



Born LearningSM Trail installation and media guide



Making the most of the
Born Learning Trail

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*Born Learning*SM is a public engagement campaign helping parents, caregivers, and communities create early learning opportunities for young children. *Born Learning* educational materials are made available through the efforts of United Way, United Way Success By 6 and Civitas. For more information, visit us online at www.bornlearning.org.

I. Introduction

One of the challenges in making lasting community change — especially regarding early childhood — is communicating its impact in a memorable and meaningful way.

An event can help you get that message across, whether it's a Day of Caring, a campaign launch, or a media event.

An event can also be the launch of a new early childhood project, not just a one-time activity. An ideal event is one that generates visibility and deepens your community's understanding of the issues facing young children, while moving your impact strategy forward, creating volunteer opportunities, and connecting your volunteers and sponsors more closely to early learning.

That's the idea behind the *Born Learning Trail*. Installing the *Trail* provides not only visibility but also strategic, fundraising, and volunteer opportunities. The *Trail* lends itself to impact — offering activity stations with fun, interactive learning games that parents, grandparents, and caregivers can play with young children. The *Born Learning Trail* could be installed in a park, greenspace, river walk, playground, school yard, company grounds, even inside a shopping center.

Why Build a *Born Learning Trail*?

If you're already focused on early childhood — whether or not you have an early childhood initiative — the *Trail* is a great way to build momentum and deepen impact. The *Born Learning Trail* can help you:

- Shape your Day of Caring or campaign kickoff event around early childhood in a way that connects with United Way's early learning outcomes

I. Introduction, *continued*

- Provide a visible, enduring symbol of commitment to young children
- Offer new sponsorship opportunities
- Generate new funds for your early childhood work
- Strengthen volunteers' and corporate partners' connection to early learning
- Stage a media event (outside your Day of Caring or campaign) that promotes United Way, key sponsors, and volunteers, as well as the importance of investing in early childhood
- Give parents, grandparents, and caregivers easy, fun ways to help young children increase early learning
- Launch an early learning initiative

This turnkey *Trail* kit is one of the 500-plus tools in the *Born Learning* public engagement campaign to help parents, grandparents, caregivers, and communities support early learning. *Born Learning* offers step-by-step guidelines and online tips, tools, and templates to support awareness, education, and community mobilization strategies around young children. Visit Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org for details.

II. Getting Started

National Early Learning Partners

United Way of America (UWA) is partnering with national organizations on early learning. Many have local affiliates or members you can engage to support your *Born Learning Trail*, including elected and appointed municipal leaders, state legislators, governors, law enforcement officials, children's museums' staffs, and state leaders of elementary and secondary education. In addition to Civitas, Families and Work Institute, and the Ad Council, UWA's early learning partners include:

- The Association of Children's Museums (ACM), representing 350 children's museums that average more than 30 million visitors each year. UWA and ACM are working to provide venues for *Born Learning* materials in museums and through partnerships with local United Ways. www.childrensmuseums.org
- The National League of Cities (NLC), which serves as a resource for 1,800 cities, towns, and villages and their appointed and elected leaders. UWA and NLC are working together to support families, friends, and neighbors who care for more than half the nation's young children. www.nlc.org

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Align resources. Before you embark on building the *Trail*, make sure your marketing/communications, investor relations, and community impact staffs are working together as a team. The process of installing the *Trail* can advance strategic goals for each of these departments.

Identify partners. Which potential partners or sponsors could make the *Trail* an even more successful project? For example, partners may be helpful in identifying and securing the *Trail* site, ensuring that all safety and legal considerations are fully addressed, and lending credibility to the *Trail* as an added value to your community. Below you'll find a list of potential partners, allies, or sponsors for early childhood projects. Your list of partners may be driven partly by decisions you make as you go through the process. Here are some questions to consider:

- Are your mayor and/or council members already early childhood champions? The *Trail* could highlight that support, and their staff could help find a good site, especially if you want to use a public location (such as a city or county park).
- What about your school superintendent and school board members? You may want to approach them, especially if you're interested in using a school playground as your *Born Learning Trail* location.
- Are you involved in any other early childhood efforts or community partnerships (with family resource centers, children's museums, parks, schools, libraries, community playgrounds, etc.) that could benefit from an enhancement like the *Trail*?

You may already have a short list of community partners or sponsors with whom you're working to create the *Born Learning Trail*. But the list of potential early childhood allies is longer than you might think. Here are some stakeholders to consider, either to help underwrite the *Trail* or to spark ideas for locations:

- Businesses participating in your United Way campaign
- Elected officials (mayors, county commissioners, city and county council members, and school board members)
- Government (state, county, and municipal), especially parks and recreation divisions
- Children's museums, theater and arts organizations
- Faith communities

II. Getting Started, *continued*

National Early Learning Partners. *continued*

- The Birth To Five Policy Alliance, which is committed to shifting the odds for vulnerable children and their families. It includes the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Committee on Economic Development, the Center for Law and Social Policy, the National Center for Children in Poverty, Fight Crime Invest in Kids, Zero To Three, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and UWA. With generous support from the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and an anonymous foundation, the members of the Alliance are working to ensure that more at-risk infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their families have access to comprehensive early childhood development services that promote early success and school readiness. The Alliance promotes improved bipartisan public policies nationally and in several states, including Illinois, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Washington, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado. www.buffettearlychildhoodfund.org

- Business leaders and major employers (including chambers of commerce and major employers that focus on workforce development)
- Civic groups (Junior Leagues, National Urban League affiliates in your area, Rotary, Jaycees, Kiwanis Clubs, etc.)
- Child care providers, programs, resource and referral networks, and child care associations
- Garden centers and nurseries
- Health-related organizations (hospitals, health clinics, public health departments, and health outreach programs)
- Hardware stores
- Housing authorities and developers
- Libraries
- Media outlets (print, broadcast, and web-based)
- Mentoring groups (Big Brothers/Big Sisters, etc.)
- Museums
- PTAs, PTOs, parent councils
- Pediatricians and local medical societies
- Law enforcement
- Retailers
- Senior citizen organizations (AARP, corporate retiree groups, etc.)
- Schools (superintendents and principals)
- Shopping centers
- YMCAs
- YWCAs
- Youth groups (Girl and Boy Scouts, Campfire, Boys and Girls Clubs, etc.)

Target a location. As you determine where to build your *Born Learning Trail*, here are some questions to consider:

- Are you seeking the greatest visibility across the community or the greatest impact on a particular target audience?
- Where do children and families in your community go to learn and to play?
- Are you already focused on a particular neighborhood through your community impact work?
- Do existing or prospective partners already have a presence in the types of settings you're considering?

II. Getting Started, *continued*

Three Things to Remember

There are three key considerations when planning to install a *Born Learning Trail*:

1. The site you select must be safe. Consider how you'll ensure the safety of children and adults.
2. The final *Trail* must be high-quality — in design and finished product. Make sure construction and painting meet professional quality standards.
3. A continuing maintenance plan is critical, even if the *Trail* is on public land. Your corporate sponsors must be confident that anything they've branded will be clean and well maintained.

A maintenance plan is another way to engage volunteers, so factor that into your Volunteer Engagement Plan. Consider creating an annual planting day (perhaps on Arbor Day) as another way to link your volunteers with the *Trail* and your focus on young children.

- Is there a geographic link that current or prospective sponsors might prefer? For example, a bank that's already supporting United Way might want to add a *Born Learning Trail* to its grounds. A school that houses a family resource center would be a logical place to connect families with a *Trail*. A home improvement store — which may already use its playground equipment in an interactive display at the store — may agree to expand that into a *Trail*. A river walk may benefit from a *Trail* that attracts families and sponsors.
- Is the selected setting safe and well maintained?

Exercise due diligence. Once you've identified some possible target locations, it's essential to research, understand, and follow all rules and regulations. (It's best to engage a volunteer attorney for this part.)

- Safety — If it's a playground or other public space, do you have current local and state safety regulations in hand? You can review the Consumer Product Safety Commission's Public Playground Safety Checklist at www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/327.html.
- Access for all children and caregivers — Is the site in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act?
- Maintenance — Who owns the site? The owner will be legally responsible for maintenance, but you should develop a supplemental maintenance plan. Keeping the *Trail* maintained after installation is critical to its "value add" and to the public message about your United Way and sponsors.
- Are there any other legal issues that must be considered in advance?

III. Your *Born Learning Trail*

Outcome Driven Games

Based on the latest early childhood research and approved by national early learning experts, all *Born Learning Trail* activities support *Born Learning's* national outcomes (listed below). Research affirms that preliteracy and language are foundational skills for school success and that these skills are most readily developed in the context of loving, nurturing relationships. UWA engaged the American Institutes for Research to identify parent and caregiver behaviors with the greatest impact on early learning and school readiness for young children. *Born Learning* educational material, its website, and PSAs support these behavior and knowledge outcomes, and local campaigns are encouraged to focus on them:

- Building of language and literacy skills through talking, reading, telling stories, writing, singing, and rhyming with young children
- Building social-emotional development through responsive caregiving such as responding sensitively to children's needs, establishing routines, sharing love and affection, and talking lovingly with young children
- Greater understanding by parents and caregivers that they play a valuable role in supporting early learning
- Use of everyday moments — fun, loving interaction — to reinforce learning

For more on *Born Learning* outcomes and indicators and evaluation framework and resources, visit Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org (track results section).

The components you choose for your *Trail* will depend on your community, your site, and your resources.

Welcome sign. This should be placed at the *Trail* head or entrance as an introduction to the *Born Learning Trail* and your United Way and sponsors. It can be localized with their logos.

Learning activity signs. There are nine signs with expert-approved learning games available, each with fun and easy activities for children and adults to do together. Four of the signs come with reusable stencils and should be placed near sidewalks or asphalt so icons can be painted on these surfaces. (Be sure to use the right paint, and make sure it's not lead-based. See *Three Things to Think About Before Painting* in this manual for more.) The other five signs do not require icons and can be used in any outdoor setting. You may choose to use all nine signs or just a few. Each sign can be localized. The signs include:

- *Watch! Stop! Learn! Play!* Encourages the caregiver to follow the child's lead, building the child's curiosity and confidence, and reinforcing learning
- *Look! Learn! Laugh!* Encourages caregivers to pay attention to children in positive ways, building self-esteem
- *Talk! Listen! Sing!* Encourages talking and singing with children, building language and pre-literacy skills critical to reading
- *See! Say! Point! Read!* Encourages playfulness with letters and sounds, building preliteracy skills
- *Imagine! Create! Pretend!* Encourages interactive storytelling, building a child's ability to imagine and listen
- *Jump! Clap! Skip! Move!* Encourages physical activity and gross motor skills, which are important for kindergarten
- *Hop! Toss! Shake! Wiggle!* Gets children's brains and bodies moving, building fine and gross motor skills as well as the thinking that's key to kindergarten success
- *Describe! Compare! Learn!* Encourages children to think in ways that build readiness for reading and math
- *Look! Listen! Touch! Think!* Encourages exploration of nature, building a child's problem-solving skills

III. Your *Born Learning Trail*, continued

Legal notice

Born Learning is the registered trademark of Parents as Teachers and is used under license by United Way of America and Civitas. All *Born Learning* products, including *Born Learning Trail* activities, are subject to copyright restrictions. It is not permissible for you to create local *Born Learning Trail* signage, activities, or other *Trail* components. If your needs are not met by the existing *Trail*, contact the UWA Success By 6 team through Melissa Rohr, United Way SB6 communications manager, at Melissa.Rohr@uwa.unitedway.org or 800.892.2757, ext. 225.

While all *Born Learning* products are reviewed by early childhood experts, UWA and Civitas make no further warranties or guarantees with respect to fitness for a particular purpose and disclaim any and all liability arising under any cause of action related to use of this product.

Learning activity sign backer boards. To make sure the plastic signs are sturdy and long-lasting, it's best to install a **backer board** for each. The boards do not come with the kit, but it is easy to make them (along with buying signposts locally). Most home centers sell 10' x 2" x 12" pressure-treated boards that can be cut into five 2' x 12" pieces (same size as the signs). Two of these boards will yield the 10 required backer boards for signs. Be sure to follow the steps in the Instruction Sheet closely and use the recommended tools. Also, it's important to have the edges sanded for rounded corners, ensuring child safety as well as aligning with the sign shapes. You may want to recruit a professional carpenter as a volunteer for the installation team.

In addition to the signs in the kit, your *Trail* could include:

Planting. Depending on the outdoor setting, you may want to add landscaping as part of your *Trail* and Volunteer Engagement Plan. Be sure to plant nontoxic flowers, shrubs, or trees. Find out which plants are safe at <http://homecooking.about.com/library/weekly/blflowersnot.htm>.

Benches. You may also choose to provide benches for your *Trail*. You'll need to check with the site's owner for any safety regulations dictating materials.

IV. Engaging Volunteers

A *Born Learning Trail* is more than a great way to engage volunteers. It's also an ongoing opportunity to connect them more closely to early learning, to each other, and to meaningful community service. Think broadly about how to engage volunteers in the planning, promotion, and advance work, in addition to activities around *Trail* installation. Here are some suggestions:

Develop a long-term engagement strategy. Early on, develop a Volunteer Engagement Plan with a strategy for involving volunteers in the *Trail* and the early learning issue in general. Your goal should be sustaining the relationship and deepening volunteers' engagement in your early childhood work over time. The *Trail* installation best serves as a component or kickoff, not a one-time event. Consider how you can use these volunteers down the road — to advocate for policy, help boost book distribution efforts, serve on early childhood committees or coalitions, etc. How will you keep them educated and enthusiastic about early learning? How will this effort be supported by your investor relations, marketing and communications, and community impact outreach activities?

Brainstorm all tactical volunteer pieces. Scope out the volunteer aspect of the *Trail* installation, including specific roles before, during, and after the event.

Designate volunteer leaders. You may want a chair for the overall event as well as chairs for subcommittees on planning, solicitations (donations of cash, plants, lumber, etc), landscaping, food, entertainment, setup, signage, and cleanup. If you're planning to hold any recruitment events (events with target companies, or a community event as described below), recruit these leaders beforehand so they can help make the pitch for other volunteers.

Build on relationships. Recruit volunteer leaders in a way that builds on your relationship with them. Look at this as building a long-term relationship with your stakeholders, not just completing a project or installation event. As you build the relationship, ask questions and listen hard. What does he/she care about? Young children are important to many people, whether or not they're parents. Grandparents value spending time with grandchildren, and others look at the matter through the wider community lens of building a future workforce. Your early learning work bridges to all of that. Discern the passion and find a way to connect it to early childhood.

IV. Engaging Volunteers, *continued*

Get your board on board. Look for other opportunities to help current and potential volunteers understand the issues facing young children and their families in your community. You want them to see how your *Trail* and impact strategies fit together to drive strategic community goals.

- Make a presentation to your United Way board. You may want to use the *Getting Your Board on Board* toolkit, designed by the United Way Success Association, to help enlist board members as early learning champions. The toolkit includes a User Guide with tips for engagement, as well as templates and a DVD featuring UWA board members and CEO/president Brian Gallagher touting the value of early learning community change. It's available from the United Way Store at www.UnitedWayStore.com.
- Schedule one-on-one briefings with key community leaders, speak at civic or faith community events, and/or discuss the *Trail* at elected officials' meetings.

The new *Making the Business Case* toolkit, with communications tools designed to help persuade business leaders on early childhood issues, may be helpful here. Based on proven messaging and the latest research, the tools include an adaptable PowerPoint presentation and brochure, as well as champion action tips with specific steps supporters could take to support early childhood. You can download *Making the Business Case* from Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org.

Reach out broadly. Naturally, you'll want to offer volunteer opportunities to companies that support your campaign. But depending on the scope of your project, you may need to recruit volunteers from other venues as well.

- Consider recruiting United Way's fundraising volunteers. This experience will help them understand more about early learning — and why their fundraising efforts are so important.
- Develop a volunteer invitation and send it to companies, associations, clubs, social networks, faith communities (especially any near the *Trail* location), etc.
- Look to your agency partners, especially any serving youth. In addition to volunteering, youth will learn more about United Way and early learning — and may even earn a badge for their efforts.
- Ask community garden clubs or county extension services' master gardeners to help with landscaping plans and planting.

IV. Engaging Volunteers, *continued*

Whatever the details of your Volunteer Engagement Plan, consider every interaction with volunteers as a “teachable moment” about the importance and impact of early learning. It’s not just about building the *Trail*! It’s an opportunity to raise volunteers’ awareness and deepen understanding about early learning. And it’s an opportunity to turn *Born Learning Trail* volunteers into public champions for children, to build long-term partnerships and public support for school readiness in your community.

- If you want to reach deeply into the community to engage new allies from outside your network, consider creating a volunteer recruitment breakfast. Look at this as an event with dual purposes: engaging supporters for your organization (and *Trail* installation) and deepening community engagement by presenting the *Born Learning Trail* concept to a wide array of community leaders, in the context of your ongoing early childhood work.
- Engage your volunteer leaders to create a targeted invitation list. Which community leaders and elected and appointed officials need to know about your early childhood work as well as about the *Trail*? Have you already engaged all the community organizations and faith communities near your *Trail* site? If not, this is a good opportunity. For ideas on structuring the event, see suggestions for media events in the Media Opportunities section. Community events are often the best media events!

Capture your volunteer data. However you recruit volunteers, be sure to collect their names, email addresses, and telephone numbers. This lets you build on outreach efforts; you can stay in communication with them — and update them on your early childhood activity. Get their home addresses, too, so you can mail them a thank-you note after the event.

What Can Volunteers Do When?

Volunteers can play many roles in the planning and execution of the *Trail* installation. Here are just a few ideas:

Before the event

- Serve on the planning committee to help plan an event.
- Obtain permission to use chosen site(s).
- Recruit and coordinate other volunteers.

IV. Engaging Volunteers, *continued*

Three Things to Think About Before Painting

Four of the nine *Trail* signs come with stencils that require painting game icons (shapes, letters, etc.) on a hard surface. Ask at a paint store or consult a painting professional about what you'll need to ensure a durable and high-quality result. There are three important factors to keep in mind before painting:

1. Properly prepare the surface. Find out how to clean and prep the specific surface on which you'll be painting.
2. Find out what kind of paint is best for that surface.
3. If possible, engage a professional painter as a volunteer to paint the stencils. If you cannot find a volunteer, consider paying for a professional. Badly painted icons will undercut the look and impact of the *Trail*.

- Help with publicity planning.
- Contact media, especially media leaders they know personally.
- Serve as media spokespeople for articles prepared in advance to promote the event.
- Produce or underwrite a radio or cable TV PSA to promote the event.
- Help brainstorm places to hang the *Born Learning Trail* poster to recruit volunteers and raise visibility.
- Help put up the posters or deploy staff in their companies to do so.
- Create the landscape plan.
- Donate plants, trees, shrubs, and flowers.
- Donate or purchase the “hard” materials — signposts, concrete, paint.
- Help map the *Trail*, determining which signs goes where.
- Install benches.
- Prepare the site for the installation.
- Consult painting professionals and prepare sidewalks or asphalt surfaces for painting activity icons (see *Three Things to Think About Before Painting*).
- Plan for any food or refreshments needed for the volunteers.

During the event

- Put up balloons, signs, etc., before the event begins.
- Dig holes for signposts and plantings.
- Pour concrete for signposts.
- Install signposts.
- Oversee professional painting of stencils on pavement or sidewalk (see *Three Things to Think About Before Painting*).
- Serve as tour guides.
- Staff tables or booths.
- Take digital photos and videos of the event (be sure anyone photographed signs a release form to allow photos to be used on websites, with media, in materials, etc).
- Serve as media liaisons or spokespeople.
- Handle refreshments.
- Clean up afterward.

IV. Engaging Volunteers, *continued*

After the event

- Help stage a follow-up media event (see Media Opportunities).
- Write thank-you notes. Consider including a photograph of the *Trail* installation day or of an adult and child enjoying the *Trail*.
- Conduct media outreach, encouraging media coverage of the *Trail* in use and its connection to early learning supports in your community.
- Help publicize the *Trail* to families, caregivers, employees, and civic groups. For employers and business leaders, the *Trail* can be a great topic for civic luncheon speeches, HR updates, employee newsletters, etc.
- Help promote the *Trail* with future sponsors and champions.
- Participate in regular work days to maintain the *Trail* and/or recruit others to do so.
- Plan other *Born Learning Trails* in the community.
- Host a community event at the *Trail*, such as a free book distribution or family picnic where *Born Learning* materials are shared.

V. Building Public Engagement and Support for Early Learning

Born Learning In the Workplace

Here are some ideas for employers to use *Born Learning* awareness and educational tools to add internal value:

- Post a banner ad on the company's intranet that links to www.bornlearning.org. UWA has a pre-designed web banner and PSAs for employers' use.
- Send e-postcards with helpful parenting tips to employees. Even employees who are not parents or grandparents may be spending time with young children.
- Engage human resource staff to target employees who are new or prospective parents or parents of preschoolers, with age-appropriate *Born Learning* material.
- Run the *Born Learning* public service announcements or parenting and grandparenting videos on a loop in break rooms or cafeterias, or post them on the intranet.
- Invite a local parent educator or early childhood expert to conduct a brownbag "Lunch & Learn" for employees where *Born Learning* materials will be passed out.
- Add *Born Learning* materials or promotional items — like T-shirts and informational booklets — to gifts for employees who become parents or grandparents.

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Your United Way and your early childhood impact efforts can reap the benefits of the *Born Learning Trail* installation long after the event. Think ahead about how you can sustain and build the involvement, interest, and excitement that were generated by the installation.

Map out an engagement strategy. Ideally, the *Trail* installation is just one component of an outreach plan that will deepen community engagement in your early childhood impact effort. If you haven't already developed a long-term volunteer engagement strategy, now is the time to do it!

Stay in touch. Plan a regular outreach communication to all the volunteers you contacted for the *Trail's* installation and anyone who attended the event. Email them a regular, short update on your early learning activities. (United Ways have free access to Constant Contact, an email marketing software that makes it easy to create professional HTML email campaigns with no technology skills. Go to United Way Online <<http://online.unitedway.org/constantcontact>> to find out more about getting your free Constant Contact account and creating an e-newsletter focused on early childhood development.)

Look for stakeholders around connected issues. Many communities are elevating the issue of physical fitness for children, focusing on reducing obesity. Local universities, area health education centers, special fitness commissions, county health departments, medical societies, hospitals, and school systems may already be involved in the children's fitness issue. These stakeholders may see the *Trail* as a natural extension of their work and may be able to offer funding and other support outside the early childhood education arena.

Offer the *Trail* as an added value by employers to employees. Consider promoting the *Trail* with your corporate partners, whether or not your workplace campaign is linked to the *Born Learning Trail*. Employers are often looking for activities or information to share with employees that boost the employer-employee relationship. By letting employees know about the *Trail*, employers can support early learning and families and grandparents.

- The *Born Learning Trail* promotional poster in this kit is designed to solicit volunteers for the installation event. Your corporate partner can localize the poster and put it up in break rooms, elevators, bathrooms, etc.

V. Building Public Engagement and Support for Early Learning, *continued*

Born Learning in the Workplace, continued

- Display *Born Learning* informational posters around the office, in elevators, in rest rooms, and in break rooms.
- Set up an early learning kiosk in the employee lounge with a selection of *Born Learning* tips on everything from child care to sleep to nutrition to social/emotional development.
- Include *Born Learning's* "Learning on the Go" tips in employee newsletters, on the company's intranet, and in paycheck envelopes.
- Celebrate mothers, fathers, and grandparents with a special e-postcard on Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Grandparents Day that thanks them for their commitment to children and informs them of resources on www.bornlearning.org. (UWA can provide a template.)
- Encourage employees to sign up for *Born Learning's* monthly parenting newsletters, "Bits of Understanding," at www.bornlearning.org.

- You can use other *Born Learning* educational products to add value to your relationships with companies throughout the year. *Born Learning* offers a wide array of high-quality educational materials that companies can localize (with their logo and yours) for employee distribution. (See *Born Learning in the Workplace* for ideas.) Any registered *Born Learning* campaign can download the print files from Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org.

Look for ways to connect your *Trail* with existing initiatives that involve literacy for families and children, like Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and First Book (both of which are working closely with UWA).

Sponsorship Opportunities. A *Born Learning Trail* is a great way to connect your sponsors more deeply with early learning. Sponsors can be promoted on each *Born Learning Trail* sign. Some ideas for corporate sponsorship include:

- Welcome table with prominent signage at installation event
- Recognition in event program
- Banner sign over entrance
- Logo placement on some or all *Born Learning Trail* signs
- Logo placement or name on *Born Learning Trail* volunteer T-shirts
- Underwriting all or some plantings, or adding more landscaping
- Nameplate applied to benches installed along *Trail*
- Refreshments (add logos to the *Trail*-branded water bottles)
- Booth along *Trail* or at entrance
- Relevant giveaways — especially anything to do with literacy, physical fitness, nature, or outdoor games.
- Adopting park or *Trail* for long-term maintenance

VI. Media Opportunities

Consider how your *Born Learning Trail* supports — or could drive — your media strategy. Beyond the headlines of an installation event, the *Trail* offers an ongoing opportunity to position your United Way as a leader in galvanizing the community around young children. It can be used as a backdrop to highlight your other early learning impact work. And it can help you explain your United Way's shift from fundraising to community impact.

- Because the *Trail* contains research-based, research-vetted games that build language and literacy — which are key drivers of school readiness — look for opportunities to tout it as part of your community's response to school readiness or literacy challenges. Present the *Trail* in the larger context of your early learning impact work.
- Approach media leaders — newspaper publishers, TV and radio station general managers, the heads of regional cable and outdoor advertising organizations — as partners or sponsors for your *Trail* and/or installation event. If you have any resources for advertising, media organizations are often willing to sweeten the pot (e.g., provide “two-for-one” promotions) and add editorial coverage to the mix. But even without advertising dollars, many media leaders want to be engaged in tackling a pressing social problem, not just to be asked to promote events.

Some ideas are offered here, but be sure to take a look at early learning PR and media relations tips, tools, and templates on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org. You'll find ideas and examples for background fact sheets, messaging, media pitching, press releases, editorial and parent columns, media events, and more — all geared to early learning. (Look in Campaign Central's Launch Your Campaign section and in the Tools for You/PR and Media Relations Tools section.)

News Angles — There are three ways to maximize the media potential of your *Trail*:

1. Create a newsworthy installation event that demonstrates volunteerism and the importance of everyday moments to early learning. (See the media event suggestions below.) Possible news angles you could emphasize as part of your program include:

VI. Media Opportunities, *continued*

- Volunteerism
- Community involvement of key corporate sponsors
- Youth engagement in building the *Trail*
- Your United Way's work on early childhood learning

However you shape your event, be ready to provide — in writing and as part of the program — a snapshot of the issues facing young children in your community and what your United Way, with volunteers' help, is doing in response. (Find tips for creating an effective early childhood backgrounder on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org in the Tools for You/PR and Media Relations section.)

Spell out how the *Trail* connects to your work and relates to early learning. UWA research shows that volunteers want to do more than give money — they want to make a difference on issues that matter, and they want to understand how their involvement is part of a larger, outcome-focused effort.

Depending on your media strategy, time, and media relations capacity, you may want to use these proven strategies to boost media interest in your *Trail*:

Before your event

- A few weeks before the installation event, send out a backgrounder to education, health, and human services reporters, laying out the early learning challenges facing young children in your community and your United Way's response (and results). See suggestions for developing backgrounders on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org (in the Tools for You/PR and Media Relations section).
- If time allows, take a community VIP to meet with newspaper editors a few weeks before the event, doing in person what the backgrounder does on paper (see suggestions for editorial board meetings on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org). Whether or not you've approached the media outlet to be a sponsor of the *Trail*, this is a good time to provide context and background on the need for the *Trail*. Present it as part of your United Way's ongoing response to the early learning challenges in your community.
- Send out a media advisory four to five days before your event and follow up with phone calls the day before. (See the media advisory example later.)

VI. Media Opportunities, *continued*

Day of your event

- Call news and assignment editors early in the morning to remind them of the event, the attendance expected, and the opportunity for colorful images of volunteerism in action. If VIPs will be in attendance, offer details.
- Send out a press release the day of the event (just after it ends) with a high-quality digital photo. (See the press release example later.)

After your event

After the *Trail* is installed, look for additional ways to leverage its news value. Here are a few ideas to make sure the installation event is maximized:

- If you have advertising dollars or an in-kind contribution from the local newspaper, run a thank-you ad to thank volunteers, partners, and sponsors. You can use the promotional print ad created in the online *Born Learning* toolbox. (It's on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org in the Tools for You/Promotional Materials section.)
- Adapt the existing *Born Learning* parent column (designed to appeal to parents, grandparents, and caregivers as “news you can use”) to promote the *Trail*. (You can find the existing column on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org in the Tools for You/PR and Media Relations section.)
- Send digital photos and a short outline to community news editors at area newspapers. Many media outlets are creating more space for local community news, so photos and a brief overview of an event that happened last weekend are often welcome. (But do it very soon after the installation.)
- Send your photos and release (tweaked to elevate the role and support of your partner or sponsor) to your sponsors and partners, and suggest they use them for websites, intranets, newsletters, etc. (While that doesn't generate traditional media headlines, it does connect your United Way to the sponsors/partners' employees and makes it easier for the sponsors/partners to promote their community relations.)

VI. Media Opportunities, *continued*

- Send a letter to the editor or an editorial column — signed by your CEO, board chair, or a prominent volunteer — to local newspapers touting the importance of your key issues as they pertain to the *Born Learning Trail*. For example, you can write about the importance of volunteerism, as shown by the great turnout and work performed by the *Born Learning Trail* volunteers. Or you can zero in on helping parents and caregivers create everyday learning moments as a critical component of school readiness (supported by *Born Learning* research). If you have an existing *Born Learning* campaign, a column or letter would be the opportunity to tout those activities and results. (You can adapt the *Born Learning* column on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org for this purpose.)
- You can also extend the message of the *Born Learning Trail* by offering the *Trail* as a site for events already planned. Are your community partners planning a health fair or school readiness event before school starts? Why not hold it at your *Trail*?
- Consider holding an annual *Trail* event during commemorative weeks involving young children or literacy. (There is a list of commemoratives relevant to young children on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org in the Tools for You/PR and Media Relations section.) Here are two possibilities:

Week of the Young Child, an annual celebration to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs. In 2008 the Week of the Young Child is April 13–19.

El Día de los Niños/El Día de los Libros (Children's Day/Book Day), a celebration of children, families, and reading held annually on April 30. The celebration emphasizes the importance of literacy for children of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Promoted by the Association for Library Service for Children, the celebration involves hundreds of libraries across the country.

VI. Media Opportunities, *continued*

PR Resources for Early Learning Media Coverage

There are a number of free PR tools and templates on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org (Tools for You/PR and Media Relations section) to help you elevate visibility around the issue of early childhood. All can be adapted to promote your *Trail* project and installation. Tools are cited below under the categories in which they can provide help:

- Craft your messages and frame your campaign.

Born Learning Key Messages

Born Learning Sample Press Release

- Communicate your organization's successes and role in early learning.

Early Learning Backgrounder Tips

- Showcase your community champions to show support for early learning.

Early Learning Media Event Guide

Born Learning Op-Ed Column

Continued on next page

2. Create news afterwards in the context of the importance of early learning. Possible news angles:

- Launch or expansion of a *Born Learning* campaign
- Activities/success stories of an existing *Born Learning* campaign
- The importance of early learning to school readiness — perhaps pegged to “back to school”
- The importance of parents, grandparents, and caregivers in supporting a young child's learning. (Research can be found on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org.)
- The importance of using everyday moments to support learning, as the *Trail* does (You can find a wealth of other “Learning on the Go” ideas in the educational materials at www.bornlearning.org.)

Holding community events that involve children at the *Trail* — such as health fairs, readathons, etc. — is another way to attract media attention, especially when done just after the *Trail's* installation.

3. Piggyback onto existing news events that could be connected to your early learning work. That means immediately calling up reporters or editors when you see a relevant story and suggesting a follow-up story showcasing your impact work as a local response to the larger problem highlighted in the story. News stories that lend themselves to this strategy include:

- The value of “free play” for children (which is the topic of many new books and a good bit of coverage in news and parent magazines lately).
- School readiness challenges in your community, which you can tie to the need for more effort to promote language and literacy.
 - Kindergarten readiness scores
 - Third-grade reading scores
 - Low literacy rates
 - High school dropout rates
- Children's physical fitness — whether a ranking is issued or you pull together data from local school systems, this can be a way to link the importance of physical development to school readiness.

VI. Media Opportunities, *continued*

PR Resources for Early Learning Media Coverage, *continued*

- Target your message to business and community leaders.

Why Does Early Learning Matter Most? (Early Learning Research Fact Sheet)

Economic Development Fact Sheet

Making the Business Case PowerPoint and adaptable brochure — designed to appeal to business leaders

- Attract media attention.

Early Learning Media Coverage Tips

Commemorative Months for Use in Early Learning PR

UWA Media Relations Guide

UWA PR Thought Process

- Reach parents through the news media.

Parent Born Learning column

Promote Your *Born Learning Trail*

As with any event or impact initiative, you'll want to create "street buzz" around your *Born Learning Trail*. You may want to use some of the many *Born Learning* promotional and marketing templates created for this purpose:

- Street banner
- Podium sign
- Flyer
- Invitations
- Announcement flyer
- Name tags
- *Born Learning* poster
- House ad for print (could also be used as a thank-you afterward)

All are localizable, and you can add language in the body of the piece to turn it into a *Trail* promotional piece. They're available from www.bornlearning.org on Campaign Central (Tools for You/Promotional Materials section).

In addition, you can create localizable magnets and bookmarks to be given out at your event. You can print those locally or through the United Way Store (www.UnitedWayStore.com). The United Way Store also offers *Born Learning* balloons, pens, pins, emblems, T-shirts and rubber bracelets, and copies of the PSAs for community viewing.

VII. Resources

How do you access the other tools, tips, and templates referenced here?

First, become a registered *Born Learning* campaign. That takes about 10 minutes and can be done by logging on to Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org.

United Way Success By 6[®]

Success By 6[®] is the nation's largest network of early childhood coalitions, focused on boosting school readiness. In more than 350 communities or states — touching 60 percent of the U.S. population — Success By 6 coalitions are galvanizing private, nonprofit, and public-sector leaders to ensure that young children come to school ready to succeed. They are raising awareness about early childhood development, improving the quality and availability of family and child services, advocating for public policies, and overhauling systems — budgets, laws, and supports — to improve young children's lives. For more, visit <http://national.unitedway.org/sb6>.

Logging on to Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org

Get set up with a log-in and password by following these easy steps

1. Open a web browser and go to <http://www.bornlearning.org>. In the top navigation, click on the tab labeled *Campaign Central*.
2. Verify that there is no *Born Learning* effort already going on in your community by doing a quick zip code search using the left-hand search.
 - If an existing effort isn't already in place, continue with the registration process by clicking on the *Register today!* link on the right-hand side of the page.
 - If you find a campaign listed in your area, get in touch and find ways to work together on *Born Learning* in your community. This ensures you're not doubling up efforts and targeting the same populations in the same ways. (The lead organization will be able to add you as a user and your organization as a member of the effort in your community, and you'll have access to all the materials, tools, and templates available.)
3. On the registration page, fill out the form. Once you register yourself, you will then be able to set up your partner organizations and individual staff users.
 - *Lead Organization* information is what comes up for your *Born Learning* effort in zip code searches.
 - *Contact Person* is the lead staff person charged with *Born Learning* at the *Lead Organization* (information is not made public; log-in details are sent to this email).
 - *Type of Organization* should describe the *Lead Organization*.
 - You'll be able to add your *Coalition Members* after getting your log-in information.

VII. Resources, *continued*

4. Select the *Level of Involvement* that best describes the current work of your *Born Learning* effort. Descriptions of each level are available by clicking on each title.
5. Hit *Register* button and wait for the email approving your registration.
6. You will be notified of approval via an email with the title *Login information for bornlearning.org*. When it comes through, open <http://www.bornlearning.org> and click on the *Born Learning Campaigns* tab in the top navigation. In the right-hand box, click on *Already Registered? Enter Here!*
7. Log in to the site using the username (your email address) and system-generated password in the email.
8. Upon your first log-in, scroll down and click on *Update Profile* in the left navigation to change your log-in password. If you're with a United Way, please change it to your UWOnline password — one less password to remember will make your life easier!
9. Once you've done this, you're good to go. Explore using the left-hand navigation bars, especially *Getting Started* and *Launching Your Campaign*. If you're looking for a specific awareness, education, or community mobilization tool, look under the *Tools for You* section.

Questions?

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Born Learning Trail Installation Media Event Tip Sheet

How to Organize Your Event — You can stage this event in three ways:

1. As a media event

To announce your *Trail* (whether or not it's part of a new or expanded *Born Learning* campaign) and to showcase your early learning community impact activities or other support of children's programs. To do this, invite the media and be prepared with a press release and other media materials.

2. As an outreach event

To introduce your community to the *Born Learning Trail* and to increase awareness and enthusiasm for your early learning activities. To do this, invite as many stakeholders as you can. (See "Getting Started: Identifying Partners.")

3. As a combination media/outreach event

This is the ideal event, with potential to receive media coverage and to generate enthusiasm among your stakeholders.

Suggested Invitees

- TV, print, and radio media (reporters as well as publishers, station managers, and other media leaders in your community)
- United Way staff
- Volunteers
- Agency partners
- Community partners
- Current and prospective sponsors of your *Born Learning* campaign
- United Way donors
- Corporate partners involved in other United Way initiatives
- Government officials, including elected officials and representatives of agencies impacting families and young children
- Prominent business leaders (especially anyone who has been a vocal champion of young children's issues)
- Faith community leaders
- Academics in your area who focus on young children
- Representatives of local, regional, and statewide child advocacy organizations

Born Learning Trail Installation Media Event Tip Sheet, continued

Useful Backgrounder

You may want to create a one-pager that sums up what your community is doing around *Born Learning*, if you're far enough along. Or, if you're kicking off a *Born Learning* campaign with the *Trail* installation, you can list ways that attendees can participate and support the campaign.

Also pull together information that provides a "local snapshot" — priorities around young children, initiatives under way, outcomes so far, future plans, etc. Highlight numbers from your needs assessments that indicates what young children in your community lack. Highlight a partner who's supporting an innovative solution now. Give a brief overview of what your United Way/early childhood initiative is doing in this area, emphasizing outcomes. (Other suggestions, tools, and tips are provided on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org.)

Suggested Flow and Timeline for Your Event

- Have a sign-up sheet (including email addresses) for later follow-up.
- Designated a local host and/or a few local speakers to welcome the group and introduce and set up the event.
- Have these speakers sum up issues/problems facing young children locally and highlight the efforts under way that are sponsored, funded, or conducted by your organization and its partners.
- Provide light refreshments.
- Following the event, distribute materials about the *Born Learning* campaign (including your local press release, local United Way and/or Success By 6 fact sheet, etc.)
- Close the event with a discussion led by your host that links back to the early learning issues facing your community. Have some people in the audience ready with questions or comments you've suggested in advance. If your *Trail* is connected to a *Born Learning* campaign, look for ways to highlight what you are planning to do with *Born Learning* PSAs and educational materials, or give good local examples of how the campaign is already helping families and children.

Suggested Materials

The media advisory and release are part of the *Born Learning Trail* toolkit; templates denoted with * are on Campaign Central at www.bornlearning.org.

- Media advisory announcing your *Born Learning Trail* installation event (This is not for coverage but to catch the interest of assignment editors. Keep it short, send it out four to five days before the event, and follow up to ensure the event is on reporters' calendars.)
- *Press release on your *Born Learning* campaign and *Trail* (send out day of event)
- Background information on your United Way
- *Background on your activities around early learning
- **Born Learning* public engagement campaign overview
- *FAQs about the *Born Learning* campaign

Born Learning Trail Installation Sample Media Advisory

Attn: News or Assignment Editor

Media Advisory

Day, date, year

Your Town

Contact: XXXX

Cell Phone

Email

United Way of Anytown to Launch *Born Learning Outdoor Trail*

What

United Way and XXXX (insert info about partners, volunteers, etc.) will build an outdoor learning *Trail* at XXX (insert site) to help parents and caregivers support early education for young children.

When

Day, date, year

Start-finish times

Featuring (List event participants and any notable attendees or volunteers.)

Where

XXX (site)

XX (address) (Provide directions and specify media parking.)

Why

The *Born Learning Trail* is a fun, easy way for XXX (insert your community here) parents, grandparents and caregivers to use outings to build learning critical for school readiness. A series of signs offering educational games (approved by experts) will guide adults on specific ways to create learning games outdoors and suggest tips to use at home.

Photo Opportunities

List any visuals you know your event will offer.

Background

If there is relevant school readiness data that underscore the need for a *Trail*, or background on other early learning activities of which the *Trail* is one component, include it here.

About United Way of Anytown

Background information about your United Way and its early learning focus goes here.

Born Learning Trail Installation Sample Press Release

For Immediate Release
Day, date, year

Contact Name
Phone Number
Email

United Way of XXX Launches *Born Learning Trail* to promote early childhood learning and family fun

City, State — Date XX, year — Learning happens everywhere a child goes, but parents, grandparents and caregivers may not always know how to support that learning.

That won't be the case at XXX (*insert Trail site*). When Mom and Dad, Aunt Amy and Grandpa take their favorite young child to XXX (*insert Trail site*) now, they'll be able to play fun games together that will help the child come to school ready to succeed.

That's because (*Your United Way and key sponsors/partners here*) and XXX (*number*) community volunteers today created an outdoor interactive early learning *Trail* at (*insert Trail site*) to help parents, grandparents and caregivers turn excursions into fun learning moments.

The *Born Learning Trail* is a series of learning activities that any adult can play with young children at XXX (*insert site here*). It is sponsored by XXX (*insert sponsors or partners here*).

Based on the latest early childhood research and approved by national early learning experts through United Way of America, the *Born Learning Trail* is designed to help adults interact with children to boost language and literacy development and to help caregivers understand how to best support early learning in outdoor everyday moments.

There are XX signs on the *Born Learning Trail*, each including activities such as (*insert descriptions of two or three games you have chosen, using the language from the Installation and Media Guide*):

Watch! Stop! Learn! Play! encourages the caregiver to follow the child's lead, building the child's curiosity and confidence (and reinforcing the learning already under way) (*or whichever activities you've chosen*).

Born Learning Trail Installation Sample Press Release, continued

“The *Born Learning Trail* promotes fun and games — important components of early childhood learning,” said XXX, CEO of *Your United Way* (*insert details*). “Research tells us children are literally ‘born learning.’ That means five years of education take place before they ever enter kindergarten. We know that what happens in a child’s early years matters — for success in life and for school readiness. And we want to help parents, grandparents and caregivers use everyday outings — including trips to XXX (*insert Trail site*) — to support that learning.” Parents who need *Born Learning* materials or information and resources about early learning programs can call 2-1-1. (*insert contact information for parents, whether that’s your 2-1-1 or another resource number*)

(*Insert name of key sponsor or prominent community partner*) is a strong supporter of the *Born Learning Trail*. “We hope the *Born Learning Trail* will help our community do even more to get kids off to the right start,” said XXX.

(*If you have local data highlighting the need to do more for early childhood education, cite the most compelling “problem” information here.*)

United Way research has found that many parents undervalue their role in preparing young children for school, that parents and caregivers don’t know exactly what actions to take to prepare young children for school and that parents and caregivers feel like they don’t have time to do what’s needed.

(*If you’re conducting a Born Learning campaign, use the following*) The *Trail* is part of *United Way of Anytown’s* (*insert your United Way*) *Born Learning* campaign, designed to help parents, caregivers and communities provide young children with early learning opportunities. (*Add details of your Born Learning activities and a few results if possible.*) The *Born Learning* campaign is designed to help young children prepare for school. Through PSAs, a website (www.bornlearning.org) and educational materials, it offers “doable” action steps that make it easy — and fun — to help young children learn during everyday activities such as sorting laundry, shopping for groceries and taking a walk in XXX.

(*Background about your organization/coalition’s support of early learning activities goes here.*)