

MAKING THE ELECTION COUNT FOR KIDS

FUTURE IN FOCUS



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ABOUT FIRST FOCUS:

First Focus is a bipartisan advocacy organization committed to making children a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. Children's health, education, family economics, child welfare, and child safety are the core issue areas around which First Focus is working to promote bipartisan policy solutions.

MORE INFORMATION:

For more information about this request for proposals, First Focus, or the Future in Focus initiative, please contact:

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FIRST FOCUS

MAKING CHILDREN & FAMILIES THE PRIORITY

Dear Student Advocate,

As we approach the most important election in decades, the rising influence of young voters is a phenomenon that has captivated the nation. Not only has research shown a dramatic increase in young voters during this year's presidential primaries, but their participation has been deemed a key factor in determining the nominees. In fact, *TIME* magazine reports that over 70 percent of young people are paying attention to this year's elections; exceeding youth interest in celebrity gossip and even sports. Never before have we seen such a powerful surge of civic engagement and youth action. Why this year? Why this election?

Most political experts attribute this outpouring of interest to a new generation of civic leaders known as the "millennial generation." These digitally connected, socially engaged youth have been growing up global, fully aware that the challenges facing our nation today will profoundly affect their lives and the lives of their children. Consequently, candidates for public office are paying serious attention to young voters for the first time. This gives you a unique opportunity to make your voice heard in a way that will have a substantial impact on this year's election results.

Your state's congressional and presidential elections offer a rare opportunity to focus the attention of national leaders on critical issues that will impact your future. Unquestionably, issues relating to our nation's children and young adults are the most important for ensuring that millennials are given the same benefits and opportunities as prior generations. As a Washington, DC based youth advocacy organization, First Focus believes that taking action to help kids today is an important investment in our nation's future. There is no better voice to persuade candidates to advocate on behalf of young people than youth themselves.

That's why we have launched the First Focus **Future in Focus** initiative. Through this project, we will give you the tools to tackle these challenges -- by providing financial support, information, data, and other resources for student organizations to make children's issues a major topic during your state's Congress and presidential elections. The following pages will explain your next steps.

For the first time, a majority of Americans believe that the next generation will not fare as well as their parents. Today, millions of American children do not receive adequate health care, and millions more are struggling in schools that lack the resources to provide the support they need. These young people are America's future, and with so much at stake, we cannot afford to remain silent on issues of such importance.

Join First Focus this fall and help make children a priority. **It's time to Focus on the Future.**

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley

President

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

First Focus is a national advocacy organization focused on improving the lives of America's children. We work directly with Congress and the president to increase the government's commitment to meeting the needs of kids and young people alike. The **Future in Focus** initiative seeks to take advantage of the upcoming political debates and elections to inject the needs of children and young adults into the conversation. **Future in Focus** will give student organizations the monetary and administrative support they need to bring public attention to children's issues. By participating in this initiative, you can send a clear message to those running for office that the well-being of America's children is a priority for their constituents.

Participating student organizations will raise awareness of federal and state specific problems that affect children, and potential solutions. In addition, you will be expected to raise the profile of two specific issues:

- Increasing federal dollars for children's programs during 2009 and 2010; and
- Renewing and improving the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) within the first 100 days of the new presidential administration

After the election, your organization will also be required to ensure that elected officials follow through on their campaign pledges to make children and youth a policy priority.

Grant awards will be distributed to 20-25 student groups and will range between \$500 and \$2,000 in amount. Award amounts will depend on the scope of work outlined in the proposal. In addition to financial support, technical assistance and a toolkit of supporting materials will be made available to selected student organizations. Student organizations may **NOT** use **Future in Focus** funds in any way to endorse a particular political candidate, whether for the presidential, congressional or other election.

ELIGIBILITY:

Highly motivated, innovative collegiate student organizations or groups are encouraged to submit proposals for funding to participate in the **Future in Focus** initiative. These student organizations or groups can either be a formal organization affiliated with a university and or the surrounding community, or a less formal group or club with college student members/participants.

IMPORTANT DATES:

Proposals to participate must be received by First Focus no later than 5:00pm Eastern Daylight Time on **September 12, 2008**. Applications submitted earlier will be given advanced consideration.

Selected organizations will be notified during the week of **September 15, 2008** and will be expected to begin implementing **Future in Focus** activities by **September 22, 2008**. All work will be completed by **December 22, 2008**.

APPLICATION PROCESS:

Applications must be written with a font size no smaller than 11-point and should be single-spaced. Applications must not exceed five (5) printed pages and must be saved using one of two file formats: Microsoft Word, or Adobe Acrobat Reader portable document format (PDF).

Applications must be delivered as a single file attached to an e-mail message addressed to Katie Peters at katiep@firstfocus.net. The subject line of that e-mail message must be "Future in Focus Proposal."



Helpful Information:

CHILDREN IN THE FEDERAL BUDGET:

This year, the federal government's budget will be nearly 3 trillion dollars. Only about 8 percent of those funds will go towards improving the lives of children and young people. In fact, the share of federal dollars invested in children has actually been declining for the past five years.

There are more than 180 different federally supported programs that seek, in one way or another, to help children and young people. These programs range from grants to school districts, to providing vaccines for children, to foster care support, to job training, to poison control centers. Over the past five years, most of these programs have suffered significant cuts, meaning that they can serve fewer and fewer children and young people.

How we choose to invest our resources today will have repercussions for decades to come. The federal budget is a reflection of our national priorities and recently, it seems children and young people aren't at the top of the list.

THE STATE CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM (SCHIP):

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) was created in 1997 to provide health care for children in working families unable to afford coverage on their own. Prior to SCHIP's creation, about 15 percent of all children were uninsured.

The program has been wildly successful since its inception; reducing the number of uninsured children by one-third. After just a decade, SCHIP has provided health insurance for more than 6 million American children.

Last fall, the US House of Representatives and the Senate passed legislation to strengthen and improve the SCHIP program. On two occasions, the Congress sent these "reauthorization" bills to President Bush for his signature. Unfortunately, the President declined increased support for SCHIP, and vetoed both bills.

In March of 2009, the SCHIP program will expire. Thus, those running for office must indicate a strong commitment to renewing and increasing federal resources for this important program.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS:

Adhering to the application guidelines on page 2, please prepare a proposal that provides information about the following five categories:

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

What is the history of your organization/student group? When were you founded? What types of activities or events has your group participated in or hosted? Does your group have a history of civic engagement? If not, how will participating in **Future in Focus** change this? Does your group have a political affiliation?

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Describe the three most significant issues/challenges facing children and youth growing up in your state or community. What is the current political landscape of your state and community? What federal elections are scheduled to take place in fall, 2008? How can these races impact key children's issues previously mentioned?

FUTURE IN FOCUS ADVOCACY ACTION PLAN

How will your student group use the fall elections to raise awareness around children's issues? What will you do after the elections to ensure that your members of Congress address children's issues? Describe your Advocacy Action plan by sharing your goals, **workplan**, and **communications strategy**:

A. Project Goals:

Demonstrate the focus of your action plan by creating a list of concrete goals for your **Future in Focus** work. Goals should be described in terms of both outputs (rallies, letters to the editor, video creation, etc.) and outcomes (every major party congressional candidate in the state will commit verbally or in writing to make X a top priority during 2009).

Strong proposals will describe goals in terms that adhere to **S.M.A.R.T** objective setting principles:

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Realistic
Time-bound

B. Workplan:

Demonstrate your ingenuity in the use of **Future in Focus** initiative resources by including a workplan specifying the various activities your student group will take to achieve your goals.

C. Communications Strategy:

How will you raise awareness about children's issues in you college, university or community? How will you involve the media in your project?

PROJECT TIMELINE

Create a timeline with tentative dates and activities in which your group will participate. While you are not bound to this timeline, it will give First Focus a good sense of your ability to plan and organize on deadline.

BUDGET PROPOSAL

Proposals should specify the amount of **Future in Focus** initiative funds sought by the applicant organization and include a detailed project budget describing how funding will be allocated across the activities described in the applicant's workplan (video equipment/software, printing costs, meeting/event space, etc.).

Advocacy Ideas:

- Hold a candidate forum where young people can ask questions of candidates running for office. Invite the press to attend.
- Produce a pamphlet or informational flyer about issues that affect children in your community. Provide the views of the candidates on these issues.
- Create a viral video about the importance of "voting for kids," i.e., electing politicians who will make kids issues a top priority. Post your video on YouTube and promote it for widespread attention.
- Create a blog, Myspace page, or Facebook group about the fall elections. Use this medium as a way to garner awareness around issues relating to children and youth in your state.
- Host campus rallies, town meetings, and other public events.
- Develop a questionnaire for federal candidates, to determine how young people are reflected in their policy priorities. Work with local media to publicize candidate responses.
- Write letters to the editor, submit editorials/OpEds, or create a public service announcement about children's issues.
- Launch a letter writing campaign or draft a sign-on letter urging the candidates to make kids issues a priority if elected.
- Hold a voter registration drive

**First Focus will provide ideas, support, feedback, templates, and other tools to assist you in implementing these ideas.

EXPECTATIONS OF SELECTED ORGANIZATIONS:

By accepting **Future in Focus** funding, selected organizations agree to meet First Focus's expectations for student organization partners, including but not limited to:

KEY POINT OF CONTACT:

Selected student organizations must identify one student leader as a key point of contact. This key contact person will be responsible for all communication with First Focus.

FOCUS ON NATIONAL PRIORITY ISSUES:

Selected organizations will be expected to highlight community and state-specific priority children's issues through their **Future in Focus** work, as well as the two key national priority issues:

- Increasing federal dollars for children's programs during 2009 and 2010; and
- Renewing and improving the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) within the first 100 days of the new presidential administration

MONTHLY REPORTING:

First Focus is committed to showcasing the exemplary work of our student partners to national funders, partners, and policymakers. To ensure that the best work is available, grantees will be encouraged to share materials (videos, talking points, news clippings, brochures and other publications, press releases, etc.) with First Focus on a monthly basis, accompanied by a brief overview of the **Future in Focus** activities undertaken during the month.

FINANCIAL REPORTING:

Selected organizations will be expected to provide a final report to First Focus, describing the use of grant funds. The final financial report will be due on **January 19, 2009**.

CONSISTENCY IN COMMUNICATIONS:

First Focus will provide grantees a toolkit of materials to support their work on behalf of the initiative. This toolkit may include specific messages that selected organizations will be expected to deliver in communications supported through grant funds.

First Focus expects organizations to develop workplans responsive to the particular needs and priorities of their campus, community, and state. However, the **Future in Focus** initiative is a network lined by a shared purpose, and we expect that selected organizations will prominently and consistently identify their work as part of the First Focus **Future in Focus** initiative.

LOBBYING PROHIBITION

As a condition of funding under this initiative, First Focus prohibits any portion of the **Future in Focus** initiative grant award to be used for direct or grassroots lobbying, or electioneering, as those terms are defined in federal tax law and regulations and any applicable state laws and regulations.

Useful Resources:

The following websites and research might be helpful resources as you work to write your proposal to participate in the **Future in Focus** initiative:

First Focus: Visit the First Focus website to find a variety of background information, press releases, and reports about the issue areas we work to address. www.firstfocus.net

Rock the Vote: After ramping up their website with an array of new resources and online tools, Rock the Vote is once again using technology and popular culture to engage and build the political power of young people. www.rockthevote.org

Scoop '08: Nearly 300 high school and college journalists from across the country write for this "first-ever daily national student newspaper." The paper is sure to provide your students with access to information and interesting peer perspectives. www.scoop08.com

Vote Poke: With a database of compiled voter rolls from each state, this site allows visitors to check their registration status immediately. They can also "poke" friends by sending them an email reminding them make sure they are registered and ready to vote. www.votepoke.com

Think MTV: Chose or Lose, the election awareness initiative hosted by Think MTV, provides a number of interesting resources for students, including a group of 50 student leaders called their Street team '08 – their very own squad of mobile youth journalists. Students can find the journalist covering their state and have access to election information presented by someone their own age. www.think.mtv.com/Issues/politics/

CIRCLE: Visit this website to find research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. Although CIRCLE conducts research, not practice, the projects they provide information about have practical implications for those who work to increase young people's engagement in politics and civic life. www.civicyouth.org