

Public Affairs – Early Childhood Investment Corporation *Michigan's Prenatal-to-Three Collaborative*
Submitted by Piper & Gold Public Relations

Research/background

For tens of thousands of families with infants and toddlers in Michigan, their child's race, family income and ZIP code currently determine their destiny due to under-funded and under-utilized programs, workforce shortages and fragmented systems. As early childhood experts and leading members of the Pritzker-funded Michigan Prenatal-to-Three Collaborative (P3-C), the Early Childhood Investment Corporation knows the first three years of a child's life are critical, a formative period that can lay the groundwork for the best possible outcomes throughout life. That's why ECIC sought to gather input, insight and ideas from as many parents, caregivers, providers, teachers, health care professionals, administrators, community leaders, advocates and agency directors as possible to create a policy agenda to effect meaningful change. Piper & Gold Public Relations was brought on to develop key messaging, outreach materials and digital engagement tools as ECIC launched Action Teams and facilitated statewide conversations on five infant-toddler policy priority areas to shape policy solutions that will make Michigan the best place in the country to have and raise a child.

We started by sharing ECIC's simple and powerful vision: Michigan as a top state to have and raise a baby. The roadmap to achieving that vision is filled with ambitious goals and confronting hard truths. Throughout the planning process and interwoven into the final policy agenda and implementation plan, Michigan's P3-C addressed topics that are typically uncomfortable to discuss: historical trauma, racism and classism. To better build the Michigan P3-C, Action Teams were launched to facilitate dialogues statewide that would shape policy recommendations, while a digital ad campaign was developed to reach intentional and diverse populations and raise awareness and gauge interest in what it is they need (aka test the policy priorities). Extensive research was put into determining who needed to be reached and how. We identified the following groups of parents as priorities to not only connect with regarding their reactions to priority policy areas, but to expand our network of engagement for P3-C's next phase —to take action and help shape policy change.

The audiences were selected carefully and based on data: African American mothers in urban centers, African American fathers in Detroit, Hispanic and Latinx families throughout Michigan, and white rural families in Michigan.

We worked closely with the Michigan Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives and the State of Michigan demographer to identify the target audiences based on demographics and geographic concentrations of different groups throughout Michigan who are below 200% of the federal poverty limit and have children younger than 3. We also leveraged secondary research about parenting behaviors and values to and develop data-driven messaging for each audience.

Planning

Budget: With a total budget of \$24,995, including a \$6,000 digital ad buy, we were able to reach thousands of families across Michigan. This included development of key messages, visual project branding, Action Team toolkits to facilitate dialogue, audience profiles and digital engagement in partnership with Change Media Group, as well as impact analysis and strategic counsel throughout the project.

Target audience: Our primary target audiences for the P3-C outreach were early childhood service stakeholders, including leaders from across the state both inside and outside government, parents, early educators, health professionals, administrators and advocates. We also targeted demographic and geographic concentrations with the highest numbers of families eligible for services: African American mothers in urban centers, African American fathers in Detroit, Hispanic and Latinx families throughout Michigan, and white rural families in Michigan. By strategically engaging people from a wide variety of institutions and geographic communities, Michigan's P3 Collaborative sought to integrate, inform and align state and local efforts by design.

Objective one: Develop Action Team toolkits to facilitate stakeholder conversations and feedback. Action Teams of engaged ECIC stakeholders from around the state were provided with toolkits to facilitate conversations in the following areas: Child Care Assistance; Early Intervention; Home Visiting; Infant-Toddler Child Care; and Preventative Care. Each toolkit included clear steps to host, facilitate and report on their discussions, and offered suggested agendas depending on the time available to the groups. The toolkits also outlined current data, identifying gaps in families not currently receiving the assistance they need across all policy priority areas. Discussion questions were provided for parent groups and provider groups, intending to spark critical dialogue on what challenges each group faces accessing early child care services. Potential policy solutions were also offered to the facilitated discussion groups, a testing ground for the expert experiences to make them as actionable and realistic as possible. Stakeholders were encouraged to leverage existing meetings or gatherings to encourage the highest participation possible, such as board meetings, parent teacher conferences, etc.

Objective two: Develop and launch a digital advertising and feedback campaign focusing on underrepresented communities to gauge awareness about available early child care programs, the desirability of these programs and, most importantly, begin building interest among parents in various communities to shape policy change. In partnership with Change Media Group, we ran a Facebook campaign targeting African American men, African American women, Latinx families, rural Michigan families and a generic statewide audience of those likely to be eligible for programs based on income and age of children. The research identified the demographics of those who met the campaign criteria, while the target audience profiles shaped messaging. Across all audiences, we specifically targeted parents of infants and toddlers. For both African American groups as well as UP and rural Michigan families, we elected to expand the target beyond the initial

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demographic findings to include parents who held an undergraduate or associate degree in order to generate a higher awareness and response rate.

Execution/creative quality

Images and messaging were essential to successful engagement, particularly in the digital phase of the project. While the Action Team toolkits were developed to be easy-to-use and functional, providing those in the field with everything they needed to have meaningful conversations, those hosting Action Team meetings were already well-versed in ECIC's goals and the importance of its policy recommendations. As a result, they focused more on process and facts and less on explaining to people the "why" behind the work.

For the digital execution, however, we recognized the importance to speaking to each audience with intentional language and ensuring they felt represented in visuals and imagery given the majority of the audiences were unfamiliar with ECIC and its work. Audience profiles were created for the four largest eligible demographic groups helping us to understand their values and habits surrounding parenting. After all, we were speaking to families about their children – one of the most emotional, cherished and important topics in their lives. We were careful to develop language that was supportive and approachable, while also reflecting each demographic groups specific values, such as the prevalence of multi-generational families in the Hispanic and Latinx communities and the unique roles within those families, or acknowledging the data bucking common negative stereotypes surrounding Black dads, given that research shows them to be the most involved and knowledgeable demographic group of fathers. Digital ad targeting allowed us to leverage those who fell into each target audience in video content presented before their peers. Videos were of real people, and intentionally filmed in a "selfie-style" based on performance metrics showing videos to be the most engaging content, and informal videos to perform better than more formal pieces. When certain aspects of the ads were underperforming within several of the target audiences, we adjusted the demographic targeting within Facebook to broaden reach while still staying true to the messaging.

Evaluation

Objective one: Develop Action Team toolkits to help facilitate stakeholder conversations and feedback. A total of 63 stakeholder group conversations were held statewide, representing over 950 people. That feedback drove Michigan's Prenatal-to-Three Policy Initiative final report, having just been submitted to the Pritzker Children's Initiative for additional funding consideration. From the report:

"Through joint advocacy, community engagement and strategic communications, leaders from across the state, both inside and outside government, will work side-by-side with parents, early educators, health professionals, administrators and advocates to ensure the adoption of policies that will measurably and sustainably increase enrollment in high-quality child care, home visiting, early intervention and preventative care that exceed our initial ambitious goal of serving an additional 41,750 infants and toddlers by 2023 and 83,000 by 2025, by striving to serve 113,500 infants and toddlers who currently do not receive high-quality services, and live in low-income households, by 2023."

Objective two: Develop and launch a digital advertising and feedback campaign to raise awareness. Overall, the campaign garnered 134,120 impressions, reaching 29,575 individuals in the target audiences. While awareness was our primary goal, ads also directed people to a Facebook survey allowing them to react to policy priorities.

Though fewer than half of all respondents were aware of any of the programs, all reported high rates of program desirability, indicating the power and feasibility of the proposed policy solutions. The final report concludes:

"This planning grant was a catalyst in many ways. Toward the conclusion of the planning process, the Governor's Office of Foundation Liaison and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation hosted a full-day convening featuring the P3-C team and leaders from MDE (Michigan Department of Education) that attracted nearly 50 philanthropic leaders to provide input on the draft P3 policy agenda and the Preschool Development Birth through Five Grant plan. This important opportunity ensured transparency and consensus about the changes that will be pursued in the next 3-5 years and provided support in identifying champions, planning messaging, and mitigating risks and challenges.

"Michigan is now poised to leverage and mobilize this first-of-its-kind network of engaged and diverse community members, parent leaders, providers and state-level administrators who are collectively focused on families with children 0-3 to achieve the goals in the policy agenda and implementation plan. All Steering Committee members and partner organizations that participated in the planning phase of this grant, including the parent members, have committed to continuing to support this work, and Parent Coalitions throughout the state signed on in support of the policy agenda and committed to support the implementation efforts."

From Dawne Bell, ECIC executive director: "The social media campaign allowed the Michigan's P3 Collaborative to build our army, expanding who we can reach and engage with, demonstrating that we can reach diverse populations through multiple channels. We were also able to learn about what works and what doesn't when reaching out to parents via social media."