STRENGTHENING THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF BEST START COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)
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I. PROCESS AND TIMELINE

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<td>RFI Released</td>
<td>May 25, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informational Webinar</td>
<td>June 8, 2016</td>
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<td>Questions and requests for additional information should be submitted by:</td>
<td>June 27, 2016</td>
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<td>Posting of responses to questions</td>
<td>June 30, 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFI submissions due electronically</td>
<td>5:00 pm PT on July 8, 2016</td>
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In order to ensure that all responders have the benefit of the same information from First 5 LA, we request that you submit all questions and requests for additional information regarding this RFI to First 5 LA via email before 5:00 pm PT on June 27, 2016. Questions and responses will be posted on the First 5 LA website, www.first5la.org, by June 30, 2016. First 5 LA may respond to individual inquiries and then post replies to all questions by the posting date. We welcome your questions and requests for information to assist all interested parties in providing fully informed responses.

Please submit questions and requests for additional information via email to:

Sabel Morales, Contract Compliance Officer
smorales@first5la.org

This is not a solicitation for funding but rather a request for information from relevant stakeholders. Responding to this RFI does not guarantee or preclude respondents’ eligibility for possible funding opportunities in the future if First 5 LA releases a solicitation to strengthen infrastructure supports for the Best Start Community Partnerships, or any other project or initiative. First 5 LA will submit responses to this RFI, along with other research and information from other sources to substantive review by staff and third party reviewers to assist with designing support infrastructure for Best Start Communities. Responses to this request for information shall become the property of First 5 LA and, by responding, you agree that your ideas, responses and all submissions may be incorporated by First 5 LA into a future First 5 LA project or solicitation, with or without specific attribution.

1 Note: Dates are subject to change at First 5 LA’s sole discretion.
II. INTRODUCTION

First 5 LA is issuing this Request for Information (RFI) to invite community stakeholders to provide their best thinking and ideas about key aspects of our place-based investment in 14 Best Start communities throughout Los Angeles County. We are seeking a better understanding of community assets and strengths that can reinforce the vision, passion and work of the Best Start Community Partnerships for years to come -- even as we carefully consider how First 5 LA can continue to strengthen the overall Best Start effort.

Specifically, the purpose of the RFI is two-fold:

1. Understand how a variety of community organizations and other assets can be strategically mobilized to increase local governance and strengthen the ability of the Partnerships to sustain collaborative efforts and achieve results we all seek for children and families in the Best Start Communities.

2. Learn about organizations (including existing networks of organizations) that may have an interest in fulfilling key functions (e.g. coordination, financial management, and skill building support) for one or more Best Start Community Partnerships as outlined in this RFI.

The RFI is part of a larger landscape analysis to gather information that will be used to strengthen the infrastructure of the Best Start Community Partnerships in the near future. Based on six years of implementation experience and ongoing community feedback, we are looking to shift from a structure where First 5 LA is the sole funder and directs the work of the Community Partnerships to one in which there is strong local governance with the support of partners, including but not limited to First 5 LA. We believe this shift will support the Community Partnerships in long-term sustainability, becoming stronger, and doing more to promote community resiliency and improve conditions for children and families.

First 5 LA is committed to fulfilling the promise of Best Start -- that is, to cultivate strong collaborative efforts with parents, residents, organizations, and key leaders so that, together, they are a powerful catalyst for change to achieve and sustain the results we all seek for children and families in these communities. However, we realize that we do not have all the answers to meet this promise. As we reflect on our experience in implementing Best Start for the last six years, we acknowledge the need for strong infrastructure that optimizes community resources, increases local ownership, and promotes cross-sector collaboration and the sustainability of the results for children and families.

Our commitment to Best Start is strong, and we value the collective wisdom that exists within communities to help us determine the best way forward.

III. OVERVIEW

Since 2010, First 5 LA has worked to strengthen community leadership and infrastructure in 14 communities in Los Angeles County through Best Start, an approach that emphasizes the important role of “place” and its

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2 An association of organizations having a common interest, formed to provide mutual assistance, helpful information, or the like.

3 Infrastructure is defined as “the basic fundamental structure of a system, organization or community (e.g. material, social, political, financial, cultural, institutional, etc.) which determines how it functions and how adaptable it is to meet future requirements” (First 5 LA’s 2009-2015 Capacity Building Plan, pg. 30).
impact on a child’s development. With approval of its new Strategic Plan, First 5 LA continues its commitment to build community capacity to create and sustain thriving and healthy environments for all children. Working in 14 communities across Los Angeles County, our investment in Best Start is about helping communities build and sustain nurturing and enriching environments for children so that they are ready to succeed in school and life. This means that multiple community stakeholders work together continuously to achieve the following results:

- **Families** are socially connected.
- **Communities** have services and supports that meet family needs.
- **Communities** have places and spaces that encourage interaction and physical activity.
- **Systems** (with particular emphasis on health, mental health, substance abuse service systems) improve policies and practices to make services more responsive and accessible to families.

By working to achieve these outcomes, First 5 LA and its partners promote policy and systems change at the county and community levels in an effort to create community environments that promote the safety, healthy development, and well-being of children prenatal to age five and their families. Additional background about First 5 LA is included in Appendix A: Background about First 5 LA.

**Guiding Principles**

First 5 LA’s overarching organizational value is collaboration. “We believe joint effort toward common goals achieves trust and produces greater impact for LA County’s youngest children and their families.” Consistent with our overarching value, Best Start is grounded in a commitment to cultivate, and work in partnership with, community leaders to transform neighborhoods into places where families have the resources, relationships, and opportunities to support the healthy development of their children. To live out this commitment, we developed a set of criteria to guide programmatic design and implementation.

1. **Parent and resident leadership is central to this work. They are the driving force for change.** Parents and families are at the center of our work because they are their child’s first and most influential teacher. This investment is about increasing the network of parent and resident leaders who, we believe, are most adept at producing strategies that best fit community needs and context. We treat parents and residents as real partners and decision makers who are a powerful voice to change the negative environmental factors that affect families.

2. **To have the greatest impact on the largest number of people, focus on changing the community environment.** Communities and neighborhoods matter. We want to foster resilient, thriving communities by cultivating a shared vision, igniting collective action, strengthening the coordination of services and informal supports for families, and improving the quality of the physical/built environment.

3. **Organizations, systems leaders, funders, and other stakeholders are important partners.** We recognize that we are part of a larger ecosystem of resources, commitments, and efforts at many levels to improve community conditions that affect children and families. We cannot, and should not, do this work alone.

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4 Please refer to Appendix B for a map of each Best Start Community.
5 First 5 LA Strategic Plan 2015-2020, pg. 10
These guiding principals have served as a foundation for our work to date and will serve as a foundation for our internal decisions and the relationships we have, and seek to develop, with a variety of key stakeholders.

**Best Start Community Partnerships**

Aligned with our guiding principles, *Best Start* Community Partnerships (Partnerships) are a central component of First 5 LA’s community capacity building strategy. For the last six years, our investment in the Partnerships has been about amplifying and mobilizing the power and voice of parents and residents in concert with other community stakeholders to transform communities into places of support and opportunity for children and families.

The initial launch of *Best Start* began in 2009 with Metro Los Angeles (Metro LA) as the pilot community and resulted in mobilizing efforts in 13 additional communities in 2010. Community Partnerships – comprised of parents, residents, community-based organizations, health care professionals, educators, faith-based organizations, government representatives and businesses – were established in each community as the vehicles to launch, advance and sustain broad-based, inclusive efforts to improve the community’s ability to provide nurturing and enriching environments for children. The majority of the members are parents and/or residents; they are the driving force of the Partnerships’ work.

Since 2010, these Partnerships have been actively working to connect families to information and resources, and champion a shared vision and results-focused agenda to implement strategies that increase the community’s ability to support families with children prenatal to age five. They have established and maintained a safe, collaborative space for multiple stakeholders to learn, connect, and build shared experience working together to collectively address needs in the community. The Partnerships are a platform for authentic collaboration, and members are responsible for developing and/or informing the implementation of a broad-based, inclusive change effort to improve the environments and resources that affect the health and wellbeing of families with children prenatal to age five.

For the last six years, all of the *Best Start* Community Partnerships have been crystallizing their efforts to become stronger voices and vehicles for change within *Best Start* communities. They have been strengthening their governance structure, fostering collaboration among multiple stakeholders, using data to inform decisions, identifying and implementing projects to address needs in their community, and fostering relationships among and between parents and providers, and building their capacity to effectively advocate for children and families in their communities. In other words, the Partnerships have been strengthening their capacity to influence systems change, mobilizing and maximizing community assets and resources, and becoming effective models for the engagement of parents/residents in sustained collaborative efforts. Today, the Partnerships are developing into strong, inclusive, results-focused groups whose voice, authenticity and commitment to children and community change is sought after by diverse spheres of influence.

**Sustainability of Best Start**

In the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, First 5 LA has defined sustainability as follows: “the ability to maintain programming and its impact on the well-being of children and families after the expiration of First 5 LA funds.” This definition highlights two important aspects of sustainability – programming and impact.

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Sustainability of Best Start at the program level means preserving safe, multi-sector collaborative spaces developed through Best Start that amplify parent voice and propel collective action. At an impact level, it means promoting continuous improvements in the community environment that affect the health and well-being of children and families. In other words, we are seeking to sustain the ability of communities to come together, with parents as a driving force, to lead changes that will create an environment where children prenatal to age five and their families can thrive.

For more than 15 years, First 5 LA has been committed to the wellbeing of children, prenatal to age five, and their families. Moving forward, that commitment remains, accompanied by a strong desire to maximize our contribution to improving outcomes for young children in the context of declining revenues. First 5 LA’s primary source of income comes from the Proposition 10 tobacco tax. In the 15 years since the passage of Proposition 10, tobacco tax revenues have decreased 50 percent. Because of this, First 5 LA made a strategic decision to shift its emphasis to policy and systems change to expand the reach and impact of our resources. This means that we need to clarify our role and intended impact for each of our investments, including Best Start. We want to ensure that the great work that we have supported in Best Start communities over the last six years grows and is sustained over time.

The pressing issues that affect children and families in the Best Start Communities are deep and complex. To truly transform a place, First 5 LA and the Best Start Community Partnerships need strong, committed partners who can mobilize the social, political and financial capital needed to improve conditions for children and families over time. Best Start provides foundational infrastructure for current and future work throughout Los Angeles County to improve policies, systems and environments that affect families. What we learn in the 14 Best Start communities will inform countywide efforts that also aim to ensure that children and families thrive in the places where they live, learn, play, and work. It is through Best Start Community Partnerships that First 5 LA, and its partners, can support the growing momentum, ongoing capacity, and determination that community stakeholders have for the continued advancement of a shared agenda for children.

IV. PURPOSE OF THE RFI

First 5 LA is looking to the knowledge, expertise, and experiences of organizations and groups that understand what it means to harness the collaborative efforts of groups of people efficiently and continuously to achieve results. We seek innovative ideas and key partners to marshal the collective wisdom that exists, throughout LA County and beyond, to have a meaningful and transformative impact on communities for the long haul.

Our experience and ongoing reflection -- as well as feedback from Community Partnership members and lessons from other place-based efforts -- underscores the importance of having strong, local community ownership and governance structures, driven by parents and residents, in order to achieve sustainable community change. We are using this RFI as a key source of information to assess the landscape of existing organizations within and that serve Best Start communities that have the values, commitment, relationships and resources (social, political, and financial) to strengthen the viability and work of the 14 Best Start Community Partnerships.
Strengthening the Infrastructure of the *Best Start* Community Partnerships

The Community Partnerships are not formal, legal entities. First 5 LA is the sole funder and primary organization providing support for community engagement, capacity building, Partnership meetings, logistics, learning and development, communications, and administrative functions. First 5 LA manages all aspects of the Partnerships with the exception of the pilot community, Metro LA, which launched using a lead agency approach. This lead agency provides direct support for the Metro LA Community Partnership. In the other 13 communities, First 5 LA staff and contractors have been providing direct programmatic, administrative and capacity building support to the Partnerships.

Since the inception of *Best Start*, First 5 LA has continued to explore how to support this work more effectively across the 14 communities. We want to promote the collective efficacy of *Best Start* Community Partnerships by building upon the lessons learned from Metro LA and the other 13 communities as well as growing evidence and emerging learning from local and national place-based efforts. We want to achieve and sustain community-level results, build capacity expertise in the County, as well as strengthen the infrastructure of the Community Partnerships – all within the context of our fiduciary responsibilities as a public entity.

First 5 LA is one of many partners that work to support an environment where children prenatal to age 5 can enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life. We recognize the need to strengthen relationships and strong partnerships with other funders and systems leaders who also care about and invest in efforts to bolster and enhance community vitality. Therefore, First 5 LA is interested in ensuring that:

1. The Partnerships are viable for the long term.
2. Infrastructure support is flexible and responsive to the needs and interests of the Community Partnerships.
3. Other funders and systems leaders are key partners in building community capacity collectively.
4. The experience and lessons learned from other funders are incorporated into the implementation and ongoing learning about *Best Start*.
5. Its investment in *Best Start* builds upon and strengthens existing community infrastructure.

As a result, an intentional, collaborative approach is necessary to strengthen the infrastructure that will help Partnerships build the capabilities required to be stronger and more effective as they facilitate collective action for continuous achievement of desired results.

**Functions to Strengthen Infrastructure Support**

As mentioned earlier in this RFI, the Community Partnerships are not formal, legal entities. After a review of other local, state and national place-based initiatives, First 5 LA is seeking to understand the role that existing community-based organizations (or existing networks of organizations)\(^7\) may be able to play in fulfilling one or more of the functions described below. The functions can be shared or fulfilled by one or more organizations in collaboration with the Community Partnerships.

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\(^7\) As a reminder, we are defining a network as an association of organizations having a common interest, formed to provide mutual assistance, helpful information, or the like.
• **Function #1: Coordination**
  o Providing facilitation and logistical (venue, childcare, translation, transportation, catering, etc.) support for Best Start Community Partnership meetings, committees, and workgroups
  o Cultivating parent leadership and voice in decision-making
  o Working in partnership with the governance body of the Partnership to ensure the Partnership is representative, high-functioning, and advancing the work towards results
  o Facilitating ongoing learning and strategic planning of the Partnership that builds on what exists within communities
  o Ensuring ongoing quality improvement to achieve results
  o Helping the Partnership to make connections and establish working relationships with other place-based and community strengthening efforts including First 5 LA investments
  o Building support based on lessons learned from other community-based collaboratives
  o Utilizing conflict resolution techniques to address conflict and mitigate potential conflict
  o Working with partners to leverage resources and attain additional funding
  o Reporting progress to First 5 LA

• **Function #2: Financial Management**
  o Providing fiduciary oversight, financial management, and other administrative functions
  o Working with First 5 LA to develop the necessary assurances for an impartial and transparent process aimed at distributing funds for community investments identified by the Best Start Community Partnership
  o Facilitating distribution of funding for community-identified investments
  o Tracking and reporting expenditures to the Best Start Community Partnership and First 5 LA
  o Implementing sound accounting and fiscal management practices
  o Leveraging resources and attaining additional funding

• **Function #3: Skill Building Support**
  o Partnering with local, grassroots, advocacy groups (and others as needed) to provide knowledge, training and exposure to new opportunities in content areas such as:
    ▪ Community Mobilization
    ▪ Civic Engagement
    ▪ Coalition Building
    ▪ Leadership Development
    ▪ Communications and Messaging
    ▪ Evaluation and Learning

For purposes of this RFI, First 5 LA is seeking input from organizations and existing networks that have experience and interest in any or all of the functions described above. This is also an opportunity for respondents to share whether there are additional functions that will help make the Best Start Community Partnerships more viable vehicles for change. We encourage all organizations (or existing network of organizations) that may or may not already be members of, or participating with, the Best Start Community Partnerships to respond to this RFI.
Geographic Approaches to Infrastructure Support under Consideration

In addition to a review of other local, state and national place-based initiatives, First 5 LA held a number of conversations with members of the Best Start Community Partnerships and internal staff regarding geographic approaches that will strengthen First 5 LA’s investment in the Community Partnerships. Based on the feedback, we have identified the following options:

**Option 1: Use a one-to-one approach**
In this option, First 5 LA would work with one or more strong, credible and well-connected organization(s) that may or may not currently have a relationship with the respective Best Start Community Partnership. One organization (with or without subcontractors) per Community Partnership would fulfill all three of the functions outlined above (i.e. Coordination, Financial Management, and Skill Building Support). Please refer to Appendix B: Map of each Best Start Community.

**Option 2: Use a regional approach**
In this option, First 5 LA would work with strong, credible and well-connected organizations to support a region of two or more Best Start Communities (e.g. one organization to work with both the Palmdale and Lancaster Community Partnerships). These organizations may or may not currently have a relationship with any Best Start Community Partnerships. One organization (with or without subcontractors) would fulfill all three of the functions outlined above (i.e. Coordination, Financial Management, and Skill Building Support) for a region of Best Start Community Partnerships, which have yet to be determined (regions will be subsets of the 14 Community Partnerships - Please refer to Appendix C: Map of the 14 Best Start Communities). The responses received will help determine regions.

**Option 3: Use a countywide approach**
In this option, First 5 LA would work with a strong, credible and well-connected organization to support all Best Start Communities. This organization or organizations may or may not currently have a relationship with a Best Start Community Partnership. One organization (with or without subcontractors) would fulfill all three of the functions outlined above (i.e. Coordination, Financial Management, and Skill Building Support) for each Best Start Community Partnership.

**Option #4: Other ideas**
We invite respondents to provide other options and their best thinking about how to strengthen the infrastructure of the Best Start Community Partnerships in ways that ensure community ownership, promote operational efficiency, optimize local community resources, and promote sustainability of Best Start.

First 5 LA is not asserting one approach over another, nor are we assuming that Options 1-3 are the only possible choices. This RFI will inform decisions about the type, number, and ultimate role of organizations (or existing networks) that may fulfill the Coordination, Financial Management, and Skill Building Support functions for the Best Start Community Partnerships.

The information gathered through this RFI will inform First 5 LA of the existing capacity, capacity building needs in relation to the three functions identified in the RFI, level of interest, and opportunities to provide infrastructure support for the Best Start Community Partnerships. The results – and any subsequent information gathering efforts – will be used to design an approach that fosters partnership and promotes community governance. Following the RFI, First 5 LA may follow up with respondents of this RFI and other key stakeholders to gather additional information to help further inform the design and implementation of
infrastructure support of the Best Start Community Partnerships. First 5 LA will consider costs and potential risks associated with shifting from the current structure to a new one. We will also use the information obtained through this RFI to identify potential partnership and leveraging opportunities. All of the information gathered and subsequent decisions will be viewed in the context of our ability to achieve mission-critical outcomes through this strategy, consistent with its vision, values, and strategic direction.

This is not a solicitation for funding but rather a request for information from relevant stakeholders. Responding to this RFI does not guarantee or preclude respondents’ eligibility for possible funding opportunities in the future if First 5 LA releases a solicitation to strengthen infrastructure supports for the Best Start Community Partnerships, or any other project or initiative. First 5 LA will submit responses to this RFI, along with other research and information from other sources to substantive review by staff and third party reviewers to assist with designing support infrastructure for Best Start Communities. Responses to this request for information shall become the property of First 5 LA and, by responding, you agree that your ideas, responses and all submissions may be incorporated by First 5 LA into a future First 5 LA project or solicitation, with or without specific attribution.

V. INFORMATION REQUESTED

Please respond to the following questions via narrative (not to exceed ten pages, single spaced 11 point font), being as specific as possible. If responding on behalf of an existing network of organizations, please submit one (1) response per network. The information you provide, along with responses from others, will help us understand the myriad of community assets and strengths that can support the Community Partnerships. Please respond to the following questions to the best of your ability:

1. Overall Thoughts
   - Please share your overall ideas about how to strengthen the viability and work of the 14 Best Start Community Partnerships.
   - Given your experience, what are the core elements for sustaining collaborative efforts like the Best Start Community Partnerships?
   - What philosophy, core values, and characteristics should organizations possess in order to adequately fulfill the functions outlined on page 9?
   - Describe any functions that you think are missing from the list on page 9.
   - Considering the three different approaches as outlined on page 10:
     i. From your perspective, what are the benefits and challenges associated with these approaches?
     ii. How can First 5 LA promote collaboration among organizations regardless of the approach it decides to use?
     iii. Are there any other approaches First 5 LA should consider?
     iv. What else should First 5 LA consider?
   - What role do you think First 5 LA should play in supporting the growth and viability of the Best Start Community Partnerships?
   - How do you think First 5 LA can best support the sustainability of Best Start overall as described on page 6?
2. **Collaborative Experience**
   - Describe any experience working to promote a shared vision and foster effective collaboration among multiple community stakeholders.
   - Please list network members or collaborative partners, if applicable.
   - Describe your experience engaging parents and residents in collaborative efforts to drive solutions to pervasive community problems.
   - Describe how you have worked with community stakeholders in the past to build the capacity of organizations or community members.
   - Describe what other organizations you think you can work with to fulfill one or more of the functions described in this RFI.

3. **Background & General Experience**
   - Describe the purpose, mission, goals, programs and activities that comprise your organization/network’s main work.
   - What is the philosophy and values that guide your organization/network’s work?
   - Describe the type of capacity building efforts your organization/network has implemented. Highlight lessons learned from similar capacity building work.
   - Provide a description of any work or relationship your organization/network has with any of the Best Start Community Partnerships.
   - Describe how your organization/network has served as a hub of information and resources (if at all).
   - Physical location of your site(s), if applicable. Include location of network members or collaborative partners, if applicable.
   - List any funding your organization/network has received for capacity building work over the last five years. Include funding source, amount and award period.
   - Please discuss your organization’s ability to secure, leverage, and mobilize a range of social, financial and political resources and relationships in support of your work.

*If your organization or network is interested in fulfilling any or all of the functions described on page 9, please answer the questions in sections 4 and 5 below.*

4. **Infrastructure Supports**
   - Which function(s) (Coordinator, Financial Management, Skill Building Support) is your organization best suited to fulfill and what is your experience fulfilling the function(s)?
   - Discuss any barriers or gaps to fulfilling these functions.
   - If First 5 LA releases a solicitation to support the Best Start Community Partnerships:
     - What factors would make your organization more or less likely to apply? Please explain.
     - Which one or more Best Start communities or region would your organization/network be interested in supporting? Please explain.

5. **Capacity Building Needs**
   - Please describe the type of technical assistance your organization/network would likely need to successfully fulfill the functions outlined in this RFI. *(First 5 LA does not expect organizations (or networks) to have expertise in all of the functions. The information you*
VI. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

First 5 LA shall not be liable for any costs incurred in connection with a respondent’s preparation of a response to this RFI. Any materials, including attached materials, submitted in response to this RFI shall become First 5 LA’s property and subject to public disclosure.

Each response shall be retained for official files and will become public record upon submittal unless the response or specific parts of the response can be shown to be exempt from disclosure by law. Each respondent may clearly label parts of a response as “CONFIDENTIAL” if the respondent thereby agrees to indemnify and defend First 5 LA for honoring such a designation. The failure to so label any information that is released by First 5 LA shall constitute a complete waiver of all claims for damages caused by any release of the information. If a public records request for information labeled confidential is received by First 5 LA, First 5 LA will notify the respondent of the request. Within seven (7) calendar days after First 5 LA’s notification to the respondent, it will be the respondent’s duty to act in protection of the labeled information. The respondent’s failure to so act shall constitute a complete waiver.

The respondent agrees that, by submitting a response, the respondent authorizes First 5 LA to verify any or all information submitted in the response.

VII. LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Background about First 5 LA
- Appendix B – Map of each Best Start Community
- Appendix C – Map of the 14 Best Start Communities