

**The Society for Community Research and Action  
Public Policy Initiative  
Grant Proposal**

**INFLUENCING PREVENTION POLICY THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH  
LEGISLATORS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

**Address Current Public Policy Issue of Importance to the Community of Interest**

Children’s Trust of South Carolina is the only statewide organization in South Carolina dedicated to strengthening and supporting public and private prevention efforts that keep South Carolina’s children safe. We work to prevent child abuse, neglect and unintentional injuries so that every child has the opportunity to thrive in a healthy, nurturing environment. Children’s Trust is home to Safe Kids South Carolina, KIDS COUNT South Carolina, and Prevent Child Abuse South Carolina. We administer the community-based child abuse prevention grants, Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting program and Strengthening Families program.

One of our signature programs, Safe Kids South Carolina, is an associate of Safe Kids Worldwide. Safe Kids Worldwide is a global organization of more than 600 coalitions and organizations in 23 countries that are dedicated to preventing injuries in children. South Carolina is one of a few states that have a state coordinating office. Children’s Trust coordinates and supports thirteen local Safe Kids Coalitions across the state. Safe Kids local coalitions lead their communities in reducing child injury through a variety of programmatic activities including education, awareness and safety device distribution.

Safe Kids Coalitions see firsthand how a child’s death or serious injury changes the lives of families and entire communities. But these tragedies do not have to happen. Preventable injuries are just that, preventable. Children’s Trust, in partnership with local coalitions, is focusing efforts in three specific areas, namely, motor vehicle accidents, suffocation and drowning. These three areas are top priority as they are the leading causes of childhood injury fatalities in South Carolina. Increasing general awareness and proper parental and child education are essential to keeping kids safe. However, local efforts can only reach a small subset of the population and legislation is needed to adequately address the problem to see a significant reduction in child injury and death.

Education, economy, taxes and employment dominate political conversations in South Carolina. We know that Children’s Trust will need to position the conversation among state legislators so that it is future-driven and one that stresses collective values around protecting children. Communication with legislators needs to not only be recognized as an important issue by the legislators, but also ignite support for actions or direct actions by the legislators. Additionally, the communication may need to overcome preconceived notions or misperceptions about the issue. In this specific context, we want to avoid the negative teenage stereotypes and misdirected blame on “bad parenting”. Instead, we want to promote the image that all children deserve the opportunity to thrive in a healthy, nurturing and safe environment, free from injury.

**Address a Policy Area Where Community Psychology Has a Contribution to Make**

Motor vehicle accidents are the number one cause of childhood injury fatality for children ages 0-19. In South Carolina, more children die on our roads than their peers across the United States (a

rate of 14.3 per 100,000 versus 9.24 per 100,000). In the past decade, more than 1,598 children have died in motor vehicle accidents in South Carolina. With such high numbers and numerous options for targeted intervention efforts, motor vehicle injuries are a top priority for our prevention efforts. Given the value of prevention efforts within the field of community psychology, especially at the policy and advocacy level, community psychologists are well-prepared to make contributions to policy-related prevention efforts.

With our legislative focus on improving child safety in motor vehicles, we have been working to achieve the following:

- Update the current South Carolina Child Passenger Restraint Law to reflect American Academy of Pediatrics and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration standards,
- Pass legislation to ban texting while driving, and
- Create a stronger graduated driver's licensing law.

The numbers are substantial and this work has the potential to considerably reduce the number of child injury and fatalities. We believe this movement could have bipartisan potential in a divisive political landscape. No other South Carolina organization has taken on motor vehicle accidents at a state-wide scale, proposing changes to state law.

This January, the South Carolina Legislature will begin the second year of its two-year legislative session. We want to use this policy grant opportunity to survey members of the General Assembly to gain a better understanding of their perspective of the work of Children's Trust, effective advocacy strategies, and positions on child passenger safety. While the majority of members of the House will be seeking re-election, it is anticipated that many of the incumbents will remain in office after November 4<sup>th</sup>.

Additionally, we want to use this policy grant opportunity to survey members of the Safe Kids Coalition to identify areas for increasing policy and advocacy related capacity. We currently have assumptions as to why members of the Coalitions do not participate in advocacy efforts, including lack of time, lack of knowledge, or restrictions from lead agency. Our hope is that this survey will confirm or disprove our assumptions and help us better address these barriers. While legislative changes could be achieved by increasing the capacity for the Children's Trust to engage in effective communication with legislators, increasing the capacity of coalition members would make actual policy changes more likely.

## **Method**

- Survey Development: Children's Trust will review the current academic and research literature for previous studies and projects that have surveyed legislators and coalitions. The Children's Trust will use this information to inform content- and geographically-relevant surveys.
  - Safe Kids Coalition: Questions for Safe Kids Coalitions (made up approximately 200 individuals) will center on measuring their capacity for advocacy, level of community involvement and perceptions of seriousness of the issue of children and motor vehicle safety.
  - Legislators: Questions for legislators (174 in total) will seek to measure their knowledge of these issues (i.e., child passenger safety, texting while driving, graduated driving), the frequency in which they are approached or involved in this issue, and how effective advocacy efforts impact their decision-making process to

support legislative action.

- Survey Administration: The surveys to both the legislators and Safe Kids Coalition members will take place online via SurveyMonkey. Legislators and coalition members will be sent a link to the survey and recipients will be asked to complete the survey within 30 days. A reminder will be sent to the recipients at the mid-way point.
- Survey Analysis: Data from both of the surveys will be analyzed with IBM SPSS 20. Anticipated analyses include descriptives, frequencies and linear and logistic regressions.
- Survey Follow-up: A follow-up with Safe Kids Coalition members and key legislators will be conducted after the survey data has been analyzed. The purpose of the follow-up is to gather additional qualitative information to supplement the results from the survey.
  - Safe Kids Coalition: Follow up in-person meetings will be conducted with representatives from each of the 13 Safe Kids Coalitions. The number of in-person meetings will depend on the response rate to the survey overall and the response rate from each of the 13 Safe Kids Coalitions. The goal is to conduct two in-person interviews for each of the 13 Safe Kids Coalitions. Follow-up questions would attempt to better understand barriers to advocacy, as well as develop opportunities to disseminate local successes in child passenger safety to support statewide efforts.
  - Legislators and key staff: Follow up in-person meetings will be conducted with key legislators and committee staff. We will focus on surveying legislators that Children's Trust and/or Safe Kids Coalitions have an existing relationship with, members of the Freshman Caucus (newly elected legislators), Senate and House members of the Joint Citizens and Legislative Committee on Children, and committee staff from Senate and House Transportation and Judiciary. The goal is to conduct one in-person meeting with three members from the Senate, five members from the House and four committee staff.

### **Connection to Community Psychology**

Children's Trust and the proposed project have several clear connections to community psychology. First, the organization and the proposed project emphasize prevention. Prevention is a growing field within community psychology and has received recent attention by the Prevention Project (see [preventionproject.us](http://preventionproject.us)). The idea that problems can be prevented, rather than treated, is valued within community psychology.

Second, the proposed project has the potential to increase individual and family wellness, which is one of the core values of community psychology. The preservation of the life of a child is not the only benefit to legislative changes to South Carolina's child passenger laws. Legislative changes would likely reduce the rate at which children are harmed in motor vehicle accidents, and would prevent distress and harm caused to others by the death of a child.

Finally, the proposed project has a great potential to increase empowerment of individuals and organizations, and increase collaboration with South Carolina's legislators. Empowerment and collaboration also represent two core values of community psychology and are important for increasing control over ones' life and developing relationships to increase effectiveness of community change efforts, respectively. While empowerment and collaboration are discussed in more detail below, it is important to note that this project will increase empowerment for members of Children's Trust and the Safe Kids Coalitions. The project will also increase collaboration between Children's Trust and the Safe Kids Coalitions and South Carolina's legislators. By increasing empowerment and collaboration in the policy arena, many children and families

throughout the state of South Carolina are likely to benefit from changes.

### **Demonstrate Potential to Establish or Build Relationships with Organizations**

We currently work closely with a strong coalition around the issue of child safety, in particular child passenger safety. Current collaborators include South Carolina Children's Hospital Association, University of South Carolina, Children's Law Center, South Carolina Brain Injury Alliance, local Safe Kids coordinating coalitions and other public safety officials. We would like to use this opportunity to broaden this network to include medical groups, religious institutions and other youth-serving organizations. We anticipate that the work conducted as part of this grant will strengthen the advocacy efforts of Children's Trust and Safe Kids coalitions and will serve as a model to enhance our collaborative work with these organizations. Lessons learned from this grant will shape our future work together with partners who are also working on the issue of child motor vehicle safety.

### **Demonstrate Potential to Have a Successful Impact**

With strong data, our coalition members and survey results we believe that we can have an impact on moving state legislation to keep kids safe. Children's Trust has a history of successful legislative work, including the most recent passage of a bill to protect student athletes from repeat concussions. Children's Trust, in collaboration with several of the organizations listed above, assisted in writing the legislation, provided educational information to legislators and submitted testimony on the concussion bill. We acknowledge that the presence of the National Football League and the Carolina Panthers played a critical role in the passage of this bill. While few of our legislative priorities get national support, being a key organization at the table on this bill, furthered Children's Trust respect among child well-being professionals and strengthened our reputation among members of the General Assembly. This proposal would further enhance our efforts and scale up our impact at both a local and statewide level.

### **Increase Capacity of Communities/Groups to Influence Policy**

This grant would not only provide Children's Trust with the opportunity to build our legislative capacity but would also build capacity of the local Safe Kids coalitions across the state. While the Safe Kids coalitions are powerful in numbers (including more than 600 trained child passenger safety technicians), they have not been organized around advocacy efforts. Few coalition members will contact their legislators regarding a particular issue and even fewer engage their elected officials at a local level (e.g., inviting them to community safety events). Safe Kids coalitions are extremely crucial to the work of keeping kids safe because they see the results of improperly installed car seats or texting while driving. We hope through this effort (e.g., empowering the coalition members with knowledge of effective legislator-communication tactics), they will begin cultivating relationships with member of the General Assembly and bringing to light the true high incidences and seriousness of child injuries as well as the impact these accidents have on the communities they serve.

### **Increase Capacity of SCRA to Influence Public Policy**

The process and results from the project could increase the capacity of SCRA to influence public policy in a number of ways. First, the process will be important for the lead applicant as a member

of the SCRA policy committee. The lead applicant will be able to share experiences from the project with the policy committee, as the policy committee engages in public policy efforts.

Second, the results of the project could be shared with SCRA via the general and policy website. Members would be able to access information about the project, results from the surveys, lessons learned, and dissemination methods. Additionally, the website and membership could be updated on legislative actions that result from this project.

Third, the results of the project could be published in academic outlets. For example, the project applications would be interested in writing an article in *The Community Psychologist* (TCP). By publishing an article in TCP, members of SCRA are able to access information about the project and, most importantly, information about how to communicate with legislators.

Finally, the results of the project could be shared in-person with SCRA members at conferences. Currently, SCRA and The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) are exploring a pre-conference activity (i.e., Advocate Day) at the annual American Psychological Associate (APA) conference. The purpose of the Advocate Day would be to increase the advocacy-related skills of SCRA and SPSSI members and inform legislators of the values, skills, and knowledge of SCRA and SPSSI members. The information provided to SCRA and SPSSI members on Advocate Day could include results from this project, specifically regarding communication with legislators. In addition, the results of the project could be presented at the SCRA biennial conference, potentially as part of the policy workshop.

## Budget

Budget Item	Amount Requested
Staff time for Policy Liaison	\$3,500.00
Travel (in state)	\$500.00
Refreshments for coalition meetings	\$300.00
Administrative costs (printing, survey tool, dissemination materials)	\$300.00
APA conference	\$400.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,000.00</b>

Two Children’s Trust staff, Evaluator and Policy Liaison, will be the lead on this project. Grant funding will cover staff time to research and conduct surveys and compile results (Evaluator staff time matched through Duke Endowment grant). Funding for travel will allow staff to meet with Safe Kids coalition members across the state. We are also requesting funding for light refreshments to provide at these meetings to increase attendance and participation. Administrative costs will cover the cost of a survey administration tool (SurveyMonkey) as well as printing a publication and other dissemination tools of the survey findings. We are also requesting funding to attend the APA conference to present some of our findings.

## Plan for Dissemination of Results

Children’s Trust has several ways with which the results of this project will be disseminated. First, the Children’s Trust will be hosting a policy forum in the fall of 2014. Advocates and community partners (including many Safe Kids Coalition representatives) will be in attendance. The purpose of the forum will be to educate attendees on effective advocacy tactics, find common ground among our legislative agenda’s and recognize State House champions for their work supporting our efforts. At this conference, we would like to highlight the results of our survey in hopes of increasing advocacy efforts (and subsequent policy changes) when the session resumes in January 2015.

Children’s Trust will also use social media outlets to share results of the survey. Through our website, blog, Twitter and Facebook we will highlight key findings of the survey. We will also include information about this project in our monthly e-newsletter, the Policy Post. There are more than 3,000 individuals that subscribe the Policy Post and membership consists of our Advocacy Network, key partners in child well-being organizations, and legislators.

## Tentative Project Timeline

Month	Activity	Deliverable
<b>January-March 2014</b>	Survey development	
	Communicate project intentions to Coalition and Legislators	
<b>April-June 2014</b>	Data collection	
<b>June 2014</b>	Complete progress report for SCRA Policy Committee	Progress Report
<b>July 2014</b>	Data analysis	
<b>August 2014</b>	Schedule follow-ups with Legislators	
	Update website, blog, Twitter and Facebook with key findings of the survey	
<b>August-September 2014</b>	Conduct follow-ups with Legislators	
<b>October 2014</b>	Data analysis	
	Share results at policy forum	Survey results hand-out
<b>November-December 2014</b>	Update website, blog, Twitter and Facebook with key findings of the survey	
<b>December 2014</b>	Complete progress report for SCRA Policy Committee	Progress Report
<b>January 2015</b>	Write column for <i>The Community Psychologist</i>	<i>The Community Psychologist</i> column
<b>TBD 2015</b>	Submit presentation for SCRA Policy Workshop	
<b>TBD 2015</b>	Present project at SCRA Policy Workshop	

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