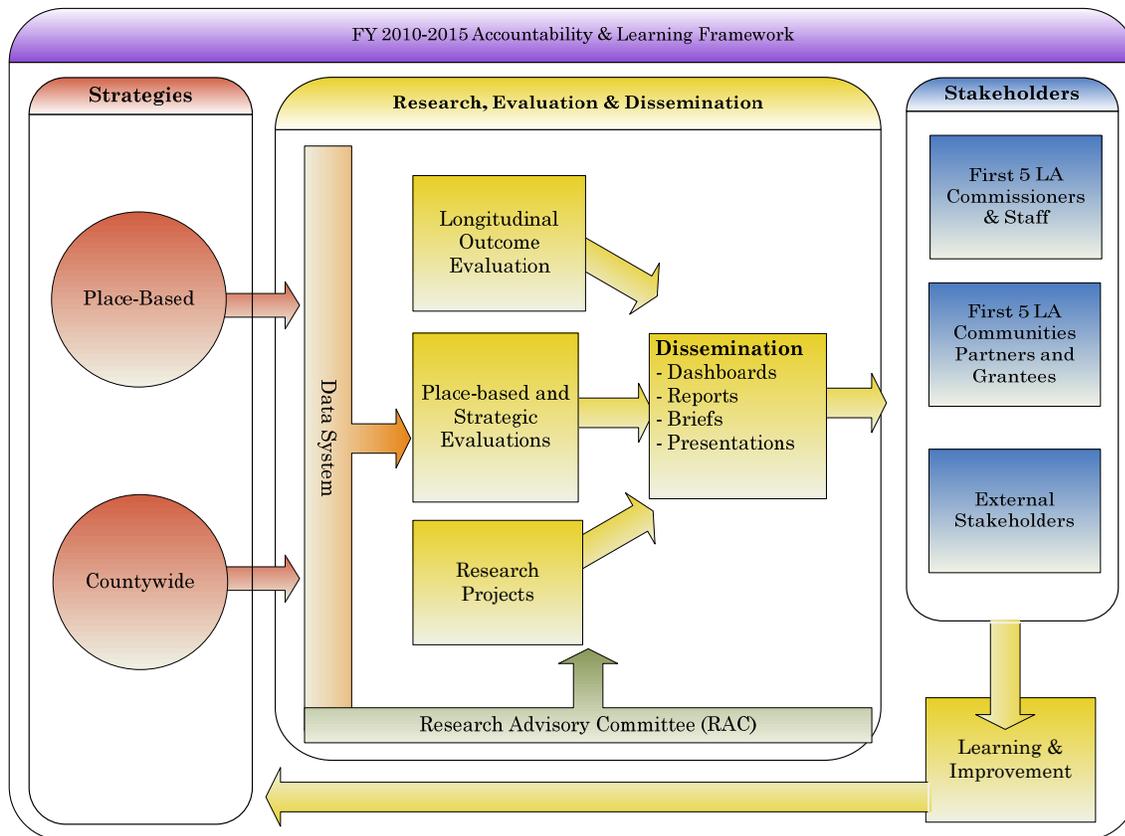


First5 LA's Accountability and Learning Framework

The Strategic Plan represents a major shift in the way First 5 LA will work to achieve our goal of enhancing the lives of expectant parents, children prenatal through five and their families. Our experience of nearly ten years of working in LA County has helped us to better understand that our existing approach to funding programmatic initiatives through grants to individual organizations across the County is not producing the level of change we desire for children and families. Likewise, an accountability approach which is focused on studying each programmatic initiative separately has not enabled us to demonstrate the collective impact of our investments. The Commission's decision to move to an integrated place-based and countywide funding approach, as opposed to initiative-based funding, is an effort to more intentionally focus on impacting the well-being of families and children by improving communities. Thus, our FY 2010-2015 Accountability and Learning framework (see diagram below) reflects an emphasis on place-based evaluation and understanding how we are improving outcomes countywide, as well as a strengthened emphasis on using results from evaluation and research projects to learn and improve our approach on an ongoing basis.

This implementation plan outlines the major types of activities we will engage in over the course of the Strategic Plan, as well as the tools we will use in support of these activities, specifically: a) a longitudinal study; b) place-based and strategic evaluations; c) research projects; d) dissemination activities; e) a research advisory committee (RAC); and f) the learning and improvement process.





Longitudinal Outcome Evaluation

The purpose of the longitudinal study is to evaluate the collective impact of our investments by studying changes experienced by young children and families within our target communities over time. We will do this by following a cohort of families within our target communities and a comparison group of families from outside our target communities from birth through third grade. A broad range of methods will be used, including but not limited to regular surveys of parents, direct child assessments and observations at various points throughout the child's development. In addition, we will explore the use of innovative qualitative data collection strategies such as digital storytelling to tell the story of how families and communities are changing over time and in response to our investments.

Place-Based and Strategic Evaluations

In addition to evaluating the impact of our investments through a longitudinal outcome evaluation, we will also engage in formative process evaluations to gather information about our place-based approach as well as to evaluate key countywide strategies. These evaluations will be long-term, comprehensive studies that offer a holistic understanding of the implementation of both the place-based approach on which we are embarking and the progress of our family strengthening (direct service) strategies.

The place-based evaluation will study the roll-out of our Strategic Plan from the perspective of our grantees, strategic partners, First 5 LA staff and Commissioners. The purpose of this investigation is to gather information that will document our process, and in turn help us improve the implementation of our investments in real time. The emphasis will be on qualitative data collection approaches using a participatory approach to evaluation.

In addition to the global place-based evaluation, we will conduct comprehensive evaluations of our place-based and countywide high investment strategies (e.g., the policy agenda). The purpose of these strategic evaluations is to understand the degree to which these strategies have been implemented successfully, to identify barriers and opportunities to change approaches as needed, and to document successful outcomes.

Research Projects

In addition to our evaluations which focus on studying the implementation and outcomes of our investments, we will also devote time and resources toward completing focused research projects that will be designed to respond to policy or program issues arising out of our evaluation work. These studies will be prioritized based on their feasibility, timeliness, opportunity for furthering the field, and the possibility of leveraging existing research partnerships. In the near term, Research and Evaluation staff have identified research projects focused on developing and identifying indicators and measures related to the newly designed dashboard, described below. Research in the area of measurement development will not only allow First 5 LA to better track our progress, but it will also contribute to the general knowledge base of those interested in the field of early childhood development.

Data System

To support our efforts, Research and Evaluation staff will rely on the comprehensive data system being developed by First 5 LA to collect data from grantees and share information about resources available for young children and families. This tool is designed to improve the quality of data First 5 LA collects from grantees and increase the availability of information about



resources available in our target communities. This data will be used by both First 5 LA and our grantees to evaluate progress and to modify programs as needed. Data collected through the data system will also support monitoring functions across the organization including contract, fiscal, and programmatic monitoring and compliance. While the Research and Evaluation staff will be responsible for monitoring the quality of the data collected, monitoring compliance will be the responsibility of other staff within the organization.

Research Advisory Committee (RAC)

The First 5 LA Research Advisory Committee (RAC), which was originally established to support research and evaluation activities for our preschool investments, will be realigned to support our overall efforts. The RAC will provide technical input, guidance, and advice to First 5 LA on early childhood research issues relevant to LA County and our strategic plan in particular. By utilizing both locally and nationally recognized early childhood experts, the RAC will provide essential technical knowledge to our work as well as increase the visibility and prominence of First 5 LA's research and evaluation efforts. In June 2010, Research and Evaluation staff will disseminate widely a request for nominations to identify qualified candidates for the RAC. The final RAC members will be announced in August 2010. The RAC will meet between one and three times per year for day-long meetings in Los Angeles, with the possibility of additional topical workgroup conference calls. First 5 LA's Research and Evaluation staff will set the meeting agenda and dates on an annual basis.

Dissemination Activities

A major goal of the FY 2010-2015 Accountability and Learning Framework is the timely dissemination of findings to community partners, First 5 LA staff, Commissioners, and the general public. A core approach to disseminating what we are learning will be the development of a dashboard as well as a coordinated plan for sharing findings via internal discussions, presentations, briefs and articles. The dashboard will help us track our progress toward making change in our priority measures and to promote our own learning and improvement. Through the dashboard, we will monitor changes in key indicators within the target communities as well as countywide trends. First 5 LA will also set goals for change on each of our priority measures, and will track progress towards making change on those goals via the dashboard. In addition to the dashboard, First 5 LA will continue to disseminate findings from the various projects through research briefs, reports, presentations, and publications in peer reviewed journals.

Learning and Improvement

Research and Evaluation staff will also facilitate the formation of an internal Learning and Improvement team in order to capitalize on staff expertise and promote meaningful use of our findings. The team will be comprised of key staff from across the agency and will meet on a regular basis to discuss study approaches, data collection questions, and to review recent findings. The team will also play an important role in dissemination activities.