

**Origins and History of Children's Policy and Funding Initiative
Interest in Whole Child**

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Thanks for attending this workshop. We have a tremendous amount of talent and expertise at this gathering.

As we see the multiple simultaneous crises on COVID-19 – resurgence of white supremacy, economic and political calamities – this is a crucial moment for the people on this zoom in our lifetimes. This is an important moment on the US role in the world. It's an important moment on US leadership and foreign assistance. It's an important moment for children, girls and young people around the world. It's an important moment for the advocates, organizations, and the constituencies who represent their needs.

As you heard, the **purpose of this meeting** is to come together around a children's agenda for 2021 and common areas of interest. We hope there will be sharing of expertise, networking and idea generation.

When we say children, we mean, boys, girls, gender-nonconforming young people, and youth. Many highly effective and diverse institutions and coalitions are here today. We recognize there is already tremendous leadership and existing efforts and the question is what can be done to galvanize energy around that. The questions are what else could help to amplify those efforts, could be there a convergence across efforts, what else is needed, and are there new or additional efforts that can break new ground. At this urgent moment, the initiative aims to support a discussion of immediate needs and also make space for a discussion to lay the groundwork for the medium term. Can we build back better?

The **purpose of the Initiative** is to contribute to a greater global effort that enables children, girls, and adolescents around the world to access holistic support and to thrive and fulfill their potential, grow up in safe and nurturing environments, and exercise their human rights in a healthy and safe environment. The United States clearly has an important role in this, both on children within our country, children at the border, and children around the world. The entry point is for the initiative to better support the advocacy community, to facilitate convenings, and understand gaps and priorities across different sectors and among leading actors including how they fit into and advance a whole child approach; develop and share best practices and evidence.

History & Whole Child: The seeds of initiative began with the Elevate Children Funder Group. Oak Foundation, after the last Presidential election, became concerned about the US foreign assistance budgets being reduced including funds for health, education, humanitarian, and other areas affecting children and youth. Oak put some small resources at ECFG to track budgets. WPF and GHR also were interested. The private donors recognized that the private foundation grantmaking was on the back of the overall US foreign assistance infrastructure. The original impetus was to protect US governmental

foreign assistance budget lines for children, particularly for areas that seemed less protected without organized constituencies. The concerns then broadened and included both policy and programming.

Elevate Children Funders Group's initial small effort led to the report by Gillian Huebner, entitled "On the Side of Children and Youth in U.S. Government" in December 2018 and a convening around that paper in May 2018. The paper looked carefully at US budget lines. In the discussion and survey which followed the meeting, the advocates pointed out the need for both short term and longer term support, including policy, legislation, and budget mappings and analysis; convening across coalitions and sectors to strengthen complementary approaches, shared messaging, and space for planning long-term objectives for strategy, among other needs.

The three foundations each had their own mandates—the Oak Foundation focused on ending sexual abuse and exploitation, GHR is a faith-based donor on promoting family care in place of institutionalization, and Wellspring is a rights-based foundation to advance rights of children and girls. We are hoping other foundations will also join us.

What the three donors saw together, particularly those that had been working in the field for decades, was that institutional landscape tends to silo, slice and dice the child's needs and development, which did not overall best serve the child or the field. There was not a whole child approach. They saw that the issues were inter-related, and that each foundation's approach plus others were needed for a whole child approach, with healthy child development, wellbeing, rights, and social justice. In a child development approach, human growth involves a myriad of inter-related and interdependent interventions and supports. For children, girls, and adolescents to thrive, their healthy development requires children of all abilities, including those with special needs, to grow up where their multidimensional range of needs, values, skills and contexts are met. A holistic, whole child approach includes physical, social, emotional, relational, educational, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of the child's life, including the active engagement and support of their family and community. The rights-based approach recognizes the evolving capacities of the child or girl and calls on the adults around the child to make room for the child's voice. It identifies the need for the child or girl's agency including ability to make meaningful choices, have leadership opportunities, and have opportunities for collective organizing. A social justice approach calls for shifting power and resources to those directly affected, the young people directly to set the agenda, define the challenges and the solutions.

Rather than work separately, the three donors realized the potential for greater impact for young people and created a small, pooled fund at a neutral backdrop of Tides. The initiative has begun modestly with a series of interviews with Alex Arriaga that we will hear about later. This is the first gathering. Today's discussion will inform the initiative's next steps.

Going forward, we are living in unprecedented times. In this room we have experts following US foreign policy and budgets for 30 years. We realized that the status quo has developed as it is currently formulated for reasons, and that many of you have been engaged for years on foreign assistance reform add build back better again?

This is a unique moment. Never has it been more important to come together. The US role in the world is at stake, as well as the lives of children. Can we work together to make it better for children and young people around the world? What would a better approach look like? Can we imagine and build a better way?