

# **BEST START BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION FAQS**

**September 13, 2013**

## **BACKGROUND ON THE BEST START REVIEW PROCESS**

### ***Why did First 5 LA decide to do a review of Best Start?***

*Best Start* was paused in July of 2012 because Commissioners wanted more clarity about Best Start's priorities, intermediate outcomes and progress measures. With new leadership on board – the Chair of the Commission and Executive Director -- First 5 LA began an “inquiry” or review process of *Best Start* in the spring of 2013.

The purpose of the review process was to achieve clarity and a common understanding of:

- The results for children and families that First 5 LA and its community partners seek through this place-based effort
- How progress toward desired results will be measured
- The strategies and activities to support intended results.

### ***What did the review process consist of?***

The review process included Board discussions, one-on-one meetings with Commissioners, discussions with experts and professionals doing place-based work, an agency-wide strategic plan review process, First 5 LA senior leadership meetings with the Community Partnerships and lessons learned from the experiences of Community Partnership members and Staff with *Best Start* to date.

### ***What did First 5 LA learn from the review process?***

Some of what was learned from speaking with parents and community members included:

- Parents are the key contributors to a child's well-being.
- By giving parents information and a “seat at the table”, *Best Start* has given them a voice. This has changed the way parents interact with community stakeholders and services in their communities.
- Community organizations are learning more about and improving how to meet the needs of families with children 0-5 years old. Some of these organizations are changing their business practices to be more inclusive of parents.
- Parents and communities are ready to move forward with *Best Start*.

### ***What happened at the Special Commission Meeting (Retreat) on June 26?***

Staff shared an update on the *Best Start* review process and presented a framework for Best Start. This framework responded to the questions Commissioners have raised related to results, progress measures, and strategies. Staff also shared implementation issues and discussed next steps for moving forward.

The First 5 LA Board of Commissioners endorsed First 5 LA's Building Stronger Families Framework for Best Start and its core results. The core results will be the basis for implementation plans, *Best Start* activities to be funded by First 5 LA, and measuring progress. The Commission also asked that staff provide a report at the September 2013 Board meeting on:

- An implementation timeline for Best Start
- An initial analysis of community partnership readiness
- A recommended approach for Best Start community plan funding

For more detail on the June 26 meeting and the framework, visit the *Best Start* website [here](#).

## **ABOUT THE “BUILDING STRONGER FAMILIES” FRAMEWORK**

### ***What is the Building Stronger Families Framework?***

The Building Stronger Families Framework recognizes that strong families and family-supporting communities are essential to positive outcomes for young children. It brings a sharper focus to *Best Start*.

The Building Stronger Families framework identifies three core results for building stronger families:

- Family capacities – knowledgeable, resilient, and nurturing parents
- Social connections – families participating in positive social networks
- Concrete supports – access to services and supports that meet families' needs

And three core results for promoting family-supporting communities:

- Coordinated services and supports that meet families' needs
- A common vision and collective will to strengthen families
- Social networks and safe spaces for recreation and interaction

Click [here](#) for a PowerPoint presentation on the Framework that was presented to Commissioners at the June 26, 2013 retreat.

### ***How is the Building Stronger Families Framework different from what has been done so far?***

The Building Stronger Families Framework does not represent a turn from *Best Start's* work to date. Instead, it clarifies *Best Start* to focus our work on the central role of families in improving outcomes for young children.

What First 5 LA learned from *Best Start* community partnerships, research and best practices, and the work done to date is that if we are to move forward our goals for young children, we

must focus and that focus must be on strengthening families and the communities in which they live.

This means there will be some differences and improvements:

- The Building Stronger Families Framework reflects an extensive body of evidence about what conditions need to be present in families and communities to improve outcomes for children.
- The Framework is grounded in specific family and community results that can be achieved within a 5-10 year period. These “core results” are a pathway to First 5 LA’s four strategic goals.
- Shows the more clearly defined Partnership capacities needed to execute the framework and move forward the family- and community-level results.
- Provides greater clarity about the types of activities that will be supported and how activities will be identified. Future community plans or “agendas” will now be aligned with the Building Stronger Families Framework and its core results instead of with the four overarching strategic goals.
- Will provide a revised funding approach that reflects the Framework’s core results, partnership capacities and supporting activities..
- Presents an evaluation framework to measure results and promote accountability.

### ***Have First 5 LA’s 4 strategic goals changed?***

First 5 LA’s four strategic goals have not changed and will continue to be the anchor for First 5 LA’s work. The long-term goals First 5 LA seeks for children provide a purpose for First 5 LA’s work throughout LA County. The Building Stronger Families Framework provides a *Best Start pathway* to First 5 LA’s goals – a pathway that reflects our belief that if children are to have better long term outcomes, then families must be strong and communities must support families: This is Best Start’s theory of change.

### ***How else is the Building Stronger Families Framework similar to what has been done so far?***

*Best Start* under the Building Stronger Families Framework retains the same philosophical foundation. It is still a place-based investment approach that focuses on families and the social and physical environments there they live, work and play.

It is not an approach that focuses on specific services needed to “solve” problems for individual families.

The three main strategies to support *Best Start* – family strengthening/direct services, community capacity building and systems improvement –remain the same as well. They will continue to play a central role in *Best Start* as the holders of a shared vision and leaders of collective action on behalf of young children and their families.

## **ACTIVITIES**

### ***What activities will First 5 LA support under the new framework?***

At the June 26, 2013 Commission Retreat, the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners approved criteria for potential future activities to be supported with First 5 LA funding. Criteria include activities that:

- Align with the *Best Start* Framework's core results for families and communities.
- Are evidence-based or reflect promising practices.
- Advance outcomes that can be achieved and measured within 5-10 years.
- Offer the potential to connect with existing resources and be sustainable.

Informed by these criteria and feedback from the Board, staff is recommending using a "Learning by Doing" approach. This approach to implementing the Building Stronger Families Framework will allow Community Partnerships to move into an action phase immediately while still continuing to grow in capacity. First 5 LA staff is currently working to develop the details of how Partnerships will implement this approach.

### ***What will happen with the community plan projects?***

First 5 LA will engage community partnerships to discuss how their work aligns with the Building Stronger Families Framework and how to reorient their work, as necessary, to the core results. In this regard, partnerships will need to relook at community capacities and resources through the Building Stronger Families Framework lens and reconsider the strategies to achieve the desired results and indicators.

### ***How will Best Start work with other First 5 LA investments?***

The Building Stronger Families Framework brings to *Best Start* greater strategic focus and it can bring similar benefits to the rest of First 5 LA's work. First 5 LA staff is reviewing the connection between the Building Stronger Families Framework and other First 5 LA investments.

### ***How will money for activities be distributed? Who will make that decision? Will existing community service providers be given priority for funding?***

These are all areas of ongoing work that Staff is working through. More information on each of them will be provided as it becomes available.

## **COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

### ***Will the Community Partnerships change under the Building Stronger Families Framework?***

The ultimate goal of the partnerships is to improve outcomes for children in *Best Start* communities. As such, the community partnerships will continue to be an extremely important

part of *Best Start's* efforts to advance the core family and community results of the Building Stronger Families Framework.

As *Best Start* transitions to activities focused on the Building Stronger Families Framework core results, First 5 LA will work with *Best Start* community partnerships. Community partnerships will learn about the capacities needed to implement the framework, and staff will support the partnerships as they develop..

### ***What will be the role of the Community Partnerships in informing how Best Start moves forward?***

The Community Partnerships play an important role in the ongoing implementation planning work around *Best Start* in the following ways:

- Becoming familiar with the Building Stronger Families Framework
- Examining the current activities they are working on and seeing how they are aligned with the core results of the framework.
- Providing input and feedback on and participating in several of the priority areas of *Best Start* implementation and participating in the Community Partnership capacity self-assessment tool, the “Learning by Doing” approach, choice of evaluation indicators and measures and business model development. .

## **FIRST 5 LA PARTNERSHIP CAPACITY REVIEW**

### ***The Board asked for “an initial analysis of community readiness” by their September meeting. What will that analysis consist of? Who will be administering it? What role will Partnerships play?***

As *Best Start* transitions to the Building Stronger Families Framework there is a need to have a clear understanding of where each partnership is in having the capacities needed to move forward the core results of the framework. First 5 LA staff developed a learning and development tool which was used to do an initial Review of Partnership Capacity.

This review was done in August by First 5 LA staff and the contractors who have worked most closely with each community. Staff presented a report to the Commission at their meeting in September. The report gave the Commission an understanding of partnership capacities and how quickly partnerships can move forward with implementation of the new Building Stronger Families Framework. It informed Commissioners of the general progress Community partnerships have made in three foundational areas: community vision, inclusive governance and effective collaboration.

### ***What did First 5 LA’s initial Partnership Capacity Review consist of?***

It was conducted by First 5 LA staff and meeting facilitators that have been working with each Community partnership using a learning and development tool developed for this purpose. The

review provided input on the stage of development of each partnership in three key areas: the partnership as the holder of its community's vision, inclusive governance and effective collaboration—all in support of the core results of the Building Stronger Families Framework. It was anchored in a review of the types of capacity building activities that Partnerships have undertaken in recent years.

### ***Why did First 5 LA perform this review?***

- The results of the Partnership Capacity Review provided a picture of where communities are in the development of those important capacities necessary to successfully implement a core results-focused framework. The Commission requested an initial assessment to be provided at their meeting in September.
- It will inform First 5 LA staff as to the development of partnerships through the lens of the new framework and the learning and development tool.
- It will provide the Commission with more accurate expectations about how effectively and how rapidly partnerships can move forward with BSF framework implementation. It will also help the Commission and staff to better understand what to expect as partnerships continue their efforts to strengthen families and promote family-supporting communities through selected activities and capacity building.

### ***How will the results of the review be used?***

The report did not mention specific communities but rather showed how communities have reached different stages of overall development. It will not be tied to any decision regarding First 5 LA's support for communities. Results for individual communities were not shared with the Commission or partnerships.

### ***What did the tool measure?***

- It looked at the development of foundational elements that enable groups to effectively work together and make positive change. These elements are:
  - Holding of the community vision
  - Inclusive governance
  - Effective collaboration
- It looked at these elements in light of the capacities needed to achieve the core results of the Building Stronger Families Framework.

### ***Why didn't the partnerships take part in this review?***

- It was a preliminary review for Commission information only.
- Partnerships will conduct a review of their progress in developing the capacities to implement the new framework. This will take place during a more detailed self-assessment process that will begin in September.

### ***What happens next?***

The initial Partnership Capacity Review will be followed in September and October by a more detailed capacity self-assessment process to take place in working sessions held by each partnership.

The partnerships will use the same learning and development tool that staff did in the initial review. The goal of the working sessions is for partnerships to better understand their starting point of capacity as they transition to working under the Building Stronger Families Framework. It will also help them understand what training and support they will need to move forward the Building Stronger Families Framework core results.

### **OTHER IMPLEMENTATION QUESTIONS**

#### ***When will a decision be made as to whether more funding will be made available after September of 2013?***

The First 5 LA Commission approved the use of \$326,115 in unspent funds for *Best Start* from the amount that was approved in March 2013 plus an additional \$510,000 for Partnership activities from October 2013 through December 31, 2013. The added amount is to support the implementation of the Building Stronger Families (BSF) framework.

First 5 LA staff will be presenting recommendations for long-term funding for Best Start from January 2014 through June 2015 at the Commission's meeting in November.