

Aligning Resources and Results: *How Communities and Policymakers Collaborated to Create a National Program*

The recent release of President Obama's fiscal year (FY) 2013 budget proposal provides an important opportunity to emphasize how - and why - local and state policymakers and community members can work together to maximize resources and ensure that supports for children and families are sustained.

Public policy and funding decisions at the federal level have a significant impact on community conditions. The current economic climate has intensified that impact as communities face greater needs while federal and state budgets are being cut. While the economy has started to recover nationally, policymakers in many states are continuing to face budget shortfalls. Since the recession began in 2008, nearly all states have had to reduce services for their residents, including some of their most vulnerable individuals and families.

Cuts occurred in areas that include health care, services to the elderly and disabled, K-12 education and higher education. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, in 2011 some 24 states had already projected shortfalls totaling \$46 billion for FY 2013. Yet, the need for services has increased as more families face difficult financial challenges.

The federal budget process serves as a critical opportunity for policymakers and community members to work together to ensure that children and families, especially those living in under-resourced communities, are supported through federal policy and funding. The president's budget proposal outlines the administration's policy agenda and budget for federal spending in the upcoming year and sets the tone for the national policy agenda. The federal budget becomes the guide by which every major spending and revenue decision is made, making it one of the largest policy vehicles for supporting children and families.

As this brief highlights, the best way for policymakers and community members to promote equitable outcomes for children, families and communities is to ensure that *all* children and families are supported by federal policy and funding that is aligned with a common set of results. One example of how this has been successfully done is the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. This program exemplifies how working collaboratively to align public policy efforts around shared goals improves the odds that the needs of children, families and communities will be addressed in a cost-efficient and effective way.

Shared Vision: How Policymakers and Community Members Can Work Together

Both policymakers and community stakeholders have key roles to play in ensuring that policies and funding most effectively meet the needs of the community and thereby improve outcomes for children and families. By starting with a shared vision of the results that they would like to accomplish, their work can move beyond just passing a law or funding a program. Instead, they can be more deliberate about targeting resources in a way that ensures communities have the support and opportunities they need to promote the well-being of children and families.

Policymakers are positioned to see the larger policy landscape. This allows them to support innovation, prioritize strategies they have learned are the most effective in communities, identify gaps in funding or services - as well as barriers that might exist in the current infrastructure - and create incentives that ensure policies and programs address the needs of different populations and geographic areas. Policymakers also have the ability to reach across multiple branches of government, which is important for breaking down silos and ensuring increased coordination across agencies. The platform policymakers have allows them to cross traditional divides and bring government and community partners – which include business, faith-based and other community organizations – together. These partnerships not only help to inform policymakers of what is needed on the ground and what has been working, but can allow them to track the ongoing progress of investments and make adjustments as needed to achieve better outcomes for children and families in a transparent and commonsense way.

Community members also have a critical role in this process. A growing number of communities are learning how to use data to help policymakers better understand the level of resources needed, provide concrete information on what is most effective to achieve results and show how specific policy measures can either help or hinder progress. To do so, communities are forming strategic partnerships with key local, state and federal stakeholders to advocate for policy and funding streams that are best aligned with their specific needs. Increasingly, residents and other constituents are sharing their experiences with policymakers to highlight the opportunities and supports needed to make a difference. With this information, legislators can align policies and resources with what is working on the ground by ensuring continued access to key funding streams and eliminating unnecessary policies that are serving as barriers to local efforts.

From the Ground Up: A Case Study on the Healthy Food Financing Initiative

Successful partnerships between policymakers and community members exist across the country. One notable example of how community members and policymakers were able to work together to achieve concrete results for families at both the local and state level – while influencing the national policy and funding agenda - is the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative. Policymakers and community members in Pennsylvania joined together to achieve the shared result of improving children's health.

This work began at a time when the increase in obesity rates across the country had begun to illustrate the importance of healthy food access as a significant national issue. The impact is most acute in under-resourced communities, which often are predominantly communities of color. Data shows that many low-income communities have limited access to affordable, quality, healthy foods, which results in high rates of obesity and correlated health problems, such as diabetes. Limited access to healthy food options has a significant impact on the health of individuals and families, but also cuts community members off from important economic benefits that local grocery stores and markets could bring, such as employment. Additionally, the costs associated with obesity create a significant drain on the economy.

The Fresh Food Financing Initiative began as a local collaboration with The Food Trust, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit focused on nutrition education and food access. The initial goal was to address the need for greater and more equitable access to healthy foods in Philadelphia. The Food Trust became interested in this work after a national study illustrated that Philadelphia had the second lowest number of supermarkets per capita of all major cities in the United States, with access severely lacking in Philadelphia's low-income neighborhoods. This local work eventually led to the development of a state effort that is now The Healthy Food Financing Initiative – a federal program.

How the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Initiative was Born

Community engagement was central to the development of the Pennsylvania initiative. For years, The Food Trust heard from the community about the need for full-service supermarkets and the difficulty residents faced when buying healthy food for their families. After the national study, The Food Trust partnered with the University of Pennsylvania to

“Customers come out in large numbers to support new store openings, many with tears in their eyes, and often tell stories of how life-changing having a grocery store is for their family. It has truly been an amazing program to be a part of.”

**- John Weidman,
Deputy Executive Director
The Food Trust**

map the lack of grocery stores in Philadelphia and the areas with the highest rates of death due to diet-related disease. Gathering this data led to city council hearings and a request from the council for The Food Trust to convene a task force to address the problem. The task force process facilitated the development of partnerships by bringing together different sectors, like the supermarket industry and public health organizations, around the common goal of improving children's health.

The local task force engaged Pennsylvania House of Representatives Delegate Dwight Evans, who had a strong interest in creating jobs through grocery store development and would end up being

a critical partner in the effort. The task force recommended that the state create a financing program to improve children's health by providing financing incentives and tax breaks to stores willing to locate in underserved areas. The program was created as a public-private partnership between the state and two nonprofit organizations: The ReInvestment Fund (a community investment group) and The Food Trust. This new partnership would provide grants and loans to encourage supermarket development in under-resourced communities throughout the state. Rep. Evans was instrumental in securing the funding to start and administer this program.

The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative quickly became a model for communities across the country. The initiative provided funding for 88 fresh-food retail projects in 34 Pennsylvania counties, creating or preserving more than 5,000 jobs and improving access to healthy food for more than half a million Pennsylvania residents. Once the state launched the program and it began to demonstrate success, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Friedman Foundation funded The Food Trust to work with partners in other states to create similar task forces, leading to the creation of similar programs in New York and Louisiana. In 2009, The Food Trust and The ReInvestment Fund developed another critical partnership by joining with PolicyLink, a national research and action institute, to start building a national coalition to support the creation of a federal Healthy

Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) to both improve health and create jobs for communities across the country.

In FY 2011, with the support of the Obama Administration, the National Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) was launched. Through the “megabus” appropriations bill passed in December 2011, \$32 million in funding was appropriated for FY 2012. This funding supports a range of programs administered by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Treasury and Health and Human Services (HHS) to expand the availability of nutritious food and to develop and to better equip grocery stores, small retailers, corner stores and farmers markets to sell healthy food. Twenty-two million dollars will come through the Department of Treasury to encourage private investment in food deserts - areas that lack access to affordable healthy food - by funding Treasury-certified community development financial institutions (CDFIs) that will in turn lend to retail food outlets to expand food access. At least 10 percent of the Treasury funds are reserved for efforts in “persistent poverty counties,” or counties that have had 20 percent or more of their residents living in poverty over the last 30 years. The remaining \$10 million in funding is allocated to the Department of Health and Human Services for its Community Economic Development Program, which funds Community Development Corporations for projects located in low-income communities without ready access to healthy and affordable food. In the 2013 budget proposal, the president requested \$25 million from the Department of Treasury and \$10 million from HHS to continue their efforts to finance and improve access to healthy food retail options in low-income communities as part of the HFFI. Overall, the president proposed a total of \$400 million in financing to community development financial institutions, other nonprofits, public agencies and businesses with sound strategies for addressing the healthy food needs of underserved communities.

***Putting It All Together:
Community Members and
Policymakers Achieving Results***

In Philadelphia, working together around a shared vision at the local level led to state efforts and to the creation of a federal initiative. Community members and community-based organizations took action to address a community problem and united under a shared vision. Local government involvement provided a platform that led to state government support. The success of the work taking place throughout Pennsylvania led to foundation involvement and expansion to sites in other communities across the country. The great work and successful outcomes taking place in these communities across the country resulted in the federal government taking the work to scale and establishing

"In just a few years, the Fresh Food Financing Initiative has gone from a simple idea to one of the most talked about public policy efforts in the country. The White House and Congress have shown interest in our work; their public recognition, and that of our First Lady, has raised awareness about food access to a new level. The federal budget proposal marks an important step in bringing healthy food options to all Americans. When we first started on the Fresh Food Financing Initiative journey I didn't know exactly what to expect. However, the outcomes of providing healthy food to underserved areas, stimulating investment of private capital in local neighborhoods, and creating living wage jobs have far exceeded my expectations."

- Rep. Dwight Evans

opportunities for sustainability. As HFFI demonstrates, working together from the ground up can lead to policy solutions that best utilize resources while meeting the needs of communities. The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative provides a strong model for community members and policymakers across the country to collaborate to improve results for children and families and make real, lasting differences.

Other Key Line Items for Children, Families and Communities in the President's Proposed FY 2013 Budget

Department of Education

The American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC)

Part of the Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization and Job Creation Act of 2010, the AOTC provides families with a partially refundable tax credit worth up to \$10,000 over four years. The FY 2013 budget proposes making the AOTC permanent as it has already helped more than nine million families afford the cost of college.

Community College Support

A new initiative funded by the Departments of Education and Labor will spend a proposed \$8 billion building partnerships between local businesses and community colleges to more effectively align the skills students learn with the needs of local businesses.

Promise Neighborhoods

The budget proposal includes \$100 million for Promise Neighborhoods – an initiative that aims to improve high school and college graduation rates by providing an effective pipeline of support services to children and families in under-resourced neighborhoods.

Department of Health and Human Services

Child Care

Nearly \$6 billion has been proposed to increase access to child care, including the Child Care Entitlement and Child Care and Development Block Grant. The proposed funding would allow an additional 70,000 low-income children to receive care compared to FY 2012. Additionally, \$300 million has been proposed to develop a child care quality initiative that would ensure that low-income children have access to quality early care settings that successfully prepare them for school entry.

Community Health Centers

With more than 21 million Americans expected to utilize local community health centers, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has allocated \$3.1 billion in 2013 for the development of new centers throughout the nation.

Community Service Block Grants (CSBGs)

The proposed budget allocates \$350 million to CSBGs, which provide funding to community-based agencies that have successfully demonstrated their ability to meet the unique needs of their community, including: unemployment, education, housing and nutrition issues.

Foster Care and Permanency Initiatives

The budget proposal includes an increase in mandatory funding - \$2.5 billion over 10 years – to support child welfare system reform efforts. Specifically, the funding is designed to provide financial incentives to states as they improve outcomes, including: reducing the length of stay in foster care, increasing permanency through reunification and adoption and improving the well-being of foster youth that are transitioning to adulthood.

Successful Transitions to Adulthood

The proposed budget includes \$10 million to support two new cross-agency efforts aimed at strengthening supports for disconnected youth, defined as 14 to 24-year-olds who are neither working nor in school. Collaborative efforts between the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Labor would prepare disconnected youth, including those in foster care, for successful transitions to college, career and adulthood.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Sustainable Communities

The budget proposal allocates \$100 million to help communities develop comprehensive housing and transportation plans to achieve sustainable development, reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions and increase affordable housing near public transit.

Department of Justice

The Byrne Criminal Justice Initiative

The budget proposal includes \$20 million for the Byrne Criminal Justice Initiative – a community-based program striving to combat crime and increase public safety by addressing the specific needs of a community.

Department of Labor

Pathways Back to Work Fund

With the president's proposed \$12.5 million, the fund is designed to help low-income youth find summer and year-round employment. The fund will also subsidize employment and work-based training opportunities for low-income and long-term unemployed adults.

Department of Treasury

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)

More than \$220 million has been allocated to fund CDFIs, which provide communities with the capital needed to develop quality financial institutions and bring healthy food grocery stores and other retailers to the area.

Additional Resources on the Federal Budget

- [Policy Basics: The ABCs of State Budgets](#)
- [Policy Basics: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process](#)
- [Federal Budget Vocabulary Tip Sheet](#)