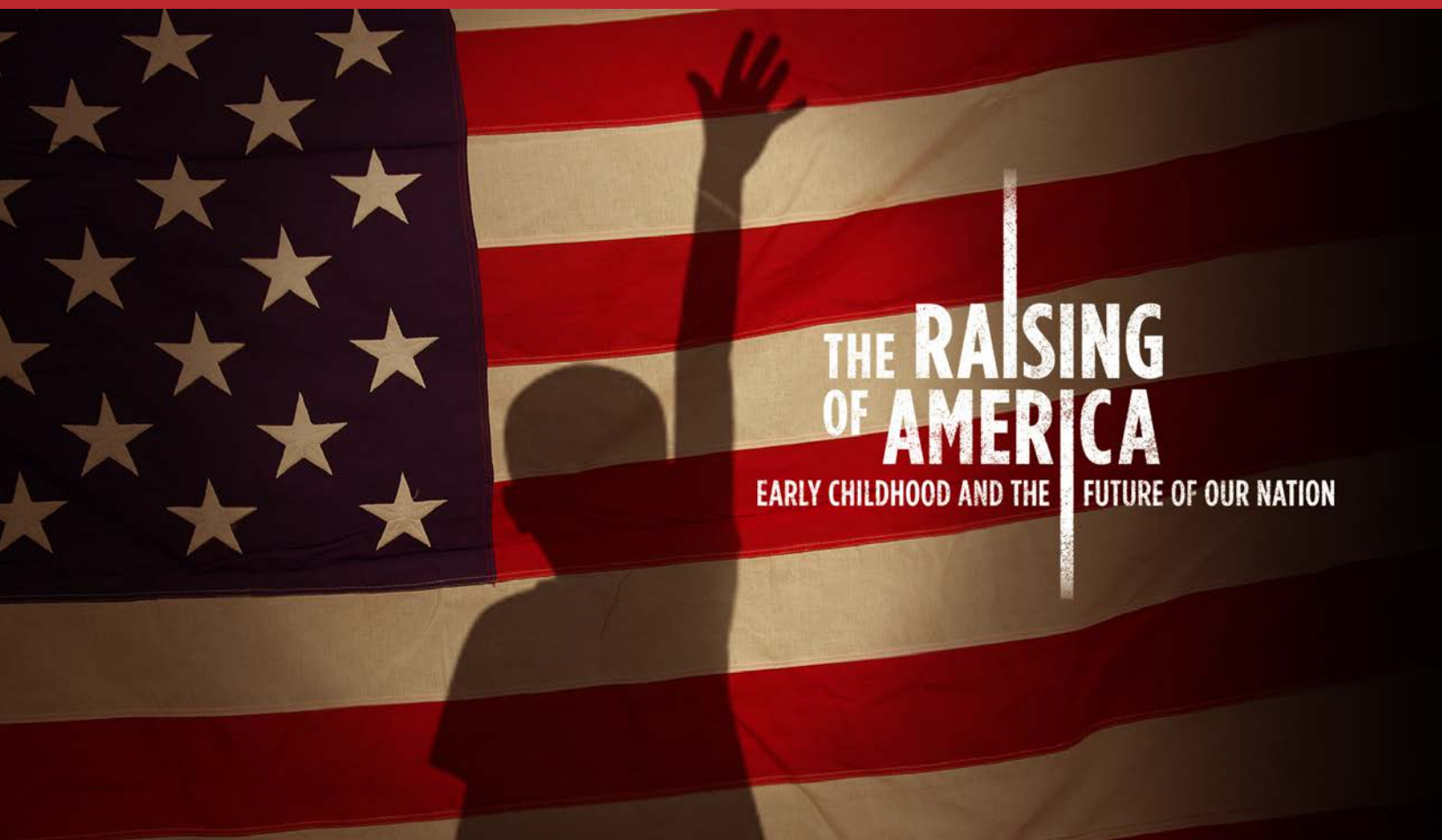


# EVALUATION REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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

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.

As of this writing, more than 730,000 people have screened and discussed one or more episodes of *The Raising of America* in structured settings (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 as part of a public engagement initiative connecting *The Raising of America* to more than 700 partners and countless others since the series' 2015 release.

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—with the hope that their 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. The [Evaluation Report](#) consists of the User Survey results; two Case Studies exploring how networks in Kansas City, MO and Colorado leveraged the series; and deeper insights and lessons in the Discussion and Recommendations.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of survey respondents work in early childhood, ranging from early care and ed to children's and family services, violence prevention, health care, education, and advocacy. Community-based organizations and public health each represented about 25% of the respondents, government agencies 19%. Another 18% cited public policy as a focus of their work, 13% work-family issues, 12% racial justice. Faith-based groups and professional associations each comprised 5-6% of the respondents, with think tank/research centers and foundations each about 2%.

98.5% strongly agreed or 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 (no doubt, in part, reflecting selection bias among those who took the survey). Users commented:

*"Makes the concepts come alive."*

*"Can be a catalyst for change on a grassroots level."*

*"It's fantastic. I wish everyone in America would watch this and then reprioritize our social spending to invest in creating happier, healthier lives."*

62% of respondents used the series internally for staff, student and leadership education, while 55% also reported using screenings to reach the public and build constituencies around a new public narrative which went beyond programs and services to ask how their organization, municipality, state or even the nation might better assure the conditions all babies and young children need to thrive. Old

alliances were strengthened, new ones built, agendas created. Some launched campaigns and even won victories advocating more child and family-friendly public and workplace policies such as paid parental leave.

## Challenges

Still, many organizations were challenged by how to make their screening/s more than a “one-time” event. For many, screening the series was their first experience engaging others in a “wider lens” around early childhood, one that focused on social conditions and public policy not only programs and services. Moreover, many groups had little experience hosting and structuring film screenings, doing outreach, convening community dialogs, and building alliances (97% of those who knew about *The Raising of America Action Toolkit* agreed or strongly agreed it’s a useful resource for organizing screening events, but 38% didn’t know about it). Early childhood equity has not yet coalesced into a national movement able to connect local advocates to organizations and actions. Nor does *The Raising of America* itself suggest specific actions; it’s a conceptual film rather than a campaign piece. As one respondent wrote, “There are so many issues the film touched on, it’s been a challenge to identify and move on a focused action plan.”

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 offer a range of specific

options for audiences to translate their insights and enthusiasm into initiatives which tackle inequities, build power and improve systems and structures which impact young children and 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.”

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 larger “social ecology” in which they are embedded—their family, neighborhoods, schools and local institutions, policies, systems, laws and racial and economic arrangements.

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 many actions can improve the lives of young children. Not only early care and education but also anti-poverty work, work-family policies, racial and economic justice, healthy, affordable housing, better transit, community organizing... they are all ipso facto child development work.

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## Knitting the Network

Some respondents expressed frustration that their events were “preaching to the choir” or reaching “mainly the usual suspects.” In part, this 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-oriented 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 development we noted among child and family services and advocacy organizations using the series was a (sometimes uncomfortable) look at how they could make their own workplace practices more child and family-friendly by introducing paid family leave, flex time, living wages and benefits for support staff, private nursing rooms, and other changes.

### Working Across Sectors

But the survey also suggested 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 and highlighting 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 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.

One non-child group a surprising number of screening organizers tried to reach was business leaders, because “they have the power” as one respondent put it. 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 also risked coming at the expense of building a base and the counter-vailing power of low-income and communities of color.

Some respondents wanted shorter films, 15 or 20 minutes or less. But as filmmakers trying to go beyond exposé and produce compelling films that employ evidence and good storytelling which challenge deeply imprinted assumptions about why some children thrive while others flounder, we found that impossible to do, or at least beyond our skill-level.

There are many ways *The Raising of America* can be used to increase awareness, organize constituents and diverse sectors and communities, and advocate for the transformative changes needed to make ours 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 whom 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.

## Summary of Recommendations for Optimizing the Utility of *The Raising of America*

(See [full report](#) for details.)

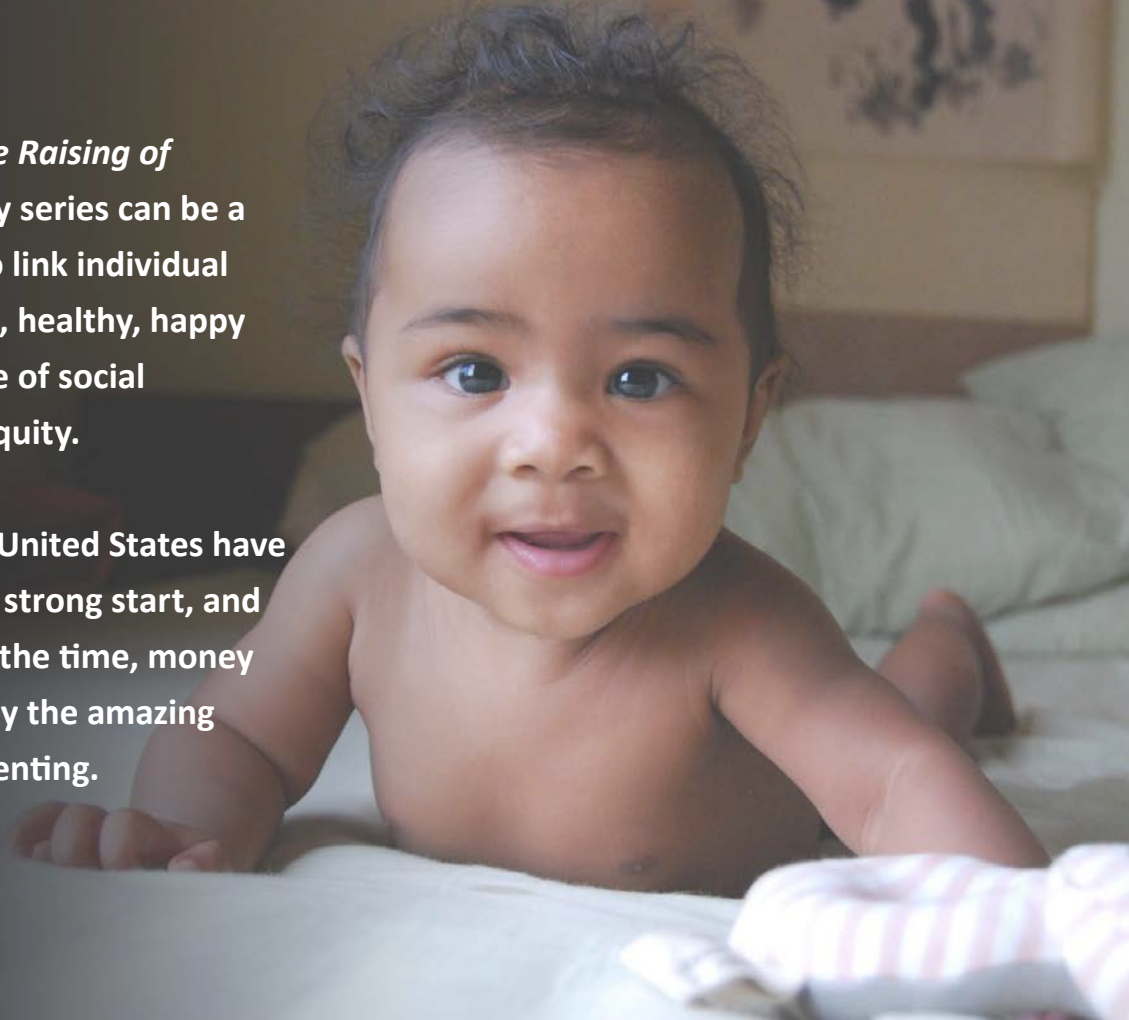
1. Early childhood equity is a framework, not an issue. Apply the lens of the young child to assess the impact of existing and future programs, initiatives, policies and practices.
2. Start with internal screenings and conversations.
3. Don't organize around the film; use the film to help organize around 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.



Click here to read the full  
Evaluation Report.

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.



## MAJOR FUNDING

*The Raising of America* project funded by:

- The W.K. Kellogg Foundation
- The California Endowment
- The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)\*

Additional funding provided by Kaiser Permanente, The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Foundation, and the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation (NIHCM).

\* The companion tools and website were supported in part by Grant Number CE002079 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## CALIFORNIA NEWSREEL

*The Raising of America* was produced by California Newsreel with Vital Pictures.

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](http://www.newsreel.org) to view more than 150 documentary titles.