

USING CHILD IMPACT ASSESSMENTS IN YOUR COMMUNITY OR STATE: A Starter Guide



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About This Starter Guide

This Starter Guide for Using Child Impact Assessments is the third in a series of publications from Kids Impact Initiative (<https://kidsimpact.org/>) that focus on ways to strengthen policymaker accountability for children's well-being. It provides a rationale and a process for policymakers to systematically consider the impacts that proposed policies will have on children. It is written for elected and government officials, nonprofit leaders, and philanthropists interested in improving outcomes for children and youth. Environmental and economic impact assessments have been widely used in the U.S., but child impact assessments have been tried in only a few communities to date. Kids Impact Initiative's research has determined that the time is ripe for this strategy.

We hope this guide spurs more localities and states to try child impact assessments. As they do, Kids Impact Initiative will provide strategic advice; and will help translate lessons learned from various communities' experience into further guidance about effective use of child impact assessments. For the research on which this guide is based and for additional information on the examples and recommendations included, see <https://bit.ly/3a0gy55>.

Why Consider Using A Child Impact Assessment?

Children are affected by nearly every policy decision elected officials and staff in government make. But the impact on children is rarely considered. As a result, many policies that might benefit some stakeholders in the short run either neglect or may actually harm children. The consequences of not considering impacts on kids are right in front of us: Increasing numbers of young people are growing up in poverty, going to bed hungry, missing out on a strong education, and taking their own lives. Children of color experience these consequences disproportionately. And the COVID-19 pandemic has only intensified these unacceptable conditions.

Whether our country's 74 million children have the opportunity to reach their full potential rests with elected representatives and senior staff in government agencies at the local, state, and federal levels. These individuals decide how taxpayer dollars are spent and create the policies and programs that help families ensure their children are safe, healthy, and well-educated. These officials are responsible, for example, for health clinics, mental health resources, parks, sports and recreation programs, public schools, and affordable housing.

This starter guide zeroes in on one promising strategy to provide information to policymakers so they can understand and, if needed, strengthen proposals that affect children's well-being. Through reliable data and analysis, child impact assessments can identify effects of a proposal on children in general, as well as on groups whose unique needs are often overlooked, such as kids living in rural areas, children with disabilities, children suffering from trauma, and LGBTQ+ young people. Such assessments are especially helpful in addressing impacts on BIPOC children and youth (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), who too often experience the greatest disparities in their opportunities to succeed in school and in life.



What Is A Child Impact Assessment?

A child impact assessment is an agreed-upon set of questions—combined with awareness-building, training, and structured reporting—that summarizes the potential effects of a proposed or existing law, policy, program, or practice on young people and that, as a result of this process, advances policies that benefit children’s well-being. These assessments can be conducted at the city, county, state, or federal level and can be as short or as detailed as the leaders who design them choose.

For example, if a change is proposed in a city bus route, an impact assessment would address, among other questions, how the proposed new route affects students who use the bus to get to and from school and other after-school activities.



Case Study

Shelby Co./Memphis Tennessee: How a Child Impact Assessment Resulted in a Better-Informed Decision

In Shelby County/Memphis, Tennessee, use of child impact assessments helped prevent budget cuts that would have caused the Regional Medical Center to close. The impact analysis showed the proposed cuts would save money only in the short run and would likely result in increases in infant deaths and complications from childhood diabetes and other chronic diseases. The impact assessment also helped bring about needed management restructuring at the medical center.

How Are They Carried Out?

To produce a child impact assessment, staff in government agencies or outside entities answer basic questions designed to uncover both expected and unintended consequences for children. Available models show that such initiatives can be based in the executive or legislative branches of government, or they can be “housed” in an independent entity such as the office of a children’s commissioner (which may operate outside of government but with public funding.) The actual research and analysis can be done by staff in government agencies that oversee the policies, by government offices that specialize in research, or through a partnership with philanthropy, a university, or nonprofit. The work can be carried out as part of existing staff responsibilities and within existing budgets, or dedicated funding can be secured from the public or private sectors.

How Can Child Impact Assessments Help Improve Outcomes for Children & Youth?

Kids Impact Initiative's research on the experience of other countries and the two U.S. communities that have used impact assessments shows this strategy can have an outsized effect in promoting policies that are in children's best interests because it hardwires consideration of children into the structure of decision-making itself. (See <https://bit.ly/3a0gy55>.) Child impact assessments can accomplish the following:

- Inform better public policy decision-making, resulting in choices that support children's healthy development and more effective use of tax dollars;
- Institutionalize analysis of young people's needs so that they are routinely considered when important decisions are made, and so that, as a result, children become a higher public policy priority; and
- Engage and equip leaders outside of government to keep a spotlight on kids' needs as they urge policymakers to make children a priority.



Case Study

New Brunswick, Canada: How a Child Impact Assessment Resulted in a Better-Informed Decision

As the province of New Brunswick considered where to locate a new center for children with complex needs, an impact assessment resulted in changing its location. The new center was moved from its proposed location at a facility in a remote part of the province to a location nearer to where the children in need and their families lived.



How Can Child Impact Assessments Help Promote Racial Equity?

Many policy decisions have a disproportionate impact on children of particular racial and ethnic groups—and on the underlying structures like schools and human services that too often result in perpetuating racial inequities. For this reason, all child impact assessments ought to help clarify how a proposed policy affects child equity—both in terms of individual kids who are impacted and also the underlying structures that define their day-to-day experiences. The assessment can accomplish this goal in the following ways:

- Focus on issues and structures that disproportionately affect children of color;
- Analyze impacts on children by race, neighborhood, and income;
- Use data sources that focus on equity for children, such as diversitydatakids.org; and
- Include residents from communities who are most affected by the decision in the design and implementation process.

That said, some communities may choose to focus even more closely on how proposals affect equity among children. This guide includes additional questions focused on racial equity impacts as they affect BIPOC children and youth (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). These equity questions can be included in any child impact assessment effort and are presented along with the Sample Child Impact Assessment Form at the back of this guide.

The additional child equity questions also offer a way for the growing number of groups and legislative bodies working to advance racial equity to prioritize impacts on children and youth specifically who, too often, suffer lifetime consequences from disparities in their health, education, and opportunity.

When Do They Work Best?

Kids Impact’s research concluded that child impact assessments have the greatest positive effect when they are part of broader efforts to improve conditions for kids. Examples of such efforts include a widely embraced and clearly defined agenda for children; reliable data related to the agenda; entities within the executive or legislative branches that promote kids’ well-being specifically; and nonprofit organizations and/or an independent entity (such as a Commissioner for Children) that advocate outside of government.



How Can Impact Assessments Add Value for Child Advocates?

Child advocates have long understood the importance of analyzing child impacts. And many advocacy groups produce analyses of certain policy or budget proposals that have had a major influence on policymakers' decisions. Child impact assessments can add value to their ongoing work in three important ways:

- Impact assessments can fundamentally change the way children are treated in policy decision-making, as the assessments become standard practice, carried out in a consistent way, and incorporated into the “rules of order.”
- Impact assessments have an “official” status because their use is authorized by public officials; there is an expectation that policymakers pay attention to the assessments.
- Child impact assessments give community residents who are interested in children a way to keep abreast and engage with their elected representatives.

Do Child Impact Assessments Make Sense in Your Community?

An impact assessment effort in your community is more likely to succeed if you have certain community assets. These are relevant whether impact assessments are used in a local community, statewide, or at the federal level:

- Support from major stakeholders to implement child impact assessments—including government agencies, legislative bodies, child advocacy organizations, other community leaders, and philanthropy;
- Interest from elected officials and government staff in making better-informed public policy decisions;
- Readily available data on children and families—including by race, income, and ethnicity—as well as the analytic capability within government to use the data to better understand policy impacts;
- Related advocacy elements in place—such as a clearly articulated children’s agenda with achievable objectives, children’s budget, and strong advocacy for children independent of government; and
- Staffing and resources to support the effort now and in the future.

“ Ten years ago, kids’ issues were sidelined. Now, children come up on every issue our (county) board considers. Now what’s good for children is part of our culture in everything we do.”

Staff, Office of Supervisor Cortese,
Santa Clara County, California

How to Get Started Using Child Impact Assessments

There are two ways to get started:

1. **A governmental entity**—whether legislative or executive branch—requires use of child impact assessments; or
2. **A coalition or organization outside of government** sparks the process by urging their elected officials to require their use. The outside group can also work with elected officials to design how the initiative will work.

Regardless of who initiates the idea, it makes sense in most cases for a governmental entity to carry out the initiative. Government produces or holds most of the data to complete the assessment, and government officials who use the impact assessments are more likely to trust analysis produced by their own teams. Local, state, or the federal government may choose to partner with an outside entity such as a university or think tank for training and help performing the assessments.



Case Study

How Santa Clara County, California Got Started with Child Impact Assessments

In 2011, following conversations with a child advocate, county Supervisor Cortese recommended and his board colleagues approved “including child impact assessments in all Board transmittals.” Agency staff were expected to align these impact assessments with the county’s Bill of Rights for Children and Youth and indicators used in the county’s Children’s Agenda. Abbreviated child impact assessments are still in use today in Santa Clara County, California.



How to Authorize Their Use

There are a number of levels at which the use of child impact statements can be authorized. They include the following:

City Level

A city council can require use of child impact assessments on proposals they consider—whether the proposal is developed by the council or sent to council by the mayor. A mayor can mandate their use as a routine procedure across city agencies. Their use can also be established through a city ordinance.

County Level

The county board can require use of child impact assessments on proposals they consider—whether the proposal is developed by the board or sent by the chief executive or a county agency. A county chief executive can mandate their use as a routine procedure across county agencies. They can also be established through a county ordinance.

State Level

A state legislature can, through legislation or a resolution, require use of child impact assessments. A governor can mandate their use as a routine procedure across state agencies.

Federal Level

The president or congress can require use of child impact assessments through legislation or an executive order.

The design and implementation of impact assessments can be specified in the authorization, or it can be referred to an entity within government or to an independent institution. The Key Decisions Roadmap provides a list of key questions to answer.

“ We have been able to show government staff how these assessments help staff do their job better. Once people in agencies see how these assessments can save time, embarrassment, and money, and be better for children, they want to incorporate them into their work.”

Interview by Kids Impact with staff of
New Zealand Office of the Children’s Commissioner

Key Decisions to Design Your Child Impact Assessment: A Roadmap

Child impact assessment initiatives can be designed in different ways. Here are the decisions community leaders will want to make—along with possible actions to operationalize these decisions. The actions are posed as questions because they involve choices. But *for most of the decisions, taking multiple actions will strengthen the effort.*



BUY-IN: How will your initiative achieve maximum buy-in, credibility, and sustainability?

- Involve key stakeholders?
- Place the function in the best-suited “institutional home”?
- Engage relevant agencies across government?
- Align this effort with related strategies—such as a children’s budget—that reinforce a focus on children?
- Build or strengthen a support base in the community?



FOCUS: Which policy decisions will be the focus of the assessments?

- Areas not usually associated with children but with clear implications for them, such as zoning, transportation, housing, or infrastructure?
- Decisions with obvious consequences for children like health, mental health, human services, and the environment?
- Areas of need where the greatest racial and ethnic disparities exist?
- All proposals in the chosen area of focus or only some?



RACIAL EQUITY: Will your effort include a particular focus on achieving racial equity goals for children?

If so, the additional child equity questions at the end of this guide can help you examine in greater depth the racial and ethnic impacts of proposals on children and on the structures that influence their well-being.

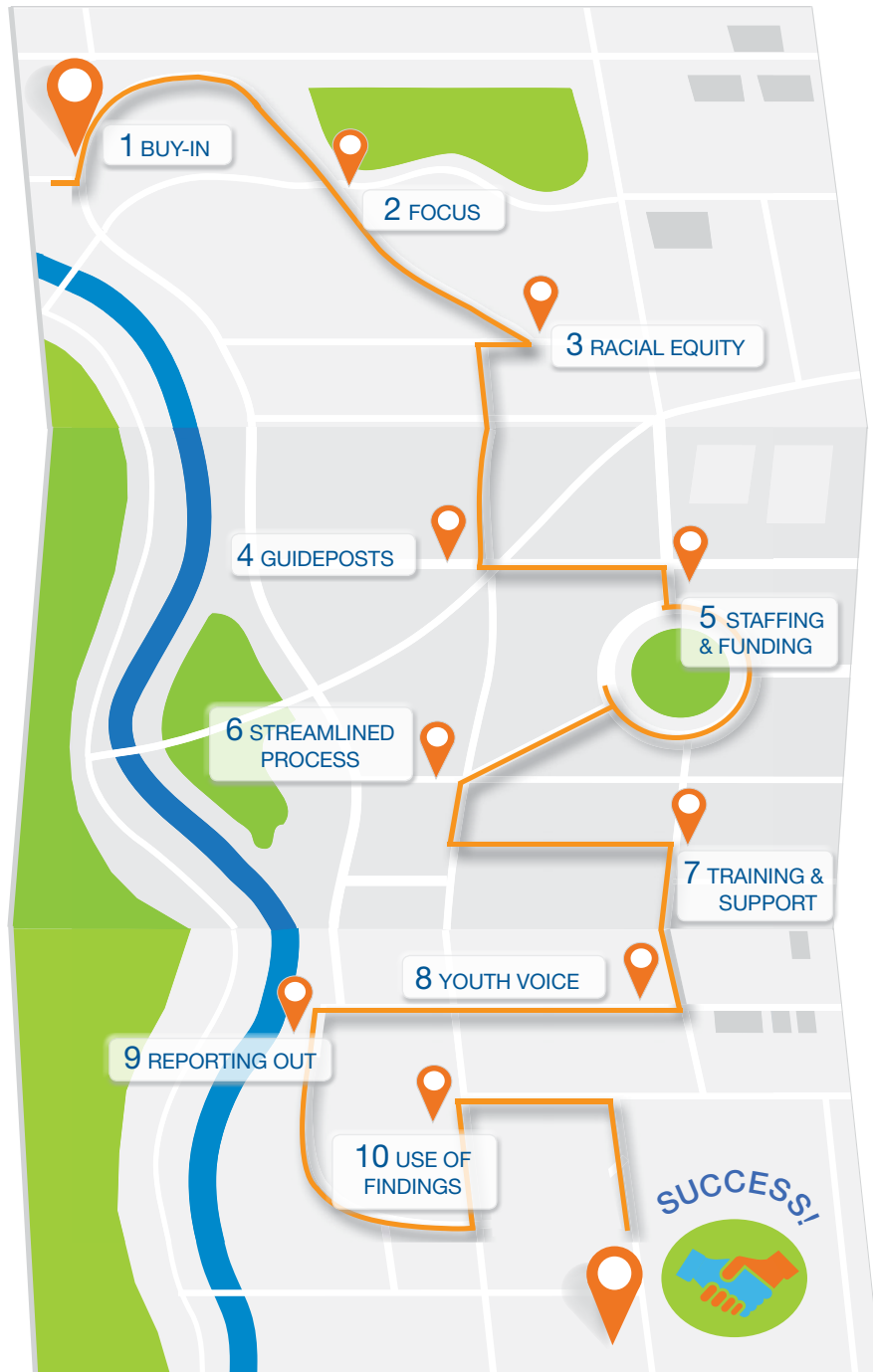


GUIDEPOSTS: What guideposts will you use to assess impact?

- Community goals for child well-being, with specific objectives?
- Reduction in disparities among children?
- Local bill of rights for children?
- Principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (<https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/four-principles-convention-rights-child>)?

Key Decisions Roadmap

How to design a child impact assessment initiative that best fits your community



Key Decisions (continued)

5

STAFFING & FUNDING: How will the assessments be conducted, staffed, and funded?

- Build the analysis function into the ongoing work of government staff in agencies that administer the policies?
- Partner with philanthropy, university, or nonprofit?
- Build the analysis function into government offices that specialize in research and analysis (such as a legislative analyst office or research bureau)?
- Secure funding, if needed, from government resources or philanthropy?

6

STREAMLINED PROCESS: How will you ensure the procedures are streamlined enough to be workable and well-accepted?

- Develop them with a small team of people, including staff who are expected to use the procedures?
- Review and evaluate the procedures at regular intervals and make adjustments accordingly?

7

TRAINING & SUPPORT: How will staff conducting the assessments be trained initially and provided ongoing support related to how available data is used, how policies affect racial equity, and other relevant areas of concern?

- Training and support through an appropriate government office?
- Training and support from a university, philanthropy, or independent contractor?

8

YOUTH VOICE: Using media/social media platforms to gather input from youth and keep young people as well as the larger community up to date on what's happening with child impact assessments?

- Having one or more “seats at the table” as the project is planned?
- Having a local youth council provide input as child impact assessments are conducted?
- Having youth ambassadors/advisors who provide feedback to project leaders on a regular basis?
- Using media/social media platforms to keep other youth and the public up to date on what's happening with child impact assessments?

Key Decisions (continued)



REPORTING OUT: When and how will findings from the assessments be shared with policymakers and the public?

- Complete them before the relevant decision-making body meets to decide on the proposal?
- Post assessments on the decision-making body's website at least 48 hours before the decision will be taken up?
- Use plain language the public can easily understand?
- Share the information in languages spoken in the community?



USE OF FINDINGS: How will you ensure the findings are used in decision-making?

- Include the assessment in the standard file that decision-makers routinely receive on proposals?
- Educate residents on the availability of the assessments so they can share their feedback with elected representatives and key officials?
- Designate an outside entity to analyze the extent to which policymaker decisions address findings in the assessments?

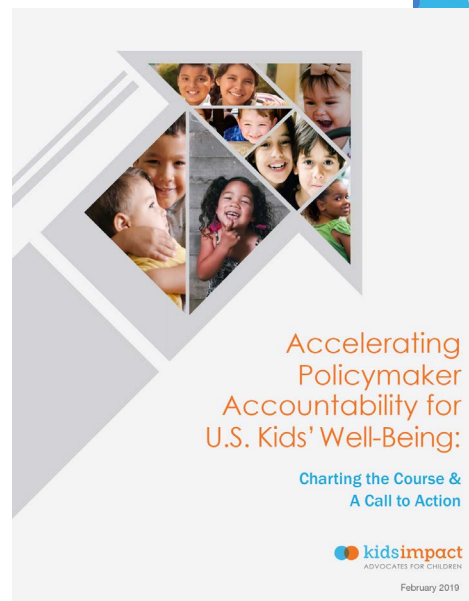
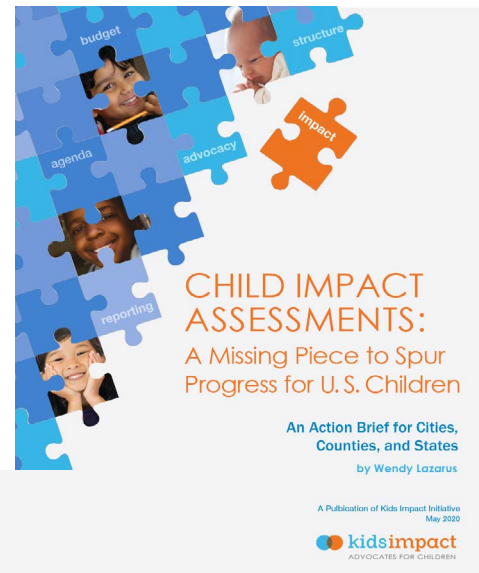
Looking Ahead

Kids Impact Initiative looks forward to learning along with leaders for kids as they test out and continue to improve the effectiveness of this largely untried child advocacy strategy in the U.S.



Resources from Kids Impact Initiative

For more information on child impact assessments, see “Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children,” May 2020, available at <https://bit.ly/3a0gy55>.



Kids Impact has also published a report on strengthening accountability for children’s well-being. See “Accelerating Accountability for U.S. Kids’ Well-Being: Charting the Course and A Call to Action,” February 2019, available at <http://bit.ly/2TaZN0p>.

For examples of completed child impact assessments and other useful tools, see <https://kidsimpact.org/child-impact-assessments/>.



Sample Child Impact Assessment Forms

The forms below offer starting questions so cities, counties, and states can create a child impact assessment form tailored to their own community. Communities can adapt the questions and add others as they see fit. We include three elements:

1. SHORT SAMPLE FORM

For communities that want to start using child impact assessments in a modest way

2. FULL SAMPLE FORM

For communities interested in a more complete picture of impacts

3. ADDITIONAL CHILD EQUITY QUESTIONS

For communities that want to examine more closely the impacts of a program or policy on BIPOC children and youth (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)

Examples of completed assessment forms can be found at <https://kidsimpact.org/child-impact-assessments/>.

1. SHORT SAMPLE FORM

Name of Proposal:

Please provide a one- to two- sentence description of its key provisions and a link to the proposed policy.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the goals of the proposed policy, practice, or program?
2. How will it affect children and youth?
3. Will/how will the proposal have a disproportionate impact on particular groups of children and youth (for example, racial or ethnic groups, children in rural areas, girls and young women, children of immigrants, children with disabilities, or LGBTQ+ youth)?
4. How does the proposal relate to your community's goals for children and youth?
5. If applicable, how could adverse impacts on children and youth resulting from the proposed policy or program be prevented or minimized?

Date completed: _____

Name and affiliation of person who completed the assessment:

Sample Child Impact Assessment Forms

2. FULL SAMPLE FORM

Name of Proposal:

Please provide a one- to two- sentence description of its key provisions and a link to the proposed policy.

Please briefly summarize the main conclusions from this child impact assessment.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. What are the goals of the proposed policy, practice, or program? | |
| 2. If the proposal is likely to have an effect—either positive or negative—on children and youth, please explain how. | |
| 3. If the proposal has no effect on children and youth, explain why. | |
| 4. Are groups of children and youth more affected by the proposal, positively or negatively, than others (for example, certain racial or ethnic groups or other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ individuals, children and youth with disabilities, or children of immigrants)?
If yes, which groups and how? | ___Yes ___No |

Note: The additional child equity questions can be included here.

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| 5. Does the proposal either positively or negatively affect the institutions that are part of everyday life for children (e.g., schools, local parks, transportation, or housing)—especially BIPOC children and other marginalized groups?
If yes, which institutions and how? | ___Yes ___No |
| 6. Are the needs of children and youth living in rural areas adequately addressed?
Explain: | ___Yes ___No
___NA |
| 7. Are the needs of children and youth with disabilities adequately addressed?
Explain: | ___Yes ___No |
| 8. Does the proposal affect parents' ability to support their children's health and well-being (e.g., employment, access to affordable transportation, quality child care, etc.)?
Explain: | ___Yes ___No |
| 9. Did young people most affected by this proposal provide input into the proposal and/or this assessment?
If yes, how? If no, why not? | ___Yes ___No |
| 10. If applicable, how could adverse impacts of the proposed policy or program on children and youth be prevented or minimized? | |

Date completed: _____

Name and affiliation of person who completed the assessment:

Sample Child Impact Assessment Forms

3. ADDITIONAL CHILD EQUITY (CE) QUESTIONS

These questions can be added for communities that want to assess racial equity impacts more closely. They can be inserted after question #4 in the full child impact assessment form. And questions #5-10 in the full form can be adapted accordingly.

CE-1.	What is the racial and ethnic make-up of the children in your community who are affected by this proposal?	
CE-2.	If BIPOC children and youth are disproportionately affected by the proposal, are certain groups—for example, rural communities, LGBTQ+ youth, children with disabilities, or girls/young women—more affected, positively or negatively, than other children? If yes, which groups and how?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
CE-3.	Does the proposal affect the parents of BIPOC children’s ability to support their children’s health and well-being (e.g., employment, access to affordable transportation, quality child care, etc.)? Explain:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
CE-4.	Did BIPOC children and youth provide input into the proposal and/or into this assessment? If yes, how? If no, why?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
CE-5.	If applicable, how could adverse impacts of the proposal on children and youth of color be prevented or minimized?	
CE-6.	What changes could be made to further promote racial equity for BIPOC children and youth, their parents, and the institutions that shape their lives?	
CE-7.	Will the proposed policy be assessed over time for its actual impacts on children and youth of color? If yes, how?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear



Helpful Child Equity Resources

PolicyLink’s guidance (<https://www.policylink.org/>) about equity provides an important point of reference: “to reach the promise of equity every policy and investment must provide significant, sustained support to the people hurting most; and serve as a bridge to creating an equitable economy, an inclusive and compassionate society, and a strong, accountable democracy.”

In addition to frequently used data sources—such as the U.S. Census and data sets produced by states and cities—the following data sources are useful for analyzing current conditions for children and youth by race and ethnicity:

- Diversity Data Kids (<https://www.diversitydatakids.org/>), including Child Opportunity Index 2.0 (<https://data.diversitydatakids.org/dataset/coi20-child-opportunity-index-2-0-database>)
- National Equity Atlas (<https://nationalequityatlas.org/>), including the Racial Equity Index (https://nationalequityatlas.org/research/racial_equity_index/index#/?geoSectionName=State)
- The Opportunity Atlas (<https://www.opportunityatlas.org/>)

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About Kids Impact Initiative

Kids Impact Initiative is a California-based nonprofit project founded in 2017. Our mission is to improve the lives of the nation's 74 million children by strengthening public-sector accountability and by helping develop and support the next generation of advocacy for children. Kids Impact works both nationally and in California, which is home to 9.1 million children.

Kids Impact's purpose is to develop and promote strategies to support and strengthen the child advocacy field as a whole. We are a team of seasoned advocates who have stepped away from the day-to-day running of organizations. Kids Impact analyzes trends and lessons across a broad range of issues and organizations in order to reinforce effective efforts already underway and ratchet up accountability and advocacy for children.

Kids Impact Initiative conducts independent research, publishes, develops advocacy strategies, and promotes action on topics relevant to child advocacy in the U.S. today. Kids Impact acts like a think tank to conceptualize and frame issues and then uses a networked approach to spark action—serving as a resource to leaders and networks. Kids Impact Initiative's work is developed specifically to offer high-impact, actionable ideas and support the diverse set of people and groups working to improve the well-being of America's children.

Kids Impact Initiative

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