FIRST 5 LA

SUBJECT: RESEARCH & EVALUATION PROJECT PROPOSAL: REDUCING EARLY CHILDHOOD OBESITY IN LA COUNTY: A COLLECTIVE IMPACT EVALUATION

RECOMMENDATION: Approve Reducing Early Childhood Obesity in LA County: A Collective Impact Evaluation

BACKGROUND: First 5 LA’s Research and Evaluation Department currently follows a policy of sharing evaluation plans to the First 5 LA Program and Planning Committee prior to the release of solicitations for projects over $100,000. All projects with a total budget exceeding $500,000 are also presented at the Board of Commissioners meetings for approval. The goal of the policy is to provide an opportunity to review and receive feedback on the goals, procedures, budget, and timelines of the evaluation plans prior to implementation. The evaluation plans were shared with the Program and Planning Committee on April 24th, 2014. The attached documents summarize the evaluation plan currently proposed (Attachment A), as well as further explanation of related research recently published about childhood obesity (Attachment B). While there will not be a formal presentation on this item, it is presented for your information and an opportunity will be provided for discussion as needed.

DISCUSSION: In an effort to address the obesity epidemic, First 5 LA has approved the largest combination of nutrition and physical activity related investments, over $53 million to date, in LA County. The current proposal is for the Reducing Early Childhood Obesity (RECO) in LA County: A Collective Impact Evaluation. The RFP is projected to be released on July 1, 2014 with the evaluation projected to start January 2015 and end June 30, 2019 with a total budget of $3,000,000. The main goals of the RECO Evaluation include understanding the reach of First 5 LA investments in nutrition and physical activity, how these investments impact individual, community, and systemic/policy-level change, economic implications and the added value of First 5 LA obesity-related investments in LA County.

For Office Use

Board Action Taken:

Approved: ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Further Discussion

Referred to Committee/Work Group: ____________________________
What is the truth about childhood obesity trends in the United States?

In March 2014, The *Journal of the American Medical Association* published an article with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Affiliations investigating the prevalence of obesity using the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data, which has been conducted annually since the 1960s and involves in-person interviews and physical exams. When investigating First 5 LA’s target population (2 to 5 years old), the sample size was 871 for 2011-2012. In some studies, this is a perfectly good sample size, but since the obesity rate is fairly low in this population, it is easier for errors to creep in through random chance.

In April 2014, *JAMA Pediatrics* published an article examining the prevalence of obesity and severe obesity over time for 14 years of the continuous NHANES data, 1999 to 2012, and to examine differences in the trends by age, race/ethnicity, and gender. The sample size was 26,690 of children, age 2 to 19 years, in the United States. The researchers found that all classes of obesity have increased over the last 14 years, with specific minorities suffering more from this epidemic.

The *New York Times* recently published an article with the headline “Obesity Rate for Young Children Plummets 43% in a Decade.” The 43% referred to in the headline is a presentation of the relative drop in obesity reported in the March 2014 *JAMA* article. The absolute drop found in the original article was 6% (8% of 2-5 years olds were obese in 2012, down from 14 percent in 2004).

The original report's closing two sentences are telling: “Overall, there have been no significant changes in obesity prevalence in youth or adults between 2003-2004 and 2011-2012. Obesity prevalence remains high and thus it is important to continue surveillance.” If you do 10 flips of enough coins, you will at some point flip one to land on heads 10 times. This isn’t fate—it’s probability, and it’s inevitable in the long run. In order to separate out the noise from the real significant results, the authors should have held themselves to a higher standard for significance. Instead, they repeatedly declare that they did not and admit that the significant decline in obesity in the age group in question should be treated with caution.

A big issue is that studies like these, and the headlines that result, drive the discussion about public health and policy in this country. The media seizes on interesting results, amplifies them without due skepticism, and the public is misled. This can impact billions of dollars allocated to campaigns meant to capitalize on the supposed implications of scientific studies.
A study of preschoolers (n=200,000 children) in the federal WIC (Women, Infants and Children) program, which provides food vouchers, nutrition classes and counseling to low-income families in Los Angeles found:

- That obesity worsened from 2003 to 2011 among 3-4 year olds.
- Obesity rose to 20.4% from about 17%; reported in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, 2013
- Little sign of changes to diet and physical activity among 2-5 year olds.
- Television watching and consumption of sweet or salty snacks increased; Fruit and vegetable consumption fell.
- Slight rise in physical activity.\textsuperscript{vi}

The comparison between the national trend articles and the WIC study indicate the dire need of collecting local data. It is difficult to make any statements regarding the LA County population from national trend data. With large variations across regions in LA County, local data is crucial for making any conclusions about our population of children zero to 5.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{iii} http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/26/health/obesity-rate-for-young-children-plummets-43-in-a-decade.html?_r=0
\item \textsuperscript{iv} Ogden et al, 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{v} http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/16/us-usa-health-obesity-insight-idUSBREA2F0CX20140316
\item \textsuperscript{vi} http://www.slate.com/articles/life/family/2014/02/obesity_rate_for_children_has_not_plummeted_despite_that_43_percent_headline.html
\end{itemize}
## Research and Evaluation Project Proposal

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<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Reducing Early Childhood Obesity in LA County: A Collective Impact Evaluation</th>
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<td>Statement of Purpose</td>
<td>First 5 LA has made a large investment to help achieve one of the four goals of the organization: <em>Children maintain a healthy weight</em>. In an effort to address the obesity epidemic, First 5 LA has approved the largest combination of nutrition and physical activity related investments, over $53 million to date, in Los Angeles County. These investments are designed to strengthen policies and systems and make environmental improvements in multiple sectors including government agencies, businesses, health care, and other community settings. Ultimately, these changes will benefit large segments of the County and will reach deep into communities to reduce health-related disparities and improve conditions for those most severely impacted by the obesity epidemic. Understanding the collective impact of various investments to prevent childhood obesity is a more powerful and realistic paradigm for social progress than the typical model of isolated impact, used to address social problems independently. While understanding the outcomes related to individual interventions remains an important aspect of evaluating program success, focusing on individual efforts causes one to lose sight of the effects of all investments combined. Assessing collective impact will help paint a picture of how all efforts are affecting the larger issue of childhood obesity, and will also allow First 5 LA and policy makers to focus on the overarching issue and think about the long-term process and gradual impact rather than short-term solutions.</td>
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| Expected learning outcomes | Our Collective Impact Evaluation will aim to understand:  
• The reach of First 5 LA investments/interventions (e.g. who was served, how many, and to what extent) and identify those who still need to be targeted.  
• How these investments impact individual, community, and systemic/policy-level change.  
• The economic implications of investing in various intervention efforts.  
• The added value of First 5 LA obesity-related investments within LA County. |
| Timeline and Major Activities | • July 2014: Release RFP  
• January 2015: Contractor begins  
• 2015-2016: Database development & Shared Measurement Data Collection  
• 2017-2019: Analysis (microsimulation modeling, predictive risk modeling, forecasting, etc) |
| Proposed Cost | $3,000,000 for 5 years |