First 5 LA: Listening, Learning, Leading (L3)

Board of Commissioners Meeting
June 13, 2013
Goal of presentation

→ Overview of Listening, Learning, Leading (L3)
→ What we heard
→ Initial reflections on what we are learning
→ Next steps
L3 Learning Goals

1. FY 2009-15 Strategic Plan (as modified) implementation status
2. Impact and opportunities to influence countywide conditions
3. What we are learning from our program work
4. First 5 LA role and strategies relative to desired outcomes
5. How First 5 LA’s internal systems and structures support/hinder strategic plan (as modified) implementation and desired impact
6. How First 5 LA is perceived by grantees/contractors and how our processes support/hinder their work
L3 informed by broad array of perspectives

Total Stakeholder Engagement: 306

Internal: 175 (individuals)
External: 131 (organizations, individuals)

Additional analyses/reports contributing into L3 inquiry:
- Accountability & Learning Report
- Chart of Investments
- Edelman Branding Study
- Environmental Scan
- First 5 LA Funding Analysis
Words our contractors/grantees used to describe First 5 LA today

Source: F5LA L3 External Stakeholder Survey, 19 Apr – 3 May 2013. N=106; Blue Garnet analysis
What we heard: Critical strategic issues

External forces influence strategic focus and integration

Leadership & Governance

Internal Systems & Infrastructure

External Relationships

Programs/Initiatives (Including Best Start)

Strategic Focus, Impact & Role
External forces

→ Needs around early childhood issues continue to expand:
  → Early Childhood Education public funding cuts
  → Substantiated cases of abuse and neglect

→ Opportunities also emerging:
  → Affordable Care Act offers challenges and opportunities for prenatal to 5 population
  → Higher minimum age offers extra 9-12 mo. of development time before kindergarten
  → Demographic shifts -- as number of children diminishes over time, First 5 LA can reach larger percentage, more intensively

→ Promising research to inform First 5 LA’s efforts to support healthy children, prepared for school

→ First 5 LA resources will never be “enough” and are declining; growing importance of strategic partnerships, policy and advocacy
External forces

“The number of children across all races and ethnic groups in the County has plummeted...nurturing the next generation is now a matter of urgent necessity to support the burgeoning senior population.”

– Environmental Scan

“Given F5LA's declining revenues, we will need to bring a different approach to our work on behalf of young kids - one that is more grounded in systems and policy change ...to shift its role from a funder of services to a convener, catalyst, collaborator working with other orgs. that share First 5's goals.”

-Staff Member
Critical issue: Strategic Focus, Impact, & Roles

- First 5 LA’s presence has already influenced early childhood ecosystem; seen to have potential for greater impact
- Despite passing 2009-15 Strategic Plan, Implementation Plan and modifications, First 5 LA’s work still lacks strategic focus
  - Lack of clarity regarding implementation goals and strategies
- First 5 LA seen as playing multiple roles; no consensus on specific role(s), but opportunity to expand First 5 LA’s leadership
- No shared understanding of what “impact” means at/for First 5 LA; difficulty in articulating its impact
- Agreement that First 5 LA mission is to support all 0-5 children, though more resources can be invested to assist populations with greater need
Critical issue: Strategic Focus, Impact, & Roles

“The Plan is too big a tent and we’ve parked too much under it. There are no clear priorities.”

- Commissioner

“[First 5 LA] Has the infrastructure, resources and political clout to make overall changes that can impact all children in LA County.”

- Grantee

“The need to make the statement: ‘as modified’ shows the lack of clarity and consistency in a rational, well-articulated strategic plan. It's a moving target.”

- Staff Member
Critical issue: Programs/Initiatives

- Discrete project activity generally benefits residents at the participant level

- Slow progress in implementation of Strategic Plan (as modified)

- Strategic plan (as modified) described as too broad and overly ambitious
  - Too many disconnected projects
  - Number of projects is unsustainable

- Resources continue to support prior strategic plan activities; some of these activities are not aligned with current strategic direction

- Strategic direction includes placed-based effort, though operations and internal systems do not currently fully support

- Breadth of work presents limitations to evaluating how projects align with and contribute to desired impact
Critical issue: Programs/Initiatives

“The real challenge will be implementation (of) all we have approved and making sense of it.”
– Commissioner

“The challenge for First 5 LA is to be focused and have greater depth. It needs to remain nimble and respond to opportunities not anticipated. It must do a better job of communicating its intent.”
– Community Leader/F5LA Partner

“F5LA’s efforts are spread too thin, not deep...With services so diluted and goals so broad, it cannot demonstrate an impact. It won’t tell the story of F5LA or LAUP.”
– Research Advisor
Critical issue: External Relationships

- Extensive network of external stakeholders seen as an organizational strength
- First 5 LA staff considered valuable resource by private funders
- First 5 LA’s relationship with the County seen as positive and negative
- No common definition, criteria or clarity about level of commitment required by “partnerships”
  - Partnerships formed as needs/opportunities arise by various depts.
- First 5 LA’s reputation as an effective partner is decidedly mixed; has a reputation for being rigid and focused on its own interests
- Grantee/contractors report a generally favorable experience, although dissatisfaction was registered in a number of areas, including the 10% indirect costs cap (based on personnel costs) and sharing of summary report data
Critical issue: External Relationships

“Better internal coordination and connection on strategies at various levels in community. F5 staff [should] have clarity and consistency on organizational direction/messaging with partners.”

– Contractor

“Continue to position First 5 LA to sustain its limited dollars and programmatic investments to improve outcomes for children 0-5 by expanding on our work to identify/establish investments via strategic partnerships with private/public sectors,... social entrepreneurs, grantees, etc.”

– Staff Member
Critical issue: Internal Systems & Infrastructure

- First 5 LA staff generally considered an asset and important resource on 0-5 yr. issues

- First 5 LA has inconsistent and unclear internal processes

- Historic internal culture, siloed structure and fragmented processes impede info flow, communication and organizational effectiveness; and, contribute to an emphasis on compliance at the expense of innovation and flexibility

- Staff skills and experience need to be aligned with job requirements and responsibilities

- Professional development or training opportunities are seen as important to staff and organizational success
Critical issue: Internal Systems & Infrastructure

“We need to become a learning organization, and we need to develop an infrastructure to support that... Let's decide what we want to achieve, pick a few evidence-based strategies, evaluate our success and learn from failure, and pivot as necessary.”

–Staff Member

“Excellent, capable, and very helpful staff; but the entire organization needs to enhance internal communication among units, so right hand knows what the left hand is doing.”

–Grantee
Critical issue: Leadership & Governance

→ Commissioners viewed as dedicated, strong advocates for children 0-5

→ Board-approved goals and strategic plan not consistently used as foundation for Board program/funding decisions

→ Staff leadership should better inform Board members on the implications of their decisions on program implementation & staff capacity; better prepare new Board members

→ Greater clarity required about Board/management roles and responsibilities; need for shared accountability for getting results

→ Widely shared perception that rotating Board chair contributes to leadership discontinuity, with implications for First 5 LA’s work

→ Perception exists around political nature of Commission as a public entity and because of its relationship to County government
Critical issue: Leadership & Governance

“The role of commissioners is becoming clearer... (In the past) some board members acted as project managers while others were uninformed. Staff didn’t feel they could set boundaries. It is time for members to become a policy board.”

-Commissioner

“Commission and staff are not on the same page regarding goals & outcomes. Need agreement on direction and action plan. [ED] must exert leadership. F5LA is constantly going in ten different directions which leads to considerable frustration in the field”

–Contractor/ Consultant
What we are learning thus far: some initial lessons (I)

Positive reinforcement for First 5 LA

1. Strong support for F5LA’s mission and desire that organization succeeds
   - Internal and external aspirations for F5LA leadership, grounded in a clearer strategic focus and framework.

2. Recognition of modest but important accomplishments in targeted areas (e.g. LAUP)

3. Clear and consistent recognition of the opportunity for greater impact
   - First 5 LA’s presence has affected our ecology. Still, we are underutilized resource

4. Reminder that F5LA has critical assets to help the organization succeed
   - Extensive network of external partners and stakeholders
   - Passionate and knowledgeable staff and commissioners
   - Substantial, though declining, resources
What we are learning thus far: some initial lessons (II)

A number of issues stand in the way of realizing our full potential

1. We lack sufficient focus and commitment to a clear strategic direction.

2. We play many roles, but lack clarity and consensus on our primary role(s) beyond funder.

3. While much good project activity is supported, the work is not sufficiently aligned/integrated/linked to a clear strategic direction – “scattershot” approach.

4. Staff passion, commitment and expertise are our greatest strength, but residual ill-effects of a historic culture of organization impede effective communication, info flow, accountability and effectiveness.
Next Steps

June Commission Meeting Focus: **Listening**
- Critical strategic issues
- First 5 LA Funding Analysis

July Commission Meeting Focus: **Learning**
- Principal learning to inform opportunities for greater impact
- Learning and Accountability Report
- Prenatal to 5 Environmental Scan
- Edelman Branding Study

August/September Commission Meeting Focus: **Leading**
- Internal and external opportunities, solutions, and priorities
- Action plan and agenda for moving forward