

SNYDER STRATEGIES:

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

CASE STUDY: Head Start California

THE BURNING QUESTION:

How can an agency focused on advocacy for California's most vulnerable children and families convince state legislators to boost the impact of a federally-funded program by also committing state resources?

THE BACKGROUND:

If your children love Big Bird and Cookie Monster, you can offer a bit of thanks to the federal Head Start program. Head Start traces its roots back to 1965, developed as part of a major White House effort to help American communities meet the needs of economically disadvantaged children. Soon after, Head Start was one of the first investors in the show that would become "Sesame Street." This was just one of the many ways Head Start ushered in a new era of early childhood investment in America.

More than a half-century later, Head Start has served more than 36 million American children and continues to support the nation's most vulnerable families. Administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Head Start supports 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.

THE PROBLEM:

Regardless of its storied history, Head Start is not without its detractors. Some studies have claimed that Head Start doesn't deliver long-term results, while others have targeted its sizeable federal investment as an area for cost savings. In 2018, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recommended eliminating Head Start as one option for reducing the federal deficit. Such a move could save the federal government an estimated \$92 billion between 2020 and 2028, though even CBO acknowledged the move would transfer many early childhood intervention responsibilities primarily to state governments and likely leave some already-vulnerable families further underserved.

Meanwhile, in California, more than 93 percent of children eligible for Head Start already can't receive services due to underfunding. To combat this, Head Start California hoped to secure supplemental funding at the state level. 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.

In 2019, Head Start California made its first state budget play, asking California lawmakers to provide \$50 million per year in state funding from the California budget.

THE SNYDER STRATEGY:

As parents and community advocates, the Snyder Strategies team 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. The issue plaguing lawmakers is rarely one of disinterest, but prioritization. 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. That's why



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grassroots advocacy among Head Start programs, leaders, and those they serve is so crucial.

Head Start California retained Snyder Strategies to develop and implement grassroots and grassroots advocacy strategies to use in its advocacy efforts. We created an advocacy communications plan to engage Head Start California's statewide network of grantees, more than 150 agencies that provide services to over 100,000 children and their families at more than 2,000 sites across California. Snyder Strategies also helped connect organizations that are also invested in strong Head Start programs, such as health

care, public health, child welfare, etc, to the advocacy effort to ensure diverse voices were involved in the effort. This also demonstrated the breadth and depth of support across California, with XX organization signing onto the effort.

While unsuccessful in their first attempt, the organization is not giving up. During the 2020 legislative session, Head Start California will continue to advocate for state funding and engage their member agencies. They are already ahead of the game, with key legislators committed to championing their budget request, organizations lined up to support their cause, and their grassroots network primed to go.

DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT:

This year 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 grassroots movement for our organization that helped activate our members into a higher level of engagement.

— CHRISTOPHER MARICLE
Executive Director, Head Start California



Head Start
CALIFORNIA