



Workshop

Policy in Practice: How to Turn Data and Stories into Legislative Impact

Speakers

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POLICY IN PRACTICE:

How to Turn Data and Stories into Legislative Impact

Health Policy Summit
October 9, 2025



Introductions



Lynanne Gutierrez
President & CEO

Dominique Johnson
Policy Associate

Caitlin Feldman
Senior Director of Policy

Objectives

Attendees will leave with an understanding of:

- Groundwork Ohio's approach to drive policy and funding outcomes that benefit young children and families; how we organize, communicate, elevate, and advance our mission and our work.
- How to activate the tools at our fingertips to inform and advance policy and funding decisions.
- Tangible ways to engage in the legislative process.



About Us

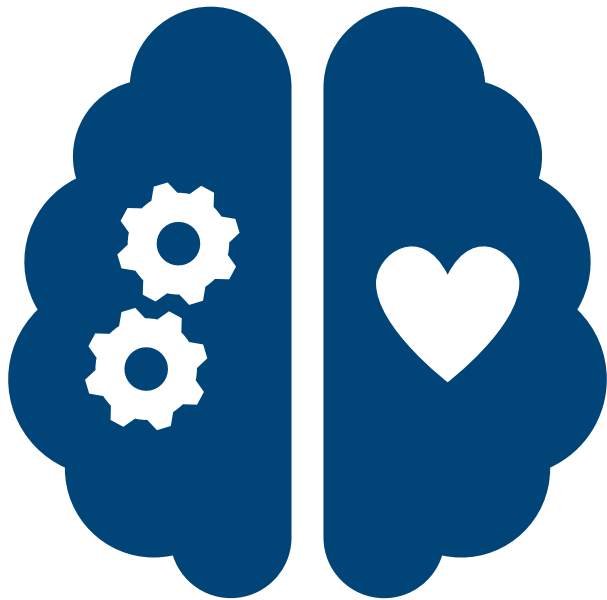
Groundwork Ohio is a committed, **nonpartisan public-policy research and advocacy organization** formed in 2004 that champions high-quality early learning and healthy development strategies from the prenatal period to age 5, that lay a strong foundation for Ohio kids, families, and communities.

We advance quality early childhood systems in Ohio by engaging, educating, and mobilizing diverse stakeholders and strategic partners to promote data-driven and evidence-based early childhood policies.

GroundworkOhio.org



Why Ohio's Youngest Children



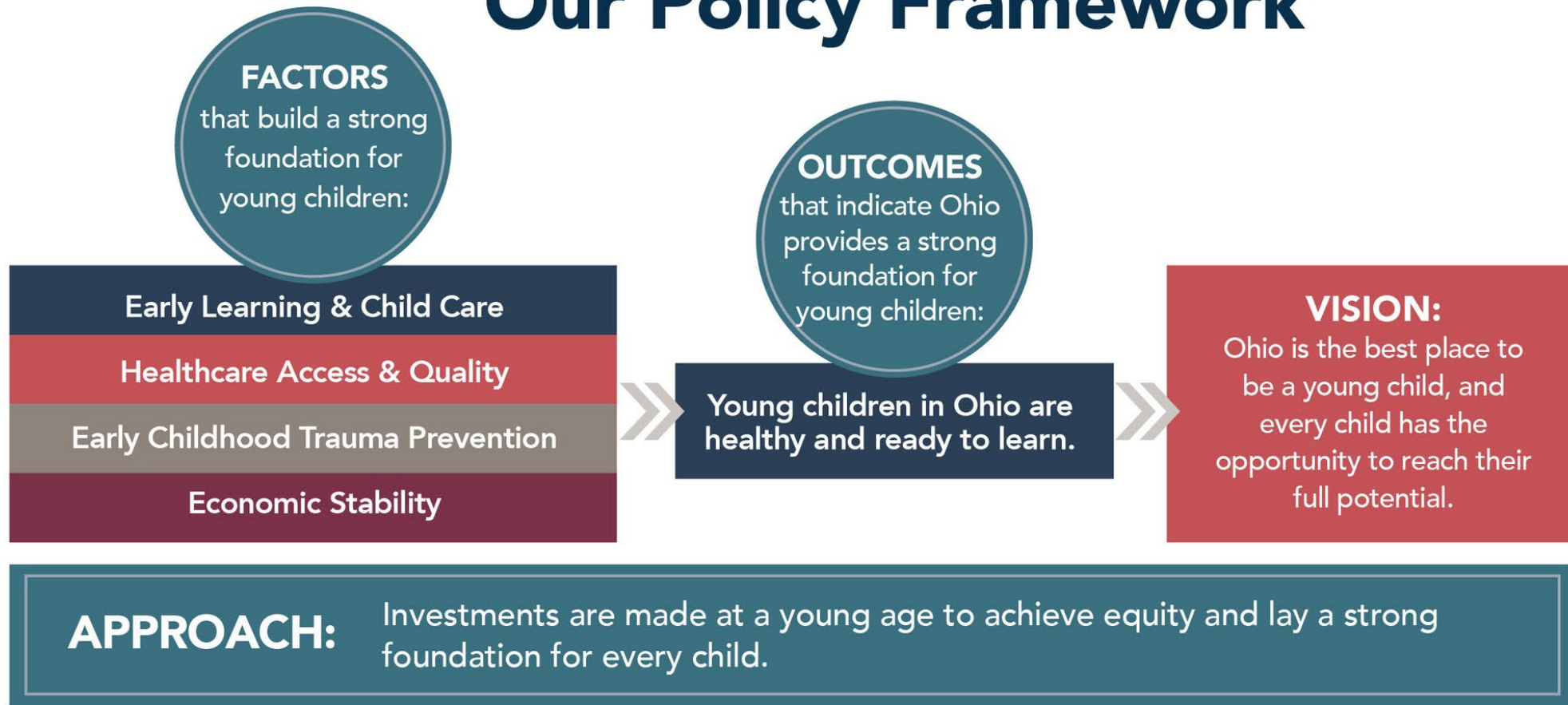
90%

...of brain
development occurs
before the age of 5.

Source: Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University

Why Ohio's Youngest Children

Our Policy Framework





**Advocacy, Lobbying, and
Mobilizing - oh my!**

Advocacy

Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others.

Advocacy builds support for an issue among audiences, such as:

- General public
- Elected officials
- The media
- Opinion leaders

Advocacy

- Educating legislators
- Inviting legislators to your program or facility
- Educating the public about the legislative process
- Research
- Regulatory efforts
- Public education on issues
- Nonpartisan voter education
- Educational conferences
- Training
- Litigation
- Writing an Op-Ed
- Lobbying

Lobbying

Lobbying is a type of advocacy. Lobbying is communicating with elected officials to influence their actions regarding a specific piece of legislation.

501c3 public charities can engage in a limited, but generous, amount of lobbying. Nonprofits can legally lobby, as long as they do not exceed restrictions on how time and resources are expended based on federal Internal Revenue Service tax laws. Expert legal and tax advice should be sought by an organization before engaging in lobbying activities.

[Bolder Advocacy & Alliance for Justice](#) can be a great resource to support navigating this work.



Types of Advocacy

Administrative Advocacy

Creating new policies, revising guidelines, and resolving program problems through activities directed at administrative and governmental agencies with authority and discretion to change rules and regulations. Many decisions are made informally, so interacting with the managing entity—rather than working through the legislature—can be the most effective way to make a positive change.

Case Advocacy

Intervening to address an individual child or family's problem. By being aware of and documenting service-delivery problems, providers can share important information and collect examples that help identify policy issues.

Legislative Advocacy

Working with elected officials to educate them about policies or programs and to inform them of the impact of the program in their home district. Advocates can educate decision-makers and suggest policies that would benefit their community. Legislative advocacy activities can also include lobbying on specific bills or requested funding levels.

Media & Social Media Advocacy

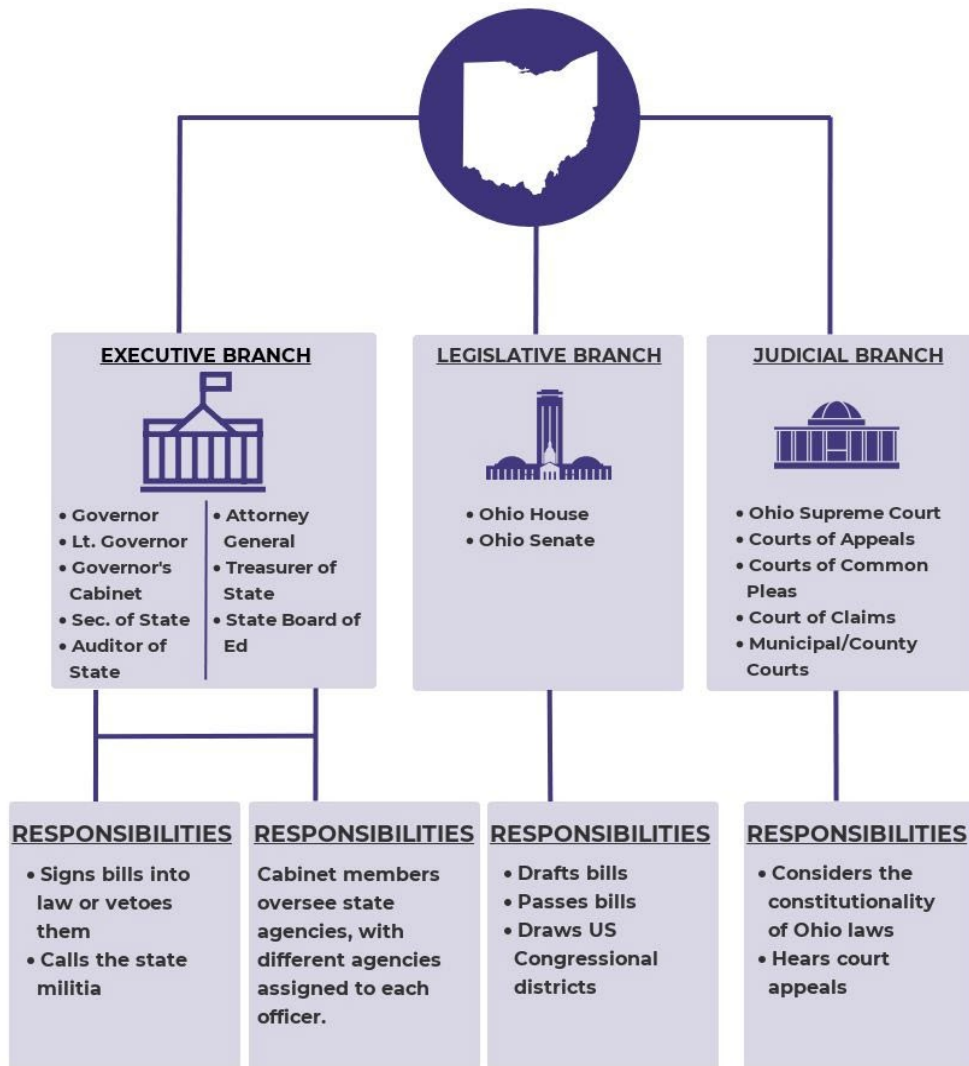
Using media to increase public awareness and influence broader public debate about early childhood issues. Keeping your issue in the news creates public recognition and support, thereby increasing its practical and political importance.

Advocacy

Identifying Opportunities

- Who and to Whom?

Who Makes Decisions?



Policymaking Framework

- **Identify Goals:** What objectives do we aim to achieve?
- **Formulate Actions:** Identify steps to reach goals.
- **Implement Guidelines:** Determine how actions are structured and enforced.

Levels of Decision-Makers

LOCAL



Close to communities: County and municipal officials implement programs and services, impacting day-to-day experiences of families.

Tailored solutions to address unique local needs through community-based strategies and partnerships.

Accountability: providing data and stories to inform state and federal policy decisions.

STATE



Decision-making rule: Governor, legislature, and agencies determine how federal funding and programs are implemented.

Flexibility: determine eligibility, services, and priorities.

State system-building: Oversees infrastructure for health, education, and human services to enable access across counties.

FEDERAL

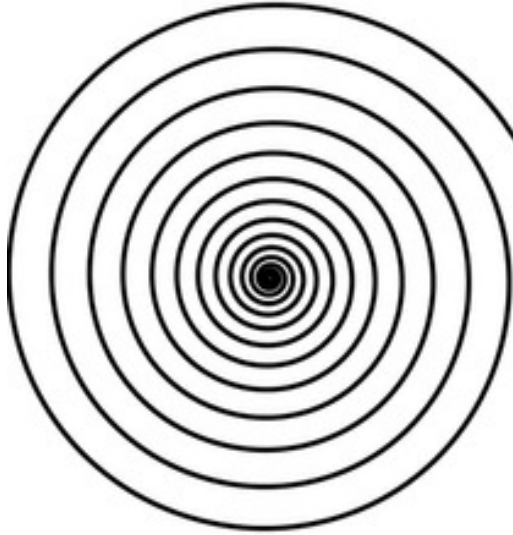


Establishes national priorities: provides majority of funding (Medicaid, Head Start, WIC, child care subsidies)

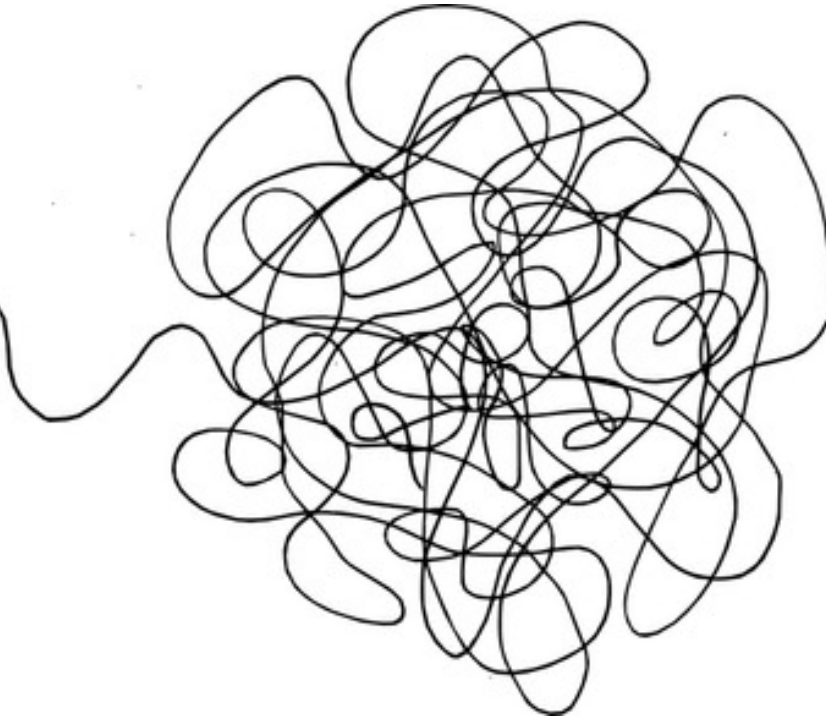
Policy framework: sets baseline rules and requirements (IDEA for Early Intervention)

Influence through incentives: Uses grants, matching funds, and compliance rules to shape state and local policies.

Where Is the Opportunity?



**Policy Processes
On Paper**



...In Reality

Where Is the Opportunity?

**When is the last time
someone changed your
mind?**



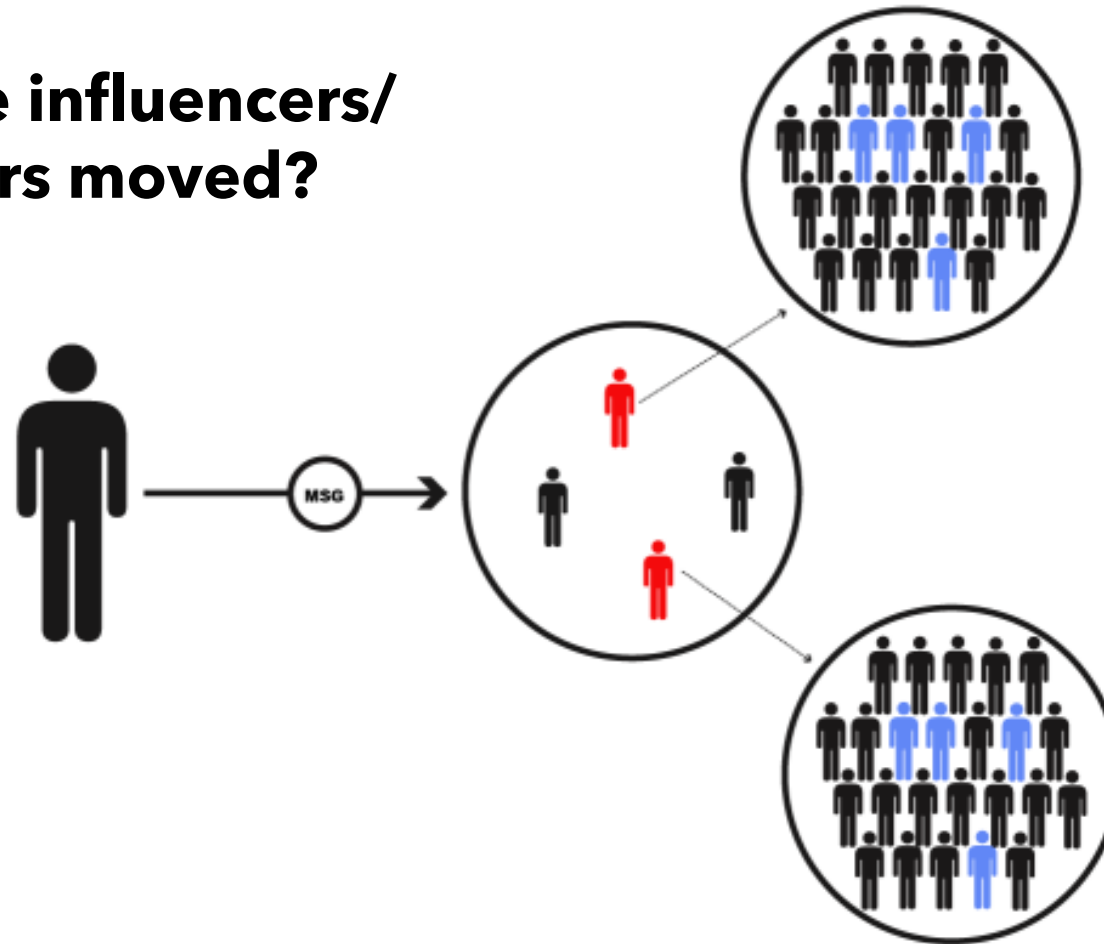
- **What did you hear?**
- **What did you learn?**
- **What was the other person's approach?**
- **Why did it stand out?**
- **How did you respond?**

Where Is the Opportunity?



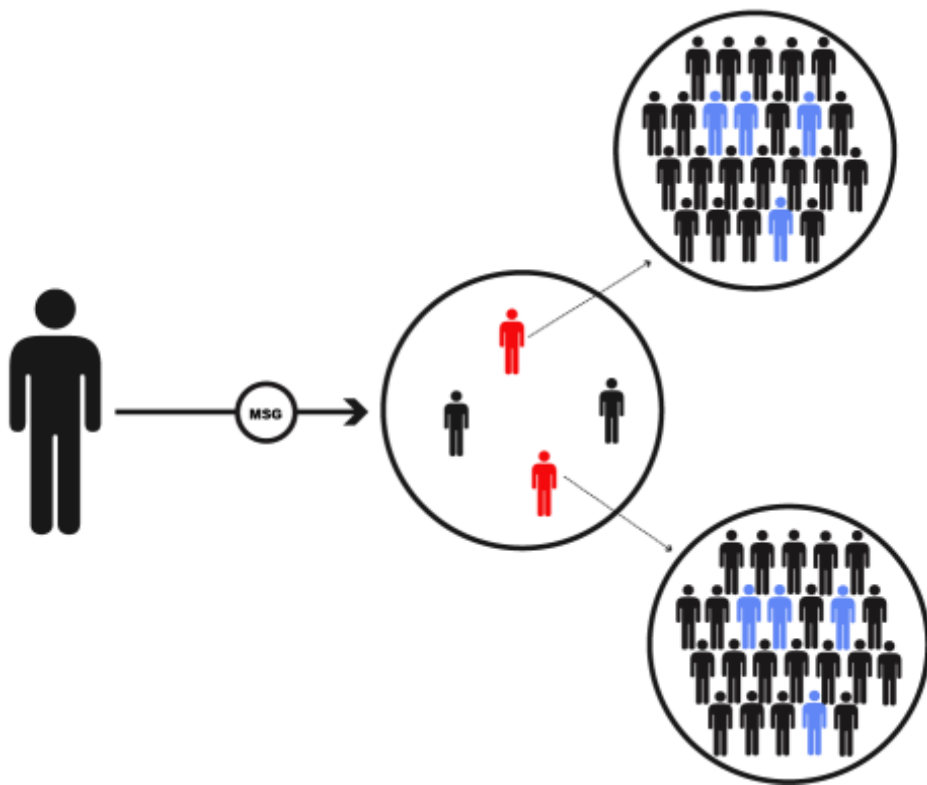
Influencing Influencers

**How are influencers/
informers moved?**



Influencing Influencers

**How are influencers/
informers moved?**



Social media

Family

Neighbors

Faith community

Parents or peers

Traditional news

Knowledge

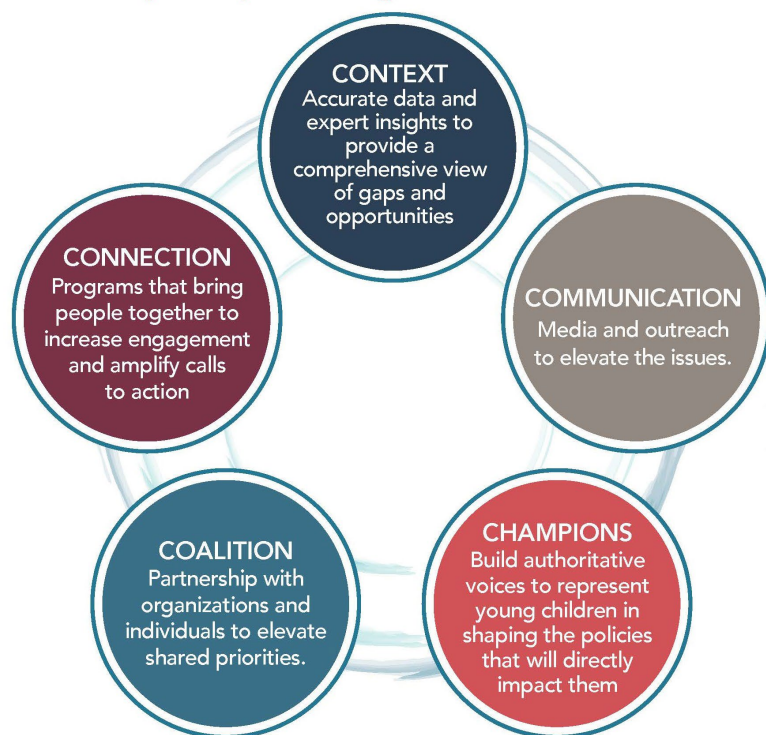
Data

Our Theory of Change

Groundwork Ohio DIRECTLY IMPACTS OUTCOMES

Our Work

Groundwork Ohio provides leadership and expertise through:



Short-Range Outcomes

State Policymakers:

- Know more about early childhood policy issues and evidence-informed strategies.
- Value Groundwork Ohio as a relevant, credible, nonpartisan and objective source.
- Turn to Groundwork Ohio for analysis and thought leadership of effective policies and strategies.
- Are accountable to Groundwork Ohio and its stakeholders when making decisions that impact young children and families.

Other Stakeholders & Supporters:

- Respect Groundwork Ohio and support its work to influence shared objectives in the policymaking process.
- Utilize Groundwork Ohio's work to guide their own work in other state and local communities.
- Value the role of advocacy in their work and increase engagement in advocacy.

Mid-Range Outcomes

State Policymakers use Groundwork Ohio's work when creating early childhood policy.

Groundwork Ohio IS ONE OF MANY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE OUTCOMES

Long-Range Outcomes

State Policymakers implement and invest in evidence-informed policies and strategies.

Other Stakeholders & Supporters:

- Implement evidence-informed policies engage in advocacy
- Engage in advocacy
- Invest in a deeper relationship with Groundwork Ohio (ex. Partnership, funder, etc.)

GOALS

Ohio is the best place to be a young child, and every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The foundational elements of this goal are that:

- Young children in Ohio are healthy
- Young children are ready to learn
- Systems & community conditions are optimal and build a strong foundation for young children in the areas of:
 - Early learning access and quality
 - Healthcare access and quality
 - Early childhood adversity and trauma prevention
 - Economic stability
- Racism and other forms of historic disinvestment and/or discrimination in early childhood systems are dismantled.
- Sectors that impact early childhood systems collaborate and align their work
- The voices of Ohio early childhood professionals are engaged in the policies and practices that impact their programs, practices, and the children and families they serve.
- The voices of families are amplified and they are engaged in the policies and practice that impact their lives and their children.

Where Is the Opportunity?



Information



Relationships



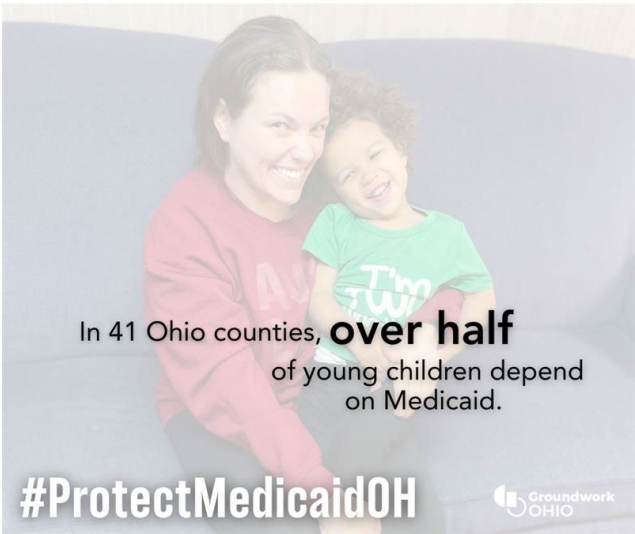
Influence

Grounded in Information and Relationships



Groundwork
OHIO

Quantitative



In 41 Ohio counties, **over half** of young children depend on Medicaid.

#ProtectMedicaidOH

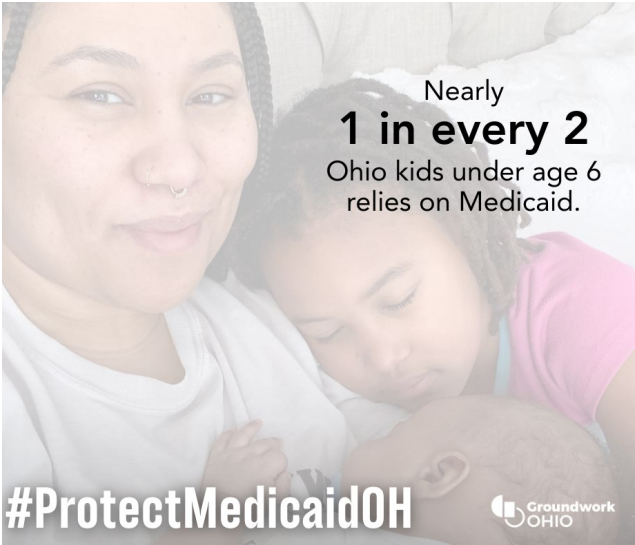
Groundwork OHIO



3 million Ohioans depend on Medicaid.

#ProtectMedicaidOH

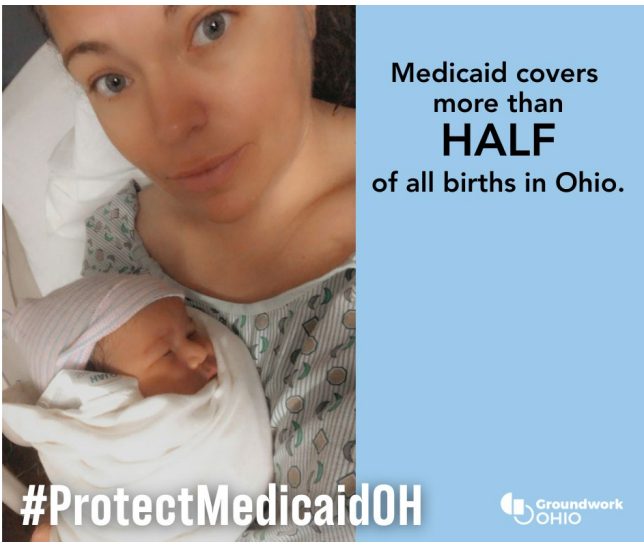
Groundwork OHIO



Nearly **1 in every 2** Ohio kids under age 6 relies on Medicaid.

#ProtectMedicaidOH

Groundwork OHIO



Medicaid covers more than **HALF** of all births in Ohio.

#ProtectMedicaidOH

Groundwork OHIO

Qualitative



When I was pregnant, I earned too much to qualify for Medicaid but private insurance was totally unaffordable. I struggled to get prenatal care and lived in fear for my health and my baby's. After my daughter was born, I became eligible for Medicaid. That changed everything. I could take my daughter to well-baby doctor visits. She got her vaccinations. I could go to the ER if she was really sick.

- Whitney

Franklin County Parent



"My youngest son is severely autistic and non-verbal. Without Medicaid, he would not be able to get the early intervention therapies he needs. Therapy that's helping him learn sign language and to speak so he can communicate."

- Deanna

Lorain County Parent

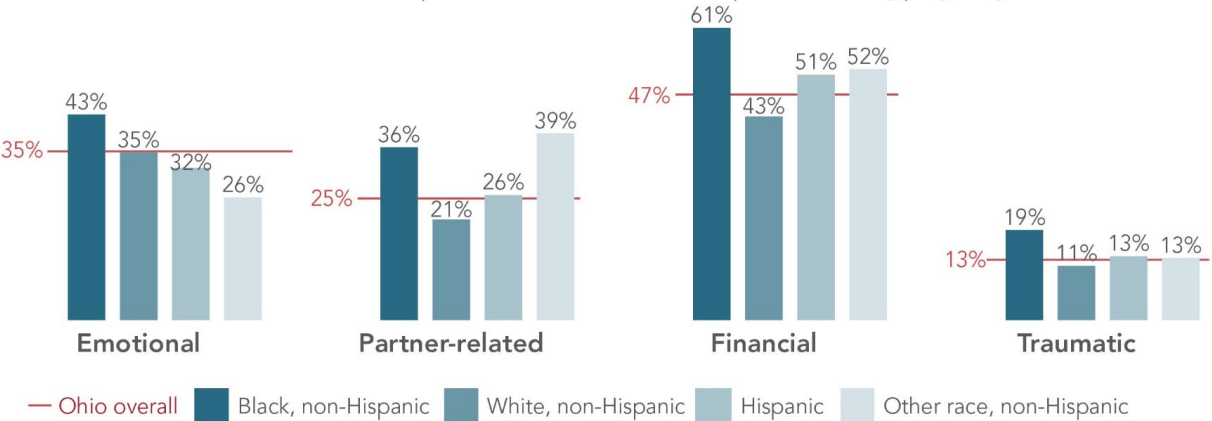
Qualitative and Quantitative



Quantitative

Stressful life events or experiences during pregnancy

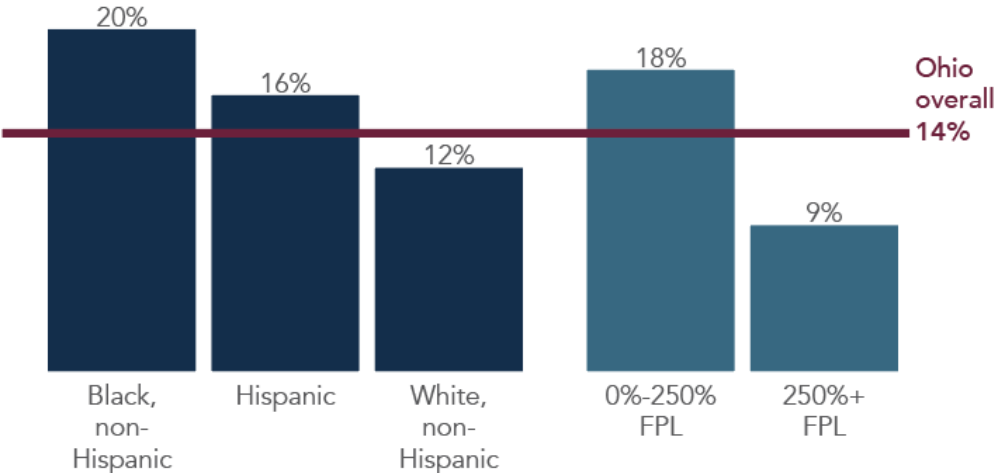
Percent of women with a live birth who reported stressful life events or experiences during pregnancy



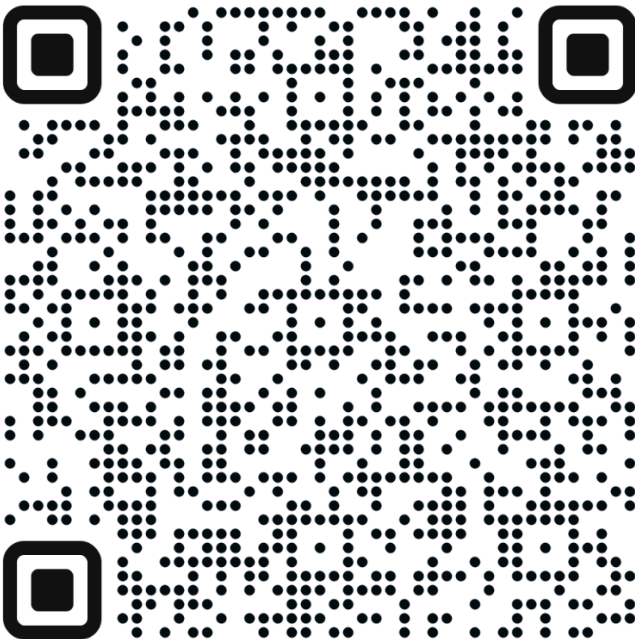
Source: Ohio Pregnancy Assessment Survey (2022)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Percent of children, ages 0-5, who experienced two or more ACEs



Source: Ohio Medicaid Assessment Survey (2021)



2025 Early Childhood
Dashboard

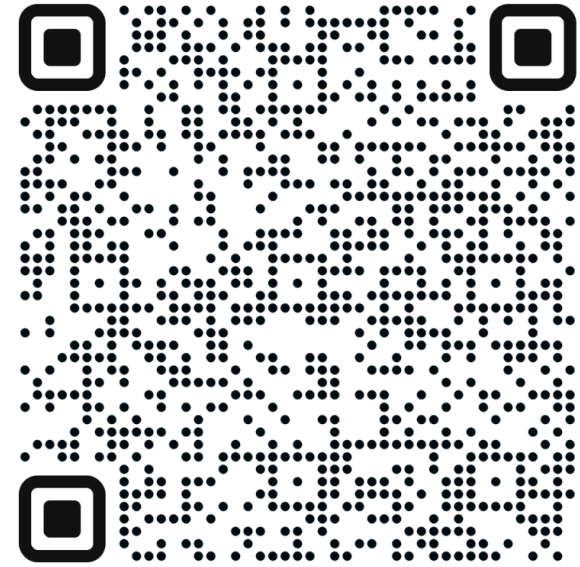
Qualitative

“ I was just stretched, like I was working two jobs...taking care of the kids, getting them to and from school and you know, I just felt like I was just living and was just existing like...time was just moving past me.

I was one of those people that didn't have much help, much resources, so I really had to look for those services elsewhere I lived in shelters, you know. I've gotten the housing vouchers to where, you know, I'm able to live a bit comfortably...I mean, but prior like...it took a while I was donating plasma weekly just to make ends meet just for that gas money, just for that grocery money.

”

- Parent from Montgomery County



Threads of Hope

Qualitative and Quantitative

The Safe Babies approach is guided by five areas of focus, with the needs of babies and their parents at the center. The approach works concurrently, at both the **Child and Family Level** and the **State and Site Level**, to ensure healthy childhood development while impacting long-term capacity building.



Quantitative

The State of Young Children



105,077

children under 5 years old ¹

21.1%

of children under 5 years
old are living in poverty ²



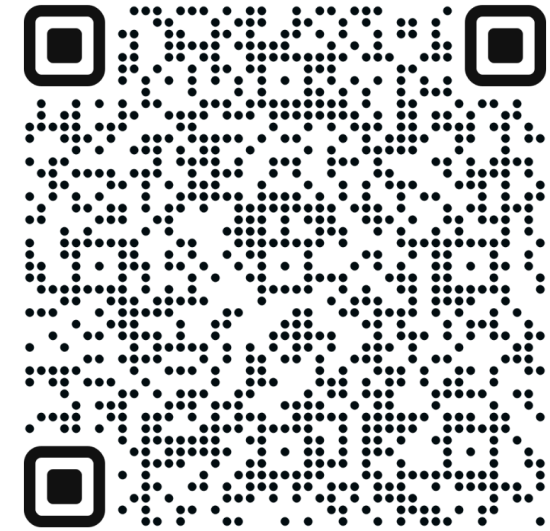
Qualitative

“ Shift work alternates between day and night, making it hard to find a single child care solution. Last-minute changes to the work schedule cannot be accommodated by child care providers. ”

- Parent from Southwest Ohio

“ Currently, one of the biggest challenges is managing the rising cost of living due to inflation. It can be tough to balance our budget and ensure we have enough for essentials like food, housing, and utilities as prices continue to rise. ”

- Parent from Central Ohio



Family Voices

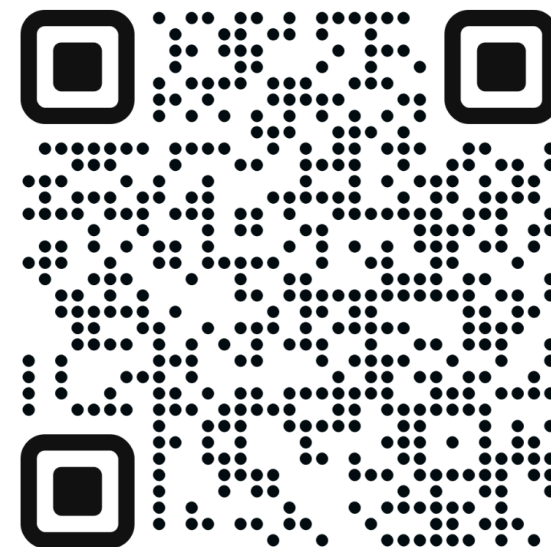
Qualitative and Quantitative



2024 Poll Data Shows:

- Child care is difficult to find and afford.
- The link between child care and the state economy is undeniable.
- Child care access results in parents leaving the workforce.

The message? **Working families need relief.**



Poll Data

Influence

Identifying Your Influence: Taking Action



**Groundwork
OHIO**

Know Your Audience

Identify the “problem,” then pivot to the solution.

Consider:

- How much does my audience already know about this issue? Are they experts in the field or hearing this information for the first time?
- Does my intended audience support, remain neutral to, or oppose this cause?
- What influence does my audience have? Does this person hold political power? Voting power? Social influence?

Key Budget Priorities for FY2026-7



Groundwork Ohio's Policy Roadmap

Ohio's economic future depends on ensuring every child has a strong start in life by supporting working families and empowering parents.

We are committed to working with policymakers, families, professionals, and communities to accomplish the following:

- 1 Make work pay for working families with young children.**
 - Increase access to affordable, quality child care for working families to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL).
 - Implement a refundable child tax credit for working parents with young children.
- 2 Improve health outcomes for moms and babies.**
 - Increase access to evidence-based home visiting programs including expanding the Family Connects model statewide.
 - Invest and scale community impact models like Cradle Cincinnati to encourage collaboration between women, clinicians, hospitals, managed care and other community partners to reduce infant and maternal mortality.
- 3 Support quality early learning experiences that prepare children for Kindergarten.**
 - Invest in effective early childhood professionals to meet the growing needs of young children by improving payment practices to child care programs.
 - Strengthen Early Development and Literacy Support: Increase state investment in Early Intervention (Part C) to ensure timely evaluations, assessments, and service coordination for infants and toddlers with developmental delays, while also expanding access to evidence-based early literacy initiatives, including curricula grounded in the science of reading and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library of Ohio.



#GroundworkOhio

The Issue: Infant Mortality

INFANT MORTALITY, DEFINED:

the death of an infant before their first birthday. The infant mortality rate is often considered a key measure of a community's overall health and well-being.

In Ohio,
7.1 babies
of every 1,000 born
do not survive
their first year.

Black infants die at
2.2X the rate
of white infants in Ohio.

FACTORS INFLUENCING INFANT MORTALITY

- Quality of **health coverage and health systems**.
- Access to **prenatal and postpartum care**.
- **Maternal health** before and during pregnancy.
- **Safe environments** (housing, food security, transportation)
- **Support services** like Home Visiting that connect families to resources and education.

WHAT WORKS

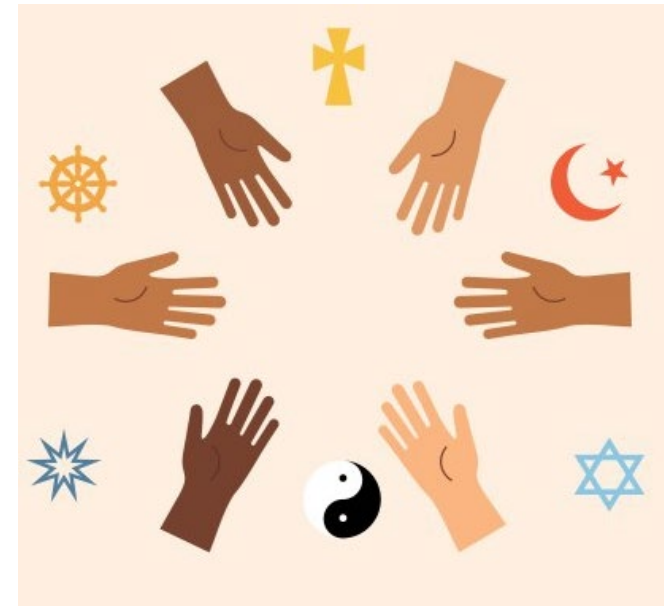
- **Home Visiting programs:** provide 1:1 support for new parents.
- **Community-based supports:** Faith groups, shelters, local nonprofits can play critical roles in connecting families to resources.
- **Policy interventions:** Local and state policies can expand coverage, fund prevention programs, and address social determinants of health.

Case Study #1: Faith Leader

Audience: A local faith leader in your community with a strong network of congregants.

Background: Has attended a local health fair and community baby shower.

Motivated by: Faith-based values, a desire to serve families in crisis, and opportunities to build trust with the community.



Case Study #1:

Groundwork Ohio's Response

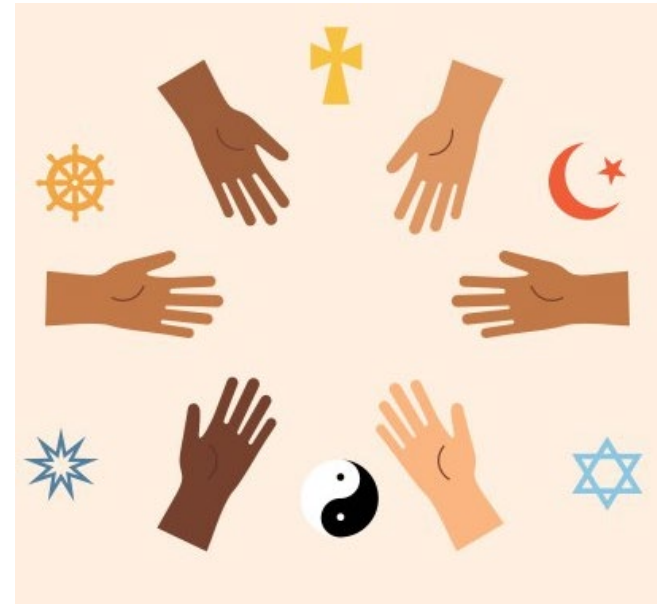
Information:

- County factsheet showing infant mortality data in the faith leader's area.
- Evidence to show the root causes of infant mortality.

Relationships:

- Bring one of the organizers of the community baby shower to the meeting.

Goals: (1) Strengthen connection between the local faith community and local infant mortality work; (2) Seek faith leader's action to engage congregants in advocacy; (3) Encourage faith leader's personal advocacy influence of a state policymaker.



Case Study #2: Philanthropic Funder



Audience: A program officer at a local foundation that invests in community health and family well-being.

Background: Currently focused on reducing racial disparities in health outcomes and seeking community-driven opportunities to make funding more equitable and impactful.

Motivated by: Data-driven outcomes, innovative approaches, partnership opportunities.

Case Study #2: Groundwork Ohio's Response



Information:

- Infant mortality data in the community.
- Evidence of local programs demonstrating efficacy in meeting the needs of those most vulnerable.

Relationships:

- Family testimonials of local program experiences.
- A program manager with the program.

Goals: (1) Build a relationship to improve likelihood of dollars allocated to community-driven infant mortality reduction efforts; (2) Support use of their voice as a leader to influence state policy; (3) Increase state advocacy investment to leverage local investments with state dollars and scale program.

Case Study #3: A local food bank

Audience: A mid-level manager overseeing food access for local families through the community food bank.

Background: Experiencing limited resources and staffing, facing additional cuts through federal and state funding changes. Often responding to immediate crises.

Motivated by: Meeting families' basic needs, building partnerships to stretch resources, improving program reach.



Case Study #3:

Groundwork Ohio's Response

Information:

- Evidence of the relationship between nutrition access and health outcomes for mother and baby.
- Disparity between eligibility for WIC and SNAP programs and uptake of benefits.

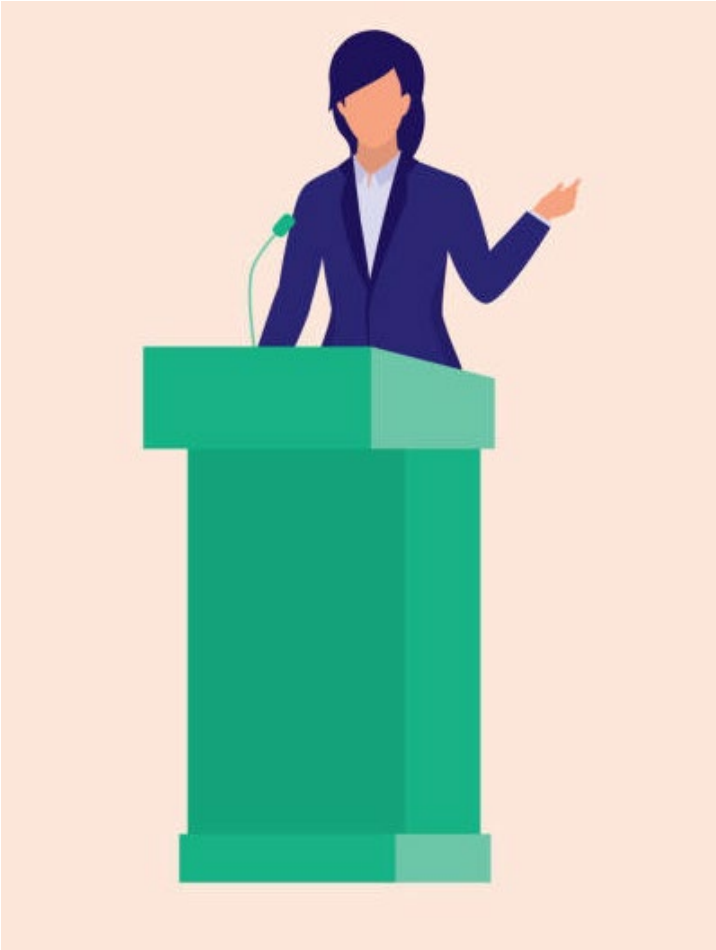
Relationships:

- A local partner leading infant mortality reduction work.

Goals: (1) Increase access to WIC and SNAP by sharing information with families in need at the local food bank; (2) Mobilize individual to become an advocate for their work & the families they serve to influence state/federal policy-makers.



Case Study #4: A progressive local policy-maker



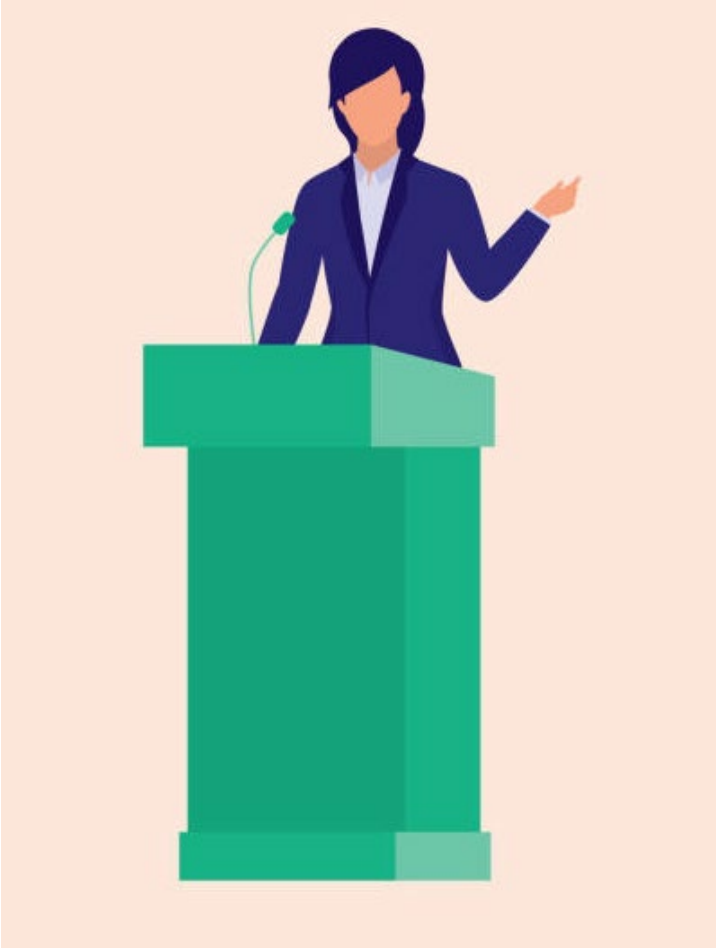
Audience: A city council member representing a diverse, urban district with high infant mortality rates.

Background: Is actively involved in equity and justice initiatives, including maternal health, housing stability, and food security. Prior to joining city council, was active in grassroots movements and local non-profit work.

Motivated by: Community voice, data showing racial disparities, and solutions that advance equity and social justice.

Case Study #4:

Groundwork Ohio's Response



Information:

- Disparity data showing Black infant vs. white infant mortality rates.
- Research highlighting the relationship between housing and infant mortality.

Relationships:

- A director from the local housing authority managing HUD Section 9 Housing Choice Voucher program.

Goals: (1) Encourage local funding to increase affordable housing options for pregnant and postpartum women and children; (2) Support them in advocating to their state association and state policy-makers about their community needs and the impact of changed local policy.

Case Study #5: A conservative state policy-maker

Audience: A conservative member of the House of Representatives serving a largely rural district with a focus on fiscal responsibility.

Background: Was a CPA prior to running for office. Is on the record as saying, "I'm a numbers guy."

Motivated by: Representing constituent needs, fiscally responsible policy, traditional family values.



Case Study #5:

Groundwork Ohio's Response

Information:

- Data showing infant mortality in the Representative's district.
- Evidence of return on investment (ROI) for programs that reduce infant mortality.

Relationships:

- Business leader from the community concerned about family basic needs and infant mortality.
- A constituent from the community.

Goals: (1) Advance legislation and funding solutions that expand evidence-based programs, like home visiting; (2) Build a champion that influences his caucus on this issue.



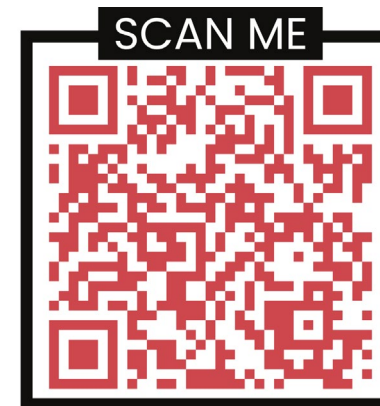
Engage

More Ways to Engage

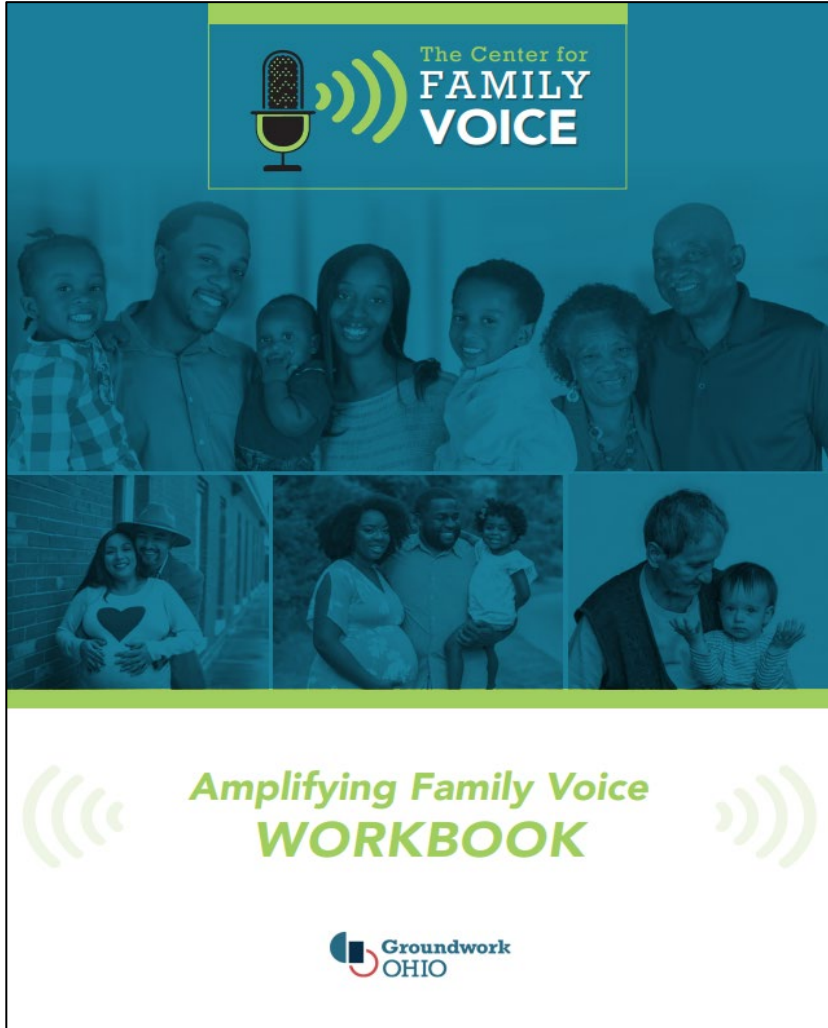


Join Us

Together, we can build stronger communities, empower families, and ensure every child in Ohio has the opportunity to thrive.



Amplifying Family Voice



Identify Your State Representative and Senator

WHO REPRESENTS ME?

Search By Address

Address (e.g. 121 Main St.) City (e.g. Columbus)

Search

Search By ZIP [What's My 9-Digit ZIP Code?]

ZIP Code (e.g. 43215) Plus Four (e.g. 4275)

Search

— or —

 Browse the Interactive District Maps



- Find your state legislators www.legislature.ohio.gov
- New districts were drawn for the current 136th General Assembly (subject to change with future redistricting)

Q&A



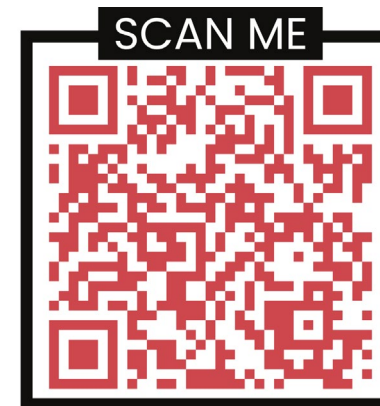
Lynanne Gutierrez
President & CEO

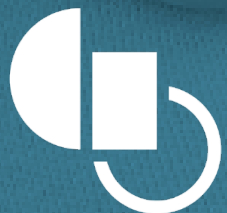
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**Groundwork
OHIO**

Thank you!

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We value your opinion

Please fill out our evaluation form to share your thoughts on this workshop