

# First 5 LA's Journey Toward Deepening a Commitment to DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION

Prepared by  
First 5 LA  
**Office of  
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and Learning**

## ■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Part I:  
Opportunities for Improvement

Part II:  
Employee-Driven Planning Process

Part III:  
First 5 LA's 12 DEI Commitments

Part IV:  
Next Steps

Part V:  
Learning and Reflections

Acknowledgements

**“When we’re talking about diversity, [equity, and inclusion] it’s not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us.”**

*- Ava DuVernay*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

First 5 LA is an independent county public agency that works to improve public systems so that they support the development of children, prenatal to age 5 in Los Angeles County. We want every child in the county to reach their full developmental potential during the earliest and most critical years of rapid brain development.

To achieve our highest aspirations for every child in Los Angeles County, First 5 LA has asserted an explicit focus on addressing systemic bias and inequities within public systems that hinder the outcomes of children, disrupt optimal development, and have disproportionately affected children of color. As a public agency ourselves, we understand that we are of public systems, therefore, what we do and how we think and behave influence outcomes that matter most for children and families. Our emphasis on systems change means we must change too. We must confront and address systemic bias and inequities within our own organization to ensure equitable outcomes for all within public systems.

Since January 2021, First 5 LA has been working with Seed Collaborative, LLC (Seed) to assess our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) competencies and identify priorities for improving the policies, procedures, practices, mindsets, and norms that shape our culture and impact our systems change work.

Seed's assessment revealed four opportunities for improvement:

- 1. DEI Acumen:** There is varied DEI understanding and confusion about First 5 LA's definition of equity, and the need for development, coaching, and training for employees and Commissioners.
- 2. Procedures and Norms:** The organizational culture was described as hierarchical, siloed, perfectionist, risk adverse, rigid, with layered decision-making driving overpreparation and overthinking.
- 3. Policy, Practice and Values Alignment:** There is work to be done on aligning policies and practices with organizational values, particularly in the areas of human resources, grantmaking, and procurement.
- 4. Strategic Plan:** There are opportunities to better infuse DEI within First 5 LA's strategic plan, connecting DEI to child outcomes.

The opportunities for improvement called out in Seed's assessment warranted an inclusive employee-driven planning process that would

yield recommendations for advancing DEI while also modeling the kinds of practices that facilitate belonging in the organization. We wanted meaningful dialogue, reflection, and ideas from colleagues representing all levels and positions across the organization. We intended for the process itself to strengthen relationships, increase trust, and promote collective ownership of our organizational culture.

The DEI Governance Board (DEIGB) was established as an employee-driven, decision-making and coordinating body to facilitate the goal of cultivating belonging through the development of recommendations that address First 5 LA's areas of needed improvement and advance DEI organization wide. Its purpose was to 1) review Seed's assessment data, 2) reflect on experiences identified by colleagues, partners, and communities, 3) design and implement processes to engage colleagues across the organization in developing recommendations, and 4) adopt a set of recommendations that would guide the next phase of First 5 LA's DEI journey.

The DEIGB was designed to facilitate belonging through structures of co-creation, shared power, and consensus decision-making. These building blocks created the conditions for thoughtful inquiry, critical analysis of data, and embracing diverse perspectives to inform their thinking and DEI recommendations. Recognizing the importance of co-creation beyond the 19 members of the DEIGB, subcommittees were formed to enable any colleague to get involved in developing recommendations for advancing DEI at First 5 LA. No colleague who raised their hand to join a subcommittee was turned away. As a result, 44 colleagues joined subcommittees in addition to the 19 DEIGB members. In total, 64% of the organization (63 of 99 colleagues) participated in subcommittees.

Though subcommittees represented more than 60% of the organization, the DEIGB wanted to ensure their colleagues had an opportunity to weigh-in, before formal decisions were made. Opportunities for full organizational engagement included all-team meetings, use of anonymity-based tools such as Google Jamboard to capture input and questions, office hours held by Seed and First 5 LA's Office of Equity, Strategy and Learning, and team-specific meetings facilitated by members of the DEIGB and leadership team.

After 11 months of listening, learning, reflection, and deliberation, the DEIGB adopted 12

DEI Priority	DEI Commitment
<p><b>Priority 1</b> <i>Strategic Direction and Values</i></p> <p>Ensuring there is consistency between our strategic plan, values, culture, and organizational identity.</p>	<p><b>1</b> Streamline the strategic plan and use it to deepen alignment among employees and Board of Commissioners around a shared organizational culture and identity grounded in outcomes we will hold ourselves accountable for and the values we will live in support of achieving these outcomes.</p> <p><b>2</b> Ensure funding opportunities aimed at systems change are grounded in an explicit problem statement and informed by an understanding of root causes that contribute to the problem(s) we seek to address.</p> <p><b>3</b> Work in partnership with individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions that have lived experience and expertise with the conditions we seek to address in order to understand root causes and develop credible and viable strategies.</p>
<p><b>Priority 2</b> <i>Culture, Internal Relationships, and Experiences</i></p> <p>Engaging our colleagues in ways that strengthen relationships, increase trust, promote collective ownership of our work and organizational culture; and address internal policies, practices, norms, behaviors, and mindsets that may be barriers to culture change.</p>	<p><b>4</b> Commit resources to improve our individual and collective skillsets and mindsets at all levels of the organization to create safe and brave spaces and embed practices into organizational processes that enable colleagues to dialogue, learn, and reflect with each other on how to improve our work together; embody, practice, and live our values; and nurture a culture of belonging, healing, safety, learning, and trust.</p> <p><b>5</b> Formalize practices for shared leadership and identify the most appropriate opportunities to apply those practices to support learning, inclusivity, power-sharing, and co-ownership of our work and culture.</p> <p><b>6</b> Engage colleagues in the design and implementation of a decision-making approach that with input, feedback, and communication channels fosters greater trust and transparency, acknowledges different types, context, and impact of decisions, addresses existing pain points, and distributes decision-making to appropriate roles.</p> <p><b>7</b> Engage colleagues in the development of a leadership philosophy with clear expectations and behaviors at individual, interpersonal, and group levels that is applied across the organization, differentiated by function and roles, and that includes employee development and accountability mechanisms to ensure that First 5 LA’s leadership team, managers, and team dynamics support a culture of belonging, healing, safety, learning, and trust and enables First 5 LA to do its best, most high-impact work.</p> <p><b>8</b> Strengthen personnel policies, practices, and processes for recruitment, hiring, on-boarding, professional development, performance evaluations, promotions, and reclassifications to ensure they are transparent, mission and values aligned, trauma informed, and reflect best practices in DEI and human resources.</p> <p><b>9</b> Develop formal policies, practices, and processes that bolster existing harm prevention policies and practices to ensure psychological safety, support colleagues with related behavior change, and objectively resolve incidents of harm.</p>
<p><b>Priority 3</b> <i>Interpersonal and Institutional Relationships with Grantees and Partners</i></p> <p>Maximizing our impact through stronger relationships with grantees and partners, and more equitable grantmaking and contracting processes.</p>	<p><b>10</b> Strengthen relationships with grantees and other system and community partners, grounded in our organizational values and a commitment to transparency, trust, and mutual accountability.</p> <p><b>11</b> Develop robust, accessible, and fair procurement and outreach strategies that address barriers to participation and ensure equitable opportunity and access for all organizations.</p> <p><b>12</b> Simplify and clarify contract terms and conditions, budget modification guidelines, and reporting requirements to reduce burden and improve accessibility and understanding.</p>

recommendations organized into three priority areas. With approval by the DEIGB, they now represent First 5 LA's DEI commitments.

The 12 DEI commitments are essentially principles for how First 5 LA will conduct its work. Making these commitments concrete through measurement and actions is the next step. We are developing a DEI Action Plan that will identify key DEI outcomes, metrics, benchmarks, and implementation actions. In the same way First 5 LA has worked on our external outcomes, our goal is to also be explicit about the internal changes we seek, how we will measure change, the specific actions we will take, and how we will track our progress for continuous improvement. Action planning will be part of First 5 LA's annual work planning and resource forecasting processes in

spring 2023, however, we will not wait until the action plan is developed to start implementing our DEI commitments. We are working on near-term opportunities, such as the review and refinement cycle for our 2020-2028 Strategic Plan, to align and integrate these commitments into our strategic plan and day-to-day work.

First 5 LA's actions to live our DEI organizational value are happening in the context of a larger countywide discourse currently underway. In many ways, we are entering the DEI discourse late, however we do have an interest in being a thought partner, contributing to and learning from our external partners and communities working to advance DEI throughout Los Angeles County. To that end, below are some of our key learnings from the past year.

## Our Learning and Reflections

### **DEI should not be considered a separate area of work.**

DEI is the work. Organizational culture has a direct impact on an organization's ability to do both internally and externally facing work. For us, that means we cannot separate our why - the impact we seek - from who we are and how we work together and with our partners.

### **Process is culture shaping.**

Structures and processes that foster collaboration across a diversity of levels, positions, and perspectives are critical facilitators of a culture of belonging and can be time and resource intensive. The goal is to enable authentic collaboration in ways that maximize available time and resources.

### **This is a journey not a destination.**

This work is not about quick fixes. It is about unearthing the root causes of inequity within the organization and systemically working to address them in collaboration with colleagues at all levels and in all positions. Therefore, this work is not a time-bound effort, as real organizational change takes time and ongoing attention.

### **Organizational context matters.**

Each organization on a DEI journey must determine what will work best in their context based on learning from others, hearing from colleagues, and assessing environmental factors that impact the organization and its work.

### **Everyone must be willing to change.**

This work requires humility, empathy, gratitude, and a willingness to change policies, procedures, practices, and individual beliefs and behaviors.

# INTRODUCTION

First 5 LA is an independent county public agency that works to improve public systems so that they support the development of children, prenatal to age 5 in Los Angeles County. We want every child in the county to reach their full developmental potential during the earliest and most critical years of rapid brain development. Regrettably, nearly every indicator across key child development areas shows an outcome gap, particularly by race and ethnicity. Children of color experience significant gaps and fare worse on key indicators of well-being than their counterparts, gaps that take hold early and persist, having long lasting effects on their future success.

**First 5 LA was created by the 1998 voter-approved California Children and Families Act (Proposition 10). Since our inception, we have invested more than \$2 billion in county and community efforts to improve conditions for young children and families.**

We desire to showcase DEI in daily interactions among our colleagues, external partners, and communities. However, we acknowledge that First 5 LA has sometimes fallen short of that aspiration. We embrace the energy that comes with being a work in progress as we continuously reflect and adjust to fully live our DEI organizational values.

That is why we turned a spotlight on ourselves to understand the experiences of our colleagues and determine areas of improvement to align our desire to live our DEI value through our everyday actions, internally and externally. Since January 2021, First 5 LA has been working with the Seed Collaborative, LLC (Seed) to assess First 5 LA's DEI competencies and identify priorities for improving the policies, procedures, practices, mindsets, and norms that shape our culture and impact our systems change work.

To achieve our highest aspirations for every child in Los Angeles County, First 5 LA has asserted an explicit focus on addressing systemic bias and inequities within public systems. As a public agency ourselves, we understand that we are of public systems, therefore, what we do and how we think and behave influences outcomes that matter most for children and families. Our emphasis on systems change means we must change too. We must confront and address systemic bias and inequities within our own organization.

Our collective work to date, with colleagues across the organization, affirms the interconnectedness between what work we do and how we do that work. Employee wellbeing and belonging, our relationships and behaviors within our organization and with partners, and our capacity to have an equitable and lasting impact in Los Angeles County, are all inextricably linked. To fully live our organizational values, advance our DEI journey, and contribute to meaningful systems change, we must be courageous and curious to explore new ideas, shift from patterns that do not serve us well, and practice thoughtful inquiry and critical analysis of data and diverse perspectives to shape our thinking and inform our actions internally and externally.

In 2019, the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners approved our 2020-2028 Strategic Plan which codified diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as one of four organizational values and equity as an investment guideline. Both shape how we do our work and the culture we aim to promote, and create a benchmark to measure our norms, practices, and performance. In 2020, First 5 LA established the Office of Equity, Strategy, and Learning (OESL) to further crystalize its commitment to DEI throughout its organizational structure. One area of work for the OESL Team is to facilitate an organization-wide approach to improving culture and embedding organizational values within work across the organization.

The entire First 5 LA team is leaning into the opportunity to embody new behaviors and habits to strengthen our organizational culture and build an increasingly diverse, equitable, and inclusive First 5 LA.

**Our Values**

-  **Collaboration:** Engaging with stakeholders early and often, in a manner that is open, respectful, and authentic, to effectively inform, plan, and execute our work
-  **Integrity:** Reflecting on our behaviors, decisions, policies, practices, and commitments and addressing inconsistencies with our values
-  **Learning:** Cultivating a culture of curiosity, innovation, listening with humility, and adapting to continuously improve our work and grow together to be the most effective we can be
-  **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Advocating for fairness and promoting full participation of people with diverse identities, economic status, opinions, and beliefs within public and community systems and organizations, including our own

## About this Report

This report is a public statement of the commitments First 5 LA has made to advance DEI within the organization. It represents the collective work of 63 colleagues who spent 11 months (October 2021 – August 2022) collaborating to develop and adopt a set of recommendations grounded in data and input from the 99 colleagues across the organization who were employees of First 5 LA at that time.

This report represents an important DEI milestone. The commitments contained herein reflect First 5 LA's intentional efforts to move beyond the naming of DEI as an organizational value to concrete actions that bring about the culture sought by colleagues at all levels of the organization: a culture of belonging, healing, safety, learning, and trust. We will use this report as a beginning point for prioritizing and sequencing DEI implementation strategies, balancing the long-term nature of this work with near-term opportunities to integrate our DEI commitments into existing work, processes, and internal and external relationships.

Our partners can use this report to inform their own thinking about how to embody DEI within their organizations. This in no way suggests that First 5 LA has all the answers. In many ways, we are entering the DEI discourse late, however we do have an interest in being a thought partner, contributing to and learning from our external partners and communities working to advance DEI throughout Los Angeles County. This report is a step in that direction.

This report is structured in five parts:

- [Part I: Opportunities for Improvement](#)
- [Part II: Employee-Driven Planning Process](#)
- [Part III: First 5 LA's 12 DEI Commitments](#)
- [Part IV: Next Steps](#)
- [Part V: Learning and Reflections](#)

# PART I: OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In the spring of 2021, Seed assessed various elements of First 5 LA as they relate to DEI, including understanding and acumen, policies, procedures and practices, and the strategic plan. This data was captured through interviews, focus groups, an all-team survey, document review, and best practice research.

Anyone in the organization who wanted to participate in an interview or focus group was invited to participate. In total, 83 participants from across the organization engaged in the process.

Preliminary data was shared with First 5 LA employees and the Board of Commissioners in the summer and fall of 2021. In addition, a Board of Commissioners survey was conducted to gauge commissioners understanding of and support for DEI.

Data across all collection methods revealed four opportunities for improvement:

- 1. DEI Acumen:** There is varied DEI understanding, confusion about First 5 LA's definition of equity, and the need for development, coaching, and training for employees and Commissioners.
- 2. Procedures and Norms:** Organizational culture was described as hierarchical, siloed, perfectionist, risk adverse, rigid, with layered decision-making driving overpreparation and over thinking.
- 3. Policy and Practice Alignment:** There is work to be done on aligning policies and practices with organizational values, particularly in the areas of human resources, grantmaking, and procurement.
- 4. Strategic Plan:** There are opportunities to better infuse DEI within First 5 LA's strategic plan, connecting DEI to child outcomes.

**Justice requires creating a system that is fair for everyone. It is the long-term goal of equity practices.**

A discussion on each of these areas follows.

### DEI Acumen

*There is varied DEI understanding, confusion about First 5 LA's definition of equity, and the need for development, coaching, and training for employees and Commissioners.*

Survey, focus group, and interview data revealed differing definitions and understanding of DEI among the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners and employees. When employees were asked if First 5 LA has a clear organization-wide definition of equity and/or an equity statement, about half said Yes and the other half said No. Interview and focus group data suggest that the organization values DEI but does not understand it or what is needed to implement this value. When commissioners were asked to define equity, some responses erroneously described equity as equality.

Though DEI knowledge and understanding varies, commissioners and employees understand the importance of applying DEI and related concepts (e.g., anti-racism, belonging, justice) to First 5 LA's work. In fact, in the board survey, commissioners indicated that anti-racism, justice, and equity are most important in helping them fulfill their governance role. Diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, anti-racism, and justice were identified as equally important in helping First 5 LA fulfill its role as an agent of systems change.

Seed noted lessons from field experts who elevated the importance of common DEI language. Commissioners and employees alike requested DEI-specific learning opportunities to help them better understand and apply DEI and related concepts to First 5 LA's work.

**Diversity** is the presence of differences and variations of identifying characteristics and life experiences.

**Equity** is fairness and justice achieved through systematically addressing disparities in opportunities, outcomes, and representation and redressing [those] disparities through targeted actions.

**Equality** is about sameness, and the same treatment regardless of circumstance.

**Inclusion** is inviting individuals into environments and spaces from which they were historically excluded.

**Belonging** is inclusion plus meaningful contributions of individuals with various identities, perspectives, and positions.

**Anti-racism** is the active dismantling of racism, not the opposite or absence of racism. To practice anti-racism, one must understand the root causes and dynamics of racism.

## Procedures and Norms

*Organizational culture was described as hierarchical, siloed, perfectionist, risk adverse, rigid, not nimble, with layered decision-making driving overpreparation and over thinking.*

Learning is a First 5 LA organizational value. However, data from employee focus groups and interviews suggests we have a way to go in being a true learning organization: one that builds and shares knowledge, promotes innovation, facilitates free exchange of ideas, and adapts to changes in external context as well as learning from our colleagues, partners, and communities. While we endeavor to be this type of learning organization, data suggests that there are aspects of our culture that perpetuate silos, perfectionism, and aversion to risk.

This finding also points to the need for greater alignment and integration of the work internally across teams as well as greater intentionality around “pulling back the curtain” to improve transparency. The data indicates that decision-making is concentrated at the top, which leaves some colleagues feeling disempowered and unheard. As a result, there are feelings of “input fatigue” and a desire for clear decision-making structures that differentiate decision-making authority at the senior leadership level, authority of employees at other levels, and when it is most appropriate for collective decision-making to occur. Though this is an area for improvement, data also suggests that internal practices are already shifting positively toward authentic engagement of a diversity of employee voices and positions, as appropriate, prior to decisions being made. There have also been more intentional efforts to share with team members how input has been or will be used.

Reflecting further on the data, employees noted the onerous level of preparation required for Board presentations and the fear of making a mistake in such a public setting. When asked about board meeting culture, most commissioners (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that the board meetings support open, robust discussions between commissioners and employees and ensure all voices are heard. Commissioners also noted an interest in cultivating a board meeting environment where people – Board and staff alike – feel comfortable taking risks, asking questions, being curious, and learning.

Commissioners also provided feedback encouraging the development of feedback mechanisms to hear from stakeholders about what is working and not working and holding ourselves accountable for continuous improvement.

## Policy and Practice Alignment

*There is work to be done on aligning policies and practices with organizational values, particularly in the areas of human resources and procurement.*

Seed’s review of internal documents focused primarily on human resources, procurement, and the strategic plan. A discussion of the strategic plan will be covered in the next section.

In terms of human resources, they found the need to update policies and practices (e.g., recruitment, hiring, retention, succession, performance evaluation, harm prevention) for greater integration of organizational values. They noted that First 5 LA has an opportunity to strengthen existing personnel policies, procedures and practices to ensure they are transparent, inclusive, and equitable, with priority attention to onboarding new employees, performance evaluations, promotions, and professional development.

In addition to human resource policies, Seed’s document review elevated the need for improving processes that promote equitable access to funding. When employees brought the updated procurement policy to the Board of Commissioners for approval in September 2021, the updated language reflected a commitment to address barriers to participation in procurement particularly for local small business, social and community business enterprises. This includes minority-, women-, disabled veterans-, disadvantaged-, and LGBTQ-owned businesses.

Data in this area suggests metrics and monitoring methods are needed to ensure policy and practice alignment with organizational values and to address misalignment.

First 5 LA is not alone in the need to update and improve policies. Seed presented a summary of their best practice research to First 5 LA’s Board in October 2021 and noted similarities to the philanthropic, nonprofit, government, and corporate sectors. All these sectors made DEI changes in the areas of Programs, Grantmaking, Products, Services, Work with Communities, and Human Resources. The philanthropic, nonprofit, and government sectors also made DEI changes to Vision, Mission, Purpose and DEI Monitoring, Evaluation, and Accountability. All but the government sector made DEI changes to Governance, Policy, and Evaluation.

Seed’s research affirms that the process First 5 LA is undertaking to integrate DEI into its work and internal operations is consistent with best practices and lessons from field experts.

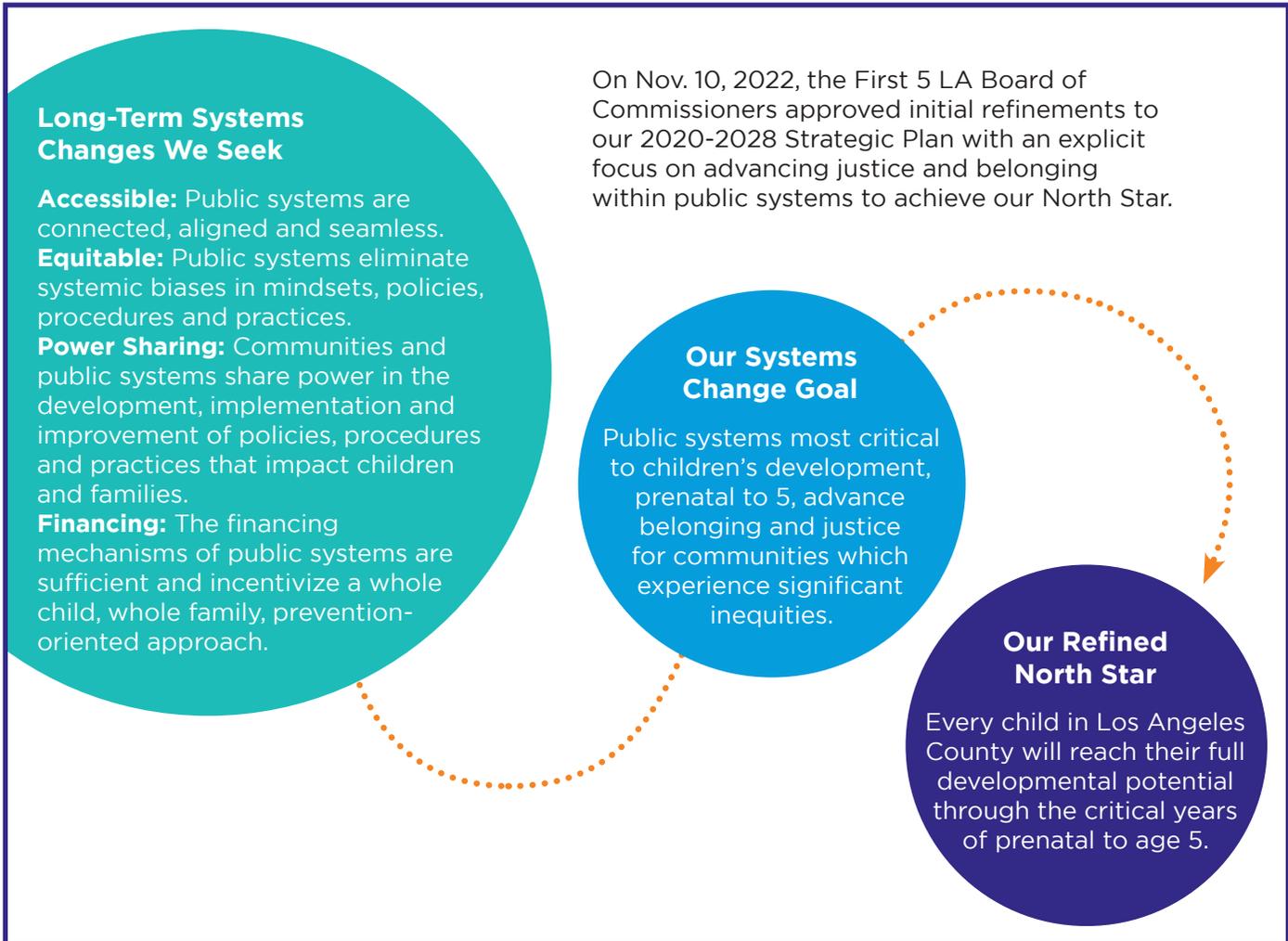
**Strategic Plan**

*There are opportunities to better infuse DEI within First 5 LA's strategic plan, connecting DEI to child outcomes.*

When the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners approved the 2020-2028 Strategic Plan, they reaffirmed an organizational focus on systems change. Some interview and focus group participants noted that the move to systems change has been challenging for the organization and community. However, the move brought stability, strategic thinking, and focus.

Some participants suggested that First 5 LA take on work that directly relates to the North Star and narrow the scope of work to do more high-impact grantmaking and be bold for children. Commissioners noted the need for being clear and unapologetic about the target populations First 5 LA focuses on - children prenatal to age 5 - in order to achieve the greatest impact by connecting our DEI work to child outcomes. These suggestions encouraged First 5 LA to be more focused in our approach to improve outcomes for children, families, and communities experiencing the greatest inequities.

Seed's review of First 5 LA's strategic plan noted multiple layers and confusing terminology, suggesting that there are different interpretations of what First 5 LA is trying to accomplish, why, and how. This is consistent with what we have heard from employees, external partners, and communities. Other than DEI as an organizational value and equity as an investment guideline, DEI does not show up throughout our strategic plan. Yet, as noted above under DEI Acumen, the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners indicated the importance of anti-racism, justice, and equity in helping them fulfill their governance role. Commissioners highlighted diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, anti-racism, and justice as equally important in helping First 5 LA fulfill its role as an agent of systems change. Likewise, employees have noted the implications of inequities in First 5 LA's work and the importance of understanding and elevating the lived experiences of communities, grantees, and colleagues to advance anti-racism and justice in our work.



## PART II: EMPLOYEE-DRIVEN PLANNING PROCESS

The organizational assessment conducted by Seed provided valuable insights that enabled First 5 LA to look objectively at the areas in which we have opportunities to improve. In particular, the data around procedures and norms warranted an inclusive employee-driven planning process that would yield recommendations for advancing DEI while also modeling the kinds of practices that facilitate belonging in the organization. We wanted meaningful dialogue, reflection, and ideas from colleagues at all levels and in all positions across the organization. We intended for the process itself to strengthen relationships, increase trust, and promote collective ownership of our organizational culture.

### DEI Governance Board

The DEI Governance Board (DEIGB) was established as an employee-driven, decision-making, and coordinating body to facilitate the goal of cultivating belonging through the development of recommendations that address First 5 LA's areas of needed improvement and advance DEI organization-wide. Its purpose was to 1) review Seed's assessment data, 2) reflect on experiences identified by colleagues, partners, and communities, 3) design and implement processes to engage colleagues across the organization in developing recommendations, and 4) adopt a set of recommendations that would guide the next phase of First 5 LA's DEI journey.

Based on Seed's experience and consultation, the DEIGB included those with and without formal authority in the organization to disrupt deference to hierarchy in the planning process. Seed suggested the following composition and criteria for serving on the DEI Governance Board:

- 2-3 employees that hold informal authority within the organization (defined as individuals who are not directors and above but have influence over strategies, policies, and processes within the organization)
- 2-3 employees working on equity initiatives within the organization
- Executive Director
- Executive Vice-President/Chief Program Officer
- Director of Human Resources
- Chief Data Officer
- Chief Transformation Officer
- Chief Operating Officer

Based on the suggested composition and criteria, the DEIGB would have been a group of 12 members, which [research suggests](#) is the

maximum membership for effective decision-making. However, recognizing the implications of limiting participation in the context of cultivating belonging, First 5 LA's Office of Equity, Strategy, and Learning reconfigured and expanded the DEIGB to no more than 20 members with the following additional criteria:

- 2-3 employees with diverse perspectives about First 5 LA's DEI journey or perspectives unknown
- Representation from each of the 15 teams within the organization to ensure feedback loops between the DEIGB and teams
- Opportunities for those who indicated interest in serving on the DEIGB via an employee interest form

With the addition of these criteria, the DEIGB was comprised of 19 colleagues, intentionally including representation from all levels: senior leadership, directors and managers, administrative coordinators, program officers, and operations colleagues.

### Building Blocks for Belonging within the DEIGB

The DEIGB was designed to facilitate belonging through structures of co-creation, shared power, and consensus decision-making. These building blocks created the conditions for thoughtful inquiry, critical analysis of data, and embracing diverse perspectives to inform their thinking and DEI recommendations.

### Co-Creation and Shared Power

In organizations with hierarchical structures, senior leaders set direction and have the decision-making authority to determine whether, when, and how the organization will change. While the involvement of senior leaders is vital, First 5 LA was intentional about the co-creation of DEI recommendations with colleagues at different levels and positions across the organization. We wanted structures and processes for building buy-in, cultivating trust, garnering diverse perspectives, and breaking down hierarchies. The DEIGB was one such structure. Recognizing the importance of co-creation beyond the 19 members of the DEIGB, subcommittees were created to enable any colleague to get involved in the co-creation of recommendations for advancing DEI at First 5 LA. No colleague who raised their hand to join a subcommittee was turned away.

We also made it mandatory for all 16 members of the First 5 LA Leadership Team (directors

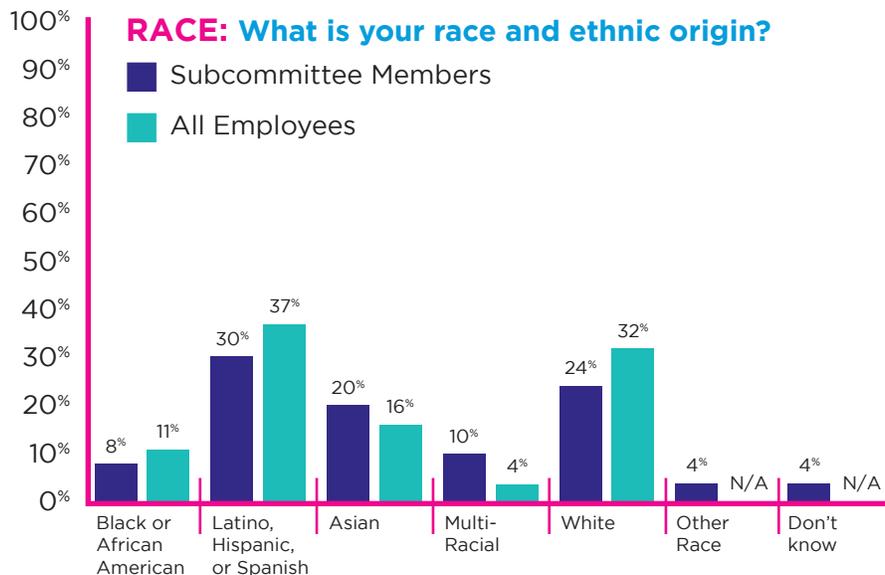
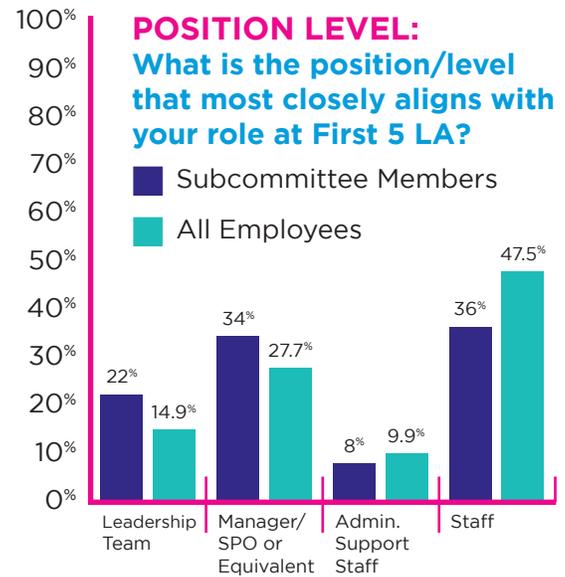
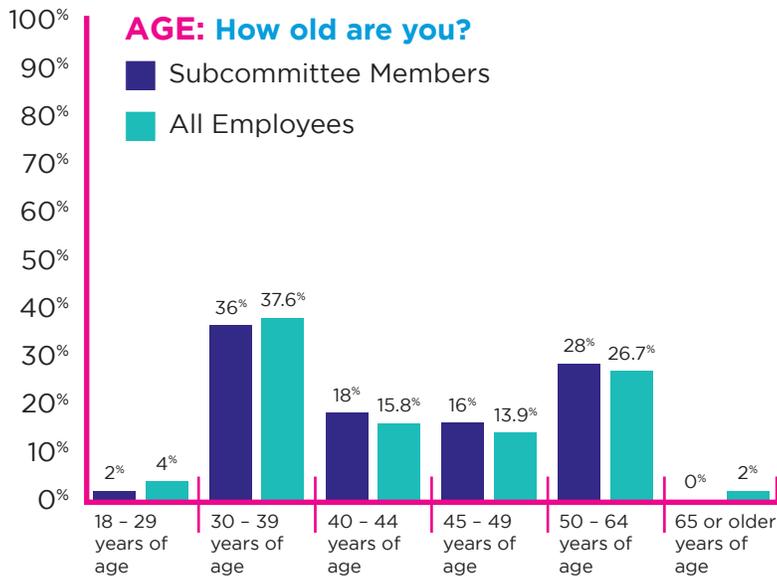
and above) to participate in subcommittees regardless of whether they were members of the DEIGB. This was to ensure that the Leadership Team contributed to the development of recommendations, had a line of sight and buy-in to the work as it was unfolding, and was held accountable for the success of the co-creation process.

Employees self-selected which subcommittee they wanted to join. In total, 64% of the organization (63 of 99 colleagues) participated in subcommittees.

An optional and anonymous demographic survey was distributed to subcommittee participants to

determine the extent to which subcommittees represented organizational demographics. Subcommittee members were asked to self-identify in the areas of age, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. A total of 50 subcommittee members completed the survey. This information was compared to demographic data First 5 LA collects for all employees (i.e., age, race, gender) as required by law. Though First 5 LA does not collect data on sexual orientation and gender identity, the anonymous survey included this question to ensure inclusivity across identities. Data also includes position level of subcommittee participants in comparison to First 5 LA's total employee population.

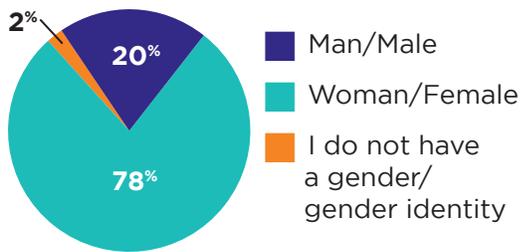
### Subcommittee demographics in relation to organizational demographics



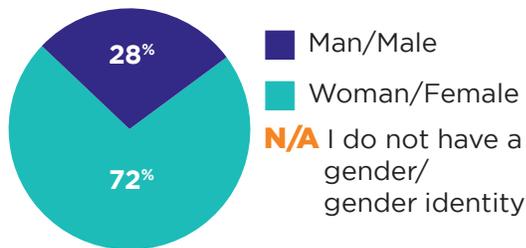
**GENDER / GENDER IDENTITY:**

When it comes to my gender identity, I think of myself as:

**Subcommittee Members**  
(Gender Identity)

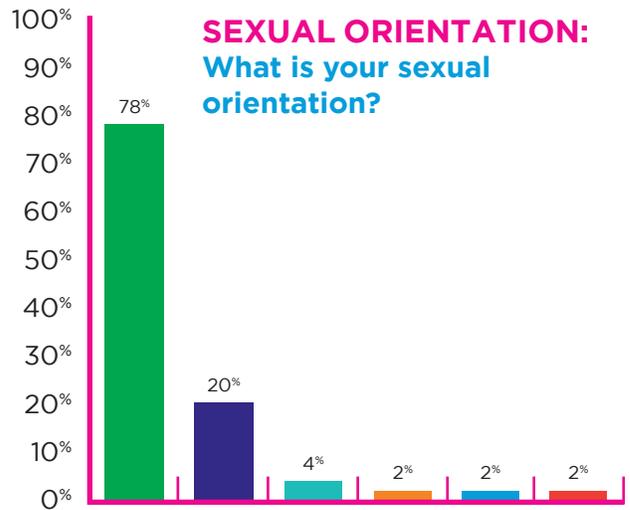


**All Employees**  
(Gender only)



**SEXUAL ORIENTATION:**

What is your sexual orientation?



**Subcommittee Members**

- Straight/heterosexual
- Gay
- Queer
- Bisexual
- I am not sure who I am attracted to sexually
- I do not wish to answer this question

*\*Survey respondents were able to choose multiple responses to this question.*

The inclusiveness of the subcommittees was vital for genuine co-creation and power sharing among colleagues with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. As the solution-generating arm of the DEIGB, subcommittees were responsible for 1) reviewing Seed’s assessment data, 2) reflecting on the experiences of colleagues, partners, and communities, 3) conducting pertinent, targeted research, and 4) adopting a set of recommendations that would guide the next phase of First 5 LA’s DEI journey. Subcommittees were self-facilitated and self-organized with Seed playing an advisory role.

Members of each subcommittee worked closely together over the spring and summer of 2022 to develop recommendations. Though subcommittees represented 64% of the organization, the DEIGB wanted to ensure colleagues had an opportunity to weigh-in before formal decisions were made. Opportunities for full organizational engagement included all-team meetings, use of anonymity-based tools such as Google Jamboard to capture input and questions, office hours held by Seed and the Office of Equity, Strategy and Learning (OESL), and team-specific meetings facilitated by members of the DEIGB and leadership team.

**Consensus Decision-making**

Barring any decisions that are under the purview of First 5 LA’s Board of Commissioners, the DEIGB was sanctioned to make decisions on behalf of the organization, which meant equal distribution of decision-making power regardless of level or position in the organization. The DEIGB used a consensus voting process – i.e., one person, one vote – so that every person’s voice and vote mattered in every decision. To assist the DEIGB in the consensus voting process, a tool called the “gradients of agreement” was used to help members express their level of support for a commitment. Subcommittees also used this kind of consensus decision-making process as they explored ideas and determined which recommendations to elevate to the DEIGB for consideration and adoption.

After 11 months of listening, learning, reflection, deliberation, and refinement, the DEIGB adopted 12 recommendations organized in three priority areas. With approval by the DEIGB, they now represent First 5 LA’s DEI commitments.

A description of each priority area and commitment is presented in the next section.

## PART III: FIRST 5 LA'S 12 DEI COMMITMENTS

The 12 DEI commitments adopted by the DEIGB are organized around three priorities, which are foundational to the transformational changes we seek at First 5 LA.

- **Strategic Direction and Values:** Ensuring there is consistency between First 5 LA's strategic plan, values, culture, and organizational identity.
- **Culture, Internal Relationships and Experiences:** Engaging our colleagues in ways that strengthen relationships, increase trust, and promote collective ownership of our work

and organizational culture. Also addressing internal policies, practices, norms, behaviors, and mindsets that may be barriers to culture change.

- **Interpersonal and Institutional Relationships with Grantees and Partners:** Maximizing First 5 LA's impact through stronger relationships with grantees and partners, and more equitable grantmaking and contracting processes.

This section describes each of the commitments associated with the three priority areas.

<b>Strategic Direction and Values:</b> <i>Ensuring there is consistency between our strategic plan, values, culture, and organizational identity.</i>	
Commitment	Rationale
<b>1</b> Streamline the strategic plan and use it to deepen alignment among employees and Board of Commissioners around a shared organizational culture and identity grounded in outcomes we will hold ourselves accountable for and the values we will live in support of achieving these outcomes.	Through strategic plan review and refinement, there is an opportunity to deepen commissioner and employee understanding of the outcomes we seek, connection to each other and the organization, and effectiveness of our partnerships.
<b>2</b> Ensure funding opportunities aimed at systems change are grounded in an explicit problem statement and informed by an understanding of root causes that contribute to the problem(s) we seek to address.	First 5 LA's work must be informed by an explicit statement of the conditions we intend to address, associated historical and present-day factors, and a root cause analysis in order to contribute to significant systems change for Los Angeles County children.
<b>3</b> Work in partnership with individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions that have lived experience and expertise with the conditions we seek to address in order to understand root causes and develop credible and viable strategies.	The insights of those who have lived experience with the conditions that impede or promote optimal development of young children can enhance First 5 LA's systems change goals and strategies. Those with lived experience also have a significant stake in and commitment to seeing those conditions improve and should be recognized and valued as key partners/ collaborators.

## Culture, Internal Relationships and Experiences:

*Engaging our colleagues in ways that strengthen relationships, increase trust, and promote collective ownership of our work and organizational culture. And addressing internal policies, practices, norms, behaviors, and mindsets that may be barriers to culture change.*

Commitment	Rationale
<p><b>4</b> Commit resources to improve our individual and collective skillsets and mindsets at all levels of the organization to create safe and brave spaces and embed practices into organizational processes that enable colleagues to dialogue, learn, and reflect with each other on how to improve our work together, embody, practice, and live our values, and nurture a culture of belonging, healing, safety, learning, and trust.</p>	<p>To nurture an organizational culture grounded in our values, we must develop infrastructure, and invest resources and employee time to learn to create brave and safe spaces and align our intentions around who we want to be with each other.</p>
<p><b>5</b> Formalize practices for shared leadership and identify the most appropriate opportunities to apply those practices to support learning, inclusivity, power-sharing, and co-ownership of our work and culture.</p>	<p>While opportunities for formal promotions are limited due to the organization’s structure, there are many opportunities to ensure all employees feel invested in and have formal and informal opportunities for growth through the intentional development of shared leadership practices that can be applied to areas of work most conducive to a shared leadership model.</p>
<p><b>6</b> Engage colleagues in the design and implementation of a decision-making approach with input, feedback, and communication channels to foster greater trust and transparency, and that acknowledges different types, context, and impact of decisions, addresses existing pain points, communicates context and impact of decisions, and distributes decision-making to appropriate roles.</p>	<p>Developing an approach that strengthens the diversity of perspectives in decision-making will promote greater transparency, help address lack of trust, and provide clarity for employees on what decisions they are empowered to make and how input will be considered.</p>
<p><b>7</b> Engage colleagues in the development of a leadership philosophy with clear expectations and behaviors at individual, interpersonal, and group levels that is applied to all employees, differentiated by function and roles as appropriate, and that includes employee development and accountability mechanisms to ensure that First 5 LA’s Leadership Team, managers, and team dynamics support a culture of belonging, healing, safety, learning, and trust and enables First 5 LA to do its best, most high-impact work.</p>	<p>Our individual behaviors can encourage or inhibit inclusion and belonging. Focusing on developing a leadership philosophy and behaviors at all levels of the organization helps to sustain high-performing teams to get results while fostering continuous learning along the way.</p>
<p><b>8</b> Strengthen personnel policies, practices, and processes for recruitment, hiring, on-boarding, professional development, performance evaluations, promotions, and reclassifications to ensure they are transparent, mission and values aligned, trauma informed, and reflect best practices in DEI and human resources.</p>	<p>Improvements in policies and processes that integrate trauma-informed and best practices in DEI and human resources will help First 5 LA to achieve a diverse organization at all levels, create a more holistic hiring process, and strengthen baseline orientation to First 5 LA work, values, and culture across the organization. These improvements also help all employees feel invested in formal and informal opportunities for growth.</p>
<p><b>9</b> Develop formal policies, practices, and processes that bolster existing harm prevention policies and practices to ensure psychological safety, support colleagues with related behavior change, and objectively resolve incidents of harm.</p>	<p>Current policies do address sexual harassment, discrimination and retaliation, and there are opportunities to strengthen and develop policies and practices to delineate other incidents of harm as well as ensure policies are clear, provide sufficient detail, outline key steps, and align with our organizational values.</p>

**Interpersonal and Institutional Relationships with Grantees and Partners**  
*Maximizing our impact through stronger relationships with grantees and partners, and more equitable grantmaking and contracting processes.*

Commitment	Rationale
<p><b>10</b> Strengthen relationships with grantees and other system and community partners, grounded in our organizational values and a commitment to transparency, trust, and mutual accountability.</p>	<p>Strong relationships with our grantees and external partners are critical to achieving the outcomes we are committed to, fully living our values, and building a culture of belonging. To do this we must communicate a clear strategic direction and engage our grantees and partners in ways that are consistent with our values.</p>
<p><b>11</b> Develop robust, accessible, and fair procurement and outreach strategies that address barriers to participation and ensure equitable opportunity and access for all organizations.</p>	<p>Eliminating or reducing barriers (such as excessive requirements, lack of knowledge of opportunities, complex or unclear processes, etc.) allows organizations of different sizes, backgrounds, geographies, etc. greater opportunity to apply for funds and participate in our grantmaking process.</p>
<p><b>12</b> Simplify and clarify contract terms and conditions, budget modification guidelines, and reporting requirements to reduce burden and improve accessibility and understanding.</p>	<p>Some contractors and grantees have provided feedback around the need for more flexibility and trust and the rigidity and cumbersome nature of our processes. Simplifying and streamlining paperwork enables our grantees and contractors to focus on the work. By simplifying and providing clarity and flexibility in our processes, we can ensure compliance with legal requirements and First 5 LA’s fiscal stewardship responsibilities while supporting our diverse partners to focus on mission critical work.</p>

**PART IV: NEXT STEPS**

The 12 DEI commitments are essential principles for how we will do our internal and external work. Making these commitments concrete through measurement and action is the next step. We will identify key DEI outcomes, metrics, benchmarks, and implementation actions. Our goal is to be explicit about the internal changes we seek, how we will measure change, the specific actions we will take, and how we will track our progress for continuous improvement.

There are opportunities for immediate action. For example, in the near term, First 5 LA is in the midst of refining our 2020-2028 Strategic Plan and there are immediate opportunities to integrate DEI commitments.

For instance, our refinement effort focuses on clarifying what First 5 LA is trying to accomplish, grounded in root cause analysis and the perspectives of those with lived experience. This is consistent with the DEI commitments related to strategic direction and values. This is just one

example of how our DEI commitments will be integrated into the work of the organization in the near term.

The adoption of the 12 DEI commitments represents a pivotal moment in First 5 LA’s evolution, and there is hard work yet to be done. To fully live our organizational values, advance our DEI journey, and contribute to meaningful systems change, First 5 LA is leaning in and holding ourselves accountable for shifting patterns within our organization that limit our ability to do the best work possible at a scale worthy of Los Angeles County’s most vulnerable children and families.

## PART V: LEARNING AND REFLECTIONS

First 5 LA endeavors to contribute to the larger DEI discourse in the county and be a thought partner to other organizations who are also on a DEI journey. To that end, below are some of our key learnings from over the last year.

### **DEI should not be considered a separate area of work.**

DEI is the work. We cannot separate our why - the impact we seek - from who we are and how we work together and with our partners. Organizational culture has a direct impact on our ability to do the externally facing work. As an agent of systems change, we must shift our own mindsets, how we show up with each other internally and in external spaces, and we must address systemic inequities including those to which we directly or inadvertently contribute. We cannot achieve the impact we seek in Los Angeles County without integrating DEI into our day-to-day work.

### **Process is culture shaping.**

The process for developing and adopting First 5 LA's 12 DEI commitments has been culture shaping. We created the DEIGB structure and process to foster collaboration across a diversity of levels, positions, and perspectives to test new ways of working together across the organization and model a culture of belonging. With the process being time and resource intensive (i.e., 11 months, more than 60% of employees involved in multiple meetings), we are exploring ways to strengthen authentic collaboration among colleagues using various processes and structures that are not as time and resource intensive as the DEIGB while still cultivating a culture of belonging.

### **This is a journey not a destination.**

When we started this work in January 2021, we anticipated the review of data and adoption of recommendations within six months. We learned that socialization of data and organization-wide engagement and planning take time to be

done well. If we had moved too swiftly, we likely would have inhibited deeper learning, collective creativity, and shared leadership to cultivate the type of culture we endeavor to create.

This work is not about checking boxes and implementing quick fixes. It is about unearthing the root causes of inequity within the organization and systemically working to address inequities in collaboration with colleagues at all levels and positions. Real organizational change takes time and an unwavering commitment to learning and improvement, recognizing that our best laid plans may not work, and we will stumble along the way.



### **Organizational context matters.**

There is no one "right" way; organizational context matters. There is no perfect roadmap or template for integrating DEI into an organization's work. Though our consultants talked to field experts as part of their best practice research, we needed to be responsive to the internal and external context of our own organization. What may work in one organization might not work for First 5 LA and the reverse is also true: what works for First 5 LA might not work for other organizations. Therefore, each organization must determine what will work best in their context based on learning from others, hearing from colleagues, and assessing environmental factors that impact the organization and its work.

### **Everyone must be willing to change.**

This work requires humility, empathy, gratitude, and a willingness to change policies, procedures, practices, and individual behaviors. Each of us has entered the workplace with different life and professional experiences, varied understandings, different perspectives, and a shared expectation to do better - these are strengths upon which we can build. However, we acknowledge that successful implementation of any DEI commitment requires that every person, regardless of level of position, is supported and held accountable for creating the conditions for nurturing a culture of belonging.

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