

Making Sure Kids Get Their Fair Share of American Rescue Plan Funds

Overview

COVID-19 response bills passed by the U.S. Congress provide unprecedented opportunities to invest in our country's children. The Children's Funding Project estimates that over [\\$360 billion](#) in federal funds is available to directly or indirectly benefit children's education and well-being over the next few years. [American Rescue Plan](#) (ARP) funds are particularly important to help families weather financial hardship, address kids' learning loss, and fill gaps in services like child care and mental health care.

But it is an uphill climb to make sure young people get their fair share as the funds are allocated by cities, school boards, counties, and states. As elected and government officials make funding choices, youth impact assessments can ensure accountability for kids by shining a bright light on their needs and addressing those needs properly.

Youth impact assessments can also promote racial equity by highlighting how children and youth of color are affected by a proposal—and how COVID-19 rescue funding can provide them more equitable opportunities. And impact assessments can help lay the foundation for future policy changes so the gains that result from this funding are sustained. For more information, see the report [Child Impact Assessments: A Missing Piece to Spur Progress for U.S. Children](#).

Youth impact assessments highlight how American Rescue Plan funding can provide more equitable opportunities for all young people.



What is a youth impact assessment?*

Like an environmental or fiscal impact assessment, a youth impact assessment is a [structured set of questions](#) that highlights the effects a proposed policy is likely to have on kids. The questions address various areas of potential impact, including:

- Whether and how a proposed policy affects young people, paying particular attention to children of color, low-income children, children who live in rural communities, and other marginalized groups of young people;
- How the proposed policy affects families' ability to support the health and well-being of children and youth; and
- How the proposal affects the institutions that influence children in their everyday lives (e.g., schools, local parks, transportation, and housing).

Although leaders for children are skilled at spotlighting kids' unmet needs, youth impact assessments can have added clout because they are authorized by elected or government officials and therefore have a more official status. Often conducted by a research or budget office within government, impact assessments can identify the unmet needs of children in a specific policy area as well as the funding necessary to fill those gaps. These findings can strengthen the case for your funding requests.

Visit [here](#) for examples of completed youth impact assessments, a sample assessment form, and other tools for using this strategy.

* Youth impact assessments and child impact assessments refer to the same strategy but may be labeled to best suit individual communities. We use the terms interchangeably.

Why is there urgency to implement youth impact assessments?

To have the greatest effect, leaders for kids will want to ensure impact assessments are being used as soon as possible. Competition for funds is intense already. Counties, school districts, and states receive a set amount of funding by formula, but many of the decisions about how these funds are spent will be made by the end of 2021—the others by the end of 2022.

Most COVID-related rescue funds require (or encourage) a public input period. During this process, you can leverage youth impact assessments to make the case for prioritizing children. As early as possible—either before the public input period starts or as soon as it begins—work with governmental officials to authorize the use of youth impact assessments in funding the areas that are your priorities. Once authorized, you will want to ensure there is an aggressive schedule for completing the analyses and using them in decision-making.

Competition for American Rescue Plan funds is already intense, so the time to start is now.




Ways impact assessments can advance your priorities for using American Rescue Plan funding

Exactly how to use youth impact assessments for budget advocacy will depend on the needs and priorities of children in your community and on [which COVID rescue funding streams](#) best address those. Following are examples of ways to use youth impact assessments in your advocacy.


Example 1: Out-of-School Activities

If one of your priorities is to increase the availability of after-school and summer activities for kids, up to \$30 billion in new funds is designated in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) with flexibility to be used for this purpose, and more could be allocated from other flexible funding streams in ARP.

 *An impact assessment could, for example, highlight the need to target resources to particular neighborhoods or groups of marginalized youth or the need to allocate additional dollars for after-school or summer programs.*


Example 2: Equity in K-12 Education

For communities interested in supplementing Title 1 funds to achieve greater educational equity, there are education stabilization funds in the American Rescue Plan (through the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund](#), or ESSER) to address learning recovery with summer enrichment; other forms of academic, social, and emotional support; summer meals and snacks, etc. Local education agencies are required to spend at least 20 percent of funds for these purposes, but they can choose to invest more.

 *An impact assessment could make the case for greater spending in these areas as well as focusing on high-need communities, such as low-income communities of color.*


Example 3: Affordable Broadband and Computing Devices

The American Rescue Plan created a \$7 billion [Emergency Connectivity Fund](#) to support schools and libraries to help close the “homework gap.” In addition, some portion of the \$350 billion in new federal funds for state and local relief can be used for broadband and computing devices. The breadth and depth of the digital divide exposed by the pandemic could also justify creating ongoing policies that ensure computing devices and broadband at home are available to all students and that funding and systems are in place to bring them to those most in need.

 *Because child-specific needs are often an afterthought when decisions are made about broadband deployment and technology tools, a youth impact assessment can spotlight young people and present solutions to address their technology needs.*


Example 4: Coordinated Leadership for Children and Youth

Some of the \$350 billion in local and state relief funds from the ARP could be used to weave together isolated investments in kids into an integrated, holistic approach. For example, these funds could support [state](#) and [local](#) children’s cabinets that coordinate policies related to children and youth. They also could support collective impact partnerships like those in the [STRIVE Together network](#).

 *An impact assessment might, for example, show a return on investment in coordinating bodies like these that can blend funding streams and leverage other public funds.*

Example 5: Youth Opportunity and Jobs

The local and state relief funds and also the education stabilization funds (in ESSER) in the American Rescue Plan can be used for paid work opportunities for high school students, youth-led community service, internships, and re-engagement efforts for youth who have become disconnected from school and work.

 *An impact assessment could help ensure funding goes to these activities and to youth who need these opportunities the most.*

Youth impact assessments could also be used to expand capacity in other areas of need, including:

- home visiting for high-need families;
- mental health care for youth;
- safety-net and care coordination services for families;
- child care;
- services for youth in foster care; and
- child abuse prevention and treatment services.

An impact assessment could highlight the need to focus spending on particular high-need communities, such as low-income communities of color.

How to get started

Once you decide on the policy area(s) in which you want to advocate and the relevant COVID-19 funding stream(s), take the following steps to pursue a youth impact assessment.

1. Find a Champion

Identify one or more government officials with decision-making authority over relevant funds and work with them to champion use of a youth impact assessment.

2. Define Roles

With the championing governmental official, clarify roles for the research entity conducting the assessment and for interested stakeholders, including youth. For example, a community organization or collective impact coalition could take the lead in convening stakeholders, drafting assessment questions, and coordinating other efforts to help make the responsibilities of government officials manageable.

3. Develop Assessment

Draft the questions to use in conducting the assessment, using this [template](#) as a starting point.

- If a proposal has been developed for use of funds in your priority area, analyze the extent of the need among children and youth; identify groups of children who are disproportionately affected; and assess the extent to which the proposal addresses the need, especially for young people most affected. Quantify the gap between what's needed and proposed as the basis for your funding request.
- If there is no proposal yet for use of the funds in your priority area, use the above approach to define the unmet needs of youth and set out solutions that prioritize young people who are disproportionately affected. Here is an [example](#).

4. Assign Research

Decide which entity is best suited to perform the analysis of funding impacts—such as a research unit in city, county, school, or state government, or a well-respected outside entity like a community foundation or university. Work with them to design the impact assessment process. Getting input from youth most affected by the funding is essential.

5. Use Findings

Activate your coalition to use the impact assessment findings as policymakers make funding decisions. Conduct outreach and engage youth and other community residents in the advocacy with decision-makers.

Getting input into the assessment from youth most affected by the funding is essential.



For further information

[Using Child Impact Assessments in Your Community or State: A Starter Guide](#)

[Child & Youth Impact Assessments: Sample Tools](#)

[The Cradle-to-Career Guide to Federal Relief Funding for Kids During and Beyond COVID-19](#)

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