Literature Review and Final Report:
Collaboration in the Context of School Readiness Programs

Submitted to:
First 5 LA
School Readiness Initiative
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Under the Direction of Bill Gould, Research and Evaluation Department
FIRST 5 LA

INTRODUCTION

In response to research supporting the value of school readiness programming (Shirley-Kirkland, 2002) and the influence that collaboration may have on the effectiveness of service provision (Kunesh & Farley, 1993, Gardner, Kloppenburg, & Gonzalez, 2002, Johnson et. al., 2003, Bruner, Kunesh, & Knuth, 1992), First 5 LA has funded the School Readiness Initiative (SR). The Initiative provides grant funding to programs and services designed to facilitate children’s readiness for school and schools’ readiness for children. Grantees include but are not limited to community-based organizations, school districts, and family resource centers that provide a wide range of services such as preschool programs, kindergarten transition activities, health, mental health, and parenting education, among others. First 5 LA heavily encouraged that requests for SR funding include interagency collaboration, calling for grantees to work collectively to meet the needs of children and families in Los Angeles. The sections to follow provide more detailed background on First 5 LA and the School Readiness Initiative, and describe the framework developed to evaluate the Initiative.

BACKGROUND

First 5 LA is committed to creating a future throughout Los Angeles' diverse communities where all young children are born healthy and raised in a loving and nurturing environment so that they grow up healthy, are eager to learn, and reach their full potential. First 5 LA is governed by a Board of Commissioners and has as its mission to make significant and measurable progress toward its vision by increasing the number of children from the prenatal stage through age 5 who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe, and ready to learn. To accomplish its vision and mission, First 5 LA works with child care providers, educators and school districts, community-based organizations, businesses, foundations, and government entities.
The School Readiness Initiative (SR) is one of a variety of projects implemented by the Commission to meet the needs of children and families in Los Angeles. SR is a $134 million partnership between First 5 LA and First 5 California. Currently, there are 42 programs located throughout Los Angeles County receiving SR funding.

First 5 LA uses the California Children and Families Commission (CCFC)-adapted National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) definition of school readiness:

- Children’s readiness for school.
- Schools’ readiness for children.
- Family and community supports and services that contribute to children’s readiness for school success.

The three parts of the NEGP definition are the framework for the “Five Essential and Coordinated Elements” put forth by First 5 LA which address the multiple barriers that prevent children, families, and schools from achieving school readiness:

- Early Care and Education
- Parenting/Family Support
- Health and Social Services
- School Capacity
- Program Infrastructure and Administration

Using local, state, and national data as well as input from diverse communities and using the Essential and Coordinated Elements as a framework, First 5 LA developed its strategic plan for 2004–2009. The plan continues to strive toward the Five Desired Outcomes for Children, adopted by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and First 5 LA: Good Health, Safety and Survival, Economic Well-Being, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and School Readiness. First 5 LA continues to contribute to the effort to improve these outcomes through three goal areas: Early Learning, Health, and Safe Children and Families.
The Next Five Strategic Plan highlights the importance of the relationships among families, communities, resource networks, environmental conditions, and public policy to effectively address child and family outcomes. As such, SR-funded programs are encouraged to work collaboratively to provide quality services. The SR evaluation plan includes items that address collaboration in terms of both process and outcomes.

**SCHOOL READINESS INITIATIVE (SR) EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**

In order to evaluate the full scope of processes and outcomes produced by SR grantees while capturing the diverse nature of their services and modalities, First 5 LA is conducting a multi-level quantitative and qualitative research and evaluation project that investigates the effects of the Initiative on families, schools, and targeted communities in Los Angeles County. Three primary research questions are under study:

1) How has the School Readiness Initiative been implemented in Los Angeles County?
2) What are the effects of the School Readiness Initiative on families, schools, and communities?
3) How does the School Readiness Initiative link to other First 5 LA efforts?

The research focus of the evaluation seeks to identify the value of the Initiative to children, families, schools, and social service providers in communities with low performing schools. Research methods include focus groups, interviews, ethnographic observations, program evaluation data, and State Commission data. Case studies are also an integral part of the evaluation design, serving to highlight the stories behind each research question listed above. A major focus of the case studies is to probe the importance of collaborations in implementing school readiness programming.
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In order to better understand how First 5 LA’s School Readiness grantees work collaboratively to serve children 0–5 and their families, a Collaboration Literature Review was conducted (see Complete Literature Review on page 81). After completing the literature review, seven programs engaging in collaborative ventures were identified for participation in the collaboration component of the SR Evaluation Framework. While randomized sampling techniques were not possible given the voluntary nature of the study, efforts were made to include grantees that effectively represented the breadth of the total SR program population (n=42) according to a number of domains. More specifically, lead agencies, defined as direct recipients of SR grant funds, were identified using the following criteria:

1) Collaborative partners were identified in the program proposal.
2) Collaborative partners had provided direct services to program participants.
3) Programs demonstrated diversity in terms of organization typologies (e.g. community based organizations, early care and education centers, school districts, mental health, health, school–community partnerships, etc.).
4) Programs demonstrated diversity in terms of demographic and geographic composition.

Research questions developed to drive the interviews with lead and partner agencies are listed below. The questions are organized by area of inquiry and emphasize the exploratory nature of the study.

1) Development
   - How are collaboratives initiated?
   - Does a history of shared projects influence partner selection and/or partnership development?
   - How are collaboratives implemented?
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- What factors influence collaborative development?

2) Membership
- What criteria are used to select members?
- What job roles do collaborative members hold within their organizations?
- How are member roles and responsibilities defined?
- How are parents or other members of the surrounding community included in the collaborative?

3) Internal Processes
- What communication processes are put into place among collaborating agencies and which are most beneficial (i.e. email, staff meetings, master calendar, staff orientations, cross-agency task forces?)
- How often do members meet and for what purpose?
- What leadership models/structures are used?
- How do members make decisions? How are disagreements handled?
- How do collaborating agencies solicit input from parents/community members?

4) Evaluation and Outcomes
- Was an evaluation component included in the collaborative design?
- How do agencies share data?
- What impact(s) do the collaborative have on children 0–5?
- What successes/challenges do collaboratives experience?

5) Sustainability
- Have efforts been made to institutionalize the collaborative or achieve sustainability?

6) Broader Impacts
- To what extent has the collaborative been active in local/state policy?
Lead agencies were contacted on an individual basis and provided with a detailed explanation of the purpose of the study and their proposed role, asking that they participate in a one to two hour semi-structured interview with an external consultant hired by First 5 LA. Lead agency contacts were also asked to schedule a similar interview between the researcher and a representative from a collaborative partner. It was requested that agencies selected for partner agency interviews be involved in direct service provision to program clients through the School Readiness Initiative.

Agencies/individuals agreeing to participate were provided with copies of the Lead and Partner Agency Interview Questionnaires prior to the scheduled interview date, as well as a copy of an Informed Consent Form. Site visits were conducted from June to December, 2006 and in most cases, lead agency interviews were conducted with the Program Director and/or Program Coordinator. Partner agency interview participants were the individuals identified by the lead agency as the primary contact(s) for the collaborative venture and included Executive Directors, administrators, Program Coordinators, and in one case a mental health counselor.

Table 1 on the following page displays the composition of the grantees included in the study and their collaborative partners.

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1 Copies of the Lead and Partner Agency Interview Questionnaires and the Informed Consent Form can be found in the Appendix.

2 For the purpose of confidentiality, identifying information for the participating sites will not be disclosed. Sample composition is presented in the aggregate in Table 1. Comments from interview participants presented in this report will not be tied to the organizations or the individuals interviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead Organization Typologies</th>
<th>Number of Partners</th>
<th>Partner Organization Typologies</th>
<th>Services Provided by Partners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Community-based organization (n=4)</td>
<td>Mean = 11</td>
<td>• Adult education provider</td>
<td>• Adult education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• School/school district (n=3)</td>
<td>Min. = 4 Max. = 19</td>
<td>• Child welfare agency</td>
<td>• Assistance with field trips</td>
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<td>• Childcare and human services agency</td>
<td>• Case management</td>
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<td>• Community–based organization</td>
<td>• Developmental screenings</td>
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<td>• Counseling center</td>
<td>• Facilities/classroom space</td>
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<td>• Educational transformation organization</td>
<td>• Family support services for special needs</td>
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<td>• Elementary school</td>
<td>• Food and clothing distribution</td>
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<td>• Family literacy program provider</td>
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<td>• Family resource center</td>
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<td>• Governmental organization</td>
<td>• Health services/outreach</td>
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<td>• Healthcare provider</td>
<td>• Home visitation</td>
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<td>• Job preparedness skills center</td>
<td>• Kindergarten orientation fair</td>
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<td>• Legal center</td>
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<td>• Middle school</td>
<td>• Literacy fair</td>
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<td>• Non–violence education and parenting education provider</td>
<td>• Materials and staff training</td>
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<td>• Preschool/childcare center</td>
<td>• Mental health counseling</td>
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<td>• Private foundation</td>
<td>• Multicultural fair</td>
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<td>• Regional educational agency</td>
<td>• Parent education</td>
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<td>• Resource and Referral</td>
<td>• Prenatal and postnatal care</td>
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<td>• School district</td>
<td>• Preschool and pre–kindergarten</td>
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<td>• Special education provision and parent</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Programming</th>
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<td>Resource and referral</td>
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<td>Workshop presentations</td>
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FINDINGS

Program Planning and Selection of Collaborative Partners

Each agency funded under the auspices of the School Readiness Initiative received a one-year planning grant prior to receipt of implementation funding in order to conduct a needs assessment and design a school readiness program that would begin the following year. When asked how the collaborative determined what types of services to provide, most interview respondents cited the findings of their needs assessments as driving program design.

• “What I learned was there were many parents whose children did not go to preschool although they had every opportunity to. A school within walking distance and so on. But they felt that their children were too young to go to school and kindergarten was quite early enough for them. So the home visiting has been something that has really been able to take care of that.”

• “The existing resources in the community were pretty much tapped out, and were not able to meet the needs...The normally developing child had resources available. The severely identified delay or special needs had resources available. But the in-between group, some of the unidentified special needs, some of the high-risk related more to psycho-social/environmental factors rather than medical or developmental delay, all of those were actually in need of significant resources.”

• “We did a survey of school administrators. Principals, Vice Principals, and teachers, and asked them, ‘What are you seeing in terms of your kindergarten class? What are the things, how are children not prepared and what would be the ideal child or parent coming into your class prepared? What does that look like?’ I think 90 percent of the responses were around social skills.”

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3 Some quotes have been edited for grammar and readability.
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• “According to the proposal there was a dearth of services that were needed. And so this program was created to serve that. I think there’s only one [Early Care and Education] program…in that particular zip code.”

Using the findings described above, several interview respondents intentionally sought out organizations that could provide the services they had identified during the needs assessment phase of program development. Interestingly, in some cases the needs assessment also resulted in the exclusion of collaborative partners from the program design process. For example, one Project Director related, “We are the ones who said to them, this is what we need. Who can provide this part? And then the collaborator would say, ‘I can do this for you.’ Then they’d become specific because they know their own program.” Another Preschool Director offered a similar explanation. As a result of the needs assessment she knew that home visitation would fill a key service gap in the community and asked potential partners if they would be willing to provide home visitation as had already been outlined in the Work Scope. However, she did indicate that, “as we got to know them, of course, they had many other services that we could certainly refer our parents to.”

However, while some interview respondents described how the needs assessment circumvented the inclusion of collaborative partners in the program planning process, others used the planning grant funds to identify potential partners through an inventory development process. For example, one family resource center developed, “A listing of almost 20 organizations that we invited to a special meeting before the RFP came out because we were just hearing that something like this was going to be launching out of First 5… we were discussing needs assessments, what gaps are there in the community, what would we envision if we could create this program, what types of elements would we want. So it was a brainstorming session but we were also gathering information.” Rather than solely use the needs assessment process to identify community needs, the planning funds were also beneficial in identifying potential partners.

A school district participating in the study described a similar process, during which “We did a need assessment and asset mapping… We tried to find every
agency that was around [the preschool site]...We actually contracted with [an evaluation firm] to do a data search and address search to find every single agency in the area.” After completing the asset mapping process, the district submitted a Request for Proposals to the agencies that had been identified, soliciting their interest in contributing to a school readiness program spearheaded by the district.

Other agencies selected partners as a result of collaborative history; they had worked together previously on past projects, some of which had been engaged in joint efforts for many years. In fact, this was the most commonly cited reasoning behind approaching agencies for inclusion in the programs under study.

- “So it goes back a number of years in terms of the agency. We were in the same place, provided the same type services, and I had a lot of respect...for the quality of services that they provided the community, and I believe they have respect for what we do.”

- “We each had a handful of collaborators that we had worked with in the past, and then now we reached out and said, ‘Hey, we’re trying to develop this big major program. Come and work with us, and we'll all will help each other out.’ And so then... we all met each other’s collaborators and that’s how we started the one big family.”

- “In some cases we had previous contracts with the agency and had an idea of how well they’d done in the past and their interest.”

In fact, the interview respondents from one of the interviewed SR organizations reported that they had worked with some of their partners for over 20 years previous to receipt of the First 5 LA School Readiness grant. Respondents’ comments suggest that as a result of collaborative history, lead agencies had an understanding of the types and quality of services potential partners would be able to provide, as well as established mutual respect and a social rapport that facilitated the development of their partnerships. Other reasons provided
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for approaching potential partners included that they were recommended by a “trusted source,” or because they had a “good reputation.”

Loss of Partners

Interview respondents were also asked if they had lost any collaborative partners over the course of program implementation. Two sites discussed the loss of partners due to the amount of time that lapsed between identifying them and submitting a proposal to First 5 LA and when grant funds were received.

- “From the moment we started planning to when we actually got funded was two years… It was really stressful and executive directors wondered whether or not this was worth it.”

- “Some of the other elementary schools that were initially on board… priorities changed. For instance, [an elementary school] completely did away with their ECE component.”

Other sites lost partners because they went out of business or lost additional funding that would have allowed them to provide services to school readiness program clients. Interestingly, individuals interviewed were most likely to discuss the loss of partners slated to provide health services.

- “…it would have been good to have a medical piece that would be a [contracted partner], a formalized part. [Two healthcare providers were] initially [supposed to be involved in the project]... And then once the proposal happened they indicated that they were not formally.”

- “We had a couple of partners to do health screening for hearing and for vision. And they did it the first year and it was wonderful, but then the funding was withdrawn for that... So that was the end of the relationship because they couldn't afford to not be compensated for it.”
An additional site had planned to collaborate with a hospital partner’s medical van service in order to provide health screenings for program clients; the relationship dissolved due to the closure of the hospital.

**Selection of Individual Members**

After identifying agencies to participate in their collaborative ventures, individual members within those partner agencies were identified to serve as ongoing points of contact as the partnerships developed. In most cases, the interview respondents described deliberately making initial contact with Executive Directors or similarly stationed individuals with the power to make decisions on behalf of their organizations.

- “I went to the...Director of [the agency providing home visitation]... She’s just a legend. And, you know, that’s the place to go, to start at the top. For [the]adult school I had a relationship with the Principal... so that also was a very natural place for me to go...I didn’t have the time to fool around...I couldn’t be starting at the bottom; I needed to start at the top.”

- “In the actual negotiations, we were primarily involved with the CEO’s or someone with the authority to make decisions.”

However, four of seven lead agencies that participated in the study described their efforts to involve all levels of partner agency staff in collaborative decision-making. For example, one Project Director solicited “three-level involvement” from partner agencies that included administration (e.g. the CEO or Executive Director), middle management, and the frontline staff. Each played a role in terms of making the initial commitment, providing direct identification of staff, and developing collaborative, interactive relationships, respectively.

In a final example in which a family resource center served as the lead agency, the evolution of staff involvement over the course of the grant was viewed with mixed feelings by various stakeholders involved in the collaborative. As part of a Leadership Committee, Executive Directors met bi-monthly throughout the
planning period and program start-up, engaging in discussions about the theoretical basis of the program and the development of the program curriculum. However, according to the lead agency’s Project Director, after start-up was complete the Executive Directors were less involved and meetings about day-to-day implementation shifted to the charge of Program Coordinators from the lead and partner agencies. Interestingly, during the partner agency interview an Executive Director voiced frustration about the transition, indicating that she felt the Leadership Committee was an important component of the collaborative and should have continued to receive funding after implementation was complete. She stated,

- “It was a big change since there was no money to stay. For my time to stay involved... So I think there was a shift and I’m not sure that that shift was in the best interest of the whole process... In the fourth year we've met only once.”

Communication

As evidenced by the Executive Directors’ comment above, roles and responsibilities for that particular partnership shifted over time. Leadership Meetings for Executive Directors were bi-monthly during planning, transitioned to monthly and then quarterly meetings during implementation, and resumed what was slated to be a more regular meeting schedule to discuss sustainability and institutionalization of the program during the final grant year. However, at the same time, front line staff, including teachers and Program Coordinators, met on a weekly basis to discuss the day-to-day functioning of the program and were in constant contact as they were housed in one central location. Two other programs took on similar meeting schedules, conducting weekly staff meetings to discuss daily functioning and client-specific issues, as well as holding quarterly Advisory Board or Council meetings to keep Executive-level members informed.

For other sites involved in the study, accommodating many stakeholders’ schedules made it difficult to meet regularly. As a result of these difficulties, meetings among collaborative members have waned or completely dissolved
for several partnerships; in some cases face-to-face contact has been replaced with newsletters or emails addressing specific program concerns.

• “We’ve gotten around [our difficulties scheduling meetings]…we put together a quarterly newsletter that goes out directly to all our collaboratives, making sure that they’re informed of what’s happening at each site, because we’ve tried to do meetings that were consistent, but with everybody scheduling [was really difficult].”

• “We tried to [schedule meetings with middle management] monthly and it is very difficult... We tend to meet once a year kind of as a check in...rather than ‘let’s talk about what each person is doing, and let’s share.’ Those meetings do not work very well. People are just too busy.”

Other programs have replaced collaborative-wide meetings with subcommittee meetings, requesting attendance only of those agencies participating in particular projects or events.

• “[We have formed sub-committees] for projects and special events. So I will bring whoever has to do something that’s relevant to that. And that works real well...when we meet it’s because we’re doing something.”

• “No, there weren’t group meetings with all of [the collaborative partners] because it was a one on one—not one on one exactly, but agency to agency. Figure out this piece.”

Yet another Program Coordinator was unaware that scheduling meetings among collaborative partners was a useful mechanism to keep programs involving multiple agencies running smoothly.

• “We really don’t have a formal system of meeting with our partners right now...I hadn’t had a chance to really think about this before. How do we work with our partners and how do we meet with our partners?...We’re kind of down and dirty on the basic stuff.”
The variation in the communication processes described above is interesting given the emphasis in the literature on facilitating ongoing communication among collaborative partners. For example, according to Wilder (1992), communication, or “the channels used by collaborative partners to send and receive information, keep one another informed, and convey opinions to influence the group’s actions,” is the fourth of six contextual factors with the power to influence the success of a collaborative venture. In addition, Bergstrom (1995) also expressed that a “communication process must be established both within the collaborative and with the surrounding community” for the partnership to function effectively.

Leadership and Decision–making

In addition to holding regular meetings to keep lines of communication open, leadership and decision–making processes are also important mechanisms to facilitate the engagement of partner agencies and members. Gardner, Kloppenburg, and Gonzalez (2002) address essential elements that should be in place when developing a new collaborative, advocating for a shared decision–making governance structure in order to draw upon the talents of a variety of collaborative stakeholders. Similarly, Wilder (1992) emphasizes the importance of Process and Structure, or “the management, decision–making, and operational systems of a collaborative effort” that aid in collaborative functioning.

Several respondents described diffused leadership and decision–making processes.

- “I think [leadership] also needs to be shared…if I’m not around, can the two coordinators run the staff meeting? I’m a real big fan of that. And I have no problem saying ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I’d like to learn.’”

- “For example, we had an opportunity last year to apply for additional funding so I called a meeting for all of [the collaborative partners] to brainstorm… It was a great meeting. It was very dynamic. We put together a good proposal and submitted it that way…My own personal
philosophy is just because we’re the lead agency I think we function more as a collaborative partner as well.”

- “It’s been a great relationship because everybody really has respected the role of the other from the very get-go. And valued it and welcomed it and been respectful when we had concerns and brought them up in a way that was respectful…And guess what? We’re doing it better. And looking back and celebrating our own progress as that relationship has unfolded.”

However, two agencies interviewed during the study indicated that their partners are not involved in decision-making, but rather, Project Directors and Coordinators from the lead agencies take on sole responsibility for decision-making on behalf of the partnership. The Project Director from a third agency related that, while it is important to engage partners whenever possible, the lead agency is ultimately responsible for meeting expectations set forth by First 5 LA, and must ultimately make decisions related to fiscal and contractual issues.

- “Let me say that…because the lead agency is responsible fiscally… Then we certainly do have ultimate decision, and we do that as philanthropically as we can. When we bring folks to the table, where it’s possible for folks to make decisions about things, we allow that. We certainly will not let folks make decisions that are on the outside of contract compliance…we will address those issues, but we certainly will not compromise contract compliance for anything.”

**Parent Involvement**

In addition to emphasizing open communication and shared leadership, parent involvement was also discussed in the literature as a critical collaborative component, as well as an indicator of high-level collaborative development. As presented by Hodges, Hernandez, and Nesman (2003), “true collaboration” moves beyond the allocation of funds specifically for collaborative service delivery to be marked by family involvement in “decisions that shape services
for their own children and the involvement of families in decisions that affect the planning and delivery of services in their community,” (pp. 298–301). Gardner, Kloppenburg, and Gonzalez (2002) also advocate for the inclusion of critical players/stakeholders from the surrounding community and emphasizing the importance of parent involvement as an essential element that should be in place when developing a collaborative. And finally, Kunesh and Farley (1993) advocate for a “profamily” system in which “Families have a major voice in setting goals and deciding what services they need to meet them,” (pp. 2–3).

When SR program staff were queried about parent involvement, respondents were divided in terms of their efforts to include parents in meetings and decision–making. For example, one Project Director felt that gathering information from parents during the needs assessment was a sufficient level of participation during program development. Others expressed that parents were too busy to attend collaborative meetings, or indicated that the issues discussed among executive members are not relevant to parents.

- “Certainly we’ve had their input during development. Not sitting at the table. We had the results of our surveys...We knew what we needed to do.”

- “Well...you can’t have them when there’s a lot of, the parents are really busy. But when we have an event... they’re there... They come in and they’ll tell you their story, of how [the program has] changed their life.”

- “We didn’t have a way of engaging the parents in the level of discussion that we were having [during the planning phase] so that they could feel a part of our group and a part of the decision–making process...because our main talk was around philosophy...it was a philosophy of how we were going to run our program.”

Despite the lack of parent involvement described above, two sites have placed a high level of importance on including parents in leadership and decision–making and have demonstrated great success in the arena of parent involvement. One Project Director emphasized the agency’s efforts to involve
parents in every part of programming. Parents are invited to monthly Advisory Board meetings where programming decisions are made, as well as annual retreats. In order to facilitate their attendance, parents are provided with a variety of assistance such as bus tokens and child care, and all meetings are translated into Spanish for those attendees who do not speak English. In addition, a case manager is currently working to develop a parent advisory group modeled after the PTA.

Another agency instituted a “Parent Leadership Cadre” to facilitate parent involvement, initially selecting parents based on the leadership qualities they demonstrated in the community.

- “We wanted to identify parents who were very vocal and said, ‘We like what we see getting off the ground, we want to participate.’ And those were the ones that we said, ‘Okay. Those would be great to be leaders.’ So once they saw what our goal was and our vision, they bought into the vision.”

To facilitate their participation, the program staff took time to work with parents and talk about how the collaborative comes together, how it functions, the way decisions are made, and why the role of parents is important. In addition to garnering their feedback about the school readiness program, the parent group was also viewed as an opportunity to train parents about how service systems function.

- “The whole process of them getting together [for parent meetings] is actually training in learning about the issues, in learning about speaking, how the function works, how the district works, how the services work. As a whole, the parent [group] itself is really about training. We don’t call it training, but that’s really what it’s about.”

Most notably, it appears that the program’s success at involving parents in the collaborative has stemmed from staffs’ attitudes toward parents, viewing them as powerful and capable of engaging in a high level of discussion about themselves and their communities. According to the Program Coordinator,
“Parents have the abilities and the qualities and everything inside of them to be able to do these things. So once you change the mindset that ‘I can,’ makes all the difference in the world. And so that’s why the program is successful is because parents are saying, ‘I can do it. I see the light. I see that this can happen.’” This attitude is in alignment with Kunesh and Farley’s (1993) “profamily” system, which “assumes [that] every family has strengths.”

At another site, although parents have not been involved in decision-making for the collaborative, which is entirely handled by the lead agency staff, monthly parent meetings are used to educate parents about their “political power” in the community. This may be a useful transitional process for parents on their way to a higher level of collaborative involvement.

- “It’s not like we have parents that are coming from some of the other professions where they really understand even at a basic level how these systems work... you’re trying to get them to understand the system and how politically powerful they are and to really access that power, but sometimes you have to start from really, really basic things.”

According to the examples above, it is possible to involve parents in all levels of collaborative decision-making. In order to do so parents may need added support to attend meetings such as transportation assistance and childcare, as well as to learn how to voice their opinions in a public forum. It is also important that program staff believe in parents’ abilities to contribute to collaborative processes.

Outcomes Assessment among Collaborative Partnerships

Outcomes assessment is important for any social service agency. Collaborative ventures designed to serve children and families are no different; agencies working together to produce social change must also work together to measure shared outcomes. Bergstrom et al. (1995) argue that, “data must be collected which establishes benchmarks for future impact and outcome analysis. Evaluation efforts are essential to monitor progress toward goals and objectives and to make modifications where necessary.” Kunesh and Farley (1993) also
emphasized that collaborative partnerships should be “outcomes-oriented,” and that “Performance [should be] measured by improved outcomes for children and families, not by the number and kind of services delivered (pp. 2–3). And finally, according to Gardner’s four levels of collaborative development (2002), the most highly-developed collaboratives (e.g. level four) are marked by “outcomes-based funding mechanisms and integrated data systems.”

When queried about data collection processes designed to meet the reporting needs of the SR Initiative, five of seven agencies interviewed reported that the lead agency is in primary contact with the program-level evaluator responsible for the collection and analysis of all data for the collaborative.

- “[Our agency] collects all the data. Our data collector conducts interviews with all of our clients. She also is the one who is the holder of all the referrals and tracks the referrals.”

- “We have a wonderful system in which we are able to select data from every activity that we do. And we have in-house data collectors that actually come out and weekly collect data from every single service that we provide and class that we hold... that’s all entered into giant databases that are run by our evaluation department.”

Agencies also related that evaluation findings are largely shared with collaborative partners through written reports and meetings.

- “We meet formally about [evaluation findings] quite a bit, especially the desired results. We do cross training with them with their teachers... and they receive a report.”

- “[Our evaluator] provides the data feedback session with slides; that was a part of our last leadership meeting. A copy of the report is also sent to [our partners].”

The decision made by many lead agencies to manage data collection is not surprising given the difficulties that often arise when attempting to bring the
data collection and reporting processes of different organizations together for a shared purpose. One Program Coordinator described the challenges she experienced as she attempted to collect client-level data from collaborative partners.

- “The agencies all have funding from other places that require them to report things in these other ways... and then to ask them to really undo or redo a corporate structure that has been set up to meet these other funding requirements becomes a bit of a challenge, especially when those other requirements are the long-term sustained way that they have done business.”

When asked if there was a central place where data on the services a particular family receives from every organization involved in the collaborative (such as to gain an understanding of the influence of intensity of services), the Program Coordinator stated that to do so would be “cumbersome and complicated” as clients sometimes go directly to partner agencies making it difficult to track every service they receive.

Similar challenges have occurred as related to documenting interagency referrals. While many agencies described data collection activities designed to measure language, literacy, or social development outcomes, when asked if referrals were tracked across agencies or the outcomes of referrals were compiled, several interview respondents indicated that their tracking of referral data is limited by confidentiality and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance.

- “If we referred them, we track whether they went and whether they were satisfied. We don’t ask the providers what they do. Although we do have cross-referral releases that we do for all families, nevertheless, those referrals get heavily tested related to healthcare and so we really don’t try to get back because of the confidentiality problem.”

- “At the school site there are certain legal parameters as far as how much we can centralize information... we might have information on how many
As a result of confidentiality laws, grantees have limited their tracking of referrals to address the number of clients referred to partner agencies and their clients’ satisfaction with the services they received. None of the programs under study had compiled referral data across collaborative partners to assess the shared outcomes of their efforts in this area.

Outcomes for Children and Families

Despite the challenges described above, interview participants shared a variety of positive outcomes for children and families served by their programs. Anecdotal descriptions highlight parents’ appreciation for the services provided to them, as well as demonstrating learning about how to better prepare their children for school. One Program Coordinator discussed how little some clients knew about health and other issues prior to participating in the Initiative, and described changes she observed in her adult clients’ behavior as a result of attending parent education classes. A representative list of anecdotal descriptions of program outcomes is displayed below.

- “When we see that families are happy and smiling and healthy we know that our services are impacting these families… We get the information from the parents telling us how it’s worked for them.”

- “Parents have said things like, ‘I never knew that before, I never knew you should talk to your child, I never knew,’ there were a lot of [those types of comments].”

- “When we had our very first end of year celebration it was on a very hot Saturday and we were coming down here early to try to set things up and here come in all of these parents, grandparents… And parents started to talk about [the program] and I knew we were doing good work. But the parents’ testimonials and their own feeling good and expressing what
Other interview respondents described teachers’ and principals’ reactions to the program.

- “The teachers and the principals are telling us how happy they are because now they have more families involved and more kids that are ready.”

- “From the teachers’ perspective…Sometimes they can perceive a difference between a child that’s been to pre-K versus not. They’re ready to do the cutting. They understand how to stay in the lines…kids with pre-K exposure, at least half of them know what to do when the teacher asks them to line up. So there are things like that, the teachers’ perception, we do hear from them that they do see a difference in a child who’s been exposed to a pre-K classroom or not.”

In addition to anecdotal data about the effects of collaboratively-based school readiness programs on children and families, each grantee also has evaluation activities in place to quantitatively measure change over time. Interview respondents indicated that program clients have demonstrated marked improvements using pre-/post- methodology including the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), Ages and Stages (ASQ), Teacher Rated Observation of Language and Literacy (TROLL), and parent surveys, among others.

- “We’re able to document that parents, in fact, are doing more with their children. They believe their children are doing better. We have some follow-up on our doing better in kindergarten. By parent survey, at least, we’ve improved access to early care and education. And basically, the services have done something besides them being happier and working together. We actually have outcomes.”
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- “We certainly use the desired results... and we’re absolutely seeing results there. And then the parents, certainly the parent surveys... in all of these surveys, they always talk about what they have learned... they always talk about the fact that they learn English better and that they learn how to be more patient. And they learn how to talk to their kids.”

- “We have data to prove we have more children that are attending school and are in childcare. And that parents and children are learning what things are, the developmental processes for each age group.”

Successes

After describing how their efforts had influenced the lives of children and families, interview participants were invited to share program successes. One Project Director indicated that the lead agency had been praised for uniting community organizations for the first time and explained that collaborative partners were appreciative of the opportunity to work together under a shared grant rather than competing for funding. Another individual responded similarly, lauding collaborative members’ willingness to share ideas and resources.

- “We have been very complimented by the fact that we have been able to bring collaborators to the table that have never talked before.”

- “I would say that we tremendously respect each other. We each value what the other has to bring to the table... I think we’re able to share ideas and resources.”

Others were proud of the shared vision they had developed with their partners, a key characteristic of successful collaborations according to Bergstrom at al. (1995) and Gardner, Kloppenburg, and Gonzalez (2002). Another Program Coordinator explained that collaborative staff members were able to view clients in a more holistic way as a result of their joint efforts, describing in her own words a system similar to Kunesh and Farley’s “profamily” system (2003) which “meets the needs of whole families, not just individuals.”
“I’d say the successes are actually everyone working together and everyone having the same vision. That is what has been successful.”

“I think the fact that we are working together, and that there is a shared goal. I think that affects all of the agencies, and how they see the client or the family that they are serving. Not just from one perspective, but it broadens the perspective of the various agencies... So that the preschool teacher doesn’t just see the child, but has a better understanding of the family that goes with the child.”

And finally, several study participants related that their clients had become more trusting of the social service system, finding it easier to access a variety of services through one central location, as well as gaining a willingness to utilize services offered through the lead agency’s collaborative partners.

“We’re dealing with trust issues... Because a lot of times what happens is the families isolate themselves, they don’t want to go to this place, they don’t want to go to that place. Maybe they heard something negative, who knows? But once they start working with us and they’re already part of [our program]... then through the relationship they have with us, they will dismiss whatever they felt, if there was anything, and just go with it.”

“They’ve been saying this is the first time they’ve felt like it was easy for [them] to get the variety of services [they] needed... Usually when they first come in... they will come in for just a limited kind of thing, just testing the waters, and as they become more involved, it then becomes a secondary home to them, and they trust the staff... and then they start to open to all of their other needs.”

“We have a family that is in the home visitation program and this family built trust with the home visitor. And through that we know that they need help with different issues. So we connect them to the Case Manager. And the Case Manager connects this family to other services...
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It’s not only one organization—we cannot provide all the services. So it’s the collaboration that makes the family really—improves their life.”

Challenges

After being queried about their successes, each interview also included an opportunity for program staff to describe challenges they had experienced over the course of their programs. In addition to the challenges addressed above such as staff turnover, data collection, and scheduling collaborative-wide meetings, responses suggested that challenges were highly varied across the partnerships under study. One project has found the services provided by its evaluator to be unsatisfactory; the evaluator has not been hands-on and has not incorporated the program’s philosophy into the evaluation design.

• “I would not go with a large evaluator again. I think that’s been a huge challenge. Huge.”

Another Project Director discussed difficulties accomplishing one of the tasks set forth in the program’s work scope. The program staff was able to work around the challenge by using technology.

• “[The work scope] was written that the teachers and the family daycare providers would do cross talking. Coordinating their schedules has been a nightmare...So this last time we decided that we would...have them crosstalk by way of video.”

Joint supervision of home visitation staff hired by a collaborative partner was also discussed.

• “Who was going to supervise them? To what extent they were going to be supervised by whom? I think we had to learn the rules that [our partner agency] lived by. And they had to learn the rules that we live by in this particular situation...we learned what the commonalities were and what the differences were and how we work with the differences in the two agencies.”
And finally, working with immigrant communities has also presented a challenge.

- “We have such an immigrant community here... They have their multi-generational families with astounding problems that just are never-ending. You’ll run into a woman who’s 30 years old and she’s already a grandmother and then three years later her grandkid shows up at the pre-K and so it’s very, very tricky.”

However, despite the challenges described during the interviews, each agency demonstrated a passion for serving children and families and expressed a desire to continue with the programs they had implemented.

**Sustainability**

At the time that the interviews were carried out, the SR programs were embarking upon their final year of First 5 LA funding, making sustainability a timely topic of discussion. Interview respondents described a mix of sustainability efforts, including attending workshops, seeking additional grant funds, as well as pursuing more long-term funding sources such as Universal Preschool and Title I. Concerns were also expressed, such as funding opportunities requiring “matching” funds contributed by the grantee, or a dearth of funds sufficient to continue the programs at their current level of service provision.

- “We have an opportunity to be part of kind of a training group that takes you through five or six workshops and in that you can develop a sustainability plan and then you can present the plan to various funders.”

- “We’ve applied to three different grants and have obtained one. And hope to transition with Universal Preschool. We’re currently seeking some different funding... But again, you know, it has to be something that will be feasible... you can’t apply for them without having all these
strings attached. You know, 50% matching, which is something we don’t have.”

- “I think [First 5 is] very unrealistic about the amount of [long-term] funding that’s available, truly available, to sustain these efforts…At the same time, you can marshal support from the private sector, but they are becoming more and more driven like the public sector…they also have their own set of priorities, and for most of the ongoing funding streams, those resources are not readily available.”

- “We’re talking about it all the time… We’ve already agreed that… this is a great program and we think it needs to continue. The challenge then becomes finding these kinds of dollars at the rate that it’s currently funded, and how to go about doing that.”

Several agencies had involved their collaborative partners in the discussions, but none of the agencies indicated that they had secured sufficient funding to continue providing a comparable level of services after the First 5 LA funding cycle concludes in 2008.

**Policy**

According to Gardner (2002), highly developed strategic alliances should move beyond a project focus and work to create new community governance structures and to decategorize funding, each of which requires participation in the public policy arena. However, when public policy was addressed among interview respondents, most indicated that they had not engaged in shared efforts to influence policy, describing how member organizations or individuals were working independently, or were focused on service provision and had not allocated time or resources to public policy.

- “I have my agenda way beyond the collaborative so I’m involved in what’s important to me… policy issues, program issues. So I wouldn’t say as a collaborative that we’ve had a coming together around a policy issue that we were drawn to work on for the collaborative.”
“Frankly, it’s something that we don’t have a lot of time to do...We have to operate pretty lean. Most of our dollars go directly to services and we want it that way.”

Still, three agencies interviewed did describe modest efforts to engage local and federal politicians.

- “What we have done is for our local politicians... when they have community meetings we give that information to our clients and ask them to go.”

- “We look at local policy at the district-wide level. We are looking at the Department of Mental Health’s efforts and the Early Childhood Education Division as a whole.”

- “We went to the HIPPY [Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters] conference in Washington, D.C. this past year... part of the activity was spent for the better part of the day on Capitol Hill, going to visit our legislators. And it turned out that we got into it so much it was a really, really real powerful thing to do. To go in and sit down and talk to either the actual person, the Congressperson, or their staff person, and talk to them about asking them to specifically consider funding different bills...And it was a great experience.”

Despite these efforts, it is clear that most agencies involved in the study have not made public policy a priority.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to gain a clearer understanding of how organizations serving children and families work collaboratively, a series of interviews were conducted with lead and partner agency staff from seven First 5 LA School Readiness Initiative grantees. The interviews have served to demonstrate that organizations
working collectively to assist some of the neediest clients in the county vary widely across a number of domains. Some collaborative partnerships were marked by multi-level staff involvement, regularly scheduled meetings, parent involvement, and shared leadership and decision-making, each of which has been cited in the literature as a means to foster functional, successful alliances. Other agencies were not engaged in a collaborative as described in the current literature, keeping service provision as the primary focus of their efforts and demonstrating subcontracting relationships rather than more developed collaborative partnerships. And finally, according to the interview data collected from lead and partner agency staff members, only a small portion of the sample has attempted to influence change in the areas of funding allocation or state or federal policy initiatives, activities highlighted in the literature as paramount to the advancement of the social service delivery system.

However, it is unclear as to whether the differences among the agencies’ structural and organizational processes have made a notable impact on the quality or quantity of services that children and families receive, as a detailed analysis of outcome data was not within the scope of the current, exploratory study. This report may serve as a useful contribution to the analysis of collaborative partnerships within the context of school readiness programming, but additional research will be essential to develop a more summative review of the characteristics of successful strategic alliances.
RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

1. Grantees embarking upon collaborative partnerships should be encouraged to consult the literature addressing collaborative functioning and spend time planning how to effectively implement processes such as data collection, staff involvement, meeting scheduling and formats, and decision-making processes prior to program implementation. This will ensure that all partners have a clear understanding of member roles and responsibilities, and that all agencies are kept well-informed of the functioning of the program and are able to contribute to evaluation and decision-making processes.

2. Organizations with experience forming interagency collaborations should be encouraged to discuss their experiences with others implementing similar programs or partnerships. By sharing knowledge and offering collegial support, collaborative members can draw upon others’ expertise. It is recommended that funding agencies encourage communication among newly developing partnerships and more seasoned collaboratives by facilitating opportunities for meetings and events.

3. It is also recommended that funding agencies provide ongoing technical assistance in the area of collaborative functioning, requiring that grantees build evaluation activities into their programs that are designed specifically to measure collaborative development and functioning, as well as providing funding to compensate program staff and community stakeholders for their participation in meetings and retreats addressing collaborative partnerships. They may also wish to require the use of a valid and reliable instrument for collaborative assessment at timed intervals across the funding cycle.

4. Funding agencies should also provide clear expectations regarding the composition and measurable outcomes expected of collaborative partnerships. For example, a minimum number of partner agencies, the requirement of parent involvement in development and decision-making processes, regularly
scheduled and documented meetings among collaborative members, and the human and financial contributions of partner agencies should be explicitly outlined in requests for proposals.

5. And finally, research addressing interagency collaboration should be continued in order to gain a clearer understanding of the influence of collaborative partnerships on the quality and quantity of school readiness programming offered in Los Angeles County. By correlating variables such as decision–making and communication processes, the number and typology of collaborative partners, and parent and community stakeholder involvement with outcome indicators, it will be possible to identify key components of successful collaborative partnerships.
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review to follow summarizes relevant research focused on interagency collaboration within the framework of school readiness. The majority of the articles reviewed were identified through a literature search of PsychInfo and ERIC published between 1996 and 2000. Selected articles were also provided by First 5 LA staff members with expertise in the realm of collaboration and school readiness.

HISTORY OF COLLABORATION

Service integration has existed in the U.S. for over a century, with roots in the settlement house movement of the late 1800s. The movement gave rise to many social policy initiatives developed to improve the conditions of the most excluded members of society, and made some of the first efforts at working collectively to identify problems and offer comprehensive services to families. Sixty years later, federal initiatives under the War on Poverty developed community decision-making capacity and offered multifaceted services. Finally, in the 1970s under Eliot Richardson and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the first major federal service integration initiatives began, aimed at greater coordination and accountability among institutions serving the same children and families.

These early initiatives were important stepping stones toward more efficient, accessible, and coordinated service delivery systems. However, most child-serving institutions continued to work in isolation until the 1980s when new federal efforts emerged. Joint planning among health, human service, and education agencies was encouraged, and joint planning was often a condition of federal funding. This federal emphasis on cross-system planning has served as the impetus for a number of state initiatives emphasizing collaboration among agencies serving children and families. From the mid-1980s to the present, private foundations have also been active in offering funding for interagency collaboration efforts (Bruner, Kunesh, & Knuth, 1992).
DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORKS FOR COLLABORATIVES

Interagency collaborations represent the increasing effort of public and private agencies to restructure services to be more responsive to their clients. However, they vary greatly in terms of their development, and a number of frameworks have emerged to describe how collaborative partnerships form and grow over time.

In a seminal work by Kagen (1991), the author divides the development of collaborative relationships into three stages:

1) The beginning stage, when the collaboration is forming and making plans.
2) The growth stage, when plans are implemented in programs and policies.
3) The evaluation stage, when results are examined and decisions are made about whether or not to make changes.

Kagen chose to focus on the partnership–level development of collaboratives, while subsequent models expanded upon the framework, moving beyond the internal workings of a service integration effort to discuss the potential for collaboratives to influence both policy and funding mechanisms. The four–stage model of development put forth by Gardner (2002) emphasizes the development of collaborative partnerships beyond joint projects and shared grants to include:

1) Exchange of information/Getting to know you
2) Joint projects/Shared grants
3) Changing the rules/Redirection of funds
4) Change the system/Results–based funding

According to Gardner, most collaboratives cease to develop past level 2, or Joint projects/Shared grants, when agencies’ shared efforts are focused on project development and service provision. The author proposes that highly developed strategic alliances should move beyond a project focus and work to create new community governance structures, outcomes–based funding mechanisms, integrated data systems, and to decategorize funding, among others. Ideally,
as a collaborative venture moves through each stage over time, participating agencies become increasingly influential in the greater community, as well as further evolved internally, developing outcomes–based funding mechanisms and implementing systemic and ongoing individual and organizational development activities intended to strengthen and expand the partnership.

Rather than describe the ideal process of collaborative development, Hodges, Hernandez, and Nesman (2003) put forth a developmental framework for collaboration intended for use by child–serving systems in order to internally, “assess their current stage of collaboration as well as to consider opportunities for building collaborative processes across child–serving agencies.” After collecting interview data from nine sites that were actively building collaborative processes into their service delivery systems, findings supported the hypothesis that collaboration is a developmental process that, “is built slowly and with considerable effort,” (p. 297). The developmental process emerged as follows:

**Stage I: Individual Action**

During Stage I, the focus of each agency is internal and there are no specific collaborative activities. However, participants have identified a critical need for change.

**Stage II: One–on–One**

Early on in collaborative development, a single individual is often responsible for initiation of the collaborative, approaching another child–serving agency. Initial contact often focuses on an issue with a particular child or family, but this contact can result in identification of potential partners or leaders who will advocate for development of the partnership.
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Stage III: New Service Development

According to the author, “During this stage, participants described a shift away from agency-centered thinking about service delivery to a more child-centered approach to providing services,” (p. 300). Ideas are applied and the agencies move toward a formal collaborative structure.

Stage IV: Professional Collaboration

A professional collaboration includes collaborative activities at the agency, program, and service provider levels. Funding is allocated specifically for collaborative service delivery, and agency partners share a common vision and mission. However, study participants agreed that professional collaboration was not, in itself, sufficient.

Stage V: True Collaborations

Study participants unanimously agreed that involvement of family members as full partners is a critical component of a collaborative venture geared toward serving young children and families. True collaborations include the characteristics of professional collaboration, but also, “involve families on two levels: (a) the involvement of families in decisions that shape services for their own children and (b) the involvement of families in decisions that affect the planning and delivery of services in their community,” (pp. 298–301).

While Gardner argued that the final stage of collaborative development is marked by the expansion of the collaborative to influence governance, funding allocation, and policy, Hodges et al. found that agency staff identified family involvement as the primary indicator of a fully developed collaborative. Participants related that their partnerships had progressed from viewing family members as outsiders to involving families in a shared effort both at the individual and system levels. According to the authors, only when families are
full partners in the service delivery process has true collaboration been achieved (p. 301).

DESIRABLE QUALITIES OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

While both Gardner and Hodges et al. describe collaborations in terms of a developmental process, others discuss internal and contextual factors that influence the success of collaborations. According to Wilder (1992), “Collaboration is not always effective. It is not always appropriate. Sometimes it might even result in greater costs than independent efforts...Thus, understanding what makes it work becomes an important task to accomplish,” (p. 4). In order to determine the characteristics of successful collaboration, the Wilder Research Center compiled collaboration research and identified 20 factors that describe desirable qualities in an effective collaborative partnership. The factors fall within six categories:

1) **Environment:** Environmental characteristics consist of the geographic location and social context within which a collaborative group exists.

2) **Membership Characteristics:** Skills, attitudes, and opinions of the individuals in a collaborative group, as well as the culture and capacity of the organizations that form collaborative groups.

3) **Process and Structure:** The management, decision-making, and operational systems of a collaborative effort.

4) **Communication:** The channels used by collaborative partners to send and receive information, keep one another informed, and convey opinions to influence the group’s actions.

5) **Purpose:** The reasons for the development of a collaborative effort. The result or vision the collaborative group seeks, and the specific
tasks or projects the collaborative group defines as necessary to accomplish. It is driven by a need, crisis, or opportunity.

6) **Resources:** Financial and human “input” necessary to develop and sustain a collaborative group (pp. 12–27).

Variations across contexts, staffing, resources, and community attitudes require that collaborative members consider each area in relation to the specific characteristics of their own efforts, as shortcomings within any of the above areas have the potential to undermine the utility of a service integration effort.

Bergstrom et al. (1995) produced a similar document designed to identify and then accomplish a set of ideal collaborative characteristics. According to the authors, when initiating a collaborative partnership, it is essential that all existing and potential members share the vision and purpose of the collaborative and that the process be driven by the vision rather than an observed problem. It is also critical that roles and expectations be clear in terms of tasks, responsibilities, and work plans that are geared toward the achievement of measurable outcomes.

Moving beyond the initiation of a collaborative partnership, the Framework is built upon four components: 1) grounding; 2) core foundation; 3) outcomes; and, 4) process and contextual factors. After ensuring that the collaboration is grounded in valuing and respecting the diversity of all members, the core represents a common understanding of the purpose of the collaboration and how it relates to the surrounding environment. **Outcomes** are desired “conditions” for the community that reflect success in working to reach the collaboration’s vision. Ideally, collaborative members determine the desired outcomes for the partnership during the initiation phase. **Contextual and process factors** represent elements that can either enhance or inhibit collaborations and ultimately the desired outcomes. The process and contextual factors identified by the authors are similar to those proposed by Wilder (1992). Process factors include:
1) **Understanding the Community**: Includes people, cultures, values, and habits, and provides the foundation for effective collaboration by allowing the practitioner to gain a sense of the vision the community has for itself and the underlying values of the citizenry.

2) **Community Development**: The process of mobilizing communities to address important issues and build upon the strengths of the community. Issues, goals, and objectives are explored and the collaboration begins the process of defining its vision, mission, values, principles, and outcomes. Efforts begin to build teamwork and mobilize resources.

3) **Leadership**: Effective leadership is necessary for a collaboration to be effective, and must include those who impact change within their community, group, and/or organization. Collaborative leaders must assure that appropriate members are included and that norms of operation are established that include protocol, conflict resolution, political and cultural sensitivity, structure, and roles and responsibilities.

4) **Communication**: Within the collaboration, norms of communication must be established which assure “language usage” which is acceptable and understandable to all members and a formal communication process must be established both within the collaborative and with the surrounding community.

5) **Research and Evaluation**: Data must be collected which establishes benchmarks for future impact and outcome analysis. Evaluation efforts are essential to monitor progress toward goals and objectives and to make modifications where necessary.

6) **Sustainability**: In order to achieve sustainability, systems must be put into place that provide sustained membership, resources, and strategic program planning.
Six contextual factors important to the success of collaborative ventures were also identified:

1) **Connectedness**: Linkages between individual, groups, and organizations.

2) **History of Working Together/Customs**: The community has a history of working cooperatively, solving problems, and trust.

3) **Political Climate**: The history and environment surrounding power and decision making. Widespread political support is important in developing and sustaining collaborations, particularly for policy making and implementation of policy.

4) **Policies/Laws/Regulations**: Solving problems collaboratively means transforming and changing policies, laws, and regulations, and collaborations are more likely to succeed when supporting policies, laws, and regulations that are in place.

5) **Resources**: Includes environmental, in-kind, financial, and human capital.

6) **Catalysts**: The impetus to start the collaboration (pp. 11–14).

Both Wilder and Bergstrom et al. address the internal and external factors that influence the success of a collaborative partnership. Resources, communication, consideration for the surrounding community, and the ability to work within the political and social climate are underscored in both documents as key components to consider when developing or assessing a collaborative. These models can serve as useful tools, guiding partner agencies to accomplish their goals and achieve sustainability while remaining responsive to the surrounding community. As evidenced by similarities across the articles summarized above, community and family involvement, clear roles and responsibilities, and effective communication processes are common themes among effective and sustainable collaborative partnerships.
A CALL FOR COLLABORATION IN SCHOOL READINESS

The risk factors facing young children and families in today’s society are both numerous and complex. When those risk factors are paired with a fragmented social service delivery system, children are increasingly likely to enter kindergarten ill-prepared for the social and academic demands of elementary education. Kunesh and Farley (1993) discuss a number of problems associated with service delivery among school readiness programs. Reviewing historical trends in service delivery, the authors state that, “Most services [were] crisis-oriented. The social welfare system divide[d] problems of children and families into rigid and distinct categories that fail[ed] to reflect the interrelated causes and solutions of the problems,” (p. 1). The authors argue that fragmented service delivery focuses on the weaknesses of families rather than building on their strengths, making it difficult to access or find the assistance that they need. In response, the authors propose that the delivery of educational and human services should move toward a “profamily system” that is:

1) **Comprehensive**: A variety of opportunities and services respond to the full range of child and family needs.

2) **Preventative**: The bulk of resources are provided at the front end to prevent problems, rather than at the back end for more costly crisis-intervention and treatment services.

3) **Family-centered and family driven**: The system meets the needs of whole families, not just individuals, and assumes every family has strengths. Families have a major voice in setting goals and deciding what services they need to meet them. Service delivery features, such as hours and location, serve family needs, rather than institutional preferences.

4) **Integrated**: Separate services are connected by common intake, eligibility determination, and individual family service planning, so that each family’s range of needs is addressed.
5) Developmental: Assessments and plans are responsive to families’ changing needs.

6) Flexible: Frontline workers respond quickly to family needs and waivers are available to address or prevent emergencies.

7) Sensitive to cultural, gender, and racial concerns: Respect for differences is formalized in system-wide policy statements, carried out in staff development activities, and reflected in the diversity of governing boards and staff.

8) Outcomes-oriented: Performance is measured by improved outcomes for children and families, not by the number and kind of services delivered (pp. 2–3).

The author’s push for a “profamily” system is similar in many ways to the developmental model of collaboration put forth by Hernandez, and Nesman (2003) who argue that true collaboration takes place only when families are involved in the collaborative venture. Family involvement increases the likelihood that a collaborative will be responsive to the needs of families in the community it serves in addition to being strengths-based rather than crisis oriented. Similarly, the profamily systems model also runs parallel to the characteristics of successful collaborations proposed by Bergstrom et al. (1995) and Gardner et al. (2002) who emphasized the importance of including the surrounding community when developing a collaborative partnership.

Bruner, Kunesh, and Knuth (1992) also commented on the problems observed in the service delivery system. They state, “Interagency collaboration... provid[es] more flexible, comprehensive, and effective services to children and their families than [can] be provided without such collaboration. The end result is better outcomes for children and families,” (p. 7). They offer a list of essential elements of comprehensive service delivery that includes a wide array of services, responsiveness to the changing needs of children and families, continuity of services, a focus on the whole family, and an emphasis on
improved outcomes for children and families, as well as strategies for engaging families and communities in a collaborative partnership.

By coordinating services rather than offering each in isolation, providers are able to offer comprehensive programming that is better able to meet the needs of their clients. According to Gardner, Kloppenburg, and Gonzalez (2002), “School Readiness is by definition about collaboration, since it involves new connections among schools, parents, childcare centers, and other providers who come in contact with young children,” (p. 1). Critical partners may include early care providers, parents, schools, community service providers, Healthy Start, faith-based organizations, and businesses. A balance of financial and non-financial assets is imperative, and different issues arise according to the organizations and agencies that are involved (pp. 9–14). The authors also address essential elements that should be in place when developing a new collaborative, advocating for the inclusion of critical players/stakeholders from the surrounding community and emphasizing the importance of parent involvement, a shared vision, a shared decision-making governance structure, and data-driven processes. By including each of these elements, collaborative ventures are more likely to draw upon the talents of a variety of stakeholders and achieve successful outcomes over time (pp. 3–4).
APPENDIX 1: LITERATURE REVIEW REFERENCES


Kagen (1991) United we stand: Collaboration for childcare and early education services


APPENDIX 2: LEAD AGENCY INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Lead Agency Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to children and families in Los Angeles County, as well as to the evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative (SRI). We are interested in knowing more about the role of collaborative partnerships within school readiness programs, and we appreciate your willingness to participate in this case study project. The information that you provide today, as well as that provided by members of other collaborative partnerships funded by the School Readiness Initiative, will be used to develop a clearer understanding of how agencies work together to serve children 0–5 and their families in the County.

The interview to follow will cover a number of different issues related to the development and implementation of your collaborative in relation to the School Readiness program. Information gathered from this interview will be presented in such a way that program participants will not be identifiable in any report.

In addition, this case study project will not be used to evaluate the effectiveness of your School Readiness agency or your partnering agencies. Participation in this case study is voluntary and is not a requirement of your program. Your program can decline to participate in this interview at any time. The information shared will not be utilized to affect your program funding and/or to make judgments about future funding.

The case study will be used to identify successful processes, promising practices, and challenges that organizations face as they attempt collaborative ventures. The information can then provide a guide for future efforts to implement successful collaborative partnerships within the context of School Readiness.
I would like to record our conversation. The tape will ensure that I am able to capture the details of your comments. Is it alright with you if I begin recording?

Do you have any questions that I can answer before we begin? Okay, let’s get started.

**Background**

1. Please describe the organizations involved in your collaborative: Small/large organization size, service types, role in the community, population served, etc. Who would you say are your primary partners and why? Are there any parties that should be participating that aren’t? Did any partners drop out along the way?

**Beginning Work**

2. Who initiated the collaborative? Have you developed an inventory of resources and programs already in the community that aim at your collaborative’s shared goals? How did you identify your partnering agency/agencies? Was/were the relationship(s) pre-existing? If yes, please describe the nature of your past collaborative efforts.

3. What criteria were used to first identify/select individual members? What roles do staff play in their own organizations (administration versus front-line staff)? Are parents/community members involved? If yes, please describe.

4. How did the collaborative determine what it was going to accomplish and how it would do so? How were key activities determined? Were there specific needs that were identified in the needs assessment that the collaborative has focused on? How were member roles and responsibilities defined?

5. How was the collaborative implemented? Please describe the development of your collaborative from startup to the present.

6. Have you carried out a resource inventory? By this, I am referring to an inventory of financial resources available to your collaborative, not limited to grant funds, but also including sustainable funding sources such as from school districts, DCFS, Medi-Cal, or the 15 + funding streams for childcare.
Day-to-Day Operations

7. What does each agency contribute to the collaboration? What resources do collaborative members share? Examples include financial resources, materials, space, and staff. Is there any sharing of referrals or service provision? Approximately what percentage of services is provided by each partner?

8. How do you generally communicate with your partner(s)? Examples might include meetings, e-mail, conference calls, staff meetings, cross-agency task forces, and the use of a master calendar. Which have been most beneficial?

9. What leadership model/structure are you utilizing with this collaborative? Was an individual leader/convener identified to direct the partnership, or was leadership shared among key players from partnering agencies?

10. How does your collaborative make decisions? Consensus, voting, delegation? Were subcommittees employed? How are disagreements handled?

Accomplishments and Challenges

11. What, in your opinion, are some of the successes of your collaborative? (Increased efficiency, new service links, improved quality/quantity/diversity of services, accomplish more with fewer resources, benefit from diverse points of view, etc.)

12. What, in your opinion, are some of the challenges of your collaborative? (Too many meetings, unproductive meetings, dominating participants, too much of a challenging/time consuming process, etc.)

Evaluation and Outcomes

13. Are you tracking children/families across collaborative partners? Are you compiling data in one centralized place on all the services children/families receive from all of your collaborative partners?

14. Did the evaluation of your SR program include an evaluation component intended to specifically assess the effectiveness of your collaborative partnership(s)? What have you learned so far? Were preliminary findings used to augment how partners interact or deliver services?

15. Has service data been shared among partners? How has/is data used to improve collaborative functioning? Please explain.
16. How do you think the collaborative has impacted services for children 0–5 (i.e. What **shared** outcomes are you measuring?)? What evidence do you have to support that? How is the impact measured?

17. How is your collaborative planning for sustainability? By sustainability, I am referring to the sustainability of the partnerships that we have discussed today, rather than the sustainability of your SR program. Please describe. Have you made any efforts to obtain long–term funding for your project so you will not need to rely on short–term grants?

**Influence on Policy**

18. Is any member of your collaborative involved in local policy? Are there any public policies changes that your collaborative has attempted to influence?
APPENDIX 3: PARTNER AGENCY INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Partner Agency Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to children and families in Los Angeles County, as well as to the evaluation of the School Readiness Initiative (SRI). We are interested in knowing more about the role of collaborative partnerships within school readiness programs, and we appreciate your willingness to participate in this case study project. The information that you provide today, as well as that provided by members of other collaborative partnerships funded by the School Readiness Initiative, will be used to develop a clearer understanding of how agencies work together to serve children 0–5 and their families in the County.

The interview to follow will cover a number of different issues related to the development and implementation of your collaborative in relation to the School Readiness program. Information gathered from this interview will be presented in such a way that program participants will not be identifiable in any report.

In addition, this case study project will not be used to evaluate the effectiveness of your involvement with this School Readiness. Participation in this case study is voluntary and is not a requirement of your program. Your program can decline to participate in this interview at any time. The information shared will not be utilized to affect your program funding and/or to make judgments about future funding.

The case study will be used to identify successful processes, promising practices, and challenges that organizations face as they attempt collaborative ventures. The information can then provide a guide for future efforts to implement successful collaborative partnerships within the context of School Readiness.
I would like to record our conversation. The tape will ensure that I am able to capture the details of your comments. Is it alright with you if I begin recording?

Do you have any questions that I can answer before we begin? Okay, let’s get started.

**Beginning Work**

19. Who initiated the collaborative? Was/were the relationship(s) pre-existing? If yes, please describe the nature of your past collaborative efforts.
20. What staff from your organization are involved in the collaborative (i.e. administration versus front-line staff)? What role do they play? Have you invited parents/community members to be involved in the collaborative? If yes, please describe.
21. How did the collaborative determine what it was going to accomplish and how it would do so? How were key activities determined? Were there specific needs that were identified in the needs assessment that the collaborative has focused on? How were member roles and responsibilities defined?
22. How was the collaborative implemented? Please describe the development of your collaborative from startup to the present.

**Day-to-Day Operations**

23. How do you generally communicate with your partner(s)? Examples might include meetings, e-mail, conference calls, staff meetings, cross-agency task forces, and the use of a master calendar. Which have been most beneficial?
24. What leadership model/structure are you utilizing with this collaborative? Was an individual leader/convener identified to direct the partnership, or was leadership shared among key players from partnering agencies?
25. How does your collaborative make decisions? Consensus, voting, delegation? Were subcommittees employed? How are disagreements handled?
Accomplishments and Challenges

26. What, in your opinion, are some of the successes of your collaborative? (Increased efficiency, new service links, improved quality/quantity/diversity of services, accomplish more with fewer resources, benefit from diverse points of view, etc.)

27. What, in your opinion, are some of the challenges of your collaborative? (Too many meetings, unproductive meetings, dominating participants, too much of a challenging/time consuming process, etc.)

Evaluation and Outcomes

28. Did the evaluation of your SR program include an evaluation component intended to specifically assess the effectiveness of your collaborative partnership(s)? What have you learned so far? Were preliminary findings used to augment how partners interact or deliver services?

29. Has service data been shared among partners? How has/is data used to improve collaborative functioning? Please explain.

30. How do you think the collaborative has impacted services for children 0–5 (i.e. What shared outcomes are you measuring)? What evidence do you have to support that? How is the impact measured?

31. How is your collaborative planning for sustainability? By sustainability, I am referring to the sustainability of the partnerships that we have discussed today, rather than the sustainability of your SR program. Please describe. Have you made any efforts to obtain long-term funding for your project so you will not need to rely on short-term grants?

Influence on Policy

32. Is your collaborative involved in local policy? Are there any public policies changes that your collaborative has attempted to influence?
Executive Summary

Collaboration in the Context of School Readiness Programs

This executive summary provides a synopsis of the “Collaboration in the Context of School Readiness Programs” report which was submitted to First 5 LA on February 23, 2007. The summary will describe the purpose and methodology of the study as well as key findings and recommendations. Additional details may be found in the full report.

Overview

The purpose of this study was exploratory in nature. In order to better understand how First 5 LA’s School Readiness grantees work collaboratively to serve children 0–5 and their families, seven programs engaging in collaborative ventures were identified as voluntary participants. A review of current literature focused on interagency collaboration was conducted to inform the study design and questionnaire development, and summarizes relevant research focused on interagency collaboration within the framework of school readiness. Interviews with the lead agency and a partner agency were held for each of the seven participating programs. The full report includes site visit analysis that synthesizes findings from the interviews.

The literature review discusses several developmental frameworks for collaboratives. While one framework’s final stage of collaborative development is marked by the expansion of the collaborative to influence governance, funding allocation, and policy, another indicates that family involvement is the primary indicator of a fully developed collaborative. Still other researchers identify internal and external factors that influence collaborations. Resources, communication, consideration for the surrounding community, and the ability to work within the political and social climate are underscored by these researchers as key components to consider when developing or assessing a collaborative. These models can serve as useful tools, guiding partner agencies to accomplish their goals and achieve sustainability while remaining responsive to the surrounding community. As evidenced by similarities across the articles summarized in the full report, community and family involvement, clear roles
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and responsibilities, and effective communication processes are common themes among effective and sustainable collaborative partnerships.

When considering collaborations within school readiness programs we must look at the current state of educational and social service systems. The literature review indicated that many believe these systems are fragmented and further argue that fragmented service delivery focuses on the weaknesses of families rather than building on their strengths, making it difficult to access or find the assistance that they need. In response, these authors propose that the delivery of educational and human services should move toward a “profamily system” that is:

- Comprehensive
- Preventative
- Family-centered and family driven
- Integrated
- Developmental
- Flexible
- Sensitive to cultural, gender, and racial concerns
- Outcomes-oriented

Family involvement increases the likelihood that a collaborative will be responsive to the needs of families in the community it serves in addition to being strengths-based rather than crisis oriented. Similarly, the profamily systems model also runs parallel to the characteristics of successful collaborations proposed by other frameworks which emphasize the importance of including the surrounding community when developing a collaborative partnership.

**Methodology**

Seven programs engaging in collaborative ventures were identified for participation in the study. While randomized sampling techniques were not possible given the voluntary nature of the study, efforts were made to include
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grantees that effectively represented the breadth of the total grantee population (n=42) according to a number of domains.

The research questions developed to drive the interviews with lead and partner agencies are included in the full report. The questions follow the areas of inquiry listed below and emphasize the exploratory nature of the study.

- Development of Collaborative
- Collaborative Membership
- Internal Processes
- Evaluation and Outcomes
- Sustainability
- Broader Impacts

The study sample consisted of four community-based organizations and three school district programs. The mean number of collaborative partners was eleven, and the range was four to nineteen. Twenty-five different partner typologies were documented with an even larger number of different services provided by the partners. Needless to say, the sample varies widely across a number of domains.

Findings
Program Planning, Collaborative Partners, Loss of Partners, and Selection of Members

- Most interview respondents cited the findings of their needs assessments as the driving force of their program design.
- Grantees sought out organizations that could provide the services needed to fill the gaps after the needs assessment process.
- The most commonly cited reason behind approaching agencies for inclusion in the SRI programs was a previous collaborative relationship.
- A small portion of the lead agencies reported the loss of partners during implementation, due to: partners’ loss of funding and the amount of time which lapsed between identifying the partner, submitting the proposal, and receiving SRI funds.
• After agencies were identified as collaborative partners, individuals within those agencies were also identified to be the key points of contact.
• Most of the study respondents reported a deliberate effort to make initial contact with the Executive Directors of the agencies, although four of the seven lead agencies also reported efforts to involve all levels of partner agency staff.
• Leadership from the Executive Directors was an important component of the collaborative and should continue after implementation,

Communication
• The communications strategies among grantees included: advisory meetings, staff meetings, subcommittee meetings, newsletters, and emails.
• The variation in the communication processes described above is interesting given the emphasis in the literature on facilitating ongoing communication among collaborative partners.

Leadership and Decision-Making
• Again, there is variability among the grantees in terms of their leadership and decision making processes.
• Several sites reported diffused models where leadership is shared.
• Others view meeting First 5’s contractual and budgetary expectations to be the responsibility of the lead agency, placing responsibility for decision-making with the lead agency.

Parent Involvement
• Respondents were divided in terms of their efforts to include parents in meetings and decision-making.
• Despite some sites’ lack of continuous parent involvement in the collaborative, others place a high level of importance on including parents in leadership and decision-making processes.
• These sites include parents in advisory board meetings where program decisions are made, and they credit this success to their ability to support parents with transportation assistance, childcare, and Spanish translation.
One program in the sample credited their success at involving parents in the collaborative based on their staffs’ attitudes toward parents, viewing them as powerful and capable of engaging in a high level of discussion about themselves and their communities.

Outcomes Assessment among Collaborative Partnerships

- Five of seven agencies interviewed reported that the lead agency is in primary contact with the program-level evaluator responsible for the collection and analysis of all data for the collaborative.
- Evaluation findings are largely shared with collaborative partners through written reports and meetings.
- A common challenge many of the grantees reported was tracking referrals across agencies and the outcomes of the referral due to confidentiality and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliance.
- None of the programs under study had compiled referral data across collaborative partners to assess the shared outcomes of their efforts in this area.

Outcomes for Children and Families

- Study participants shared a variety of positive outcomes for children and families served by their programs. Both anecdotal descriptions and quantitatively measured assessments indicate positive outcomes for children and families.
- Interview respondents indicated that program clients have demonstrated marked improvements using pre-/post- methodology including the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), Ages and Stages (ASQ), Teacher Rated Observation of Language and Literacy (TROLL), and parent surveys, among others.

Successes

- Praise for uniting community organizations for the first time, and the collaborative partners were appreciative of the opportunity to work together under a shared grant rather than competing for funding.
Others were proud of the shared vision they had developed with their partners, a key characteristic of successful collaborations according to the literature. Collaborative staff members were able to view clients in a more holistic way as a result of their joint efforts, describing a system similar to the “profamily” system discussed in the literature review which “meets the needs of whole families, not just individuals.” And finally, several study participants related that their clients had become more trusting of the social service system, finding it easier to access a variety of services through one central location, as well as gaining a willingness to utilize services offered through the lead agency’s collaborative partners.

Challenges
- Several challenges such as staff turnover, data collection, and communication have already been discussed through other areas of the study.
- Additional challenges included working with an external evaluator, accomplishing activities in the scope of work, joint supervision, and working with immigrant communities.

Sustainability
- Efforts to sustain programs included attending workshops, seeking additional grant funds, as well as pursuing larger and long-term funding sources such as Title I and Universal Preschool.
- Several respondents were also concerned with the requirement of funding agencies for matching funds and their ability to continue their programs at their current level of service provision.
- Several agencies had involved their collaborative partners in the discussions, but none of the agencies indicated that they had secured sufficient funding to continue providing a comparable level of services after the First 5 LA funding cycle concludes in 2008.
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Policy
- Most respondents indicated that they had not engaged in shared efforts to influence policy, describing how member organizations or individuals were working independently, or were focused on service provision and had not allocated time or resources to public policy.
- Three of the seven agencies interviewed described modest advocacy efforts at the local and federal levels.

Conclusions
In order to gain a clearer understanding of how organizations serving children and families work collaboratively, a series of interviews were conducted with lead and partner agency staff from seven First 5 LA School Readiness Initiative grantees. The interviews have served to demonstrate that organizations working collectively to assist some of the neediest clients in the county vary widely across a number of domains. Some collaborative partnerships were marked by multi-level staff involvement, regularly scheduled meetings, parent involvement, and shared leadership and decision-making, each of which has been cited in the literature as a means to foster functional, successful alliances. Other agencies were not engaged in a collaborative as described in the current literature, keeping service provision as the primary focus of their efforts and demonstrating subcontracting relationships rather than more developed collaborative partnerships. And finally, according to the interview data collected from lead and partner agency staff members, only a small portion of the sample has attempted to influence change in the areas of funding allocation or state or federal policy initiatives, activities highlighted in the literature as paramount to the advancement of the social service delivery system.

However, it is unclear as to whether the differences among the agencies’ structural and organizational processes have made a notable impact on the quality or quantity of services that children and families receive, as a detailed analysis of outcome data was not within the scope of the current, exploratory study. This report may serve as a useful contribution to the analysis of collaborative partnerships within the context of school readiness programming,
but additional research will be essential to develop a more summative review of the characteristics of successful strategic alliances.

**Recommendations**

1. Grantees embarking upon collaborative partnerships should be encouraged to consult the literature addressing collaborative functioning and spend time planning how to effectively implement processes such as data collection, staff involvement, meeting scheduling and formats, and decision-making processes prior to program implementation.

2. A collaboration learning community should be fostered where organizations with successful collaboration strategies and lessons learned can share their experiences with others.

3. Funding agencies ought to provide technical assistance in the area of collaborative functioning, require grantees to incorporate measures to evaluate their collaboratives into their evaluation plans, and finally, compensate program staff and community stakeholders for their participation in collaborative planning and operational activities.

4. Funding agencies should also provide clear expectations regarding the composition and measurable outcomes expected of collaborative partnerships.

5. And finally, research addressing interagency collaboration should be continued in order to gain a clearer understanding of the influence of collaborative partnerships on the quality and quantity of school readiness programming offered in Los Angeles County. By correlating variables such as decision-making and communication processes, the number and typology of collaborative partners, and parent and community stakeholder involvement with outcome indicators, it will be possible to identify key components of successful collaborative partnerships.