

## Menu of Story Pitching Angles for Media Outreach

The following “pitching angles” can help you “shop” (present) your story ideas to reporters to increase the likelihood that they’ll cover the issues, and so they’ll potentially frame the issue in the way you presented it. Use these angles to craft a 30-second “pitch” for each story idea you can deliver over the phone. After pitching your story, be prepared to follow up with additional details in an e-mail.

To ensure your pitch is the most successful, customize the below ideas to timely events or issues being debated within your community, and include local statistics and specific local case studies when possible. Be mindful of any potentially competing stories in the current coverage. Think through how to make your pitch relevant to the latest news; or, alternatively, think through how your story is exciting and different from current news.

For more information on pitching your story, see the “How to shop your First 5 story” section in the Promotion and Media Strategies Overview of the Toolkit.

### **Pitch Stories About the Town Hall**

Think through all of the participants and information to be featured in your town hall and how it might be appealing to reporters. You could highlight almost any aspect that is noteworthy — from your partners to your policymaker and/or expert participants.

#### **Notable participants:**

- Consider all of the participants in the town hall and highlight those who are most attractive to reporters and most likely to draw the public to attend.

#### **Unique partnerships:**

- Feature how your county commission is partnering with other community organizations to host this event, and why your unique partners believe such a forum for community education and policymaker engagement is important to achieving your shared goals.

#### **Featured grantee partner and/or case study:**

- Highlight a grantee partner or case study to be featured at the town hall.
- For example, briefly describe the impact and/or challenges the grantee or its target population faces, and why this organization is significant to your community and the town hall.

#### **Timely and/or new information/data:**

- Highlight new or newsworthy information, data, or case studies to be presented at the event and the expert presenting that information.
- Connect the town hall to timely events or issues being debated within your community, including recent events or actions taken by invited policymakers on featured or related issues.

#### **Issue(s) to be discussed:**

- Craft a compelling pitch for each featured issue or demonstrate how multiple issues are connected in one pitch. Be careful not to compile too many issues into one pitch to stay concise and on-point.
- See the issue-specific pitching angles outlined below for more information.

#### **Potential solution(s):**

- Outline a potential solution to be discussed at the town hall. Highlight the person (expert or policymaker) who will be advocating for that solution.
- See the issue-specific pitching angles and some related solutions outlined below for more information.

### **Pitch Stories About the Issues**

The town hall concept provides an opportunity to talk with reporters not only about the event, but about the featured issues that are important to First 5 and your community. When developing your issue-specific pitches to reporters, consider why the issues are important, the impacts on local children and families, and how the issues at the local level compare to statewide policies or statistics. Highlight a First 5 grantee or other local organization working to resolve the issues or a case study specific to your community or region that can serve as an example.

Below are some timely, issue-specific examples and ideas to consider as pitching angles. For example, to craft a 30-second “pitch” on an issue, start by discussing the issue’s importance for child development and either choose one or two timely/relevant aspects of that issue or one aspect and one potential policy solution. After pitching your story, be prepared to follow up with additional details in an e-mail.

### **Quality Early Learning**

#### **Importance:**

- Early brain development:
  - Babies form over 80 percent of the brain connections that determine how they learn, think, and grow before they are three years old, which has lasting impacts on learning, behavior, and physical and mental health.
  - A supportive environment that provides young children with adequate nutrition, is free of toxins, and is filled with positive social interactions with responsive caregivers leads to a strong foundation for a healthy, developing brain.
  - An adverse environment where young children are not well-nourished, are exposed to toxins, and/or do not receive positive emotional and social experiences impedes healthy brain development and can lead to learning, behavior, and health problems over the course of a child’s life.
- Supporting school readiness and preventing the achievement gap:
  - Research shows high-quality early learning services can improve children’s health, social-emotional, and cognitive outcomes; enhance school readiness; and help close the school readiness gap, reducing the achievement gap before it starts.
  - High-needs children who receive an effective, high-quality early learning experience from programs that focus on language and literacy, early math skills, and social-emotional competence show strong gains in school readiness. These positive results remain even when controlling for risk factors such as maternal education, race, and parents’ ages.
  - Children who have high needs and do not receive quality early learning face lifelong challenges.
- Return on investment:
  - Nobel Laureate Dr. James Heckman’s research shows the younger the child is at intervention, the greater the payoff to the child’s positive development, to the community, and to society.
  - Children with high needs are 50 percent more likely to receive special education services, 25 percent more likely to drop out of school, 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime, and 40 percent more likely to become a teen parent.
  - Returns on early, effective investments include long-term outcomes, such as higher reading and math achievement, lower rates for special education, 44 percent lower grade retention rates, 29 percent higher graduation rates, increased four-year college enrollment, higher earnings, and less welfare assistance.

- How does your county compare to the research, in terms of cost savings, school readiness, and/or achievement gap statistics?

**Access:**

- In California, only nine percent of infants and toddlers, 40 percent of 3-year-olds, and 70 percent of 4-year-olds who are eligible for publicly funded early learning programs have access to those programs. How does your county compare to the statewide statistics on access across age groups?
- Starting in the 2016–17 school year, the state will add 8,877 new full-day California State Preschool Program (CSPP) slots phased in over four years. With the new slots created, what percentage of low-income children in your county will have a space? How will this affect your local CSPP providers and providers outside of the CSPP? How will this increase affect providers and children in other age groups?

**Affordability:**

- The state has not increased income eligibility limits for subsidized child care programs in almost a decade — current income eligibility is 70 percent of the State Median Income (SMI) from FY 2007–08. This means income eligibility has not kept up with inflation in terms of the increasing cost of living, cost of care, and the state minimum wage.
- The state recently increased per child reimbursement rates by \$527 million across subsidized child care programs beginning January 1, 2017. The intent is to increase the share of the care market that low-income families have access to using their subsidies. How will this affect local families' access to subsidized and/or private child care?
- Highlight recent studies that demonstrate the high costs families pay for child care across the state or the nation, including actual costs (per child in which age group, per month, per year, etc.) and the percentage of a family's total income spent on child care.
- How does your county compare to the statewide or nationwide average a family spends on child care? Discuss the contributing factors, such as your county's demographics, including cost of living standards, housing prices, transportation issues, low- vs. high-wage employment opportunities, etc.

**Quality Programs:**

- A quality early learning program is a safe, supportive child care environment that supports children's social-emotional, physical, and cognitive development, including:
  - Highly skilled adults that engage children in warm, responsive interactions
  - High-quality teacher preparation and ongoing professional supports
  - Small class sizes and adult-to-child ratios
  - Developmentally and culturally appropriate standards, practices, and environment
  - Developmental screening and child observation
  - Families engaged in their children's learning
- Do families in your county have access to quality early learning programs? Are there any specific challenges families face in accessing quality care options (urban vs. rural challenges, child care costs vs. income, provider capacity, lack of facilities, etc.)?
- This is a great opportunity to highlight a local example(s) of grantee partners who are providing high-quality programs and what it would take to expand similar programs.

### **Quality Workforce:**

- Discuss how having a highly skilled early learning workforce is tied to quality child care settings and how the quality of the workforce affects child outcomes across program settings.
- What are the (local and state) efforts to ensure young learners have access to programs with highly skilled adults who are prepared and supported?
- Discuss the gap between the child care workforce's wages and the market cost of providing quality early learning programs at the local level. With the recent state minimum wage increase, how have programs been affected (including families' access to programs, providers' costs, and educators' employment opportunities)?

### **Early Identification and Intervention**

#### **Importance:**

- Children with undiagnosed developmental or behavioral delays are at risk for life-long issues with learning, behavior, and health.
- Early identification is both the screening process that identifies a developmental delay or disability at the earliest age possible, and the system that connects young children and their families to early intervention services, such as speech and language services, occupational therapy, and behavioral supports.
- Early identification allows children to get the support they need to thrive both in and out of school. Ensuring all infants and toddlers get routine developmental and behavioral screenings to monitor their development is essential to their overall wellbeing.
- Children and families can be served most effectively through comprehensive, coordinated local referral systems that are integrated with a robust and effective state system of screening and treatment.

#### **Access:**

- One in four children ages 0 to 5 in California are at-risk for developmental, behavioral, or social delay.
- Even with a quarter of California's children at-risk, only 28 percent of young children received developmental screens in 2013.
- This low statewide screening rate persists despite significant First 5 investments and even though screenings are covered by Medi-Cal and private insurance plans under the Affordable Care Act.

#### **Community Spotlight:**

- How does your community's population compare to the state's rate for developmental screening of at-risk children?
- What does early identification and intervention look like in your community, and what specific needs does it address for your vulnerable populations?
- This is a great opportunity to showcase what your county commission is doing to support these services, and highlight a local example(s) of grantee service providers.
- What are some policy solutions in your community that would lead to a more comprehensive, coordinated system?

## **Family Strengthening**

### **Importance:**

- Too many California children come from families coping with enormous stressors, such as poverty, housing instability, or social isolation. Times of crisis can cut families off from essential family and community support systems, and can deeply affect a child's early development.
- Family strengthening is a comprehensive approach to improving health, social, educational, and economic outcomes for entire families. Approaches include broad community-based supports, such as services provided through Family Resource Centers, as well as intensive interventions like home visiting.
- Family strengthening programs provide the community-based supports parents and caregivers need to be emotionally healthy, maintain safe and nurturing environments, and participate in their child's early learning and development.

### **Home Visiting:**

- **Importance:**
  - Home visiting is an array of family-centered health and early learning programs that match new and expectant parents with trained professionals who provide ongoing, individualized support during pregnancy and throughout a child's early life.
  - In 2015, over 30 First 5 county commissions invested in home visiting programs serving nearly 30,000 families.
  - The federally funded California Home Visiting Program currently reaches 2,500 California children.
- **Community Spotlight:**
  - What do home visiting programs look like within your community?
  - Of the families in need of home visiting services, how many have access to and/or receive services?
  - This is a great opportunity to highlight local First 5 investments in home visiting, as well as case studies of how home visiting has made a difference to individuals and/or to vulnerable populations.

### **Paid Family Leave:**

- **Importance:**
  - California is one of only three states to offer Paid Family Leave (PFL), a program that all California employees pay for through the State Disability Fund, which allows parents and caregivers up to six weeks of paid leave to bond with a new or adopted child.
  - Recent legislation increased the PFL wage replacement rate from 55 percent of a weekly wage to 70 percent of the weekly wage rate for low-income workers and 60 percent of the weekly wage for all other incomes.
  - Research demonstrates the benefits of parental leave on the health and welfare of children, working parents, and the state's economy.
  - Time spent during those first few months also has significant implications for a child's development throughout life and is crucial in establishing attachments that will lay the emotional, physical, and intellectual foundation for children to develop and enter school ready to learn.
  - Despite California's well-established PFL program, over 40 percent of workers do not qualify for job protected leave under the PFL or the federal Family Medical Leave Act because they work for an employer with less than 50 employees.



**The State of Young Children:  
A Community Town Hall**

- According to a recent field poll of California’s PFL program, 37 percent of employees who were eligible to use PFL chose not to apply for fear of losing their job.
- Pending 2016 legislation would create more equitable access to the program for all California workers and alleviate the risk of losing one’s job by extending parental leave rights for new parents who work for employers with 10 or more employees.
- **Community Spotlight:**
  - Does your community have a “family friendly” culture? Does your local government (city and county) and business community (small and corporate businesses) have family leave policies in place and how do they compare statewide?
  - Are local working families getting the support they need? What would it take on the local and/or state level for families to get that crucial support?

### **Oral Health**

#### **Importance:**

- Cavities are the most prevalent chronic health problem among California’s children, and tooth decay is the number one reason children are absent from kindergarten.
- Untreated oral health issues negatively affect a child’s ability to learn and participate in school.
- Poor overall health affects the brain’s ability to grow and develop, and leads to long-term consequences for children’s ability to learn and succeed.

#### **Access:**

- Although pediatric dental coverage is available through all Covered California health plans and Medi-Cal, access to dental care remains a critical problem, as relatively few dental care providers offer care to young children enrolled in Medi-Cal. Even fewer providers offer a full range of necessary dental services for young children.
- Statewide, of the nearly 1.7 million children under age six were enrolled in Medi-Cal in 2013, 63 percent did not have a single dental visit in the previous year.

#### **Community Spotlight:**

- Are young children in your community receiving the dental care they need? What are the statistics in your community?
- What are some innovative programs your commission or other local organization funds (such as the Virtual Dental Home) that can increase families’ utilization of dental services and reach more children in underserved areas? What are the potential solutions in your community?

### **Tobacco and E-Cigarette Prevention and Cessation**

#### **Importance:**

- Infants exposed to tobacco products are more likely to be born small and preterm, and are three times more likely to die of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).
- Nicotine damages fetal brain cells — making learning, attention, and behavior problems more likely as children grow.
- Tobacco and liquid nicotine are toxic to children. 45ml of e-cigarette liquid could kill 10 children if ingested.
- Despite having the second lowest smoking rate in the country, over half of California’s children are exposed to tobacco smoke.
- Despite overall declines in traditional cigarette use, e-cigarette use among young adults in California tripled from 2.3 percent in 2012 to 7.6 percent in 2013.

**Community Spotlight:**

- Discuss the impact local First 5 programs have on tobacco prevention/cessation efforts in your community, and the benefits your investments have on improved child health and other positive outcomes for children and families.
- What state and local policy changes does your commission support that will help prevent children's exposure to tobacco and e-cigarettes?