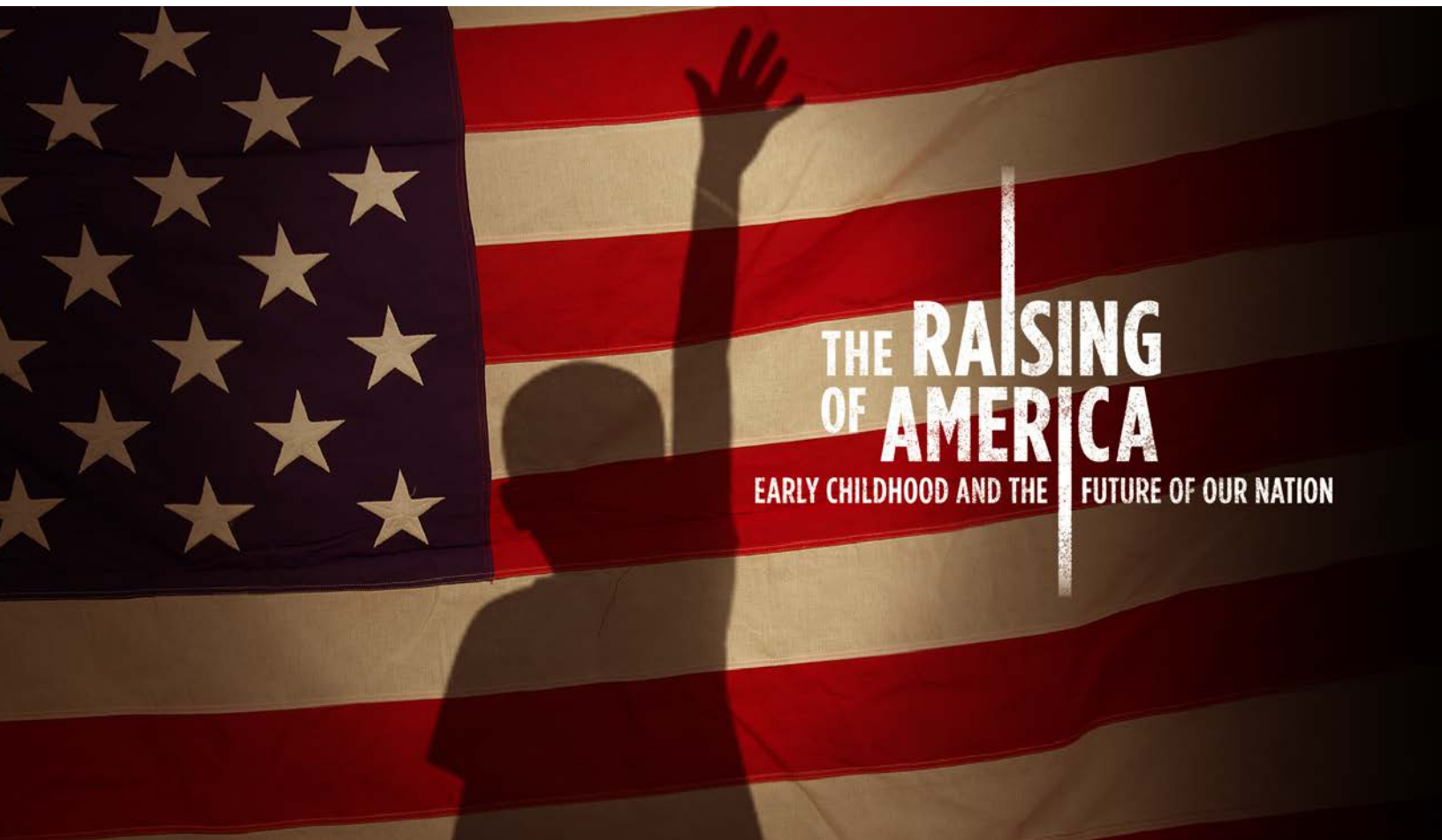


EVALUATION REPORT



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The Raising of America: Early Childhood and the Future of Our Nation

The Raising of America is the acclaimed five-part documentary series and public engagement campaign that seeks to reframe the way we look at early child health and development. It investigates how a strong start for all our kids leads not only to better individual life course outcomes (learning, earning and physical and mental health) but also to a healthier, safer, better educated, more prosperous and equitable nation.

Created as part of a national public engagement campaign, more than 700 Partners and countless others are using the series and companion tools to change the conversation about why some children thrive while others flounder—and society’s role during the crucial early years.

Watch clips and discover more about the science of early childhood, the squeeze on parents, and how we can do better at raisingofamerica.org:

- Ep 1: *The Raising of America Signature Hour*
- Ep 2: *Once Upon a Time: When Childcare for All Wasn't Just a Fairytale*
- Ep 3: *Are We Crazy About Our Kids?*
- Ep 4: *Wounded Places: Confronting Childhood PTSD in America's Shell-Shocked Cities*
- Ep 5: *DNA Is Not Destiny: How the Outside Gets Under the Skin*

Find the Action Toolkit, Discussion Guides, interactives and more at raisingofamerica.org to help change the conversation about what we can—and should—do to give all our kids a strong start.

This evaluation was conducted and written by Alisha Wang Saville with Larry Adelman and Rachel Poulain at California Newsreel, with initial input from Victoria Benson, an intern at California Newsreel. Alisha Wang Saville produced the design with Shannon K'doah Range.

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We're beginning to see a shift in the way people think and talk about early childhood.

There is growing recognition, both within and outside academic circles, that organizations, municipalities, states, even the nation can—and should—do much more to better assure the safe, secure and nurturing conditions all babies and young children need for a strong start. The stakes are high, for our babies and for the future health, safety, education, prosperity and equity of our nation.

The widespread use of the five-part documentary series *The Raising of America: Early Childhood and the Future of Our Nation* has been part of this journey.

We at California Newsreel have had the privilege of working with a brilliant “brain trust” of advisors, more than 700 public engagement partners, and countless others as we produced and distributed the series, developed the companion website and tools (www.raisingofamerica.org) and embarked on a public engagement campaign to help change the conversation about why some children thrive and others flounder.

More than 730,000 people to date have screened and discussed one or more episodes of *The Raising of America* in structured settings as part of this public engagement initiative since the series' 2015 release (that's in addition to those who watched its broadcast on public television and home video).

Screening events have been convened by more than 3,200 organizations across all 50 states. Events have been internal (for staff, member, student and leadership development), others external (with existing and new partners, constituents, the public and policy makers).

Most all attempted to rupture the conventional frame that a child's success or failure can be traced to their parents making right or wrong choices. While the importance of parents and caregivers is indisputable, in order to improve conditions for young children we need to view families and child development within a larger nested social ecology—our neighborhoods, services, institutions, corporate practices and public policies, and racial and economic structures all profoundly shape opportunity structures, the choices we have and the choices we can make.

In February 2017, California Newsreel began a quantitative and qualitative evaluation of how organizations have used *The Raising of America* in these structured settings—what worked, what didn't, the victories won, opportunities missed, and the lessons learned—in the hopes that understanding these organizations' experiences can further the movement to improve the conditions for families and young children. We also hope insights from this evaluation can more generally enrich the practice of creating and using documentary films for social change.

In this report:

- The Survey explores use patterns and insights gleaned from a 35-question online survey.
- The Case Studies dive into the stories of two campaigns to improve conditions for families with young children. In Kansas City, MO, an organizing and public health partnership changed the narrative around early childhood; in Colorado, members of a statewide network shifted how they approached their work.
- The final two sections of this Evaluation draw some lessons and makes recommendations for using documentary as a tool to advance narrative and social change.

Summary of Recommendations for Optimizing the Utility of *The Raising of America* (See page 37 for more details)

1. Early childhood equity is a framework, not an issue. Apply the lens of the young child to assess the impact of existing and future programs, initiatives, policies and practices.
2. Start with internal screenings and conversations.
3. Don't organize around the film; use the film to help organize around an existing issue.
4. Allow adequate time for thoughtful goal setting, planning and for the screening event itself.
5. Offer audiences specific opportunities for action and next steps which support your goals.
6. Make the screening about "us" not "them". Invite participants to reflect on how they personally, their families, friends, and/or their workplaces are affected by the issues depicted on the screen.
7. Be prepared to redirect the conversation from "good" or "bad" parenting to the larger systems and policies which help or hinder parents to be the parents they want to be.



Conducting the Survey

In February 2017, roughly a year and a half after the release of *The Raising of America*, California Newsreel designed and administered a 35-question online survey to better understand just how the series was being used to educate, organize and advocate for the changes needed to improve conditions for young children and families and advance early childhood equity.

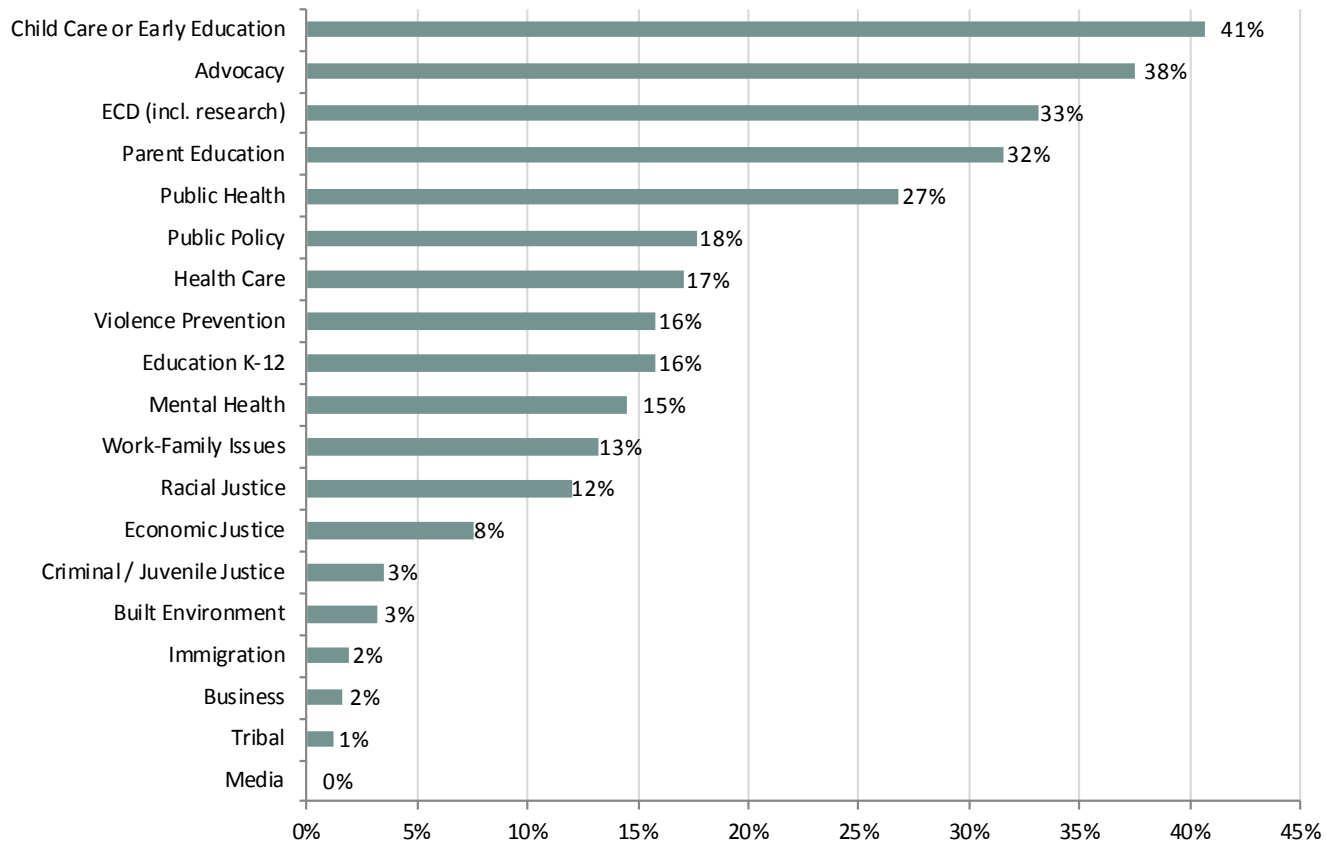
We wanted to hear from those organizations which had organized or convened one or more screenings and learn about their planning process and what they did or didn't accomplish. To that end, we emailed the survey to purchasers of the series, engagement campaign partners, our newsletter subscribers, and posted to our social media feeds. Our goal was 250 completed surveys from event organizers; we received 317. An additional 211 submitted surveys which we did not include in our analysis because they were incomplete or identified themselves as participants in, not organizers of, the events.

The pool of respondents solicited is non-randomized and the time investment to complete the survey (up to 30 minutes) likely reflects selection bias of those who are favorably inclined towards the series. Still, combined with our qualitative case studies and our ongoing relationships with campaign partners for almost two years, we believe this report reflects a fairly comprehensive picture of how organizations have used the series, with whom, what worked and what didn't, and why.

Who Is Using the Series?

Respondents represented many fields. The majority were involved in early child health and development with the largest representation from early care and ed at 40%. 38% of organizations indicated an advocacy focus with about $\frac{3}{4}$ of those focused on early child and family issues. We saw that 27% worked in public health, 17% in health care, 16% violence prevention, 15% mental health, 13% work-family issues and 12% racial justice. (See *Chart 1 on pg 7.*)

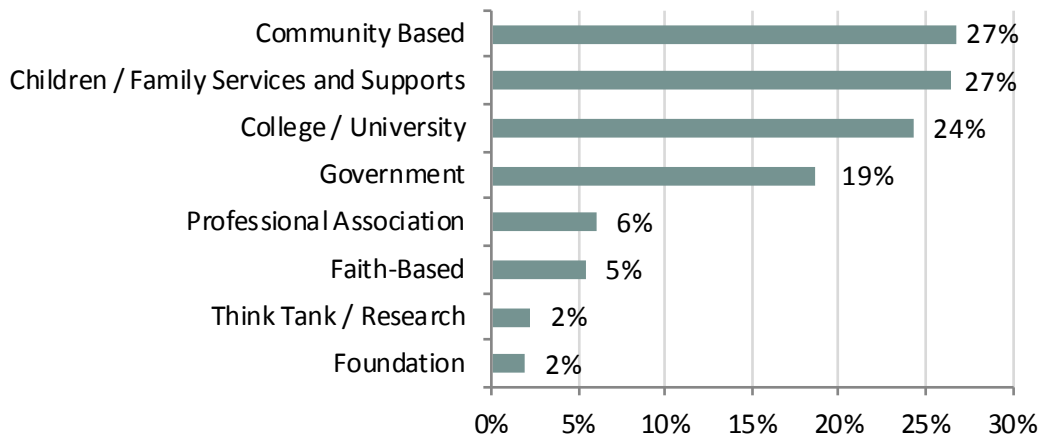
We were not surprised that early childhood constituted the majority of users but were gratified that the series is being used in others fields as well. While business, the built environment, immigration and criminal and juvenile justice fields reflected less than 5% of respondents respectively, their use indicates that using the lens of early childhood to advance a more equitable society is growing across sectors. This led us to consider what more we might have done to reach these “non-child” fields and encourage alliances between them and child advocates, as each can strengthen the other's work. Any changes that improve the opportunities available to families and communities is ipso facto child development work, and using the lens of the young child to assess trends, policies and initiatives can help non-child organizations build support for their own social justice priorities.

Chart 1: Organizational Areas of Interest (% of respondents)

Given the visibility the opening *Signature Hour* gives to paid family leave and reliable work hours—and the growing movement for the same—we wonder whether the relatively low percentage of screenings reported by work-family organizations reflects a low number of organizations which prioritize work-family issues, whether those organizations are using other media to organize and mobilize, or whether the much larger number of organizations devoted to early care and ed and parent education (by far the largest sectors of the ECD field) have not yet made work-family life “their” issue. On the other hand, some of the significant “victories” won using the series involved paid parental or family leave and

improvements in employer work-family policies (see the Case Studies for examples). This question needs more investigation.

Respondents represented a range of organizational types. Community-based organizations, children and family services, and colleges and universities were most strongly represented, each comprising about 25% of respondents; government agencies weren’t far behind at 19%. In addition, faith-based organizations, professional associations, think tank/research centers and foundations comprised 6% or less of respondents respectively. (*See Chart 2 on pg 8.*)

Chart 2: Types of Organizations Represented (% of respondents)

56% of respondents worked at the local level, 31% regionally, 38% operated at the state level, while 19% worked nationally. 47% of organizations responding were situated in urban centers, 31% suburban, while 36% worked in rural areas. (These sums are greater than 100% because some organizations work at multiple levels).

Not surprisingly, California led the number of respondents (14%), but next were Colorado, Missouri, Minnesota, Washington, Michigan and Georgia.

Which Audiences Are Being Reached?

More than half (53%) reported screening the series 2-5 times and 13% of respondents have already screened the series more than 11 times, with a few reporting holding 40, even 100 screenings.

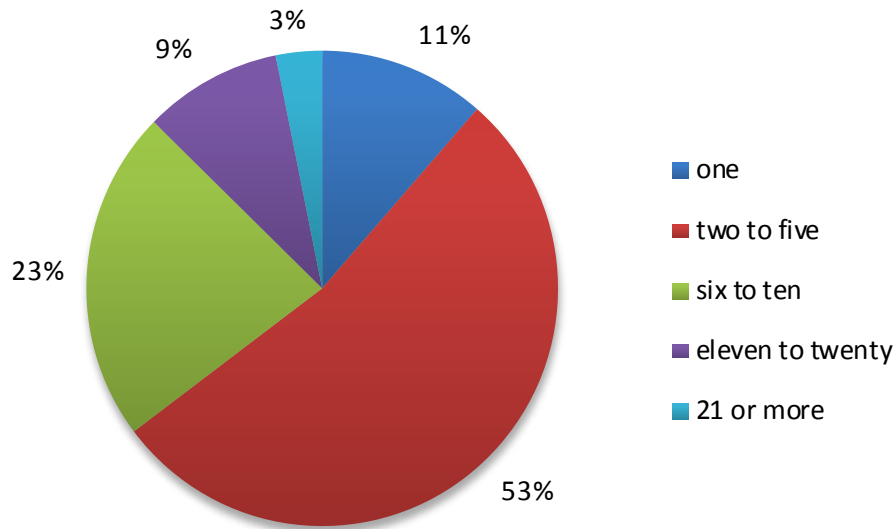
38% report engaging 100 or more people with their screening events; 6% reached 500 or

more with some organizations reporting reaching more than 2000 people. (See Chart 3 on pg 9.)

A majority of respondents (62%) used the series internally with staff and/or leadership; about 2/3 of these also engaged an external audience, mostly community members/the public, existing partners and other stakeholders within their sector.

More than half of respondents (56%) engaged students. In colleges and universities, the series is being used primarily in public health and early childhood education, but also in the social sciences, human services and development, nursing, and pediatrics.

More than half (55%) reported taking the films directly to community members and the general public. Many wrote that educating the public was the most important way to change the conversation. Some used the series to gather and share stories about the conditions which help or hinder raising a family in their own community, explicitly giving voice to parents. 28% reported reaching policy

Chart 3: Total number of screenings convened per user (% of respondents)

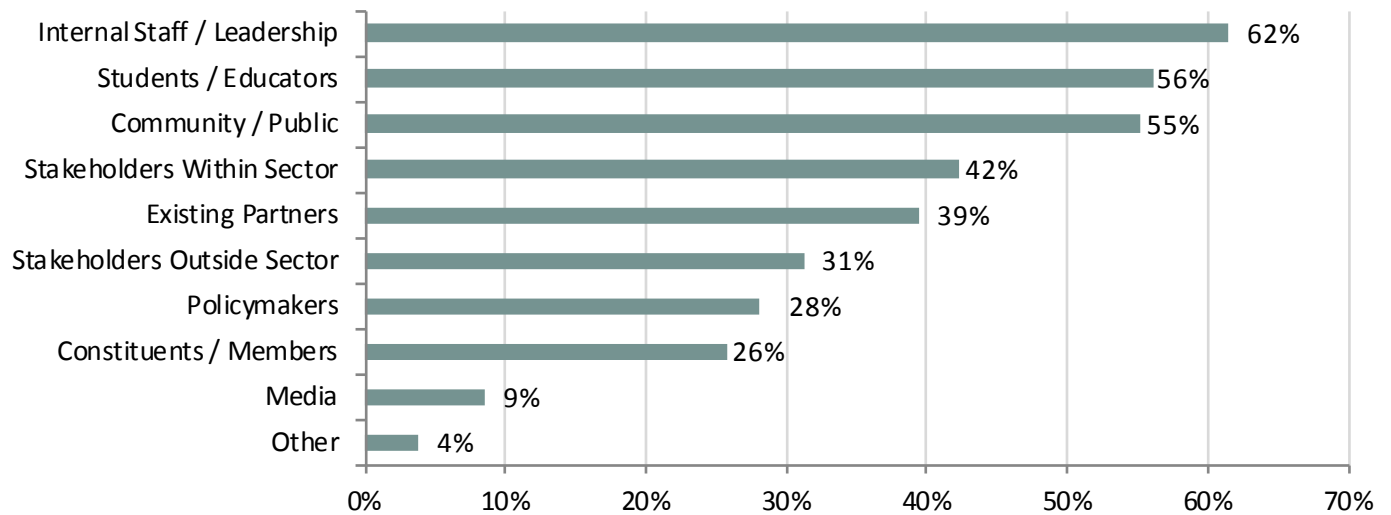
makers and other officials with the power to make public decisions. It isn't clear how many used the series strategically to first organize and mobilize different sectors or publics and then used that energized base to engage government officials. (See *Chart 4 on pg 10.*)

Many engaged "natural" audiences such as stakeholders within their sectors (42%) and existing partners (39%). But even when reaching outside their own sector, conveners mostly connected with sectors already involved in some way with early childhood health and development (e.g. early care and ed, pediatrics, violence prevention, family services, public health, child advocacy) and less so with "non-child" sectors (e.g. housing, racial justice, living wage jobs, reliable hours). One exception was the number of respondents (18%) who reached out to business leaders.

What Actions or Next Steps Emerged?

Nearly everyone (97%) used the series to educate and change the conversation; 41% also aimed to organize and build collective power around a shared vision to improve early childhood outcomes, and 48% wanted to advocate for specific policy changes. (Respondents could choose multiple goals.)

When asked about the series' effectiveness, 98.5% agreed or strongly agreed that *The Raising of America* is an effective tool to change, expand or deepen the conversation about early childhood, and that they would recommend the series to others. "It's fantastic. I wish everyone in America would watch this and then reprioritize our social spending to invest in creating happier, healthier lives."

Chart 4: Types of Audiences Reached (% of respondents)

Between 92% and 98% agreed or strongly agreed that the series is effective in generating discussion and understanding about how:

- a baby's earliest experiences shape their developing brain
- social conditions and public policies help or hinder parenting and caregiving
- investing in the early years benefits not only families with young children, but society as a whole
- we need policies (e.g. paid leave, affordable high-quality childcare, living wages, etc.) that go beyond parenting programs and services if we want to better assure all babies a strong start
- each of our own lives—as children, as parents—has been affected and shaped by public policies and social conditions
- each of us has a personal stake in making sure all babies get a strong start

While *The Raising of America's* public engagement campaign was centered on “changing the conversation about early childhood in America,” as producers we also hoped that event planners would use the screenings to inspire audience members to action. We created an Action Toolkit to guide event organizers through an intentional, strategic and thoughtful planning process to ensure they would maximize their screening to advance their work. Best practices included tying the film's content to local conditions and providing short and long-term opportunities for participants to take action. 97% of those familiar with the Action Toolkit found it a useful resource for organizing their events. However, 38% of survey respondents didn't know about it.

As for other tools such as the Discussion Guides, Transcripts, Discover Articles and Interactives, and Promotional Materials, it was also clear that the vast majority of those who knew about them found them valuable (between 82% and 99% agreed or strongly agreed). “Great tools to help the audience engage thoughtfully and pro-actively.”

Of those who offered audiences concrete next steps they could take after the event, the vast majority (90%) reported asking participants to inform and educate others. They shared these general examples:

- Raise awareness, e.g. of the importance of the early years for healthy development, toxic stress, impact of social conditions on caregivers, etc.
- Vote and contact elected officials
- Connect with existing community organizations (service with some advocacy)
- Educate parents
- Get your friends, family, local communities to watch the film

But other organizations also reported alliances built or expanded, initiatives undertaken and policy victories in which the film screenings played a key role to educate, organize, or support advocacy work:

- Kansas City, MO passed six weeks paid parental leave at 100% for all municipal employees.
- Several organizations formed or strengthened early child, child equity and work & family coalitions in IN, WI, CA, OH, and MN, to name a few.
- A North Carolina group initiated small, linked screenings intended to spark a “cascade” of growing awareness and invested advocates.
- Child maltreatment groups in MI and PA, among others, are using the film to press for trauma informed policies, paid parental leave and affordable, healthy housing.

- Some agencies formed workgroups to pursue alliances with other stakeholders.
- Some said they had purchased DVDs (up to 500) which they were distributing to constituents, allies and /or policy makers.

Interestingly, nearly 40% of users didn’t know whether their attendees took action. Some commented that they didn’t develop a way to capture what audiences did after watching the series, possibly indicating that their screenings were one-off educational events rather than embedded in a larger effort to improve conditions for young children. “We’ve definitely raised awareness—just not sure how people use the information to change things after they leave.”

So, why didn’t even more actions emerge from the screenings? Comments revealed the following:

- Some only thought of film screenings as a tool to inform. They hadn’t thought through how screenings could be structured as a jumping off point for something more. “I think awareness has increased but not so much the action aspects.”
- Several conveners were surprised, even overwhelmed by the emotions the series engendered and the enthusiasm for taking action. “Make sure you realize what a powerful tool it is for community mobilization before you screen it publicly. The dialogue that comes out of screenings is a natural lead in to ‘what do we do next?’ We didn’t have enough of an answer at the time and we have lost some momentum since.”
- Others hit roadblocks in terms of their capacity. “Didn’t have the bandwidth to follow up.” “Without funding it was hard to sustain our efforts.”

- A few stuck to their comfort zone of programs and services. “We shared our programs philosophy and goal to get families connected with each other, with their community, and with services.” “Respondents shared the services available in the community.” “Explored the gaps in [local] early childhood services.”

Still, a survey can only capture so much detail in terms of actions taken. Of respondents who said attendees took action, only 37% shared more in the comments. Even then, respondents were limited by space (and likely time). The survey couldn’t capture the nuance and rich anecdotes we heard through our hundreds of conversations with organizations using *The Raising of America*, and to that end we decided to dive into how two networks—one regional, one statewide—used the series to change the public narrative around early childhood.

KANSAS CITY, MO: ORGANIZING FOR PUBLIC NARRATIVE CHANGE

Introduction

In May 2016, Kansas City, MO began providing 6-8 weeks of paid parental leave for all city employees upon the birth or adoption of a child. Seven months later the city joined the national When Work Works initiative to make Kansas City workplaces the most family-friendly in the nation. Kansas City Mayor Sly James credited *The Raising of America* as a catalyzing inspiration, saying, “When we first saw the documentary film, I knew we had to do something in Kansas City to promote family-friendly policies such as paid parental leave and affordable childcare.”

As honored as we were by his comment, we also know that documentaries by themselves don’t make social change; rather they are tools. So we were curious—how was *The Raising of America* leveraged purposefully and strategically to support a broader initiative designed to improve conditions for families with young children?

This inquiry led us to the story of Communities Creating Opportunity (CCO), a multi-faith-based community organizing nonprofit, their public health partners, and how they utilized *The Raising of America* as an organizing and narrative change tool to mobilize support and action around investing in Kansas City’s young children—and the future of the region.

A Natural Partnership Between Community Organizing and Public Health

For more than 35 years [Communities Creating Opportunity](#) (CCO) has been organizing diverse communities and people of faith to “realize their power, develop strong leaders, unite partners, and advance solutions to our connected challenges” in the realms of health equity, economic opportunity, racial equity, education and more. CCO includes congregations across the Kansas City metro region straddling the Missouri-Kansas border, but their work focuses mostly on Kansas City, MO—the largest city in the state with 481,420 residents.

Ten years ago CCO began partnering with what was seen as an unusual ally, one that would shape the course of their future work: the [Kansas City, Missouri Health Department](#).

“If you look at the philosophies of public health and community organizing, you’ll find that they are very similar,” says Kathryn Evans Madden, former Community Organizer at CCO. Public health focuses on protecting and promoting population and community health and tackling health inequities. Community organizing is a way for communities to build power to improve where they live, work and play. “At the core,” says Evans Madden, “[both are] about what we can do collectively to ensure people have the power to thrive and to live healthy lives.”

Dr. Rex Archer, Director of the KCMO Health Department, knew that while public health was skilled at researching the social determinants of health and enforcing regulations, it wasn't improving health equity because it didn't engage communities effectively. "We lack the training and experience in engaging and mobilizing ordinary people to build power to shape the social, economic, political and environmental decisions that affect their health," says Dr. Archer. "Community organizing is necessary to bring the power to change."

"Community organizing is necessary to bring the power to change."

*Dr. Rex Archer, Director
KCMO Health Department*

The KCMO Health Department and CCO began supporting each other's work, and CCO began to connect its organizing initiatives to health equity. Over the years both groups cross-trained their staff in core community organizing principles and health equity, shared resources, and eventually CCO moved into the health department's building to symbolize their partnership born out of a shared vision for a more just and equitable society.

Putting Young Children and Families First to Advance Health Equity

Four years ago CCO and the KCMO Health Department were considering a new campaign to make the well-being of young children and their families a priority for Kansas City's public policies and investments. Research showed that the early years of life built the foundation for lifelong social, emotional, mental and even

physical health, and that investments during the early years paid off significantly down the road in the form of better health and economic outcomes, and lower unemployment, substance abuse and incarceration rates.

From their organizing work CCO knew that high quality, affordable early childhood education and paid parental leave in particular were huge concerns for families across their member congregations.

Kansas and Missouri fared poorly in how much they spent on early education, coming in 38th and 39th respectively out of 41 state-funded programs, and the Kansas City, MO school district was considering ways to raise funds for universal pre-K. Nationally, President Obama had just highlighted universal pre-K in his State of the Union address.

Paid parental leave was also gaining traction in Congress where the Family and Medical Insurance Leave Act (called the FAMILY Act) had recently been introduced. In Missouri, 58% of parents who qualify for unpaid leave can't afford to take it; in Kansas, 62%.

At the same time, *The Raising of America* documentary series was coming out. Evans Madden's colleagues at the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), the CDC Division of Violence Prevention and the Healthy Heartlands Collaborative (a Midwest-based coalition of public health departments and community organizers of which CCO and the KCMO Health Department were members) all brought the series to her attention.

She and her public health counterparts previewed a work-in-progress cut and determined that showing the documentary would be a good way to learn to what degree investing in young children and their families resonated with their member congregations. “Not only did the series cover early education and paid leave really well,” said Evans Madden, “but it showed how both issues are connected to early brain development along with societal issues like economic development and public policy.”

The series also told a story of early child development that expanded the conventional narrative from individual families standing in isolated bubbles making right or wrong “choices” to the wider social ecology where neighborhood conditions, social norms, class and racism, and public policies can literally get under the skin and impact a child’s opportunity to thrive. In other words, what surrounds us shapes us.

Having a story that shifts the focus from individual failings to the presence or absence of socially-produced opportunity structures and their patterning along class and racial lines is key to CCO’s community organizing. When people see their own lives reflected in a public narrative they begin to feel part of a larger collective, and that together they have the agency and power to affect change.

CCO began screening early cuts and episodes of *The Raising of America* with member congregations. This new narrative resonated deeply and sparked energetic conversations around the connections between early brain development and the importance of investing in young children and their families in Kansas City, including early education, paid leave and other policy changes.

Building a Broader Base around Investing in Young Children

CCO and the KCMO Health Dept. concluded they could use *The Raising of America* more widely to change the public narrative around early child development and build a Kansas City base of 5,000 constituent leaders committed to increasing investments in young children’s health and development.

But if the CCO-KCMO Public Health partnership was going to be successful, they would have to expand beyond CCO’s member congregations and public health departments and include stakeholders in education, violence prevention, human services, childcare and early education, as well as community groups, the government, and business.

At the time, CCO and KCMO Health Department were part of a social change experiment launched by NACCHO and the PICO National Network (a faith-based community organizing network for social justice) designed to learn how public health departments and community organizers could partner to build power and make change. The project, supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation with evaluation support from the CDC Foundation, offered an unusual opportunity: the funding, training and time to build a new project to advance health equity.

CCO, the KCMO Health Department, along with three other public health agencies in the region—Jackson County Health Department (MO), Independence Health Department (MO), Wyandotte County Health Department (KS)—and MORE2: Metro Organization for Racial and Economic Equity (MO and KS), decided to create a broad, multi-sector coalition

called Raising of America Kansas City (ROAKC) grounded in the vision that all children deserve an equal opportunity childhood—and that doing so would improve the future health, prosperity and equity of the region.

Evans Madden and Jackie Powell, then-Health Commission Liaison at the KCMO Health Department, were appointed co-chairs of ROAKC to cultivate, direct and drive the coalition—a network of engaged and committed organizations and individuals with the influence to lift up a broader public narrative around early childhood and the power to organize and advocate for investing in the early years.

They began building the ROAKC coalition by identifying and inviting a small group of key community leaders to a screening and discussion of *The Raising of America* Episode 3: *Are We Crazy About Our Kids?* which explores the costs and many benefits of early education—an arena which had already attracted multi-sector interest in Kansas City. This episode was particularly well suited because it brought to life the classic economic studies demonstrating how high-quality early care and preschool yield huge long-term personal and social benefits—while paying for themselves many times over. The screening’s purpose was to show the need for investments in young children in Kansas City, demonstrate that the timing was right, and to recruit organizations to the Coalition.

They considered the event an absolute success: 30 key leaders from elementary and

secondary education, early care and education, healthcare, government, and faith communities attended, and 10 organizations signed up on the spot to join the Coalition. The film not only made clear that Kansas City would be crazy not to invest in its youngest children, but the

event itself provided an intimate space in which attendees connected their own priorities to the larger public narrative change.

The co-chairs followed up with their new partners along with others on their initial invite list via in-depth one-to-one conversations.

“Relationships are the bread and butter of community organizing,” says Evans Madden. “[Every conversation] required us to be very clear about what we wanted to accomplish, what we wanted from people, what we expected from them, and how it connected to their own interest as well.”

Evans Madden and Powell began to strengthen the Coalition and build momentum in a variety of ways:

- They facilitated several small screenings with congregations, neighborhood groups, and partner organizations of the 11-minute trailer and episodes 2, 3, and 4 (the *Signature Hour* was still in production at that time) of *The Raising of America* where they discussed the new narrative on the science of early development, the growing squeeze on parents for time, money and resources, and how our policies actually stand in the way of providing the safe, secure and nurturing environment every baby and young child needs to thrive.

“Relationships are the bread and butter of community organizing.”

*Kathryn Evans Madden
Former Organizer, CCO*

- These small screenings also modeled what an effective, tailored and responsive facilitated screening could look like.
- ROAKC members could access DVDs and work-in-progress versions of *The Raising of America* along with a facilitator's guide ROAKC wrote so members could host screenings in their own circles, exercise their agency and lead discussions.
- Members were also invited to sign up for action alerts around bills and budget items related to children sent by the Missouri Budget Project and Kansas Action for Children, advocacy organizations part of the ROAKC coalition, so they could connect the stories and science in the films to action opportunities to improve their own lives, environments and local policy landscape.

Elevating the Public Narrative

As relationship building continued and the coalition grew, the organizers heard a common refrain that affirmed they were on the right track: “We need more people to see this.” “This needs to be a broader conversation.”

The Coalition decided to elevate the new public narrative around the importance of investing in young children and their families by hosting a large, Kansas City-wide screening of *The Raising of America Signature Hour* followed by a forum. “We publicly declared that in order for children in our city to thrive, we have to invest in their early years of life, and that means investing in their parents,” Evans Madden says. To help advance this change in public narrative—babies do remember, parents don't live in a bubble, our socio-economic environment as

babies has a profound effect on our life course and chances for health—the ROAKC coalition decided to screen the opening *Signature Hour*.

The Coalition wanted to connect the narrative change to a specific call to action. At the time the Kansas City School District was moving forward a property tax initiative to fund universal pre-K, and they would likely put it on the ballot in the next local election cycle. The initiative was a multi-sector, collaborative endeavor with strong business and community partners. The funding structure, administration and oversight were set up. If passed, it would be ready to implement. “Strategically,” says Evans Madden, “if you want to build a constituency around a narrative, you want to build them towards an endpoint where they can take action.”

Those on the event planning team also knew that event setup and promotion mattered a lot for elevating a strong, unified public narrative—and for strengthening the ROAKC Coalition and building their base.

Kansas City Mayor Sly James agreed to provide opening remarks. “We needed the credential of the Mayor's office behind our campaign,” says Evans Madden. “And we knew that [City Hall] needed to see a constituency...who would be in favor of any sort of local policy change around children and families.” The coalition also knew the Mayor had the power to reach the local business community.

Coalition members framed issues around investing in early childhood like universal pre-K and paid parental leave in ways that resonated with their respective constituencies. The Kansas City public health director called this a public health issue. The school superintendent called

this an education crisis. Those in the business community who were engaged called on their colleagues to invest in a future workforce. “We even had the president of one of our state advocacy organizations sending Tweets to legislators to remind them their future voters are watching and counting on them to make good decisions now,” recalls Evans Madden. “There was this very loud and very public narrative that said, ‘We all agree that this is in all of our best interests.’”

The event planning team engaged Kansas City Public Television (KCPT) to co-host the screening as a trusted regional media outlet, and to tape the post-screening panel so it could be aired following forthcoming broadcasts of *The Raising of America* on Public Television. Eventually the station combined the panel with local early childhood reporting to create a one-hour special which aired after the broadcast of each of the five episodes of *The Raising of America*, all which served to elevate this public narrative.

The Coalition turned their attention to recruiting sponsors. Funders don’t usually fund one-time events but, as Evans Madden noted, the coalition made it very clear that this screening was a launching point for larger narrative change around investing in young children and families. Sponsors eventually included the Black Community Fund, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas City, the Health Care Foundation of Greater Kansas City, the Mid-America Regional Council, Children’s Mercy Hospital, the Crown Center and Walgreens. All saw how early childhood mattered for improving Kansas City’s future.

“[The coalition] had this very loud and very public narrative that said, ‘We agree this is in all our best interests.’”

*Kathryn Evans Madden
Former Organizer, CCO*

Finally, the coalition designed their panel very intentionally to include child advocates, a school superintendent, respected health leaders and a foundation representative. This combination strategically provided complementary perspectives from respected public leaders about the importance of investing in the early years.

The event was a success with 200 in attendance and a strong majority submitting “pledge cards” on how they could take action in the coming months—whether it was connecting ROAKC with potential partners, hosting a screening of *The Raising of America* in their own circles to spark conversations, volunteering to collect signatures for a potential early education ballot initiative, or contacting their elected officials about policies that give children a strong start. More than 50 attendees offered to screen the series

to spark conversation and engage others in their own communities. The Coalition had the capacity to leverage this level of interest and uploaded everyone’s contact information and their preferred actions to CCO’s organizing database so when relevant opportunities arose, CCO could reconnect with the attendees.

The Domino Effect

Near the end of the large public event, panelist Peter Yelorda, former Executive VP at Blue Cross Blue Shield KC made a spontaneous ask: “I would love to see the Mayor have the board of directors of the Chamber of Commerce—ideally the entire membership—sit down and watch this.”

Mayor James, who had stayed for the entire hour-long screening and 45 min panel, replied that he had “already started working on that.”

Like the ROAKC coalition, the Mayor’s office never did one-off events. “It’s the mayor’s preference to not do screenings for screenings’ sake, or events for events’ sake,” says Dr. Julie Holland, Education Advisor to the Mayor. “He always wants there to be a very concrete call to action or some type of follow-up event.”

While watching *The Raising of America Signature Hour*, Mayor James linked the film’s contents to one of his administration’s priorities: the Women’s Empowerment initiative to help city government work better for women. His staff was already studying how City Hall’s internal policies impacted women. Employee surveys revealed paid parental leave as one policy that would improve the workplace. Because of this, his staff was researching the feasibility, cost and impact of paid leave on the City. *The Raising of America* added a new dimension: how paid parental leave and other workplace policies were not simply employee benefits but biological and developmental game changers for babies.

The public screening showed the Mayor and others that KC residents were responding enthusiastically to this new narrative. But the campaign for universal pre-k was delayed by a year because another tax initiative was on the ballot by law and stakeholders—including the Mayor—didn’t want two tax bills before voters at the same time. Even so, the public narrative continued to shift due to ROAKC’s base-building work. *The Raising of America* screenings had their own momentum by now, with more than 2,000 people having seen and discussed the films in structured settings. The work sparked

effects beyond what ROAKC anticipated despite the delay on universal pre-K.

The Mayor’s Office used the momentum to challenge KC employers to adopt family-friendly workplace policies that promote early childhood development. To lift up this priority, his Office decided to host its own screening of *The Raising of America* for 100 leaders of the business community in partnership with the United Way of Greater Kansas City, the Women’s Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce and Central Exchange (a women’s leadership network).

At the event, the Mayor drove home his commitment to make Kansas City supportive of young children and their families in two ways.

First, he and the City Manager pledged to advance a municipal ordinance to provide 6-8 weeks paid parental leave at 100% pay for all eligible City employees. “Parents shouldn’t have to worry about getting paid when they take critical time off from their jobs following the birth or adoption of their children,” said Mayor James. The city council approved the policy one month later. Kansas City, MO became one of the first municipalities nationwide to offer paid parental leave at 100%.

Second, the Mayor’s call-to-action for businesses was urging them to assess their own work-family policies as part of an initiative to make Kansas City workplaces known as among the most family-friendly in the nation. Seven months later the Mayor’s Office launched a partnership with the national [When Work Works](#) initiative, a tool which describes best practices around family-friendly workplace policies and sponsors a national award, to support this priority. The

Mayor, in collaboration with the Women's Foundation and the Society of Human Resource Management of Greater Kansas City, followed up with screening attendees and called on them to evaluate and improve their own workplace practices and apply for the award. Three Kansas City companies were honored the first year; the next year, seven more.

"I'm proud of this work and the ongoing changes underway...We will continue focusing our efforts on family-friendly policies at City Hall, and I encourage other cities and KC-area companies to follow our lead," said Mayor James. "I also give CCO and the Raising of America Coalition (ROAKC) a lot of credit for bringing so many people together to talk about these important issues and to provide resources and solutions."

"I also give CCO and the Raising of America Coalition (ROAKC) credit for bringing so many people together to talk about these important issues."

*Mayor Sly James
Kansas City, MO*

For CCO, the KCMO Health Department and the ROAKC, the Mayor's announcements and passage of paid leave was a huge win that demonstrated how screenings of *The Raising of America*, large and small, can be used strategically as part of a community organizing campaign to build the power of

often marginalized communities, change the public narrative around early child development, and to set the groundwork for policy changes.

COLORADO: SHIFTING INTERNAL PRACTICES FOR GREATER IMPACT

Introduction

The [Early Childhood Colorado Framework](#) (the *Framework*) was developed by Colorado as a vision and resource guide to help state and local early childhood stakeholders identify needs, guide planning and decision-making and build partnerships to improve child and family well-being.

The [Early Childhood Colorado Partnership](#) (the Partnership) is a statewide network of more than 650 individuals, organizations and agencies—health, mental health, family support, early learning and more—“implementing strategies to move the needle” on the prioritized outcomes within the *Framework*. The Partnership offers the space and conditions for its members to identify common results, share best practices, and implement strategies to improve system effectiveness for young children and their families.

When the Partnership previewed a work-in-progress cut of *The Raising of America* in 2014, they decided it

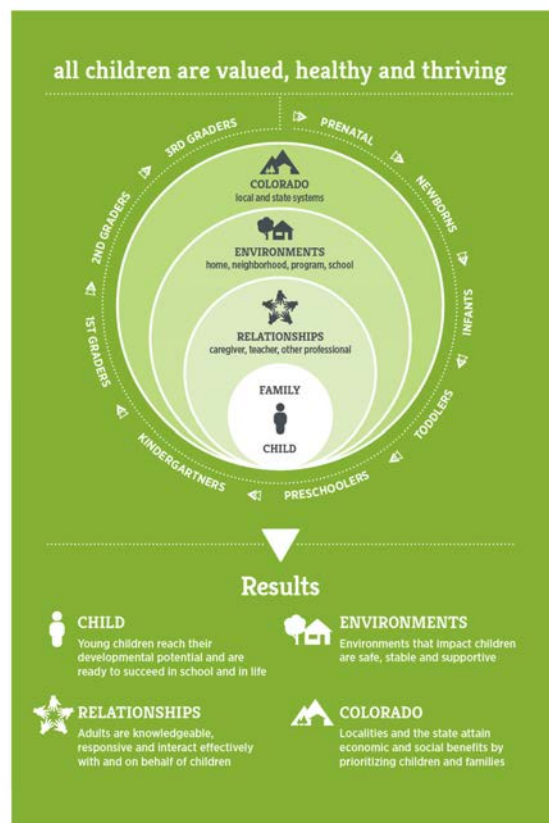
was an ideal tool members could use across the state to advance the *Framework’s* vision for ensuring all children are valued, healthy and thriving.

What drew us to their story is not only how member organizations used the series, but more precisely how they shifted their own internal practices and approaches in order to have a greater impact.

In less than a year, members of the Partnership convened more than 100 screenings, funded 15 communities with mini-grants to spark

dialogues around the series, hosted two webinars, partnered with Rocky Mountain PBS to broadcast multiple episodes, and created a Colorado-specific screening toolkit around the series.

Time and again, audiences connected the issues in the film—the squeeze on families and communities for time, money and resources, and how these stressors ‘drip down’ on babies and young children—to their own personal struggles and professional



From the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*

experiences working to improve family-serving systems. They understood how, as economist and former hedge fund manager Robert Dugger puts it in the opening episode, “Our policies actually actively discourage parents from being able to take care of their children when they’re very young. They may instinctively want to do it, but we don’t make it easy for them.”

The uptake of a new narrative around early childhood through screenings of *The Raising of America* generated a surprising amount of interest and enthusiasm for change. That compelled event organizers time and again to ask: How do we best engage our community around early childhood issues? Who is leading this work? What actions should come next?

In this case study, we look at five of the Partnership’s member organizations to explore how in using the series to advance the *Framework* they ended up shifting their own internal practices and approaches.

- **The Civic Canopy**, the “backbone” organization for the Partnership, expanded their role in social change work from “neutral systems facilitator” to “active community convener” in order to lift up the voices of local leaders and families.
- **The Boulder County Public Health Department (BCPH)** used the series to engage families in an open-ended, community-centered process where the health department was setting its course of action based on what community members had to share, rather than approaching communities with a set agenda.
- **Children’s Hospital Colorado (CHC)** launched their new strategic focus on the “First 1000 Days” and widened the lens from the individual biomedical view of health to recognize how social determinants shape early childhood outcomes. CHC used the series to inform and engage parents, caregivers, clinicians and administrators in this new, combined approach to child well-being.
- **Executives Partnering to Invest in Children (EPIC)** works to harness the capital of Colorado’s business sector by engaging business executives around early childhood to ensure that all children develop into healthy, educated and productive citizens. They changed their narrative frame around these crucial years from the long-term return on investment to society to how employers benefit from strong family-friendly workplace policies and practices.
- **Rocky Mountain PBS (RMPBS)** bucked the conventional model of public television outreach; rather than go to their established members and viewers, they set their sights on engaging stakeholders in the early childhood field and promoting the use of the series as a tool to advance the field’s work.

The Civic Canopy: Lifting Up Community Voices

[The Civic Canopy](#), an organization which facilitates collaborative networks needed to address complex social issues, is the backbone organization for the Partnership. They build network capacity, facilitate collective processes, and provide communications and technical assistance to statewide member organizations that are adopting and promoting the *Early Childhood Colorado Framework*. Supporting Partnership members to use *The Raising of America* was among their first activities. They encouraged screening events by agencies, providers and educators, developed toolkits, facilitated partnerships, and convened webinars for the network.

While supporting others to screen *The Raising of America*, The Civic Canopy decided they also wanted to engage their immediate community using the series—something they hadn't yet done as a capacity-building nonprofit focused on statewide partnerships. This experience eventually inspired The Civic Canopy to reimagine *their* role in social change work.

“We’ve always played the role of neutral facilitator and doing capacity building,” says Hanna Nichols, Early Childhood Manager at The Civic Canopy. “[This was] a big lesson for us—the fact that we truly need to bring communities to the center of decision-making. They know their communities best. Not funders, not nonprofits working in these communities like us. We’re not the authority either. It’s residents.”

“We truly need to bring communities to the center of decision-making. They know their communities best.”

Hanna Nichols, Early Childhood Manager, The Civic Canopy

The Civic Canopy partnered with the Denver Early Childhood Council and with funding from The Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, a Colorado-based foundation focused on early childhood, co-hosted community screenings of *The Raising of America* in each of the five neighborhoods around their Denver office. These sessions were called the Denver Dialogues for Infants and Young Children, a series of conversations facilitated by family leaders about healthy early child development.

In each screening, families and residents viewed clips from Episode 1: *The Signature Hour* and Episode 4: *Wounded Places* and discussed how young children are faring in Northeast Denver using the *Framework* as a guide.

What came out of these discussions was powerful: Families across these five neighborhoods identified fatherhood engagement, access to child care, neighborhood safety and financial stability as core challenges. These dialogues laid the groundwork for a new community-led health equity effort called EastSide Unified | Unido, a place-based collaboration between residents, health care systems and local public health to achieve the *Framework's* vision that all children and families are valued, healthy and thriving.

EastSide Unified | Unido received a BUILD Health Challenge grant to “build a thriving network of support systems and a community-wide commitment to leveling the playing field for young children so they can succeed in school and in life,” according to their website eastSideunified.org. Nichols

shares, “*The Raising of America* and the Denver Dialogues laid the groundwork to apply for the BUILD grant.”

For The Civic Canopy, using the series to advance the *Framework* was pivotal to leveraging their capacity-building strengths and knowledge of system-based work in a new way. “We can be a catalyst not only for bringing those voices to the table, but for ensuring action gets taken,” says Nichols.

Boulder County Public Health Department: Fostering a Community-Centered Process

The [Boulder County Family Health Division](#), along with the larger Public Health Department, joined the Partnership because they recognized that isolated services for individual families don’t, by themselves, improve conditions for all young children. Instead, solutions have to cut across silos, align with other work happening statewide, and take a population and systems view of families.

Heather Matthews, former Manager of the Boulder County Family Health Division, saw that the documentary series told a new story of early childhood—connecting individual early brain development with the social conditions in which families live, work and play—and drove home the point that bold, collective action needed to be taken to truly transform children’s chances in the U.S.

Matthews wasn’t exactly sure at first how to use the series in Boulder County but knew *The Raising of America* could be a powerful tool to bring community members together

in conversation around early childhood—something public health doesn’t normally do. “I thought [the series] could be a way to engage not just in the same conversation [about child services] but in a new conversation about transformational societal changes to support all young children and families to thrive,” says Matthews.

Matthews started by sharing *The Raising of America* with the Early Childhood Council of Boulder County and the Community Foundation of Boulder County to explore how they might leverage the series in the region. The Early Childhood Council improves the accessibility, capacity and quality of early childhood services, and acts as the county-wide convener for over 35 agencies which serve children and families to improve the kindergarten readiness of Boulder County’s young children. The Community Foundation’s funding priorities include children and youth, education, and health services. Both organizations had extensive networks and could help convene programs and services across sectors, as well as residents. “I thought they would have the most vision for what was possible with *The Raising of America*,” says Matthews.

The three organizations previewed the series with the question in mind, “Who needs to see this, why, and to what end?” They initially prioritized three distinct audiences:

1. Parents and caregivers, to elicit their experiences and ideas for solutions that meet their needs
2. Businesses, to foster workplaces that truly support working families

- Policy-makers, to engage them in understanding how societal conditions impact families, why work-family policies and quality early care and ed matter, and why supporting healthy early development matters for the future of Boulder County

Matthews and her colleagues at the Early Childhood Council and the Community Foundation formed [The Raising of America Partnership-Boulder County](#) (ROA-BC)

to drive this work, and decided to first engage parents and caregivers in smaller settings to see how they responded to the films. Over three months the ROA-BC showed the film at parent meetings, co-hosted with libraries, while each partner held a few informal viewings as well.

Two topics emerged from the small gatherings of five to 20 people each. First, residents gravitated towards paid parental leave. Though participants felt a paid leave policy was daunting on the federal, even state level, Matthews recalls that *The Raising of America* really helped open up people's thinking. "It gets people to that point of asking what's possible."

Other attendees zeroed in on public support for affordable, high-quality childcare and early ed. This provided ROA-BC with a clear direction for a larger, public screening event that would sew these issues together and start widening the conversation around early childhood beyond individual programs and services.

Around this time the Early Childhood Colorado Partnership announced 15 mini-grants were

available to groups across the state who wanted to host community screenings of *The Raising of America*. ROA-BC applied for and received funding and kicked their planning process into gear. At first they tried to choose between the three main audiences they had identified: each required different engagement approaches and framing around early childhood. But then they thought, these isolated conversations are part of the problem. "What would it look like to bring them all together?" mused

Matthews. The risk of such an approach was failing to reach one—or all—of the audiences. ROA-BC decided the risk was worth it and set a community screening date for three months later to discuss paid parental leave, childcare and early ed with parents and caregivers, the business community and policymakers.

"It was all-hands-on-deck to get this off the ground," says Matthews. "It was a really great event." By this point the ROA-BC had grown to eight organizations and each contributed to the event's success. More than 120 people attended the community screening at Centaurus High School in Lafayette, CO. The YWCA, InReach (a mental health organization and planning partner), Foothill United Way, and the Sister Carmen Community Center encouraged the families they worked with to attend, ensuring that about a third of the audience were mainly Spanish-speaking families. In addition the director of public health, a superintendent, a county commissioner and the District Attorney participated in the event. The City of Longmont (another partner in the county) facilitated the

"The Raising of America gets people to the point of asking, 'What's possible?'"

*Heather Matthews
Former Manager
Family Health Division, BCPH*

event and provided an audio system for Spanish translations while the Community Foundation of Boulder County paid for interpreters. The city also provided childcare to make the event more accessible. The Colorado Trust helped pay for dinner and Boulder Housing Partners helped with transportation.

The YWCA developed a facilitation guide for *The Raising of America*. The driving discussion question during the large screening was, “How can we [county systems and services] do better for families in Boulder County?” After watching Episode 1: *The Raising of America Signature Hour*, audience members broke into small groups to reflect on their own experiences before re-convening as a large group to share those issues they most wanted addressed. ROA-BC then took the next six months to aggregate and analyze the data that emerged from the event to inform how they could best move forward from there. Three areas emerged:

1. Centering families’ voices and concerns in the decision-making process for new community initiatives
2. Partnering with business partners around workplace issues
3. Access and affordability of early care and education

Originally, ROA-BC had planned to host a second event to announce the results from the first and to decide on next steps with their growing base, but they realized that the first area that emerged—centering families’ voices—would be more important to their work than they initially thought. It was rare for child and family serving systems to bring

parent voices to the table, but parents were the experts in their own lives and needed to see themselves as part of the solution. ROA-BC decided they needed to build their own capacity to do a deeper listening tour before convening a large gathering. The Boulder County Public Health Department set aside funds to secure a part-time ROA-BC position to carry forward the momentum, continue hosting small screenings of *The Raising of America* with county residents and look for opportunities to take action.

As ROA-BC considered how best to proceed, Matthews spoke with the county’s Human Resources Manager Julia Yager to review the county’s work-family policies in light of the community’s stated priorities. “I sensed that if we wanted [family-friendly policies] in the community, we had to do it first,” says Matthews. Boulder County already had decent flex scheduling and telecommuting options for its employees, and the County’s awareness of the *Framework’s* vision meant they were open to bold ideas. Matthews and Yager brainstormed whether paid parental leave could be possible. After running the numbers, Yager concluded the cost was reasonable to offer four weeks of paid leave to all 2,000 County employees. The County commissioners expanded the family leave benefit beginning January 1, 2016.

Matthews sees ROA-BC’s work and this internal change along complementary tracks. “If we had gone to the County commissioners and said we need [paid leave for county employees] without the community piece, it wouldn’t have been as strong of an argument.” The ROA-BC’s efforts to center resident voices in change work showed the commissioners that passing paid leave for county employees was part of

“walking the talk” of ROA-BC’s larger vision. “And simultaneously,” says Matthews, “the community argument isn’t as strong if we’re not pursuing it internally.”

Now that the County showed that making change is possible, ROA-BC is looking forward to their next phase of work. They were recently awarded a BUILD Health Challenge grant to support a sustainable pathway for engaging families, encouraging leadership and involvement, and creating a bridge between health care and community health—all with the intention of improving family-friendly policies and early childhood development in the city of Lafayette in Boulder County. By centering community voices in deciding how to align their efforts with the *Framework*, the ROA-BC is beginning to create a base for investing in young children and their families.

Children’s Hospital Colorado: Tackling Social Determinants of Health

In 2015, [The Children’s Hospital Colorado](#) (CHC), a nonprofit pediatric hospital system with 16 locations employing more than 6,500 people, made the First 1,000 Days a priority advocacy area—a shift that meant expanding from an individual biomedical view of health to looking at how the social determinants of health (SDOH) shape individual, community and population outcomes.

The First 1,000 Days priority action areas include:

1. Increase universal awareness of the importance of a child’s First 1,000 Days through a broad media campaign to reach

caregivers, community members and providers who work with young children.

2. Assess internal policies and work environments—particularly those that impact caregivers of young children—to improve CHC’s position as a policy advocate.
3. Increase provider awareness and understanding of the importance of the First 1,000 Days.
4. Implement universal psychosocial screening as a standardized tool within the hospital to identify young children at risk or already facing adversities due to SDOH.
5. Expand partnerships to help more babies and young parents, especially with pre-natal and early childhood providers.

CHC recognized this wider lens was necessary to truly improve children’s health outcomes; they also understood that to truly “shift the needle” in the First 1,000 Days they couldn’t work in isolation. They connected with the Early Childhood Colorado Partnership to begin aligning their activities with the *Framework* and other early childhood stakeholders in the state.

It was through the Partnership that Abby Waldbaum, Early Childhood Senior Strategist at CHC, learned about *The Raising of America*. She and her colleagues at Children’s felt that screenings of the series would be an excellent way to publicly launch their new First 1,000 Days priority and bring on board their clinicians and administrators, their network of care, and parents and caregivers.

CHC kicked off the program with a public event. “We hosted a screening and partnered with our early childhood council, a local mental

health office, and a couple of nonprofits,” says Waldbaum. While publicizing the event, she also had another sector in mind: business. Film, she felt, offered a terrific vehicle to engage “unusual suspects” in conversation around the importance of early childhood. “It was more accessible than a Powerpoint or a journal article,” says Waldbaum. While turnout was strong, only five or six people not already engaged in early childhood attended. “We hadn’t broadened our reach as we had hoped,” she said.

Though CHC didn’t raise the public profile of the First 1,000 Days with this one screening, it did bring CHC in contact with potential partners. “Some of those connections that started with *The Raising of America* have morphed into other projects that we’re doing.”

Moreover, CHC realized they ought to begin the First 1000 Days not with public events but with screenings to get buy-in from their own staff, and here they succeeded in reaching employees across departments. “Granted these people are invested in the health and well-being of children, but I don’t think everyone really understood how all these things [physical health, mental health, parental stress and social conditions] are connected,” says Waldbaum. After viewing *The Raising of America*, clinicians and administrators began to appreciate why the hospital was undertaking initiatives that went beyond conventional healthcare, such as a new psychosocial screening tool aimed

at revealing whether toxic stress and adverse social conditions—such as hunger and housing insecurity—might be influencing the health and well-being of their youngest patients. The hospital is committed to using the tool at every health visit and is piloting the protocol for how to connect patients and their families to relevant community services and supports.

“Some of those connections that started with *The Raising of America* have morphed into other projects.”

*Abby Waldbaum
Senior Strategist, Early Childhood, CHC*

“*The Raising of America* helped us get going on the work we wanted to do in the early childhood space,” says Waldbaum, as the Hospital continues to expand its First 1,000 Days activities.

Executives Partnering to Invest in Children: Shifting the Narrative Frame to Engage Business

[Executives Partnering to Invest in Children](#) (EPIC) is the business voice for investing in early childhood in Colorado. The organization began in 2010 when “return on investment” (ROI) early childhood research from Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman, economist and former hedge fund investor Robert Dugger, and former Minneapolis Federal Reserve Senior Vice President Arthur Rolnick was entering the national conversation (each is featured in Episode 3: *Are We Crazy About Our Kids?*). As a result, EPIC adopted this 15-20 year ROI narrative frame for engaging businesses around early childhood.

EPIC saw that *Are We Crazy About Our Kids?* laid out the ROI argument clearly and cogently and decided to use it in their outreach work. In partnership with Rocky Mountain PBS and the local United Way, and with funding from The Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation, they started out by co-hosting five forums built around screenings designed to encourage business leaders, along with elected officials and child advocates, to advocate for investing in high-quality early care and education for all.

EPIC defined a successful event turnout as 50/50: half business executives, half public health, nonprofits and early childhood professionals. But only one of their initial five screenings attracted 50% business leaders, the Denver Metro North Chamber of Commerce event. When reflecting on why, David Shapiro, Manager of Business Relations at EPIC, says, “[Businesses] are used to going to the Chamber. The invitation came from them. It was a member breakfast coordinated in conjunction with another committee meeting they were having. That’s when we have the best success, when a Chamber takes this on as a topic and we become a presenter.”

The other screenings EPIC co-hosted mainly attracted the usual suspects, says Shapiro. “We did an event at RMPBS, an evening with hors d’oeuvres, clips from Episode 3, a really strong panel, we probably had 100 people in the room—and maybe five employers.”

EPIC soon realized the return on investment message wasn’t resonating with a business audience. Investments in early care and ed pay for themselves many times over, but not for 15-20 years down the road. “The half-life of a CEO in Colorado is around 7 years,” says Shapiro. “So they may not see these [early childhood] investments pan out in 20 years.”

EPIC began shifting the narrative around early childhood to lead with issues closer to employers’ more immediate concerns: “Let’s talk about employee productivity and presenteeism, work-life stress related to childcare [availability and quality], and how that impacts your bottom line this quarter,” says Shapiro. “And all of a sudden the conversations became so much easier.” The conversation became less about investing for the future and more about how family-friendly work policies strengthen employees and their communities.

“Most of our conversations now are about work-life integration, supporting employees with young children, and supporting the communities that employees work and live in, and less so about the 15-20 year return on investment,” says Shapiro.

“Most of our conversations now are about work-life integration, supporting employees with young children, and supporting the communities that employees work and live in, and less about the 15-20 year ROI.”

*David Shapiro
Business Manager, EPIC*

EPIC also realized that the family-work policy conversation could expand beyond companies to include nonprofits, government agencies, and advocacy organizations—anyone who is an employer. Shapiro recalls noticing that

while early childhood advocates were focused on changing the world, very few at that time looked inward at their own workplace policies.

EPIC saw a new opportunity to engage businesses around improving workplace policies when they connected with Colorado Essentials for Childhood (EfC)—a child maltreatment prevention initiative funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC). EPIC and EfC partnered with Health Links, a workplace evaluation body, to add a family-friendly set of measures to their Healthy Business self-audit and assessment tool.

Employer interest in using the assessment has taken off. “An easier first step is to review yourself as an employer, to use the toolkit or to engage your HR person in terms of understanding your own place of work,” says Shapiro. From there, employers can identify their strengths in supporting families, where they need improvement, and connect with resources to implement those improvements.

For EPIC, the assessment is a way to engage employers in the early child development conversation most relevant to their current concerns and day-to-day work.

For more on the assessment and supplemental toolkits, visit www.familyfriendlycolorado.com.

Rocky Mountain PBS: Starting with Early Childhood Stakeholders

Four years ago [Rocky Mountain PBS](http://www.rockymountainpbs.org) (RMPBS), a Colorado statewide public television network, prioritized early childhood as a focus for their

programming at the direction of their President and CEO at the time, Doug Price, a former banker who was also the founding chair of an early education rating system called Qualistar Colorado. RMPBS brought on consultant Laurie Zeller to lead the system’s early childhood work. As a longtime advocate for children and families, Zeller knew about the Early Childhood Colorado Partnership and connected with them just as the Partnership was beginning to brainstorm how to amplify *The Raising of America* throughout the state.

Zeller saw an opportunity for RMPBS to approach *The Raising of America* with a different outreach strategy than most public television stations. She started by asking Partnership members, “How can we help you use this [series] in a way that aligns with the conversations you want to have? What else can we do [beyond future broadcasts]?” Zeller wanted to see how RMPBS’s strengths in media distribution and communications could serve the Partnership’s goals.

RMPBS and the Partnership first cooperated on an early broadcast of Episode 3: *Are We Crazy About Our Kids?* and tried a new way to engage their viewers: a text service where viewers could connect with Qualistar Colorado with questions around quality childcare, or with EPIC around the economic case for investing in young children. Very few people used the service; those who did looked for childcare. Zeller concluded the texting system wasn’t a productive way to engage with their audience around early childhood issues.

Next, Zeller and the Partnership experimented with a new Public Television technology called OVEE, which allowed RMPBS to offer private video viewings to Partnership member

organizations with webinar features that allowed for discussion and exchange of ideas between the sites. The initial screening ran into connectivity issues and had low attendance. Six months later RMPBS had debugged the platform and tried again. 50 Partnership member organizations spread across the state joined an online screening and discussion of Episode 5: *DNA Is Not Destiny* with 4 to 5 people per room designed to introduce the series as a tool members could use to advance their own work and expand the reach of the *Framework*. Both the station and the Partnership considered this a successful way to engage remote organizations; for RMPBS, engaging small groups around the state as event planners was a radically different way of working—one that significantly increased the impact of the series, taking it from the informational realm to one of action. To support organizations who wanted to host their own screenings of the series, RMPBS later co-created a discussion guide and offered a press release template and newsletter article template which event organizers could amend for local viewings.

When the station planned their air dates for *The Raising of America*, their earlier connection with Partnership member organizations through OVEE meant the organizations were prepared to engage their target audiences and communities around the broadcasts. Rocky Mountain PBS broadcast Episode 1: *The Signature Hour* in November 2015 aiming at a

public affairs audience (on a Thursday at 9:00 PM). In January 2016 they ran all five episodes and had approximately 90,000 viewers total statewide—a respectable number for that time slot. RMPBS also partnered with Qualistar to

make all five episodes of *The Raising of America* available to the state’s early childhood educators for continuing education credit.

Zeller’s new way of engaging issue stakeholders ended up influencing how other teams at RMPBS conducted engagement at the station. For example, after *The Raising of America* aired,

RMPBS produced an independent documentary called *Precious Loss* about African American infant mortality linked to stress and racism as part of their *Race in Colorado: Health* series. The engagement team identified and approached stakeholders with this invitation: “We have this documentary coming down the pike. How would you like to use it?” Among their key engagement partners were African American sororities and women’s leadership groups.

“The work that we did on *The Raising of America* and the relationships that we built through that work have been profoundly influential for RMPBS,” says Zeller. “It’s taught us to be responsive to our own community, to particular sectors of the community we serve, and how they want to use or engage with [public media] content.”

“The work that we did on *The Raising of America*...taught us to be responsive to our own community...and how they want to use or engage with [public media] content.”

*Laurie Zeller,
Former Consultant; Current Chief
Engagement Officer, RMPBS*

Moving Forward

The Early Childhood Colorado Partnership's efforts with *The Raising of America* raised the visibility of the early years and initiated debate across the state about how to better assure the conditions all young children need for a strong start.

One challenge most every Partnership member organization faced was setting an action agenda to follow the screenings. Some took the time to develop next steps based on community feedback, but many organizations looked to the Partnership for this leadership. That led to a Catch-22 because the Partnership itself is a capacity-building network focused on supporting actions prioritized by its members. They hoped their local and sectional partners would develop their own strategies for change.

And so the Partnership began to expand from their traditional capacity-building role. "For [the Partnership members on] *The Raising of America* Action Team, we all faced the same challenge at the end of our screenings," says Abby Waldbaum of CHC. "We asked ourselves, 'What should we do next? What can we do? How do we address this in our own communities?' It became clear that what is really going to push things is policy change."

This was a big shift for program and service providers. But what kind of policy change? Two kinds of actions had emerged from the screenings: legislative public policy change on the one hand, and promoting the benefits of more family-friendly workplace policies among member organizations and other employers. The Partnership is still discussing what the

public policy piece might look like, but the workplace piece is taking off as they provide members with EPIC's family-friendly workplace tool to assess their own employee policies.

"We're encouraging partners to think about their own family-friendly workplace changes, because those of us already serving children and families

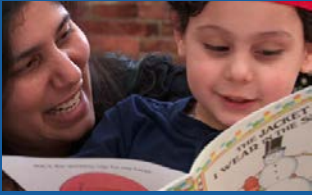
"Those of us already serving children and families are not very family-friendly as it turns out.

Before we advocate for changes at the state level, let's look internally at how we're supporting—or not supporting—family-friendly policies."

*Hanna Nichols,
Manager, The Civic Canopy;
Lead Staffer for the Partnership*

are not very family-friendly as it turns out," says Hanna Nichols, speaking in her role as lead staffer for the Partnership. "Before we go advocate for all these changes at the state level, let's look internally at our own organizations and how we're supporting—or not supporting—family-friendly policies."

"We definitely wouldn't have had this focus if not for *The Raising of America*," says Nichols.



SECTION 4 DISCUSSION

The Raising of America project grew directly out of California Newsreel's previous documentary series *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, which explored the root causes of our alarming class and racial inequities in health. *Unnatural Causes* brought to life a new understanding of how social and economic conditions drive population health more than individual genes, behavior and access to healthcare.

Following *Unnatural Causes'* release, many urged us in surveys, conversations and emails to focus our next project on the growing evidence indicating that early experiences build the foundation for lifelong physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive health. Since society shapes our health, they said, we have to look at the time from conception to age five as a critical period for cultivating a strong foundation.

We conducted an extensive Needs Assessment of the field and learned that early child development is a large but siloed field, primarily a reactive system built on the rescue model of (often disconnected) programs and services. Not only that, but it lacked a comprehensive view of early child development that went beyond parental "right choices" and the "family bubble" to highlight how public policies, social conditions and systems structured every child's opportunity to thrive.

The Raising of America was created to tell this new story.

Thousands of organizations nationwide are using *The Raising of America*. Many have already organized eleven or more events or distributed DVDs to all their members or grantees. Comments from survey respondents were overwhelmingly positive: "A powerful tool." "Makes the concepts come alive." "This series brings people together." "Can be a catalyst for change on a grassroots level." "It's shaping the dialogue in public health and providing a tool we can use for advocacy and policy change."

Clearly the commitment to improving conditions for children and families is growing. Respondents reported using screenings purposefully to help create or expand alliances and build constituencies around a new public narrative which went beyond programs and services to ask how organizations, municipalities, states and even the nation might better assure the conditions all babies and young children need to thrive. Some launched campaigns and even won victories advocating child and family-friendly public and workplace policies.

For many organizations, screening the series was their first experience engaging others in a "wider lens" around early childhood. But that also meant they had to grapple with what adopting a wider understanding of early childhood equity actually implies for their own organizations. Moreover, many groups had little prior experience hosting and structuring film screenings, doing outreach, convening community dialogs, and building alliances. Because early childhood equity has not yet

coalesced into a national movement able to provide guidance and leadership, many seem hindered by a lack of a specific action, policy, or legislative agenda around which to organize on the municipal, state and national levels and found themselves stymied by the question of what to do next.

Some respondents wrote, “I think awareness has increased but not so much the action aspects.” “There are so many issues the film touched on, it’s been a challenge to identify and move on a focused action plan.” “We are still working on what to do next.”

Providing ways for audiences to get involved and take action is key to transforming the insights and emotions the film evokes into energy, engagement and a commitment to work for improving systems and structures that impact families. As one user commented: *“Do not just show the series. Have a plan for concrete opportunities that people can actively get involved—otherwise, they will be moved by the viewing, then frustrated.”*

Clearly, many who use and watch *The Raising of America* want to take action but don’t know where to start. That is why it is so important for event planners to provide a range of specific ways for audiences to engage.

On the one hand, advocating to ensure every child has a strong start in life is challenging since children are part of, and affected by, every part of the “social ecology” in which they are embedded—their family unit, neighborhoods, schools and local institutions, policies, systems and laws. Reforms are needed in not any one area but in all, and are tightly bound with movements for a more just, democratic society. But that also means there are many actions

which can improve the lives of children and their families. Not only early care and education but also anti-poverty work, work-family policies in the public, non-profit and private sectors, racial and economic justice, healthy, affordable housing, better transit, community organizing... they are all ipso facto child development work. Organizers in these arenas who use *The Raising of America* and the lens of the young child can help build the power of low income communities and communities of color.

Some users expressed frustration that their events were “preaching to the choir” or reaching “mainly the usual suspects.” In part, that reflects the limits of their own outreach. But those “choir” screenings have an often under-recognized value of their own. The survey and our own observations suggest the early childhood field is still a long way from building a shared understanding, shared language, and shared vision for future work; thus screenings which attract the “usual suspects” serve to “knit the network” and build a base more ready and able to embrace advocacy and population and public policy-oriented initiatives, rather than just more programs and services. As one respondent wrote: “Thank you for this incredible work. It has moved many quiet believers in change into a role of advocacy.” One exciting change we noticed among child advocacy organizations was a (sometimes uncomfortable) look at how they could make their own workplace policies more child and family friendly by introducing paid family leave, flex time, living wages and benefits for support staff, reasonable time and private rooms to nurse or pump, and other changes.

But the survey also confirmed that many early childhood practitioners and advocates have

not yet built strong relationships with “non-childhood” sectors (e.g. affordable and healthy housing; living wage jobs; racial justice). Building strong cross-sectoral coalitions, including community voices, are key to building the power to impel the social changes needed if we are to better ensure the conditions all our babies need for a strong start.

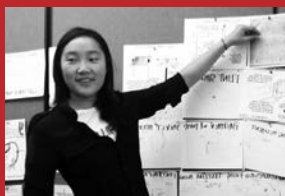
For their part, many “non-childhood” sectors still do not recognize the relevance and advantages of using the early childhood equity lens to build support for their own social justice work. Or in some cases, they are so overwhelmed by more urgent exigencies (e.g. police violence; immigration rights, the fight for \$15) that they find the early childhood lens less immediate. We had hoped organizations would use the series to help make these cross-sectoral links and build these alliances, but that happened only occasionally, as in Kansas City, MO.

There was one non-child group which a surprising number of screening organizers did try to reach and that was business leaders on the basis that “they have the power.” But that decision led to some challenges of its own.

Organizers often narrowed their focus to early care and education fearful of alienating business. They would screen Episode 3: *Are We Crazy About Our Kids?* for example, not the opening Signature Hour, and use a return on investment frame. Recruiting business leaders risked coming at the expense of building the counter-vailing power of low-income and communities of color. To pursue the latter, of course, also presupposes a longer-term strategy for the changes needed to make one’s region “a great place for all young children and their families.”

There are many ways *The Raising of America* can be employed to increase awareness, organize constituents and diverse sectors and communities, and advocate for a more equitable child and family friendly society. In all cases, however, the key to a successful film screening event lies in organizers asking how the screening intersects with their existing work, having a clear vision for who they want to reach and what they hope to achieve, next steps which can harness the enthusiasms generated, and the time to plan and hold the event along with follow-up.

RECOMMENDATIONS



The following recommendations can help organizations use *The Raising of America* even more effectively to change the conversation and build a stronger movement to give every young child a strong start in life—perhaps the most prudent investment any nation can make. The recommendations are based on the survey findings, the Case Studies, and the many hundreds of hours of conversations with engagement partners we’ve worked with during the past two years.

1. Early childhood equity is a framework, not an issue. Apply the lens of the young child to assess the impact of your existing and future programs, initiatives, policies and practices.

Early childhood equity doesn’t need to be a “new issue” to add to your work. Consider it a lens to explore the impact of your own work on young children and their families and how it might be strengthened.

Start with the issues your organization already addresses (such as early child health and development, economic justice, access to affordable housing, public health, transportation, education, research, or racial justice) and ask:

- How does our current work help ensure the conditions all babies and young children need to thrive? (Don’t forget to include your work’s impact on families, caregivers and communities.) What evidence can illustrate this impact?

- What does applying an early childhood equity framework imply for our own organization’s priorities, work flow, allocation of resources, and outreach? What changes might we have to make? Are there tradeoffs in accepting this frame?
- How can we communicate the positive impacts of our work on early childhood health and development to increase support for our efforts among our constituencies, other organizations, the public, the media, and policymakers?
- What opportunities does early childhood equity provide for alliance building? Who are our obvious – and not-so-obvious – partners? How are we engaging and empowering community members? Are we enhancing their capacity for tackling inequities?
- What role can we play in building a larger movement for a more equitable society that provides resources and opportunities for young children and their families to thrive, especially historically excluded populations?
- Can we apply the “lens of the child” to ensure that public and private initiatives, actions, and laws are assessed by their impact on young children and family well-being?
- What existing struggles, initiatives, or social policies show promise for improving conditions for young children and families? How can we support them?

- How can we help the media, the public and policymakers understand the early childhood implications of an issue currently receiving public attention?

2. Start with internal screenings and conversations.

Staff and leadership may have different understandings and perspectives on how systems impact early child development, which makes it harder to build alliances and engage others in the work.

Internal screenings followed by holding space for conversation allow organizations to:

- Build a shared language and understanding of the social determinants of child well-being, including how systems and policies can help or hinder families caring for young children
- Brainstorm ideas for ways to leverage the films to advance your work
- Assess the organization’s capacity

Consider various ways to integrate screenings into existing organizational development outlets:

- Include the series in new staff/membership orientation.
- Integrate into all-staff development days.
- Provide continuing education credits for attending screenings and discussions.
- License closed-network streaming rights that allow personnel to log in and view episodes and consider questions on-line on their own schedules.

See raisingofamerica.org/take-action/change-conversation for more examples of what it means to change the conversation around early childhood.

3. Don’t organize around the film; use the film to help organize around existing efforts.

“The documentary is a tool to use in larger efforts, not necessary the effort itself. There needs to be follow up action.”

The Raising of America is a tool—no more, no less. The first question to ask is: “How will organizing an event around a screening of this film (or any film, for that matter) advance our goals? How are we leveraging the most out of the time we have?” Films can be a powerful way to engage audiences and generate energy for action, but in the end a screening is only as powerful as the thoughtful and critical conversations, ideas for next steps and organizing for action that surround it.

4. Allow adequate time for goal setting, planning and for screenings themselves.

Some organizations have shared the difficulty of finding the time to watch whole episodes and consider the implications of the “lens of the child” for their work. We understand that many organizations doing this work are, like parents, pressed for time, money and resources. Yet widening the lens around early childhood—let alone developing and garnering support for bold, transformative change—is nearly impossible without making time to reflect and ask, What is possible? Who do we need to be in relationship with? What is our role in that work? How can we have the most impact?

Long-form documentary films (30 min. and up) can offer emotional engagement and a depth of content lacking in short films which can help viewers challenge assumptions and reframe issues. *The Raising of America* was designed to be a series of essays which develop unfolding arguments in the course of telling stories. But screening events demand time—time to plan, time to show the film, and time for the audience to view, process reactions and discuss. If the issue is important to you, invest that time!

Whether working internally or externally, your screening will be more effective if your organization is clear about how the event is a step in your larger strategy.

The Raising of America Action Toolkit, Discussion Guides and other resources available at raisingofamerica.org offer many ideas for planning and structuring productive conversations.

5. Offer audiences specific opportunities for action and next steps which support your goals.

“Have a long range plan but focus on short-term objectives.”

We often heard from organizers that, as one person put it, “we under-anticipated the level of community interest and desire for a next step.” Viewers were eager to get involved and “do something” after watching the film, but too often organizers weren’t prepared to channel those enthusiasms and emotions productively. We have also heard of conveners “putting the information out there” and then leaving action items and follow-ups “to the community”—this sounds democratic but rarely leads anywhere.

To prevent your screening from being a one-time, feel-good event, offer defined ways your audience can take action that aligns with and encourages further engagement with your objectives.

Consider offering your audience immediate, mid-term and long-term actions. Ask yourself: Do these opportunities for action align with our goals and objectives? How might the actions we offer build towards more?

Immediate actions require little time and can be done relatively easily and quickly:

- Subscribe to a newsletter or listserv
- Write a post card or letter to a policy maker; send a tweet
- Commit to a follow-up conversation or a gathering
- Identify which colleagues, members, allies, or others should view the film
- Share video clips and articles from raisingofamerica.org on social media

Mid-term actions take more of a time commitment:

- Host an internal screening
- Support local organizing efforts around racial and economic justice issues that can improve early childhood health and well-being (living wages, quality affordable housing, transit, policing and criminal justice, high-quality childcare and early ed, community violence...)

- Assess work-family policies at your own organization (paid leave, breastfeeding support, flex time)
- Engage non-traditional partners

Long-term actions require a deeper level of engagement:

- Start internal conversations to define what using the “lens of the child” means for your organization and develop an action plan
- Evaluate how internal work policies impact staffers who are parents, and decide how to make your organization a more family-friendly workplace
- Build a cross-sectoral coalition around early childhood to develop a vision for *all* young children and their families to thrive in your city/county/state
- Pressure local government to adopt an ordinance requiring that city initiatives are assessed by their impact on young children and their families
- Ensure that the city or county strategic plan targets ways to reduce inequities in young children’s chances to thrive

6. Make the screening about “us” not “them”. Invite participants to reflect on how they personally, their families, and/or their workplaces are affected by the issues depicted on the screen.

Too many, we’ve learned, apply the insights from the film to ‘others’ rather than themselves or their own families, workplaces and communities. When those of us “in the choir” immediately focus on persuading others, we

miss a valuable opportunity to see this as “our” issue and explore what that means for our own lives and workplaces.

Once viewers—whether staff and leadership or partners and members—recognize how their own lives (or their parents / kids) have been influenced and/or shaped by public policies, including work-family policies in their own workplace or agency, their commitment to improving conditions for children and families tends to strengthen.

Some questions to spark conversation:

- How are we affected as parents and children ourselves—and not just in their role as service providers or advocates?
- Keeping the lens of the young child in mind, how can we make the greatest impact in our current roles?
- How can child service providers and advocates, a core constituency for change, receive the time and training to connect the dots between children’s outcomes and the “social ecology” around them and their families?
- Staff are often overburdened already. When asking staff to tackle public policy issues, do we provide them the time and recognition to do so?

Opening the floor for reflection can bring about, as one user shared, “very strong reactions.” Early childhood and parenting are personal topics for all of us; before viewers can put on their “professional” hats, facilitators need to acknowledge the emotions in the room and, depending on the situation, make time and space for viewers to process.

7. Be prepared to redirect the conversation from “good” or “bad” parenting to the larger systems and policies which help or hinder parents to be the parents they want to be.

The predominant way of talking about early child development in the U.S. places a disproportionate focus on parents making right or wrong choices. The parental “right-choices” frame is deeply imprinted, always lurking and easily triggered. Don’t be surprised when someone at your event deflects the conversation to “good” or “bad” parents.

The Frameworks Institute and a growing number of researchers suggest that this emphasis on parenting actually stands in the way of change. When parenting behaviors are seen as the driver of childhood outcomes then solutions are limited to changing parenting behaviors. Obviously, the quality of parenting and caregiving is critical. But managing adversity, chronic stress and the pressures on our lives is not the same as reducing the sources of that adversity and stress. What changes will better enable parents to be the parents they want to be?

Transfer viewers’ locus of attention from the individual to the systems with which they interact.

Ask new questions which pivot the conversation to changing social conditions. (See Chart 5 on the next page for examples.) This shift helps to change the conversation and open up space to consider bold and creative solutions.

Use the series to educate the media on this shift from individuals to systems.

Go beyond trying to get coverage of a one-off event and find ways to educate the press on bringing a wider view to early childhood development and family issues.

Local and regional media play an important role in shifting the public narrative around early childhood. Several users partnered with their local public media stations to hold public screenings of *The Raising of America*, film post-screening panels to broadcast with subsequent airings, and create localized toolkits around how to use the series in viewers’ work. (See the Colorado Case Study on page 21 to learn about Rocky Mountain’s role in the work.)

Chart 5: Ask New Questions

USUAL QUESTION	BROADER QUESTION
How can we increase the number of mothers who breastfeed?	How can we ensure that mothers have the time and privacy to pump at work?
How do we ensure more children are kindergarten-ready?	How do we ensure all families have access to affordable, high-quality early care and education?
How can we help children in neglectful or abusive situations?	Why do parents struggle to provide a loving, nurturing environment for their babies?
How do we help low-income families, especially families of color, make better parenting decisions?	How do we advance racial justice and improve socioeconomic conditions and opportunities in low-income communities of color?
How do we get policymakers to understand the importance of investing in the early years?	How can we build a movement that will impel policy makers to listen and act?
What policies can improve conditions for young children?	Who's at the table making decisions? Who's left out? Who decides?
How do we buffer children from adversities?	What's causing these adversities and who benefits?
What's wrong with you?	What happened to you?



SECTION 6 CONCLUSION

How does one bring the “lens of the young child” to all policies? How can local, state, and national policies be changed or crafted to support early childhood equity? How can changing your organization’s internal work-family policies be part of “walking the talk”? How do engaged groups build a “community of practice” so that lessons learned by one may be shared by all? How do we articulate and share a vision of all young children and families thriving? Of [insert your city, your state here] being a healthy and nurturing place to raise a family? Can this work be brought together under one early childhood equity national strategy, coalition or umbrella? Should it?

These broader questions are beyond the scope of this report, but we hope that the seven recommendations in the previous section will

help continue the conversations, bold thinking, and alliance-building already underway in communities around the nation.

The challenges to providing every child the opportunity for a strong start in life are daunting. But unlike when we first began production on *The Raising of America*, the conversation is changing, cross-sectoral partnerships are being formed, and there is a readiness among many to move into public policy and organizing for power. Let us lift up our victories, learn from our missteps, communicate a vision of all children and families doing well together, and keep moving forward.

Acknowledgements

To all who have used *The Raising of America* as a tool to advance early childhood equity—thank you for your work to give every child in America the strong start they deserve.

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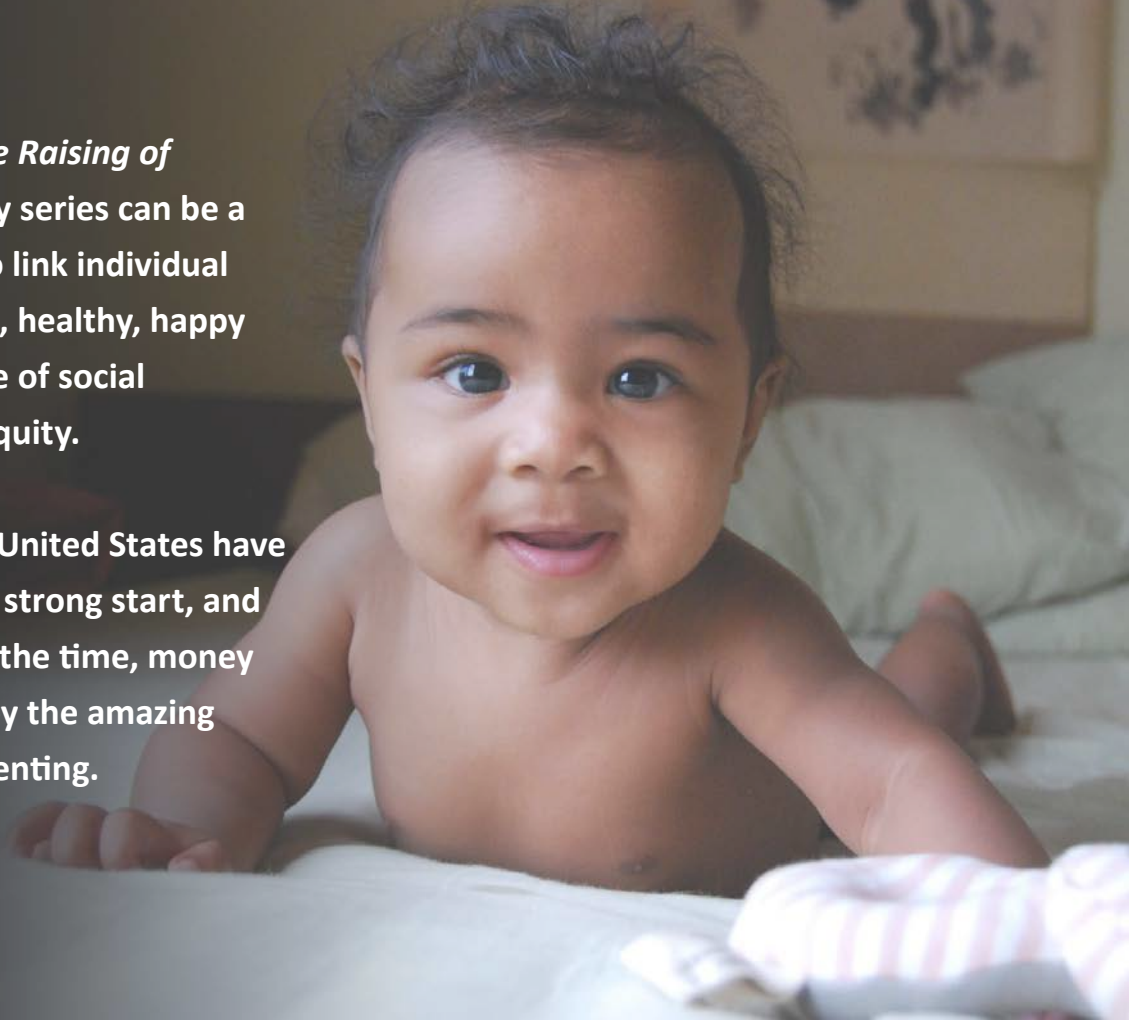
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It is our hope that *The Raising of America* documentary series can be a media tool you use to link individual aspirations for strong, healthy, happy children to a language of social connectedness and equity.

May all babies in the United States have the opportunity for a strong start, and may all families have the time, money and resources to enjoy the amazing adventure that is parenting.



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CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL

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California Newsreel produces and distributes cutting-edge social justice films that inspire, educate and engage audiences. Founded in 1968, Newsreel is the oldest non-profit, social issue documentary film center in the country, the first to marry media production with contemporary social movements.

Award-winning titles include *Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?*, *RACE-The Power of an Illusion* and *Ethnic Notions*.

Visit www.newsreel.org to view more than 150 documentary titles.