On June 11, 2009, the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners approved the FY 2009-2015 Strategic Plan. This strategic plan represents a new commitment by the Commission to direct funding to specific communities in LA County, called “Best Start Communities.” The adoption of a “place-based” approach has multiple benefits, including the ability to

- focus resources on families most in need;
- create a seamless pipeline for children through which to more effectively serve families along the continuum of a child’s development;
- fund creative partnerships with families, communities, residents, and other funders; and
- better measure First 5 LA’s impact across funding areas.

In addition, place-based funding is based on the recognition that the places where children live are strong influencers on their ability to be safe, healthy, and ready to learn. This new approach will allow First 5 LA to focus on strengthening families while fostering the communities’ ability to create and sustain safe and nurturing places for children to grow and thrive.

First 5 LA’s Best Start communities include (also see attached map):

1. Central Long Beach
2. Compton, East Compton
3. East Los Angeles
4. El Monte, South El Monte
5. Lancaster
6. Metro LA
7. Pacoima
8. Palmdale
9. Panorama City
10. South Los Angeles/Broadway-Manchester
11. South Los Angeles/West Athens
12. Southeast L.A. County Cities
13. Watts, Willowbrook
14. Wilmington

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First 5 LA established four specific outcomes that it seeks for young children in L.A. County. All of First 5 LA’s investments, particularly in the Best Start communities, will be focused on changing outcomes in these areas. These outcomes are our long-term goals of ensuring that children:

- are born healthy
- maintain a healthy weight
- are safe from abuse and neglect
- are ready for kindergarten

**BEST START STRATEGIES**

Our place-based approach in the Best Start communities will focus on three strategies: Family Strengthening, Community Capacity-Building, and Countywide Investments. Each community will create a partnership and write a strategic plan to help them make progress with respect to the long-term outcomes described above. Simultaneously First 5 LA countywide investments will augment the Best Start efforts by changing the systems within which the communities function.

I. **Family Strengthening:** These direct services will impact children’s most essential influence — their family. Home visitation will be a central component of this strategy, along with other types of activities designed to assist caregivers in supporting children’s development.

Community members will also have the opportunity to work with First 5 LA to plan additional family support programs for their communities around such topics as parent education, new parent support, family literacy, nutrition and physical activity.

II. **Community Capacity-Building (CCB):** This area of support to the Best Start communities will promote relationship-building among parents, caregivers, residents, community leaders, faith-based groups, service providers, and other neighborhood stakeholders to ensure active, broad-based representation and participation in the Community Partnerships, the availability of comprehensive resource and referral networks to serve families, and long-term sustainability of the Best Start projects and community strengthening. In addition, organizational capacity-building activities will be made available to communities to enhance their effectiveness through access to professional resources that strengthen non-profit organizations, improve performance and strengthen their ability to achieve their mission.

The impact of the CCB support will be capacity gains in the following areas:

- Community Engagement
- Community Leadership
- Community Infrastructure
- Community Investment
III. **Countywide Investments:** First 5 LA will support its place-based Best Start investments with countywide investments that will include direct services and other efforts to improve services and strengthen systems that touch young children and their families both in Best Start communities and throughout Los Angeles County.

**BEST START COMMUNITIES TIMELINE AND PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

In order to maximize the potential for success, Best Start will be driven and informed by the communities themselves. Communities have invaluable insight on how best to support families and possess the wisdom, creativity, hope and resilience that result from their experiences. Community members will determine how best to achieve our four long-term outcomes for young children and we will work with them over a period of years to make progress towards these changes. This will require an initial and intensive community planning process, at the center of which will be a strong *Community Partnership* to provide leadership and decision-making about the plan. The partnership will be based on community members and others learning to trust each other, sharing ideas, and working cooperatively toward common goals and outcomes. Trust and mutual respect will be encouraged through activities and supports designed to identify and build upon existing community strengths and resources. Of necessity, the partnership must be broadly representative of the people, organizations, institutions and agencies in the community. Generally, the partnership will reflect and include parents/community members, service providers, community workers and civic leaders.

Initial community outreach activities began in August 2010, to include both regional meetings and individual community meetings. Current steps include continuing with cross community outreach efforts and development of the Best Start Communities implementation timeline presented as an attachment to this document.
COMMUNITY SELECTION

COMMUNITY SELECTION METHODOLOGY

First 5 LA selected its 14 Best Start communities through a complex and comprehensive methodology that reflected both strengths and weaknesses of communities throughout Los Angeles County. The final methodology developed for community selection included three levels of assessment reflective of criteria and principles determined by the First 5 LA Commission:

- **Level I Analysis** – Identified communities with greatest need in Los Angeles County
- **Level II Analysis** – Assessed and examined the strengths and capacity of the high-need communities within four categories:
  - Leadership capacity
  - Engagement with multiple sectors
  - Infrastructure
  - Prior and current investments and resources
- **Level III Analysis** – Maintained racial/ethnic and geographical diversity and balance across the portfolio of communities. To ensure diversity was maintained, this analysis was conducted at both Level I to Level II.

**LEVEL I ANALYSIS**

The Level I analysis focused on the assessment of community need. The indicators selected were well supported by research and were held as commonly recognized risk indicators. In addition, we also examined the level of existing First 5 LA investments and density of births. The geographic areas assigned to a community were identified by urbanized census tracts as well as Los Angeles Unified School District high school feeder zones.

The first part of the Level I analysis utilized previous needs assessments that were analyzed to identify high need areas. This enabled us to identify 56 of the urbanized areas that are high need. In the second part of the Level I analysis, the Advancement Project/Healthy City reevaluated the 56 high-need communities using a refined set of need indicators, as informed by the most up-to-date research and a literature review of other need assessments. The indicators were divided into three groups (Needs-Based Assessment Indices) to account for the population the indicator reflected: Birth, Child and Adult. Included in these indicators are low-birth weight, families with mothers accepting public assistance, academic performance, educational attainment, and unemployment. The analysis used four weighting scales and an unweighted calculation to rank the importance of the indicators related to each group, which emphasized one or more population of need relative to the others.

The results across all four weighting scales, in addition to the unweighted calculation, resulted in the same cluster of communities as having the highest need. This presented a clear natural break in the rank ordering of all communities analyzed.

The final step was to look at geographic distribution across L.A. County. An examination of the cluster of communities revealed a lack of communities in both Supervisorial District 3 and District 5. In order to address this finding and ensure geographic diversity and balance, communities from these
districts were identified from further down in the rankings and the two highest ranked communities from District 3 and District 5 were added.

LEVEL II ANALYSIS

The Level II analysis consisted of examining four categories of strengths and capacity within the cluster of high-need communities:

- Community leadership capacity,
- Community infrastructure,
- Engagement of multiple sectors, and
- Prior and current investments and resources.

This stage began with collecting qualitative and quantitative data from and about these communities. The unit of analysis was the community and not individual organizations so that data sources would be representative of the entire community. A literature review was completed by the Advancement Project/Healthy City to inform the methodological strategies used within the Level II analysis of community capacity. In addition, interviews were conducted with experts in community capacity work and served to confirm the indicators of capacity and strengths selected by staff as well as to inform the continued development of the general Level II Community Selection process.

Our contractor, Special Service for Groups (SSG), worked with staff to collect qualitative data on community strengths and capacity pertaining particularly to community leadership capacity and the engagement of multiple sectors. Specifically, they conducted focus groups and interviews to gather data and produced community profiles that summarized the data gathered. The community profiles were then reviewed by the Community Selection Team and the Strategic Plan Steering Committee who then scored in relation to each other so that their relative capacity could be determined. The scoring tool required that reviewers give communities a numeric score for each indicator within the four categories of capacity. The score for each indicator were weighted equally and summed to give the community a total score based upon the qualitative data collected.

The scoring tool yielded a raw qualitative score for each community. This qualitative raw score was then normalized on a scale between 50 and 100 points, by giving the community with the highest score a 100, and the community with the lowest score a 50. The process of normalizing data allowed for the easy identification of the highest and lowest scores obtained, and for placement of the remaining communities on a continuum.

LEVEL III ANALYSIS

The third level of analysis was applied at each stage of the data analysis in order to insure that selected communities represent a diversity of racial and ethnic populations and are geographically spread across the County. The following principles were specified by the First 5 LA Commission:

- A minimum of one community be selected from each supervisorial district
- The communities would represent a combined portfolio that is representative of LA County’s diversity. Therefore, the selection process used oversampling when considering
ethnic diversity to ensure that communities with sizable Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, African-American and Caucasian populations are included.

COMBINATION OF COMMUNITIES

Based upon community feedback during focus groups, nine of the high-need communities were consolidated into four communities. Participants from these initially distinct communities felt that they should be combined with a neighboring community/communities. Since the new, combined communities observed the principles by which we initially defined a community and the boundaries were recognized by participants as a singular communities, we allowed for such combinations in the final analysis.
The First 5 LA FY 09-15 Strategic Plan includes an innovative blend of place-based and county-wide funding strategies designed to improve outcomes in four goal areas, including: babies are born healthy, children maintain a healthy weight, children are safe from abuse and neglect, and children are ready for kindergarten. The Commission’s decision to move to a “place-based” funding approach, as opposed to initiative-based funding, is an effort to focus more intentionally on impacting the well-being of families and children by improving the communities in which they live. The FY2009-2015 Accountability and Learning framework reflects the emphasis on place-based evaluation as well as a strengthened emphasis on using results from our evaluations and research projects to learn and improve on an ongoing basis.

The goals of First 5 LA’s Accountability and Learning Framework for the FY 09-15 Strategic Plan include the following:

- Gather and disseminate timely information on implementation and outcomes to support and improve our work and the work of our grantees;
- Capture change over time in Best Start communities;
• Enable us to “tell a coherent story” of our investments to our stakeholders – most notably First 5 LA Commissioners and staff, our community partners and grantees and other external stakeholders.

The major types of research and evaluation activities in which First 5 LA will engage over the course of the strategic plan include the following:

• A longitudinal study which will track a cohort of families from our Best Start communities, and families from comparison communities, over time;
• Place-based and strategic evaluations, including evaluations of some of First 5 LA’s key strategies, as well as data collection within each of First 5 LA’s Best Start communities to monitor progress towards change;
• Research projects, designed to be responsive to policy and programmatic issues arising out of our evaluation work;
• The convening of a Research Advisory Committee (RAC), which will provide technical input, guidance, and advice to support First 5 LA’s research activities as we embark on this new strategic plan and accountability framework;
• Dissemination activities, including the development of a Community Change dashboard where each target community will be able to monitor the change that is happening within its boundaries;
• A learning and improvement process in order to promote meaningful use of our findings.

**FIRST 5 LA LONGITUDINAL STUDY**

The Best Start LA longitudinal study will form the cornerstone of our evaluation activities in the Best Start communities. This evaluation is intended to most closely approximate the impact of First 5 LA in the communities we serve. We will follow community residents from before the birth of a child until that child’s third grade year. The Longitudinal Study will have two components, a longitudinal outcome evaluation, and a longitudinal qualitative augmentation study.

This section includes a brief overview of the purpose of the longitudinal study and the guiding research questions, followed by a discussion of the technical design aspects of each of the components of the study. Finally, we outline the questions that will be brought to the First 5 LA Research Advisory Committee (RAC) to help guide our early planning processes.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions will guide both components of the Longitudinal Study.

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

- To what extent do children in Best Start communities demonstrate better outcomes than children in non-Best Start comparison communities? To what extent do these differences in children’s outcomes continue over time?
- Are there any unintended consequences for children (both positive and negative)?

OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

- To what extent do parents/caregivers in Best Start communities demonstrate better outcomes than parents/caregivers in non-Best Start comparison communities? To what extent do these differences in parents'/caregivers' outcomes continue over time?
  - Outcomes may include the 4 priority measures and common outcomes to be determined across all Home Visitation program models
- Are there any unintended consequences for parents/caregivers (both positive and negative)?

OUTCOMES FOR COMMUNITIES

- To what extent do parents/caregivers in Best Start communities feel their communities are healthier and safer places to raise children compared to non-Best Start comparison communities?
- To what extent do parents/caregivers in the Best Start communities find the services they need are available and accessible in the community? To what extent do they find the services integrated?

The Longitudinal Study Team (LST) will coordinate closely with the Best Start Communities Department on the implementation of the study. The determination of specific short and long term outcomes to be assessed will be done in concert with the program models team, based upon the logic models of the home visitation programs selected by each Best Start community.

A critical consideration in the planning of the Longitudinal Study is adequate program maturity. The Best Start communities will be implementing a range of strategies, some with very rigorous fidelity standards that will take some time to implement well. Additionally, each Community Partnership may be given the opportunity to employ an “innovation fund,” which would allow for community agencies to make programmatic changes to the evidence-based models that are selected, if it is determined by programmatic staff that those models need alteration in any way. This sort of innovation would require additional time for the innovations to be designed, tested, implemented, and reach full development.
For these reasons, the longitudinal study will not be undertaken until at least two years following the introduction of these strategies in the communities, and depending on the utilization of the innovation fund, the timeline may be further extended. While this study is far off, we want to ensure that we build any study requirements into our organizational implementation plan early, which will require a fairly well-developed plan early on.

The Longitudinal Study is expected to extend beyond 2015.

LONGITUDINAL OUTCOME EVALUATION DESIGN

SUMMARY OF PRELIMINARY DESIGN PLAN

The longitudinal outcome evaluation, guided by the research questions described above, will serve as an outcome evaluation of the entire Best Start LA (BSLA) effort. We do not intend to compare communities, or programmatic strategies within the communities, individually. Nor will we compare individual communities to each other. Because communities will be empowered to decide, based upon their specific needs, the most appropriate mix of program models and other strategies for their community, selection bias at the community level would cause some difficulty in establishing a link between community and/or program model and outcomes. Instead, we intend to evaluate the outcomes associated with the entire effort undertaken by First 5 LA, across all communities.

Furthermore, due to practical constraints, we cannot conduct a truly experimental evaluation of our endeavors. We do wish, however, to conduct as rigorous an assessment of our impact as is possible given the constraints of the Best Start model, as well as explore any opportunities afforded by those constraints.

We intend to construct a comparison group of families residing in those communities that were on the “short list” of communities being considered for selection as Best Start communities, but were not selected. While the “short list” was determined entirely based upon community need, principles of ethnic and geographic diversity, as well as the desire to work with communities of mixed capacities, led to discontinuities in community average socio-economic status (SES), within and across supervisorial districts. For this reason, comparison communities will not necessarily have a higher average SES than intervention communities, and may in fact be very close to the average SES and ethnic/racial makeup of the selected communities.

In order to most closely approximate the underlying causal model, we intend to utilize Propensity Score Matching (PSM) in order to balance the observable characteristics that may influence families’ selection into BSLA communities, as well as those characteristics that predict program participation within the communities. PSM has been shown to be moderately effective at reducing bias in non-experimental studies, and we expect that drawing the comparison sample from similar communities in the same region will further reduce bias in the study.²


From BSLA and comparison communities, families will be recruited prior to the birth of a child. In an effort to be as representative as possible, the recruitment strategy as planned will mirror and likely capitalize upon the Family Survey that will be conducted within the communities. The Family Survey is a separate endeavor that will begin in the Fall of 2011. It will be a door-to-door survey of a representative sample of families in BSLA communities. The survey will be conducted among a new sample of families each six months. For the purposes of recruitment for the Longitudinal Study, the Family Survey may be utilized for BSLA communities and extended to non-BSLA communities for one or more data collection cycles.

The Best Start intervention includes many components beyond direct services, such as public awareness campaigns that are hypothesized to impact all families, not just those that are direct service recipients. It also includes the Countywide Strategies described above. For this reason, we will not only sample from the Best Start communities those families that are involved in Best Start direct services, but from the broader community in each community. This is the same approach being used in the execution of the Family Survey sampling plan. Depending on our direct service take-up rates, we may need to oversample direct service recipients from our BSLA communities and families eligible for the more intense direct services being provided through BSLA in our control communities.

Our intention is to conduct intensive child and family assessments in the home at 6 months, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 years. The child and family assessments will cover a range of outcomes related to our four priority measures as well as common outcomes to be determined across all Home Visitation programs. In addition to in-depth in-home assessments, study participants will be given short telephone or internet-based surveys periodically, based on their technological capacity and preferences. These surveys may be matrix-sampled in order to keep them very short. Incentives for participation will be given for both the in-depth and brief assessments.

Attrition is a key concern for this evaluation, particularly because of the high degree of mobility that is observed in populations with lower SES\(^3\). In order to minimize attrition, we intend to collect contact information not only for participants but also for their family members and/or friends who may be able to help locate them in the case that they are lost to follow up. Additionally, we hope to encourage participation in the study through the use of incentives and clear messaging on the importance of their involvement. Analytically, we will account for missing data using longitudinal imputation methods.

\(^3\) First 5 LA is currently engaged in a Demographic Migration Study that will give us greater insight into the mobility of populations in our Best Start communities.
QUALITATIVE AUGMENTATION STUDY

The information collected as part of the qualitative augmentation study will complement the outcome evaluation providing the context around what we are seeing in the communities. The qualitative augmentation study will sample family members, most likely a subset of the participants in the longitudinal outcome evaluation. Focus groups and interviews with families will be conducted multiple times a year with the aim of collecting contextual information related to the outcome evaluation. Focus groups of the Best Start Community cohorts will be grouped by different compositions including those who are receiving direct services by program type as well as those who are not receiving any direct services.

Given the breadth of programs and campaigns we hope to implement in the Best Start Communities, it may be difficult if not impossible to conduct traditional observations, such as shadowing a small subset of families for an extended period of time. An alternative approach may be to provide a subset of families in the intervention and control communities with a digital camera to take photos related to how their communities and families are growing and changing over time. A subset of these photos would be uploaded to a Best Start LA social media site, and also would be collected for use in a photojournalistic sub-study conducted with the participation of the families. Finally, we hope to engage the artistic community in Los Angeles to help us tell the story of change in our communities through a documentary audio and film.

QUESTIONS FOR THE RAC

Below are some of the questions that we hope to address at the March 2011 meeting of the First 5 LA Research Advisory Committee (RAC)

LONGITUDINAL OUTCOME EVALUATION

Due to practical constraints, this is not an experimental study, but we would like to approximate the impact of First 5 LA’s overall strategy as closely as possible. To that end, we would like to explore the following questions at the March 2011 RAC meeting:

1. What are your thoughts about the general design and analytic plans presented here?
2. Are there improvements that would increase the rigor of the design?
3. Is the sampling strategy realistic?
4. Would you suggest any additional methods for preventing and/or correcting for attrition in our study sample?
5. What are some considerations, enhancements or precautions you would raise about this plan?
6. If we were to narrow down our time points for assessment (annually from 6 months until 8 years) to a more limited set, what do you suggest are the optimal time periods for data collection?
1. Please share experiences from your own work where you have used longitudinal qualitative methods to complement an outcome evaluation.
   a. What was the most valuable aspect of the qualitative work?
   b. What were the lessons learned?
2. What sampling strategies should we consider such that we are able to conduct in-depth interviews but in a way that will be feasible given the breadth of this project?
3. How do we account for sample attrition in the qualitative study?
4. What sampling strategies should we consider such that we are able to conduct in-depth interviews but in a way that will be feasible given the breadth of this project?
5. Should techniques used for the qualitative component be repeated in the comparison communities?
FIRST 5 LA PLACE-BASED EVALUATIONS

In addition to observing change over the long term, First 5 LA needs to be able to observe short-term changes at the community and organization levels. In order to do so, we will conduct two additional evaluations designed to directly observe changes across all communities and organizations as well as to contextualize these changes (or lack thereof) by documenting the implementation of place-based approaches. This section provides background for 1) The Place-Based Implementation Evaluation (the contextual studies) and 2) the Community-level evaluations, with particular focus on the Cross-Community Evaluation (change at the organization and community levels).

THE PLACE-BASED IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION

As First 5 LA embarks on a place-based funding approach, it is important to document the process of implementing the place-based components of the Strategic Plan so as to contextualize our role and contribution to change in the 14 targeted communities. The Place-Based Implementation Evaluation will document the implementation process at two levels. First, we will examine First 5 LA’s process as we plan and roll out our various strategies and provide support to the Community Partnerships. Second, we will document how the Community Partnerships in each of the communities implements their respective community plans.

One purpose of the Place-Based Implementation Evaluation is to systematically document First 5 LA’s process in implementing the First 5 LA Strategic Plan so as to provide feedback to the organization, influence decisions, and recommend and implement mid-course corrections. As such, it will be a formative, process evaluation. We want to capture as many perspectives in this effort as well as to observe and document as much of the process as possible. An equally important purpose is to examine how each of the Community Partnerships is implementing their own community plans so that we can document their process and determine whether any of the Community Partnerships need more or less support from First 5 LA.

Design of the Implementation Evaluation is currently in progress. First 5 LA has hired a contractor to work with us on this evaluation, to collect the necessary data and provide analyses and reports on an ongoing basis. We are currently working with them to design a study with two overarching components, which are briefly described below.

COMPONENT #1- DESIGN AND CONDUCT AN EVALUATION OF FIRST 5 LA’S PROCESS

The first step is for our contractor to work with First 5 LA staff to complete a full, detailed evaluation design that conforms to the following principles. We expect to triangulate data sources and employ a combination of qualitative methods including, but not limited to, observations, interviews, focus groups, staff reflections/surveys, and document analysis. The following is a general idea of what the sources of information and samples might be for the first year of the evaluation:
The guiding questions for this component include the following:

- How is First 5 LA implementing the key place-based components of the First 5 LA Strategic Plan?
  - What are some best practices?
  - What are areas or approaches in need of improvement?
- How successful is First 5 LA at supporting the partners in our communities?

These are the broad, guiding questions we will further refine in the co-design of the evaluation.

Participants in this evaluation will include the following:

- First 5 LA staff
- First 5 LA contractors who are supporting our organization in planning and implementing this place-based approach
- First 5 LA Commissioners
- Community Partners
- Organization representatives in the 14 targeted communities who are not members of the Community Partnerships.

We believe these groups of individuals can provide us with the information necessary to document how the implementation actually happened. We will gain multiple perspectives from different groups including how staff believe the implementation progressed as well as how our stakeholders believe we did. Thus we will interview key participants to determine their perceptions of the process, what they believe are some good practices and strategies in need of improvement/rethinking and what additional supports and resources they need to actualize our goals.

Often what participants perceive and communicate is different from how implementation actually unfolds. As a result, we will triangulate data sources by also observing important meetings and events. These observations will allow us to see how the plan is implemented. We will observe how staff plan for and execute community meetings so as to be able to tell the story of our efforts. One challenge will be to observe the planning and decision-making that happens informally. Some data
has already been collected by the First 5 LA staff, including narrative notes from observations and staff reflections.

Given that one of the main purposes of the Place-Based Implementation Evaluation is to inform First 5 LA about effective practices and ways in which our process can be improved, a large part of the study will include ongoing, formative feedback to us. The contractor will be responsible for devising a strategy to relay feedback to the organization in as timely a manner as can be expected by the design and methods to be used. This will enable First 5 LA staff to contemplate alternative approaches and make mid-course corrections when necessary.

**COMPONENT #2- DESIGN AND CONDUCT AN EVALUATION IN EACH OF THE 14 COMMUNITIES**

As with Component #1, the first step is for the contractor to complete a detailed study design in partnership with staff. This part of the Implementation Evaluation will be carried out at the Community Partnership level. Again, we expect to triangulate data sources and employ a combination of qualitative methods, some of which are listed below.

- **Observations**
  - Partnership Meetings
  - Community Meetings and Events

- **Interviews**
  - Partner Interviews
  - Organization Representative Interviews

- **Document Analysis**
  - Community Plans
  - Planning documents

The guiding questions for this activity include the following:

- How are the partners implementing their proposed plans?
  - What are some best practices?
  - What are areas or approaches in need of improvement?
- What additional support do the Community Partners need from First 5 LA?

These are the broad, guiding questions we will further refine in the co-design of the evaluation.

Participants for this research activity will be the following:

- Community Partners in each of the communities
- Organization representatives that may not be included in the Partnership but have a role in implementing the community’s plans.
We intend to ask Community Partners and other engaged individuals how they are planning and implementing their respective plans. We are interested in knowing how First 5 LA is supporting their efforts as well as what more we can do to provide the resources and support they need to implement their plans.

As noted above, the contractor will be responsible for providing findings and feedback to First 5 LA on an ongoing basis. In addition to providing First 5 LA staff with information on the implementation process, each of the partnerships also have a vested interest in learning about the findings from this evaluation. First 5 LA staff will work with our contractor to share findings in a meaningful way with the community partnerships.

Our goal in answering these questions is not to conduct 14 separate case studies, but to be able to document and tell the story of how implementation occurred across all 14 communities. One challenge we foresee is how to find themes and tell a coherent story if all 14 communities have vastly different plans and implementation strategies.

For both Component #1 and Component #2, given that qualitative studies require flexibility in their design, it is expected that the design plan will be dynamic and subject to change. Also, given that this is a formative evaluation, it is expected that analyses will be conducted in an ongoing way and simultaneous with data collection. As data are collected, we will draw on leads to determine what additional sources of information to gather, from whom, and how frequently.

**QUESTIONS FOR THE RAC**

1. Component 2 is intended to be an examination of all 14 communities in the aggregate. How do we keep the evaluation at this comprehensive level rather than conducting 14 individual case studies?
2. What suggestions do you have for ensuring that we provide feedback to the agency in a timely manner, such that it can inform mid-course corrections?
3. Can you suggest ways to successfully capture the substance, frequency, and type of informal communications among a planning agency’s staff members?
COMMUNITY LEVEL EVALUATIONS

In order to observe change at the community and organization level, two different perspectives must be taken into account: the granting agency and the community itself. By setting goals at both levels, we also ensure that the program activities that take place in the community are responsive to the needs of both funders and community members. Therefore First 5 LA has designed two separate evaluations to meet those related but very different needs. Each serves an important function, and taken together they will enable us to document the process of our investments and changes in the community and organizations. They are intended to assist communities and their Partnerships with their decisions around planning and implementing activities to reach First 5 LA’s four priority goals and to tell a coherent story of Best Start’s efforts in and across all 14 communities. The following are summaries of each of the two community-level evaluations where Research and Evaluation (R&E) staff will play a supporting role.

CROSS-COMMUNITY EVALUATION

The purpose of the cross-community evaluation is to measure change at the community and organization level in the following areas: community capacity-building (CCB), community investment, family strengthening programs and policy/advocacy. It is intended to provide an aggregate analysis of all First 5 LA investments in the Best Start Communities. It is our hope that each of the Communities will use the data in their own specific evaluation activities (see Individual Community Evaluations section below). First 5 LA is creating a set of indicators that reflect our theory of change. This data will be collected by a First 5 LA contractor in all 14 communities. R&E staff has worked with First 5 LA Program staff designing the CCB activities, community investment, programs and policy agenda in order to help them articulate their goals for change at the community and organization level. R&E staff are now working to operationalize those goals and translate them into indicators that can be measured across the 14 communities. This agreed-upon set of cross-site indicators will be collected three times throughout the rollout of the strategic plan: baseline, mid-implementation, and as the 2009-2015 Strategic Plan comes to an end.

A Community Assessment is being conducted in each community that will provide data to the Community Partnerships for planning purposes. The Community Assessments are intended to directly inform the partnerships about the assets and strengths available in their communities along with barriers to service and areas for improvement. A subset of the data collected will include the cross-site indicators described below, so this assessment will also serve as baseline for the cross-community evaluation. The results of the assessment will be used by the partnership when developing their proposals and by First 5 LA staff to refine activities/programs to be offered.

Research Questions

1. Have there been improvements in our target communities within the four capacity areas? (including in the community writ large and in the organizations)
2. What was First 5 LA’s role and contribution to those changes?

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4 Engagement, Leadership, Investment and Infrastructure. See the earlier Best Start Background section.
This list of indicators represents our initial thinking on how we might begin to measure change at the community and organization level, across our 14 communities, in our four capacity areas. For each capacity we have worked with relevant program staff to identify areas where they expect to see change in the community as a result of their programs. These are listed in the Indicator column. We are currently working to develop systematic methods to measure those indicators. Those measures are still in early stages of development, and are listed below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Possible measures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>How accessible are services for 0-5 children in each community?</td>
<td>- Culturally accessible</td>
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<td>- Language assistance</td>
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<td>How are organizations engaging families of 0-5 children?</td>
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<td>- Retention strategies</td>
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<td>How do organizations communicate with families?</td>
<td>- Presence of parent advisory councils or liaisons</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Are leaders representative of their community?</td>
<td>- What are their characteristics?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Which subgroups do they represent?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there opportunities for future and emerging leaders?</td>
<td>- Presence of leadership development programs</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Community member boards or other decision making bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Participation in these opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are leadership opportunities developed and encouraged in this community?</td>
<td>- Funding for leadership opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Participation by organizations in incorporating community leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Government structures/political organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Organic leadership happening at a grassroots level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>What funding do organizations have access to for serving families with 0-5 children?</td>
<td>- Includes First 5 LA funding</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Which of those funding sources support First 5 LA’s Best Start priority outcomes?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How much place-based focused federal funding are communities utilizing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are funding sources leveraged to address barriers to resources/services?</td>
<td>- Amount of dollars targeted to address barriers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How have organizations been able to sustain their services/programs?</td>
<td>- As a result of F5LA’s investments</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- After F5LA funding have been discontinued</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>What resources/services are available to families with 0-5 children?</td>
<td>- Includes physical items (e.g. parks, schools, transportation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What collaboratives exist to serve this community?</td>
<td>- What communication channels are used by collaboratives to send and receive information?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>- How effective are the collaborations in making policy change?</td>
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INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY EVALUATIONS

The Best Start model is predicated on the idea that community goals and perceptions are valid and should be respected with creating and evaluating programs. Therefore we will provide funding to each Community Partnership to conduct a self-evaluation where they will set their own goals for their Best Start endeavor, collect data over time and analyze it. Individual Community Evaluations will allow communities to evaluate their progress on the goals defined in their respective community proposals. The goal of the community evaluations is to evaluate the work of the partnership, to assist each community in making data-driven decisions, to make any mid-course corrections, and to continue practices that are deemed effective. It is also a key factor for long-term sustainability, as it increases the capacity of the community to measure its work and improve its own work over time. The data collected by the community evaluations will inform questions the Community Partnership has developed.

Each partnership will identify a Community Evaluator who will work closely with the partnership in each community to develop a study design that incorporates research questions of interest to the community.

In terms of evaluation management, given that the First 5 LA Program Officers in the Best Start Communities Department will be working more closely with the communities, they will oversee these evaluations and the Community Evaluators. R&E will provide support to the Individual Community Evaluations by hiring a consultant or “Super Evaluator” to oversee coordination and collaboration among all 14 Best Start Community evaluators. The “Super Evaluator” will also provide technical assistance and access to existing data from First 5 LA’s research partnerships and other ongoing evaluations.

Research questions will be developed by the Community Partnerships. Possible general questions include:

1. Were the goals set forth by the partnership’s proposal met?
2. How did community capacity building improve over time?
3. How were the program models adapted to the community context?
4. What were some challenges to implementing each community’s plans?

Some of these questions may overlap with Activity #2 of the Implementation (see section above). The answers to these questions, should the communities decide to pose them, will be specific to that community and will thus be more nuanced and in depth. In addition, First 5 LA may be interested in learning from these community-led evaluations. Research questions we may ask include the following:

1. What are some trends across communities as it relates to challenges faced?
2. What changed in the community or Partnership as a result of our investments (to the extent we are able to answer this)?
3. How did things change in the community during our investment period?
QUESTIONS FOR THE RAC

1. What do the programs need to change at the community and organization level to see changes in the four priority goals?

2. What are some methods you might recommend to operationalize the four community capacities (Engagement, Leadership, Investment and Infrastructure) and collect data to measure change in these indicators?

3. Are the listed cross-site indicators appropriate for measuring capacity in the four areas of interest (Engagement, Leadership, Investment, and Infrastructure)? If not, what additional indicators would you recommend adding? Which would you recommend deleting?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARCH</th>
<th>APRIL</th>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>JUNE</th>
<th>JULY</th>
<th>AUGUST</th>
<th>SEPTEMBER</th>
<th>OCTOBER</th>
<th>NOVEMBER</th>
<th>DECEMBER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Outreach</td>
<td>Community Meetings</td>
<td>Community Vision</td>
<td>Governance/Decision-Making</td>
<td>Community Assessment</td>
<td>Jumpstart Proj Development &amp; Implementation</td>
<td>Strategic Plan Development</td>
<td>Community Assessment Results</td>
<td>Community Assessment Results</td>
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<td>(March-April)</td>
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<td>(May)</td>
<td>(May-June)</td>
<td>(June-September)</td>
<td>(October)</td>
<td>(October-December)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Select Facilitators</td>
<td>Outreach for Parent Summit</td>
<td>Hire Community Organizers</td>
<td>Community Vision</td>
<td>Governance/Decision-Making</td>
<td>Community Assessment</td>
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<td>(May)</td>
<td>(May-June)</td>
<td>(Mid-June - Mid-August)</td>
<td>(June-September)</td>
<td>(Commerce and Budget)</td>
<td>(October)</td>
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### Cross – Community Activities
- Summit I (May 14)
  - Parent Engagement
  - Parent Recruitment
  - Parent Leadership
- Summit II (Late June)
  - Community Visioning
  - Decision-Making
  - Governance
  - Conflict Resolution
- Summit III (Early Oct)
  - Community Assessment
  - CBAR
  - Community Boundaries
  - Strategic Planning

### Milestones
- Facilitators hired
- Community Organizers hired
- Community Vision crafted
- Governance Structure finalized
- Community Assessment completed
- Jumpstart Projects selected
- Community Assessment results shared
- Jumpstart Projects developed and launched
- Community Strategic Plans submitted

### Jumplstart Project Planning (July-September)
- Home Visiting / New Parent Support
- Family Literacy / Parent Education
- Nutrition / Physical Activity

### Contributions to First 5 LA RAC Meeting
- **Background for First 5 LA RAC Meeting | 24**