



The Playbook is a guide to build and leverage power for equity, justice, and systemic change. A foundational blueprint for collective liberation, our playbook centers marginalized voices in reshaping societal structures and policies.

Starting with Kids Forward's Theory of Change, this guide details seven actionable strategies with related policy advocacy tactics and examples for building narrative, resource, and infrastructure power. By integrating antiracist leadership principles and community empowerment within our strategies, we seek to build power within and unite diverse communities into a cohesive force for systemic change.

At its core, the playbook is organized around three interconnected pillars of power inspired by the Grassroots Power Project “Three Faces of Power”. Each pillar reflects a different facet of the strategies and principles needed to create transformative change*:



Narrative Power

Critically analyzing and reshaping understandings of the world and what is politically possible to promote inclusivity and dismantle oppressive narratives.

Elevating stories that highlight the lived experiences and contributions of marginalized communities.



People & Resource Power

Building community capacity for political and policy change through accessible advocacy tools and methodologies.

Mobilizing people and resources to ensure equitable policy reforms and systemic improvements.



Infrastructure Power

Strengthening alliances and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations to shape political agendas.

Creating sustainable structures to support long-term equity and justice initiatives.

*This Playbook is informed and shaped by the Grassroots Power Project’s “Three Faces of Power” by Richard Healy and Sandra Hinson https://grassrootspowerproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2_GPP_3FacesOfPower.pdf.

**“The arc of history
does not bend toward
justice through gravity.
It bends because we
exert force upon it.”**

- Nikole Hannah-Jones



By underscoring the importance of solidarity and power, the Kids Forward Playbook fights for thriving futures for all children and families. This is a call to action for individuals and organizations committed to creating a more equitable and just society.

History

Kids Forward was established in 1881 as the Wisconsin Conference on Charities and Corrections, and is the oldest multi-issue child and family advocacy organization in the country. For well over a century, Kids Forward has focused on improving conditions for children and families through policy change, expanded public investments, and public education that lead to improvements in outcomes and practices in the delivery of publicly funded health care, education, workforce development, and social services.

Mission

Kids Forward is a statewide, non-partisan, and non-profit antiracist policy center that inspires action and advocates for children and families of color and those furthest from opportunity in Wisconsin.



Power for a Reimagined Wisconsin

We envision a Wisconsin where every child has the freedom to live, learn, and thrive free of oppression.



We have been lied to.

We were told that if we worked hard, then we will succeed. If one doesn't succeed, it's completely your own fault.

The truth is that the system was rigged from the very beginning.

Over centuries, powerful wealthy interests have funneled the results of our hard work out of our communities and into their own pockets. Then, they try to pit our families against each other based on what we look like, distracting us as they hoard wealth.

As a result, Wisconsin faces some of the most tragic economic and racial disparities in the country. These intentional choices by legislators don't just hurt their intended audience: Black, Brown, and immigrant families. They also hurt low-income rural white families.

Our Collective Charge

To dismantle structural racism within public policy, so that every child and family has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of race, ethnicity, or geography. If we are successful, together we will:

Transform Public Policy

Wisconsin's public leaders adopt a community-informed, racially and socially just framework for policymaking. This will ensure that policies are shaped by the lived experiences of those most impacted by racism and inequity. Policies will actively dismantle the root causes of structural racism, promoting inclusive systems of justice, economic freedom, and opportunity for all communities.

Equip Community-centered Movements

Wisconsin communities—especially Black, Brown, Indigenous, and rural communities—lead the movement for racial and economic justice. These communities are empowered with the tools, resources, and networks to build collective power, organize, and advance equitable policy solutions that directly address the needs of those most impacted by structural racism.



Our Collective Charge

(continued)

Advance Equitable Social, Political, & Economic Change

Wisconsin's social, political, and economic systems will shift toward equity, creating structures that nurture wellbeing, provide economic freedom, and ensure justice for marginalized groups. This change will be sustained through grassroots leadership and organized coalitions working to maintain and expand equitable policies.

Reimagine Wisconsin's Future

The collective imagination of Wisconsin, rooted in the stories and wisdom of its most marginalized communities, will reimagine and actively create a world where racism and oppression no longer exist. **This new vision of Wisconsin will offer possibilities for radical joy, equity, and interconnectedness for all children and families.**



Our Non-Negotiables

We believe that:

- » **Structural racism is upheld through policies, practices, and procedures to create inequities between racial groups.** Unjust education, criminal justice, housing, healthcare, and other policies are the result of intentional and racist institutional policies, practices, and procedures. Race, gender, social class, geography, disability, and sexuality interact within structural racism to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression;
- » **Building power is the work.** Everyone deserves the ability to control the conditions of their existence while honoring our interconnectedness, shared humanity, and collective responsibility;
- » **Shifting public narratives and changing policies are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.** We interrupt and question harmful rhetoric, elevate structural and systemic causes, and acknowledge the dignity and humanity of all people;
- » **Voices of marginalized communities must be centered above all else and never exploited.** Communities most impacted by structural racism have the knowledge, power, and capacity to lead and drive change; and
- » **Antiracism is a system in which we intentionally create policies, practices, and procedures to promote racial and economic equity.** We believe that being antiracist requires the active resistance to and dismantling of the system of racism. Through targeted strategies that account for the disparate harm to marginalized communities, outcomes will be improved for everyone.

Powerbuilding Strategies

01 Advocate for Collective Liberation



Shape narratives that embrace an inclusive (radical) understanding of the world and what is possible, a world without racism and oppression, where every child and family can thrive.

02 Educate Stakeholders for Change



Educate our audiences on how our policy recommendations and budget priorities will enable children and families to thrive, inspiring Wisconsinites to join us in challenging unjust narratives and influencing decision makers to pass equitable policy.

03 Unite & Organize for Shared Impact



Drive a collective power strategy with allied partners bringing attention to the needs of impacted children and families and advocating for responsive policy and budget decisions.

04 Resource Strategic Vision



Raise financial resources to support strategic opportunities of the moment and long term sustainability of liberation movements.

05 Persuade Power Brokers



Cultivate strategic relationships with community leaders, policy makers, elected officials, and funders advancing a visionary pathway to equitable structures and policies benefiting all Wisconsin children and families.

06 Policy Research & Analysis



Conduct deep community-informed analysis of budgets and policies, creating accessible tools to highlight inequitable policy impacts and needed structural/policy reforms.

07 Develop Antiracist Leadership Capacity



Invest in cultivating multi-racial, multi-generational, community-informed, values driven, racially and socially just leadership.

“If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

— Lilla Watson

01 Advocate for Collective Liberation

Shape narratives that include an inclusive (radical) understanding of the world and what is possible, a world without racism and oppression, where every child and family can thrive. Inspire Wisconsinites to join us in challenging racist and classist rhetoric, and to pressure decision makers to pass equitable policy.

Advocating for collective liberation leverages and contextualizes data and research, sharing historical and current day context that uncovers root causes of inequities. Its purpose is to interrupt and question harmful rhetoric, elevating structural and systemic causes. It is characterized by inclusive language that acknowledges the dignity and humanity of all people, and promotes solidarity and equity.



Audience

Media, Decisionmakers,
Grasstops & Grassroots that
Influence Decisionmakers



Tactics

- **Media editorials, blogs, statements, & interviews**
- **Multimedia storytelling visual arts & music**
- **Social Media**



Examples

- [Hear Us Podcast](#)
- [DACA Primer](#)
- [Worker's Speak Webinar](#)
- ["I Speak" Cards](#)

[View at kidsforward.org](http://kidsforward.org)

Leadership Traits

- **Self-Reflection.** Reflect on your own biases.
- **Foster spaces for open dialogue.** Create respectful spaces for others to reflect.
- **Persistence.** Shifting deeply ingrained beliefs takes time; celebrates small victories.
- **Courage.** To say and defend inclusive narratives, even when it's the least popular opinion in the room.
- **Empathy.** For folks experiencing challenges some of us could never imagine. "I don't need to feel your pain to see that you are hurting." Our liberation is bound together. If you are hurting, so am I.

02 Educate Stakeholders for Change

Educate our audiences on how our policy recommendations and budget priorities will enable children and families to thrive, inspiring Wisconsinites to join us in challenging unjust narratives and influencing decision makers to pass equitable policy.



Audience

Impacted Community Members, Activists, Allies, Persuadable Residents in Wisconsin, Decisionmakers



Tactics

- Blogs & fact sheets that center actions community members can take
- State Budget breakdowns, infographics, & policy deep dives
- Community education events
- Media Coverage & Op-Eds



Examples

- [Webinar: A State Budget that Works for Every Kid](#)
- [Every Healthy Baby Starts with Healthy Parents](#)
- [Explained: End Juvenile Life Without Parole in Wisconsin](#)
- [Community explainer: Rich Get Richer Under Proposed Tax Plan](#)
- [Restoring Drivers Licenses to all Wisconsinites](#)

[View at kidsforward.org](https://kidsforward.org)

Leadership Traits

- Ability to connect and communicate with people from different lived experiences & backgrounds.
- Understanding of engagement levers - where/when/how can partners and communities impact decisions.
- Knowing & influencing where the decision points are.
- Understanding of scale of issues & movement building.
- Actively contributes to the creation of a KF policy agenda; Owns division/adaptation of the agenda for their areas of expertise.
- Ability to analyze policy and legislative processes to understand their impacts and then convey them to community.
- Actively engage in developing policy solutions.

03 Unite & Organize for Shared Impact

Drive a collective power strategy with allied partners bringing attention to the needs of impacted children and families and advocating for responsive policy and budget decisions.



Audience

Coalition Partners & Allies



Tactics

- Coordinating political and legislative strategy with partners
- Building coalitions around timely advocacy opportunities
- Providing partners with budget analysis and talking points
- Engaging & training partners as trusted messengers



Examples

- [Wisconsin Leaders Call on Congress to Protect Medicaid](#)
- [Reimagine Wisconsin: Build Worker Power Coalition](#)
- [Statement: Raise the Age in Wisconsin](#)
- [Broad Coalition Urges Governor to Stand with Families and Veto Restrictions on Public Supports](#)

[View at kidsforward.org](http://kidsforward.org)

Leadership Traits

- Empowers partners to identify issues and develop solutions for systemic change.
- Builds trust and relationships with diverse communities.
- Deep, radical listening and conflict resolution skills.
- Adaptability to evolve based on shifting political climates, community needs and coalition needs/challenges.
- Continuous improvement mindset, actively seeking feedback, assessment and refinement of the work.

04 Resource Strategic Vision

Raise financial resources to support strategic opportunities of the moment and long term sustainability of social movements. Raising financial resources is a vital part of ensuring the success and longevity of social movements. Effective fundraising ensures that movements can operate effectively, mobilize communities, and continue their work long after a specific campaign or initiative has ended. Although, building financial support for social movements is not just about money—it's about empowering people, communities, and organizations to work together toward a future where equity and justice are the foundation for all.



Examples

- [The Big Share](#)
- [A Failing Healthcare System: Colleen's Story](#)
- [Disrupting Structural Inequity: Jacquie's Story](#)
- [Partners in Equity](#)

[View at kidsforward.org](https://kidsforward.org)

Fundraising Policies Centering Justice

- **Our fundraising practices will be grounded in principles of equity and racial & social justice.**
- **We treat donors as partners in our work.**
- **We do our internal work to dismantle white supremacy culture and share our process and learning with you.**
- **We acknowledge that each of us personally benefits from supporting and engaging in the work of social justice—it's not just charity and compassion.**
- **We understand there are inequities in capacity to provide gifts of all types. We recognize gifts of time, expertise, goods, and financial investments of all sizes equally.**
- **We commit to keep donors informed of our progress and how your investment brings us closer to realizing our shared vision.**



Tactics

- **Grant Prospecting, Writing & Reporting**
- **Donor Prospecting & Engagement**
- **Partners in Equity Promotion & Recruitment**
- **Campaign Storytelling**

Resources

- [The 10 Principles of Community-Centric Fundraising](#)
- [Decolonizing Wealth](#)
- [Fundraising Policies Centering Justice](#)

05 Persuade Power Brokers

Cultivate strategic relationships with community leaders, policy makers, elected officials, and funders, advancing a visionary pathway to equitable structures and policies benefiting all Wisconsin children and families. Policymakers are more likely to take action when presented with a clear, compelling vision that reflects the needs of their constituents. The key to success lies in building trust, staying persistent, and ensuring that our work is rooted in the needs and voices of the people. Through collaboration, advocacy, and accountability, we can create a future where equity is the foundation of every policy decision.



Audience

Decisionmakers, Elected officials, Agency Heads, Donors



Tactics

- **Building relationships with legislators to identify champions, supporters, & opponents**
- **Joint statements with partners**
- **Budget analysis & policy deep dives**
- **Petitions and sign-on letters**
- **Caucus briefings**



Examples

- **Testimony: Extend Postpartum Coverage for up to 1 Year**
- **Tell Congress: No cuts to Medicaid**
- **Sharing the Reimagine Wisconsin policy agenda with the Governor**
- **Testimony: End Juvenile Life without Parole in Wisconsin**
- **Rich Get Richer Under Proposed Tax Plan**

[View at kidsforward.org](https://kidsforward.org)

06 Policy Research & Analysis

Conduct deep community-informed analysis of budgets and policies, creating accessible tools to highlight inequitable policy impacts and needed structural/policy reforms.



Audience

Allies, Media, Close
Partners, Elected
Officials, Decisionmakers



Tactics

- Surveys & questionnaires
- Policy Briefs, Reports, Fact Sheets
- Stakeholder Input and Public Testimonies
- Budget Breakdown, Impact Assessments, Cost Benefit Analysis



Examples

- Immigrant Taxpayers Deserve Dignity & Justice
- Rich get Richer under Proposed Tax Plan
- Proposed Tax Cut Privileges Wealthiest 1%, Leaves Struggling Families Behind
- State Budget Summaries

View at kidsforward.org

07 Develop Antiracist Leadership Capacity

Invest in cultivating multi-racial, community-informed, values driven, racially and socially just leadership. Developing antiracist leadership is an investment in capacity building for antiracist organizational development. It requires the organization to seek ongoing opportunities to explore racial and social justice histories, systems of oppression, privilege, and resistance. It creates and supports antiracist and inclusive leadership models, empowering marginalized voices in leadership and decision-making.



Audience

Kids Forward Staff/Close Partners



Tactics

- Train and provide direct experience in advocacy
- Build relationships and partnerships with different communities, recognizing intersectional struggles
- Advise and encourage self-care practices



Operationalize Antiracism

- Kids Forward Employee Handbook
- Antiracist Policy Advocacy Competency Rubric
- Conversation Guidelines
- Antiracist Decision Framework

Core Competencies

- Sincere passion for the antiracist mission and values of Kids Forward, and the ability to articulate and share that passion with internal and external audiences.
- Inclusive, relationship-oriented leadership style with demonstrated expertise sharing power and knowledge for team effectiveness in a remote first environment.
- Vision, creativity, and leadership to guide the development and execution of a pro-active, antiracist and anti-austerity policy agenda.
- Demonstrated commitment to inclusive outreach and community engagement for diverse and effective coalitions, alliances, and community-based relationships.
- Interest in major public and state budget policy issues facing low-income individuals and people of color in Wisconsin.



Join Us.

This playbook is a statement of hope and vision. It's both a call to action and a roadmap, guiding us toward systemic change that uplifts communities, dismantles barriers, and fosters a society where every individual, regardless of background, has the opportunity to thrive. We invite community allies, advocates, and policymakers to join us. Use this tool to build and leverage power for equity, justice, and systemic change. Together, we can turn our vision into reality.

Visit kidsforward.org.

Contact us at info@kidsforward.org.



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