

**Meta-evaluation of EvAP's Evaluation of First 5 LA Child  
Care Initiative: Final Report**

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## **Introduction**

### ***Purpose of evaluation of First 5 LA***

This is the final report on the meta-evaluation of the work Evaluation, Assessment, and Policy Connections (EvAP) conducted for the First 5 Los Angeles (First 5 LA) Child Care Initiative. Meta-evaluation is the evaluation of an evaluation's process and outcomes. Dr. Marvin C. Alkin and Kara Crohn of UCLA conducted an independent meta-evaluation examining the extent to which EvAP's evaluation of First 5 LA's Childcare Initiative was effective. This report is a reflection on EvAP's work from August 2002 through December 2004 with the Research & Evaluation and Grants Management staff who worked with the Child Care Initiative and the Child Care Initiative grantees.

The Child Care Initiative was one of the first initiatives funded through Proposition 10, which designated tobacco tax money to be used to support early childhood development in California. The purpose of the Child Care Initiative was to help improve the quality of child care for children ages 0-5 years in the Los Angeles area by providing child care providers and related service providers with funding to enhance their existing services or create new services. The services focused on literacy, quality care, special needs, health, and training needs. The initiative had two phases: Child Care I (CCI) and Child Care II (CCII). CCI began in May 2000, when First 5 LA provided \$12 million (allocated over the course of three years) for 18 large child care agencies. CCII began in 2001, allocating \$59.1 million in funding for an additional 35 large agencies, and then a subsequent \$2.9 million for one year of funding for 110 small agencies.

Led by Dr. Rita O'Sullivan, EvAP's collaborative evaluation intended to help First 5 LA and their grantees assess processes, outcomes, and policy components of the Child Care Initiative. The first phase of the evaluation, ending in April 2002, focused on providing descriptive profiles of the CCI and CCII grantees' programs, projects, services provided, funding process, organizational infrastructure, and capacity. Phase II of the evaluation continued to track program characteristics and implementation, but also sought to examine the impact of the programs and the relevance of child care policy issues. EvAP proposed, as an important component of the evaluation, to build the evaluation capacity of First 5 LA staff, commissioners, and grantees primarily by employing a collaborative style of evaluation and providing evaluation training opportunities. First 5 LA felt that the collaborative approach to evaluation fit well with the organization's needs.

The meta-evaluation focused primarily on phase II of the evaluation and examined the extent to which EvAP met the informational and capacity-strengthening needs of First 5 LA and impacted the grantee organizations with which it worked. The meta-evaluation also aspired to provide interim feedback from First 5 LA staff and grantees concerning the evaluation. Feedback was delivered through interim reports, meetings, and ongoing communication with EvAP. We felt that the collaborative concepts

discussed in the next section framed the context for the meta-evaluation and served as a natural guide for addressing the meta-evaluation questions in more depth. This report discusses the extent to which EvAP adhered to the tenets of its collaborative model and the degree to which the application of this model rendered sound and useful processes and results for First 5 LA and the Child Care Initiative grantees. Data sources for this report are cited throughout the report. Interim reports available for public review are listed in the Appendix.

## ***Definition of meta-evaluation of a collaborative evaluation***

### **Fundamental concepts of collaborative evaluation**

In chapter two of her book, Practicing Evaluation: A Collaborative Approach, Dr. O'Sullivan describes some fundamental concepts that drive her collaborative approach. At their core, these concepts emphasize the active engagement of program staff and participants as a way to ensure that the evaluation is appropriate, timely, accurate, understood, and useful. Many of the concepts presented in her book were used to guide the evaluation capacity building training EvAP led, and provided grounding for the overall evaluation of the Child Care Initiatives. We present a short summary of the concepts here in order to provide necessary background information for reading the rest of the report.

An important component of a collaborative approach to evaluation involves the participation of those directly impacted by the evaluation. The extent to which program staff and participants are involved in the evaluation is negotiable, but the leadership and ownership of the evaluation should rest with program staff and participants as well as with the evaluator. As an example, the evaluator may take more of an advisory role while program staff and participants make decisions about the direction and nature of the evaluation. Whereas in another evaluation, it may be more appropriate for the evaluator to be primarily responsible for the direction of the evaluation while program staff and participants participate by reviewing instruments and drafts of reports.

Regardless of the amount or type of participation, an evaluator should seek to engage program staff and participants at every stage of the evaluation process, from beginning to end. Active participation at each stage benefits both the quality of the evaluation and those involved with the program. Access to program information and resources greatly increases when program staff and participants are viewed as an extension of the evaluation team. This relationship results in the evaluator being more aware of program happenings, having more cooperation from the program, gaining more access to higher quality information, and enhancing receptivity to evaluation findings. Although not an intended outcome of collaborative evaluation per se, program staff and participants may enhance their understanding of evaluation and possibly their evaluation skills as a function of actively participating in the evaluation.

Additionally, by encouraging the program staff and participants to become and remain regularly involved with the evaluation, the utilization of evaluation findings – a

primary goal of collaborative evaluation – is more likely to occur. The more involved in the evaluation program participants and staff are, the more likely they will be to understand and trust the evaluation process, and the more likely they will be to understand, accept, and use the evaluation findings.

## **Collaborative evaluation techniques**

In practice, Dr. O'Sullivan recommends employing a variety of techniques that promote a collaborative approach to evaluation. By means of a short outline, here is a quick introduction to these techniques:

### **1. Evaluation planning and monitoring:**

- a. Develop a logic model to help program staff connect goals to activities and outcomes.
- b. Determine how to monitor whether or not activities occur and what information will demonstrate whether or not desired results surface.
- c. Use an evaluation crosswalk chart to help attach evaluation questions to specific data sources.
- d. Be familiar with and coordinate evaluation activities with any program auditing/monitoring plans in order to avoid duplicate work.

### **2. Program staff involvement:**

- a. If program staff are brought into the evaluation team, train them to conduct an evaluation.
- b. Ensure that program staff's evaluation duties are appropriate to their skills and position, and are not excessively time-consuming.
- c. Communicate with program staff as coworkers.
- d. Encourage better utilization of evaluation findings by involving program staff in ways that expand the evaluation effort and raise awareness of the evaluation purpose and activities, which should lead to better evaluation questions, promote cooperation, and improve evaluation data.

### **3. Evaluation fairs:**

- a. Use evaluation fairs to reinforce the need and importance of implementing (rather than just talking about) an evaluation plan.
- b. Provide networking opportunities for attendees.
- c. Provide programs with an opportunity to show the results of their evaluation and, if appropriate, invite other stakeholders to their presentations. Programs should bring handouts, create posters, and prepare presentations of findings.
- d. Compile and summarize information presented at the fairs and ask the programs to check the summary for accuracy. A summary document can be compiled and distributed to the participants and the foundation.

### **4. Technical assistance:**

- a. Provide technical assistance to staff and participants by responding to requests – and in some cases by proactively offering advice – at a level that is appropriate for the individual.
  - b. Evaluation fairs can assist in relieving the demand on an evaluator’s time by helping many people at a single event, and by doing so in a way that encourages program staff and participants to learn from each other’s evaluations.
- 5. Evaluation capacity building training:**
- a. The training (e.g. 5-day institutes, 1-hour focused seminars) supplements capacity building that naturally occurs through active participation in the evaluation. By strengthening evaluation capacity within programs, the programs are able to assess their accomplishments and make improvements. The evaluators can do more than an outside trainer would because they can make the training contextually-relevant and help the participants apply the skills to specific situations.
  - b. Use collaborative evaluation methods (evaluation planning, technical assistance, evaluation fairs, and capacity building training) in order to encourage programs to collaborate, enhance understanding of evaluation, and improve quality of evaluation reports.
- 6. Data gathering:**
- a. Involve program staff and participants in identifying appropriate samples and stakeholders.
  - b. Involve stakeholders, staff, and/or participants in the development, testing, and checking the appropriateness of final data gathering tools, (e.g. surveys, focus group protocols, etc.).
- 7. Data analysis:**
- a. Stakeholders should be involved in the data analysis to the extent to which they want to be involved. Stakeholders, program staff, and/or participants will participate in the analyses that they are capable of producing, and evaluators can offer technical assistance as needed in this situation.
  - b. Participation in the analysis process enhances trust, interest, understanding, and use.
- 8. Reviewing findings:**
- a. Findings should be reviewed as data becomes available, e.g. gather data, analyze it, and report it immediately. Do not wait for the final report.
  - b. Immediate dissemination and discussion of findings ensures that information is timely, potentially useful for program planning, and interim findings can be discussed and interpreted as they arise – no surprises.

***Purpose of meta-evaluation of EvAP’s evaluation of First 5 LA***

## Meta-evaluation questions

We worked with EvAP to develop some guiding questions for the meta-evaluation concerning the effectiveness of the evaluation and the extent to which EvAP was able to enhance the evaluation capacity of the staff and grantees. Sub-questions helped hone in on specific aspects of evaluation effectiveness and capacity building. In this report, we use the meta-evaluation questions to summarize the findings of the report. The questions were:

1. Evaluation effectiveness: To what extent has the evaluation of the Child Care Initiatives been effective?
  - a. What was the technical soundness of the evaluation process and outcomes?
  - b. Was the evaluation free from bias?
  - c. Was the evaluation useful?
2. Capacity strengthening: To what extent are the evaluation's capacity-strengthening efforts effective?
  - a. Has grantee capacity been enhanced? (Grantee and commission perceptions)
  - b. Has commission staff's capacity been enhanced? (Commission perceptions)
  - c. Have grantee evaluation reports improved?
  - d. Did EvAP accommodate their training to meet trainees' needs?

## Meta-evaluation methods

### Communication:

The meta-evaluators often met with EvAP when they flew to the Los Angeles area for their evaluation meetings and events. Email and phone contact was maintained throughout the meta-evaluation process as a means of exchanging documents, offering updates, and discussing ideas and findings.

### Observation:

One of the meta-evaluators observed and occasionally participated in many of the events, meetings, and workshops hosted by EvAP. Observation of evaluation fairs, institutes, cluster meetings, training sessions, and planning sessions, helped the meta-evaluator become familiar with the First 5 LA staff and grantees and understand the nature of the relationship among First 5 LA, EvAP, and the grantees. The processes of various collaborative techniques were noted, as well as the reactions of the participants. These notes provided context for and supported other meta-evaluation findings.

### Document review:

EvAP provided the meta-evaluators with copies of reports, plans, instruments, and other documents for our review. The meta-evaluators occasionally provided feedback, but primarily used the documents to become familiar with and monitor the occurrence of various evaluation activities and their outcomes.

### **Surveys and interviews:**

At various points during the evaluation, surveys and interviews were conducted with grantees as well as a First 5 LA director and members of the First 5 LA staff. Grantees were surveyed in person at the beginning of the 2003 and 2004 evaluation fairs. Those who were unable to attend the evaluation fair in 2004 were asked to complete the survey via email. Interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of grantees during June and July of 2003. The First 5 LA director and the leader of the Research and Evaluation Department, primary intended users of the evaluation, were interviewed during December 2003 and January 2004. First 5 LA Grants Management staff members involved with the Child Care Initiative were surveyed in July 2004 via email.

Interim findings of the surveys and interviews were discussed with EvAP as the information became available, and the results were formally reported as soon as possible. Results of the grantee surveys and interviews were reported in the interim meta-evaluation reports of July 2003 and October 2004. Results from the interviews with the director and leader of the Research and Evaluation department were reported to EvAP in February 2004. Results from the Grants Management survey were reported in the second interim meta-evaluation report in October 2004.

### **Analysis of grantee reports:**

A document analysis of grantee quarterly reports was conducted in order to look at the ways in which reporting changed over the course of EvAP's evaluation with First 5 LA. While First 5 LA was responsible for the quarterly report requirements, EvAP gave them advice on their reporting and ultimately led the design of a web-based reporting system to gather quarterly reports. To examine changes in format and quality of reporting over the course of EvAP's involvement with the Child Care Initiative, a sample of grantee quarterly reports was analyzed. Because the grantees' programs generally divided along five primary areas of focus (literacy, quality care, special needs, health, and training), one grantee organization was randomly sampled from each of the five focus areas (a.k.a. cluster groups). To control for differences among individual reporting styles, the meta-evaluators emailed or called each of the selected grantees to determine whether or not the same person was responsible for submitting quarterly reports from 2001 to 2003. If more than one major change in personnel had occurred, another grantee was randomly selected from the cluster group as a replacement. Once a definitive list of grantees was finalized, copies of second quarter reports (for the months spanning August through October) from 2001 and 2002 were obtained from First 5 LA or EvAP for each of the selected grantees. The grantees' 2003 second quarter reports were downloaded from the web-based reporting system.

The analysis consisted of two stages. For the first stage, an independent graduate student/program evaluator conducted a literature review and subsequently developed

a rubric of the kinds of information an evaluation report would likely need to convey. A large portion of the rubric relied upon reporting guidelines developed by the Kellogg Foundation. This independent reviewer had little knowledge of EvAP, First 5 LA, or the Child Care Initiative grantees, and was thus able to provide the meta-evaluators with a fresh perspective on the contents of the grantees' evaluation reports. Utilizing this rubric, the independent reviewer described components of the grantees' evaluation reports that were or were not present and created an evaluation report 'inventory' for each report reviewed. For example, one of the rubric elements included "Evidence of community input into program development." Each report was reviewed three times and all mentions, descriptions or allusions to community input into program development (as found in that particular report) was described in this section of the rubric.

In the second stage, the meta-evaluators used the independent analysis to then look at the kinds of information we would expect to see given the context of the programs, First 5 LA's interests, and EvAP's approach towards evaluation. We also looked at the kinds of changes in reporting we would expect EvAP to influence through their work with First 5 LA and the grantees. In order to investigate consistencies and changes within and across grantees over time, the aspects identified through the independent analysis were tallied for each report. The meta-evaluators also used qualitative coding to identify patterns in the level and kinds of detail reported within and across grantees over time.

## **Findings and Analysis**

### ***Degree to which evaluation met criteria of collaborative evaluation model***

#### **Evaluation planning and monitoring**

EvAP worked with the leaders of the First 5 LA Research and Evaluation group to help them connect the goals, activities, and outcomes of the Child Care Initiative. EvAP then created an evaluation crosswalk to describe the way in which the evaluation would address key aspects of the program. The crosswalk was organized into four aspects of the evaluation: process evaluation, outcome evaluation, policy issues, and capacity building. Evaluation questions listed under each aspect of the evaluation reflected the information needs of the program. The source of data used to gather information was listed next to each evaluation question. The evaluation questions remained consistent over the course of the evaluation. A few changes were made regarding the collection of data as the evaluation progressed and adapted to meet the initiative's changing needs. For example, collaborative pilot studies initially proposed as part of the evaluation were eventually deemed unnecessary for the Initiative and EvAP's evaluation resources were allocated instead to researching the needs of

children ages zero to three years and the services Child Care Initiative grantees currently provided for this population (personal communication).

EvAP helped First 5 LA update their monitoring and reporting practices and connect these practices to the goals of the initiative. First 5 LA needed help developing and launching a sustainable way to monitor the grantees' activities and accomplishments. The system in place when EvAP was hired required grantees to submit quarterly and annual paper evaluation reports describing their program, changes made, clients served, and progress towards their individual goals. This system required a lot of time, was difficult to manage, and failed to allow the Initiative to understand, at a macro-level, who their grantees were, what kinds of services they provided, or what progress they were making. The reporting requirements changed from year to year, and through informal conversation at EvAP events, several grantees explained that the reporting requirements were vague. EvAP collaborated with First 5 LA to design, implement, and manage a web-based reporting system that allowed for individual and group monitoring of the grantees' programs on a quarterly basis and for the generation of multiple kinds of summary reports.

The Research and Evaluation division leaders indicated that the development of a monitoring system was one of the most valuable outcomes of the evaluation, saying: "The value of the evaluation – the most visible to Commission and other staff – has been taking us through the process of seeing how grantees would report some accountability measures to us," (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004).

The grantees also benefited from the web-based reporting system. It allowed them, once set-up, to more quickly submit reports, to have a record of receipt, and to generate monitoring and summary reports for their own use. After having used the web-based reporting system to submit three reports, 15 of 18 grantees responding to a meta-evaluation survey in April 2004 said the web-based reporting system was somewhat to a lot better than preparing and submitting written reports (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p. 3). Towards the end of the Initiative, the four Grants Management staff who worked on the Child Care Initiative were not using the web-based reporting system to a great extent, but a few understood its potential for aggregate reporting (Grants Management Survey, Summary of Results, October 2004, p. 9). It is important to note that the Grants Management staff underwent organizational changes during the evaluation and had limited exposure to EvAP, and that this likely contributed to their lack of use of the system.

In addition to the development of the web-based reporting system, EvAP was also able to monitor the progress of the grantees and their relationship with First 5 LA through their evaluation activities and events, such as cluster meetings, evaluation fairs and institutes, evaluator exchanges, focus groups, and site visits. Although monitoring was certainly not the primary purpose of these events, it provided EvAP with an informal way to stay abreast of successes, challenges, issues, and questions the grantees had. EvAP dedicated some time at each meeting or event to update the grantees on the evaluation process, and to discuss questions the grantees had. During the development of the web-based reporting system, many grantees had questions about how they would incorporate various kinds of information into the structured, web-

based reports and how various aspects of the system would be used. Midway through the development of the system, for example, a grantee raised the issue of numerically reporting on unintended outcomes, concerned that these kinds of outcomes were often important but that they may not be able to report and track numerical data on the unintended outcome. EvAP was able to address this concern in a group format by suggesting that they use the narrative section to describe the unintended outcome, and also took the opportunity to explain the degree to which the indicators could be altered from report to report. Through these kinds of regular discussions, EvAP was able to understand and respond to the grantees needs and concerns.

### **Program staff involvement**

EvAP involved the staff of First 5 LA and the Child Care Initiative grantees to co-construct the evaluation plans, process, and measures. Through evaluation institutes, EvAP trained the First 5 LA staff in basic evaluation skills (explained in detail under the Evaluation capacity building training section). In addition to explicit training sessions, EvAP also incorporated training into their collaborations with the staff by encouraging the staff to learn by participating in the evaluation activities. For example, the First 5 LA staff was asked to participate in the development of a rubric of quality for grantee reports.

In response to the grantees' need for feedback from First 5 LA on their evaluation reports, EvAP drafted a rubric of quality for First 5 LA staff to use in assessing the reports and providing advice on grantee reports. During a meeting with the staff in December 2002, EvAP explained how and why the rubric was developed, asked the staff to try to use the rubric to critique a grantee report, and then gathered the staff's feedback for improving the rubric. Going through this process provided the staff with a learning opportunity while also encouraging their participation in the evaluation process. It was an opportunity for the staff to understand how a tool like the rubric could be used to identify and reflect on the most important aspects of the evaluation reports, and evidence of grantees' progress. The staff actively participated in the exercise, made suggestions for additions such as the inclusion of an area for barriers to program implementation, and expressed interest in having further training on how to use the rubric (notes from observation of 12/11/2002 meeting).

As is demonstrated in the above example, it was important for EvAP to maintain an open dialogue with both program staff and grantees in order to identify and address their evaluation needs. Communication is one of the greatest challenges for program evaluators, especially when working with a large number of program participants (like those of the Child Care Initiative) that experience staff turnover and have a variety of communication preferences. Although EvAP received some criticism on the 2003 meta-evaluation grantee survey from a small number of grantees about not receiving information in a timely way, the majority of respondents rated the overall clarity and timeliness of EvAP's communication as medium high (3) to high (4) on a four-point scale (Results of Grantee Survey and Interviews, July 2003, p. 28-29). On the 2004 meta-evaluation grantee survey, there was markedly less criticism of EvAP's

communication, and the majority of survey respondents rated EvAP's overall communication with their organization as good (3) to excellent (4) on a four-point scale (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p.15). In addition to saying that calls and emails were answered promptly, six of the seventeen grantees who offered additional comments suggested that EvAP was supportive and professional, and three others said that they were available, open to hearing or helping with grantee concerns, and that they advocated for the grantees.

EvAP also maintained respectful dialogue and interactions with the program staff over the course of the evaluation. At the beginning of the evaluation, EvAP worked with the primary users of the evaluation, the leaders of the Research and Evaluation group, to establish communication with other departments around the purpose of the evaluation. One of the Research and Evaluation leaders explained:

*At the very beginning of the evaluation, I believe we created a very good model of the engagement process. We were adamant about bringing other staff from other units together to refine our evaluations, to discuss their part and their expectations. We held brown bag meetings where anyone else could come. Other directors came, and it was a very positive experience. It was very effective in educating other directors about evaluation. It was very difficult to explain what it is we're trying to accomplish through the evaluation. They see it as an up and down, positive or negative process, whereas Rita sees it as a learning process.*

In addition to opening up communication about the evaluation of the Child Care Initiative at an organizational level, EvAP's brown bag meetings and other meetings with directors outside First 5 LA's Research & Evaluation department seemed to help expand the organization's knowledge of evaluation in general.

Throughout the evaluation, EvAP solicited the feedback and input of the Research and Evaluation leaders and other groups working with the Child Care Initiative, such as the Grants Management group. When the staff indicated that they wanted more communication from EvAP about the progress and direction of the evaluation, EvAP was responsive to their needs. Although EvAP did not have extensive contact with the Grants Management staff due to organizational changes and staff turn-over, the Grants Management staff that worked on the Child Care Initiative spoke favorably of EvAP's communication with the organization as a whole, and felt that EvAP was able to increase their communication with Grants Management over time. One Grants Management staff person explained the nature of their relationship:

*I think overall EvAP's communication with First 5 LA has been very good given the structure of First 5 LA and its various departments. As an evaluation consultant, EvAP's formal communication was with the Research and Evaluation Department. The Grants Management department was created in July 2003. Prior to that, Program Officers were part of the Planning and Development Department (formerly Programs and Planning).*

Other Grants Management staff commented on the increase in communication over time:

*[The] overall relationship has been positive. There were kinks and communication gaps in the beginning, but the relationship has evolved and grown based on open communication . . . it has evolved to the point where it is very good.*

*[Our] contact [with EvAP] has been limited until we attended the St. Anne's Evaluation training . . . It appears that EvAP and First 5 LA Evaluation Dept. staff have a close working relationship and work well together.*

The above quotes demonstrate EvAP's commitment to fostering dialogue among First 5 LA staff and that EvAP made an overall positive impression on the organization in terms of their working relationship with the Research & Evaluation department.

## **Evaluation fairs**

EvAP held three annual evaluation fairs in April of 2002, 2003, and 2004. The fairs provided an opportunity for grantees to demonstrate how they evaluated their programs, their findings, and the ways in which they used their evaluations to make decisions about their programs. The fairs were structured to allow grantees to interact with all other grantees during poster presentations and lunch sessions, and to interact with smaller cohorts for more in-depth one-at-a-time presentations. The grantees often provided hand-outs and program materials along with their poster or in-depth presentations. These handouts often included a description of program goals and activities, as well as evidence of their program evaluation procedures and outcomes, such as service statistics, standardized pre-post measures collected, results of observational protocols, survey results, and anecdotal stories (based on hand-outs gathered at evaluation fairs).

The attendance at the three evaluation fairs fluctuated from year to year. In 2002, 111 people attended. In April 2003, 98 people attended, and in 2004, approximately 20-25 people attended the fair (attendance estimates based on EvAP records). The low attendance in 2004 is largely explained by the fact that the Child Care I grant ended in 2003, which meant that the number of grantee organizations dropped from 52 to 34.

Additionally, by April of 2004, the Child Care II grant was coming to an end without immediate refunding options available through First 5 LA, so there was less incentive for the grantee organizations to attend the 2004 evaluation fair.

The evaluation fairs became an opportunity for grantees to practice certain evaluation skills, namely: program description, data synthesis, and presentation of findings. Referring to the April 2002 evaluation fair, one grantee said she enjoyed having the opportunity for her program manager to have a moment to shine saying that *"it is valuable for people at his level to have this opportunity [to make a presentation],"* (Results of Grantee Survey and Interviews, July 2003, p. 34). In reference to the April 2003 evaluation fair, three grantees indicated that the evaluation fair helped push their organizations to create presentations and practice talking about what they do (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p.9; quotes from survey data):

*[This was my] first time presenting evaluation outcomes . . . [it] helped me and my organization to be knowledgeable on presenting outcomes.*

*[The evaluation fair was the] catalyst for us to put a presentation together (PowerPoint and poster) with our findings.*

The evaluation fairs were each rated, on average, as somewhat to extremely useful in terms of their utility for grantees (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p.7 and p. 9). Grantees explained that it was a good networking opportunity; that they were able to learn about and exchange information with other grantees concerning their evaluation and program plans.

The First 5 LA staff and directors were invited to the evaluation fairs. It was rare for First 5 LA staff to have an opportunity to interact with the grantees in person, so the evaluation fair helped facilitate the relationship between the grantees and the First 5 LA staff, and helped the staff better understand the kind of work the grantees did and the progress they made with their programs. One Grants Management staff member explained that (s)he “was able to learn more about grantee success from their perspectives and was able to talk [to] the grantees I work with,” (Grants Management Survey, Summary of Results, October 2004, p. 6). Another Grants Management staff member also valued being able to attend the evaluation fair, saying (Grants Management Survey, Summary of Results, October 2004, p. 6-7):

*I appreciate [EvAP's] extensive work with the grantees. The evaluation fairs allowed grantees to network and learn about evaluation. The most recent grantee evaluation fair, for example, was very informative and it was evident from their presentations that grantees valued evaluation.*

As the above quote demonstrates, this grants management staff member viewed the evaluation fair as an opportunity for staff to see evidence of the grantees' growing knowledge of and appreciation for evaluation, and as a way for grantees to learn about evaluation and network with each other.

## **Technical assistance**

EvAP provided technical assistance to First 5 LA staff and grantees as requested and proactively in some cases. Technical assistance for the First 5 LA staff was delivered, as requested, on a variety of issues including some that fell outside the scope of the evaluation plan. Examples of technical assistance EvAP provided included offering evaluation advice to grantees, researching potential areas for future funding, and providing advice on First 5 LA's own evaluation guides and report formats.

EvAP provided evaluation assistance to the grantees when First 5 LA staff was overwhelmed. At the beginning of the Child Care Initiative, First 5 LA was managing a lot of grantees, and the staff appreciated the evaluation support EvAP offered to grantees when they could not (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004):

*This was quite some time ago, but in terms of their presence, grantees were able to talk to EvAP about things that were going on. The grantees were not necessarily getting [assistance] from us because of our heavy case loads, so EvAP had more of a presence than R&E [Research and Evaluation group] and were able to meet some of the grantees' needs.*

EvAP provided group-based technical assistance for grantees on their evaluation plans through the evaluator exchanges, evaluation fairs, evaluation institutes, and web-based reporting training sessions. Grantees indicated learning from other grantees' evaluation plans and receiving feedback their own plans during other group-oriented meetings, such as the cluster meetings and evaluator exchanges (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p.7-11).

EvAP also provided individual feedback during site visits and on an ad-hoc basis when grantees requested assistance. A lot of individual technical assistance was also provided over the phone to grantees learning to use the web-based reporting system.

Grantees expressed gratitude for receiving individual assistance with their evaluation plans. A few grantees specifically mentioned the evaluation planning help EvAP provided during the cluster meetings and site visits (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p.8-9). Two other grantees mentioned specific instances of receiving evaluation planning help, one saying, "We greatly appreciate EvAP's help in reviewing our evaluation and lending a listening ear," and another explaining an instance at the evaluation fair in 2002 saying, "The EvAP team is committed and caring. For example, one team member dedicated the lunch hour to a one on one consulting session on specific database questions," (Results of Grantee Survey and Interviews, July 2003, p. 32, and EvAP Phase I evaluation report, p. 94, respectively).

In addition to activities related to the current initiative, EvAP tapped into their research expertise to write a research report on the school readiness needs of, and programs for, children ages zero to three. In response to the First 5 LA commission's changing information needs, EvAP altered part of their evaluation plans to research the child care needs of the children ages zero to three years ("First 5 LA Child Care Initiative Evaluation Summary: Programming Needs for Children Pre-Natal through Age 3"). EvAP's flexibility and willingness to provide research assistance was appreciated by the Research and Evaluation leaders (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004):

*We're trying to come up with the most useful summary for the commissioners and staff of what CCI did. I appreciate [EvAP's] flexibility because the needs of the evaluation change as time goes along. For example, we've just gotten this new 0-3 push [meaning a new initiative focusing on children ages 0-3] from the commission. In my position, I am a liaison [who is] trying to figure out how the evaluation can be useful in helping to address the new 0-3 focus.*

The above quote demonstrates EvAP's flexibility and their willingness to provide assistance to help First 5 LA plan for future initiatives.

EvAP also provided technical assistance for First 5 LA Research and Evaluation group beyond the scope of the Child Care Initiative, such as First 5 LA's Evaluation Kit

and reporting formats that bolstered staff evaluation tools, as was explained during a January 2004 interview with a Research and Evaluation group leader:

*I also appreciated that, even if I had questions unrelated to the Childcare Initiatives, she [Rita] was willing to help. [For example,] she gave us feedback on an Evaluation Kit, and reviewed and gave feedback on the quarterly report format developed by First 5 LA staff. EvAP was helpful with other things [than just the Childcare Initiatives].*

EvAP provided assistance with aspects of First 5 LA's general evaluation practices such as the Evaluation Kit and their quarterly report format, which benefited the Initiative evaluation, but also aspired to improve evaluation practices at an organizational level.

### **Evaluation capacity building training**

Many of the grantees indicated experiencing an increase in their understanding of evaluation while participating in the First 5 LA Child Care Initiative. Some commented specifically about EvAP's role in this process, noting that their evaluation knowledge/skills improved as a result of the evaluation training EvAP provided.

EvAP conducted two annual evaluation institutes for grantees in 2002 and 2003-2004, and a more customized evaluation institute for First 5 LA staff in May-June 2004.

These training sessions were intended to boost the grantees' and First 5 LA staff's evaluation capacity in order to help them better design and implement their own evaluations, but also to encourage their active participation in the evaluation of First 5 LA. The training sessions covered fundamental evaluation concepts and skills, as well as the principles of a collaborative evaluation design. EvAP provided participants in the training with binders of information and training activities. The binders were organized into day-by-day sections which addressed the following topics: (1) "Evaluation Theory and Practice," which covered theoretical and practical approaches to evaluation, ethical guidelines, the role of the evaluator, and evaluation needs assessment; (2) "Elements of an Evaluation Plan," which covered the development of evaluation plans including logic modeling, the evaluation crosswalk, and budgeting; (3) "Designing Evaluations," which covered how to collaboratively develop evaluation designs, sampling strategies, and instruments; (4) "Summarizing Information," which covered quantitative and qualitative data analysis; and (5) "Reporting," which covered how to write evaluation reports, and examples of good evaluation reports.

For the grantees, the evaluation institutes were helpful in a variety of ways. Those who were new to evaluation gained a better understanding of evaluation in general, and those with some exposure or experience with evaluation or assessment benefited from learning more specific skills. EvAP collected workshop evaluations during their 2003-2004 evaluation institute sessions for grantees, asking them to rate the individual sub-sections on a poor to excellent (1-4) scale, and to explain their overall ratings, whether the homework assignments were useful, and what else they wanted to know (EvAP documentation: "EvAP Institute, Evaluation Training Questionnaires, LA 2003-04"). The seven grantees who attended the sessions rated all of the sub-sections of the Institute as "good" to "excellent." In explaining their overall ratings, the grantees

indicated an appreciation for the practical application of and usefulness of the training, making comments like, "It was very practical and applicable to my job," and "Increase skills and understanding of evaluation processes as well as opportunity to consult on own project." They also indicated valuing the resources provided and the use of examples to help ground their understanding of the concepts, as synthesized in these comments: "Gave an impressive amount of resources ensuring a good foundation for evaluation activities," and "There was a lot of information provided but there were a lot of examples given which brought all of the information together." Their main criticism of the 2002 workshop was that it was difficult to be away from work for 5 days in a row.

In response to this feedback, EvAP scheduled the 2003 evaluation institute into two two-day sections, with the first section held in November and the second held in February (observation notes, personal communication).

The grantees' responses to the April 2003 meta-evaluation grantee survey verified EvAP's workshop evaluation findings. The grantees, on average, indicated experiencing an increase in their knowledge/understanding of evaluation, and those who experienced an increased understanding of evaluation credited EvAP (Results of Grantee Survey and Interviews, July 2003, p. 7). The grantees who attended the November 2002 evaluation institute rated the five-day workshop as medium-high to high in terms of the quality of materials provided, overall usefulness of the sessions, relevance of the sessions to their evaluation work for First 5 LA and with their own organization, and the EvAP staff's knowledge of evaluation tools (Results of Grantee Survey and Interviews, July 2003, p. 22). Two grantees mentioned in particular how they used the training to shape their evaluation plans, stating: "The evaluation institute was extremely helpful and well done. Because of this institute, I was able, with my limited experience in evaluation, to redesign our evaluation tools," and "I thought this was really terrific. I didn't realize how useful it was at the time, but it has really guided our work over the last few months." On the April 2004 meta-evaluation grantee survey, the grantees who attended the November 2002 and the November 2003 and February 2004 evaluation institutes rated the sessions as somewhat to extremely useful (Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data, October 2004, p. 8 and 10). These grantees commented that the training was very good overall and some offered specific reasons, for example, that the training was a good refresher on evaluation, and that it helped improve their program design.

During the meta-evaluation, the grantees were often asked about the development of their program evaluation skills, but they were not asked about the impact of EvAP's evaluation on the development of their programs. However, several grantees made unprompted comments on this positive, unintended outcome. On the 2004 meta-evaluation grantee survey, one of the eight respondents who found the evaluation institute somewhat to extremely useful indicated that the institute helped her organization improve their program's design. Another grantee (among 9 respondents) who found the November 2003 and February 2004 cluster meetings somewhat to extremely useful indicated that (s)he got ideas for future programs from attending the meetings. EvAP also received a comment directly to this effect. During the November 2003 evaluation institute, some grantees indicated on their workshop evaluation forms that it was helpful to hear about the other grantees' programs. Most spoke of the

benefits in terms of developing evaluation ideas, but one person added this comment: “Hearing from different programs, and [having] them [speak] about their challenges and how to break through – those challenges gave me, personally, more ideas for my program.” This person explained why hearing from other programs was important from a program development perspective.

EvAP’s evaluation training for the Child Care grantees were also valued by the First 5 LA staff as important to the initiative, so much so that additional training was requested specifically for the First 5 LA staff (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004):

*[They have done] grantee trainings – grantees have valued this and it goes well with our capacity-building values. . . . For those grantees . . . it makes First 5 LA look good because we’re doing something useful [by] building the capacity of their organization. Even our new Grants Manager wants to do the evaluation institute just for the Grants Management staff. [We] clearly see the value of [EvAP] as evaluation trainers.*

This quote demonstrates how the Grants Management manager recognized how her own staff could benefit from the training and how the First 5 LA staff valued EvAP’s ability to conduct evaluation training. EvAP held a one-day session just for the Grants Management staff in Fall 2003 titled, Evaluation A-Z, and then a two-day evaluation institute in Spring 2004. Although the Grants Management staff received the training towards the end of the evaluation process (due primarily to organizational changes at First 5 LA, not EvAP’s preference), those who participated indicated that they appreciated and benefited from the sessions. When surveyed for the meta-evaluation, the Grants Management staff members who worked on the Child Care Initiative all found the evaluation institute extremely useful (rating it a 4 on a 4-point scale). Three of the four Grants Management staff responding to the survey offered these comments: “very comprehensive and applicable overview, especially when directly applied to First 5 LA Grants Management work, (i.e. practical),” “good refresher and [was] useful hands on [training],” and “the training was very applicable to the work we are doing, EvAP consulted with us prior to the training to assess our training needs.” The comments demonstrate the usefulness of the training and EvAP’s willingness to customize the training to meet their group’s needs (Grants Management Survey, Summary of Results, October 2004, p. 2, 3, and 6):

In addition to the evaluation institutes, EvAP promoted the development of grantee and grants management understanding of collaborative evaluation techniques through their involvement in evaluation fairs, planning and cluster group meetings, focus groups, and the development of the web-based reporting system. As one First 5 LA staff member explained, First 5 LA was able to take what they learned through the evaluation of the Child Care Initiatives and start to apply similar techniques in the evaluation of other initiatives (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004):

*Yes, it’s [meaning EvAP’s events and meetings] been very helpful in building our capacity and providing us with a good model that we’re implementing in other evaluations.” In addressing my follow-up question, “That’s important to know – What kinds of things carry over into your other evaluations?” the interviewee said, “[We have*

*started having] general convening [meetings] with grantees with our Home Visitation Initiative, and with our Family Literacy in more formal ways, such as the family literacy network. [The objective there is to] increase family literacy grantees' evaluation capacity through training, seminars, etc.*

The above quote demonstrates First 5 LA's adoption of some of the collaborative principles, such as building evaluation capacity among participants, into their other initiatives.

## **Data gathering**

EvAP worked collaboratively with First 5 LA staff and directors as well as the Child Care Initiative grantees to develop and/or check the appropriateness of the various data gathering tools they used, such as protocols for questionnaires and focus groups administered throughout the evaluation (notes from meetings with EvAP, Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004), and the web-based reporting system including the performance measures built into the system.

EvAP collaborated with both First 5 LA head staff and grantees to develop the web-based reporting system, run a pilot test, and make post-launch adjustments to the web site to ensure usability and accuracy (meeting notes, observations of focus group on pilot test). As explained by one Research and Evaluation leader, providing the technical assistance First 5 LA needed to develop and host a web-based reporting system was viewed as a very important, understandable process among First 5 LA staff and commission members (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004):

*A huge part of this [evaluation] – at least, this has come to be so – is this [web reporting] database. That [database] has been very explainable to the public. [They understand] that this [database serves as] an accountability framework; that it fits a model for setting county-level outcomes, and for mapping grantee-level outcomes to this framework. EvAP's way of working with grantees to come up with [indicators and] outcomes and then relating them to the commission [and county was the proper way to develop indicators].*

The web-based reporting system gave the Research & Evaluation leaders a product to point to as the evaluation progressed; reassurance, in a sense, that the evaluation would generate reportable results.

In developing a web-based reporting system, EvAP collaborated with the grantees during years 2002 through 2004 to develop a list of indicators that represented the grantee program outcomes but also included indicators that were handed down from the state and county levels (documentation from November 2002 cluster meeting, observation notes from 11/18/03, 2/19/04). EvAP felt it necessary to include the grantees in the process not only to ensure that their program outcomes would be accurately represented, but to also ensure that the grantees would understand and use the system with confidence. EvAP asked the grantees to meet in groups according to the primary focus of their program, i.e. healthcare, quality care, training, literacy, or

special needs. When each group met, they learned about the three main types of indicators they would be asked to consider (performance measures, service statistics, and policy indicators). One to two meetings were dedicated to each of these types of indicators. EvAP facilitated group discussions of the appropriateness of a prepared list of indicators, and asked the grantees to consider which indicators their programs addressed. EvAP then facilitated activities in which the grantees eliminated, changed, or added indicators to the list. The outputs of these cluster meetings fed directly into the development of the web-based reporting system that grantees used during the last year of the grant. In addition to receiving training on the system, some grantees were asked to pilot test the system, and all were asked to give feedback on how to improve it. The grantees' involvement from the beginning of the process through the development and implementation of the system helped bolster the appropriateness of the reporting requirements and format, and helped improve grantees' understanding of and ability to use the reporting system.

The cluster meetings gave the grantees an opportunity to experience various kinds of collaborative working group techniques which promoted an understanding of EvAP's evaluation process and also provided grantees with ideas that they could use with their own organizations. For example, by asking grantees to work through the indicator development process, the grantees received hands-on training in connecting program goals and desired outcomes with measurable indicators of success. As an unintended benefit, some grantees also picked-up facilitation techniques, like those used in an early cluster meeting in which EvAP worked with groups of grantees to brainstorm and narrow an initial list of indicators of their programs' success. One grantee noted that she wanted to try the group decision making techniques EvAP used that day with her own colleagues (observation notes from November 2002 cluster meeting).

By analyzing a sample of grantee second quarter reports from 2001-2003, we were able to illuminate some areas in which the reporting changed over time. Considering the differences from year to year in First 5 LA's reporting requirements, grantee programmatic changes, grantee staff changes, and differences among grantees' attendance at EvAP events, it was not possible to directly attribute changes in the report quality and format to EvAP's work. However, there were some notable changes, and we feel that EvAP's presence and work on the web-based reporting system likely influenced the changes in First 5 LA's reporting requirements. We also feel that EvAP's training and collaboration with grantees to develop performance measures and service statistics for the web-based reporting system may have positively influenced the quality, specificity, and descriptiveness of the grantees reports over time.

As described in the Methods section, we asked another UCLA graduate student evaluator to conduct an independent analysis of the changes in reporting requirements.

This person was not familiar with EvAP's evaluation, and thus provided a novel perspective on the kinds of information the evaluation reports provided or lacked. The meta-evaluators used this analysis to then look at the kinds of information we would expect to see given the context of the program and EvAP's approach towards evaluation, and the kinds of changes in reporting we would expect EvAP to influence through their work with First 5 LA and the grantees. From the findings of the independent analysis, we found that none of the reports described the programs' logic

and few described how the kinds of data they collected related to their program goals and activities. Although it seems that First 5 LA would have benefited from understanding the various programs' logic models, the report formats did not lend themselves to reporting this kind of information, nor was it directly requested. It is also highly likely, given their size and resource limitations, that the programs had not developed formal program logic models. EvAP did discuss connecting program goals, activities, and outcomes with the grantees during certain evaluation capacity building activities (e.g. evaluation institutes, cluster meetings). The web-based reporting system did not contain a section specifically geared for explaining the program's logic, e.g. an area for explaining the connection between program goals and activities, and activities and outcomes. However, the performance measures section did, in effect, reflect the outcomes of particular activities or broader goals. For example, grantees could choose a performance measure like, "increased family reading and storytelling" and then describe how they measured their performance against the goal (e.g. pre-post survey) and the results of the measurement (e.g. 99% of parents indicated reading more to their child).

Based on the independent analysis, a few patterns emerged in terms of the kinds of information grantees reported consistently over the years and the kinds of information that the grantees increasingly reported from 2001 to 2003. The programs consistently provided descriptions of their program staff and staff recruitment efforts throughout the years. Concerning program implementation, the reports consistently discussed the implementation strategies from year to year, explaining which aspects were or were not implemented, which aspects of the implementation were going well or not going well, and whether or not they were reaching their intended audiences. However, the reporting of program outcomes changed over the years. The last quarterly report showed an increase in reporting of individual-, program-, and community-level outcomes as well as descriptions of who the program served. As opposed to the few programs that included information on individual- and program-specific outcomes in the first year, four out of five programs reported those statistics in greater detail in the final year. Only one program included community-level outcomes in the first year, but all five reported the statistics in the final year. None of the programs described who they were serving in the first year, but all five provided descriptions in the final year. The inclusion of more and more specific performance measures in the final year can be attributed to the work EvAP did to develop a list of potential performance measures and service statistics for grantees to choose from when they set up their quarterly reports.

For some grantees, EvAP's training, events, and technical support via phone and email helped them develop their evaluation reporting skills. One grantee in particular worked without an external evaluator, but demonstrated substantial gains in the level and quality of evidence used to support their evaluative claims. In 2001, the grantee briefly described the program goals but provided little evidence to support claims of increased knowledge among participants, for example. The grantee's 2002 second quarter report was much more thorough in its description of activities and the kinds of measures it used to evaluate progress towards their goals. In addition to the required service statistics, the grantee supplied samples of their brochures, calendar of events,

client tracking sheet, class evaluation forms, a pre-post test, a survey, and letters from their participants. In the report, the grantee mentioned attending EvAP's evaluation institute and receiving feedback that helped them adjust their measures, explaining, "after attending the First Five/Chapel Hill training and becoming aware of the retrospective post-test, it made sense to modify our pre/post test to fit the needs of our clients." In the 2003 second quarter report, the grantee reported in greater detail on the quantity and purpose of program activities, on the results of their various surveys and pre-post measures, and on the instruments used and outcomes of their performance measures. The report also indicated that two additional staff members attended training provided by EvAP, saying, "The Administrative Assistant and a Child Development Facilitator both attended the 'EvAP: Evaluation, Assessment & Policy Connections' training. This training enabled both attendees to assist with program evaluation implementation and development." In addition to the influence EvAP had on their evaluation plans and reporting stated in the quarterly reports, the program's primary contact at the organization stated in email communication with me in February 2004 and again through the 2004 grantee survey that EvAP's training, support, and evaluation fairs helped her organization craft their evaluation plans. On the 2004 grantee survey she stated that the evaluation institute gave her "very useful tools that I have used extensively," and that participating in the web-based reporting system pilot test "helped shape some of our evaluation tools and procedures."

## Data analysis

EvAP collaborated with both First 5 LA staff and grantees to interpret findings from data collection efforts. By nature of the existing process, grantees each interpreted and reported the evaluation findings for their Child Care Initiative-funded programs. As described above, EvAP helped to facilitate this process through the development of the web-based reporting system. In addition to their participation in the development of performance indicators and their submission of quarterly reports, grantees participated in focus groups and filled-out questionnaires to give EvAP feedback about working with First 5 LA and about the evaluation process itself. After EvAP summarized the results of a focus group, questionnaire, or site visit they would send the results to the grantees to ensure the accuracy of their interpretation and to allow grantees to add their input to the interpretation of the findings (email communication with EvAP, copies of draft reports).

Likewise, EvAP held meetings with and sent drafts of the analyses to the Research and Evaluation leaders at First 5 LA to discuss the findings and come to agreement on the interpretation of the analyses. One of the leaders explained what they gained from their participation, stating (Interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004):

*Lately I've been very involved in that. [It's] good. It's almost been like, in the way things are analyzed, it's allowed me to say how I would want it done, being close to the ground so that the analyses are relevant. It's a different thing . . . naturally, that kind of level of involvement takes more of my time, but in this particular evaluation,*

*it makes it a better evaluation. You could have evaluators do all the work, but then it wouldn't be as collaborative and staff would have less time to interact with EvAP. It takes more of my time, but I acknowledge that that's part of what collaborative evaluation is.*

As demonstrated by the above quote, the leader felt that, although time consuming, the analyses were more relevant as a result of their participation in the interpretation process.

## **Reviewing findings**

EvAP provided First 5 LA with reports of the data analyses throughout the evaluation; they did not wait until the end of the evaluation to share information gleaned from the evaluation. The purpose of sharing information as it became available was to allow First 5 LA to participate in the interpretation of the data, as described above, and to allow First 5 LA to use the information to inform their Initiative plans. One staff member in particular commented on the importance of being involved with the reporting function of the web-based reporting system, saying,

*[I've] definitely been involved in [the reporting]. Especially the performance measurement system. . . . I, as well as other staff in grants management, have been involved, which is critical for buy-in. It's the only way to do it; it has to be relevant to the organization.*

This staff member mentioned an important result of their participation – the staff's belief in the data gathering process and the findings presented.

EvAP produced interim reports for First 5 LA head staff and conducted regular meetings about the evaluation's interim findings (notes from meetings with EvAP, drafts of reports). Some interim reports were descriptive in nature such as an early report which detailed the various kinds of programs funded through the Child Care Initiative and provided an overall understanding of the services provided through those programs. Some interim reports were used to make decisions about the Initiative. For example, based in part on information provided through the evaluation, First 5 LA re-organized their staff so that grantees would have more centralized management as opposed to many points of contact within the organization (interview with First 5 LA Research and Evaluation leaders in January 2004). The web-based reporting system also fulfilled an important role in delivering timely evaluative information, providing First 5 LA staff with the capability of accessing aggregated reports on the grantees' progress as they needed the information.

## ***Extent to which evaluation model worked***

### **Evaluation effectiveness**

To address the evaluation's effectiveness, we proposed to examine the technical soundness of the evaluation process and outcomes, any biases that may be present in the evaluation, and the usefulness of the evaluation. If the evaluation was *not* technically sound there would have been a mismatch between the proposed evaluation activities and the way in which those activities were carried out. We found no instances in which EvAP failed to deliver the evaluation services negotiated with First 5 LA. Nor did we find a lack of quality in the products they delivered. In fact, EvAP delivered, upon request and sometimes proactively, additional advice, support, and research to assist First 5 LA and its Child Care Initiative grantees. Two examples include (1) providing First 5 LA with research on the ways in which grantees served or could serve the needs of children age 0-3 (see p. 13) and (2) providing group and individual technical assistance on evaluation plans and instrumentation to grantees (see p. 13).

If the evaluation were to show signs of bias, EvAP or a particular stakeholder group involved in the evaluation would have shown undue influence over the evaluation or signs of a conflict of interest. One of the benefits of EvAP's collaborative approach is that it inherently reduces the risk that one group would have undue influence over the evaluation by preventing the evaluation from privileging information provided from by one stakeholder group (i.e. evaluators, grantees, First 5 LA staff, First 5 LA directors) over the others. EvAP was successful in including a variety of voices in the evaluation by fostering relationships with the various stakeholder groups, and by facilitating meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, site visits, and events that allowed the various groups to contribute not only to the data collection process, but also to instrument development, analysis, and reporting aspects of the evaluation. By keeping the evaluation process open and making evaluative information available to those involved, the evaluation remained transparent to the stakeholders, who were able to check the accuracy of the evaluation findings. Two examples include (1) checking with participating grantees about the accuracy of findings from the focus groups, site visits, and cluster meetings (see p. 20) and (2) involving First 5 LA in the data analysis and report writing processes (see p. 10).

If the evaluation were not useful to the stakeholders involved, then First 5 LA and the grantees would not have benefited from the evaluation process or its findings. The evaluation process and findings, however, proved useful to both First 5 LA and its grantees. Two examples of the ways in which findings and processes proved useful include: (1) First 5 LA used evaluation findings provided by EvAP early in the evaluation to make organizational changes in order to better manage the grantees (see p. 21), and (2) grantees used the evaluation training and feedback provided by EvAP to improve their evaluation plans and instruments (see p. 15, 21).

## **Capacity strengthening**

To address the evaluation's effectiveness in building evaluation capacity among First 5 LA staff and the Child Care Initiative grantees, we examined the extent to which the grantees and First 5 LA staff enhanced their evaluation capacity, whether or not grantees quarterly evaluation reports improved over time, and whether or not EvAP

accommodated their training to meet trainees' needs. If the evaluation capacity of the grantees and First 5 LA staff was not enhanced, we would expect to find poor ratings of EvAP's evaluation institutes, evaluation fairs, and the Evaluation A-Z training for staff.

We would also not expect to find evidence that EvAP's training had influenced the ways in which some grantees and staff understood and performed evaluation activities.

To the contrary, both grantees and First 5 LA staff indicated on several occasions that they had increased their understanding of and ability to perform certain evaluation skills. Two examples include (1) grantees indicated on the 2003 and 2004 meta-evaluation grantee surveys that they benefited from their involvement in EvAP's capacity training and that their overall understanding of evaluation improved (see p. 14-15); and (2) First 5 LA staff indicated incorporating techniques learned from EvAP into the evaluation of other initiatives (see p. 16).

As discussed in the Data Gathering section (p. 17-20), it is important to understand that it is difficult to establish EvAP's direct influence over the quality of the quarterly reports because First 5 LA dictated the format for the reports for the first two years with some advice from EvAP, and of course, the individual styles of particular organizations and their staff members heavily influenced the level of detail and quality of their reports.

If the evaluation reports did not improve over time, then we would expect to find that the level of detail and quality of the evaluation data would remain about the same, and EvAP would not be credited by grantees or First 5 LA as having helped them with reporting. However, for most of the five sets of grantee reports we analyzed, we found increases in the detail with which they reported program activities, performance measures, and service statistics. We also found evidence that grantees received help from EvAP to improve their evaluation measures and reporting. Additionally, First 5 LA noted the importance of the work EvAP did to develop the web-based reporting system, and most grantees felt it was an improvement over the paper-based system it replaced (see p.8, 20)

To examine whether or not EvAP accommodated their evaluation training to fit trainees' needs, we examined the feedback of grantees and First 5 LA staff, and tracked the changes that EvAP made. If EvAP did not make any changes to their training, then it would be because they either ignored the grantee and staff opinions, or because the feedback was positive and did not warrant changes. The feedback on EvAP's evaluation institutes was highly positive, and we found that the only significant change requested by the grantees was that EvAP not hold the training for 5 consecutive days. EvAP responded by scheduling the following year's institute in two sections, as described on page 15 and also held two sections of training for the Grants Management staff in Spring 2004 (observation notes, personal communication).

## **Discussion**

### ***Synthesis statement***

In summary, the purpose of the meta-evaluation was to formatively assess the technical quality of EvAP's evaluation of the First 5 LA Child Care Initiative and to assess the extent to which the evaluation enhanced the capacity of the First 5 LA staff and the Child Care Initiative grantees.

The meta-evaluators found that EvAP's evaluation of the First 5 LA Child Care Initiative was conducted in manner that met the needs of the Initiative. The Initiative aspired to improve and expand the quality and availability of child care in the Los Angeles area. The Research & Evaluation leaders responsible for the internal evaluation of the Initiative believed that, to the extent possible, the grantees and the First 5 LA staff should participate in the evaluation process. EvAP addressed both of these goals by developing a collaborative evaluation process that required the involvement of the grantees and staff in order to identify those elements most important to the assessment of the grantees' progress in expanding and improving the quality of the child care services they provided. EvAP demonstrated no visible conflict of interest during the evaluation process, and by actively involving grantees as well as First 5 LA staff members and directors, they put in place a process that inherently helped to prevent undue influence of one group over another.

The methods EvAP employed ensured that the voices of those being evaluated and those directly impacted by the evaluation were represented in the process. In order to adequately prepare the grantees and First 5 LA staff members to contribute to the process of developing indicators of success and to be able to adequately demonstrate progress against their various goals, EvAP trained them on the fundamentals of evaluation, and encouraged them to learn by participating in the evaluation. As an important function of their approach, EvAP worked to ensure ongoing communication about the evaluation process and findings with First 5 LA staff, directors, and grantees.

This ongoing communication and dialogue about interim reports helped to ensure that the Initiative received information important to their planning process in a timely fashion, and ensure that the evaluation continued to meet the changing needs of the Initiative and the organization.

As a result of the ongoing dialogue and interim reporting, evaluation findings were used to make organizational and reporting requirement changes, to help facilitate the relationship between First 5 LA and the Initiative grantees, and to make adjustments in the evaluation plans. The capacity building training conducted by EvAP had the intended effect of engaging First 5 LA staff and the Initiative grantees in the evaluation process, which in turn led to much-needed improvements in the reporting format, content, and performance indicators used to assess progress made by the grantees. The quality of the evaluative information provided by the grantees improved over time and better reflected progress made by their programs. The ability of First 5 LA to quickly aggregate and assess the grantees' progress also improved with the adoption of a web-based reporting format. Without the buy-in and participation of all parties, this would not have been feasible. Additionally, there were some positive unintended outcomes of the evaluation. Some Initiative grantees that engaged in the evaluation process and training not only enhanced their capacity to understand and conduct evaluations, but also improved the quality of their programs. Beyond the Child Care Initiative, First 5 LA adopted aspects of EvAP's collaborative evaluation approach to enhance the evaluations of other initiatives.

**In sum, the evaluation of the First 5 LA Child Care Initiative met the standards set forth by the meta-evaluation, successfully enhanced the capacity of those involved in the evaluation, and produced high quality, timely, un-biased evaluation findings that proved useful to both First 5 LA and the Child Care Initiative grantees.**

### ***Implications for First 5 LA, EvAP, and collaborative evaluation***

#### **(Remarks by EvAP)**

[RITA, IF YOU WISH TO, FEEL FREE TO WRITE A FEW PARAGRAPHS HERE REFLECTING ON THE COLLABORATIVE NATURE OF THE EVALUATION, AND ANY PERTINENT IMPLICATIONS FOR EvAP, FIRST 5 LA, OR COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION IN GENERAL.]

## **Appendix**

### ***Interim meta-evaluation reports***

Crohn, K. & Alkin, M. (2003, revised 2004). Meta-evaluation of EvAP. Interim report: Results of Grantee Survey and Interviews. University of California, Los Angeles.

Crohn, K. & Alkin, M. (2004a). Meta-evaluation of EvAP. Interim report: Summary of Child Care II Grantee Survey Data. University of California, Los Angeles.

Crohn, K. & Alkin, M. (2004b). Meta-evaluation of EvAP. Interim report: Grants Management Survey, Summary of Results. University of California, Los Angeles.