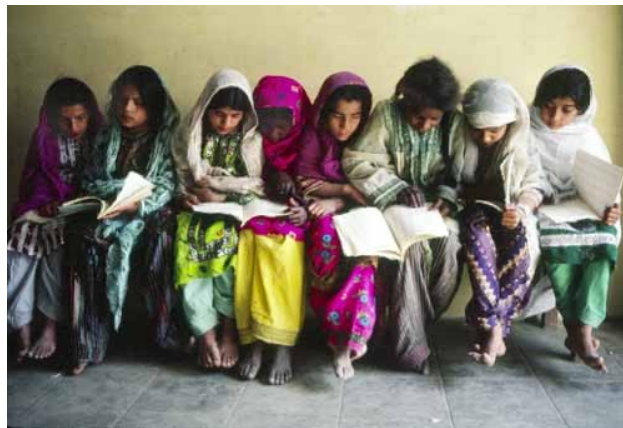


*United Nations
Convention on the
Rights of the Child*

**TOOLKIT FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE
CHILD BY CITY COUNCILS AND STATE
LEGISLATURES**



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Introduction

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UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD: TOOLKIT FOR CITY COUNCIL ADOPTION

On February 11th, 2009, the Chicago City Council passed a resolution pledging to “advance policies and practices that are in harmony with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all city agencies and organizations that address issues directly affecting the City's children.” This resolution was adopted due to the efforts of a team of professors, students, and staff at both the Center for International Human Rights and the Children and Family Justice Center at the Bluhm Legal Clinic at Northwestern University School of Law. In addition, the team owes considerable thanks to the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, the Mayor’s Office, and Mayor Daley himself for helping to facilitate the resolution through the Chicago City Council. Finally, the team recruited a broad coalition whose members rallied support throughout the process. The following is a reference guide or “toolkit” that outlines how we managed to pass a CRC resolution in the City of Chicago and documents how you may be effective in working towards this goal in your own community. Of course, every city and state is distinct and we are available to consult with those in other jurisdictions.

The passage of the CRC resolution in Chicago was the product of more than one year’s work by the team and coalition members. We hope this toolkit will help you reach the same goal, as we believe it is important for local communities to express their support for U.S. ratification of the CRC and comprehensive children’s rights in general. Local

advocacy for the adoption of the CRC is a crucial part of a national grassroots organizing strategy to build support for ratification and to encourage the alignment of our laws and practices with the standards of the CRC. Local advocacy also serves as a tool for public education and discussion about children's needs and rights.

The City of Chicago was by no means the first city to pass a resolution expressing support for the CRC. In fact, state and local governments have been adopting resolutions of this sort since the United Nations General Assembly adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. That year, New York City passed a resolution expressing support for the CRC, and since then other cities, states, and municipalities across the United States have expressed support for the Convention. Despite this, the United States remains one of two nations in the world yet to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the other being Somalia). Our hope is that with the continued support of local municipalities, thanks largely to efforts from groups just like yours and ours, the United States will acknowledge the importance of the CRC and support the rights of children by ratifying the treaty.

In the toolkit you will find a step-by-step guide to passing a CRC resolution in your municipality or state, including everything from writing a background paper, to building a coalition, to engaging in outreach with local government officials, to drafting a resolution, to passage and beyond. We hope that this toolkit will help you along your way towards creating, advocating for, passing, and implementing legislation in support of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We thank you for your commitment to children's rights, and indeed human rights in general, and hope that you find this guide useful on your quest. If you have any questions do not hesitate to contact the Center for International Human Rights or the Children and Family Justice Center. Good Luck!

PART 1

WRITING A COMPREHENSIVE BRIEFING PAPER

Perhaps one of the most important first steps in your effort to pass a resolution in support of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in your municipality or state is to educate yourself about the provisions of the CRC, the ratification process in the United States, and the relationship between the treaty's provisions and children's issues in your community. This is important not only for those whom you will try to persuade to pass the CRC, but also for your own education and coalition building. You should attempt to gather as much information as possible since you will likely be questioned throughout the process. For these reasons, we recommended that you begin your campaign by writing a background or briefing paper. This paper may be used solely to educate yourself and the members of your team (in our case, law students, social work students, and coalition partners), or you may provide it to politicians you are trying to persuade. The tone of the paper will differ according to its intended use.

CRC Background

Your team must completely familiarize itself with the provisions of the CRC, as having in-depth knowledge of the CRC is essential in order to persuade lawmakers to pass your law/ordinance. You should be aware that the United States had a major role in the decade-long process of drafting the Convention, from 1979 to 1989.

Briefing Paper Components

Your paper should describe the background of the CRC, beginning with the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) and including core treaties to contextualize the Convention and its importance. These could include, but are not limited to: the United National International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976); the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (1969); the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2002); and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography (2002).

It is difficult for many people to understand the relationship between international treaties and municipal law. For that reason, you may wish to spend significant time exploring the status of children in your municipality so that you can consider whether your municipality is meeting or falling short of the core standards set forth in the CRC. Possible main areas to consider include, but are not limited to: Education, Child Poverty, Child Health, Youth Justice and Violence Prevention, and Child Protection. Possible subtopics for these categories may include, but are not limited to: Infant Mortality Rates, Malnutrition/Hunger, Right to Survival, Gun and Gang Violence, Juvenile Life Imprisonment without the Possibility of Parole, Child Protection and Foster Care, Adoption, and Corporal Punishment (both by parents and in school). These topics are simply ideas for your research, they are by no means precisely what should be in your paper or the order in which they should appear. It may be the comprehensive nature of the CRC that is most relevant. The discussion on the state of children should be tailored to specific areas of concern in the municipality in which you are trying to adopt a resolution. A legislative body will be far more likely to listen if you discuss issues that are pertinent to them and their constituents. You should consider your strategy carefully, however. Some politicians will feel more comfortable passing a resolution if they believe it will not require the city to alter existing policies. Others may only support a resolution if they believe it will have a concrete impact on city policies. You need to know your audience.

You may also choose to include other resolutions your municipality has passed that are centered on international treaties; we will discuss this more in the next section.

Finally, be sure to have a conclusion in which you discuss the importance of this resolution for your specific municipality. You may also choose to include an appendix with facts and figures relevant to the content of your background paper.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL TREATIES SUPPORTED BY YOUR MUNICIPALITY

Many cities/states across the United States have expressed their support previously for other international treaties. While the United States has been slow to ratify some international treaties (for example the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the CRC), several municipalities across the country have adopted resolutions expressing their support for these treaties. It is therefore likely the municipality you are trying to persuade to support the Convention on the Rights of the Child has expressed support for other international legislation in the past. You can search for such legislation in this municipality and others surrounding it. Pay particular attention to international human rights legislation, because if you can persuade your city/State that they have supported similar resolutions in the past, they may be more willing to adopt a resolution supporting the CRC. Possible topics to look for may include, but are not limited to: women (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), climate (U.S. Counsel of Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement), people with disabilities (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities), Torture (Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

Finding Legislation in Support of International Treaties

During our research, we discovered that it is often quite difficult to locate legislation passed by local municipalities in support of international treaties. While the internet is an invaluable tool for researching such legislation, it generally does not have copies of legislation by smaller municipalities; this creates difficulty in locating copies of such legislation. While searching for human rights legislation to help further our goal, we ran into problems locating Chicago's earlier resolution expressing support for the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Ultimately, we ended up finding this legislation with the help of the city's reference librarian. Therefore, in the likely event that you have difficulty finding legislation in support of international treaties in your municipality, you may want to check with city librarians or clerks. Often it is through these sources that you will find the easiest access to local legislation that otherwise may be difficult to find.

PART 3

OTHER CITIES/STATES PASSAGE OF CRC LEGISLATION

In addition to finding resolutions that your city/state (or other related or neighboring municipalities) has adopted in support of international treaties, you should familiarize yourself with the list of other cities and states that have adopted a resolution in support of the CRC. In our research, we determined that as of early 2009 nine major U.S. cities and five U.S. states had adopted resolutions in support of the CRC. City Councils include: Austin, TX; Cambridge, MA; Cleveland, OH; Detroit, MI; Kansas City, MO; Minneapolis, MN; New York, NY; San Diego, CA; and Savannah, GA. State governments include: Hawaii (2007); Rhode Island (2002); Vermont (1997); South Carolina (1992); and New York (1989). We had difficulty tracking down the text of many of these resolutions. Nonetheless, it is important that your municipality understands that it is taking a forward-looking, but not unprecedented, step by adopting a human rights treaty in your community.

Search for Implementation Strategies

Though it does not involve the CRC, one success story regarding the passage and implementation of human rights legislation centers on the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in San Francisco. On April 13, 1998 the city council passed a local ordinance, that “require[d] city departments to use a gender and human rights analysis to review city policy in employment, funding allocations, and delivery of direct and indirect services.” The ordinance, which passed thanks largely to a coalition group headed by WILD for Human Rights, also “require[d] the City to ensure the protection of human rights, including the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, and establishe[d] a CEDAW Task Force to assist in its implementation in San Francisco”. The passage of such legislation provides hope that CRC resolutions may lead to similar legislation in U.S. cities and states.

While difficult to locate, actively attempt to search for how (if at all), the adoption of these resolutions in support of the CRC have spawned, re-aligned, or strengthened social programs, or stimulated other support for the rights of children and the betterment of their well-being in regions that have passed such resolutions. If you cannot find information on ways in

which these cities/states have implemented such legislation, it may be good practice for your group or organization to brainstorm ways in which this adoption of a CRC resolution can help local children. It is virtually certain that you will be asked this question by the decision-makers you are attempting to persuade.

Is your City a UNICEF Child Friendly City?

In looking at cities that have passed resolutions in support of the rights and protections of our children, another mechanism stands out: UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative. Chicago has emerged as one of only two U.S. cities (the other being Oakland, California) to have joined The Child Friendly Cities Initiative.

In 1996 the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as part of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), established the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative. The goal of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative is to make cities a more livable place "for children first". Furthermore, the Initiative was designed to be "synonymous with the implementation of [CRC] in a local governance setting and incorporate[d] a number of characteristics that put children front and centre." These characteristics included ensuring: children's participation; a child friendly legal framework; a city-wide children's rights strategy; a children's rights unit or coordinating mechanism; a child impact assessment and evaluation; a children's budget; a regular state of the city's children report; making children's rights known; and independent advocacy for children. If your city is not a Child Friendly City, you may want to consider helping it become one as part of your advocacy for the passage of CRC legislation. While it is important to recognize the primary goal of your advocacy group should be the passage of a resolution in support of the CRC, if you can also achieve Child Friendly City status, either during or after the passage of your resolution, it is a win for children's rights in your town. If you choose to do this, UNICEF has provided a Child Friendly Cities Toolkit on their webpage which may prove useful.

PART 4

EXAMPLE TALKING POINTS

Convention on the Rights of the Child Chicago City Council – Talking Points

Create Talking Points for the Future

Along the lines of identifying controversial issues, it is important for your team to create talking points to discuss these issues and others that your group deems important. Talking points are ideas that you can voice to legislators, coalition members (more on that in the next section), and other parties concerned with passage of CRC legislation. Your talking points should include responses to controversial issues such as parental corporal punishment; however, they should also include positive aspects of the CRC. It is important to know your talking points as well as possible, since you will likely be speaking to individuals who know little of the CRC and may be skeptical of the benefits of a resolution. You should also make sure that each member of your team is well versed in the talking points because if one member of your group falters, it may deter the passage of your resolution.

Think of this conversation as a 1 minute pitch.

Your objective for the call is to seek advice regarding how best to persuade the City Council to adopt a resolution of support for the CRC. You are not seeking sponsors at this time. You want to know who will support this, and who will oppose it. How should we proceed?

Identify yourself as a Northwestern law student or social work intern.

Inform the Councilperson that a coalition of children's rights organizations, headed by two Northwestern legal clinics, is hoping the City Council will adopt a resolution of support for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the "CRC".

Discuss the first and second points below. Discuss each "General Benefit of the CRC" followed directly with the same "Benefit to Chicago by Adopting the CRC".

Ask if there is a time available to come in and discuss adoption of the CRC in more detail. If not, take full advantage of the call to obtain their advice on how to proceed.

Ask if they have any questions about the CRC or the benefits to Chicago. Discuss the remainder of the points below if you have time.

Thank the person for their time.

**Remember: We are not asking the City Council to "implement" the CRC. We are asking for a resolution of support for the CRC that will commit the City of Chicago to promote the framework and standards set forth in the CRC.*

General Benefits of the CRC	Benefits to Chicago by Adopting the Framework and Standards of the CRC
<p>The CRC is the most widely ratified treaty in the world. Only the United States and Somalia have not ratified the CRC.</p>	<p>With adoption of the Framework and Standards of the CRC, Chicago will be seen as an international leader, ready to host the Olympic Games in 2016.</p>
<p>The CRC places the interest of the child as first priority in decisions affecting our children.</p>	<p>Cities and states across the nation have enacted resolutions that adopt the CRC and its principles of putting the interest of the child first. With adoption of the Framework and Standards of the CRC, Chicago will continue to be seen as a leader regarding the protection of our children.</p> <p>Chicago has a legacy of protecting our children.</p> <p>Chicago created the first juvenile court in the world more than a century ago.</p> <p>Chicago became a UNICEF Child-Friendly City less than a decade ago.</p> <p>Adoption of the CRC is the next step for Chicago.</p> <p>Adoption of the CRC is consistent with Chicago's history as a leader in protecting our children.</p>
<p>The CRC is the most comprehensive instrument ever to systematically address the protection of our children.</p>	<p>With adoption of the Framework and Standards of the CRC, Chicago will be able to continue to make needed progress in any and all areas of concern to families and children all across Chicago.</p>
<p>The CRC creates a common language with which all aspects of government and society can understand the protections and rights needed and provided for our children.</p>	<p>With adoption of the Framework and Standards of the CRC, Chicago's city departments, agencies, and committees will improve their ability to coordinate programs and policies to best protect our children and to best make use of Chicago's resources.</p>
<p>The CRC provides a dynamic framework through which all arms of the government can cooperate together to effectively, efficiently, and expeditiously protect our children.</p>	<p>With adoption of the Framework and Standards of the CRC, Chicago will gain an invaluable tool to address the many issues and protections needed for our children in a consistent, comprehensive manner.</p> <p>The CRC embodies principles universally approved.</p> <p>The CRC explicitly allows for local implementation of these principles in ways that respect a nation's customs and a family's autonomy.</p>

PART 5

IDENTIFY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES RELATING TO THE CRC

The issues that have delayed U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child revolve around mischaracterization of the CRC, historic U.S. isolation regarding international treaties, and a constructed framework by the opposition that pits children's rights against parents' rights. Certain pro-parents' rights groups have aggressively expressed their opposition to the passage of the CRC in the United States. Organized groups and websites cite provisions of the CRC that they believe impede upon parents' rights. In addition, U.S. law in a few specific respects is inconsistent with provisions of the CRC; two examples involve the sentencing of juvenile offenders to life without parole (easily addressed by a US reservation to that provision) and rights to health care. As a group advocating for a resolution in support of the CRC, it is important that you know your opposition and can formulate responses to their arguments. As you research these topics, it is especially important issues that may galvanize local opposition, as you may need to address those concerns during your advocacy.

In Chicago, we managed to avoid generating any opposition to our resolution by keeping our advocacy low-key and taking steps to avoid media coverage. There are pros and cons to this approach. The benefit was that we managed to pass a resolution quickly and without harmful debate. The downside is that few Chicagoans know about the resolution, so we lost an opportunity to educate the public during the course of our campaign.

In addition to possible political and social opposition to the CRC, municipalities may be concerned that the passage of legislation in support of the CRC would inevitably lead to money being allocated to new social programs for children. Many cities/states are hesitant to pass legislation that creates new budgetary demands. In Chicago, we deliberately chose to advocate for a non-binding resolution that would not impose such requirements, on the theory that a binding ordinance had little chance of passing. We believed that even a non-binding resolution could serve as a stepping stone toward the betterment of children in our municipality. But there is no doubt that a binding ordinance would have relevance and potential enforcement provisions that a simple resolution lacks. You should consider the politics in your municipality carefully before adopting your approach.

PART 6

BEGIN COALITION BUILDING

Once the members of your team are experts on the CRC, it is time to start expanding your advocacy group. You will want to reach out to organizations in your community that have similar interests and/or goals. These organizations will likely form your coalition, which will make you that much stronger in the eyes of legislators who will be voting on the resolution. The best way to reach out to these community organizations is through letters, websites and e-mails, in which you can explain your goal of passing a resolution in support of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in your city/state.

Convene a Coalition Meeting

Once you know your target audience of community and professional groups, agencies and allied constituencies, and have had some contact with them, it is a good idea to hold a coalition meeting. In this meeting you will have the opportunity to meet people from these groups face to face, which will allow you to better discuss your goals and how they align with theirs. Having coalition meetings with several community groups will also create an opportunity for a great brainstorming session, in which you can discuss the best course of action to pass a resolution in support of the CRC in your municipality. In this meeting you can also begin to assess who will sign on to support your piece of legislation. Once you have determined this, you can ascertain which of the coalition members have contacts with the elected officials you are trying to lobby and/or connections with other important people or groups in your community that will help your reach your goal. You should also decide how big you want the coalition to be. If your coalition is too large, then nothing will be accomplished as it will be hard for everyone to be on the same page. If your coalition is too small then you will likely not benefit from all the expertise and support that is available in your community.

Continue to Hold Coalition Meetings

It is important that in addition to your first coalition meeting, you continue to hold periodic meetings for coalition members. In the case of the Chicago Coalition to Support the CRC, law students were invited to make presentations to coalition organizations as part of the education process. Similarly, coalition members made presentations to the rest of the group about their work. If you do not fully involve coalition members in the process you will not receive the full benefit of their expertise and resources. At the same time, keep in mind that not all coalition members will attend your meetings. This, however, does not mean that they are not interested in your project, but more likely that they simply have busy schedules. A major benefit of building a coalition is learning how to talk about and integrate children's human rights into everyday grassroots work on issues involving children. Even if community organizations do not show up to your meetings, it is still important to keep them informed about your progress towards the passage of legislation in support of the CRC in your community, as perhaps it can help them in their work and benefit the overall well-being of children in your community.



PART 7

CREATING A FACT SHEET

The purpose of a fact sheet is to provide a simple, short document for people interested in the work you are doing with the CRC. When creating the fact sheet, it is essential to keep in mind your fact sheet's intended audience. For distribution to a city board, council, or government, a fact sheet should explain basic principles of the CRC so policymakers understand what they are supporting. In addition, explaining how the CRC will help their community will give policymakers a reason to support the CRC. Keep in mind that policymakers will likely not be the only people to receive your fact sheet. You can distribute your fact sheet to coalition members, community members, organizations involved with children, and to anyone else interested. The most important aspect of writing the fact sheet is to keep it brief and easy to read. A one-page document is best, as a longer document may not be read. Included in this toolkit is sample fact sheet which can be used as a model.

Components of your fact sheet:

Title and Subtitle

The idea of a title is to compose a very brief phrase that captures the essence of your resolution and catches your audience's attention. An example might be "Children's Rights in Chicago." Following the short title should be a subtitle that more clearly explains your agenda, like "Adopting the City of Chicago Resolution Supporting the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)." Now you have an attention-getting title with a more descriptive subtitle that will explain your purpose.

Brief Background

Your brief background is your chance to tell policymakers and lawmakers what the CRC is - in a nutshell. Cover only the most important points on the history of the Convention. Points you may want to include are: the Convention's purpose, when it was adopted by the United Nations, the important role of the United States in the CRC drafting process, and the fact that only Somalia and the US have not yet ratified the Convention. You may note that the U.S. has ratified the two

optional protocols to the CRC (in 2002) and appeared before the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva to report on US compliance with the Optional Protocols in 2008.

Major Principles of the CRC

It is important that your audience understands why the CRC, and children's human rights are so important. An outline of the Convention's guiding principles will provide them with a broader understanding of the document. Summarizing the major principles of the CRC requires close reading of the articles and culling the discrete principles that guide the document. Following each of the principles should be a short explanation, no more than a sentence or two in length. This is an important place to consider your intended audience's perceptions of the Convention. You might be concerned that your resolution will come under attack by opponents of the CRC, so be sure to highlight certain points. For example, some opponents of the Convention believe that it undermines the rights of parents. You can preempt such arguments by stressing the value and role of family and parents as cited in a number of the CRC's articles.

Why to Adopt the CRC and How the CRC Will Affect Your City

In this section, include any past action or leadership in human rights or children's welfare your city has exhibited, including any policies created by the city or recognition of the city as a UNICEF Child Friendly City or recognition of other treaties' such as CEDAW. In addition, include how the CRC will benefit the city. Think carefully before discussing specific policies you would like to see implemented, as policymakers may be reluctant to support a resolution that creates binding obligations. Instead, you may wish to explain how the CRC provides a common framework for children's issues and how supporting the CRC demonstrates the city's commitment and concern for human rights and children's issues. This is a good place to mention that supporting the CRC will establish the city as a leader in human rights. Your message here will depend on the local politics in your city/state.

Organization and Contact Info/ Coalition Support

If you are affiliated with an organization or institution, include your logo in the fact sheet. This

adds credibility to your fact sheet. Also, be sure include contact information so people may direct any questions they have to you. Another thing to include is a list of the organizations in your coalition who are supporters of the resolution. This shows people reading the fact sheet that your resolution has support from a broad range of organizations. We also included a list of the organizations that support the National Campaign for Ratification of the CRC. We have included the list of local organizations that supported the Chicago resolution with this toolkit.

U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Fact Sheet

What is the CRC?

- The CRC is the most comprehensive and most widely ratified treaty on children's rights in the world.
- The U.S. actively participated in the ten year drafting process.
- The CRC was adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1989.
- 193 countries have ratified the CRC.

What principles does the CRC support?

- The CRC encompasses non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival, and development, and the protection of the child.
 - Non-discrimination: Children should not have to endure discrimination based on "race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.
 - Best interests of the child: The best interest of the child should always be the primary concern in any situation involving children, including court, administrative, legislative, or other decisions.
 - Right to life, survival, and development: The CRC provides that children have the inherent right to life and development, "to the maximum extent possible," including protection from exploitation and abuse.
 - Views of the Child: Children should be allowed to express their own opinions in critical matters involving them, with due regard to their age and maturity.
- The idea of the family is reinforced in the CRC and is called "the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children."

Why should Chicago support the CRC?

- Chicago has been a past leader in both human rights and children's legal protection and rights.
 - Chicago is one of two U.S. cities to adopt the UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities Initiative.
 - Chicago City Council has supported international human rights legislation involving women, laborers, and the homeless.
- Support of the CRC furthers Chicago's stature as an international leader in human rights.

What does the Resolution commit the City to do?

- The resolution would demonstrate the city's support for the standards and principles of the CRC and would encourage relevant city entities to promote policies and practices in line with the principles of the CRC.
- The CRC offers a comprehensive framework through which different arms of the government can effectively promote the well-being of Chicago's children.
- The resolution does not ask for any budgetary commitments.

LINK YOUR COALITION WITH NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS THAT SUPPORT THE PASSAGE OF THE CRC

Example factsheet:

By making national organizations your partners in support of the CRC, your coalition gains credibility as an organization that should be taken seriously. Your city council will be more open to receive your ideas if you have backing from a number of reputable organizations and movements. It can also be useful to make contact with these national organizations and movements, which may have valuable information and suggestions on children's human rights policy and implementation. As national groups, these organizations have gained experience in policy implementation throughout their years, and they will often be willing to help you.

Find national organizations and movements that support the CRC

You can start with your coalition members. As they have long been involved in child well-being projects, your coalition partners probably know and may even have contact with a number of national organizations. Many of them will already be supporters of the CRC or would be willing to align themselves with the CRC. Simple searches online can also yield names of organizations that support the CRC: religious groups, professional organizations, community service organizations, and humanitarian organizations are just a few examples.

Meet representatives from national organizations

Contacting and meeting with these organizations can be very useful. In Chicago, we met with the director of the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This meeting generated new ideas and strategies that proved useful in our local advocacy efforts. Meetings like this can provide ideas on how other cities have implemented the CRC and can keep you apprised of ongoing efforts to persuade other municipalities to adopt CRC resolutions.

Organizations we suggest:



The Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC): <http://childrightscampaign.org/>

Amnesty International (AI): www.amnesty.org/



The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): <http://www.unicef.org/>

Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD) for Human Rights:



www.wildforhumanrights.org/

American Medical Association (AMA): www.ama-assn.org/

American Bar Association (ABA): www.abanet.org/



Child Welfare League of America (CWLA): www.cwla.org/

Conference of Catholic Bishops: <http://www.usccb.org/>

In addition, the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) has a list of supporting organizations. You may want to reach out to some of these organizations.

PART 9

RESEARCHING YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Find out how your local or state government passes legislation

Your local or state legislature probably has a regularly-maintained website. The easiest way to figure out how your city council or state legislature works is through that website. There should be links to the general agenda of meetings and a set of rules that explains how new legislation is introduced and passed. It may take some time to look through all the rules and regulations, but the information will be there.

Who's who in your city council or legislature?

Find out who will most likely be supportive of your resolution. Who chairs key committees involving child rights, protection, and services? Which legislators have previously supported children's rights or human rights resolutions? Who has established a reputation for leadership and respect? Which have been active in their legislatures to get bills and resolutions passed? How do you obtain bipartisan support?

Researching your legislators

There are two main channels with this type of information. The first is online. Look up your legislators and find out their recent activities as well as possible connections to your own organization. In addition, research which legislators are members of committees relevant to the CRC, such as those related to children, human rights, health, etc. Second, talk to people. If you have established contacts in the local or state political arena, or convened your coalition, it will be useful to consult them for advice. If you don't have contacts already, set up meetings with people who do. Anyone with local or state political expertise will be a great resource to get started. Solicit their advice regarding the legislators to approach and the ideal channels for resolution passage.

PART 10

OUTREACH WITH MEMBERS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Meeting your legislators

Communicating with legislators is key to knowing exactly how your CRC resolution will be introduced and passed by the legislature. An initial phone call or e-mail to your potential contacts will open the lines of communication. Explain who you are, your goal to get a CRC resolution passed, and what you need from them. Don't ask for too much in your first contact. If you ask your legislator to sponsor your resolution right away, they may not be receptive in the future. Instead, solicit their advice and information. Ask them how to get support for your resolution and how to get it passed; they will then be more open in talking to you about areas of their expertise. At the same time, educate them. Explain what the CRC is, and what your resolution aims to do. Legislators will be more helpful if they are interested in your cause. Set up a meeting if possible, so that you can have their focused attention and can discuss your strategy in detail.

Find out where the political power resides

It is also important to find out where the political power really lies in your legislature or city council. For this reason, it is important to communicate with your non-legislator contacts. You can talk to these contacts more openly about where the political power really resides, a question you may not want to pose to your legislators. For example, a city council alderman may not want to say that the power lies primarily in the mayor's office, while a contact within the city government will be willing to disclose that information. In addition, talk to your coalition. They may have past experience working with the local government and will be able to advise you who to contact and how. Again, an in-person meeting with a city official or legislator is always preferable to a phone or e-mail conversation.

Attend open meetings

Attend a meeting of your city council or legislature before your resolution is introduced to understand how everything works. Be aware of the time it may take to get a resolution passed.

Find



out

whether the resolution will be referred to committee, when the committee meets, and whether they will hold a hearing on the resolution. Be aware of divisions or controversy among legislators, and give careful thought to the individuals who will serve as your “messengers.” Work together with elected officials to prepare for any hearings. Make sure you are always available to answer questions posed by legislators and council members.

DRAFTING A RESOLUTION

The first step to writing a resolution is looking at other resolutions that have been passed in your city and other cities. Collect resolutions in support of the CRC that have been passed in other cities. The resolution passed in Chicago, as well as resolutions we gathered from other cities and states, are included in this toolkit. These resolutions will provide you with a model for the sort of details and language to include in your own resolution. Look at other resolutions that have been passed in your city, especially those relating to human rights or children. Analyzing these resolutions will give you an idea as to how different cities structure their resolutions, since the structure of resolutions can vary from city to city. Write the draft of your resolution in the format that your city uses, while incorporating clauses that are relevant to the CRC.

In reviewing these resolutions, you will see that some of them simply urge the federal government to ratify the CRC. In Chicago, we believed it was important to obtain some commitment – even if it was non-binding – to improve the status of the city’s children by implementing the provisions of the CRC. You may want to aim even higher by trying to persuade your city to pass a binding ordinance.

Elements of a Resolution

Resolutions consist of many "whereas" clauses that are followed by one or multiple "be it resolved" clauses. In the “whereas” clauses, include basic information on the CRC, such as the basic principles of the treaty, the US failure to ratify the CRC, and the ways in which the CRC will benefit the city. The "Be it resolved" clauses are where the city commits its support to the CRC. This is where you and the city officials working to pass the resolution decide how binding the resolution is.

In the Chicago resolution, the city pledged to "work to advance policies and practices that are in harmony with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all city agencies and organizations that address issues directly affecting the City's children."

Distributing the resolution

After drafting the resolution, distribute it among coalition members and any members of the city government who have expressed support for your campaign. Coalition members may be familiar with other resolutions that have been passed in the city, and may also have suggestions regarding the content of the resolution. Supporters in the city government may also have suggestions for the resolution. Incorporating suggestions from allies within city government can be very useful to alert you to language that may raise opposition. .

It is likely that the resolution you draft will be changed or edited later by city officials. This is inevitable, but you can ask to be updated with any changes made to it to ensure that the intent of the resolution stays the same.

PART 12

EXAMPLE RESOLUTION

City of Chicago Resolution Adopting
the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

February 11, 2009

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago has demonstrated a sustained commitment toward ensuring the realization of human rights for all, including rights for women, laborers, and the homeless; and

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago has high aspirations and standards for its children and families and is constantly seeking ways to improve their lives and ensure an environment that protects children's health; and

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago is one of only two U.S. cities distinguished as a UNICEF Child Friendly City; and

WHEREAS, The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 20, 1989 and became effective as an international treaty on September 2, 1990; and

WHEREAS, The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the only international human rights treaty to recognize the vital role of the family and the parent child relationship; and

WHEREAS, the United States and Somalia are the only two countries that have not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child enhances Chicago's stature as a municipal leader in promoting the care and well-being of children; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the City Council is consistent with Chicago's past support of securing fundamental rights for the most vulnerable; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms Chicago's commitment to protect children and promote their rights; and

WHEREAS, the Convention would provide a single, comprehensive framework within which the diverse arms of the Chicago city government can assess and address, in a consistent manner, the rights and protections of our children; now, therefore

IT IS RESOLVED, that the Mayor and members of the City Council of Chicago, gathered here on the 11th day of February, 2009 A.D., do hereby affirm their support of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; and,

IT IS FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Mayor and members of the City Council of Chicago will advance policies and practices that are in harmony with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all city agencies and organizations that address issues directly affecting the City's children.

PART 13

PRESS RELEASE

Writing a press release

Start writing a press release in advance of the passage of the resolution so that the press release can be distributed and posted immediately after the resolution is passed. The press release should include basic information about the CRC, how the resolution is hoped or expected to affect the city, and information on who advocated for passage of the resolution. In addition, you can use quotes from people involved with the resolution. These can be people from the group of people directly working on the project, coalition members, and city officials who support the resolution. Quoting the resolution itself can also be useful to give news agencies and the public a better idea of what the resolution actually entails. Be sure to include contact information for yourself or other group members so interested news agencies and organizations can contact your group with questions. A copy of the press release used in Chicago is included in this toolkit. .

Distributing the press release

If your efforts are associated with a university or large organization, contact the publicity department of the university or organization in advance with the press release. Ask them to post the press release on their website and send it to news agencies and to any associated organizations when the resolution is passed. In addition, email the press release to all human rights or child rights listserves or groups to which you subscribe. In this way, it is likely to circulate widely. Also, contact coalition members with the press release so they may distribute it to other affiliated organizations or groups. Meet with the editorial boards of local news media.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Coalition meeting on implementation

Once your resolution is passed, implementation is the next step. Meet with your coalition to figure out your implementation strategy. What issues will target first? What are your priorities as a group? What will be the role of your coalition members? Identify your priority issues and the role your coalition members will play in the implementation process. The purpose of this meeting is to begin organizing your implementation strategy, figure out what you want to accomplish and how to do it.



Meeting with city government officials

After the resolution is passed, set up meetings with people in your local government to discuss how the resolution can be aligned with their work and priorities. In addition to working with the people you have already established relationships with, try to meet with officials in city departments that are relevant to children, such as health, child and family services, education, child protection, foster care, adoption, etc. Oftentimes, the resolution can be implemented most easily in these departments, since these are the people in the city directly working with children. By meeting with people in the city to work towards implementation, you are ensuring that the resolution is more than symbolic.

