

Making Private Foundation Resources Available to Grow Civic Engagement and Focus Attention on the Child Care Crisis in America

Background. Finding and affording high-quality child care is a challenge for most hard working American families. Without reliable, safe, and nurturing child care, many parents face difficult choices because they have to work or attend school. At the same time, those who provide care and education to young children often earn less than a living wage, and many have multiple jobs or rely on public assistance programs to make ends meet. Despite broad support among voters across parties for increased access to quality early childhood care and education, significant reforms and public investment have not come to pass.

Could foundation support of community-based organizing of the people most hurt by the lack of equitable access to high quality child care make a difference for moving the issue to the top of public policy agendas in states?

The Raising Child Care Fund (RCCF), a project of the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (ECFC), was founded by five foundations that joined together to explore this question. The Irving Harris Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, Heising-Simons Foundation, J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, and the Vanguard Starting Kids Off Right program are the founding members.

RCCF is working toward three goals:

1. Lift parent, child care teacher, home-based child care provider, caregiver and ally voices and increase their participation in crafting policy solutions in states and/or communities.
2. Build effective coordination among RCCF grantees and advocacy groups, community groups, parents, child care teachers, home-based child care providers, caregivers, and allies.
3. Expand financial resources to secure increased and equitable access to quality child care, including through intentional strategies to reach and prioritize children and families most affected by injustice and inequity.

ECFC launched RCCF as a pooled fund in 2018, with support from its fiscal sponsor, TSNE MissionWorks. So far, the pool has raised \$1.9 million for a three-year project and made one initial round of grants in 2019. Demand for RCCF grants was triple the funding level raised thus far.

Lessons. Although the idea behind the RCCF was to see if this type of investment might result in child care policy “wins” in key states, working more closely with organizing experts has shifted the focus to building power within individuals and their communities as a more long-lasting and profound outcome. A critical lesson learned is that **organizers help people recognize and hone their own leadership skills to advocate for themselves, set their own policy agendas, and determine what actions they are willing to take to demand change.** This is fundamentally different than paid professionals advocating on behalf of those most affected by a social policy, or soliciting involvement of parents, teachers, and home-based care providers in support of policy asks developed by the advocates. It is a labor intensive process in which the journey to leadership for the individual parent or early educators is equally important as policy change or outcome.

When people who have experienced systemic disenfranchisement become the leaders of actions and activities to call for change that will benefit their families and communities, there is an opportunity to change racial and equity power imbalances and have ripple effects well beyond a child care policy change. For example, parent leaders can work against a rollback or defunding of an initiative when the political winds change. Building understanding of where and how decisions are made in state and local government within those who have been historically disenfranchised can inspire more women and people of color to seek public office and work on a wider range of issues of concern to their communities.

Our Grantees

The first nine RCCF grantees are located in California, Georgia, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, and Oregon.

[Alliance for Quality Education \(New York\)](#) *Mission:* Mobilizing communities across the state to keep New York true to its promise of ensuring a high quality public education to all students regardless of zip code.

[Coalition for Social Justice \(Massachusetts\)](#) *Mission:* The Coalition for Social Justice (CSJ) is a grassroots organization founded in 1994 to bring together people affected by and concerned about poverty to advocate for economic opportunity.

[Family Forward \(Oregon\)](#) *Mission:* Family Forward Oregon's mission is to advance economic security for women and families, with a particular focus on improving economic security for mothers.

[ISAI AH \(Minnesota\)](#) *Mission:* Our mission is to promote racial and economic equity through intentional, intensive leadership development and collective, faith-based actions that work toward systemic change.

[Mothering Justice \(Michigan\)](#) *Mission:* Our mission is to build a coalition of well-equipped mother activists -- mamavists! especially women of color.

[Ohio Organizing Collaborative \(Ohio\)](#) *Mission:* Building community power for social, racial, and economic justice in Ohio.

[OLÉ Education Fund \(New Mexico\)](#) *Mission:* The OLÉ Education Fund partners with working families in New Mexico to develop grassroots community organizing capacities that they use to enrich and empower their communities.

[Parent Voices \(California\)](#) [Parent Voices CA c/o CA Child Care Resource and Referral Network](#): *Mission:* The CA Child Care Resource & Referral Network (the Network) is committed to helping all families find and maintain affordable, quality child care that best meets their families' needs. Parent Voices, a project of the Network is a parent-led, parent-run grassroots organization fighting to make quality child care accessible and affordable to all families.

[9to5 \(Georgia\)](#) *Mission:* 9to5 Georgia's mission is to build a movement to achieve economic justice, by engaging directly affected women to improve working conditions.



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