

## **STRATEGY SPOTLIGHTS: Making Early Childhood a City Priority**

### **STRATEGY #1: Public Will And Public Education Campaigns**

To improve outcomes for young children, early childhood success must be a community-wide priority. City leaders can be important catalysts for change by focusing attention on early childhood issues and by communicating the significance of strong systems of support for young children and their families. Local communication initiatives can be directed to two important goals:

- **Building Public Will**— Local officials can help raise awareness among the public and policymakers that it is important to invest in efforts to support early childhood development, from quality child care to home visiting.
- **Educating the Community**— Local officials also can play a key role in ensuring that parents and other caregivers of young children have the information and resources they need to promote early childhood success.

### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

When planning and implementing a public will campaign, it can be useful to focus on a few key messages about early care and education. In a paper entitled “Why Early Ed Benefits All of Us: Communication Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education,” George Lakoff and Joseph Grady focus on two key facts that should be the basis for building a pro-early education consensus across the political spectrum:

- **The Need for Care Issue.** For economic reasons, a very large number of parents work and require affordable, high-quality child care.
- **The Early Development Issue.** A child’s intellectual, emotional, social, and moral development is largely shaped by experiences and education between birth and age six.

As local officials and their community partners set out to make the case for action on these issues, they have an array of research findings and other facts to draw on. City leaders can frame their messages and appeals around the following:

- **Brain development research.** By age 3, a child’s brain has reached about 90 percent of its adult size. Drawing attention to this fact can help raise awareness of the impact of early experiences on brain development, as well as the importance of a quality learning environment for young children.
- **Data on deficiencies in current system.** One-third of children entering kindergarten are unprepared for school challenges. Only one in seven child care

centers provide good quality care. And, with full-day care costing between \$4,000 and \$10,000 a year, many families find it hard to cope. Statistics such as these, including local figures wherever possible, can help make the case for action to improve the current system.

- **Data showing return on investment.** A number of research studies have shown that high-quality early education programs can have a significant impact on academic and social outcomes, especially for at-risk children. Among the positive outcomes: higher scores on reading and math tests; increased likelihood of attending college and delaying parenthood; and decreases in delinquency and crime. Local officials should emphasize the return on investments in early childhood initiatives, noting that every dollar invested in early education yields a seven-dollar return in long-term public savings.

Recent research on public attitudes toward early care and education confirms that many of these messages resonate with voters and citizens. Polling also shows widespread support for action to strengthen early childhood programs, especially for low-income and working-poor families and their children. At the same time, the public expects that parents will have a primary care-giving role for children from ages zero to three.

On the role of government, Americans tend to prefer programs that are perceived as community- and neighborhood-controlled. In addition, polls show that the public supports increased revenues for preschool from three principal sources: so-called "sin taxes" such as tobacco or alcohol; portions of funds raised by state lottery systems; and higher taxes dedicated to early care and education. The public also supports tax credits paid to working parents who have children in early care, as well as credits to employers who make preschool available to their employees.

## WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Identify your audience.** Choosing a target audience for a public will initiative can help to determine what types of outreach strategies would be most appropriate. Possible audiences include: parents, community members, local officials, state government, business leaders, and local foundations. Often, city leaders will have multiple audiences. The key to success lies in figuring out specific messages and strategies that will work with each. In reaching out to business leaders, for example, city leaders will want to make the economic case for action on these issues. Meanwhile, the state legislature might respond to a message that emphasizes how quality early childhood programs can reduce long-term spending on health care, special education, and criminal justice.
- **Develop a clear and compelling message.** As discussed above, city leaders will want to make a powerful case for action. Effective messages will tout the importance of the early years and the need to ensure high-quality, developmentally appropriate care, both at home and in early care and education programs. The key is to affirm the choices that different parents make (rather than disparaging this or that parenting approach) and to generate support for a wide

variety of efforts, including early learning programs and parent education. Emphasizing themes that resonate with the public helps ensure that the message will be well-received.

- **Educate parents and other caregivers.** City leaders can help make sure that local communications efforts include a strong education component for parents and other caregivers. Among the topics for public education: why the early years are so important to the healthy development of children; how parents can help promote positive early childhood development through immunizations, reading to their children, limiting their exposure to television, etc.; how to choose quality caregivers; and how to access community resources and other supports. Municipalities might want to work with others in the community to set up information lines for parents and other caregivers who have questions about early childhood issues and resources within the community.
- **Use the “bully pulpit” to spread the word.** Mayors, councilmembers, and other municipal leaders have numerous opportunities to share information with the public and other audiences and to advocate an early childhood agenda. These opportunities include: public speeches; council meetings and hearings; appearances/presentations on local cable channels; newspaper editorials; public service announcements; press interviews; meetings with other public officials and business and community leaders; and town hall meetings. Through these and other venues, municipal officials can mobilize support for, and focus attention on, efforts that strengthen families and promote access to high-quality early care and education.
- **Build a communications coalition.** Municipal leaders can play an instrumental role in bringing stakeholders together to design and implement a broader communications campaign around early childhood issues. Potential partners include: local agencies, public schools, child care resource and referral agencies, local early learning and parent education programs, and family support centers. City leaders can convene these and other partners to launch a coordinated effort aimed at raising awareness and building local support – with different groups responsible for reaching different audiences. Municipalities also can contribute city funds or other resources (such as staff time and public space) to local communications efforts. An initial activity for the coalition might be to create a community resource guide, explaining available early childhood programs in the city and how early care and education can be improved. The group might also want to consider paid advertising campaigns, billboards, and other steps to raise awareness of the issues.

## RESOURCES

Information on public attitudes and polling information is available from the Communications Consortium Media Center— For more information see: <http://www.earlycare.org>.

Early Care and Education Collaborative Fact Sheet— For more information see:  
<http://earlycare.org/>.

National Center for Children in Poverty. “Survey Finds Americans Support Early Learning Initiatives”— For more information see:  
[http://www.nccp.org/pub\\_win03c.html](http://www.nccp.org/pub_win03c.html).

Ad Council Guide to Creating Public Service Announcements— For more information see: [http://www.adcouncil.org/np/tips\\_psa\\_definition/](http://www.adcouncil.org/np/tips_psa_definition/).

I Am Your Child Foundation — For more information see: <http://www.iamyourchild.org>.

Success by Six Ad Campaign— For more information see: <http://www.uwchatt.org>.

San Antonio, Texas Public Will Campaign— For more information see:  
<http://www.sanantonio.gov/comminit/EarlyOn/EarlyOn.asp>.

## **STRATEGY #2: Creating A Family-Friendly Municipal Workplace**

Employed parents with young children often struggle to balance work demands with the needs of their infants or toddlers. Among the multiple challenges facing parents: finding the time, money, and resources they need to provide the best care for their children. Employers that offer support to working parents in addressing these needs not only help improve outcomes for children, but also frequently find that their employees are more productive and more dedicated workers. This is as true for municipal governments as it is for any other type of employer.

### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

Supporting municipal employees with young children is an important way for cities and towns to emphasize the importance of early childhood. By establishing “family-friendly” policies and procedures, and by offering resources to help parents provide quality care for their children, cities and towns can lead by example as a model employer in their communities. The goal: to make it easier for parents who work in municipal government to provide the nurturing and care their young children need.

### **WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO**

- **Offer flextime.** Flexible work hours, or “flextime,” can include a variety of options, such as: staggered work times that allow workers to begin or end the workday earlier or later; compressed work hours, such as working 40 hours in 4 days; job sharing; or part-time work. These alternatives to the traditional “9 to 5” workday can give working parents the extra time they need to pick up their children from child care, schedule medical appointments, and balance child rearing and work responsibilities. Cities can consider offering one or more of these options to their employees.
- **Enhance parental leave policies.** If they have not already done so, cities can adopt policies that give parents ample time off from work to attend to a newborn or adopted child, or to care for a child who is ill or needs extra attention. Leave policies such as these help to ensure that employees are able to be productive workers while meeting the needs of their families. The federal Family and Medical Leave Act mandates that employees can take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for newborn, adopted, or sick children. Yet, some employees may want more time off to spend with their children, and others might not be able to afford taking leave without pay. Cities can consider offering a longer leave period or paying some portion of an employee’s salary when he or she takes time off for family reasons. In Washington, D.C., the city’s Family and Medical Leave law allows employees to take up to 16 weeks of unpaid leave. Cities also can offer time off for parents to attend preschool functions or volunteer at their child’s school.

- **Support breastfeeding mothers through a lactation program.** Cities can make it easier and more convenient for new mothers to continue to breastfeed when they go back to work by providing time during the workday, as well as private space within municipal buildings, for mothers to pump breast milk. In Lincoln, Nebraska, all city agencies are required to make available a private room with a lock and electrical outlet for employees who are nursing. Mothers are allowed to take three breaks throughout the day to pump.
- **Establish dependent care accounts.** To help working parents pay for quality child care, cities can allow employees to put pre-tax money into a dependent care or “flexible spending” account. Money contributed to the account can only be used for child care expenses. In Norfolk, Virginia, city employees can put up to \$5,000 per year into the flexible spending account for purchasing child care that enables them to work.
- **Support resource and referral services.** Employed parents often need resources and information to help them make good decisions about how their children will be cared for while they are at work. Local child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) assist parents in finding appropriate child care. Cities can help connect municipal employees to CCR&Rs by including contact information in paychecks or municipal newsletters, or by allowing time during work hours for employees to take advantage of CCR&R services. Some cities actually operate the CCR&R for their communities. For example, the Boulder, Colorado city government runs the Community Resource and Referral Service, which provides information about and referrals to child care, preschools, and other services for children and families. This is a free service for city employees and is available to all residents of Boulder.
- **Make child care more affordable.** Cities can consider offering subsidies or arranging discounts for employees to help them cover the costs of child care. For example, in Phoenix, Arizona, monthly financial aid for child care is offered on a sliding scale to employees with household income below a certain level. In addition, the city publishes a listing of providers in the area who offer city employees a discount on child care services ranging from 5 to 30 percent. Similarly, in Austin, Texas, eligible city employees can get from \$50 to \$200 of their monthly child care expenses reimbursed. Austin also offers scholarships for part of the cost of summer children’s programs operated by the Parks and Recreation Department. The scholarships range from \$40 to \$80 per week.
- **Provide child care on-site or near municipal work facilities.** Cities can establish quality child care programs for their employees using space in a municipal building or a nearby location. In San Diego, California, the city recently opened a child care facility in the downtown Comerica Bank building to serve city employees. On a smaller scale, cities can contract with an outside child care provider to offer back-up care when an employee’s typical arrangements fall through, or when a child cannot attend his or her regular program due to an

illness. In Phoenix, Arizona, city employees can use an “in-home sick childcare” service that provides care for a mildly ill, dependent child. All caregivers are F.B.I. fingerprinted, bonded, and specially trained to provide these services. The city subsidizes most of the cost for eligible employees.

### **STRATEGY #3: Making The Business And Economic Case For Action**

In today's tight fiscal environment, all city spending is held up to close scrutiny. A key concern is return on investment— what are the city, local businesses, and residents getting in return for funds spent on early care and education? With the experts saying that quality early care and education can return \$7 in reduced future expenditures for every \$1 spent today, cities can lay the groundwork for action on early childhood issues by saying it makes perfect economic sense for everyone.

#### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

Three major studies have looked at the effect of high-quality early childhood education programs on society and the economy (see box). All have shown the same results: increased school achievement scores; decreased rates of being held back in school; and decreased placement in special education programs. Over the longer term, the studies show that quality early childhood programs can lead to an increased rate of high school graduation, and decreased crime and delinquency rates.

<b>SUMMARY OF KEY RESEARCH ON EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS</b>			
<b>Program:</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Program Description</b>	<b>Key Long-Term Outcomes</b>
Chicago Child Parent Center	Chicago, Illinois	Half-day program in Chicago public schools, ages three and four.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30% more likely to remain in school and finish high school.</li> <li>• 41% fewer arrests for violent crimes.</li> <li>• \$7,000 investment per child yielded \$48,000 return.</li> </ul>
Perry Preschool Program	Ypsilanti, Michigan	Educational child care, full-day, year-round, ages birth to five.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20% decreased welfare enrollment.</li> <li>• Increased income as an adult.</li> <li>• \$12,000 investment per child yielded a \$108,000 return.</li> </ul>
Abecedarian Project	Chapel Hill, North Carolina	Half-day program in public schools, ages three and four.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 25% fewer students in special education.</li> <li>• 20% increase in attendance of a 4-year college.</li> <li>• \$33,000 investment per child yielded a \$123,000 return.</li> </ul>

Other programs show similar results. Studies of early care and education programs repeatedly have shown that quality programs boost reading and math skills, reduce the number of children entering special education programs in public schools, and decrease the rate of drop-outs from school. As a result, children who attend these programs have higher adult earnings, decreased dependence on social services, and lower rates of crime.

Because of the clear economic payoff, as well as the workforce impacts of quality early care, many business-related organizations have begun advocating for increased support for early childhood education:



- A study completed in 2002 by the Committee for Economic Development concluded that the most effective way to build an educated workforce is by providing public education starting in the most critical years— birth through age five.
- A 2003 report from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis asserted that the contributions a child makes to society as an adult worker can be traced back to the earliest years of life and the availability of quality early education and child care.

The support of the business community can be a strong asset in developing and implementing municipal early childhood initiatives. However, successfully approaching local business leaders and securing their active engagement can be a difficult task. A key strategy: helping private-sector leaders understand the benefits that quality early care and education can bring to their businesses and the community as a whole.

In its document, “10 Tips for Getting and Keeping Business Involved: An Illustrated Guide for Early Childhood Leaders,” the Families and Work Institute outlines the many benefits businesses receive as a result of early childhood investments. These include: attracting better workers (if the employer provides family-supportive benefits); reducing turnover and absenteeism; and helping families access public health and child care benefits if a small business cannot offer benefits directly. The “business case” also can focus on the future, noting that future prosperity and economic development require students who have been successful in their K-12 education— which, in turn, requires quality child care, health care, and parenting supports.

## WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Make the economic case.** The direct return on investment for quality early childhood programs can be used as leverage when building support for new early childhood initiatives. City leaders can draw public attention to the research showing that investing in quality early care programs is one of the best ways to use limited public funds. Crime rates are lowered, graduation rates rise, businesses benefit from educated and committed workers, and the city sees a huge return in tax revenue from the growth in the workforce.
- **Demonstrate the economic payoff of child care investments.** According to “Framing Child Care as an Economic Development Issue: Lessons from Early Studies” by Louise Stoney,<sup>1</sup> child care can be promoted as “an industry that generates jobs, contributes to the economy through the purchase of goods and services, and supports working families at all income levels.” The City of San Antonio, Texas, for example, recently conducted an economic impact analysis of early childhood services and found that the child care industry— through direct and indirect employment— creates 8,369 jobs in the community. Total earnings

---

<sup>1</sup> National League of Cities Early Care and Education City Network—  
<http://www.nlc.org/content/Files/IYEFECEJanFeb2005.pdf>

in the industry are \$115.92 million, and resulting tax revenues are approximately \$2.5 million.

- **Ask business leaders to serve as champions or spokespeople.** Involving a CEO or well-respected business leader can lend clout and influence to an early childhood initiative while supporting the city's efforts to make the economic case for expanded early care and education programs. Without asking for a large donation of money and/or time, mayors and councilmembers can ask a business leader to be an honorary chair of an early childhood task force. Business executives also can raise awareness of the importance of early care and education through speeches and appearances; participate in advocacy efforts at the local and state level; or help recruit additional community and private sector leaders.
- **Conduct targeted business outreach.** As a way to educate businesses and encourage their involvement, city leaders can organize discussion sessions and events oriented to the needs and interests of the business community. In Irvine, California, for example, the city hosts an annual forum to help businesses develop family-friendly practices. Another goal of the forum is to review the economic impacts of quality child care in sustaining and stimulating the local economy and in helping individual employers boost the productivity of their workers.
- **Reward business involvement.** Positive recognition of and reinforcement for business contributions can help secure long-term involvement and encourage other companies to follow suit. In Louisville, Kentucky, for example, the Business/Family Partnership recognizes nearly 200 companies each year in gold, silver, and bronze categories for family-friendly practices and policies. The scoring includes a number of questions about companies' policies and programs related to child care, flex-time, and parents' involvement in their children's education.

## CITY EXAMPLES

- In Kansas City, Missouri, municipal officials, local business leaders, and others serve on a regional advisory board that helps market early childhood efforts and secures seed capital and sustaining funding for area programs. A limited number of highly engaged businesses serve as ambassadors in promoting early childhood issues to their peers. For more information, visit the Partnership for Children at <http://www.pfc.org/> or the Kansas City Clerk on-line at <http://www.kcmo.org/clerk>.
- The Business/Child Care Partnership, a project of the City of Seattle and Child Care Resources (the local resource and referral agency), helps to improve the quality of child care in Seattle through informal partnerships between business and child care providers. The aim of the project is to help local providers become accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children

(NAEYC). For more information see:  
<http://www.childcare.org/business/business-partnership.htm>.

- The Early Childhood Initiative in Yonkers, New York recently held a Human Resource Forum on Child Care for local employers. Attendees included large and small business owners and human resource professionals from local companies. The forum featured a business consultant who discussed flexible work-life options that help to retain good employees. In addition, a representative from the Avon Corporation spoke about Avon's on-site child care center, and a representative from the U.S. Internal Revenue Service spoke about how employers can help their employees connect to tax benefits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- In 1993, Kay Granger, then-mayor of the Fort Worth, Texas, teamed with business leaders to begin "Corporate Champions for Children." A collaboration of local employers who invest in quality child care, the coalition has grown to 16 large and small corporate members, including the City of Fort Worth. Each member invests an average of \$10,000 annually, which is used to support child care resource and referral services (CCR&R) and to improve child care quality. Employees of Corporate Champions members are entitled to an enhanced level of services at the local CCR&R. With the assistance of the program, more than 80 child care programs have been accredited in the last 10 years, improving the quality of care for approximately 51,000 children in the city. For more information see: <http://www.corporatechampions.org/>.
- The City of Irvine, California presents "Family Friendly Business Awards" to Irvine-based companies that have implemented family-friendly policies and procedures. Awards are given based on business size. For more information see: [http://www.ci.irvine.ca.us/depts/cs/childcare/family\\_friendly.asp](http://www.ci.irvine.ca.us/depts/cs/childcare/family_friendly.asp).

## RESOURCES

### Publications:

*Framing Child Care as an Economic Development Issue: Lessons from Early Studies*, Louis Stoney. Available at:

<http://government.cce.cornell.edu/doc/pdf/FramingChildCare.pdf>.

*Tips for Getting and Keeping Business Involved: An Illustrated Guide for Early Childhood Leaders*, Families and Work Institute. Available at:

<http://www.familiesandwork.org/index.asp?PageAction=VIEWPROD&ProdID=46>.

*Early Childhood Education: A Call to Action from the Business Community*, The Business Roundtable and Corporate Voices for Working Families. Available at:

[http://www.upkcouncil.org/docs/topicsOC\\_roundtable.pdf](http://www.upkcouncil.org/docs/topicsOC_roundtable.pdf).

*Business and Early Care and Education: A Review of Engagement Strategies and A Connecticut Case Example.* Available at:  
<http://www.ctkidslink.org/publications/ece03Business06.pdf>.

*Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Center Program: Executive Summary, June 2001,* Arthur J. Reynolds, Judy A. Temple, Dylan L. Robertson, and Emily A. Mann. Available at:  
<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/cbaexecsum4.html>.

*The ABCs of ECD. Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return, Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return,* Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald. Available at:  
<http://www.minneapolisfed.org/pubs/fedgaz/03-03/earlychild.cfm>.

*Investing in Our Children: Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions,* Lynn Karoly and Peter Greenwood. Available at:  
<http://www.rand.org/child/projects/r4.html>.

*Preschool for All: Investing in a Productive and Just Society,* Committee for Economic Development's Early Childhood Education Project. Available at:  
<http://ced.org/projects/prek.shtml>.

## **STRATEGY #4: Identifying Funding For Early Childhood Success<sup>2</sup>**

One of the biggest challenges municipal leaders face when seeking to promote early childhood success is identifying resources for new or expanded initiatives to serve their cities' youngest citizens. Strategies range from bringing in new federal money to making the most of existing city resources to creating a dedicated, long-term source of local revenue for early care and education.

### **THE STRATEGY IN FOCUS**

Cities can tap a variety of federal, state, and local resources to support early childhood programs and priorities. Even at a time of declining federal and state support for these types of efforts, a survey of the federal resources for early childhood provides an idea of the range of funding options available.

Federal grants for early childhood initiatives and programs are available from a number of sources, such as:

- **Head Start/Early Head Start.** Funding for Head Start/Early Head Start goes directly from the federal government to local programs. Municipal governments are eligible to submit applications to be local grantees.
- **Early Learning Opportunities Act (ELOA).** These federal grants are awarded to local communities working to improve early learning through child care provider training, early literacy programs, linkages between child care and health services, and parent supports. A number of cities have applied for and received ELOA funding, including: Chandler, Arizona; Washington, D.C.; Minneapolis, Minnesota; St. Louis, Missouri; and Wilmington, Delaware.
- **Early Reading First.** These new, three-year grants from the U.S. Department of Education fund school readiness and early literacy efforts for preschool-aged children. Groups eligible to apply for funding include: local school districts; public agencies; nonprofit and private organizations; faith-based organizations; and collaborations of two or more of these groups. The City of Seattle was among the first set of Early Reading First grantees.

In addition to these direct grants, the federal government provides various resources and subsidies for families to support quality early care and a healthy start for kids. These include: child care subsidies; tax credits such as the federal (or state) Dependent Care Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, or the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); low-cost health insurance through Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); and food benefits under the Food Stamps or WIC programs.

---

<sup>2</sup> This strategy spotlight is based on NLC's "Financing Early Care and Education - A Strategy Guide for Municipal Leaders". To request a copy of this guide, please contact IYEF at or 202/626-3014

Last but not least, the federal government also provides some funding to service providers. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), for example, reimburses the cost of meals and snacks for early care and education providers that serve low-income families, including Head Start programs, for-profit centers, and family child care providers. And, the Even Start program provides funding to states for family literacy programs. Partnerships of school districts and community-based organizations can apply for grants from their state's education agency.

In addition to these federal programs, cities can consider a range of strategies for securing local and state funding for early childhood initiatives.

### WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO

- **Make the most of federal grants.** City leaders can work to make sure that their cities are taking full advantage of available federal grants for early childhood initiatives— from Head Start and Early Head Start to Early Learning Opportunities Act funds and new Early Reading First grants. Municipal officials can work with city staff to learn more about what is available and how to apply.
- **Help local families connect to federal and state resources.** City officials also can make sure that families with young children are aware of federal and state early childhood resources and benefits available to them— and that they know how to apply. Cities, for example, can advertise the availability of child care subsidies and tax credits such as the EITC through public education campaigns, including public service announcements (PSAs), advertising and billboards, and other outreach. For example, in Laredo, Texas, the city produced a television PSA featuring the mayor and paid for several billboards to be displayed throughout the city to raise awareness about low-cost or free health insurance opportunities.
- **Make sure local service providers are maximizing the funding available to them.** City leaders can convene service providers to talk about opportunities for federal and state funding. Municipalities also can play a key role in nurturing partnerships among schools, child care providers, and others to explore and pursue state and federal dollars. In addition, by providing city support for grant applications (through letters of support, grant-writing assistance, and in-kind contributions), city leaders can improve the chances of local providers securing grants from federal and state government, as well as private foundations and other donors.
- **Use existing city resources.** Existing city resources can be used creatively to support early childhood programming, often without a large outlay of new funding. Cities, for example, can consider donating the use of municipally-owned buildings for early learning programs. Also, early literacy activities and other child development programs can be built into the mission of the public library or parks and recreation programs. In Monrovia, California, the city supports reading activities for young children and their families at the local library. Parents who

## **STRATEGY #5: Coordinating Early Childhood Efforts**

As cities and towns work to develop early childhood initiatives, they often create a structure for their efforts. The goal: to coordinate or “institutionalize” early care and education programs.

### **WHAT CITY LEADERS CAN DO**

- **Designate a point person on early childhood issues.** Many cities and towns have a child care coordinator or early childhood specialist who is responsible for managing local efforts to improve outcomes for young children. In Long Beach, California, for example, the city hired a child care coordinator to manage the community’s strategic planning process for early childhood and oversee its implementation.
- **Create a mayor’s office for early childhood or children and youth.** The City of Nashville, Tennessee created a new Office of Children and Youth led by the mayor’s former education policy advisor. And, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the city’s Office of Children, Youth & Families (OCYF) evaluates public policy and facilitates communication and partnerships among the city, Grand Rapids Public Schools, and other partners.
- **Create a new town council committee on children and families.** The council can lead and coordinate local early childhood efforts. To ensure adequate staffing and attention to these issues, cities should consider having an additional entity—within or outside of city government—that can advance the council committee’s ideas and initiatives. In his inaugural address, Mayor Ed Garza of San Antonio, Texas announced a council committee focused on healthy families, underscoring his commitment to working with the council to ensure that programs and funding support the common goal of making connections to strengthen families. Meanwhile, in Wilmington, Delaware, the city council passed an ordinance creating the Wilmington Early Care and Education Council (WECEC). The council includes parents, child care providers, local community organizations, school districts, and representatives from the mayor’s office, the Office of City Council, and the Delaware Early Care and Education Office.
- **Appoint an interagency coordinating council on early childhood or school readiness.** Local officials can develop a structural commitment to early childhood by establishing a coordinating council that includes key agencies within, and sometimes outside of, city government. The council can be asked to meet regularly to address school readiness issues and find opportunities for joint initiatives. In New Haven, Connecticut, for example, Mayor John DeStefano and Superintendent of Schools Reginald Mayo established the Mayor’s Task Force on Universal Access to Early Care and Education in September 2000. The task force’s charge was to develop a plan to ensure that all New Haven children arrive

have difficulty reading are encouraged to attend special sessions at the library where they learn to become more comfortable reading to their young children.

- **Invest local revenue.** In addition to contributing existing city resources or general funds, municipal officials also can consider ways to generate new or additional local funds for early childhood services. Cities can create a dedicated source of revenue through a local sales or property tax, or earmark a portion of existing taxes for early learning programs. Fees for the use of parks or for new businesses also can be dedicated to child care improvements.

### **CITY EXAMPLES**

- In Seattle, Washington, the Project Lift-Off Opportunity Fund is supported through a partnership between local community foundations and the city. For every \$2 contributed to the fund by an association of local philanthropies for any element of the city's child care "Blueprint for Change," the city invests \$1 in matching funds (up to a set limit).
- In Santa Fe, New Mexico, the city allocates 3 percent of its gross receipts tax to programs involving children and youth. The programs are targeted to serve low-income families and children in Santa Fe. In the past, the fund provided approximately \$900,000 to 40 nonprofit programs in the city, primarily in the areas of child development for high-risk children; mental health and health education; recreation; youth training; and supplemental education programs.
- Aspen, Colorado is one of a handful of communities in the country that collect dedicated local tax dollars for early childhood programs. Through the .45-percent Affordable Housing/Day Care Sales Tax, Aspen funds the "Kids First" Childcare Resource Department. This department administers a financial aid program to help defray the costs of child care for eligible families enrolled with licensed child care providers. In 2002, over \$190,000 was allocated to the financial aid program, helping more than 70 families meet their child care costs.



at kindergarten with the skills, knowledge, and support they need to be successful. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, the Youth Coordinating Board (YCB) is an intergovernmental organization dedicated to promoting the healthy, comprehensive development of Minneapolis children and youth ages 0 to 20. The YCB was created through a state-authorized joint powers agreement among the City of Minneapolis, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, Minneapolis Public Library Board, and the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners. For more information: <http://www.ycb.org/schoolreadiness.asp>.

- **Ask an appropriate city department to make early childhood part of its core mission.** Many cities have elevated early childhood as a key priority within the broader mission of a city department working on human services or family support issues. In Jackson, Mississippi, the city established an Early Childhood Development Division within the Department of Human and Cultural Services. And, one of the key priorities for the Department of Family and Community Services in Albuquerque, New Mexico is to support the development of young children.
- **Create a regional entity supported by area towns and businesses to provide early childhood leadership and support.** In southeastern Virginia, local elected officials from 11 cities and towns joined other key regional stakeholders to form an economic development coalition called the Hampton Roads Partnership. After recognizing that the success of young children is critical to economic development, the partnership launched an early childhood initiative called Square One in 1999. For more information: [www.sqone.org](http://www.sqone.org). In another example of a regional initiative, the City of Elkhart, Indiana partnered with Elkhart County to provide financial assistance to a local Child Care Issues Task Force. With \$32,000 in city and county support, the task force has assisted the business community in exploring child care options, in part by conducting employee surveys to identify work and family child care issues.

