Technical Assistance Institute

A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMS
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The Technical Assistance (TA) Institute was a pilot program established by First 5 LA to strengthen nonprofit organizations serving young children and their families. First 5 LA believes that healthier, stronger organizations will better serve their constituencies and accomplish their desired outcomes. Our investment in the organizations that serve young children is an investment in those children.

This evaluation report investigates the complex components of the TA Institute’s programs, reports on findings from a series of interviews with participants, and provides recommendations for both program design and evaluation of other capacity building investments. These recommendations may apply to future programs at First 5 LA or more broadly to the work of other organizations.

Between 2008 and 2012, First 5 LA invested in a series of programs designed to increase the capacity of select current and former grantees in three key areas: fund development, financial management and strategic communications. These programs were carried out by organizations that are experts in each of these three fields.

Entry into the TA Institute programs was competitive, with acceptance being determined by the organization’s readiness for capacity building, as well as their ability to invest the required staff time. Each organization paid a fee to participate as well.

A total of 51 organizations participated in the TA Institute. This evaluation finds that at the end of their programs, participants believed their organizational capacity had been improved. They valued the opportunity for professional development, as well as the specific skills and knowledge gained. They reported that their greatest learning took place in face-to-face venues, whether with instructors or through peer learning. Participants generally felt positive that they would be able to implement what they had learned. For many of them, simply not enough time had passed for full implementation. Interviews for this study were carried out with participants soon after completion of their program, so it is not possible to determine long-term impact.

This study identified five areas of planning that should be considered when designing an organizational capacity building program:

- Creating hands-on and face-to-face learning opportunities
- Structuring peer learning so that people and organizations at the same level have opportunities to learn from each other
- Devoting the time needed for social enterprise development, which may take longer than other types of capacity building
- Balancing expenses with organizational ability to pay when setting program fees
- Balancing time needed to cover content with participant time demands when scheduling

In addition, this study makes four recommendations about how to improve evaluation of capacity building programs:

- Try to incorporate quantitative measures of change into the program design
- Require participants to define success at the start of the program, then measure the degree to which they achieved that success
- Require all trainers to complete a consistent final report so that results can be compared across participants and across programs
- Extend the time frame for evaluation, in order to determine whether new skills were fully implemented and maintained, and whether they led to meaningful change over time
Introduction

The Technical Assistance (TA) Institute was a pilot program established by First 5 LA to strengthen nonprofit organizations serving young children and their families. The TA Institute ran from 2008 through 2012. The institute oversaw, developed and managed a collection of programs designed to build capacity in participating organizations and improve organizational effectiveness.

First 5 LA believes that healthier organizations will better serve their constituencies and accomplish their desired outcomes (Backer, 2004). The primary participants in the TA Institute were organization personnel such as board members, the executive director and additional key staff.

The TA Institute was made up of three individual programs:

- **Customized Consulting** – provided by Benevon to assist organizations with individual donor development, by the Nonprofit Financial Fund to address organizations' financial management and by the Taproot Foundation to develop organizations' strategic communications.

- **Social Enterprise Academy** – provided by the Academies for Social Entrepreneurship to help organizations identify and begin to implement an earned income source.

- **Organizational Leadership Development Program** – provided by the Fieldstone Foundation to provide mentoring and network development for nonprofit executive directors and senior managers.

This study presents a snapshot of the TA Institute’s program models as well as lessons learned during the course of this pilot project.

First 5 LA’s Research and Evaluation Department was tasked with evaluating the TA Institute for organizations participating during FY 2009-2010. The purpose of the evaluation was to understand and explain how the TA Institute was implemented, and to measure the influence or effect of the TA Institute on local organizations at several levels. Moreover, the Research and Evaluation Department saw the opportunity to support the evaluation of the TA Institute as a chance to support implementation of First 5 LA’s 2009-15 strategic plan, which named Organizational Capacity Building as one of four Sustainability Activities of focus. There was a need to determine what elements of our capacity building programs were particularly effective. The TA Institute evaluation gives an opportunity to begin to answer those questions, and to improve evaluation methods in capacity building as well.

This report begins by describing the approach used in this evaluation. Next is a description of each component of the TA Institute as they were implemented. Findings are presented next, followed by recommendations for both capacity building program planners and evaluators.
In an effort to increase the use of any results and findings from this evaluation, the First 5 LA Program Officers administering the TA Institute participated in an initial meeting with the Research and Evaluation staff based on the Utilization-Focused Evaluation Model (Patton, 1996). Research questions were adapted from Connolly and York’s (2002) *Evaluating Capacity Building Efforts for Nonprofit Organizations*.

The primary research question in this evaluation was: *How has an organization’s capacity been affected by participating in the TA Institute?*

The secondary research questions were:

- What did participants learn as a result of participating in the TA Institute and how did they do so?
- To what extent and how have the attitudes and beliefs of participants changed regarding the problem or issue being addressed?
- To what extent and how did the participants apply what was presented during training sessions and advised during consulting engagements? What have they done differently?

**Methods**

The evaluation used qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Due to the relatively short timeline, the evaluation methods relied heavily on participants’ perception of change within their organization and utilized evaluation forms that were put in place within the various programs to further contextualize the data.

Initially, the Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT) results were considered a potential quantitative data method for the evaluation, but it was later deemed an inappropriate use of this tool. The CCAT is not intended to show change over time across the four core capacities. Its primary use is to provide organizations a point-in-time view of the organization’s strengths and challenges from the perception of its leaders. As leaders change and priorities are reevaluated the results of the CCAT may vary widely between these snapshots. Also, the TA Institute programs were one year in length or less and it is not recommended for organizations to repeat the CCAT over that short of a timeframe.

Table 1 summarizes the methods used to answer the research questions above.

**Table 1: Methods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Method</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. How has an organization’s capacity been affected by participating in the TA Institute?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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<td>2. What did participants learn as a result of participating in the TA Institute and how did they do so?</td>
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<td>3. To what extent and how have the attitudes and beliefs of participants changed regarding the problem or issue being addressed?</td>
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<td>4. To what extent and how did the participants apply what was presented during training sessions and advised during consulting engagements? What have they done differently?</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
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**Participant Interviews**  Interviews were conducted with organization staff who directly participated in TA Institute activities, as they were best able to determine how overall organizational management capacities changed as a result of their participation. The interviews focused on what they learned as a result of the capacity-building activities and also aimed to understand how their attitudes have changed regarding the problem or issue being addressed. The focus on specific issues is of particular importance, as the programs within the TA Institute are designed to address specific organizational capacity areas such as donor development, financial management or marketing materials. Finally, the interview attempted to ascertain how the organization applied what they learned during the training and asked for lessons learned for future reference. All questions were open-ended responses. Interviews were conducted via phone and each lasted approximately 45 minutes. A total of eight interviews were conducted: three with participants of the Customized Consulting, three with participants of the Social Enterprise Academy, and two with participants of the Organizational Leadership Development programs. Once all the interviews were completed, responses were categorized around themes that had emerged upon reading of all eight interviews.
Observations  During the evaluation period (January-December 2010) there was the opportunity to observe the capacity-building activities and training as they occurred for two of the programs: Leadership Development Forum and the Social Enterprise Academy. Three unstructured observations were conducted, without a standardized observation protocol. The information gathered from the observations lent context to the responses given by participants in the interviews.

Program-Specific Data Collection  Each of the programs collected its own set of unique data as part of the grant reporting. To the extent possible, this data was incorporated to inform how each program met its specific program goals in addition to the overall TA Institute intermediate outcomes. The data collected was not uniform across the three programs and consisted mainly of participant satisfaction surveys related to individual training sessions. This included contractor scopes of work, progress reports, budgets and participant feedback forms.
TA Institute Program Description

Capacity building programs independent of any specific funding initiative were initiated at First 5 LA in 2006, with the introduction of the Sustainability Project. This project supported agencies in developing a written sustainability plan. Between 2006 and 2009, approximately 60 organizations participated in this program.

In 2008, the Grants Management department of First 5 LA conducted a Grantee Technical Assistance Survey. Based on the results, a set of focus areas was selected for additional organizational capacity building programs. Respondents indicated substantive agreement on technical and professional resource needs in three areas: fund development, financial management and strategic communications.

To meet these needs, First 5 LA partnered with five existing capacity building providers recognized for the effectiveness of their work and proven records of strong collaboration with philanthropic organizations. Although their services were tailored to nonprofit organizations serving young children and their families, First 5 LA did not ask them to develop new services or models as part of the TA Institute curriculum.

Several organizations that participated in the TA Institute had previously received funding from First 5 LA to complete the Core Capacity Assessment Tool or CCAT, as part of earlier programs. The Core Capacity Assessment Tool, developed by the TCC Group, is a 146-question online survey that measures a nonprofit organization’s effectiveness in relation to four core capacities—leadership, adaptability, management, and technical capacities—as well as organizational culture.

Although other capacity building activities were developed during this time period, they were not considered part of the TA Institute. These additional efforts included a Consultant Resource Directory, introduced in 2009, containing listings of over 60 consultants and firms; the Organizational Assessment Pilot launched in 2010 to determine what organizational capacity building resources are most currently needed for the specific organization assessed; and the Sustainability for Collaboratives Pilot developed to support a selection of First 5 LA’s existing Partnerships for Families and Healthy Birth Collaboratives. Several of First 5 LA’s other investments include a capacity building component for grantees, such as the Community Opportunities Fund (COF), Partnerships for Families (PFF) and LA Universal Preschool (LAUP).

The TA Institute provided capacity building support to 51 current or former First 5 LA grantees. Eleven organizations participated in more than one TA Institute program. The overall number of individuals participating is more difficult to measure given that four of the five programs required a team whose membership often fluctuated and changed through the duration of the training. On average, two to three individuals participated per organization resulting in an estimated range of 102 to 153 individuals served.

Over the course of four fiscal years, beginning in 2008 and ending in 2012, $595,750 was budgeted across the five capacity building contractors. A total of $484,189 was spent through June 30, 2012. This calculates to an average cost per participating organization of $9,494. The length and intensity of each component varied, as will be described later in this section. Costs per participant are provided for each program, but they do not take into account variability in program intensity.

Customized Consulting

As various program components of First 5 LA’s TA Institute were being developed, the need to include customized professional organizational management resources became evident. This customized approach to capacity building requires a high level of organizational readiness as well as a commitment of time and resources in order for agencies to engage successfully.

Beginning in the fall of 2009 and continuing for the following year and a half, First 5 LA provided full underwriting for customized professional consulting to 26 qualifying organizations in the areas of financial management, communications and developing individual donors. The customized consulting opportunities were offered in partnership with Benevon, the Nonprofit Finance Fund and the Taproot Foundation. The total cost of the Customized Consulting program was $250,000 for an average of $9,615 per organization.

Individual Donor Fund Raising (Benevon)

In the 2008 Grantee Technical Assistance Needs Survey, fundraising was consistently listed as one of the top three challenges facing organizations. In an effort to address this challenge, First 5 LA partnered with Benevon beginning in FY 2009-2010 and ending in 2011 to help organizations develop increased financial sustainability by developing lifelong connections with individual donors, rather than relying solely on public funding or sporadic donations. Their one-year Building Relationships with Individual Donors Program is designed to provide organizations access to the
Benevon Model in order to successfully initiate and generate support from individuals and become less dependent on restricted funding from foundations and corporations, labor-intensive special events and other similar kinds of fundraising strategies.

The Benevon Model is a strategy for raising funds from individual donors through a series of engagement and cultivation activities. The goal of the process is to produce a consistently high level of giving and generate a self-sustaining cycle of continued and meaningful personal engagement and philanthropy. By following the model, and setting and achieving specific benchmarks, an organization is able to produce increased funding and major gifts from mission-focused donors who truly understand and support the organization’s work over time. The model also prepares an organization to develop relationships with funders, with the potential to achieve capital and endowment goals in addition to sustaining operating and program needs.

Program Components

The Building Relationships with Individual Donors Program consisted of a specialized combination of training, coaching, and facilitation.

1. **Benevon 101, Two-Day Workshop**: Organizations sent a team to a two-day training that guided participants through the steps involved in designing a customized process for systematically developing individual donors. The training included identifying each organization’s unique emotional appeal, ascertaining its audience and how to reach them, and learning the Benevon method of securing financial support. At the conclusion of the workshop, participants were prepared to implement the model within six to nine months.

2. **Telephone Coaching Sessions**: Each organization received four hours of personalized telephone coaching sessions from Benevon to support implementation of its plan.

Organizations were selected through a competitive application process, based on level of readiness, ability to compose an appropriate team, and demonstrated commitment of the time and resources required to implement the customized plan. The program was open to current or former First 5 LA grantees in good standing and required a $2,000 participation fee. The opportunity was open to
five grantees and all five slots were filled. The total cost of the program was $70,000 or an average cost of $14,000 per organization.

First 5 LA staff received regular updates and reports from Benevon, and conducted general project management and oversight. One First 5 LA staff member attended the two-day workshop. Benevon and participating organizations provided interim and final summary reports to First 5 LA.

Financial Management (Nonprofit Finance Fund)
Another one of the top challenges identified by grantees was the need for assistance with financial management. The financial health of an organization is often considered as part of a grant application and organizations were hoping to better understand how their expenses and income are generated. First 5 LA partnered with the Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF), beginning in FY 2009-2010 and ending in 2011, to offer a comprehensive package of financial management and sustainability services for nonprofit organizations, regardless of size. The services were customized to meet needs based on factors such as mission, focus, financial condition and goals for the future. The techniques taught are designed to function in both stable and challenging financial periods.

NFF offered the Strategic Financial Management and Sustainability Program, with the intent of supporting nonprofit organizations in managing during difficult times and emerging stronger. The program helps organizations balance mission with financial realities, examine financial health, and develop options for courses of action to address weaknesses and build financial viability.

Program Components
To participate in the Strategic Financial Management and Sustainability Program each interested organization was required to attend an introductory information session, and participate in a competitive selection process. Applications were reviewed by First 5 LA and NFF and acceptance determined by consensus. The selected organizations received a needs assessment prior to implementation which determined which of the following diagnostic and planning approaches they would undertake:

- **Situation Analysis and Cash Flow Analysis:** NFF reviewed the organization’s existing financial reporting materials and provided suggestions for additional or improved tools to inform financial management, communication and decision making.
- **Program Profitability Model (PPM):** An important tool for managing through an economic crisis, the PPM was designed to help nonprofit management understand the revenue and expense dynamics of each major program and determine which programs are operating at a profit or loss in order to inform financial decision making and planning, including financing strategies.
- **Scenario Planning:** NFF assessed historical and current financial conditions and worked with senior management to evaluate potential organizational and programmatic impacts of unanticipated or worse-than-expected shortfalls in contributed and earned revenue.

At the conclusion of the analysis, NFF conducted a three hour in-person meeting with senior staff and board of each selected organization to discuss findings and observations and a final report with trend analysis, observations, recommendations and next steps. Additional follow-up technical assistance was made available, including continued coaching in implementation of financial management strategies and tools and presentation support to internal and external stakeholders (e.g., boards and funders). The total process took an average of four to eight weeks.

The program was open to current or former First 5 LA grantees in good standing and required a participation fee in the range of $200 to $1,000 depending on the type of support. Seven organizations participated in NFF with a range in cost from $7,500 to $20,000 for a total project budget of $100,000.

First 5 LA staff received regular updates and reports from NFF, and conducted general project management and oversight. NFF and participating organizations provided a final summary report to First 5 LA.

Strategic Communication (Taproot Foundation)
The third challenge identified by several organizations was the need to better market or publicize their work to a broader audience, particularly in relation to their web presence. First 5 LA partnered with the Taproot Foundation to work on increasing effective communication in traditional methods such as newsletters and announcements to more complex branding and positioning needs.

The Taproot Foundation provides organizations with tools and services to maximize the impact of their work by engaging teams of volunteer business professionals
to work on strategic communications and other nonprofit management projects. The Taproot Foundation customized its services to meet the needs of TA Institute participants.

Program Components
The Strategic Communications Program involved an introductory information session, a competitive selection process and an orientation session prior to implementation of one of the following strategic communications project types:

- Annual Report
- Brochure
- Website
- Naming and Visual Identity
- Visual Identity and Brand Strategy
- Key Messages and Brand Strategy

The competitive application process was based on level of readiness, ability to compose an appropriate team, and demonstrated commitment of the time and resources required to successfully complete the customized strategic communications plan. The program was open to current or former First 5 LA grantees in good standing and required a $200 participation fee. Fourteen organizations participated in the Strategic Communications Program for an average cost of $5,714 or a total of $80,000. The majority of organizations chose to improve their website or key messages and brand strategy while a few chose to revamp their annual report. The first nine organizations began their projects in February 2010, the remaining five in April-May of 2010. All fourteen projects were complete by September 2010. Each selected organization attended a Nonprofit Roundtable to further explain the program and a team of five to six professionals volunteered approximately 100 hours of time and expertise over a six-month project working in close collaboration with the grantee organization.

First 5 LA staff received regular updates and reports from the Taproot Foundation, and conducted general project management and oversight.

Social Enterprise Academy
The Social Enterprise Academy was introduced by First 5 LA in 2008 and continued for a total of four years with 23 organizations participating. The twelve-month program was designed to guide and coach nonprofit organizations through the process of preparing a plan for developing or expanding an earned income service, product or business, and to provide support in implementing the plan. The program was led by the Academies for Social Entrepreneurship and combined teamwork (with an average of two to four individuals per organization participating), expert training and individualized coaching in a comprehensive approach.

Over the first five months, five full day (six hours per day) workshops were combined with individualized coaching to support participants in identifying, researching and vetting earned income opportunities. Through a series of workshops, participating organizations developed a plan for a social venture that would have the strongest market potential that complemented the organization’s mission and competencies. Each organization presented its plan at a Social Enterprise Showcase where they “pitched” their plans to a panel of experts from the field. Participants were assigned a mentor to support them in developing a professional fifteen minute presentation of the key elements of their business plan targeted for potential investors or strategic partners.
Following the Showcase, team leaders from each organization met at First 5 LA on a monthly basis for day-long sessions to refine their plans and resolve challenges encountered during the launch process. These facilitated peer meetings involved confidential, focused coaching and specific, practical discussions about business practices, such as pricing, marketing and cash flow management. Each Academy lasted approximately one year and required 12 day-long in-person meetings at First 5 LA, plus additional work to be completed in between sessions.

Participants proposed earned income ventures as varied as a resale clothing boutique, field-trips to a horse ranch and health literacy materials for pregnant women.

First 5 LA staff received regular updates and reports from the Academies for Social Entrepreneurship staff, and conducted general project management and oversight including attending the monthly facilitated peer meetings.

The Social Enterprise Academy program cost $152,244 over four fiscal years. The average cost per participating organization was $6,619.

Organizational Leadership Development Program

In the fall of 2008, First 5 LA introduced the Organizational Leadership Development program that focused on peer-learning through cohorts of executive directors and emerging leaders, as well as mentoring and the development of networks. The Organizational Leadership Development Program was administered by the Fieldstone Foundation and was designed to support executive directors and senior managers on their organization’s operations, programs, and sustainability. It consisted of two parts:

- **Part I – Executive Director and Senior Managers Learning Groups:** In six monthly sessions, participants developed and strengthened leadership skills by examining real-world case studies, engaging in team-building and problem-solving exercises, taking part in facilitated discussions, building collective wisdom and establishing continuing relationships with colleagues in the field.

- **Part II – Peer and Individual Mentoring:** Individuals who complete Part I have the option of participating in an additional year of peer and individualized mentoring and coaching.

Although the program was conceived as an eighteen-month long engagement, some participants perceived the commitment to potentially be too long. Participants were given the opportunity to opt out of Part II, the mentoring portion of the program. During the first six months, the cohorts followed a customized curriculum and during the following year, executive directors were teamed with a mentor, and the emerging leaders continued to meet as a group for facilitated peer support.

Beginning in January 2009, the program recruited twenty-one participants from fourteen organizations, and graduated twenty participants from the first portion of the program. Of the nine executive directors participating only four opted to continue in the mentoring phase and only two of the four continued the mentoring for the full year. Of the eleven senior managers, all initially participated and only two were unable to continue in the mentoring, one because of time constraints and the other after leaving the organization for a new job.

First 5 LA staff received regular updates and reports from Fieldstone Foundation, and conducted general project management and oversight, but did not attend the facilitated peer support. One key reason for the separation was to allow participants to feel comfortable with sharing candidly about the condition of their organization and personal experience as a nonprofit leader. As the participant pool was drawn from current and former First 5 LA grantees, staff did not want to hinder openness as they represented the funder of the participating organizations. Staff did attend the de-briefing at the conclusion of the program to listen to lessons learned directly from participants.

The Organizational Leadership Development Program was originally budgeted for $184,250 with an additional $6,000 collected in participant fees directly paid to the Fieldstone Foundation. A little over 44 percent of the allocated budget, $81,945, was expended for an average cost per participant of $4,097. The reduced budget was a result of fewer participants continuing in the mentoring portion of the program than originally anticipated.

1 This figure excludes the one participant who did not complete the first portion of the program.
Overall, participants’ perceptions of the TA Institute were positive. The findings are organized around the main questions asked during the interviews.

**Why did your organization participate in the TA Institute program?**

Six reasons were given and they are listed in declining frequency:

1. Timing
2. The activity was part of their organizational sustainability plan
3. It was a service the organization was already planning on paying for
4. Previous experience in First 5 LA organizational capacity training
5. The nonprofit focus of the training
6. A last effort to prevent from closing down

Those respondents who had noted participation in the TA Institute’s programs was part of their sustainability plan had all participated in First 5 LA’s Sustainability Project. This previous capacity building effort consisted of a structured eight-month, team-based curriculum, during which agencies planned strategically about how to build their organizational capacity to pursue and secure resources that would address their long-term needs. The program culminated with a Sustainability Forum during which grantees presented their plan for feedback from the local philanthropic community and government agencies. These agencies’ long-term needs were partially addressed by the TA Institute, but their participation in further capacity building was not a condition of the Sustainability Project.

**What previous information or experience did you have regarding the TA Institute program?**

The majority of participants had none to very little experience or information about the specific capacity building resources they would be receiving. Most had heard about the opportunity from First 5 LA staff. Although participants had identified the need for this type of assistance, i.e. financial review or website development, they were not familiar with the contractors administering the program. A few participants noted they were familiar with the specific program and the organization implementing it.

**How has your organization’s capacity been affected by participating in the TA Institute program?**

All of the participants interviewed felt their organizational capacity had been affected positively by participating in the TA Institute programs. The capacity area in which participants saw change varied widely by which TA Institute program they participated. As a result, each program will be discussed individually below.

Social Enterprise Academy (SEA) program participants cited enhanced professional development, in particular for program line staff, which might not have otherwise had opportunities for this type of training. Another participant stated that by participating in the SEA it shifted the agency’s viewpoint as it pertains to what types of work they conduct that can be sold in the public marketplace. All of the participants were still in the process of implementing their social enterprise when interviewed, but were hopeful it would result in additional funding for their organization.

The Customized Consulting participants worked to develop various areas of organization capacity dependent on the type of consulting they took advantage of: strategic communications, donor development and/or financial management. All participants could cite specific ways their organization’s capacity was affected as a result of participating. Examples of those capacity improvements ranged from static items such as a new website, to an enhanced relationship with their board members who participated in the organization’s Customized Consulting project team.

The Leadership Development participants cited additional personal and professional qualities they discovered as part of the program. Specific examples include the importance of listening to staff, identification of new strengths, problem solving skills and perseverance.

**What did you learn as a result of participating in the TA Institute program?**

Participants cited a wide range of skills and knowledge they acquired as a result of participating in the program. Most of them mentioned learning from specific items that were either given or required within the curriculum such as completing homework and the written materials given to them by the program. Others mentioned a shift in perspective towards the work they do and a greater understanding of the costs associated with their programs. Benevon participants in particular cited an increased ability to develop donors among multiple demographic groups and an increased awareness of their organization’s strengths. The Leadership Development
participants cited specific tools and strategies from their experiences such as structured problem analysis and decision-making, as well as the opportunity to meet other individuals in the nonprofit field.

For the projects that required less staff involvement because consultants handled the majority of tasks, i.e. Taproot, participants did not report an increase in skills/knowledge.

How did you learn this?

The majority of participants stated learning was a result of the dialogue they had with other organizations during the course of the project. Participants also learned from the required tasks that were expected to be done in between sessions (i.e. homework), in particular for the Social Enterprise Academy.

The dialogue among participants assisted in learning the most when it was among organizations of similar sizes and in similar stages of development. As the programs neared their end, the dialogue was considered less helpful, because organizations were in different places in their capacity building and participants found it became harder to relate to one another.

For the programs that were conducted remotely and did not have a peer learning component, primarily Taproot and the Nonprofit Finance Fund, participants learned most when they met face-to-face; participants reported that in-depth learning was difficult via email and phone. The exception was Benevon which included a hands-on training component and is where the majority of learning took place.

How has participating in the TA Institute changed your organization’s ability to generate additional cash flow?

Responses differed by program. For Benevon participants the main goal of participating was enhanced donor development and increased fundraising. Participants reported immediate large financial gains. After one of the signature events developed as part of the Benevon curriculum, one participating organization raised 10 percent of their total fiscal revenue. Another organization reported that after one of its first events, 75 percent of the funds raised were from new donors.

As part of a Taproot project, one organization redesigned its website that allowed for easier collection of online donations and links to other online fundraising opportunities. At the time of the data collection, none of the Social Enterprise Academy participants had fully implemented their business idea or product to realize direct financial benefits, but participants did see how if fully implemented their enterprise could lead to increased cash flow. The remaining two programs, the Nonprofit Finance Fund and Leadership Development Academy, did not have building additional funding as an immediate result of the program.

How has your organization been able to implement what was presented in the TA Institute?

Participants were in various stages of implementation when interviewed. The Benevon and Nonprofit Finance fund participants felt they were close to full implementation. One participant mentioned that partial motivation to complete all of the project requirements was due to the fact that their participation was paid for by First 5 LA. They suggested that if it had been initiated from within there might not have been the same level of follow-through. The Taproot projects were all still in development when interviewed, but participants were confident the projects would be completed in the near-term future.

The Social Enterprise Academy and Leadership Development Academy participants stated they were in the earlier stages of implementation and that it would require additional effort on their part past the end of the program to complete all the steps necessary to reach the programmatic goal. A few participants expressed concern about being able to set aside the necessary time to complete the project considering they would no longer be meeting on a regular basis with their program counterparts to check-in on progress.

Is there anything you wish you had known before you started?

Participants felt prepared about the amount of time and effort they would be committing to participate in the project. One recommended that a timeline for capacity-building programs be released prior to applications being due. This would allow organizations to strategize which program would fit best with their current needs and readiness. Several participants were unhappy that they were not able to continue the relationships they had forged during the TA Institute process either with other organizations or with the program consultants. A few would encourage previous program participants to share their experiences with new applicants to give a real-world perspective on both the benefits of participating and the commitment needed to make the program a success.

Limitations

As a result of the relatively short time frame of this evaluation, assessing change only at the participant level was feasible. Although organizational changes may have been in process, this evaluation was not able to address the longer-term outcomes related to how organizations participating improved across the four core capacities as a result of the TA Institute.

The study utilized only qualitative data and focuses on the individualized experience of participating individuals. The use of quantitative data could be used to enhance this type of study if appropriate tools can be found and incorporated into the program design.
Several recommendations emerge based on what was learned through interviews, observation and documentation analysis. These fall into two categories: program design and evaluation.

**Program Recommendations**

The findings from this study do not provide definitive direction as to the “right” or “wrong” way to design an organizational capacity building program. However, they do suggest some clear areas that should be considered as part of program design:

Overall, participants valued **hands-on and face-to-face learning** more highly than theoretical discussions and felt it should be the main focus of peer learning and in-person meetings with the capacity building providers.

For those programs that involved **peer learning**, participants recommended they be grouped according to organization size and sophistication when possible for it to be most effective. This was particularly important in the Organizational Leadership Development program where the curriculum’s subject matter was reviewed through the lens of organizational context.

**Social enterprise development** takes much longer than other types of capacity building. If the goal of the project is to see the development of the product or service to its implementation phase, more time would need to be allotted for the Academy. Organizations often need to develop additional financial resources to pay for initial set-up and the first few months of product or service roll-out. If the goal of the Academy is for organizations to develop an implementation plan only, the twelve-month length is sufficient.

**Participant fees** ranged from zero (Social Enterprise Academy) to $2,000 (Nonprofit Finance Fund and Benevon). The only program in which the fees were a barrier was the Organizational Leadership Program which had originally asked for $600 per participant with 50 percent rebate if he/she completed the program and after receiving feedback from applicants this was reduced to a one-time $300 fee. When considering participant fees for capacity building programs for nonprofit organizations, balance should be sought between the actual cost of the program and the ability of participants to pay.

Participants noted that the **time commitment** to participate varied substantially by TA Institute program. The least amount required was in those programs which did not require significant in-person meetings, such as NFF and Benevon. Others required several, including the Social Enterprise Academy and the Organizational Leadership Development program. The majority of participants opted out of the second part of the latter program due to time constraints. Program planners should weigh the time needed for learning against the busy schedules of organization leaders when designing capacity building programs.

**Evaluation Recommendations**

Evaluating change in capacity for organizations is challenging. Both the process and findings of this study of First 5 LA’s TA Institute suggest four areas to consider in future evaluations of capacity building programs:

Try to develop **quantitative measures of change** as part of the program design from the beginning, in coordination with the capacity building providers.

Ask each participant to specify the organization’s **definition of success** for participating in the capacity building program as the program begins. Then follow up with them at the conclusion of the program to determine whether or not they achieved their goals.

Have capacity building providers complete a **consistent consultant final report** at the end of the project utilizing similar tools and methods, to allow for easier cross-comparison across programs.

Extend the **time frame** for evaluation. Change in capacity takes time, and some of the most important changes may be found well after completion of the program. By following up with participants at one to two years post-program, it may be possible to learn whether the agency is still using what they learned and begin to assess if the longer-term outcomes of capacity building have been reached.
Acknowledgments

First 5 LA oversees the Los Angeles County allocation of funds from Proposition 10, which added a 50-cent tax on tobacco products sold in California. Funds raised help pay for health care, education and child development programs for children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families. First 5 LA’s mission is to increase the number of young children who are physically and emotionally healthy, safe and ready to learn. For more information, please visit www.First5LA.org.

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