

## **POWERING AN EMERGING MOVEMENT TO TRANSFORM LOCAL GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS IN CALIFORNIA'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

All California children and youth deserve the opportunity to reach for their dreams with the care and services to support them as they grow. To realize this vision, Funding the Next Generation (FNG) builds the capacity of local communities to transform their fiscal policies in order to generate the resources needed with a focus on using the ballot as a primary tool. Local action and the use of the ballot to create fiscal policy ensures money is allocated where it is needed, and just as importantly, mobilizes and empowers those most impacted by how public dollars are spent.

After its first decade of groundbreaking work to foster a democratic approach to increasing public resources for children and youth at the city and county level and after a broad inclusive planning process, FNG is embarking on the next phase of its work. We are seeking funding to build on the lessons learned, broaden our impact throughout California, and realize the potential of the movement we have led for local budget equity for children and youth.

### **THE CHALLENGE FACING CALIFORNIA CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

California's children and youth lack the services and opportunities they need to become healthy, independent, confident, and engaged adults. Public resources are grossly inadequate, imbalanced, and focused on repressive policies that serve those already in the welfare or justice systems or those already ill. No where is this truer than at the local level where public safety usurps over half of local discretionary investments and investments in prevention are often less than 5% of the discretionary budget. Furthermore, much of the funding earmarked for children and youth in local budgets is often one-time and unsustainable, creating uncertainty for all stakeholders from year to year. Those most impacted and knowledgeable about the needs of young people do not have the power to re-balance fiscal priorities nor the skills and resources to do the work to effect that kind of change.

### **FUNDING THE NEXT GENERATION (FNG)**

FNG began in 2014 as an independent initiative, fiscally-sponsored by the First 5 Association of California and later by San Francisco State University School of Public Affairs and Civic Engagement. Our mission is to increase city and county dedicated funding for children and youth with a focus on placing measures on the ballot to create the source of revenue. Funding streams created by voters and embedded in local government charters and laws are more sustainable and stable than the line items included each year in local budgets. Inspired by California's first and the nation's largest Children and Youth Fund in San Francisco, FNG builds the capacity of local coalitions and leaders, creates the theory and educational materials to guide the work, and catalyzes a movement to advance budget equity for children and youth in California.

Since our inception, we have literally written the book [about how to create children and youth funds through ballot measures](#). We have provided education and support to over 800 leaders throughout coalitions with 41 coalitions in every corner of the State participating in our learning opportunities. We have cultivated a network of consultants who have become experts in every aspect of this work and remain steadfast in advancing the creation of local dedicated funding for children and youth.

We have become the go-to organization for helping communities find new and more democratic ways to generate resources at the local level by using the ballot – a process that engages those most impacted by fiscal policies and builds infrastructures inside and outside government for community accountability. We collaborate with groups throughout the State working to increase resources and build power for

children and youth. Most importantly, we have built a community across this movement and have become a critical part of the children's advocacy infrastructure in California.

### **CONNECTED TO THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT: THE CHILDREN'S FUNDING PROJECT**

Last year FNG became the California division of the Children's Funding Project, a national non-profit social impact organization that helps cities, counties and states expand equitable revenue for children and youth through public financing. As a result of this important shift, FNG's future work will become more central to the national work on local funding strategies and better positioned to contribute to the national movement, aligning its work with organizers and policy leaders throughout the country.

### **LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES**

Since its launch in 2014, FNG has stimulated an outpouring of energy and interest among advocates, non-profits, youth, parents, and policymakers in placing measures on local ballots to create dedicated funds for children and youth. We have developed a deeper understanding of the complex and time-consuming path to the ballot for grassroots advocates for children and youth, including how to build the case, navigate the legalities of revenue and election policy, develop readiness for a local budget equity campaign, work in coalitions, and turn aspirations into concrete measures ready for the electorate.

We have learned that there is nothing like a ballot measure to focus civic attention on an issue and build the power of advocates to achieve their vision. Since we started, there have been 21 measures on local ballots throughout the state and twice that many communities enthusiastically began the journey. Already eight measures have passed generating \$400 million annually. Just as important, these dedicated public funds for children and youth have created tables and planning processes for impacted communities to guide local policies and investments. The community engagement process required by these ballot measures has resulted in an ongoing infrastructure for civic engagement.

The momentum of this movement continues to grow. This year we have seen an even greater hunger for new approaches to generating resources for young people to overcome the glaring injustice of the current misallocation of resources and strengthen community voice in the policy-making process. Last summer, 20 coalitions and lead organizations responded to FNG's call to start local campaigns and participate in its learning community for future elections. This reflected a significant increase in the number and type of organizations aspiring to place measures for children and youth on the ballot. We believe COVID-19 contributed to this as it brought to light and exacerbated so many needs such as childcare and youth mental health.

Yet, at the same time, we have faced significant challenges. They include the lack of political engagement and political capital of many local non-profits which can and should be the core of this movement. Other significant challenges are the laws of California that are over-influenced by anti-tax zealots, local political cultures that de-value prevention in favor of public safety, competition for resources by those with greater political power, and inadequate funding for the daring pioneers who strive to do this work. Our plans moving forward will address these challenges.

### **OUR GOALS AND METHODS MOVING FORWARD**

Together with our network members, advisors, and partners, we have created an impactful organization to promote this work, a dream team of some of the best experts in the country, tools and theory for implementation, and learning communities and technical support to advance peer support and bring new information.

We will expand and strengthen that structure and add some new elements to our work to address the challenges listed above. We will:

- Expand our outreach and create more extensive educational strategies to build a broader, more diverse statewide network of local intergenerational cross-cultural coalitions committed to budget equity for children;
- Expand our partnerships with key potential allies, such as unions, school boards, youth organizing groups and State-level stakeholders ranging from grassroots voter outreach projects to business associations;
- Create a more structured, well-defined package of support to our learning network to meet the needs of more diverse coalitions at various capacity levels and political and legal circumstances;
- Focus on assisting non-profits develop an organizational culture of civic and policy engagement;
- Address the legal challenges facing cities and counties in raising adequate resources by promoting State policy reforms in budget legislation;
- Expand the scope of our work to include other ways local government can increase resources for children and youth (i.e., through the budget process and other policies that mandate funding to serve the next generation); and
- Research other potential donors that can help fund local-level campaigns.

#### **STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION FOR THE MOVEMENT**

We aim to expand FNG with a new director, an additional staff person, and several trainers, strategists, and legal advisers. This new era of work calls for a \$800,000 annual budget. Our current director will continue to provide consultation as “founder-in-residence.” Our new budget reflects our goal of setting up a new director for success. We are strengthening our advisory structure to ensure more diversity and connection to more aspects of the work on the ground. We are taking the significant step of becoming an arm of the Children’s Funding Project, a strong partner in every aspect of the work.

#### **THE NEXT GENERATION OF CALIFORNIANS**

By building and connecting local campaigns throughout California with the vision, passion, and capacity to generate resources for children and youth, FNG’s proposed direction grows the investments in the next generation of Californians, ensures equity in the allocation of resources, and lays the groundwork for local organizing that also enhances State and national efforts.