



SNYDER
STRATEGIES

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Case Study: Head Start California



THE BURNING QUESTION:

How can an agency that serves California's most vulnerable children and families convince state legislators to boost a federally funded program with state resources?

THE BACKGROUND:

Since 1965, Head Start has served more than 36 million American children and continues to invest in and support the nation's most vulnerable families.

Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start serves more than a million children each year across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories, and various tribal communities, with an annual federal commitment of about \$9 billion.

Though Head Start is a federal initiative with federal funding, individual states are responsible for its implementation and offer programming through about 1,600 local social service agencies and other grantees nationwide. However, federal funding for Head Start continues to fall significantly short of demand—meaning millions of qualifying families are excluded from an essential pre-kindergarten educational experience. In California, this gap in funding is especially acute; because of the state's high population and high poverty rates, only about 7 percent of eligible children (around 100,000 students total) can participate.

THE PROBLEM:

To combat this chronic underinvestment, Head Start California proposed in 2019 for the first time that California lawmakers provide supplemental state funding for the program. Currently, only about a dozen states dedicate state funding to Head Start programs, ranging from about \$600,000 a year in Rhode Island to more than \$60 million per year in Oregon. The 2022 California proposal would include \$50 million per year from the state budget, meant primarily to boost teacher salaries and retention.

While Head Start California had focused its previous advocacy efforts on shoring up its federal allocation, it had never conducted state-level advocacy before, and launching a new in-house program would mean engaging members in a new, more localized, type of advocacy.

Furthermore, the organization would need to educate state lawmakers unused to thinking about Head Start funding at all—about the program's potential and track record, about the worsening inadequacy of federal allocations, and about the transformative power state dollars could have on student outcomes.

The issue plaguing lawmakers is rarely one of disinterest, but prioritization—making grassroots advocacy even more crucial. Considering that 75 percent of state governments do not provide supplemental funding to Head Start programs, there's little pressure for California to add this to its to-do list. But Head Start California wanted to make a difference, even after the previous proposals failed to advance.



THE SNYDER STRATEGY:

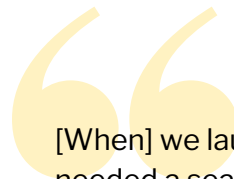
Head Start California retained Snyder Strategies, LLC from 2019-2022 to develop and implement grasstops and grassroots advocacy plan to advance its advocacy efforts. With years of expertise in health and human services,

Snyder Strategies is well aware of the shortfall in early childhood education across America, and the overall lack of investment in underserved children that perpetuates a cycle of poverty as they grow into adults. That urgency, coupled with broad support across many agencies, inspired our advocacy communications plan to engage Head Start California's statewide network.

Snyder Strategies began with Head Start California's grantees—more than 150 agencies that provide services to over 100,000 children and their families at more than 2,000 sites across California—as well as other organizations invested in strong Head Start programs, such as health care, public health, and child welfare organizations. Engaging this broad assembly of stakeholders in the advocacy effort ensures diverse voices stay involved in the effort while also demonstrating the breadth and depth of support across California, with many new organizations signing onto the effort.

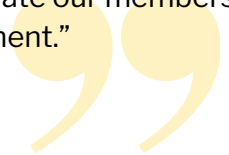
Snyder Strategies and Head Start California have continued to advance this cause in subsequent legislative sessions, advocating for state funding while engaging member agencies. Each session, Head Start California is ahead of the game, with key legislators committed to championing the budget request, organizations lined up to support this cause, and a grassroots network primed to go.

DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT



[When] we launched a major legislative effort and needed a seasoned grassroots strategist, Snyder Strategies did not let us down. Bethany jumped feet-first into our campaign with passion, dedication, and a wealth of ideas.

Bethany is an organized, results-oriented, positive thinker. She increased our visibility among legislators and key stakeholders and crafted a grasstops movement for our organization that helped activate our members into a higher level of engagement.”



— **CHRISTOPHER MARICLE**

Former Executive Director, Head Start California



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SCAN ME

