

**STATE LEGISLATORS' PERCEPTIONS
OF *KIDS COUNT***

Prepared for

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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STATE LEGISLATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF *KIDS COUNT*

August 2004

Executive Summary

The Annie E. Casey Foundation asked the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to collect information about how state legislators and legislative staff perceive *KIDS COUNT* and how the *KIDS COUNT* Data Book can better meet their information needs. *KIDS COUNT* provides measures of educational, social, economic and physical well-being for children in the United States. NCSL, in conjunction with the Centers at the Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver completed a national survey of 276 legislators and 118 legislative staff, as well as in-depth interviews with legislators in order to ensure both quantitative and qualitative assessments of *KIDS COUNT*. Findings also are based on a focus group that was used to inform survey design and get additional in-depth input.

Overall, respondents had favorable views of *KIDS COUNT* and many felt it impacted both public awareness of issues affecting children and families and public policy in their state. Major findings are as follows:

Awareness and Use of National Information Sources

- Three-quarters of legislators and 91 percent of legislative staff are aware of *KIDS COUNT*.
- A majority of legislators (55%) and of legislative staff (73%) say they use *KIDS COUNT*, and 17 percent of each group uses it "a lot."
- Legislators who have served for six or more years are substantially more likely than those who have served only one to five years to report that they use *KIDS COUNT* "a lot."
- The National Conference of State Legislatures is the most commonly used source of information on the status and well-being of children; it is used by 85 percent of legislators and 97 percent of staff.
- A majority of legislators are familiar with all of the 9 information sources listed in the survey with the exception of Child Trends.
- A majority of legislative staff are familiar with all of the listed information sources except for Child Trends and Focus on the Family.

Evaluation of KIDS COUNT Data Book

- Legislators and legislative staff evaluate the KIDS COUNT Data Book positively on a number of different dimensions. Of those who are aware of KIDS COUNT, a majority of legislators say it is “very” timely (58%), clear and understandable (63%), credible (65%), useful (53%) and relevant to policy makers (52%). Staff are somewhat less positive on several of these dimensions.
- The KIDS COUNT Data Book is perceived as credible by virtually all of the legislators (one said it was not credible) and all of the legislative staff who responded to the survey, as well as all of the legislators we interviewed.
- A majority of respondents rate the Data Book favorably, regardless of political party affiliation.
- Legislators who say they heard about KIDS COUNT from an advocacy group rate it more highly than those who heard about KIDS COUNT in other ways.
- The data suggest that legislators who heard about KIDS COUNT from more than one source are more likely than those who heard about KIDS COUNT from only one source to evaluate it as “very” credible and “very” useful.
- The greatest barriers to using the KIDS COUNT Data Book are lack of familiarity and the perception that other state and local data sources are more useful. Among interview respondents, there is some tension between wanting more indicators to measure each area and wanting specific state and local data, versus preferring fewer, more general indicators that can be measured over time and across all states.
- Mailing is an effective way of getting KIDS COUNT to legislators. When asked for the most effective way to deliver the KIDS COUNT Data Book, however, most of those interviewed responded that it should be delivered in person by a constituent or credible advocate who can provide a brief summary.
- Most of those interviewed and most focus group participants said they don’t have time to read the essay in the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Those interviewees who read it, however, think it is useful to get a summary of the data and to learn about successful programs.
- One concern about the KIDS COUNT Data Book is that it lacks context. Since indicators are not interpreted, legislators may not know how to use the data—or may misuse the data—to create policy agendas.

How KIDS COUNT Information is Used

- Legislators use the information provided in KIDS COUNT primarily to learn about issues affecting children (79%) and to do background research on an issue (68%). Nearly half use

KIDS COUNT in various ways in the legislative process (for example, 49 percent use it in committee deliberations and 48 percent use it to craft legislation, policies or programs) and to check or confirm other data sources (45%).

- Generally, legislators who have served longer are more likely than those who have not to say they use KIDS COUNT to craft legislation, policies or programs.
- Most legislative staff use the information in KIDS COUNT to do background research on issues (91%). About half use it to check or confirm other data sources (57%) and to inform themselves about children's needs (51%).

Assessment of State KIDS COUNT Initiatives

- A majority of legislators (63%) are familiar with the work of their state KIDS COUNT grantee. Reflecting the views of the national KIDS COUNT products, legislators view state initiatives positively. Of those who can rate their state KIDS COUNT grantee, a majority think it is "very" credible (61%) and useful (58%).
- Nearly three-quarters (72%) of legislative staff are familiar with the work of their state KIDS COUNT grantee. Staff rate their state grantee somewhat less positively than legislators. Of those who are able to rate their state KIDS COUNT grantee, nearly half think it is "very" credible (48%) and useful (48%).

Impact of KIDS COUNT

- Of those who are aware of KIDS COUNT, a majority of legislators and legislative staff think it has had at least a "moderate" impact on public awareness of issues affecting children and families (64% of legislators and 60% of staff).
- Of those who are aware of KIDS COUNT, a majority of legislators and nearly half of legislative staff think KIDS COUNT has had at least a "moderate" impact on public policy in their state (60% of legislators and 46% of staff).

Introduction

KIDS COUNT is an effort to track the status of children in the United States using indicators available on a state-by-state and national basis. It was initiated by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1990. “By providing policymakers and citizens with benchmarks of child well-being, KIDS COUNT seeks to enrich local, state and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children.”¹

The KIDS COUNT initiative has two main components: a national component and a state component.

- At the national level, the primary activity is the publication of the annual KIDS COUNT Data Book, which provides measures of educational, social, economic and physical well-being. The book typically provides national profiles and national indicator maps, as well as profiles and rankings for each of the individual states. It also includes an essay, which addresses in some depth an issue facing children.
- At the state level, the Annie E. Casey Foundation funds state organizations that provide a more detailed, community-by-community picture of the condition of children. These organizations comprise a national network to facilitate communication on the uses of data to highlight children’s well-being and to influence policies.

In an effort to understand whether the materials are reaching policymakers and helping them to understand the status of children, the Annie E. Casey Foundation asked the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) to work with its members to learn more about how they view the Initiative.

The Study’s Approach and Methods

The National Conference of State Legislatures teamed with the Centers at the Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver to develop a multi-pronged approach to understand how legislators and their staffs view KIDS COUNT. The following core questions are addressed by the study:

- Are legislators and their staffs aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book?
- Do they find it useful to have indicators of child well-being that are consistent across states and over time so that they can track changes?
- Are the data presented in the Data Book credible, understandable and sufficiently comprehensive?
- How are the data used?

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK: State Profiles of Child Well-Being 2003* p. 224

- Has the data had any impact on public awareness or public policy in the states?

To answer these questions, a study using qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was developed including a focus group, two mail surveys directed at legislators and legislative staffs respectively, and follow-up, in-depth interviews with 12 legislators.

Focus Group

The first step in the process was to organize a focus group of legislators and legislative staff. The purpose of the focus group was to gather information on the usefulness of the KIDS COUNT Data Book to a legislative audience, and to identify and refine issues to be covered in a national survey of state legislators and staff.

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) invited six legislators and three legislative staff to Denver, Colorado, on September 16, 2003, to provide feedback on the KIDS COUNT Data Book, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The participants were chosen for their geographic and political balance.

The four-hour focus group discussion centered on four main areas:

- Legislator and staff knowledge of the Data Book
- How it is used
- The quality of the information, including the format and presentation of the information
- The adequacy of the first draft of the survey instrument

While the focus group was used to inform survey design, it also produced important findings. The major findings are presented in this report. The complete focus group summary, followed by the questions used to guide the focus group, are shown in Appendix 1.

Surveys of Legislators and Legislative Staff

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) also conducted a survey to learn about legislator and legislative staff perceptions of KIDS COUNT, their information needs more generally and their preferred methods of communication. While surveys are somewhat limited in what they can test, they do allow for a systematic compilation of information from larger numbers of informants and the ability to reach conclusions with greater confidence. The survey instruments are shown in Appendices 2 and 3, respectively.

The Centers at the University of Colorado at Denver worked with NCSL to develop the survey and sampling protocols.

- **The Sample of Legislators:** A sample was developed using a list maintained by NCSL of all state legislators. Legislators were stratified into two groups: those who serve on committees that deal with issues affecting children and families, and all others. A random sample was selected from within each stratum, but legislators with relevant committee assignments were

over-sampled. This was done to increase the numbers who could reliably report on KIDS COUNT and its usefulness in state policy deliberations. We sent out a total of 1,200 surveys: 800 to committee members and 400 to other legislators. A minimum of two follow-up contacts were made to increase response.

- **The Sample of Legislative Staff:** Using an NCSL list of staff directors, we sought to identify up to three legislative staff agencies in each state. Typically these agencies are responsible for policy analyses and research evaluation, or fiscal notes. The director of each of the selected legislative staff agencies was given three surveys and asked to distribute them to staff members (including themselves) who are most knowledgeable about children's issues. Since states differ in how they structure legislative support, the agencies contacted differ by state.

Survey Response and Data Weighting

Legislators returned a total of 276 surveys, for a 23 percent response rate. Seventy-five percent of respondents serve on committees that deal with issues that affect children and families, while 25 percent do not. Put another way, 25 percent of committee members and 18 percent of those not on committees responded to the survey. Committee members responded in greater numbers, as we would expect, since legislators who serve on these committees presumably have greater professional and perhaps personal interest in and knowledge about issues that affect children and families.

Given the over-sampling and the higher likelihood of response based on relevant committee membership, the data are weighted prior to analyses, so that they accurately reflect the views of all state legislators, regardless of committee assignment.

All states are represented in the legislative survey. Respondents are about equally split between Democrats (52%) and Republicans (48%). The full spectrum of political viewpoints are represented with 6 percent self-identifying as strongly liberal, 19 percent as liberal, 34 percent as middle-of-the-road, 35 percent as conservative and 7 percent as strongly conservative.

Legislative staff members returned a total of 118 surveys. Since we do not know how many staff members actually were asked to complete surveys, it is not possible to calculate a response rate. Legislative staff in 42 states returned completed surveys. There are no respondents from Idaho, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Vermont or West Virginia.

Interviews with Legislators

As a follow-up to the national survey of state legislators, the University of Colorado conducted interviews with 12 state legislators. The purpose of the interviews was to gain more in-depth understanding of barriers to using the KIDS COUNT Data Book as well as how KIDS COUNT has impacted public awareness and public policy in their states.

We selected two groups of legislators for the interviews:

- “High Use”: Legislators who use the KIDS COUNT Data Book “a lot” and who told us in the survey that it has had a major impact on public awareness of problems faced by children and families and on public policy in their state. Within this group, seven interviews were completed with legislators from Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota and Oklahoma.
- “Low Use”: Legislators who serve on committees dealing with issues that affect families and children and who are aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book but don’t use it at all, or use it only a little. Within this group, five interviews were completed with legislators from Arizona, Georgia (2), New Hampshire and North Carolina.

Both groups included Democrats and Republicans, with political orientations that range across the full spectrum. The “Low Use” Group included a somewhat greater proportion of Republicans and conservatives than the “High Use” Group.

The interview guides and a complete summary of interview results are presented in Appendix 4.

All interviews were conducted by a senior researcher, and modified to fit the specific responses of each state representative or senator. Follow-up questions enabled us to get more information about the success of KIDS COUNT and how it can be improved.

Summary of Results

Awareness and Use of National Information Sources

As a whole, focus group participants had not read the KIDS COUNT Data Book before being invited to the focus group. They were, however, aware of the Data Book through press releases and handouts from advocacy groups. They thought that only legislators serving on committees dealing with issues related to children and human services would be likely to know much about the Data Book. They also suggested that the amount of knowledge legislators have would vary depending on the extent to which state advocacy groups use the data. For example, advocacy groups might refer to the data in direct testimony at committee hearings, or use statistics and citations from the book on information sheets.

The first part of the survey was designed to determine where KIDS COUNT fits in the broad spectrum of potential sources of information on children's issues. It includes more general questions about information needs, so that legislators and legislative staff unfamiliar with KIDS COUNT still could respond. The survey found that:

- Legislators and legislative staff generally turn to the same organizations for information on children's issues. Legislative staff use the most popular sources somewhat more often than legislators.
- A majority of legislators are familiar with eight of the nine information sources listed, the exception being Child Trends (see **Figure 1**). A majority of legislative staff are familiar with the information sources listed except Child Trends and Focus on the Family (see **Figure 2**).

Figure 1
Legislator Awareness and Use of National Information Resources

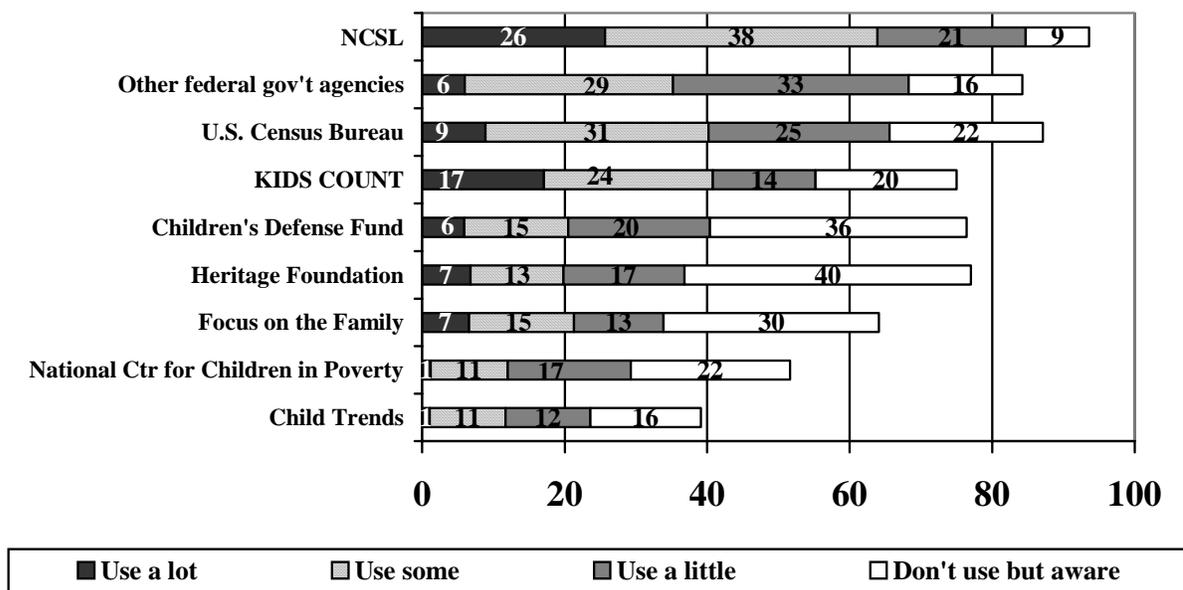
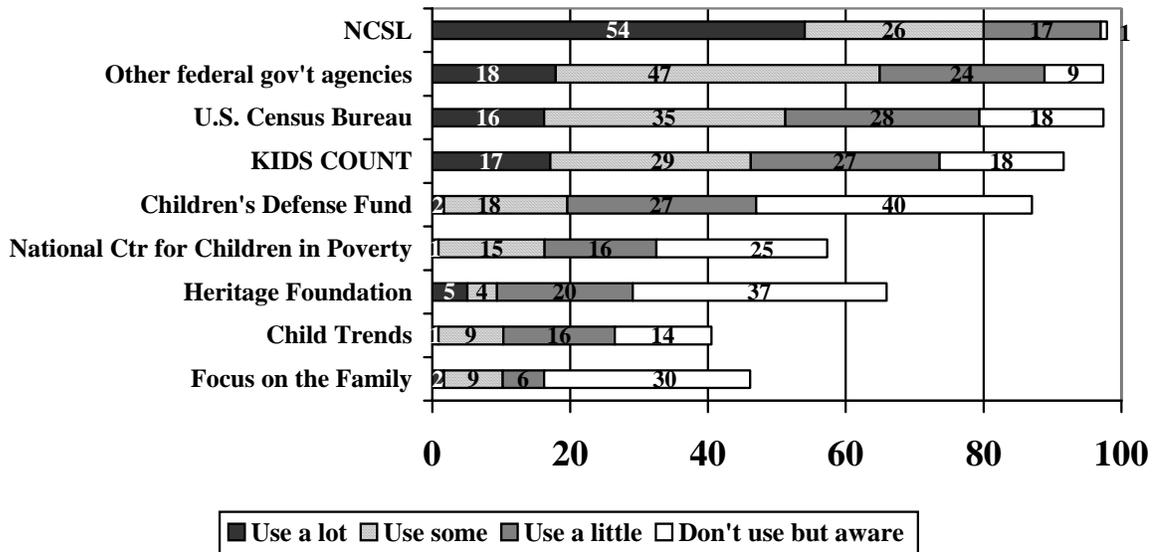


Figure 2
Legislative Staff Awareness and Use of National Information Resources



- The National Conference of Legislatures is the most commonly used source of information on the status and well-being of children. Eighty-five percent of legislators and 97 percent of legislative staff report using this source for information. Twenty-six percent of legislators and 54 percent of legislative staff say they use it "a lot." No other source is used as much.
- Approximately two-thirds of legislators and 80 percent of staff members get information from the U.S. Census Bureau and other federal government agencies. Less than 10 percent of legislators and 20 percent of staff members say they use either organization "a lot."
- A majority of legislators (55%) say they use KIDS COUNT, and 17 percent use it "a lot". Nearly three-quarters of legislative staff use KIDS COUNT, with 17 percent reporting that they use it "a lot." Twenty percent of legislators and 18 percent of staff are aware of KIDS COUNT but don't use it.
- Survey data indicate that both legislators and legislative staff use other non-profit organizations that provide research and information on children's issues much less frequently, including The Children's Defense Fund, The Heritage Foundation, Focus on the Family, Child Trends and the National Center for Children in Poverty. Less than half of each group uses these sources, and those who use them are most likely to use them only "a little."
- Political party and political orientation are strongly related to legislators' use and awareness of KIDS COUNT. Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to say they use KIDS COUNT "a lot": 26 percent versus 10 percent. Democrats are less likely than Republicans to say they are not aware of KIDS COUNT: 16 percent versus 27 percent.

Use of KIDS COUNT by Political Affiliation

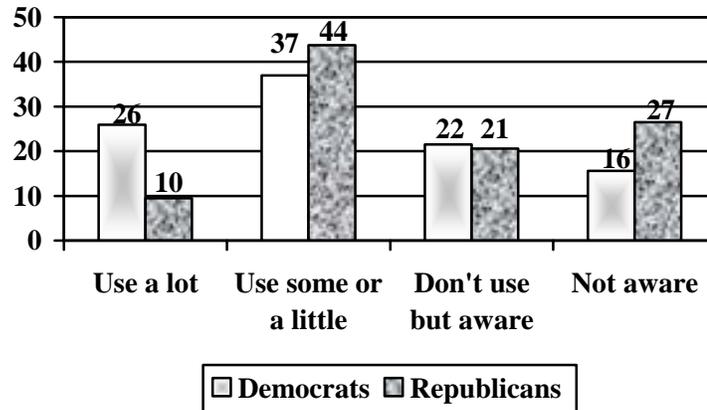


Figure 1 (Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.)

- Legislators who describe their political orientation as liberal are more likely than those who describe themselves as middle-of-the-road or conservative to use KIDS COUNT: 38 percent of liberals compared to 21 percent of middle-of-the-road and 5 percent of conservatives say they use KIDS COUNT "a lot." Eleven percent of liberals, versus 18 percent of middle-of-the-road and 29 percent of conservatives, are not aware of KIDS COUNT.

Use of KIDS COUNT by Political Orientation

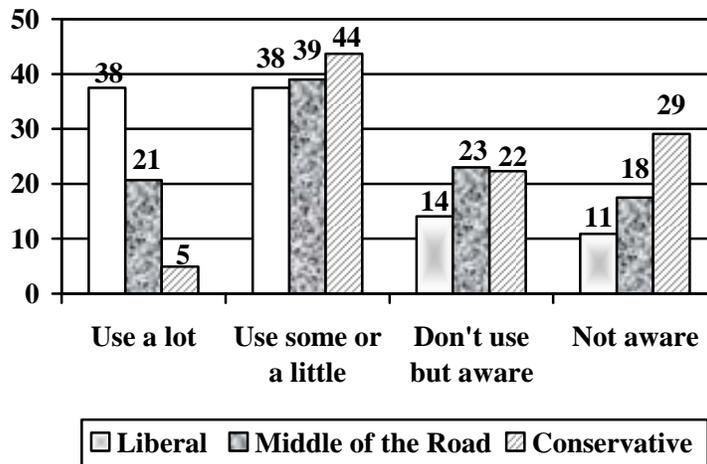


Figure 2 (Percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding.)

- Legislators who have served for six or more years are substantially more likely than those who have served only one to five years to report that they use KIDS COUNT "a lot." More than one-quarter of longer-serving legislators say they use KIDS COUNT "a lot" compared to 8 percent of those who have served for less time.

Importance of Having Measures on the Well-Being of Children

A majority (51%) of legislators and half of legislative staff think it is "very important" to have access to consistent measures on the status and well-being of children by state that are tracked over time. There are differences, however, based on party and political orientation. Democrats and liberals are substantially more likely than others to think it is "very important" to have access to consistent measures. Two-thirds of Democrats compared to slightly more than one-third of Republicans think it is "very important." Three-quarters of liberals compared to 55 percent of middle-of-the-road and about one-third of conservatives think it is "very important."

A majority of all legislators (81%) and legislative staff (72%) are satisfied with the data that are currently available to them for tracking the status and well-being of children in their state. Many more in each group are "somewhat satisfied" (60% of legislators and 59% of legislative staff) than "very satisfied" (21% of legislators and 13% of staff members). Democrats and Republicans are equally likely to be "very" or "somewhat satisfied" with the data that are currently available to them for tracking the status and well-being of children in their state. Liberals are more likely to be satisfied than others, but 19 percent of liberals are dissatisfied with available data.

Users of KIDS COUNT data express greater satisfaction with the data currently available for tracking the status of children than do non-users. Among legislators, 28% of KIDS COUNT users say they are very satisfied compared to 15% of non-users. Among legislative staff, the pattern is similar with 18% of users saying they are very satisfied, compared to 4% of non-users.

Awareness of KIDS COUNT

When asked specifically about the Data Book or Web site in Part II of the survey, a somewhat smaller proportion of legislators and legislative staff members indicate they are familiar with KIDS COUNT. Only legislators and staffers who said they are familiar with either the KIDS COUNT Data Book or Web site were asked to respond to specific questions about KIDS COUNT.

Familiarity with KIDS COUNT

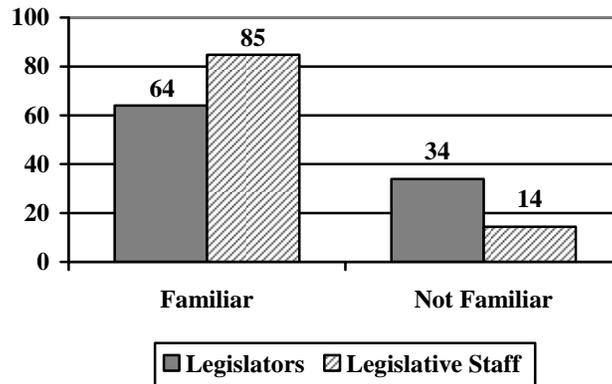


Figure 3 (Percentages add to less than 100% because some persons did not respond)

Familiarity with KIDS COUNT may be unrelated to a respondent’s legislative role. One-fifth of legislators were aware of KIDS COUNT before joining the legislature. A similar proportion of staffers were aware of KIDS COUNT before becoming legislative staff members. In the focus group, several participants noted that they had become familiar with KIDS COUNT in their professional lives apart from the legislature or through service on boards of non-profit organizations.

Mailing is an effective way of getting KIDS COUNT to legislators: 61 percent of those familiar with KIDS COUNT heard about it because they received the Data Book in the mail (see Table 1A). Fifteen percent received the Data Book in person. Forty-five percent of legislators heard about KIDS COUNT from an advocacy group. At least one-in-five heard about KIDS COUNT from a state government agency or from a state legislative staffer. Media and local government are less effective methods for introducing KIDS COUNT to legislators.

Table 1A: How have you heard about KIDS COUNT?	
State Legislators	
How Heard about KIDS COUNT	Percent of Those Familiar with KIDS COUNT Naming Each Source*
Received the Data Book in the mail	61%
From an advocacy group	45%
From a state government agency	26%
From a state legislative staffer	20%
From a state legislator	17%
In the newspaper	16%
Was given the Data Book in person	15%
In a newsletter or other publication	14%
From a service provider	13%
From a constituent	12%

On radio or television	10%
On the Internet	6%
From a local government agency	6%
From a local elected official	4%
Some other way	4%
*Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents could hear about KIDS COUNT in several different ways.	

The same dissemination strategies are successful with legislative staff members (see **Table 1B**). Almost half heard about KIDS COUNT from an advocacy group (48%), and slightly fewer received the Data Book in the mail (45%). About one-third heard about KIDS COUNT from a state government agency. The Internet was much more effective with this group: 26 percent of staffers heard about KIDS COUNT on the Internet. Newsletters and newspapers, cited by more than one in five, also did a reasonably good job of informing staff members about KIDS COUNT.

Table 1B: How have you heard about KIDS COUNT?	
Legislative Staff Members	
How Heard about KIDS COUNT	Percent of Those Familiar with KIDS COUNT Naming Each Source
Received the Data Book in the mail	45%
From an advocacy group	48%
From a state government agency	32%
On the Internet	26%
From a state legislative staffer	22%
In a newsletter or other publication	22%
In the newspaper	21%
Was given the Data Book in person	20%
From a state legislator	16%
On radio or television	10%
From a service provider	8%
From a local government agency	1%
From a local elected official	0%
Some other way	8%
*Percentages add to more than 100% because respondents could hear about KIDS COUNT in several different ways.	

In the follow-up interviews, both groups of legislator--those who use KIDS COUNT frequently and those who do not--thought that the KIDS COUNT Data Book should be delivered in person rather than sent through the mail because they are “inundated” with material and “get buried by mail.” Specifically, three of the five legislators in the “Low Use” group supported this plan. One said, “Since I have virtually no staff to sift through information, it either needs to be presented in person or be very crisp and clear with more detail later in the document.”

Legislators in the “Low Use” group suggested that different, local groups should hand deliver the Data Book and the information should be summarized:

- “Here’s the information contained in this document and here’s why it is valuable to you.”
- “It needs to be more personal....When they send it out in the mail they (legislators) don’t get what it means. People won’t know what to do with the raw data. You need to walk them through it so they have a better understanding and appreciation of what the data are really showing, so they can come up with policy initiatives or policy changes in order to accomplish what they need to accomplish.”

It matters who delivers the book to the legislator. Ideally the person should be someone who is viewed as having expertise. “Absolutely [it matters],” one legislator said. “The messenger is always a big part of the message.” The Data Book should be delivered by “someone from my district (or) the head of Children’s Alliance. I would feel they have the knowledge. I want them to deliver it in person and explain it some.”

- “They [advocacy group] make a big deal about it. It does help to know the people who bring it in. I know the people who work here [my state] are very credible.”
- “Legislators tend to listen to information that comes to them from their constituents rather than from another legislator. So groups in the community should present the information to legislators....It should come from their own constituency.”

Legislators also made suggestions about when the KIDS COUNT Data Book should be delivered. One legislator said that it should be delivered earlier, before the session starts, so that he has time to read it: “Once committees start, agendas are in place and it’s too late to change them and I’m too overwhelmed to read anything else.”

Another legislator suggested that they could do more “pre-work” through e-mail to alert legislators that the Data Book is coming. This would be a “way to build it up a little bit and to try to say this is important and it will be coming to you shortly.”

Best Features of KIDS COUNT Data

In the in-depth interviews, legislators were asked what they liked about the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Every legislator in the “High Use” group was able to identify what he or she liked best about the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Several liked the fact that they can compare data for their state from year to year, and that they can compare their state’s performance to that of other states. One legislator was especially appreciative of the “tie-in” with the state book, produced by the state KIDS COUNT grantee, which breaks the data down by county.

In the focus group, several participants expressed concern that legislators’ views of the KIDS COUNT Data Book would be influenced by how well their state did on the indicators. For example, one legislator said: “I like the KIDS COUNT Data Book because [my state] looks very

positive. I appreciate the fact that people notice what we do for our kids.” The format, he said, makes “it easy to find things.”

KIDS COUNT “gives you a baseline each year of where you are and how you compare to other states and within your own state,” and it gives them “good information when making decisions.” --Oklahoma Legislator

The KIDS COUNT Data Book is “an exceptionally useful document. I like the breakdown by state and the aggregation of data. The data are presented in summary form, the graphs and indicators are easy to access.” --North Carolina Legislator

“I like that the data are consistent from the top to the county level – that you are comparing apples and apples.” -- Nevada Legislator

None of the “Low Use” legislators who were interviewed mentioned anything they liked about the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Several said they weren’t familiar enough with the Data Book, and the rest simply didn’t answer this question.

Barriers to Using KIDS COUNT Data Book

The “Low Use” legislators whom we interviewed were asked why they use KIDS COUNT infrequently or not at all, and why they did not give the highest ratings to the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Three basic reasons emerged from the interviews:

- Lack of familiarity. Some of the legislators weren’t familiar enough with the book to know when or how to use it.
- Preference for different data sources. Some legislators think other data, typically produced by state or local agencies, are more complete or more relevant.
- Fear of an agenda. Focus group participants thought that the Data Book and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are perceived as liberal. This perception was not substantiated in the written survey findings.

Evaluation of KIDS COUNT Data Book

Legislators evaluate the KIDS COUNT Data Book positively on a number of different dimensions (see **Table 2A**). Using a four point scale, more than eight out of 10 legislators select the two most positive responses, saying the book is either “very” or “somewhat” timely, clear and understandable, credible, useful and relevant to policymakers. More than six out of 10 say the Data Book is “very” credible (65%) and that it is “very” clear and understandable (63%). At least half choose the highest rating category with respect to timeliness (58%), usefulness (53%), and relevance to policymakers (52%). Legislators are less certain that the book is respected by people with differing viewpoints. More than one-fifth said they didn’t know how to assess this. About two-thirds believe the book is either very or somewhat respected by people with differing political views. Very few legislators have negative views of the KIDS COUNT Data Book.

Table 2A: Would you say the KIDS COUNT Data Book is:*				
State Legislators				
	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not
Timely	58 %	33 %	4 %	0 %
Clear and Understandable	63 %	30%	3 %	1%
Credible	65 %	26%	4 %	1%
Useful	53 %	36%	7 %	1%
Relevant to policy makers	52 %	34%	9 %	1%
Respected by people with differing political views	32 %	32%	10 %	3%

* Percentages are based on legislators who say they are familiar with KIDS COUNT. Percentages add to less than 100% because they do not include persons who did not provide a rating.

Legislator Rating of KIDS COUNT

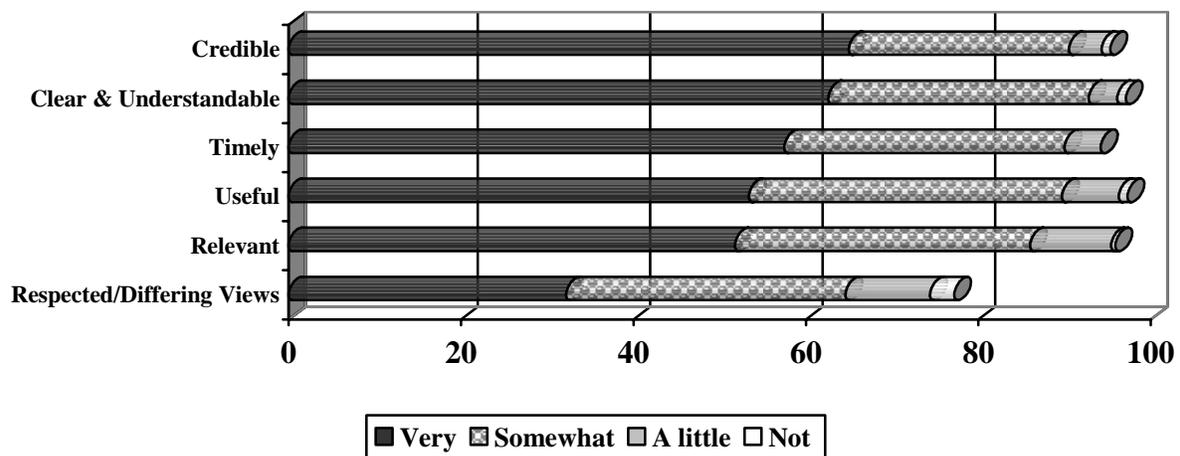


Figure 4 (Percentages add to less than 100% because they do not include persons who gave no response.)

Legislative staff also evaluate the KIDS COUNT Data Book favorably, but they are somewhat less likely than legislators to give the Data Book the most positive rating (see **Table 2B**). Nevertheless, at least 80 percent of staffers say the book is "very" or "somewhat" timely, clear and understandable, credible, useful and relevant to policy makers. Nearly 70 percent say the Data Book is "very" clear and understandable. This is the only dimension where staff are more positive than legislators, possibly because they more often deal with statistics in their work. A majority (57%) of staffers say the Data Book is "very" credible. More than 40 percent say it is "very" useful (45%) and "very" relevant (42%) to policy makers. Like legislators, staffers are uncertain that the book is respected by people with different viewpoints. Almost one in three couldn't assess this. A majority (55%) believes the book is either "very" or "somewhat" respected by people with differing political views. Virtually no staff members have a negative view of the Data Book.

Table 2B: Would you say the KIDS COUNT Data Book is:*				
Legislative Staff Members				
	Very	Somewhat	A little	Not
Timely	34%	49%	8%	1%
Clear and Understandable	69%	29%	0%	0%
Credible	57%	35%	4%	0%
Useful	45%	43%	7%	1%
Relevant to policy makers	42%	42%	8%	1%
Respected by people with differing political views	24%	31%	9%	3%

* Percentages are based on staff members who say they are familiar with KIDS COUNT. Percentages add to less than 100% because they do not include persons who gave no response.

Legislative Staff Rating of KIDS COUNT

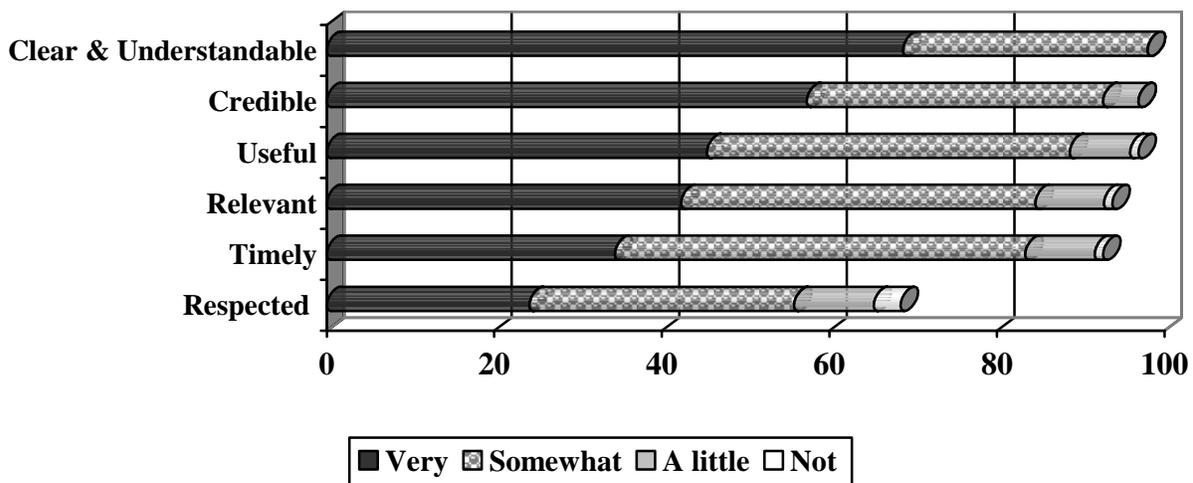


Figure 5 (Percentages add to less than 100% because they do not include persons who gave no response.)

Legislators who say they heard about KIDS COUNT from an advocacy group rate it more highly than those who heard about it in other ways. Seventy-eight percent of legislators who heard about KIDS COUNT from an advocacy group, compared to 56 percent of others, say that KIDS COUNT is "very" credible. Similarly, a higher proportion of legislators who heard about KIDS COUNT from an advocacy group than from other sources say that KIDS COUNT is "very" useful: 62 percent versus 48 percent. This group also is more likely to say that KIDS COUNT is "very" timely.

The data suggest that legislators who heard about KIDS COUNT from more than one source are more likely than those who heard about it from only one source to evaluate it as "very" credible (71% versus 56%) and "very" useful (57% versus 48%).

Legislators who serve on committees dealing with issues that affect children and families rate KIDS COUNT somewhat more positively than others. Legislators who serve on these committees are

more likely than others to say that KIDS COUNT is "very" clear and understandable: compare 68 percent to 51 percent. This may be due to the fact that legislators on these committees are more familiar with the types of data presented in KIDS COUNT.

Legislators serving on committees that deal with children's and family issues also are more likely than others to say that KIDS COUNT is "very" useful: 56 percent versus 47 percent. This may be because they use these data in committee work. There is no difference between the two groups in how they assess the credibility of KIDS COUNT.

A majority of respondents rate the KIDS COUNT Data Book favorably. Democrats and liberals rate several aspects of the KIDS COUNT Data Book more favorably than others; however, a majority of Republicans and nearly one-half of conservatives rate the Data Book as "very" credible, consider it useful, relevant and timely. These findings suggest that there are no significant differences in how Democrats and Republicans view the book.

A legislator who hadn't read the Data Book before being invited to the focus group was impressed with the credibility of the information about "how well our child support enforcement people are doing." He said, "I would be one of those people who would say that the report has a liberal bias. It's not that the statistics are wrong, but the things they have decided to collect statistics on."

Most of the legislators we interviewed who are frequent KIDS COUNT users were unaware of legislators in their state who question the credibility of KIDS COUNT. For example, the Nevada legislator said: "I never heard KIDS COUNT attacked in any hearing. I never heard it criticized publicly. I have never seen a negative news story in my state about KIDS COUNT." The North Dakota legislator said, "Since North Dakota does so well in KIDS COUNT, most people give it high credibility!" When asked if the KIDS COUNT Data Book is credible, a North Carolina legislator responded: "KIDS COUNT has been used as a source on the floor and in committee and I've never heard anyone question its credibility. The same was true when I was on the school board. I never heard it attacked in six years on the school board or one year in the legislature."

In the interviews with legislators who use KIDS COUNT infrequently, no one attributed their lack of use to a problem with credibility or political bias. As noted previously, not using the book stemmed more from lack of familiarity or a preference for other data sources.

Several legislators suggested that the book include regional rankings as well as national ratings "because people compare themselves to other states in their region, not nationally."

Legislators also disagreed whether the Data Book should include more editorial content. Some suggested that credibility would be enhanced by presenting raw data only, while others felt more interpretation was needed. A Georgia legislator, for example, said he would like the data presented in context to help him understand why states perform differently. A New Hampshire legislator also stressed the need to put the indicators in context and to educate legislators about what the data mean. He said this would prevent it from being misinterpreted by legislators and used to forward their own agendas.

In the focus group, there was general agreement that the data presentation is overwhelming. Some suggested a tailored publication program that would give legislators the national data and the section for their state, rather than a book with the details for all states.

Preferred Format

In the survey, two-thirds of legislators and 78 percent of staffers prefer to get the information in KIDS COUNT in a single volume. One-quarter of legislators and one-fifth of staff members have no preference about how KIDS COUNT is presented. Only 8 percent of legislators and 4 percent of legislative staff would prefer it to be separated into several different publications.

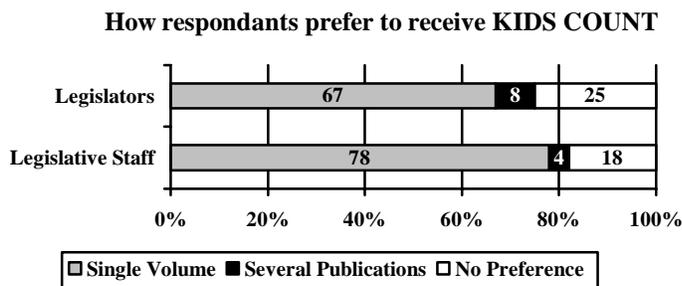


Figure 8

Several focus group participants commented that the volume was so overwhelming that they never had time to look at it. Several legislators interviewed in the "Low Use" group similarly reported that there was too much data for them to handle.

Assessment of KIDS COUNT Data Book Essay

Focus group participants believe legislators don't read the essay because they receive too much information and have too little time to read it at all. Several legislators thought the essay would be seen as liberal. However, they agreed, after reading the essay in the 2003 Data Book, that it wasn't liberal.

In the interviews, legislators who frequently used the KIDS COUNT Data Book were told that each year the Data Book includes an essay as well as data. Then they were asked if they ever read the essay and, if they did, what they thought of it.

- Three legislators who are frequent KIDS COUNT users said they never read the essay. The major reason is time constraints. One legislator explained: "It's probably too long. Every year when I get the [KIDS COUNT Data] Book, I start at the beginning and skim through it. I probably won't read something if it's titled 'essay'—essay means overwhelming and boring. I skim the book to get a general idea and then go straight to Nevada. Then I put the book on the shelf and dig it out when I need it."

- One legislator couldn't recall the essay but said "I think the essay is an appropriate thing to do, but present analysis rather than an instrument of inspiration to do a specific thing."
- One legislator said the essay is "crucial. It's kind of like an executive summary—a way of getting a snapshot before looking at all the statistics. Some people are comfortable looking at statistics and others learn better from reading a synopsis. I like both the essay and statistics... to understand the context of the statistics in the book. I want a commentary on what the research has shown."
- Another legislator who reads the essay likes it because it helps people interpret the data and offers policy ideas: "The essay also provides a highlight of states that are making a difference and programs that are making a difference. I like the way it is written, integrating analysis and efforts that are working on the state level; that is extremely useful and I wouldn't change integrating those initiatives. Most policymakers want to get quickly to the point of the analysis and then see who's working on it and is it successful and have it at their fingertips."

How KIDS COUNT Information is Used

Legislators who are aware of KIDS COUNT use the information in different ways. (see **Table 3A**). They most frequently use KIDS COUNT to inform themselves about children's needs (79%) and to do background research on an issue (68%). They also use it in committee deliberations (49%), to craft legislation, policies or programs (48%) and in speeches (46%). Forty-five percent use it to check or confirm other data sources.

Legislators who serve on committees dealing with issues that affect children and families are more likely than others to report using KIDS COUNT in the legislative process. These lawmakers say they use KIDS COUNT to craft legislation, policies or programs (53 percent versus 39 percent), in speeches (53 percent versus 32 percent) and to write grant proposals (7 percent versus 0 percent). In contrast, legislators whose committee assignments appear unrelated to children and family issues are more likely to use KIDS COUNT to inform themselves about general children's issues as opposed to other complex tasks: 86 percent versus 75 percent.

Generally, legislators who have served longer are more likely than those who have not to say they use KIDS COUNT to craft legislation, policies or programs. As term limits force legislators to retire, KIDS COUNT may need to devote greater effort to dissemination to have equivalent impact.

There are a few statistically significant differences by political party and political orientation in how legislators use the information provided by KIDS COUNT.

- Those who say their views are liberal or middle-of-the-road are almost twice as likely as conservatives to say they use KIDS COUNT to craft legislation, policies or programs; 60 percent of liberals and 55 percent of middle-of-the-road, compared to 33 percent of conservatives, use KIDS COUNT in this way.

- Democrats are more likely than Republicans to use KIDS COUNT in speeches: 53 percent versus 37 percent. Likewise, approximately half of liberals and middle of the road, compared to one-third of conservatives, use KIDS COUNT in speeches.
- Liberals and middle-of-the-road also are more likely than conservatives to use KIDS COUNT to do background research on an issue; 70 percent of liberals and middle-of-the-road and 58 percent of conservatives. Nevertheless, a majority of all three groups report using KIDS COUNT to do background research on issues.

Table 3A: In what ways do you use the information provided by KIDS COUNT?*	
State Legislators	
	percent Using Information
To inform myself about children’s needs	79%
To do background research on an issue	68%
In committee deliberations	49%
To craft legislation, policies or programs	48%
In speeches	46%
To check or confirm other data sources	45%
To hold state agencies accountable	26%
To write grant proposals	5%
Some other way	3%
* Percentages are based on legislators who say they are familiar with KIDS COUNT.	

Table 3B: In what ways do you use the information provided by KIDS COUNT?*	
Legislative Staff	
	percent Using Information
To do background research on an issue	91%
To check or confirm other data sources	57%
To inform myself about children’s needs	51%
In committee deliberations	33%
To craft legislation, policies or programs	28%
To hold state agencies accountable	13%
In speeches	12%
To write grant proposals	0%
Some other way	4%
* Percentages are based on legislative staff who say they are familiar with KIDS COUNT	

On average, legislative staff that are aware of KIDS COUNT use the information in KIDS COUNT in three different ways. Ninety-one percent of legislative staff say they use it to do background research on issues (see **Table 3B**). About half use the information in KIDS COUNT to check or confirm other data sources (57%) and to inform themselves about children’s needs (51%).

As would be expected, staff members are less likely than legislators to use KIDS COUNT in the legislative process, although one-third say they use the information in committee deliberations, and 28 percent use it to craft legislation, policies or programs.

Assessment of State KIDS COUNT Initiatives

In addition to funding the national Data Book and website, the Annie E. Casey Foundation supports organizations within the states to help disseminate the information in the Data Book and to extend the data gathering efforts to issues of state concern. Surveys were tailored by state so legislators and legislative staff could report on their awareness of and evaluation of the specific organization funded by Casey to do KIDS COUNT work.

- Sixty-three percent of all legislators and 72 percent of legislative staff are familiar with the work that their state KIDS COUNT grantee is doing.

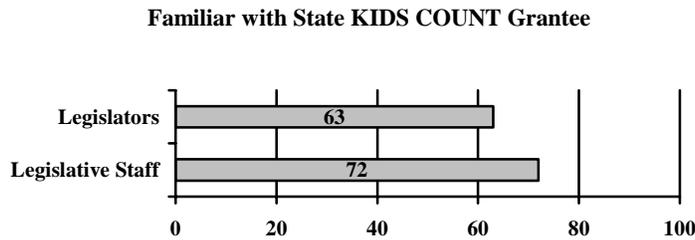


Figure 9

- A majority of legislators in each subgroup are familiar with the work of their state’s KIDS COUNT grantee, although Democrats and liberals are most likely to be familiar.
- Similar to results for the national KIDS COUNT products, legislators view state initiatives positively. Of those able to judge, 89 percent view state grantees’ work as either "very" (61%) or "somewhat" (28%) credible. Similarly, 87 percent say their work is either "very" (58%) or “somewhat” (29%) useful. Almost no legislators say the work is not credible or useful.
- Staff also views state initiatives positively. Of those able to judge, 89 percent think that state grantees’ work is either "very" (48%) or “somewhat” (41%) useful, and 86 percent think that it is "very" (48%) or “somewhat” (37%) credible. No legislative staff members say the work is "not" credible or useful.
- Differences in views of state KIDS COUNT initiatives by political party and political orientation are similar to differences for the national KIDS COUNT products.
 - Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to say that state KIDS COUNT work is "very" credible: 71 percent to 48 percent. Nevertheless, almost half of Republicans think the KIDS COUNT work done by their state grantee is "very" credible.
 - Similarly, liberals are most likely and conservatives least likely to say the work is "very" credible; however, nearly half of conservatives say it is "very" credible.
 - Democrats are substantially more likely than Republicans to say the KIDS COUNT state grantee’s work is "very" useful: 70 percent versus 41 percent. Liberals are more than twice as likely as conservatives to think it is "very" useful: 84 percent compared to 35 percent (and 59 percent of middle-of-the-road). Still, more than 70 percent of Republicans and conservatives think that the state grantee’s work is "very" or "somewhat" useful.

All but one of the focus group participants recognized the names of the listed advocacy groups, but not always in relation to the release and use of the Data Book. The perceived credibility of the information often was related to their views of the advocacy group.

In the interviews, several legislators made comments about their state's KIDS COUNT advocacy groups. One legislator said that the local group was "too university oriented. It is not doing the work of an advocacy organization. They are not saying, 'Here's the data, here's the next step, here's what has to happen.' They just give out the data and don't help with the action agenda."

In contrast, another legislator was very pleased with his state group: "We have wonderful people doing it, credible people. I hope other states have as good people as we do...They lobby for children's issues. They use it in the information they send to legislators...They do [the data] by county and I like the way they do that."

A third legislator suggested that state KIDS COUNT group might be visible in the state capitol, but that little was heard about the project in more rural areas of the state.

Impact of KIDS COUNT

While relatively few legislators who are aware of either the national or state program think that KIDS COUNT has had a "major" impact on public awareness or public policy, a majority think it has had at least a "moderate" impact in each of these areas (see **Table 4A on page 26**). Few legislators think that KIDS COUNT has had no impact.

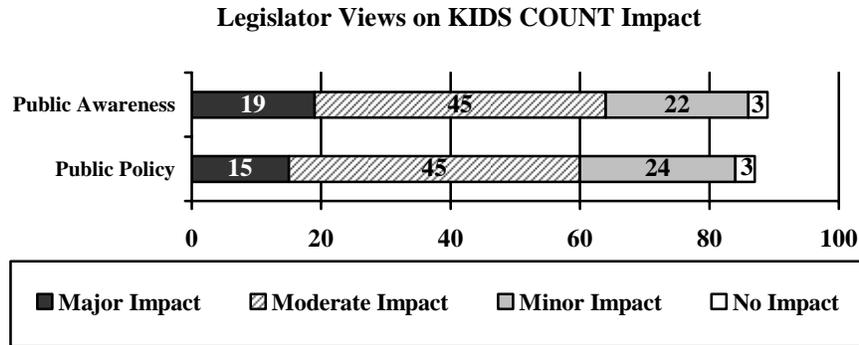


Figure 10 (Percentages add to less than 100% because some legislators gave no response.)

Staff members who are aware of either the national or state KIDS COUNT program are less likely than legislators to think that it has had a "major" impact, particularly on public policy (see **Table 4B on page 26**). Nevertheless, 60 percent of legislative staff think that KIDS COUNT has had at least a "moderate" impact on public awareness, and 46 percent believe it has had at least a "moderate" impact on public policy. Few staff members think that KIDS COUNT has had no impact in either area.

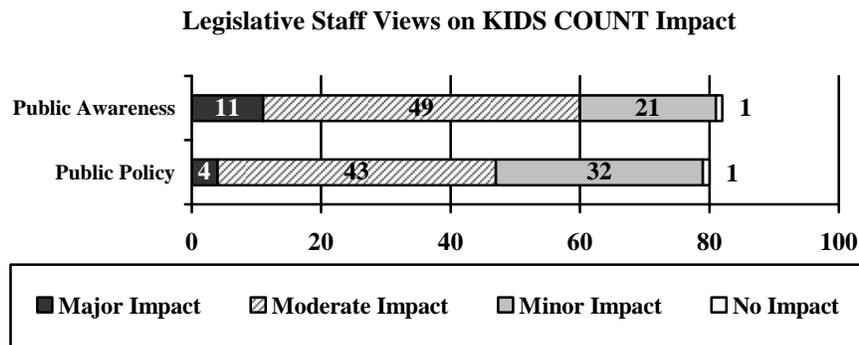


Figure 11 (Percentages add to less than 100% because some staff members gave no response).

There are no statistically significant differences in perceived impact of KIDS COUNT by political party. Differences by political orientation are consistent with results for other

questions. A majority of legislators of each political orientation think that KIDS COUNT has had a "major" or "moderate" impact on public awareness and public policy. Liberal and middle-of-the-road legislators, however, are substantially more likely than conservatives to perceive this. Three-quarters of liberal and middle-of-the road legislators think that KIDS COUNT has had a "major" or "moderate" impact on public awareness, compared to half of conservatives. At least 70 percent of who identify themselves as liberal or middle-of-the-road, versus half of conservatives, think KIDS COUNT has had a "major" or "moderate" impact on public policy.

"The data is used many times by our newspapers to show where we are and where we're going. We've been able to do some things in the tobacco area and in the health and education area that we may not have been able to do without good data....It helps constituent groups who are interested in these issues. People doing initiatives 'quote KIDS COUNT right and left'. It helps people who are trying to work with legislators." An Oklahoma legislator.

"It educates policy makers, legislators and county commissioners. We are expected to be experts in too many areas but KC helps us understand what the context is. Over time, this raises public awareness." A Nevada Legislator.

"KIDS COUNT has raised awareness of legislators who otherwise would have a pretty myopic view of what was going on by looking in their own community." A Kansas Legislator.

"Every time a new [KIDS COUNT Data Book] report comes out it generates new items on television, radio and print—it connects in a way that news agencies can understand and use. It is simple enough to catch their attention and be used in a simplistic fashion, which is good. It generates stories that the average person will read. Research studies won't get that far." A Nevada legislator.

"I think that legislative funding for the foster care system and some of the oversight of the foster care system has been facilitated by KIDS COUNT. ... The statistics in KIDS COUNT have been very valuable in pointing out problems to other legislators." A Kansas Legislator.

"Most instrumental is to look at data during allocation process—subcommittees make decisions with limited resources. I can assure you that that data was useful as the Department of Children and Families budget was reviewed.... It's more behind the scenes. It's an instrument that's more useful in subcommittees and working with staff to look at specific target areas—what are we doing and what is missing. More in earlier stage than floor debates." A Florida Legislator.

We used it when Nevada instituted our first statewide suicide prevention hotline several years ago. We use dropout numbers in discussions about legislation "a lot"—KIDS COUNT says Nevada is last and other data show similar results. Mostly I am looking where the state doesn't do well and trying to see if public policy will help. I used the child death rate to successfully introduce legislation to strengthen the child death review teams—stronger investigation and reporting, also raised money for prevention efforts. Any time I have a bill or am looking at a bill that deals with children I think about how KIDS COUNT data relates to that bill." A Nevada Legislator

Of those interviewed, all of the legislators who frequently use KIDS COUNT were able to describe how KIDS COUNT has impacted public awareness of problems faced by children and families and/or how it has impacted public policy in their state.

From an awareness perspective, some focused on the impacts on legislators, getting them to take a broader perspective than their own immediate community. Others noted the impact on local elected officials and the public. Media coverage of the report is important in getting people's attention. The following are a number of examples of what they said. More complete data are presented in Appendix 4.

In terms of impacts on public policy, legislators noted the data are most often used in behind-the-scenes deliberations, often in subcommittee. It is used in budget deliberations, and in reviewing agency and state performance.

Appendix 1

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION:
NCSL'S FOCUS GROUP ON THE *KIDS COUNT* DATA BOOK
September 16, 2003**

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) invited six legislators and three legislative staff to Denver, Colorado on September 16, 2003, for a focus group to solicit feedback on the Kids Count *Data Book*, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The participants were chosen for their geographic and political balance. Attending were:

Representative Ro Foege, Iowa
Representative Pete Hershberger, Arizona, Chair, Legislature's Children's Caucus
Representative Tim Owens, Kansas
Senator Charles Scott, Wyoming, Chair, Health Committee
Representative Marie St. Fleur, Massachusetts, Chair, House Education Committee
Representative May Whittington, Mississippi
Katherine Schill, Minnesota, Chair, National Association of Legislative Fiscal Offices
Nicole Vazquez, California, staff for Senate Health & Human Services Committee
Kate Wade, Wisconsin, Chair, National Legislative Program Evaluation Society.

Mary Fairchild, a program director at NCSL, organized the meeting. Peggy Kerns, director of NCSL Center for Ethics in Government, facilitated the discussion. Also attending were Peggy Cuciti and Laura Appelbaum, the Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation, Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado at Denver, and various members of NCSL staff from the program areas of health, education, and children and families.

The purpose of the focus group was to gather information on the usefulness of the KIDS COUNT Data Book to a legislative audience, and to identify and refine issues to be covered in a national survey of over 1,000 legislators and staff. The focus group discussion evolved around three main areas:

- Legislator and staff knowledge of the data book
- How it is used
- The quality of the information, including the format and presentation of the information

OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF THE *DATA BOOK*

The general observations about the book are that it contains important and relevant information that would be beneficial to state legislators and staff -- if they read it. Legislators receive such a large amount of information that it is impossible to read everything unless it directly relates to issues they are working on. Most states do not have a large staff (some have none), so often there is no one to review all the information that the legislator could possibly use. Several people commented that the volume was so overwhelming that they never had time to look at it. The most knowledgeable were those legislators who had served in local government or had human services jobs. They understood the importance of the information and had already read and used it before they became legislators.

The book is seen as having a liberal bias because it deals with poor children, the reputation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the list of partners and the advocacy groups.

In preparation for the meeting, most read the essay and the data for the first time. Everyone was favorably impressed, especially the first-time readers, with the amount of excellent information contained in the report. Several said they thought the information was liberal, but understanding that, they were accepting of the data. Others said the book helped confirm what they already knew and helped leverage their points of view. One legislator said his Children's Caucus uses the report in a way that augments policy positions and works to convince other legislative members that the data is correct and relevant.

REVIEW OF DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The discussion began with how the participants first learned about the publication and their knowledge of their local state data book. We made it clear that we are referring to the national Kids Count *Data Book*, not the one that includes only their state information. One legislator was aware of his local book and brought it with him, though it was a copy of the Year 2000 report.

1. Their knowledge and use of the *KIDS COUNT* Data Book

- Of the six legislators, three knew about KIDS COUNT from previous jobs as a member of a city council or work in the human service field.
- The three staff members had vague recollections of learning about the data book through research requests and information provided by the state advocacy group.
- One legislator first became aware of the book when he was director of a social service agency for kids. This legislator actively uses the book in the children's caucus, as do other members of the caucus. They have press conferences and issue press releases and statements referring to the data.
- Participants expressed concern about receiving an overwhelming amount of information and the book becomes lost in their stack of research documents. Some glance at the book when it arrives; some are vaguely aware of it.
- The group as a whole had not read the book before their invitation to this focus group. All were vaguely aware of the book through references to the data in press releases and handouts from advocacy group.

2. Do their peers know and use the book?

- The state advocacy group's use of the book has a direct correlation to participants' knowledge of the book. The advocacy groups used the book in various ways including reference to the data in direct testimony at committee hearings, and use of statistics and citations on information sheets.

- The general feeling was that most legislators and staff do not know much about the book and ignore its contents unless they serve on or staff committees that deal with children and human services, or they are interested in these issues.
- States that have more staff seem to have more knowledge of the book.
- Many in the group mentioned that their peers believe the data book has a liberal bias and so discount it. Focus group members believe that many conservative legislators do not see the KIDS COUNT Data Book as a legitimate source.
- The credibility of the data stems from the person who cites it and the group that distributes it.
- One legislator indicated that the data supports a centrist theme. The more politically moderate participants echoed this comment.

3. Impressions of book and essay

- One member of the focus group had not read the book until he was preparing for this discussion. He was impressed. “This is the first time I’ve seen credible information on how well our child support enforcement people are doing. I would be one of those who would say the report has a liberal bias, not that the statistics are wrong, but the things they have decided to collect statistics on.” This legislator had an issue with teen pregnancy rates. In the Mormon community teen marriage and pregnancy is acceptable, and including it as an indicator is perceived as a liberal bias. However, he also said, “Until I got summoned to this thing, this book was irrelevant simply because there was so much volume that I never had time to look at it.”
- Several commented that there is a core tension about whether the data book is informational or advocacy. This may undermine the credibility of the book. One staff member said, “I believe this document is two different things. The essay is one thing entirely.” She went on to say that the essay is a discussion on outcomes of poverty and a set of actions. “The second component is the data set and the explanation...and comparative analysis. The essay conveys one message, the data set conveys another message and the title of the document is misleading totally...”
- The participants suggested that the title should be changed. The title, The KIDS COUNT Data Book, sounds as if it is referring to all children; however, the book focuses on children in poverty. It does not help legislators with constituents who have kids who are doing well or who are middle-class.
- Suggestions of title change: Trends in Well Being of Poor Children, Poor Kids Count Too, Vulnerable Children, Count Kids
- Others perceived that the book is not just talking about poor children, but all children. Children of affluent families drop out, not just poor children.

- A staff participant said the purpose of the book is not to present information for a middle income or affluent audience. Her boss “would bridge the statistics with rhetoric and try to convince her colleagues to support programs. ” She said that with policymakers, they would need to have “buy-in ...and care about the status of the poor.”
- The essay is not read. Legislators get so much information they do not have time to read it. It is too much to digest and several participants said it would be seen as liberal if people read it. This was disputed by one legislator who said he did not see a liberal bias in it at all. He said the essay portrayed a centrist position since it says “hard work, self-sacrifice and prudent investment are the building blocks of economic security.”
- There was general agreement that people who believe the essay has a liberal bias may not have actually read it. “It’s talking about poverty and so therefore it must be the liberals are going at it again.”
- There’s a value in comparative statistics for legislators who have a vision for children.
- An executive summary would be helpful, as would a summary of each state's information.
- Participants are not sure how it connects to the statistics.
- Could the essay be a separate document?
- Essay may be misplaced in the document. Should it be a stand-alone document?
- Essay says something different from the indicators.
- Book needs a different type of executive summary and a different layout.

4. Discussion of indicators

- The initial reaction was that the indicators were only for poor children. As participants looked at them more, there was some consensus that the indicators are related to all children: percent of low birth weight babies, infant mortality rate, child death rate, rate of teen deaths by accident etc.
- How much are the indicators designed to support the essay?
- There are too many indicators; however, the group added a few more related to substance abuse, some rating of the quality of child care and child abuse and re-abuse.

5. Discussion of data presentation, use of information and data, and influence of information

- Data presentation is overwhelming.
- Need summary sheet on each state.
- Influence of information is coupled with the integrity and credibility of legislators and others who use it.
- Two responses: "It would influence me to vote for a bill." "It would influence me to vote no."
- From supportive legislator: "I don't think (KIDS COUNT) creates my vision. It helps me prioritize and focus, it's meaningful.
- Information not generally used by legislators or staff.
- The best use of the information comes from its use by the state advocacy group or other organizations that refer to it. As a stand-alone document for legislators and legislative staff, it is not generally used.
- The data generally would not influence or change thinking on an issue, but would strengthen the positions held. One legislator said it would influence him to vote against the position.
- Little reference to the data book in the media. In one state, the Children's' Caucus has a press conference and releases press statements when the book is published in order to augment their positions on children's issues. Otherwise, participants did not see much mention or editorial comment.
- Not much knowledge of other Annie E. Casey Foundation products that relate to KIDS COUNT.
- General agreement that the Data Book, if properly and effectively used, can create a dialogue about children's issues that is important when legislators and staff create and discuss legislation.

6. Knowledge of their state advocacy group

- Mixed reactions. All but one recognize the names of the listed advocacy groups, but not always in relation to the release and use of the Data Book. Again, the credibility of the information often was related to their views of the advocacy groups.
- General perception that the information was biased, especially if actively used by human services advocacy groups, and that advocacy groups could be more effective in their use and

dissemination of the information. Too many groups distribute information on children's issues and "they come at you from their own perspective."

- One legislator emphasized that he "wants a legislative identity separate from the advocate identity." Others agreed.

7. Comments about the partners/contributors

- NCSL is credible, but some question the biases of some of the other partners and contributors.
- General agreement that the list of partners/contributors reinforced the notion that the data book is liberal and bias. Not all thought this was bad.

8. What other sources of information do they use?

- U.S. Census Bureau
- Each participant mentioned state-based groups, such as California's It's Children Now and Wyoming's Children's Action Alliance
- State and federal agencies
- Wall Street Journal, The Economist

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR NCSL FOCUS GROUP ON KIDS COUNT

September 16, 2003

Our discussion will include three main areas:

- Knowledge of the data book
 - How it is used
 - The quality of the information, including the format and presentation of the information
1. Gather data on how they know about the KIDS COUNT *Data Book*.
 - How did you first learn about the publication?
Ask legislators first; then call on staff
 - Determine which book we are referring to: Did you know that there is one book with national data and others, produced at the state level, that contain county information?
 - If answer is yes, which book do you prefer and use more often?
 - (Need to make sure the group is clear about which publication are questions are referring to?)
 2. Gather information on the knowledge of KIDS COUNT by their peers - other legislators and staff.
 - Do other legislators in your state ever mention it?
 - What about other legislative staff or staff agencies?
 - Have you ever heard of KIDS COUNT referred to in committee testimony? On the chamber floor?
 - What about other forums such as local meetings, conferences?
 - Do advocacy agencies mention the report?
 3. Gather information on their impressions of the publication - positive, negative or neutral image?
 - Why?
 - How do you define its purpose?
 - Have you ever debated the merits of the information with another legislator or staff?
Anyone else?

4. Discussion of the indicators.

- Turn to page ?
- Are these the best ones to use?
- Do they give you the information you need?

5. Now let's shift our line of thinking to focus on how legislators and legislative staff use information and data.

- Do you use the information?
- If yes, how? (To compare your state with other states? In a speech? In testimony?)
- If no, why not?
- How is the data viewed by most legislators in your state? What about legislative staff, how do they view it?

6. This part of the discussion also is meant to learn about data presentation—what kind of information do legislators want and how is data best presented for a legislative audience?)

- Describe how the information is presented? (Probes: accessible, easy to use, easy/difficult to understand, easy/difficult to follow) - give examples.
- How do you view the format? (Is this the same question as the one above?)
- What is your opinion of the essay?
Do you read it? Strengths , weaknesses
- Are you aware that other products related to Kids Count are produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation? Do you know about the Data Wheel?
- Do you know about the web site? Do you use it?

7. Discussion of influence of the information

- Has it ever influenced your thinking on an issue?
- If yes, can you give us an example?
- Has it ever influenced how you vote on legislation? (Probe for examples.)

8. Do they use other products/information to make policy decisions on children and family issues?
 - If yes, which publications?
 - How do you decide if an information source is reliable? (Word of staff? Reputation of publisher? Opinions from other legislators? Opinions from advocates and lobbyists?)
9. Knowledge in their state of group that distributes *KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK*?
 - In your opinion, is this group a reliable source of information?
 - How do they use the information?
 - Does their use and presentation of the data influence public policy and sway decisions?

Appendix 2

Appendix 2: Legislator Survey
Status of Children: Survey on Information Needs and Use

The National Conference of State Legislatures and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are conducting a survey to learn more about the type of information legislators need to make decisions on children’s issues, and the best way to present these data to a legislative audience. The survey results will help both NCSL and the Foundation provide information that is useful to state legislators.

1. Listed below are some national organizations that compile and disseminate statistical information on children and families. Please tell us how much you use each of these organizations to obtain information on the status and well-being of children.

Please circle one response on each line

	Use a lot	Use some	Use a little	Don't use, but aware	Don't use, Not aware, No answer
The U.S. Census Bureau.....	8.9	31.3	25.4	21.5	12.9
Other federal government agencies.....	6.0	29.2	33.1	15.9	15.8
National Center for Children in Poverty.....	1.2	10.8	17.3	22.3	48.5
Child Trends.....	1.1	10.6	11.9	15.5	60.9
Children's Defense Fund	5.9	14.6	19.9	36.0	23.8
KIDS COUNT/Annie E. Casey Foundation...	17.1	23.7	14.4	19.8	25.0
Focus on the Family	6.6	14.7	12.6	30.2	35.9
Heritage Foundation...	6.8	13.0	17.0	40.2	23.0
National Conference of State Legislatures.....	25.7	38.2	20.8	8.9	6.3

2. Please list any other organizations that are important sources of information for you on the status and well-being of children.

3. How important is it to you to have access to consistent measures on the status and well-being of children, by state, that are tracked over time? Circle one response.

1	Very important	51.3
2	Somewhat important	35.6
3	Somewhat unimportant	5.6
4	Very unimportant	4.1
9	Can't say, no answer	3.4

4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the data that are currently available to you for tracking the status and well-being of children in your state? Circle one response.

1	Very satisfied	21.0
2	Somewhat satisfied	60.0
3	Somewhat dissatisfied	9.4
4	Very dissatisfied	2.6

9 Can't say, no answer

6.9

5. If there is any specific type of information on children and teens that is important to you but that you haven't been able to find, please describe it.

KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that provides national and state-by-state indicators of child well-being on an annual basis through the national KIDS COUNT Data Book and website. Additionally, the Foundation supports state organizations that may provide reports with local data and analyses of state issues.

6. Are you familiar with the national KIDS COUNT Data Book or website? *Circle one response.*

1	Yes, familiar with KIDS COUNT Data Book	46.1
2	Yes, familiar with KIDS COUNT website	1.7
3	Yes, familiar with both	16.0
4	No, familiar with neither Skip to q. 12	34.1
5	No answer	2.1

7. How have you heard about KIDS COUNT? *Please check all that apply.*

a. ___	From a constituent	12.3
b. ___	From a state legislator	17.0
c. ___	From a state legislative staffer	20.2
d. ___	From a state government agency	26.3
e. ___	From a local elected official	4.0
f. ___	From a local government agency	5.9
g. ___	From an advocacy group	44.9
h. ___	From a service provider	12.7
i. ___	On radio or television	9.7
j. ___	In the newspaper	15.5
k. ___	In a newsletter or other publication	13.8
l. ___	On the Internet	6.3
m. ___	Received the Data Book in the mail	60.8
n. ___	Was given the Data Book in person	15.2
o. ___	Other Please specify: _____	3.6

8. Were you aware of KIDS COUNT prior to joining the legislature? *Circle one response.*

1	Yes	20.5
2	No	69.7
9	Can't recall	9.7

9. Would you say the KIDS COUNT Data Book is:

Please circle one response on each line

	Very	Some -what	A little	Not	Can't Say
Timely.....	57.5	32.5	4.2	0.0	5.7
Clear and Understandable.....	62.6	30.2	3.3	1.0	2.8
Credible.....	65.0	25.5	3.8	0.5	5.2
Useful.....	53.4	36.3	6.6	1.0	2.7
Relevant to policy makers.....	51.8	34.2	9.4	0.5	4.1
Respected by people with differing political views.....	32.2	32.4	9.8	2.8	22.8

10. The KIDS COUNT Data Book includes a lot of information. Would you prefer to get this information in a single volume as it currently is presented, or would you prefer that the information be separated into several different publications? Circle one response.

- 1 Prefer single volume 66.8
- 2 Prefer several different publications 7.6
- 3 No preference 25.6

11. In what ways do you use the information provided by KIDS COUNT? Please check all that apply.

- a. ___ To craft legislation, policies or programs 48.3
- b. ___ In committee or council deliberations 48.5
- c. ___ In speeches 46.4
- d. ___ To check or confirm other data sources 44.9
- e. ___ To hold state agencies accountable 26.4
- f. ___ To do background research on an issue 68.3
- g. ___ To inform myself about children's needs 78.5
- h. ___ To write grant proposals 5.1
- i. ___ Other uses **Please specify:**_____ 3.3

12. The Annie Casey Foundation also funds KIDS COUNT initiatives within states. Are you familiar with the work that <name grantee>.... Is doing in your state? Circle one response.

- 1 Yes 64.6
- 2 No **Skip to q. 14** 35.4

13. Would you say the KIDS COUNT work done byis:

Please circle one response on each line.

	Very	Some-what	A Little	Not	Can't Say
Credible.....	61.0	27.7	6.1	2.4	2.8
Useful.....	57.9	29.1	11.1	0.0	1.9
Respected by people with differing political views	37.3	33.5	11.9	5.3	11.9

14. Thinking about all aspects of the KIDS COUNT program, what impact, if any, do you think KIDS COUNT has had on each of the following.

Please circle one response on each line.

	Major impact	Moderate impact	Minor impact	No impact	Can't say, No answer
Public awareness of problems faced by children and families in your state.....	18.7	45.1	21.6	3.3	11.4
Public policy in your state.....	15.4	44.5	23.5	3.3	13.3

* Percentages based on legislators who are familiar with national or state KIDS COUNT.

15. How many years have you served in your state legislature?

7.45 years (mean)

16. Would you characterize your constituents as: *Circle one response.*

1	Mostly urban	25.3
2	Mostly suburban	30.2
3	Mostly rural	28.9
4	Too mixed to say	15.0
5	No response	0.6

17. What is your political affiliation? *Circle one response.*

1	Democrat	51.6
2	Republican	47.8
3	Other party	0.0
4	Not affiliated	0.0
5	No response	0.6

18. How would you describe your political orientation? *Circle one response.*

1	Strongly liberal	5.8
2	Liberal	18.2
3	Middle of the road	32.5
4	Conservative	34.1
5	Strongly conservative	6.5
6	Can't say	2.9

If you have ideas for improving the content, presentation, or distribution of KIDS COUNT, please describe them.

We want to ask a limited number of legislators some more in-depth questions about KIDS COUNT. If you would be willing to talk with us about how KIDS COUNT can better meet your needs, please fill in your name and telephone number.

Name: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Thank you very much for your help!

Please return the survey in the enclosed business reply envelope by DATE to The University of Colorado, Campus Box 133, PO Box 173364, Denver, Colorado 80217-3364.

Appendix 3

Appendix 3: Legislative Staff Survey
Status of Children: Survey on Legislative Information Needs and Use

The National Conference of State Legislatures and the Annie E. Casey Foundation are conducting a survey to learn more about legislative information needs. Legislative staff input on this survey is extremely important. The survey results will help both NCSL and the Foundation provide information that is useful to state legislatures.

1. Listed below are some national organizations that compile and disseminate statistical information on children and families. Please tell us how much you use each of these organizations to obtain information on the status and well-being of children.

Please circle one response on each line

	Use a lot	Use some	Use a little	Don't use, but aware	Don't use, Not aware, No answer
The U.S. Census Bureau.....	16.1	34.7	28.0	17.8	3.4
Other federal government agencies.....	17.8	46.6	23.7	9.3	2.5
National Center for Children in Poverty.....	.8	15.3	16.1	24.6	43.2
Child Trends.....	.8	9.3	16.1	14.4	59.3
Children's Defense Fund	1.7	17.8	27.1	39.8	13.5
KIDS COUNT/Annie E. Casey Foundation...	16.9	28.8	27.1	17.8	9.3
Focus on the Family	1.7	8.5	5.9	29.7	54.2
Heritage Foundation...	5.1	4.2	19.5	37.3	33.9
National Conference of State Legislatures.....	54.2	26.3	16.9	.8	1.6

2. Please list any other organizations that are important sources of information for you on the status and well-being of children.

3. How important is it to you to have access to consistent measures on the status and well-being of children, by state, that are tracked over time? Circle one response.

4	Very important	49.2
5	Somewhat important	44.1
6	Somewhat unimportant	5.1
4	Very unimportant	.8
5	Can't say, no answer	.8

4. Overall, how satisfied are you with the data that are currently available to you for tracking the status and well-being of children in your state? Circle one response.

1	Very satisfied	12.7
2	Somewhat satisfied	59.3
3	Somewhat dissatisfied	16.1
4	Very dissatisfied	3.4
9	Can't say, no answer	8.4

5. If there is any specific type of information on children and teens that is important to you but that you haven't been able to find, please describe it.

KIDS COUNT is a project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that provides national and state-by-state indicators of child well-being on an annual basis through the national KIDS COUNT Data Book and website. Additionally, the Foundation supports state organizations that may provide reports with local data and analyses of state issues.

6. Are you familiar with the national KIDS COUNT Data Book or website? *Circle one response.*

1	Yes, familiar with KIDS COUNT Data Book	49.2
2	Yes, familiar with KIDS COUNT website	4.2
3	Yes, familiar with both	31.4
4	No, familiar with neither Skip to q. 12	14.4
5	No answer	.8

7. How have you heard about KIDS COUNT? *Please check all that apply.*

a. ___	From a state legislator	16.0
b. ___	From a state legislative staffer	22.0
c. ___	From a state government agency	32.0
d. ___	From a local elected official	0.0
e. ___	From a local government agency	1.0
f. ___	From an advocacy group	48.0
g. ___	From a service provider	8.0
h. ___	On radio or television	10.0
i. ___	In the newspaper	21.0
j. ___	In a newsletter or other publication	22.0
k. ___	On the Internet	26.0
l. ___	Received the Data Book in the mail	45.0
m. ___	Was given the Data Book in person	20.0
n. ___	Other Please specify: _____	

8. Were you aware of KIDS COUNT prior to working as a legislative staff member? *Circle one response.*

1	Yes	19.2
2	No	70.7
9	Can't recall	10.1

9. Would you say the KIDS COUNT Data Book is:	Very	Some -what	A little	Not	Can't Say
<i>Please circle one response on each line</i>					
Timely.....	34.4	49.0	8.3	1.0	7.3
Clear and Understandable.....	68.8	29.2	0.0	0.0	2.1
Credible.....	57.3	35.4	4.2	0.0	3.1
Useful.....	45.4	43.3	7.2	1.0	3.1
Relevant to policy makers.....	42.3	42.3	8.2	1.0	6.2
Respected by people with differing political views.....	24.0	31.3	9.4	3.1	32.3

10. The KIDS COUNT Data Book includes a lot of information. Would you prefer to get this information in a single volume as it currently is presented, or would you prefer that the information be separated into several different publications? *Circle one response.*

- 1 Prefer single volume 78.0
- 2 Prefer several different publications 4.0
- 3 No preference 18.0

11. In what ways do you use the information provided by KIDS COUNT? *Please check all that apply.*

- j. To help craft legislation, policies or programs 27.8
- k. In support of committee or council deliberations 33.0
- c. In writing speeches 12.4
- d. To check or confirm other data sources 56.7
- e. To help hold state agencies accountable 13.4
- f. To do background research on an issue 90.7
- g. To inform myself about children's needs 50.5
- h. To write grant proposals 0.0
- l. Other uses *Please specify:* _____ 4.1

12. The Annie Casey Foundation also funds KIDS COUNT initiatives within states. Are you familiar with the work that <name grantee>.... Is doing in your state? *Circle one response.*

- 1 Yes 72.0 2
- No *Skip to q. 14* 27.1
- 3 No answer .8

13. Would you say the KIDS COUNT work done byis: **Very Some A Not Can't**
byis: -what Little Say
Please circle one response on each line.

	Very	Some -what	A Little	Not	Can't Say
Credible.....	48.2	37.3	8.4	0.0	6.0
Useful.....	48.2	41.0	8.4	0.0	2.4
Respected by people with differing political views	25.3	32.5	7.2	10.8	24.1

14. Thinking about all aspects of the KIDS COUNT program, what impact, if any, do you think KIDS COUNT has had on each of the following. *Please circle one response on each line.*

	Major impact	Moderate impact	Minor impact	No impact	Can't say, No answer
Public awareness of problems faced by children and families in your state.....	11.3	49.1	20.8	.9	17.9
Public policy in your state.....	3.8	42.5	32.1	.9	20.7

* Percentages are based on staff members who are familiar with national or state KIDS COUNT.

15. How many years have you worked as a legislative staff member?
10.6 years (average)

If you have ideas for improving the content, presentation, or distribution of KIDS COUNT, please describe them.

Thank you very much for your help!

Please return the survey in the enclosed business reply envelope by February 9, 2004 to The University of Colorado, Campus Box 133, PO Box 173364, Denver, Colorado 80217-3364.

Appendix 4

INTERVIEWS WITH STATE LEGISLATORS

Introduction

Methodology

As a follow-up to the national survey of state legislators, the University of Colorado conducted interviews with 12 state legislators. The purpose of interviews was to gain more in-depth understanding of barriers to using the KIDS COUNT Data Book as well as how KIDS COUNT has impacted public awareness and public policy in their states.

We selected two groups of legislators for the interviews:

1. Group 1. Legislators who use KIDS COUNT Data Book “a lot” and who perceive that it has had a major impact on public awareness of problems faced by children and families in their state and on public policy. The focus of the discussion with members of this group was on:
 - How they use KIDS COUNT
 - How KIDS COUNT has impacted public policy and public awareness in their state
 - Assessment of the KIDS COUNT Data Book essay
 - How to increase the credibility and usefulness of the KIDS COUNT Data Book
 - Most effective method for delivering the KIDS COUNT Data Book
2. Group 2. Legislators who serve on committees dealing with issues that affect families and children and who are aware of the KIDS COUNT Data Book but don’t use it at all or use it only a little. We made every effort to interview Republicans and Conservatives who were included in this group. The focus of the discussion with members of this group was on:
 - Reasons for not using the KIDS COUNT Data Book
 - What they like about the KIDS COUNT Data Book
 - How to increase the credibility and usefulness of the KIDS COUNT Data Book
 - Most effective method of delivering the KIDS COUNT Data Book

The interview guides for Group 1 and Group 2 were developed in conjunction with the National Conference of State Legislatures and are shown in Appendices 1 and 2, respectively. All interviews were conducted by a senior researcher, and modified to fit the specific responses of each state representative or senator. By following up on what legislators said with probes and additional questions, we were able to get more information about the success KIDS COUNT has achieved and how it can be improved.

Description of Interviewees

We completed interviews with seven state legislators in Group 1. These legislators serve in Florida, Kansas, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nevada, Oklahoma and Colorado. The sole Republican identified as a “strong conservative.” Among the Democrats, four say their political orientation is “middle-of-the-road” and two are “liberal.”

We completed interviews with five state legislators in Group 2. This group was somewhat more reluctant to participate. We scheduled interviews with three legislators who were unavailable at the time of the interview. While we made repeated attempts to reschedule, we were unable to complete interviews with them. In addition, we terminated an interview with a Georgia legislator because she was totally unfamiliar with KIDS COUNT and therefore was unable to answer any of our questions.

The legislators in Group 2 serve in Arizona, Georgia (2), North Carolina and New Hampshire. Two of those interviewed identify themselves as “conservative” Republicans. Two are “middle-of-the-road” Democrats and one identifies as a “strong liberal.”

Results

Summary

The KIDS COUNT Data Book is perceived as credible by all of the legislators we interviewed. The greatest barriers to use are lack of familiarity with KIDS COUNT and the perception that other, state and local data sources are more useful. There is some tension between wanting a number of indicators to measure each area and specific, state and local data, versus preferring more general indicators that can be measured across all states.

Another concern about the KIDS COUNT Data Book is that, with the exception of the essay which few read, it lacks context. Indicators are not interpreted, so that legislators may not know how to create– or may misinterpret – policy agendas.

Barriers to Using KIDS COUNT Data Book

Legislators in Group 2 were asked why they use KIDS COUNT infrequently or not at all, and why they did not give the highest ratings to the KIDS COUNT Data Book.

One reason legislators don’t use KIDS COUNT is lack of familiarity. In fact, as noted above, we discontinued an interview with one legislator because she wasn’t familiar enough with KIDS COUNT to discuss it.

The most frequent barrier to using KIDS COUNT among these legislators is that they perceive that there are better sources of data for addressing the issues that interest them. For example, a Georgia legislator stated:

The main reason I don’t use [KIDS COUNT] is because of the focus of my work. I do work with kids as it relates to education so most of my research is relative to education, on how things impact education. It’s not that I think the information isn’t valuable; it’s that we use other sources of data.

This legislator uses information from the U.S. and Georgia Departments of Education, from local school districts and from the Georgia Association of Professional Educators. He stressed that because Georgia has part-time, citizen legislators and no staff, he only has a limited amount of time

to do research. If an issue is brought before him, more often than not that information will be presented with supporting documentation from the source. In his view, since there is no advocate for KIDS COUNT, no one who is providing information uses KIDS COUNT as their source.

A legislator from Wyoming also felt he could get better data from local and state sources, namely the Wyoming Department of Education, the State Superintendent and local school districts, than from KIDS COUNT. In addition, he felt that “KIDS COUNT wouldn’t be that important because most of Wyoming’s issues are funding issues.”

The Arizona legislator is a former health services researcher and therefore has his own information network. He typically uses data from state agencies, the Medicaid Agency, and the Arizona school-based health care council because “I want the data that I need to look at bills with.” Similar to several others in Group 2, he believes he can get more useful information from other sources. Furthermore, “the comparative information with other states which the KIDS COUNT Data Book does well doesn’t seem terribly relevant.” For him, “What does seem relevant is Arizona-based data and I think we have data that is more relevant and in some cases simply more timely.” He expanded on this theme:

The data that KIDS COUNT has doesn’t always match the data that we need as we consider a certain piece of legislation. For example, we might need the number of kids in the child protective service system [broken down into] several categories. There is no way that the KIDS COUNT Data Book would have that, and even if they did it probably wouldn’t be timely. Our own Children Protective Services people presumably would have that information.”

The other legislator from Georgia assessed KIDS COUNT less favorably, stating that the “form and format are of no real value.” Like his fellow Georgian, he thinks that other, local sources are more useful because they “itemize things in such a way in Georgia that are really much more applicable to Georgia.” He noted that the Chamber of Commerce puts out a “function-oriented analysis of each school that is very helpful to most people. It has things that are actually usable as opposed to broad numbers that don’t mean anything.” Basically, his position was that “we’ve got things that are much better” than the KIDS COUNT Data Book.

A New Hampshire legislator had a very different perspective on why he doesn’t use the KIDS COUNT Data Book. His concern with that KIDS COUNT is that “people are using it to push a particular agenda.” They are “trying to achieve a specific goal which is troubling. They are using measures in ways that aren’t justified. They are doing it with a specific agenda in mind.” As an example, he cited legislators using indicators to justify putting more money into education because it supposedly produces better outcomes for kids, which he says studies done in California and New York do not support.

When asked what KIDS COUNT can do about this problem, he conceded that his colleagues put the “spin” on the data, not KIDS COUNT: “KIDS COUNT presents raw data and legislators take the data and use it in the ‘wrong’ ways.”

Best Features of KIDS COUNT Data Book

Everyone in Group 1 was able to identify what he or she liked best about the KIDS COUNT Data Book. A Florida legislator felt that the indicators alerted them to important issues:

What gets measured gets done. Anything that can give us specific details about what's being done and gaps is helpful. Legislators don't know where all kids programs fit together, so data showing that is useful. 'In God we trust all others bring data.' It is important to see how successful programs are and where they are falling short.

Several legislators like the fact that they can compare data from year to year and compare their state's performance to that of other states. An Oklahoma legislator likes that KIDS COUNT "gives you a baseline each year of where you are and how you compare to other states and within your own state." It gives them "good information when making decisions." A Kansas legislator gave a similar response, namely, that KIDS COUNT lets her compare data from year to year and "gives me a way of assessing how my community is doing" on important measures of children's services. A Colorado legislator also appreciated that the KIDS COUNT Data Book helps her see how her state is doing: "It gives a great overview of how Colorado addresses kids' issues, different ages, different problems, and how Colorado is faring in taking care of its kids."

A Nevada legislator only likes to compare her state with other states, but also likes the "tie in" with their state book, which breaks the data down by county. "I like that the data are consistent from the top to the county level – that you are comparing apples and apples."

A North Carolina legislator stated that the KIDS COUNT Data Book "is an exceptionally useful document. ... I think it's about as comprehensive a volume for use in these areas [children's health, immunization, education and economic condition of families as it relates to children's health issues] as I get. It is very useful." Specifically, he likes "the breakdown by state and the aggregation of data. The data are presented in summary form, the graphs and indicators are easy to access."

He volunteered that he uses the KIDS COUNT Data Book for writing newsletters back home because it lets him quickly incorporate data. When he wants to do more thorough research on an issue or look at legislation he's considering, "the book has extensive data that I can't get from other sources." When asked about its credibility, he said:

KIDS COUNT has been used as source on the floor and in committee and I've never heard anyone question its credibility. The same was true when I on the school board. I never hear it attacked in six years on the school board or one year in the legislature.

A legislator from North Dakota likes the KIDS COUNT Data Book "because North Dakota looks very positive. I appreciate the fact that people notice what we do for our kids." He also likes the format because "it is easy to find things."

In contrast, none of the legislators in Group 2 were able to identify anything they liked about the KIDS COUNT Data Book. Several said they weren't familiar enough with the KIDS COUNT Data Book to know what they like, and a few simply didn't answer this question. An Arizona legislator said he "got the recent one and I flipped through it, but I can't remember it." He did say that "it

certainly is attractively laid presented and laid out clearly, not boring,” but he didn’t feel that the substance is very useful.

Impact of KIDS COUNT

All of the legislators in Group 1 were able to describe how KIDS COUNT has impacted public awareness of problems faced by children and families and/or how it has impacted public policy in their state.

Florida:

Most instrumental is to look at data during allocation process – subcommittees make decisions with limited resources. I can assure you that that data was useful as the Department of Children and Families budget was reviewed.... It’s more behind the scenes. It’s an instrument that’s more useful in subcommittees and working with staff to look at specific target areas – what are we doing and what is missing. More in earlier stage than floor debates.

Oklahoma:

The data is many times used by our newspapers to show where we are and where we’re going. We’ve been able to do some things in the tobacco area and in the health and education area that we may not have been able to do without good data. ...It helps constituent groups who are interested in these issues – people doing initiatives ‘quote KIDS COUNT right and left’. It helps people who are trying to work with legislators.

When asked whether it has had an impact on legislation in his state, he said “I think it does affect legislation.”

Kansas:

It has raised awareness of legislators who “otherwise would have a pretty myopic view of what was going on by looking in their own community.

To a large extent, how children are doing is covert – not really something that people who aren’t working in social services or agencies dealing with children’s services are aware of. Because children in stressful situations and their families are less likely to be vocal and contact their legislator, don’t have political power, in contrast to the frail elderly community which has advocates in AARP and the ability to vote and empower themselves.

I think that legislative funding for the foster care system and some of the oversight of the foster care system has been facilitated by KIDS COUNT. Also there’s a program ‘Connect Kansas’ where local communities are funded through tobacco settlement money in order to work with community-specific children’s programs, for example, drug and alcohol prevention. The idea to devote a large part of the tobacco settlement money to community-based programs and the ability to continue to do it in bad economy has been facilitated by KC reports going to legislators.

She has seen KIDS COUNT information “used at the microphone when arguing about budget, funding priorities.... The statistics in KIDS COUNT have been very valuable in pointing out problems to other legislators.”

North Carolina:

It highlights issues and relative rankings, and it spurred study commission work in my state. It also was very useful when I was on the school board in making policy on educational issues. Kid Count very much spurred study commission work at the legislature and spurred legislation.

Nevada:

In public awareness every time a new [KIDS COUNT Data Book] report comes out it generates new items on television, radio and print – it connects in a way that news agencies can understand and use. It is simple enough to catch their attention and be used in a simplistic fashion, which is good. It generates stories that the average person will read. Research studies won't get that far.

It educates policy makers, legislators and county commissioners. We are expected to be experts in too many areas but KC helps us understand what the context is. Over time, this raises public awareness.

KIDS COUNT comes up several times a session. We used it for suicide when Nevada instituted our first statewide suicide prevention hotline several years ago. We use dropout numbers in discussions about legislation "a lot" – KIDS COUNT says Nevada is last and other data show similar results. Mostly I am looking where the state doesn't do well and trying to see if public policy will help.

... used the child death rate to successfully introduce legislation to strengthen the child death review teams – stronger investigation and reporting, also raised money for prevention efforts. Any time I have a bill or am looking at a bill that deals with children I think about how KIDS COUNT data relates to that bill.

North Dakota:

He has looked very closely at successes to justify the expense, and he also has looked at areas where they are not as successful and seriously argued about dedicating more money to those areas. Sometimes his arguments are successful in getting more money where it is needed.

Colorado:

The Colorado legislator seemed less familiar with KIDS COUNT than the other legislators in Group 1 and was unable to clearly articulate how KIDS COUNT has impacted public policy and/or public awareness of issues affecting children and families in Colorado. However, she did think that the information and staffing provided by KIDS COUNT helped support an initiative to keep the Child Care Commission, and in fact led to Colorado passing a bill in 2004 to continue the Child Care

Commission. In addition, she felt that the indicators in KIDS COUNT are useful in helping Colorado rate its preschools and child care establishments, particularly in assessing the quality of child care and of provider training.

Assessment of KIDS COUNT Data Book Essay

Three of the legislators in Group 1 said they never read the essay. The major reason is time constraints. One legislator explained:

It's probably too long. Every year when I get the [KIDS COUNT Data} book I start at the beginning and skim through it. I probably won't read something if it's title 'essay' – essay means overwhelming and boring. I skim the book to get a general idea and then go straight to Nevada. Then I put the book on the shelf and dig it out when I need it.

One couldn't recall the essay but said "I think the essay is an appropriate thing to do, but present analysis rather than an instrument of inspiration to do a specific thing."

A Kansas legislator reads the essay: "I read KIDS COUNT from cover to cover. I look forward to getting the report every year." She was able to give a detailed assessment:

It's kind of like an executive summary – a way of getting a snapshot before looking at all the statistics. Some people are comfortable looking at statistics and others learn better from reading a synopsis, in words. I like both the essay and statistics. I think the essay is crucial to understand the context of the statistics in the book. I don't learn that well from statistics. I want a commentary on what the research has shown.

When asked how she uses the information in the essay, she said that she shares information with constituents in an e-mail newsletter telling them state issues, so she "shares KIDS COUNT information from the essay with them because it is in words, in a context that goes into the e-mail article – here's how kids in Kansas are doing, here are some of our challenges.... The essay gives me words. She "can't think of how I'd change it – it is very helpful in the format it's in right now."

The legislator from North Carolina also reads the essay and likes the fact that it helps people interpret the data and that it offers policy ideas:

People learn in different ways. The data breakdown and summaries are easy for one purpose. But when trying to think through thoughtfully and intelligently what data mean for policy the essay is extremely helpful.

The essay also provides a highlight of states that are making a difference and programs that are making a difference that you couldn't get from data without tons of time. It's a comprehensive review of what the data means, of areas that need help. From a thoughtful policy-making point of view it is very helpful...The essay is important for folks who are thinking through issues. It gives me ideas about how to address issues and highlights things that I wouldn't get just from looking at data.

I like the way it is written, integrating analysis and efforts that are working on the state level; that is extremely useful and I wouldn't change integrating those initiatives. Most policy makers want to get quickly to the point of the analysis and then see who's working on it and is it successful and have it at their fingertips.

While he was very positive about the essay, he suggested that, "To the extent that the essay can be less content per heading, it would be easier to read – but this is minor stylistic point. "

The Colorado legislator reads the essay because "I like to have a verbal expression and not just numbers." She stressed that "you need to keep the essay part. I think it is brief and concise, to the point and well written."

How to Increase the Credibility and Usefulness of KIDS COUNT

Both groups of legislators were asked what they thought could be done to increase the credibility and usefulness of KIDS COUNT among legislators who don't use it or are critical of the information it contains.

Most of the legislators in Group 1 were unaware of legislators in their state who question the credibility of KIDS COUNT, and most had no idea of how to enhance its credibility. For example, a legislator from Nevada said: "I never heard KIDS COUNT attacked in any hearing. I never heard it criticized publicly. I have never seen a negative news story in my state about KIDS COUNT." The North Dakota legislator said, "Since North Dakota does so well in KIDS COUNT, most people give it high credibility!"

While they had never heard it criticized, several members of this group had suggestions about how to increase its credibility. A Florida legislator said that the KIDS COUNT Data Book shouldn't "editorialize."

The purer the data the better. Just give a clear picture, report what's being done and that isn't without editorializing about how wonderful or horrible it is. Talk about some priority issues but don't tell people what to do.

A Nevada legislator had this suggestion:

Maybe make more of an effort to reach the moderate Republicans, more of an effort to engage people to the right of the middle. In Nevada we have a moderate Republican bring forward legislation affecting kids. It is so good that he is the leader in the state on the right. People won't buck him unless it is important. You should be more strategic in finding people like that in each state. The most success I've had is in working with Republicans on issues.

While most Group 2 legislators thought other information sources were more useful than the KIDS COUNT Data Book, several offered suggestions about how to increase its usefulness. Two state legislators said that they would like regional data "because people compare themselves to other

states in their region, not nationally.” The Wyoming legislator in Group 1 also wanted regional data.

A Georgia legislator wanted more interpretation of data:

I don’t just want raw data and comparative rankings. The data needs to say why these indicators matter – e.g., why is the teen birth rate important? Why are there differences across states?

He would like the data presented in context to help him understand why states perform differently. The context helps them put things in perspective and helps them make sense of the “so what” part of it. E.g., are differences due to cultural differences? Does the state with the lowest teen birth rate provide condoms in schools?” He wants to see what’s successful elsewhere to help them frame public policy.

A New Hampshire legislator also stressed that the KIDS COUNT Data Book needs to put the indicators in context:

One of the problems is that KIDS COUNT comes up short, specifically with health care analysis. There are so many more factors that play into health care than they give. There are so many other factors that aren’t covered that leave me questioning what they are trying to say.

For example, he doesn’t know why immunization rates are low – is it because of lack of health care literacy; because people, particularly non-English speakers, are unaware that immunizations are available for free; etc. “KIDS COUNT doesn’t give me the context.”

This same legislator reiterated his major concern about the KIDS COUNT Data Book, namely that it is misinterpreted by legislators and used to forward their own agendas. He felt this problem could be addressed by educating legislators:

They need to raise their awareness of how stuff works... We need a reeducation process for the average legislator to understand the budget. Hold seminars. Give seminars to state legislators, tell them what the information truly means, talk to them one on one. ... Teach them the link between data and policy. They need to see how data should impact policy. They need to make a clearer link from the information KIDS COUNT provides to policies that are needed.

A legislator from Georgia didn’t want “general information.” He said that KIDS COUNT has to “make it something that is actually functional for a state as opposed to everything. It tries to give so much information that it becomes mush.” He was concerned that broad information masks important details:

We really have three different kinds of systems in the state and no one mentions it. Georgia rates really low on education – 47th out of 50 or so – but my district has some of the best schools in the country. Broad sweeping state-wide analysis really doesn’t mean anything ... They averaged a bunch of things in the state but that’s not what my state is like.

This same representative also wanted the data to be summarized so that he can get at it quickly:

My assistant goes through the mail and knows what I will read and what I won't read, not because of the information but because of the way it is presented. I won't read a tome no matter how valuable the information. I look for summaries. The information needs to be provided in a manner that gets my attention straight off

A legislator from Arizona didn't think that legislators are the right audience for the KIDS COUNT Data Book:

I'm not sure what use can be made of the KIDS COUNT Data Book for legislators. For advocates like Children's Action Alliance who are trying to get coverage for kids in the newspapers, that's a different matter. The kind of information in the Data Book is far more useful and relevant to them, for example, they can put it in a PowerPoint presentation.

Delivery of KIDS COUNT Data Book

Legislators in both groups thought that the KIDS COUNT Data Book should be delivered in person rather than sent through the mail because they are "inundated" with material and "get buried by mail." Specifically, in Group 2, three of the five legislators supported this plan. One said, "Since I have virtually no staff to sift through information, it either needs to be presented in person or be very crisp and clear with more detail later in the document."

Group 2 legislators suggested that different, local groups should hand deliver the Data Book. One said "To get somebody's attention and have them use the data it probably would be good if the local school district gave it to us. It would be more beneficial as relates to legislators really paying attention."

Not only should the Data Book be hand delivered, but optimally someone would summarize the information contained in the book: "here's the information contained in this document and here's why it is valuable to you."

The New Hampshire legislator felt that a presentation might ameliorate some of his concerns about the "spin" that legislators put on the indicators in the KIDS COUNT Data Book:

Yes, it needs to be more personal. They could do a presentation, maybe even a PowerPoint presentation. That is the only way they can put data out that it is meaningful so people better understand what it really is. When they send it out in the mail they don't get what it means. People won't know what to do with the raw data. You need to walk them through it so they have a better understanding and appreciation of what the data are really showing, so they can come up with policy initiatives or policy changes in order to accomplish what they need to accomplish. Now KIDS COUNT is used as a political football to advocate for one thing or another. No one mentions it after the first week or two, after they've used it to make political points.

The other two Group 2 legislators were more concerned about the substance of the KIDS COUNT Data Book than with the method of delivery.

Group 1 legislators responded very positively when asked if they would recommend to the Annie E. Casey Foundation that a “credible source” hand deliver the KIDS COUNT Data Book. For example, the Florida legislator said, “Absolutely! The messenger is always a big part of the message.” He wants the Data Book to be delivered by “someone from my district, the head of Children’s Alliance. I would feel they have the knowledge. I want them to deliver it in person and explain it some.”

The Oklahoma KIDS COUNT Data Book is delivered personally. The legislator said “They make a big deal about it,” which helps make him aware of it. He felt “It does help to know the people who bring it in. I know the people who work here in Oklahoma are very credible.” The Kansas legislator had a similar response:

Legislators tend to listen to information that comes to them from their constituents rather than from another legislator. So groups in the community should present the information to legislators.... It should come from their own constituency.

Legislators also made suggestions about when the KIDS COUNT Data Book should be delivered. The Florida legislator said that it should be delivered earlier, before the session starts, so that he has time to read it: “Once committees start, agendas are in place and it’s too late to change them and I’m too overwhelmed to read anything else.”

One legislator suggested that they could do more “pre-work” through e-mail to alert legislators that the Data Book is coming. This would be a “way to build it up a little bit and to try to say this is important and it will be coming to you shortly.”

Views About State KIDS COUNT Groups

In the interviews, some legislators commented about their state’s KIDS COUNT advocacy groups. One legislator, a strong KIDS COUNT supporter, felt that his state group is too “university-oriented. It is not doing the work of an advocacy organization. They are not saying, ‘here’s the data, here’s the next step, here’s what has to happen.’ They just give out the data and don’t help with the action agenda.”

In contrast, another legislator is very pleased with his state group:

In [my state] we have wonderful people doing it, credible people. I hope other states have as good people as we do... They use it in the information they send to legislators... We do it by county in [my state] and I like the way they do that.

One legislator volunteered: “I have lots of contact with them, they are very active.”

When asked, a legislator said he was not familiar with the work that his state KIDS COUNT group is doing, but thinks it is probably very visible in the state capitol and in urban centers. “We are as rural as you can possibly get, we never see those people here. They need to have at least some presence in rural areas.”

GROUP 1/ HIGH USE – LEGISLATORS WHO SAID THAT KIDS COUNT HAD A MAJOR IMPACT ON PUBLIC POLICY AND/OR PUBLIC AWARENESS

KIDS COUNT Legislative Survey Interview Guide

Hi. My name is Laura Appelbaum and I am a researcher at the University of Colorado. I appreciate your talking with me about KIDS COUNT.

1. In your survey, you were pretty positive about KIDS COUNT. What do you like best about the KIDS COUNT Data Book?
2. You said that KIDS COUNT had a major impact on (public policy and/or public awareness – fill in specifics for each legislator). Can you please give me some specific examples of how KIDS COUNT affected (public policy/public awareness)? Probe for several stories, get details.
3. Each year the KIDS COUNT Data Book includes an essay as well as data. Have you ever read the essay?
 - 3a. If never read essay, ask: Why not? Probe for details. Then, ask: How can the essay be changed so that you are more likely to read it/so that it is more useful to you?
 - 3b. If read essay, ask: What do you think about the essay?
Probes: Is it easy to understand? Is it well written? Does it present information in a way that is helpful? Does it make you think about issues in a new or different way? How do you use the information in the essay?
4. Have you encountered any legislators in your state who don't like KIDS COUNT and who don't use the information? If yes, ask: What do you think their concerns are?
5. Ask everyone: What if anything do you think can be done to increase the credibility and usefulness of KIDS COUNT among legislators who are critical of the information contained in KIDS COUNT or who don't want to use it?
6. Is there anything you'd change about KIDS COUNT to make it more useful to you and others who work on children's and family issues? Probes: The information that is presented, how the information is presented, information that they would like but isn't included, etc.
7. If you were advising the Annie E. Casey Foundation about how to get the KIDS COUNT Data Book to legislators, would you recommend that someone deliver the book in person? Does that matter? What about having the book given to legislators by their constituents? Would that increase its credibility?

GROUP 2/ LOW USE – LEGISLATORS WHO ARE AWARE OF KIDS COUNT BUT USE IT ONLY A LITTLE OR NOT AT ALL

KIDS COUNT Legislative Survey Interview Guide

Hi. My name is Laura Appelbaum and I am a researcher at the University of Colorado. I appreciate your talking with me about KIDS COUNT.

1. In your survey, you said you were aware of KC but don't use it/only use it "a little." Why don't you use it/only use it "a little"?
2. Is there any part of the KIDS COUNT Data Book that you like?
3. How useful do you think it is to have access to consistent measures on the status and well-being of children, by state, that are tracked over time?
 - 3a. If don't think it's useful: Why aren't these types of indicators useful?
 - 3b. If think it's useful: Why aren't the KIDS COUNT indicators useful to you? What is KIDS COUNT doing wrong? What group – if any – produces measures that you like? Why do you like them?
4. What do you think can be done to increase the credibility and usefulness of KIDS COUNT among legislators like yourself?
5. Is there anything else you would change about KIDS COUNT to make it more useful to you and others who work on children's and family issues? Probes: The information that is presented, how the information is presented, information that they would like but isn't included, etc.
6. If you were advising the Annie E. Casey Foundation about how to get the KIDS COUNT Data Book to legislators, would you recommend that someone deliver the book in person? Does that matter? What about having the book given to legislators by their constituents? Would that increase its credibility?

Appendix 5

About the National Conference of State Legislatures

The National Conference of State Legislatures is the bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the states, commonwealths and territories.

NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues and is an effective and respected advocate for the interests of the states in the American federal system. Its objectives are:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of state legislatures.
- To promote policy innovation and communication among state legislatures.
- To ensure state legislatures a strong, cohesive voice in the federal system.

The Conference operates from offices in Denver, Colorado, and Washington, D.C.

Centers at the Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver

The Center for Public-Private Sector Cooperation and the Center for the Improvement of Public Management are part of the service and community outreach effort of the Graduate School of Public Affairs at the University of Colorado at Denver. The mission of the Centers is to enhance the capacity of diverse communities and public, private, and nonprofit organizations to solve problems and meet the challenges of change. Centers' staff employ their diverse educational and professional backgrounds when working with communities and organizations to provide:

- Planning and problem solving assistance
- Applied research and program evaluation
- Leadership Development and training
- Custom training and technical assistance.