

COUNTY OF MIAMI DADE

PROGRAM

Children's Trust for Services
to Meet the Needs of Children

FUNDING MECHANISM

Property Tax Referendum

OPPORTUNITY

Miami-Dade County, Florida has a population of about 150,800 children under age five. While about 29.4 percent of all children under age five live in poverty, 44 percent who live with a single mother live in poverty. Slightly more than half of the families (52.1 percent) have income below \$50,000. The needs of children were exceeding the resources and support systems available.

SUMMARY

In 2002 and again in 2008, voters in Miami-Dade County approved a referendum for a modest increase in property taxes to pay for the operation of a Children's Services Council (CSC), a local government entity charged with awarding funds for programs and services to improve the lives of children and families. The property tax was increased by \$.50 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value. For 2014-2015, this increase amounted to \$37 per year more in property taxes on a median priced home valued at \$73,157. About \$100 million is raised annually through the increase and is dedicated to the operation of the Children's Trust in Miami-Dade County.

CHALLENGES

Failed Attempt in 1988 // Lessons learned included creating a broad-based initiative rather than limiting services to low income children. For 2002 and 2008, advocates raised money to operate a well-financed campaign, which was guided at every step by frequent polling.

The Economy // Despite a poor economy in 2008, the same strategy of raising money for the campaign and utilizing pollsters and professional staffing prevailed.

GETTING TO ACTION

Although Florida law allows local communities to approve a referendum to establish Children’s Services Councils, obtaining approval from voters to increase property taxes to pay for the councils was challenging. Miami-Dade failed to win approval for the initiative in 1988. At that time, the funds would assist only children from low-income families.

When supporters tried again in 2002, they applied lessons learned from the earlier attempt. They broadened the purpose to serve all children in the county, orchestrated a well-organized and strategic campaign team supported by a fundraising effort and included a sunset provision, which meant that voters would have a chance to reauthorize the funding in 2008. It passed.

In 2008, there was concern that voters might reject reauthorizing the Children’s Trust as part of an anti-tax sentiment as a result of the recession. A broad-based coalition including business leaders, religious leaders, and leaders within each of the ethnic communities was critical in diffusing opposition and building support among voters. To keep the operation of the Children’s Trust separate from the campaign, the Children’s Trust Political Committee was created. The initiative passed again and is up for reauthorization in 2020.

Sept 2002	Miami-Dade voters approved the Children’s Trust and the property tax increase to fund children’s services.
Sept 2006	Planning began for the reauthorization of the Children’s Trust scheduled for 2008.
March 2007	Campaign manager hired.
Sept 2008	Voter referendum wins 85.4 percent vs 14.5 percent (during a recession)
Fundraising	About \$743,000 was raised for the 2002 campaign. About \$1.6 million was raised for the 2008 campaign.

RESULT

The Children's Trust spends about \$100 million per year on a wide range of initiatives to improve the lives of children, including child care and early learning programs.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ▶ *An organized and well funded campaign*
- ▶ *Intentional effort to create champions for the initiative*
- ▶ *A broad-based advocacy effort/coalition campaigned in support of the referendum*
- ▶ *Initiative was time-limited (not in perpetuity)—approved in 2002, reauthorized in 2008, next reauthorization is 2020*
- ▶ *The measure was paid for and revenue source was broad-based (all property owners)*
- ▶ *Polling helped guide targeting, activities and message*



HOW DOES PROPERTY TAX WORK IN NORTH CAROLINA?

Local governments in North Carolina have the authority to raise property taxes for specific purposes designated by the North Carolina General Assembly. Within the area of “community development programs and activities” child care, health and education are listed explicitly. However, in consulting with several NC local government experts, it remains unclear if a broader set of early childhood programs or initiatives could qualify as a specified purpose.

Alternatively, local governments can adopt a resolution that affirms a desire to provide early childhood services with a portion of the property tax.