Awareness Talking Points** enclosed in this toolkit to pitch to reporters who cover local education, health or economic development issues and encourage them to write a story on the countywide impacts of investing in infants and toddlers.
- Use the **Building Awareness Talking Points** to engage strategic partners and encourage them to write opinion pieces and submit letters to the editor to make the case for investing in PN-3 programs and policies or offer a public statement from the assembled PN-3 network.
- For effective media coverage, highlight recent local data to explain why PN-3 issues are relevant to your community and position yourself as a leader.
- As you meet key benchmarks in your PN-3 campaign, customize the enclosed **Press Release** and share it with local reporters. Contact those who have already covered the growing community support for PN-3 efforts. Use the **Talking Points** to guide conversations with reporters who are interested in covering announcements and next steps for the network.

Social media: Social media is an inexpensive, engaging way to connect with members of your community. Do some research to determine which individuals and organizations are driving conversations in your community through social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter. Familiarize yourself with key conversation terms – or hashtags – to ensure that early childhood development and the issues impacting your county's infants, toddlers and their families become a part of ongoing online conversations. Some key hashtags include: #ECE, #EarlyLearning, #EarlyChildhood, #KindergartenReadiness and #EarlyYears.

7. Be Compelling

Communicate clearly, concisely and persuasively when talking about how your county can strengthen its message on supporting early childhood programs, services, policies and systems to help all children reach their full potential. Weave in personal stories to help make the issue more relevant to individuals who are not familiar with it. Consider bringing parents and young children to county council or commission board meetings to emphasize the importance of parent voice and encourage them to share their personal stories and/or message the importance of early investments. Have a clear "ask" in mind to keep your supporters engaged by contributing to the initiative. For example, when promoting your PN-3 efforts ask key stakeholders in your county to sign an open letter to the community, make a public statement, or otherwise pledge their support.

Remember, community engagement is an ongoing process. Save records of your outreach and keep key influencers informed and updated. This will help you easily monitor your progress in building and maintaining these critical relationships and preserve institutional knowledge.

BUILDING AWARENESS: SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

Below are talking points to aid county leaders in speaking with key stakeholders about prenatal to three (PN-3) issues and make the case for investing in early childhood development initiatives. These talking points are best utilized by county officials to communicate with elected officials, media, influential community members and other key advocates in the county. Counties also may use this language to engage strategic partners and draft opinion pieces or letters to the editor to express your commitment to PN-3 issues or make public statements that demonstrate a prioritization of PN-3 solutions.

- A child’s brain develops faster from birth to age three than at any period later in life.
 - » Research shows that high-quality early childhood education provides a 13 percent return on investment per year per child through improved education, health and economic outcomes.¹
 - » We know that high-quality early childhood education leads to significant gains for our children later in life, through better outcomes in education, social behaviors and even employment.²
 - » High-quality child care provides a powerful two-generation approach, by laying the crucial groundwork for tomorrow’s workforce and promoting a strong workforce today.³
- Interventions developed with children and their families in mind – backed by community leaders like you – support the whole family and promote economic growth for years to come.
 - » As a county, we can and should play a pivotal role in delivering high-quality early childhood services which lay the foundation for future learning, behavior and health.
- As a county leader, you can serve as an invaluable catalyst for this work, helping us further build the case for making investments and promoting the necessary programs and services that support families with infants and toddlers.
- We are asking for your leadership in publicly supporting our efforts to prioritize early childhood initiatives and investments. County leaders, like you, have the power to increase community engagement to support families with young learners. We cannot do this work without you.
- (Early childhood development can be tagged onto any issue or policy agenda. Below are messages that you can use to help tailor your message based on your county official’s key priorities):
 - » ***[If workforce issues are top priority for the county official you are speaking to, here is a helpful message to use]:*** This is not just about babies and new parents. Prenatal-to-three issues impact everyone in our community. Supports, such as high-quality child care, help new parents remain in the workforce and be more productive knowing their children’s development is being supported in high-quality learning environments. Early childhood policies and programs can help grow the economy now and in the future through human capital gains. Young children should receive the necessary tools that high-quality early learning environments provide to be school ready and succeed in life as adults.
 - » ***[If healthcare issues are top priority for the county official, here is a helpful message to use]:*** When we discuss early childhood education, we are also referencing programs that will improve health outcomes for our community. Research shows that children who receive high-quality early childhood supports have substantially better health later in life and are at lower risk for many

1 Heckman, James, et al. (June 2017). Quantifying the Life-cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program. Retrieved from: <https://heckmanequation.org/>.

2 Heckman, James, et al. (June 2017). Quantifying the Life-cycle Benefits of a Prototypical Early Childhood Program. Retrieved from: <https://heckmanequation.org/>.

3 Stevens, Katharine B. (June 2017). Workforce of Today, Workforce of Tomorrow: The Business Case for High-Quality Childcare. Retrieved from: www.uschamberfoundation.org/reports/workforce-today-workforce-tomorrow.

diseases. Policies supporting these programs work to improve overall health outcomes for the community and decrease the need for costlier health interventions down the road.⁴

- » ***[If K-12 issues are top priority for the county official, here is a helpful message to use]:*** Children who do not receive high-quality early child care are at risk of reaching kindergarten not ready to learn, which stacks the cards against them along their K-12 trajectory. For our county's students to succeed, we need to ensure that they are entering the classroom ready to learn, with the foundation necessary to be confident, empathetic, and ready for school and life. We need to reach them early and before pre-kindergarten entry.
- » ***[If budget issues and cost savings for the county are top priorities for the county official, here is a helpful message to use]:*** High-quality early childhood programs starting at birth provide a 13 percent return on investment per child, per year through improved education, health economic outcomes. Communities avoid costlier and less effective interventions later in life. Additionally, families benefit from a two-generational effect which is critical for lifting parents and future generations out of poverty. The evidence of long-term, lasting economic and societal impact is clear and the greatest concern to policymakers is not whether they can afford these investments, rather how can we afford not to make these investments.
- » ***[If preventing drug abuse and crime are top priorities for the county official, here is a helpful message to use]:*** Children who receive high-quality health and education supports starting at birth are proven to be more likely to earn higher wages, live healthier lives, avoid incarceration, have lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse, raise stronger families, and contribute to their communities. High-quality early childhood programs have the unique ability to set infants and toddlers up for success later in life, and this definition of success expands beyond academic and professional outcomes. The long-term benefits of high-quality early childhood programs are a vital tool for intervening early in a child's life and putting them on a healthy trajectory that prevents substance abuse and engagement in criminal activity later in life. High-quality early childhood services have played a key role in strengthening families across generations.
- » ***[If elevating parent voice is a top priority for the county official here is a helpful message to use]:*** Parents are a child's most important caregiver and they play the lead role in their child's healthy development. Yet, all too often families are not at the table when it comes time to make major decisions impacting their children's early health, learning and development. This is why it is critical to bring parent voices to the table when we discuss the importance of investing in and designing early childhood programs that meet the unique needs of families. Welcoming the insights and experiences of families is critical for gaining buy in and to design of these programs.



For more information,
please visit
www.countiesforkids.org
or email
info@countiesforkids.org

4 Heckman, James, et al. (September 2014). The Health Effects of Two Influential Early Childhood Interventions. Retrieved from: <https://heckmanequation.org/>.

TAKING ACTION: SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

Below are talking points to support any local external communications and help guide county officials in their conversations with media, elected officials and community members when describing the importance of garnering a network of support for prenatal to three (PN-3) policies and initiatives. By maintaining a consistent and clear message throughout, counties can develop strategic partnerships and generate positive media coverage of the growing momentum for PN-3 programs and policies at the county level.

- The interest and commitment of county public officials, educators and business leaders in PN-3 issues signifies a momentous step toward securing a healthy and prosperous future for generations to come by prioritizing infants, toddlers and their families in our community. We plan on building on this commitment to ensure lasting change across our county.
- *[Insert county's name]* has made a bold step by publicly declaring our commitment to young children and prioritizing supports for early childhood development.
- We recognize our county leadership for making this bold commitment and stand in unison with cross-sector and community partners in our effort to improve services and maximize investments for young children and their families.
- In *[insert county's name]*, we are challenged with *[insert local community challenge]*. Therefore, we are focusing on infants, toddlers and their families. Research clearly shows supporting children and families during the earliest years produces strong health, education and economic outcomes.
- Our growing cohort of public officials and education, health, business and community leaders signal to our county, state and region that we are united in prioritizing and investing in a prenatal-to-three policy agenda.
- *[Insert county's name]* County recognizes the critical time from birth to age three when a child's brain develops faster than any later period in life and we understand the importance of taking advantage of these earliest years to promote healthy development and a foundation for future learning, behavior and health.
- High-quality early childhood programs and services provide a powerful two-generational approach, by laying the crucial groundwork for tomorrow's workforce while promoting a strong workforce today.
- These educational, social and health benefits set infants and toddlers on a path toward future academic and career success while providing parents with the support and opportunity to continue to participate in the workforce with the knowledge and confidence that their children are receiving high-quality care.
- With this evidence of positive and long-term impact from early childhood investments, we have brought together education, health and business leaders in the county to demonstrate the wide-reaching impact of high-quality PN-3 initiatives and ultimately a commitment to our youngest learners and their families.
- The commitment from our county leaders has been an energizing start to our work as they continue to identify ways for maximizing and improving the quality of services and supports for young children and families.
- With the support of partners like the National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF), we are looking forward to developing programs that are driven by best practices and uses evidence to inform our county's prenatal-to-three policies.



OPEN LETTER TEMPLATE FOR LOCAL ADVOCACY

Dear *<County Leaders(s)>*,

Research shows that the most rapid period of brain development occurs within the first three years of life – more than at any other point – laying the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. By investing in young children early, counties have an opportunity to deliver high-quality services with higher returns and reduce the need for more expensive interventions later.

Counties not only play a pivotal role in building thriving communities for an estimated 16 million children ages birth to three across the United States, they also invest in core policies and services that help to shape early childhood systems. In *[insert name of county]*, *[insert 1-2 sentences on local data and unique needs of infants and toddlers in the county (e.g., number of children age 3 and under, etc.)]*.

The National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) is a proud partner of The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT). NCIT brings together national partners and early childhood leaders, creates and strengthens promising policies and programs, and shares what works, so that more states and communities can support the healthy development of our youngest children. **We join the NACoRF in urging *[insert name of county]* to make a bold commitment to young children. With your vocal and public support, we will take the necessary steps to ensure a strong start for our infants, toddlers and their families.**

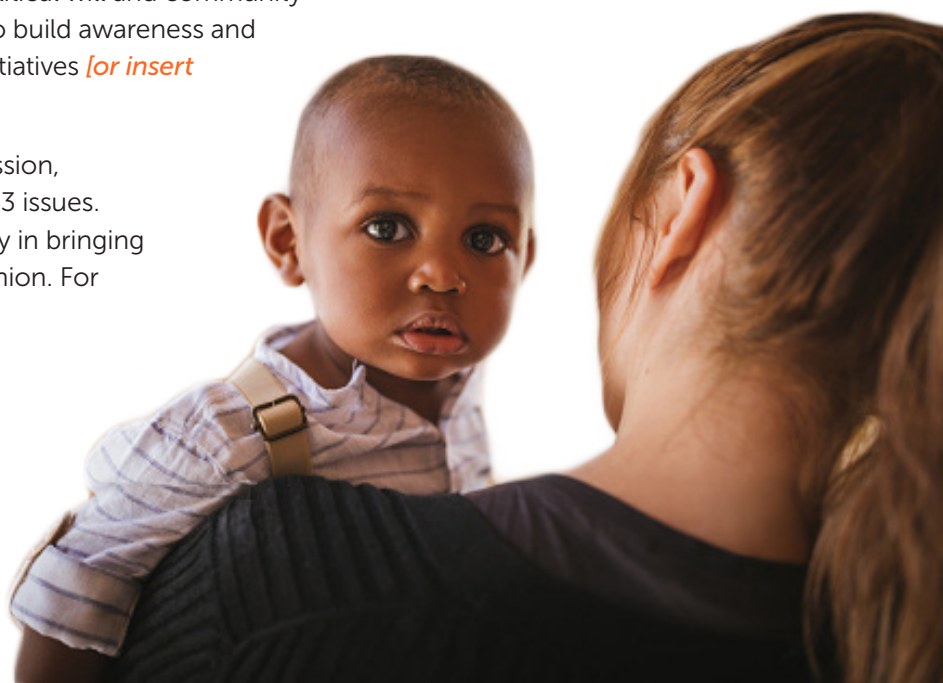
The healthy development of our youngest learners impacts the prospects of our education, health and economic systems. By building a foundation that prioritizes infants, toddlers and their families, we are investing in generations of healthy kids who are ready to learn and succeed in school and life.

Pledging support, creating a prenatal to three (PN-3) stakeholder group, or making some other type of public declaration demonstrates public will and signals to county departments and agencies, and the public, that a priority is being placed on early investments for young children. Though these gestures may appear symbolic, it will help place an emphasis on this critical time in a child's development and build awareness around how PN-3 programs, policies and systems help to address workforce, education and health challenges and spur economic growth for the entire community.

This is an impactful first step in drawing needed support from county executives and officials who have the power to generate political will and community engagement, fostering a comprehensive effort to build awareness and generate public support for PN-3 policies and initiatives *[or insert specific initiative/program, if applicable]*.

As leaders in your community, county and profession, your voice is vital to engaging the county on PN-3 issues. Demonstrating this commitment goes a long way in bringing these critical issues to the forefront of public opinion. For example, you can make a speech, visit child care centers, bring together stakeholders, or write an opinion piece or letter to the editor.

Now is a critical time for our community to join with its peers across the United States and invest in young children early by



advocating for policies and programs that support the healthy development of children and create opportunities that contribute to their long-term success.

Making a clear and unified statement that our county prioritizes its youngest residents will set us on a path to improve and expand early childhood development programs and evidence-based interventions for infants and toddlers in the *[county]* community. There are a number of ways in which our county can begin to spark and enhance early childhood investments, and as an early childhood leader in our community, we hope you will consider:

- **Convening a Prenatal-to-Three (PN-3) Stakeholder Group.** Assemble a diverse, cross-sector leadership team who can be the driving force for the well-being of infants and toddlers in your county. Collaborative stakeholder groups are an effective first step because they establish a set of early childhood champions who can help to serve as a leading coordinating body for local initiatives. By leveraging their expertise, they can help to identify community assets and deficits, set priorities, build the case for early investments and push toward the intended results.
- **Joining a rural, suburban or urban Peer Learning Network.** NACo Research Foundation's Peer Learning Networks are quarterly webinars of smaller networking groups for small/rural, midsize/suburban and large/urban counties to share early childhood best practices. These groups allow counties to engage in interactive discussions with their peers across the country to share what's working and help to spark innovative, actionable ideas for infants and toddlers.
- **Making a Public Commitment/Pledge of Support.** Making a public commitment or pledge of support, including by, but not limited to, adopting a non-binding resolution or issuing a proclamation is a ceremonial gesture that can help to build awareness around a particular PN-3 issue area, educate decision-makers, create new champions and serve as a catalyst for kicking off or enhancing prenatal-to-three efforts in your county.

With your support and partnership, in addition to that of local hospitals, pediatricians, teachers unions, business leaders and more, infants and toddlers will be prioritized in our community, ensuring a healthy start at birth, stronger support for their families and expanded access to high-quality care and learning environments.

Sincerely,

<name>

***We recommend asking the following community stakeholders to sign the letter:

- Early childhood providers
- Librarians
- Public health officials
- Pediatricians
- Teachers Unions
- Community Action Agencies
- Nurses
- Principals
- Home Visiting Councils
- Business leaders
- Parents groups
- Local advocates
- Police
- Faith leaders
- Philanthropic organizations

PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE

[Insert your logo here]

[Insert name of county] *[Insert action taken: Creates PN-3 Stakeholder Group/ Passes Resolution/Makes Pledge/Invests in Program]* **Demonstrating Strong Commitment to Supporting Infants, Toddlers and Their Families**

[County] leaders, in coordination with the National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF), prioritizes programs and policies that support healthy brain development from prenatal to age three

Insert City, State – Date TK, 2019 –With an estimated 3 million of the nation’s youngest children at risk of reaching kindergarten not ready to learn, *[Insert name of county]* today *[announcement]*. The *[county]* prenatal-to-three (PN-3) network led the efforts in partnership with the National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) to prioritize infants and toddlers by ensuring a healthy start at birth, stronger support of their families and expanded access to high-quality care and learning environments.

[Insert 1-2 sentences on local data and unique needs of infants and toddlers in the county (e.g. number of children under age 3, etc.), 1-2 sentences on county’s work to prioritize early childhood services for children prenatal to age three and their families].

“We are proud of the commitment that *[Insert name of county]* has made to its youngest residents by recognizing the importance of the prenatal to three period as the foundation for all future learning, behavior and health,” said *[Insert name of county leader]*. “*[Insert name of county]*’s *[resolution/legislation/investment]* is representative of the foundational public will that is needed at the local level to begin the development of a coordinated prenatal to three system.”

NACoRF is a partner of **The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT)**. Funded through the Pritzker Children’s Initiative (PCI), this nationwide effort brings together partners, early childhood leaders, philanthropy, policymakers and practitioners inside and outside state and local government to create and strengthen promising policies and programs, and share what works, so that more states and communities can support the healthy development of our youngest children.

“By investing in young children early, counties have an opportunity to deliver high-quality services with higher returns and reduce the need for more expensive interventions later,” said NACoRF’s Executive Director Matthew Chase. “Counties play a pivotal role in building thriving communities for our nation’s estimated 16 million infants and toddlers -- when the most rapid period of brain development occurs -- and invest in core policies and services that help to shape effective early childhood systems.”

[Insert name of county] understands the benefits of investing in infants and toddlers can be profound. Investments in high-quality programs are critical in helping more children become ready for school and more confident, empathetic, contributing members of their communities. By *[insert action taken: creating a PN-3 stakeholder group/making a pledge/passing a resolution/investing in a program]*, *[Insert name of county]* has taken an important step towards positive change for young children in the community and will receive NACoRF’s virtual resources to assist with local implementation efforts and access their support to drive change for your youngest residents.

About

About *[Insert County/State Name]*

[Insert boilerplate]

About the National Association of Counties Research Foundation

The National Association of Counties Research Foundation (NACoRF) is a non-profit organization recognized by the U.S. Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service as a 501c3 public charity providing education, technical assistance and research to counties. NACoRF's mission is to ascertain, develop and distribute knowledge about county governments and training of public officials, prospective public officials, and other interested parties.

National Association of Counties Research Foundation
660 North Capitol St, NW Suite 400
Washington, DC 20001

About the Pritzker Children's Initiative (PCI)

The Pritzker Children's Initiative (PCI), a project of the J.B. and M. K. Pritzker Family Foundation, is committed to building a promising future for our country by investing in and supporting solutions in early childhood development for children prenatal to age three, with the goal of every child reaching kindergarten ready to learn. More information about PCI can be found at <http://pritzkerchildrensinitiative.org/>.

About The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT)

The National Collaborative for Infants and Toddlers (NCIT) is committed to advancing policies and programs that ensure families have the support they need to give their infants and toddlers the foundation for a strong start in life. Funded by the Pritzker Children's Initiative, a program of the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, this effort brings together national partners, early childhood leaders, policymakers and practitioners inside and outside state and local government to create and strengthen promising policies and programs and share what works so that more states and communities can support the healthy development of our youngest children. More information about NCIT can be found at www.thencit.org.

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Media Contact: name, email, phone



For more information,
please visit www.countiesforkids.org
or email info@countiesforkids.org

