

Raising Authentic Voices for Child Care: What is the New Raising Child Care Fund Learning about Grassroots Organizing?

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April 2020*

Foundations committed to promoting equity and economic justice are looking for innovative and effective approaches to major social and policy change. Five foundations affiliated with the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative (ECFC) and committed to increasing equitable access to high quality child care are pooling funds to explore how building power among those most affected by the existing child care system could move this important issue to the top of the political agenda in states. The founders of this new project, called the [Raising Child Care Fund](#) (RCCF), decided to provide resources only to groups dedicated to lifting up the voices of families, child care teachers, home-based child care providers, and allies to be effective advocates in calling for and developing a solution to the child care crisis. The fund issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in May 2019. With the first round of grants determined, there are some initial lessons learned to share with peer foundations who are interested in this approach. This is just the start of our learning journey -- we expect to learn many more from our grantees as the work gets underway.

2019 RCCF Grantees

- 9to5 (Georgia)
- Alliance for Quality Education (New York)
- Coalition for Social Justice (Massachusetts)
- Family Forward (Oregon)
- ISALAH (Minnesota)
- Mothering Justice (Michigan)
- Ohio Organizing Collaborative (Ohio)
- OLE Education Fund (New Mexico)
- Parent Voices (California) c/o CA Child Care
- Resource and Referral Network



This first in a series of Lessons Learned articles shares what we are learning from the Raising Child Care Fund.

Get comfortable with how organizing is a different strategy than traditional advocacy.

Advocacy and organizing have different end goals and mostly rely on different methods to promote social and policy change. The authors of *“Organizing For Child Care: The Case For Including Base-Building Strategies In A Child Care Policy Fight”* clarify that advocates typically represent the interests of the people most affected and determine what the policy priorities should be. Advocates often seek to “mobilize” parents or early educators to take an action such as coming to a rally or telling their story for media; however, this is not organizing. Grassroots organizing builds the base and power of people seeking social change and creates a groundswell of activism which can hold elected officials accountable.

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 taught the RCCF that the process of building power within individuals and their communities has a more long-lasting and profound outcome.

“We meet people where they are. Often, they carry a sense of shame and feel it is their own fault for not finding child care and other things their children need. Working through that and realizing that larger economic forces, racism and sexism are shaping their access to care is foundational.” RCCF Grantee

Organizers help people recognize and hone their own leadership skills to advocate for themselves, tap into the strengths in their communities, 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 bad 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 if not more important than the policy change or outcome. While the RCCF is funding this method on behalf of increasing access to high quality child care, the grantees are building lifelong leaders who will likely continue to represent the interests of their communities to take on the racial, economic, and social injustices they see and have the skills and belief in their worth to do so. For example, [Mothering Justice](#) has an intensive fellowship program which has worked with over 300 women of color in Michigan, many of whom have gone on to paid work in advocacy. [Parent Voices](#) in California is seating parents at statewide tables to inform Governor Newsome’s child care and early education reform strategies.

Be able to articulate a rationale for supporting grassroots organizing; organizing builds power in communities that are most affected by child care policies, and strengthens accountability among policy-makers to those communities. This type of investment has long-term ripple effects well beyond a specific child care issue.

Although the third overarching goal of the RCCF is to increase equitable access to high quality child care, the foundational goal is to 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.

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 power imbalances and have ripple effects well beyond a child care policy change. For example:

- Bringing people most impacted into designing policy solutions will make policies more responsive to the real challenges they face.
- Developing a base of active parents, teachers, and home-based providers within communities to take their concerns directly to their elected leaders is an effective way to make an issue come alive, and to show that leaders will be held accountable.
- Tracking implementation of policy to be sure it meets expectations for positive impact is best done by those most affected, who can stay involved and flag when programs are not working as expected.
- Organizing the constituency for a policy or program can promote vigilance against a rollback or defunding of an initiative when the political winds change.
- Building expertise in how and where 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.

The [Ohio Organizing Collaborative](#) includes members who worked to pass ballot measures in Cincinnati and Dayton to pay for preschool programs prioritizing children from lower income families. The work did not end with the funding stream, and members continue to advocate for implementation that honors the founding principles of the campaign. New Mexico’s Organizing in the Land of Enchantment ([OLÉ](#)) members met with the new Secretary for Early Education within weeks of her starting in her position,

and then had an online meeting with the Secretary to share their experiences under COVID-19 in April 2020.

[Learn how to recognize what makes groups effective at organizing and get to know economic, social, and racial justice groups that may be newer to child care work.](#)

The skills that are critical to be an effective organizer can be very different than the skills one might look for in a traditional advocacy group. Organizers need to be able to build trust, a sense of community, and leadership skills to demand policy change among people who often have longstanding distrust and disengagement with systems of government. In developing the RFP and the review process, the RCCF tapped the knowledge of individuals and groups with experience in organizing. We developed a collaborative relationship with the Early Care and Education Organizing Network, a loose coalition of almost 20 national umbrella organizations each with affiliated local organizing groups in certain states. Two seats on the grant committee are reserved for non-foundation experts in organizing or people/groups most affected. The review teams each included a person recruited specifically for their knowledge of grassroots strategy.

Organizers helped the Grant Committee sort out proposals that were well conceived, but not organizing, from those that started with the people most impacted identifying the needs and shaping the policy priorities. For example, some included plans to survey parents, send letters of recruitment to providers, or mobilize a community without seeking their leadership. In the end most of the grantees selected work across issues important to economic and social justice, with just one grantee having a long history in child care advocacy.

Be flexible in how you measure impact.

In developing its RFP, the RCCF Grant Committee spent considerable energy discussing how best to articulate shared goals and measures for the work. Given that it was a pooled fund, this was especially important to delineate in order for each foundation lead to be able to share back to her board or principals how the funding would be used. Although they did not have to do soⁱⁱ, the foundations chose to limit use of the funding to non-lobbying purposes, which meant passing a specific piece of legislation could not be an investment outcome. We learned that it is important to measure how organizers authentically engage and build leadership in individual members, and not focus only end goals decided by the funder or advocates. In fact, organizing as a strategy means that those recruited develop the action steps and the policy demands. Current systems, like quality ratings, may not be measuring what parents or teachers see as critical to measure.

The RCCF examined the suggested measures of the Parent Leadership Indicators (PLI) Project led by [New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools](#). Resources from the Alliance for Justice publication, [Build Your Advocacy Grantmaking: Advocacy Evaluation Tool](#), provided numerous examples of specific process measures that could be quantified and did not include lobbying. Ultimately, the Grant Committee decided to set **three broad goals** and to request applicants to set their own measures and

RAISING CHILD CARE FUND 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.

timelines for how they saw fit to work toward them as befit their state or local contexts. A community organizer working with parents suggested this approach.

For example, the [Coalition for Social Justice](#) in Massachusetts is building regional “tables” to convene conversations about child care needs, develop leadership skills, and grow a story bank to include at least 50 new perspectives from parents, early educators, and other stakeholders. With the impact of COVID-19, RCCF told grantees they could adapt their measures as needed.

[Know that there is a lot of demand for funding to expand work with those most affected by the current child care system.](#)

One of the questions this group had was whether there would be a strong demand for organizing support focused on child care. The answer was yes, with applications from 19 groups from the 8 target states and 10 additional applicants in 10 more states for the Challenge Matching grants. The response to the RFP was well beyond what could be funded with \$1.9 billion at about \$6.8 million. Applicants included those with experience organizing on behalf of intersectional issues like economic justice, race equity and women’s rights. Applicants also included state early educator associations and advocacy groups wanting to build their membership and base.

Other evidence for demand for resources to do this grassroots engagement work comes from a grant opportunity offered by a partner to the RCCF, the Alliance for Early Success (the Alliance). In 2019, the Alliance offered mini-grants to its existing national network of state advocacy groups working on early childhood issues. Groups from 31 states applied, and the Alliance funding allowed for just 11 to receive a grant.

RCCF is continuing to raise funding for our pool. We also vouch for our grantees with other potential funders to help them raise additional dollars. In the case of applicant organization which we ranked highly but did not have enough resources to support, we have introduced them to other funders at the national and local levels. As the impact of COVID-19 on child care providers and the children and families they serve is better understood, RCCF anticipates increased need to support community voices to call for reinvestment in this crucial industry and community support.

[Learn about groups that may be new to early childhood but skilled as organizers. Considering building their capacity adjacent to traditional advocacy groups, and make connections among organizers and advocates in your state or community.](#)

The RCCF saw that strong advocacy groups with commitment to early childhood issues applied for this grant opportunity, but didn’t describe plans that reflected organizing principles. Several affiliates of important national early care and education national organizations applied for the RCCF, or were part of applications received. Often the applications described conducting mailings, holding convenings, and mobilizing parents or teachers for action days at the state legislature, but didn’t recognize the time commitment and relationship building needed to build power and transformational leadership skills among these populations. Typically, the advocacy groups had policy asks in mind already, and didn’t build in the process of parents, teachers or home-based child care providers in defining that the priority policy demands would be.

There is an opportunity to seize on this evident interest and build connections between traditional advocates and organizing groups in states. Partnerships between them could increase understanding of each type of group’s techniques and priorities and build the power of child advocacy and organizing together. Traditional advocates may decide they are not be the right people to lead this work. Community organizers often want to partner with advocates that are willing to share state budget and

policy information and analysis. RCCF grantees say this works best when these are mutually valuable partnerships that recognize that the power of community organizing furthers the work of the advocacy group as well, and doesn't work if the advocacy group expects to set the policy priorities for organized parents and early educators to follow.

An example of good working partnership comes from Georgia. The RCCF grantee, [Georgia 9to5](#), and the [Alliance for Early Success](#) grantee, [Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students](#) (GEEARS), have been building their relationship over time. With the new RCCF grant, Georgia 9to5 is focusing on organizing outside of metro Atlanta and with home-based child care providers, and coordinating with GEEARS on statewide strategy.

Conclusion

Launching the first grants for the RCCF has taught us initial lessons on providing resources that enable power-building at the grassroots level on behalf of access to high quality child care. Our foundation leaders are excited to continue that learning process and learn from peer foundations that are committed to supporting all manner of racial, economic and social justice issues. Are there commonalities in this cross-sector approach? Specific to the RCCF, we hope to gain more insight into the common characteristics of effective groups, understand how grantees build productive alliances with powerful leaders and traditional advocates, and to see what strategies work to engage home-based child care providers who tend to be unconnected to early childhood systems and ethnically diverse. Our learning process will be as transparent as possible, and will include webinars to which aligned foundation leaders are welcome to participate. We welcome colleague foundations to join this effort.

Please contact Rachel Schumacher, RCCF project manager, with your reactions to this paper or interest in learning more about RCCF. raisingchildcare@ecfunders.org

ⁱ Jayaraman, S. and Hall, L. *Organizing For Child Care: The Case For Including Base-Building Strategies In A Child Care Policy Fight*. , UC Berkeley Goldman School of Public Policy & National Women's Law Center, November 5, 2019 draft. Forthcoming.

ⁱⁱ Bolder Advocacy Project, Alliance for Justice. [Mays and May Nots: 501\(c\)3/501\(c\)4 Funder Groups](#).