

STRENGTHENING POLICY ADVOCACY:

A Decade of Lessons Learned from the First 5 Los Angeles Policy Advocacy Fund: 2008-2018



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Authors



Ersoylu Consulting
INTELLIGENT INSIGHTS FOR GOOD

Ersoylu Consulting is a woman-owned, Very Small Business Enterprise (VSBE) located in Costa Mesa, CA. Founded in 2007, Ersoylu Consulting provides strategic support to public agencies and private partners interested in meaningful social change. Our Planning, Research & Evaluation Services help clients accurately research issues, identify meaningful metrics, and attain impactful policy goals. We specialize in the interpretation of research and evaluation findings as well as policy analysis in economically and culturally diverse communities.

Background

Introduction

This report is an evaluation of First 5 LA's 10-year grantmaking investment into policy advocacy. The document provides insights gleaned from the period beginning with the first year of the Community Opportunity Fund (COF) (2008) through the final year of the Policy Advocacy Fund (PAF), Cycle II (2018). During this period, the COF and PAF were the primary grantmaking mechanisms through which First 5 LA impacted systems and policy change, ultimately increasing opportunities for children prenatal to age 5 and their families. This report identifies the practices, strategic shifts and overall impact of these grantmaking initiatives. We hope that the **lessons learned** will inform future grantmaking decisions for First 5 LA and other grantmakers looking to contribute to making lasting, systemic change.



Data & Methods

A multi-method approach was taken for this retrospective evaluation. For this report, Ersoylu Consulting relied on its own internal documents and memos, which were harvested during the 10-year span where our firm served as a technical assistance contractor to First 5 LA. In addition, this report used several other data sources including:

- » **Literature on systems and policy change**
- » **Internal First 5 LA documents (2008-2017)**
- » **Key informant Interviews with First 5 LA staff (2016-17)**
- » **Grantee surveys (January 2015, August 2016 and October 2017)**
- » **Grantee reports (2008-2018)**

Together, this information paints a picture of First 5 LA's evolution toward funding systems and policy change. We then summarize the impact of the fund and conclude by sharing lessons learned that can inform First 5 LA's future work.

Context: Literature from the Field

The evolution of First 5 LA's funding policy and systems change is aligned with the literature on field building. The literature on grantmaking for policy and systems change finds that funders should be **active field builders**, as this is a proven strategy for achieving systems change (Bornemeier, 2005; Kovick, 2005; The Bridgespan Group). More than achieving a singular policy goal, a "**field building**" approach to advocacy and policy grantmaking is designed to strengthen the whole field (e.g. Early Childhood Education Advocates) to more effectively advance, implement, and maintain various policies and systemic changes that can contribute to the foundation's larger mission (Beer, et al., 2012 in Jewla Lynn 2014, p. 3).

This more collaborative relationship with the grantees can empower participants and create relationship structures that are more reciprocal, an important feature of field building (Social Innovation Generation de L'innovation, 2018). By being in the field *alongside* grantees, grantmakers are better situated to assess and contribute to the field. Foundations are in a unique position to act across entire systems and support the mutually-reinforcing work of grantees (Bernholz 2010). This *relational* philanthropy – while not a common place term – is "...centered around trust, co-creation, and mutual respect. It is less about power and credit and is myopic on defining and achieving success" (Fulop, 2015).

Addressing complex social problems requires time to plan, implement, experience wins and make mistakes, learn and adapt. To accommodate this cycle, funders have turned to an **adaptive approach**, whereby funders have the flexibility to adapt to shifts in policy and/or administration (Ditkoff, 2014). Adaptive grantmaking requires both internal organizational shifts, as well as changes to the grantee-funder relationship. The research on grantmaking for social movements also supports the need for philanthropy to provide funding that is long-term, flexible, and patient (Bartczak, 2014). Research on community change initiatives demonstrates that policy and systems change requires a **long-term commitment**.



In addition, focused attention to **select topic areas** over a long period of time is another key to achieving desired systems outcomes (Downes, 2016; Powell, Huang, Foster, Boyd, & Sakaue, 2016). This orients systems actors to focus on a select “few key coordinated changes over time in order to achieve system-wide impacts that are significant and sustainable. This approach contrasts with people’s tendencies to try to do too much with too few resources and achieve less as a result” (Stroh, 2015, p. 22).

Lastly, research finds that technical assistance (TA) is best when **offered as a continuum** (Lan T. Le, 2016). Successful TA is reliant on “trusting, respectful working relationship characterized by reciprocal interaction and co-equal status” (Gibbs, 2009), and should be tailored to recipients’ needs and desired outcomes. Le et al. note that, “This synergy requires mutual goal setting with the recipient of the TA and having the recipient play a leadership role in determining needs and the methods to meet them” (Wesley, 2004; Lan T. Le, 2016). The support should empower and motivate recipients and providers, building confidence and efficacy if it is to be a fundamental ingredient in achieving positive outcomes (Hamilton, 2003).

First 5 LA: A Public Grantmaker Intent on Policy Impact

Prior to 2005, First 5 LA had conducted policy and advocacy work only on its own behalf (e.g. First 5 LA advocating directly for increased public funding for ECE). In 2005, First 5 LA began to direct a small portion of its grantmaking to have an **explicit system and policy change focus** through the Community Opportunities Fund (COF). This fund was designed to be responsive to the needs of organizations in LA County serving children from the prenatal stage to age 5 and their families by funding organizational and policy advocacy capacity building activities. This commitment to policy advocacy was strengthened and deepened through the transition to the Policy Advocacy Fund (PAF), cohorts I and II.

Over time, through the Strategic Plan iterations identified in the figure below, policy advocacy evolved from a marginal subset of a grantmaking fund (COF), to the focus of a dedicated fund (PAF I & PAF II) to a clear overarching driver of First 5 LA’s organizational strategy, as outlined in the most current Strategic Plan, *Focusing on the Future*.

The shift to policy and systems change was driven in large part by a vision championed by the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners. As one staff member noted, “*Policy was always woven into First 5 LA’s work but it was not always articulated, or brought to the top.*” Funding direct services was not having the desired, sustainable impact. As a result, First 5 LA made a fundamental shift in order to avoid a “never-ending cycle of funding.”





“Policy was always woven into First 5 LA’s work, but it was not always articulated, brought to the top.”

First 5 LA Program Officer

Phase I: Community Opportunity Fund (COF)

The COF, as approved in the *Open Grantmaking Implementation Plan*, began under the 2005 Strategic Plan, *The Next Five*. This plan had a total of three funding priority areas: (1) Early Learning, (2) Health, and (3) Safe Children and Families. Funding under COF could focus on any of the goals’ 13 outcomes. The COF’s first cycle of funding was issued in 2008, with over \$3 million funding 14 grantees (11 organizational capacity building and 3 Policy & Advocacy grantees). During the first two cycles of COF, grantees were not required to articulate specific policy goals. By the third grant cycle, grantees were required to articulate one policy goal, as it was noted, “*to have a longer lasting impact, we needed to support capacity for policy and advocacy work.*”

This initial entry into advocacy was met with apprehension by some. Because First 5 LA is funded by public dollars, having legal clarity on what advocacy activities staff and grantees were allowed to engage in was critical. As one interviewee noted, “For some in the organization, this shift to policy and advocacy represented a move they were not comfortable with – not only the shift to policy and advocacy, as First 5 LA would now contract federal and state lobbyists to support its policy agenda, but also a geographic shift that moved beyond Los Angeles County, to the State of California and nation.”

Institutional changes complemented these shifting priorities. The Policy Department was created in the 2009 Strategic Plan. Historically, there had been a Public Affairs Department and a Programs Department, under which policy staff were seated at different points in time. The Policy Department was also designated a First 5 LA Board of Commissioners Committee with whom it engaged regularly.

Additionally, in 2010, the Policy Department, rather than the Grants Management Department, began to manage the policy-related grants (although Grants Management would continue to oversee the COF capacity building grants). This reorganization paired the department best suited for the work with the particular area. Furthermore, as First 5 LA **increased its focus on policy**, the impact was magnified through increased alignment with state and federal lobbying efforts. As one staff member noted,

“We wanted to have more support from the state and federal lobbyists and have parallel tracks to being more invested in policy overall and being more open to invested differing ways to achieve it.”



The Transition

Prior to 2009, there was no official policy agenda; grantees aligned their work *only* to the Strategic Plan. In 2009, First 5 LA developed a Policy Agenda aligned with the 2009–2015 Strategic Plan, strengthening First 5 LA’s role as a public funder explicitly supporting policy advocacy. In this new iteration, First 5 LA began to explicitly align policy advocacy to the First 5 LA Policy Agenda, in addition to the Strategic Plan. This set the stage for the next iteration of the fund, the Policy Advocacy Fund (PAF). A clear distinction between COF and PAF was the criteria used to score grantee proposals. Overall, in PAF, there were **stricter criteria and a more strenuous review process** for grantees focused on policy advocacy.

	COF REVIEW TOOL CRITERIA	PAF REVIEW TOOL CRITERIA
1	Alignment to First 5 LA Strategic Plan	Alignment with First 5 LA Strategic Plan and First 5 LA Policy Agenda
2	Local focus on LA County	Local and Sacramento-based advocates can apply
3	No requirement in COF 1 for grantees new to First 5 LA; COF 2 required 60% “new to First 5 LA” grantees	Traditional organizations: existence of a plan to conduct outreach to traditional sectors; Nontraditional organizations: existence of a strong relationship with a mentor agency
4	Visibility and level of impact on the selected policy goal	Applicant defines evaluation measures and a plan to utilize evaluation findings during and at conclusion of project
5	Value added to applicant organization and First 5 LA	Applicant’s ability to leverage additional resources to complement grant funding
6	Identification of need for the project	Applicant accurately assesses policy landscape
7	Explanation of collaborative partnership	Applicant’s ability to utilize partnerships and collaborations to implement the project

A natural outcome of having stricter criteria was a shift toward funding applicants with deeper experience in policy and advocacy work—both **traditional and non-traditional** partners. Non-traditional partners would contribute to First 5 LA by, “broadening the base of support for 0-5 policy issues; expanding the number and type of voices speaking on behalf of this population and creating stronger alliances” (First 5 LA, 2011, p. 7).

One staff member recounted that during PAF II,

“We honed-in on non-traditional partners. In addition, if [applicants] partnered up with other nontraditional [organizations], that gave them a boost in points. We also changed the criteria to allow public entities (school districts, county agencies, etc) to apply. We permitted statewide groups to apply [whereas] in the past, you had to have a Los Angeles office. This made a big difference in the caliber of advocates that applied.”

In addition, First 5 LA also provided grantees with **technical assistance** in the form of a policy advocacy consultant. This support, beginning in 2009, was initially a combination of individualized grantee support and peer convenings. Under PAF, this support evolved and, in 2012, Ersoylu conducted a capacity building assessment which identified grantee learning topics of interest



and organizational development needs. As a result, Community Partners, an organization with extensive experience in organizational development and facilitation, was brought in as a subcontractor to support the evolution of the grantee convenings; this allowed the meetings to shift from being funder-driven to grantee-driven. In addition, during PAF II, funding was provided for tailored organizational development workshops orchestrated by Community Partners.

Lastly, while there was no formal evaluation conducted for the Policy & Advocacy component of COF, there was an 8% set aside in grantee budgets for evaluation in PAF I and 5% for PAF II. This shift may have been due to the technical assistance team providing evaluation support to the grantees as a part of their contract with First 5 LA. As a result, grantees did not have to use as large a part of their own budget as they would have on external evaluators, absent the technical assistance provided.

Phase II: Policy Advocacy Fund (PAF)

As PAF evolved in an increasingly policy-focused direction, the First 5 LA Strategic Plans did as well. The 2009-2015 Strategic Plan had four specific goal areas (as seen in the figure to the right). At the same time, it included systems improvements and community capacity building as key *Strategic Plan Investment Priority Areas* of the plan.

PAF included 23 grantees (13 in Cycle 1 and 10 in Cycle 2) receiving a total of \$10 million with grantees receiving up to \$500,000 for a maximum 5-year grant cycle. The fund focused on a multi-pronged effort including support for grantees engaged in diverse strategies ranging from policy development and issue education to advocacy and collaboration.



Outcomes

Systems and policy change is complex and takes time. As a result, First 5 LA created flexible, multi-year grants in which organizations could play to their strengths, align with partners, build relationships and respond quickly and effectively to policy opportunities as they arose.

Impact Areas

Over the course of a decade, the funding distribution shifted across the four goal areas. During PAF II, there was a dip in the focus on 'children maintain a healthy weight'. This may be in part due to both the relative decline in focus on obesity prevention and on the shift by advocates to focus on healthcare reform (ACA). At the same time, there was an increase in grantees focused on child welfare and access and quality care—more aligned with the goal areas “safe from abuse and neglect” and “born a healthy weight”.



2009-2015 STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS	COF	PAF I	PAF II
Babies are born healthy	3	5	5
Children maintain a healthy weight	5	7	2
Children are safe from abuse & neglect	4	2	5
Children are ready for kindergarten	3	3	2

Key Strategies

During the 10-year period, grantees contributed to the field in various ways. For instance, while some grantees worked on a pilot program with foster parents, others supported community engagement related to obesity prevention. Their varied areas of focus lent them to engage in diverse strategies, as seen below.

GRANTEE POLICY ADVOCACY STRATEGIES	COF	PAF I	PAF II	
Research/ Assessment	5	42%	4	40%
Training	1	8%	3	30%
Pilot Program	1	8%	0	0%
Community Engagement	3	25%	4	40%
Stakeholder Engagement	1	8%	4	40%
Coalition Building	1	8%	2	20%
Issue Advocacy	2	17%	2	20%
Policy Development	0	0%	3	30%
Policy Advocacy	1	8%	6	60%
Administrative Advocacy	6	50%	3	30%
Policy Implementation & Monitoring	1	8%	3	30%

During PAF, the strategies of policy development and advocacy increased, as did implementation, monitoring and stakeholder engagement. The strategies of community engagement, administrative advocacy and research each ebbed and flowed between 15-50% of the grantees under the different funds. Training also made a notable jump during PAF II whereas pilot programs decreased significantly during that time.

Grantee Impact Highlights

It is also important to also highlight some of the key success stories that emerged during the 10-year period. Below are four impact overviews that shed light on the diversity of both the topic areas pursued, as well as the strategies employed during the advocacy fund.



ECE Policy Agenda Setting with Local Champions

Public Counsel identified local policy mechanisms to expand access to early care for children ages 0-5 and worked to educate local leaders on how they could champion such policies. In collaboration with the Alliance for Better Community, First 5 LA and the Southeast Cities ECE Task Force, Public Counsel convened leading child advocates and city leaders in Cudahy on Friday, July 12, 2013 for the 6th Annual Symposium on Early Care and Education, focused on increasing funding to support quality early care programs in the Southeast communities. Additionally, statewide and national children's advocates including the Advancement Project, Children Now, and the Child Care Law Center presented strategies to attract spending for early care in the Southeast Communities.

After months of outreach, the symposium helped convince the cities of Bell Gardens and Cudahy to include child care friendly policies in their general plans. General Plans are an important local policy vehicle through which guidelines around zoning and other standards in the jurisdiction are communicated. First 5 LA funding provided Public Counsel staff the opportunity to research Southeast general plans and zoning codes so that they could make recommendations for reducing barriers to early care and education (ECE) facility development.

Developmental Disabilities Coalition Advocates for Policy Change

Special Needs Network's President co-chaired the Taskforce on Equity & Diversity for Regional Center Autism Services. The Taskforce was established in 2012 under the auspices of the California Senate Select Committee on Autism. During the 2013- 2014 Legislative Session the Taskforce completed its work, culminating in the creation of a comprehensive report with fourteen legislative recommendations. Of these, four were signed into law by the governor in October 2013. These were:

- » *SB 208 (Lara)*: Requires new "Request of Proposals" from regional centers to include a section to evaluate the applicant's ability to provide culturally and linguistically competent services.
- » *SB 367 (Block)*: Requires linguistic and cultural competency issues to be included in the mandated training and support for all regional center board members. Information about training and support that is provided shall be posted on the regional centers' websites.
- » *SB 555 (Correa)*: Requires the regional centers to make every reasonable effort to communicate in the native language of the client, guardian and/or family members during the process of developing an individual program plan or family services plan.
- » *AB 1232 (V.M. Perez)*: Requires that linguistic and cultural competency also be included as outcome measures as part of the Department of Developmental Services quality assessment of regional centers.

Community Engagement and Mobilization for Language Access Policy Change

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA (AAAJ-LA)'s *AAPI Health Care Reform Advocacy Network* worked in coalition with partners to address the need in Long Beach—where 45.5% of residents speak a language other than English at home—for public materials to be available in multiple languages. In July 2013, the City of Long Beach proposed a draft Language Access



“You [First 5 LA] are recognizing more accomplishments other than legislation and that is welcome. Not everything requires a legislative fix; nor, is that always or even often, the best approach.”

PAF Grantee

Policy that only addressed Spanish speakers and neglected other Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations. The Language Access Coalition (Coalition), comprised of over 10 community organizations, advocated for a more inclusive Policy. The Coalition gathered community input, stories, and priorities to present to elected officials. Coalition members and community residents then met with Council members to request the addition of Khmer, Tagalog, and Vietnamese languages to the policy. On August 13, 2013, over 100 community members representing Spanish, Khmer, and Tagalog speakers gathered at City Hall, several giving public comment.

The Long Beach City Council ultimately voted to approve and adopt comprehensive language access provisions, which included Spanish, Khmer, and Tagalog language access services in the policy. First 5 LA funding provided support to the coalition through AAAJ-LA’s AAPI Health Care Reform Advocacy Network, to achieve this policy victory, ensuring Long Beach policies are culturally and linguistically appropriate and providing immigrant communities with viable access to government services.

Resident Leadership Capacity for Obesity Prevention

Public Health Advocates (PHA) has a history of supporting resident leadership in the arena of obesity prevention. Through participating in their *Change Starts With Me* training program, residents in the City of South El Monte were able to learn about healthy habits, such as eating fresh fruits and vegetables and participating in physical activities, but also deepened their leadership and advocacy skills. One resident, Irene, is now a childcare provider for children ages 0-5. She now considers herself a health advocate leader after participating in the *Change Starts With Me* training, and further honing these skills through additional training opportunities. She has advocated for healthy beverages and snacks in city parks and community centers, conducted audits of vending machines in each city park, encouraged increased water consumption among children and their families and worked in partnership with the city of South El Monte staff to ensure that the nutrition standards policy was properly being implemented. Speaking about her training and advocacy experience, she noted, “Along with other childcare providers, I was trained on leadership, city resources, maps [asset maps], nutrition, and health implications of sugary drinks... I took a strong stand on this issue and wanted to make sure that there would healthier snacks and drinks in parks.” First 5 LA’s support of evidence-based leadership training programs has empowered childcare providers such as Irene to participate in the civic process and advocate for healthier communities. South El Monte parks now provide water and nutritious snacks options for children ages 0-5 and their families.



Lessons Learned

From the data, four key Lessons Learned emerged. The funding for policy and systems change should be **multi-year** and **fluid, yet-focused**. Funders should be actively involved and oriented toward **field building**. And lastly, **support** – whether from the funder directly or in the form of technical assistance – **should be adaptive**.

	1		TIMING IS EVERYTHING: Multi-year funding matters
	2		FLUID YET FOCUSED: Advocacy funding must be both
	3		SHIFT GEARS: Funder becomes an active player
	4		TAILOR-MADE: Technical assistance is dynamic



1. TIMING IS EVERYTHING: Multi-year funding matters

Policy and systems change require multi-year funding because policy and systems change takes time. This is well-established in the literature (see Foster-Fishman et al 2007) and was echoed by grantees in the October 2017 grantee survey (n=11). Table 1 identifies how grantees ‘score’ various elements of the fund (on a scale of 1-5). We can see that the grant amount and the multi-year grant length were identified as the most critical.

Table 1. Most Critical Grant Elements as Identified by Grantees, October 2017 Grantee Survey

FUND ELEMENT	SCORE
Grant amount	4.63
Multi-year grant cycle length	4.27
Evaluation budget provided	4.09
Opportunities for collaboration	4.09
Quality of grantee convenings/ TA support	3.77
Coordination of COF/PAF with other F5 LA initiatives (e.g. Best Start, Welcome Baby, etc.)	2.54



“The multi-year investment allowed for the necessary flexibility to account for political realities.”

PAF Grantee

In particular, grantees reported that multi-year funding provided the support they needed to: take advantage of new opportunities, retain staff, be flexible to changing political environment, as well as be creative and innovative (see Table 2).

Table 2. Benefits of multi-year funding, August 2016 Grantee Survey

MULTI-YEAR FUNDING ALLOWED US TO...	PERCENT	RESPONSE COUNT
Take advantage of new opportunities that arose	84%	16
Identify & retain qualified advocacy/policy staff	79%	15
Be flexible in our response to the ever-changing policy environment	79%	15
Be creative/innovative in our approach to the policy/advocacy work	79%	15
Sufficiently plan our project	74%	14
Plan for project financial stability	74%	14
Have a clear understanding of our impact, by learning from ongoing evaluation	53%	10

It is also important to note the benefits of funding focused on policy advocacy. Grantees noted that this type of funding is particularly critical because: **82% feel fundraising for their policy advocacy project is more difficult than fundraising for other programs.**

As mentioned above, multi-year funding allows for grantees to be flexible and creative, and allows them to make mistakes, learn from mistakes, and adapt accordingly. Lengthening the grant commitments to provide time space to adapt to policy shifts and political context is an effective strategy to help funders effectively support their grantees in achieving meaningful policy and systems change.¹



2. FLUID YET FOCUSED: Advocacy funding must be both

Funding must be *fluid*, insofar as grantees can respond to changes in the political environment or context using diverse and varying strategies as needed. At the same time, funding must also be *focused*, to the extent that grantees have a similar focus area with common goals and opportunities for collaboration.

1. For more on this topic see Downes (2016) No More Half Measure: Five Ways Foundations can Better Support Policy Campaign and Building Lasting Advocacy Capacity. Center for Evaluation Innovation. Accessed August 29, 2017 from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5543afc7e4b0a22c7d1e31d0/t/57fe582259cc683b7d545a78/1476286647813/NO_MORE_HALF_MEASURES.pdf.



In the grantee survey administered in October 2017, the vast majority of grantees noted that “what worked well” was: a) the flexibility to account for political realities and b) the fluidity of shifting their political targets as opportunities arose. In the grantee survey administered in January 2015 (n=22), 79% of organizations noted that as a result of their project work, other opportunities have arisen, and that their organization has been **well positioned to seize these new opportunities**. In addition, one grantee noted,

“We have been able to leverage our partnerships and work to more effectively engage our partners when relevant policy issues arise, provide possible solutions and recommendations based on our experiences, and encourage our partners to take action.”

The research on funding policy advocacy and systems change demonstrates that focusing attention on select topical areas over a long period of time is key to achieving desired outcomes (Downes 2016). However, during First 5 LA’s internal process, the Listening, Learning, and Leading (L3 campaign), it was noted that by distributing previous investments widely among diverse organizations, it was difficult for funding to make a sustained impact. The L3 process also demonstrated that previous systems change investments, “did not reflect a coherent, outcome-oriented approach” (First 5 LA, 2014, p. 3). One staff member reflected:

“COF had so many goals, it was muddy ... [It was] an evolution to make it more focused on policy: We asked them to do too many things and it wasn’t folks that specialized in policy so this new way we could attract those grantees who had a specialization in advocacy.”

This finding was aligned with the data from the January 2015 grantee survey, where **increased support of grantee coordination** was highlighted as an issue. The 2017 grantee survey further validated this, with several respondents suggesting, “there should be fewer grantees, but more focus”. The grantee surveys evidenced a desire to leverage one another more meaningfully in their advocacy work.

In the earlier years of COF, having diverse grantees—while challenging for strategy and collaboration—allowed for what one staff member referred to as “good groundcover”. This meant that they could ensure the policy fund was inclusive of all the key children’s issues of concern to the Commission and other key stakeholders. Therefore, there is a clear tradeoff for funders to risk losing ‘groundcover’ while gaining opportunities for field building and leverage.



3. SHIFTING GEARS: Funder becomes an active player

There are many ways that funders can support policy and systems change. Although First 5 LA is an active player in the advocacy field, grantees reported that First 5 LA could do more. Recall that the literature on grantmaking for policy and systems changes demonstrates that **funders should be active field builders** – they should engage as to understand the players, the funding landscape, and political context.



Table 3. Requests for F5 LA strategic support

ACTIVITY	PERCENT "VERY INTERESTED"
Strategize with other organizations about policy, advocacy, systems change or other topics.	82%
Engage in a discussion with F5 LA staff about how to get introduced to the people in the County offices and departments.	70%
Engage in a discussion with F5 LA staff about helping my organization get information about county systems and bureaucracies.	70%
Engage in a facilitated discussion with other grantees (or other policy organizations) to find common ground and collaborate on policy/systems change efforts.	70%
Learn new skills (e.g. communication, fundraising, lobbying) that I can use and customize for my own organization.	55%
Engage in a small group discussion with other grantees to learn from one another.	50%

In the January 2015 grantee survey, respondents noted that they would like First 5 LA to support their work in certain strategic ways, especially leveraging the funder's relationships in the community and media outreach and to further expand the First 5 LA brand. The table above provides a full listing of the additional supports requested.



4. TAILOR-MADE: Technical Assistance is dynamic

As PAF developed, the technical assistance provided to grantees also evolved. In the early years, First 5 LA conducted regular grantee convenings on funder-selected topics. Over time, as previously mentioned, the technical assistance team grew to include Community Partners, and convening topics were driven by grantee requests. In addition, the Ersoylu team assessed grantees to garner feedback on the technical assistance provided, both through convenings, as well as through individualized supports. The survey administered in January 2015 revealed that 87% of grantees found the training seminars useful. Grantees also noted that, as a member of the PAF cohort, their skills increased in the following ways:

- » 100% report that **project staff** increased their policy advocacy skills,
- » 89% report that the project staff developed expertise that they have **shared with others** at the organization,
- » 89% report their **leadership** increased their policy advocacy skills,
- » 56% report that their **board** increased their policy advocacy knowledge and awareness.

In the August 2016 grantee survey, respondents identified ways the PAF convenings could best support their needs:

- » *"We hear more from policy makers directly"*
- » *"We could talk about policy work in small groups, and by issue"*
- » *"Hear what the priorities of First 5 LA are and how partners can be helpful"*
- » *"Include learning and networking opportunities and/or feedback from First 5 LA"*



“I wish those grants were still available- there is nothing like what First 5 LA did with grantees, technical assistance, convenings and support over several years.”

PAF Grantee

Over the course of the decade, the technical assistance model has changed, often contingent on the program officers present. It is important to note that during the majority of the 10-year period, grantees could simply reach out to the TA provider and request support as needed. In one iteration however, grantees were required to complete a form in order to request TA. This resulted in a clear decline in the amount of technical assistance provided; grantees hesitated to ask for TA, as completing the form could be perceived as communicating ignorance. One staff member noted,

“Regarding the TA, they didn’t want to ask for it, it was a tendency to not want to air weaknesses, so they didn’t want to let First 5 LA know they weren’t up to snuff on certain elements. They were worried about not looking too confident. Just providing it [technical assistance], rather than having them ask for it—is more beneficial. Having ongoing trainings... and taking more advantage of the skills in the [grantee cohort] and having them share out with their fellow grantees.”

As one staff member noted, there remained limits to the technical assistance provided, as there was no corresponding fund for any type of mini-grants, nor a way to ‘solve’ any of the deeper organizational issues when identified by the technical assistance provider. As one staff noted,

“We needed to have a way for organizations to assess their capacity and add in capacity building as well. Not only have the Technical Assistance, but also have funds so that when the consultants found an issue, they could access funds to support the organizations in real time.”

Moving Forward

The **four key lessons learned** provide insights into how First 5 LA can continue to meet its policy advocacy goals in the future. As a result of this decade-long learning process, First 5 LA has already integrated some of the learnings into their newest policy-related RFP, the Early Childhood Education PAF (PAF-ECE) fund. The call for proposals was *quite focused*, asking applicants, among other things, to have, “a proven track record of success with ECE policy advocacy and systems change at the state and local levels”, “experience with the Sacramento policy process and a robust set of relationships with state legislators and a visible Sacramento presence and engagement” and “experience with Los Angeles policy processes and a robust set of relationships with LA-based policymakers.”



In addition, PAF ECE is focused on providing *multi-year operating support* to advocacy organizations who are focused on ECE, responding directly to the lessons learned above. Ensuring that the grantees have ECE policy and systems change as a key outcome—ensures that there are opportunities for grantees and First 5 LA to leverage one another’s strengths, to implement diverse strategies, and to truly build a field.

In the ECE PAF Grantee Agreement, there are early signs of First 5 LA’s funding being used to *support grantee field building*, as grantees must agree to:

- » **Collaborate and share data and information within the ECE field to support increased coordination among players, and continue to participate in ECE-focused coalitions**
- » **Engage in opportunities to uncover areas of possible alignment and shared priorities across the ECE field; make good faith efforts to have candid conversations and look for common ground over areas of policy or strategy disagreement**

Lastly, *technical assistance has become more adaptive* under PAF ECE. There is a fund to support broader field building as needed. The fund is a combination of ‘Rapid Response’ funds to support technical support that grantees identify, such as funding for public opinion polling, or communications consultants. In addition, ‘Field Building’ grants are available to organizations whom grantees feel add strategic skills or support to the work; these funds allow additional grantees to be brought ‘into the mix’ with intentionality. Together, these changes to the First 5 LA policy funding work are aligned with the best practices in the field. We look forward to seeing the next iteration of this unique fund make its impact on the lives of children prenatal to age five and their families across Los Angeles.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, First 5 LA has shifted its strategic focus from doing policy work on their own behalf only, towards channeling grant monies to support organizations who are working to benefit the lives of children prenatal to age five and their families through policy and advocacy. This report evaluates the practices, strategic shifts, and impact over the past decade. Phase I, the Community Opportunity Fund (COF) policy advocacy grants began in 2008, while Phase II, the Policy Advocacy Fund (PAF) terminated in 2018. First 5 LA has recently embarked on a new iteration (2017 – 2020) of the PAF, focused exclusively on Early Childhood Education (ECE PAF).

The data reveal four key lessons learned:

1. Policy and systems change require multi-year funding. To create policy and systems change, it takes time to build relationships and adapt to changing political realities. Structuring grants to embrace time for failure and learning is critical because mistakes are inevitable when a systems lens is applied to problems and solutions.



2. Funding must be fluid, insofar as grantees can respond to changes in the political context using diverse and varying strategies as needed. **Funding must also be focused**, to the extent that grantees can have some degree of topical similarity to ensure common overarching goals and an ability to leverage the advocacy work of their entire grantee cohort (e.g. an improved ECE system for children, families, and providers).

3. Shifting gears towards becoming an active player (understanding the players, the funding landscape, and political context) helps funders usher in policy and systems change. Examples of this include the creation of the First 5 LA Policy Department, creating a Policy Agenda, and more closely coordinating advocacy and communications work between grantees and First 5 LA.

4. It is necessary to provide dynamic technical assistance that adapts as the fund evolves, as well as to develop strong relationships with grantees to identify frank and honest needs and feedback throughout.

These Lessons Learned have already been integrated into First 5 LA's newest policy-related RFP, the Early Childhood Education PAF (PAF ECE) fund, as successful applicants will demonstrate a commitment to ECE policy and systems change, while working alongside First 5 LA to build the ECE field with the support of technical assistance. It is our hope that others can draw insights from this decade-long evolution in funding policy advocacy work in order to be sustainable and impactful in future ventures.



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Appendix A: Funding Comparison Table

	COF (POLICY & ADVOCACY)	PAF I	PAF II
# GRANTEES	11 organizations	13 organizations	10 organizations
# YEARS PER GRANT	2-5 years	5 years	5 years
GRANTEES	<p>Grantees Cycle 1 Policy and Advocacy Grantees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California Center for Public Health Advocacy • LA Best Babies Network • Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center <p>Cycle 2 Policy and Advocacy Grantees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breastfeeding Taskforce of Greater LA Community Coalition • Prevention Network • Maternal and Child Health Access <p>Cycle 3: Advancement Project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian and Pacific Islander Obesity Prevention Alliance (APIOPA) • Children’s Hospital Los Angeles • Great Beginnings for Black Babies Inc. • Historic Filipinotown Health Network Collaborative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advancement Project • Asian Americans Advancing Justice • Breastfeeding Task Force of Greater Los Angeles • California Center for Public Health Advocacy • California Food Policy Advocates • Community Health Councils, Inc. • LA’s Best Babies Network/ California Hospital Medical Center • Los Angeles County Perinatal Mental Health Task Force (Community Partners) • Occidental College Urban and Environment Policy Institute • Public Counsel • Special Needs Network • Western Center on Law and Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • California Child Care Resource and Referral Network • Child Care Law Center • Children Now • Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights LA • Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention & Treatment • Friends of the Family • Maternal Child Health Access • Special Needs Network • Vision y Compromiso • Western Center on Law & Poverty