

**Excerpt from *A Guide to Developing and Using Family and Children's Budgets*  
August 1998, The Finance Project**

A family and children's budget is a document that summarizes spending for children and their families for a nation, state, county, city or community... A family and children's budget can help answer seemingly simple questions like: How much is spent, for what service, and by what agencies? How much are costs increasing or decreasing? How are spending priorities changing over time? And also more complex questions like: Are children receiving their fair share of revenue growth? In times of cuts, are they protected more or less than other parts of the budget? How does our spending for children's services compare to other similar jurisdictions? Are we using our resources efficiently? What investments will produce the greatest future benefits for child and family well-being and reduced cost of remediation?

**TO CREATE, OR NOT TO CREATE, A FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S BUDGET**

**Arguments in Favor**

***Better Decisions, Better Results:*** A family and children's budget could lead to more informed decisions about financing family and children's services and supports. This, in turn, could lead to more effective use of resources and better results for children and families.

***Improved Coordination and Efficiency:*** With better information about common services and functions, a family and children's budget can help make better sense of spending within and across service systems, and lead to more coordinated and more efficient delivery of service.

***A Shift Toward Prevention Investments:*** Better information about the financial (and political) stakes of investing, or failing to invest, in children and families can help make the case for a shift to an investment approach to family and children spending. Investment in prevention could help reduce long-term costs of remediating bad results.

***Support for Building Partnerships:*** A family and children's budget can provide better information about the many players, across and within state and local boundaries, involved in family and children's services. A family and children's budget can help identify shared policy and financial interests, support existing partnerships, and help build new ones.

***More Effective Advocacy:*** A family and children's budget can serve to educate decision-makers, the media, and the general public about issues of child and family well-being. It can make the budget process more accessible, and advocacy for children and families more effective.

**Arguments Against**

***It's a lot of work.*** Family and children's budgets may not require much in the way of new spending for staff, but they will add to the workload of people already in the system.

***Data are often hard to get.*** And even when obtained, data are often not comparable across systems or jurisdictions or levels of government.

***It is difficult to define boundaries*** between what should be included and what should be left out. Everything can be considered "related to families and children" by some definition.

***It might embarrass someone.*** A family and children's budget might touch a nerve or two. It may show where we are spending too much, as well as too little. It may show where we are spending money for the same things in different organizations. It may show one jurisdiction's efforts as inadequate compared to another.

***And what's so special about children (anyway)?*** Why not have an elders' budget, or a middle-age budget? Why children?