

January 2026



# Case Study: Child Care Campaigns in New Orleans

Community leaders in New Orleans campaign to increase child care access for low-income children and families.

## What was the problem?

Before 2017, there were too few high-quality child care providers to serve families in New Orleans, the cost of child care exceeded what families could afford, and child care providers could not pay their employees living wages. Lacking quality early care, children struggled academically, especially in literacy through:

**~10,000**

low-income children aged 0–3  
could not access [early childhood education](#) in New Orleans

**48<sup>th</sup>**

in state median hourly  
wage for child care workers,  
at [\\$9.36 an hour](#)

**69%**

of [New Orleans third graders](#) not reading  
at grade level—disproportionately  
low-income and from communities of color

## What was accomplished?

Over more than five years of sustained work, community leaders won new funding to expand access to quality child care for children from low-income families in New Orleans.

- **Increased allocation of funds by the city council.** In 2017, advocates for the **Campaign for Grade-Level Reading** successfully campaigned for a [\\$750,000 budget appropriation](#) to create the **City Seats** program, which provides seats in early learning centers for children under age 4, child and family support services, and coaching and professional development for teachers. Over the next two years, advocates convinced the city council to increase investment, which eventually reached \$3 million annually and served an additional 200 children from low-income families.
- **Expanded funding through local property taxes.** After initially losing a tax measure vote in 2020, advocates regrouped to launch the **YES for NOLA Kids** campaign and successfully passed the **Early Education Property Tax Measure** in 2022. This measure will raise [\\$21 million annually over the next 20 years](#). With a match from the state of Louisiana's Early Childhood Education Fund, the total investment in New Orleans will be over \$40 million—fully funding high-quality early education for up to 2,000 children from low-income families annually. In addition to increasing child care seats, \$15 million will fund child care workforce development, training, and professional development; facility improvements and expansion; coaching; and wraparound supports for families.

In total, these wins have led to:

**\$45 million**

annual commitment for early  
education from state and local funding

**~2,000**

child care spots for children from  
low-income families each year

**50%**

reduction in low-income infants and  
toddlers without access to quality  
child care and early education

## What role did philanthropy play?

- **Invested in the foundational ecosystem and evidence base.** In the decade leading up to the 2022 campaign, local and national funders invested \$10 million to build a coalition of strong local organizations aligned on a clear plan informed by research. These funds supported staffing, partnership work with key organizations and coalitions (such as the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading), research that provided the data needed to develop compelling messages, and support for partners—such as the Louisiana Policy Institute for Children—that could tell a powerful story about the lack of child care and its impacts on the economy and community.

- **Provided both 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) funding to support advocacy.** Philanthropy contributed nearly \$650,000 to the 2022 campaign, about half of which was “C3” funding used by nonprofits for education materials, canvassing capacity, polling, and other activities. The other half, “C4” funding largely from local individual donors, paid for a campaign manager along with other staffing and communications efforts (mailers, phone banking, etc.).
- **Subsidized the cost of programs.** Philanthropy provided additional capital to the City Seats program when it launched in 2017, funding some of the costs of wraparound supports for families, while the city paid for the child care seats. Funders also supported the program’s expansion to reach up to 2,000 children after the tax measure passed in April 2022, paying for facilities expansion, staffing, planning costs, and communications during the ramp-up through August 2024.

## What were the key milestones?

Advocacy to increase child care spots for children from low-income families has built progress over five years.

- **2017** The New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading began educating city council members and candidates about child care for the mayoral election that year. Newly elected Mayor LaToya Cantrell committed to creating an Office of Youth and Families focused on early education issues.
- **2017** The campaign successfully advocated for the city council to approve a \$750,000 budget appropriation for the City Seats program, funding a pilot that provided 50 child care slots. With this budget allocation, New Orleans became the first locality in the state to fund early childhood education with local revenue.
- **2020** By 2020, the city budget allocation increased to \$3 million, and the City Seats program quadrupled in size. However, advocates knew that future funding was not guaranteed. Seeking a more stable funding source, the campaign worked with the mayor to introduce a proposal to reallocate some of the library’s budget to fund child care. The community saw this as pitting libraries against child care, and the proposal was voted down.
- **2022** Beginning in 2021, advocates spent time speaking with community members to understand why their previous efforts had failed and to mend relationships. Members of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and its partners launched a new YES for NOLA Kids campaign. Advocates met with community partners and providers to refine the tax proposal and engaged the business community to gain its support. In April of 2022, the Early Education Property Tax measure successfully passed, with bipartisan support and state matching funds.

## How was this achieved?

Success of the campaign and sustained impact for children resulted from:

COMPELLING CASE	COORDINATED EFFORT	FUNDRAISING INFRASTRUCTURE	PROVIDER ECOSYSTEM
Research made a strong case for how lack of child care access impacted the economy, the school-to-prison pipeline, etc.	A range of groups engaged in advocacy—providers, parents, the business community, and criminal justice organizing groups.	A strong fundraising team partnered with multiple nonprofits who could accept “C3” funding on behalf of the effort.	Black women owners of child care centers were key in advocacy, gaining traction with women and Black communities.

## Who made it happen?

A diverse, cross-sector coalition contributed to the effort’s success, each bringing unique assets and roles:

ANCHOR ORGANIZATIONS	PARTNERS ACROSS MULTIPLE SECTORS	COMMUNITY VOICES
<p><b>The New Orleans Campaign for Grade-Level Reading</b> led the 2017 and 2020 campaigns.</p> <p><b>Ready Kids New Orleans</b>, launched by the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and its partners, led the YES for NOLA Kids campaign that ultimately won the 2022 tax proposal.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Policymakers</b>, including Mayor LaToya Cantrell and other city council members, partnered with or supported the campaign’s efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Business leaders</b>, including the Business Council of New Orleans and the Chamber of Commerce, supported advocacy efforts.</li> <li>• <b>Other community organizations</b> that cared about child care, including criminal justice organizing groups, supported advocacy efforts.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Mothers, teachers, and Black women small business owners</b>, who were identified through campaign polling as the groups the public trusted most on the issue, played a key role in grassroots advocacy efforts.</p>