Overview

*Think Babies* events place babies front and center in the policy process by elevating family stories and connecting the families of infants and toddlers directly with their policymakers to let them know what babies need to thrive. The COVID-19 pandemic means that in many cases in person events are not currently viable and may not be for some time. As families struggle to navigate the current crisis, centering the needs of infants and toddlers has never been more urgent. Virtual *Think Babies* events are a creative and timely way to highlight the current and long-term needs of infants, toddlers and their families. Options include hosting a virtual *Strolling Thunder* event, *Think Babies* Policy Forum, Listening Session, or Advocacy Training. These virtual events focus on the *Think Babies* priorities of:

* Quality, affordable child care;
* Paid time off for parents to bond with and care for their babies;
* Healthy emotional development; and
* Strong physical health and nutrition.

Key Elements

* Elevate the lived experience of families

Family stories are the heart and soul of *Think Babies* events. This is particularly relevant now, at a time when the experience of families is changing incredibly rapidly and many more families are struggling to meet their children’s basic needs and nurture their health and wellbeing. Whatever format your virtual *Think Babies* event takes, the goal is to get the stories of families with children 0-3 in front of policymakers in order to advance the *Think Babies* policy priorities.

* Engage policymakers

Educating policymakers about the needs of babies through personal connections is a key component of successful *Think Babies* events. This is especially important during the current crisis. Policymakers are inundated with competing demands and priorities associated with both the short and long-term policy and fiscal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. ZERO TO THREE’s experience with *Think Babies* in the recent weeks and months has consistently demonstrated that personal stories and connections are one of the most impactful strategies we have available right now to lift the needs of babies up above the noise of the moment.

* Make the link to policy

As with in-person events, effective *Think Babies* virtual events draw the line that connects the individual experiences of families to the policies that shape those experiences. The newly released [*State of Babies Yearbook: 2020*](https://stateofbabies.org/national/) provides data that can be used to demonstrate that even before COVID-19 crisis, our threadbare systems for children and families meant that too many faced persistent hardship. Recovery from the pandemic presents an opportunity to rebuild with stronger policies.

Ways to Structure *Think Babies* Virtual Events

*Think Babies* virtual events can be structured in many different ways. Keep in mind that it is especially important that virtual events be succinct and relevant. Have a clear idea in mind what you want to achieve with your event and what type of event will best advance that goal.

* Hold individual meetings with key policymakers and families via phone or video conference. As with in-person meetings, you can facilitate the meeting to support the family and provide additional information.
* Convene a group video meeting with a panel of families and a group of policymakers. This can be a good way to reach a larger number of policymakers.
* Host a livestream event featuring parents and policymakers that is open to the public.
* Dedicate a day on social media to focus on the stories of families with young children. Collect family stories and photos that you can share on social media and invite others to share as well. Make sure that policymakers know about your event.

While the primary focus is on family stories, integrating the voices of providers in *Think Babies* virtual events can also provide helpful context for the experiences of families with infants and toddlers.

Maximize Impact

Get the most out of your virtual event through strong lead-up, amplification, and follow-up. Examples include:

* Promote your event in advance using your email lists, social media, coordination with partners, and any other opportunities available.
* Tag policymakers on Twitter.
* Pitch earned media.
* Send follow-up materials to policymakers electronically.
* Take screen shots and record events so that you can post them on social media after the event and amplify your message.
* Encourage your partners and supporters to share your content on social media.
* Create a custom frame for people to use on social media on the day of your virtual event.
* Record videos of family stories that can be edited together and shared.