



**Center for the
Study of
Social Policy**
Ideas into Action



Systems Change Strategies and Resident-led Advocacy

Araceli Simeón, Partnership Support Team Capacity Builder
Contributors: Corina Espinoza, Miguel Perla, Chrysta Wilson



About CSSP

The Center for the Study of Social Policy works to achieve a racially, economically, and socially just society in which all children and families thrive. We do this by advocating with and for children, youth, and families marginalized by public policies and institutional practices.

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Introduction

This brief identifies six elements or strategies for systems change and names residents as critical partners to achieve and sustain such change. It is based upon the assumption that residents can be advocates and leaders able to work with policy leaders and decision makers as partners to address the needs in their own communities. In addition, the brief highlights how and to what extent community members in Palmdale and Antelope Valley applied each element to begin and advance their systems change work and shares lessons learned from the process as well as how the Learning by Doing process helped community members in Palmdale and Antelope Valley apply several elements to begin and advance their systems change work. The Learning by Doing approach was developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) to execute a step by step process to research causative factors, background data and resident input.



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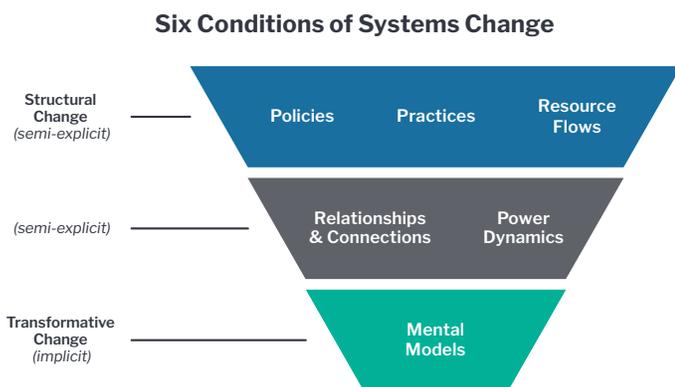


Systems Change Strategies and Resident-Led Advocacy

Advocacy is often described as “speaking truth to power.” The operative word in this description is *truth*. Effective advocates need much more than polished public speaking skills and scripted speeches: they need to use facts to demonstrate that poor outcomes stem from bad policy or a malfunctioning system, not personal flaws or bad luck. Most importantly, they must be authentic, believe that their voice matters, and share their story with conviction and passion *del corazón*.

Introduction to Systems Change Strategies

Recently, some foundations have started to include systems change strategies to support communities as they engage decision-makers (i.e. elected officials and civil servants) around complex social problems such as poverty, unemployment, failing schools, housing instability, and access to health services.



According to London Funders, a membership network for funders and investors, “systems change is about addressing the root causes of social problems, which are often intractable and embedded in networks of cause and effect. It is an intentional process designed to fundamentally alter the components [e.g. policies, regulations, practices, culture, structure, functions, metrics, etc...] that cause the system to behave in a

certain way [to produce certain outcomes].”¹ Often the goal of systems change strategies is to “enhance or streamline access and reduce or eliminate barriers to needed services by a target population.”²

Organizations and foundations striving for sustainable, long-term systems change employ different processes. However, these processes share six core elements:

1. Understanding needs, assets, context, and defining the problem;
2. Engaging multiple actors to understand others’ point of views and identify allies;
3. Thinking systemically (e.g. looking at the big picture, identifying causes and effects, interdependencies, and power structures) and mapping the system;
4. Developing partnerships and/or collaborations that will develop a shared agenda for systems changes;
5. Distributing leadership and sharing accountability for changes and results; and
6. Fostering a learning culture, including monitoring progress and adapting a plan based on what has been learned from implementation.

What is stressed across models is that ultimately, systems change is about changing structures, practices, resources, and “the people in a system, their values, beliefs, relationships, and feelings.”^{3,4} Producing changes in outcomes requires system leaders, practitioners, and beneficiaries to have difficult conversations with one another about “power differentials and implicit biases that lead to imbalances in resources, influence, and credit.”⁵ To achieve and sustain change requires assessing the system’s readiness to implement changes; building the capacity of system leaders, practitioners, and residents to think systemically; and providing transformational experiences to align beliefs and practices with the new paradigms.

The Role of Advocacy in System Change Strategies

All systems have internal mechanisms to benchmark and measure progress. However, when systems repeatedly malfunction and yield poor results, dramatic reforms cannot be initiated and sustained by system leaders and practitioners acting alone.

Practitioners have authority only over the projects they are responsible for (e.g. cases they are assigned to, or the students in their classrooms); additionally, practitioners usually don't reflect about their own implicit assumptions unless prompted.

Therefore, although advocates for change exist within most systems, it is typically difficult to achieve dramatic changes without outside advocates, as well. However, the challenge arises when the change effort becomes political, resulting in some leaders and practitioners rejecting any change (in part because they benefit from the status quo), a few supporting drastic changes, and most supporting minor modifications, none of which typically addresses the root cause(s) of the problem. Consequently, successful systems change efforts usually require a combination of outside advocates putting pressure on leaders overseeing the system and internal advocates leading and implementing organizational change.

Advocacy

Advocacy refers to “activities by an individual or group which aims to influence decisions within a system or institution.”⁶ The term “advocacy” encompasses a broad range of activities (including research, public education, lobbying, and voter education) that can influence policy.⁷ More specific examples provided by the Alliance for Justice, a national association of organizations that focus on the legal framework governing non-profit advocacy, include:

- Organizing for campaigns and rallies;
- Educating legislators on issues;
- Educating the public about the issue, the legislative process, and/or introducing legislators to community members;
- Publishing research that documents the current experience or story of the community;
- Influencing regulatory process of public agencies implementing the work;
- Providing non-partisan voter education and/or mobilization to register and vote;
- Hosting educational conferences or providing training;
- Litigating;
- Drafting a petition demanding change;
- Writing op-eds or submitting letters to share expertise on an issue; or
- Lobbying: Advocating for or against specific legislation; note that there are limitations on the amount of lobbying public charities or non-profits (organizations classified as a 501(c)(3) can do.

Resident-Led Advocacy

Resident-led advocacy focuses specifically on “shap[ing] public debate on important social issues and ensur[ing] that underserved communities have a voice in the policies that impact their lives.”⁸ Resident-led advocacy entails partnerships between non-profits and residents, many of whom are directly involved in the system they seek to change and are thus impacted by its malfunctions.

Although both non-profits and residents may seek change individually, they are often not as effective as when they work together. For example, non-profits pursuing system changes without residents cannot put a human face on the problem, may not be as credible, cannot sue without a plaintiff, and may have difficulty monitoring an implementation reached in agreements with the system. However, when residents complain about the services or inequities in the system without collaborating with a non-profit, the system usually responds by: 1) resolving the situation for the individual without improving the system for other beneficiaries; 2) disqualifying claims due to technicalities (e.g. for not following protocols as outlined in some document); 3) ignoring or dismissing concerns; or 4) accusing the resident of causing the problem they seek to resolve and perhaps retaliating for speaking up. However, when both residents and non-profits are equal partners, they can be a powerful advocacy force.

Effective advocacy requires a team of people planning and carrying out multi-step processes both before and after engaging decision-makers and demanding change. To execute all these steps, a variety of skills are needed, including research, analysis, writing, strategy, organizing, communication, outreach, capacity building, relationship building, and issue monitoring, among others.⁹ Non-profits with experience in resident-led advocacy prioritize their policy agendas based on the needs of the member base they serve, and share power, responsibilities, and credit with

members throughout the entire process. Their role is to support residents in making a compelling case for changing the system. They do this by dedicating staff who possess the necessary technical skills or can partner with others to provide needed support. “Residents’ greatest contribution in advocacy is telling their story in a way that will persuade decision makers to take action.”¹⁰ However, these powerful moments are typically a product of residents having co-led the process of defining root causes, gathering evidence, developing recommendations, increasing awareness of the problem, and possibly even monitoring impact over time.

Moreover, advocacy is a natural role for residents in a democracy, where citizens have a responsibility to be engaged in a government that is “of us, by us and for us.” As Paul Vandeventer writes in “What We Own and What Owns Us”, it “really [is] up to us [residents, nonprofits, media] to make sure those institutions live up to our expectations of quality and equality... [and we] must pay attention, and track and monitor actions of elected officials.”¹¹ Given that community and civic engagement is at the heart of democracy, a core function of residents is to “make their voices heard, gain a role in policy decisions, and affect institutions that influence their futures and those of their families.”¹²

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT RESIDENT-LED ADVOCACY FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE:

- **Two basic assumptions of resident-led advocacy are:** 1) residents are both “producers and recipients [or beneficiaries] of outcomes”¹³ and 2) everyone “benefits when underserved and underrepresented communities are empowered to control their own destinies.”¹⁴ Disregarding these assumptions typically leads to paternalistic views and actions, in which a person in a position of power decides for others, and does things to them rather than with them. The usual result is failure to achieve the desired outcome, and a waste of time and money.

- **While all nonprofits can advocate, not all are designed to lead and support systems change strategies; it all depends on their mission.**

Many nonprofits were founded to provide direct services to the community to fill the gaps left by government. Often service providers view advocacy as political activities that will jeopardize their nonprofit status and their relationships with funders or local leaders, thus, they do not typically engage in dialogue around issues of equity and institutionalized racism. Some may view residents as dependents of the system and deficient in some way, rather than acknowledging their many strengths and treating them as equal partners.

- **Although many nonprofits claim to be full and equal partners with residents, there is a wide variation in actual engagement.**

Authentic resident-led efforts are co-led by residents, meaning that residents are decision-makers and drivers of the effort. To identify where an organization is within the community engagement continuum, please refer to the “Increasing Level of Engagement” table.¹⁵

INCREASING LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Co-Lead
OBJECTIVE OF THE APPROACH	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions	To gather feedback from targeted stakeholders on the project’s goals, processes, shared metrics, or strategies for change	To work directly with stakeholders continuously to ensure that concerns are consistently understood and considered	To partner with stakeholders in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and priorities	To place final decision-making in the hands of stakeholders so that they drive decisions and implementation of the work
EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • email newsletters • send press releases announcing progress milestones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask for input on initiative strategies • invite to small group or individual presentations about initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invite to join working group or an advisory body for the initiative • partner in policy advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appoint to a leadership role on a working group to help shape strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • invite to join the steering committee and/or similar body with decision making power in the initiative

- **Although many resident-led campaigns have resulted in an accurate diagnosis of the problem and in major policy wins, many “leave implementation [and monitoring long-term impact] to others without defining what the best course of action should be.”** This results in a “mismatch between the rhetoric and real examples of success,”¹⁶ leaving system leaders and practitioners without much guidance on how to fix the problem while at the same time expecting to see results quickly.
- **It takes time for change to take root; it is key for all players to have “patient urgency.”** This phrase refers to the “productive tension” that ideally exists between the pressure that urgent matters exert on leaders to act immediately, which creates action but can result in top-down approaches, and the patience required for systems change initiatives involving residents and practitioners, which can drag out. The two opposing forces ideally create change that happens in a timely way but also involves all actors; “navigating that tension allows [system] leaders and community members [and practitioners] to achieve the right level of engagement.”¹⁷

Critical Competencies Residents Need in order to Advocate for Systems Change

As mentioned earlier, there are several competencies required at each step of the process. Also, there are a variety of tools that can be used. For example, The Systems Grantmaking Resource Guide identified “more than 50 systems frameworks, processes, and tools that communities, grassroots movements, academia, and government are using around the globe.”¹⁸ Figure 1 outlines competencies for each of the six common elements outlined on [page XX](#). While not every competency is required for every project, those deemed essential are denoted by *italicized* font.



Figure 1. Six Elements for Systems Change

PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 1: Understanding needs, assets, context, and defining the problem.

- Analyze data to base decisions and accountability on facts;
- If there isn't enough data to analyze, collect your own;
- Think how the current situation is impacted by history, race, geography, political system, economic system, beliefs, or assumptions behind actions;
- Identify root causes of the problem and a theory of change; and
- Prioritize most important and urgent issues for the community and your goals.

Element 2: Engaging multiple actors to understand others' point of views and identify allies.

- Collect data to learn if what was identified as a cause or theory fits with a broad set of community members' experiences;
- Identify other nonprofits, institutions, or agencies whose missions or priorities align with yours; and
- Gain insight from system leaders, practitioners, and elected officials to understand how they view the problem.

Element 3: Thinking systemically and mapping the system by identifying.

- How structures, policies, and practices work together to cause the current outcomes and who is most impacted
- Leaders or decision-makers that have the power to change the system; learn what they think about the issue, identify allies and opponents, and how the group might be able to influence them;
- The readiness or capacity for a system to change;
- If other strategies have been tried before, and why they worked or didn't; and
- Barriers that hinder access to resources or the processes to foster the necessary conditions for the system to work.

DOING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 4: Engaging partnerships and/or collaborations in developing a shared agenda for systems changes.

- The members of the partnership are reflective of the community and residents make up at least half of the members;
- The partnership determines all major decisions, including the plan of action after analyzing all the data gathered in the planning process;
- When a plan includes advocacy, strategies might include:
 - Raising awareness of the problem for a specific audience and/or the public at large and the need for change (e.g. education campaigns, forums, policy briefs, conferences).
 - Approaching, building relationships, and engaging decision-makers to request changes (e.g. legislative visits, providing testimonials before boards).
 - Planning last-resort strategies to pressure leaders to approve requested changes (e.g. organizing rallies, petition or letter drives, contacting the media, lobbying for a new bill, litigating).
 - Capacity building strategies to support everyone to execute their role(s).

Element 5: Distributing leadership and accountability for change and results.

All members have a role to play when implementing the plan. This stage is about:

- Coordinating and preparing to engage decision-makers;
- Identifying the most persuasive speakers for each specific audience. Speakers must:
 - Practice so that they can tell their story and provide firsthand accounts of how they or those they work with are impacted by the issue and explain why it is important to fix it now.
 - Tailor the presentation to the specific format and the messages to the audience.
- Assessing if the engagement activities were productive; and
- Determining next steps.

Element 6: Fostering a learning culture: Monitoring progress and adapting the plan based on what is learned from implementation.

- Learn the continuous improvement cycle, which refers to carrying out iterations of phases where people analyze data, develop a plan, implement activities, reflect on learnings to adapt the plan, and then restart the cycle; and
- Be able to monitor whether or not the changes approved by decision-makers are being implemented accordingly and their impact over time.

How First 5 LA's Best Start Initiative Established a Foundation for Systems Change Work

First 5 LA's mission is to “strengthen families, communities, and systems of service and supports so all children in LA County enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and life.” To advance its mission, First 5 LA launched the *Best Start Communities* in 2011, a collaborative, parent and resident-centered, results-focused, place-based initiative that focuses on “building supportive communities where children and families can thrive.”²⁰ First 5 LA supports 14 *Best Start* Community Partnerships across L.A. County, which were selected because they “face critical issues such as poverty, high unemployment, and teen birth rates while at the same time each has a strong network of local leaders and nonprofit organizations dedicated to making a difference. First 5 LA works in partnership with these networks to promote a common vision and collective will throughout each community that will give kids the best start in life.”²¹

In the next section, a two-column table is used to review First 5 LA's theoretical framework, structures, and procedures to establish a foundation for systems change work in Best Start Communities, and its application in Best Start Palmdale (one of two communities that chose a project that included an advocacy strategy).



PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 1: Understanding needs, assets, context and defining the problem

- **In 2013, First 5 LA established the Building Stronger Families (BSF) Framework**, which identifies specific strategies to strengthen families and communities to support young children, including direct services, community capacity building, and systems change strategies. The BSF framework's family results are based on research that established Five Protective Factors: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence of children.
- **The CSSP Results-Focused Community Partnership Framework was used**, which identifies six elements and 22 measures to track the progress of partnerships' organizational capacity building and development. These elements included: keepers of the vision; inclusive governance; effective collaboration; data-driven learning, decision, and accountability; resources and sustainability; and building neighborhood capacities (to lead, organize, engage, mobilize, and communicate).
- **In the fall of 2013, all Community Partnerships assessed their collective strengths and weaknesses** based on the RFCP Framework. Most were still developing their vision and governance foundation at this point.
- **In 2014, engaged in the Learning by Doing process**, which helped prioritize issues based on data, the frameworks, and introduced Community Partnerships to a results-focused process that uses effective questions to move from talk to action, assesses progress and applied learning." It took about seven months to carry out all the five steps and another seven months to draft plans and get them approved by First 5 LA.



After learning the Building Strong Families Framework and the Result-Focused Community Partnership Frameworks, Best Start Palmdale (BSP) assessed their collective strengths and weakness. **The members identified their strengths as having strong bylaws, diversity, and resident leadership.** Some of the residents had entrepreneurial backgrounds and others had served in school advisory committees over many years, advocating at the local and state levels. **They identified collaboration and community engagement as areas for improvement.**

Through the Learning by Doing process, BSP's Community Partnership reviewed data and identified two areas of need:

1. High incidences of child abuse (a Family Capacity Core Result); and
2. Lack of access to quality pre-schools and school readiness programs for low-income working families due to cost (a Concrete Supports Core Result).

A review of community partnership worksheets revealed that most residents' believed there was a lack of access to concrete supports, specifically for services related to childcare, preschool, and learning services. The BSP members believe[d] that addressing systemic inequities and increasing access to concrete supports [would] not only improve school readiness outcomes, but in the long-term [would] ameliorate other symptoms of being isolated and underserved, such as depression, aggression, abuse, or neglect.

PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 1: Understanding needs, assets, context and defining the problem

Learning by Doing Stages

1. Choose a Family Core Result

- Review the BSF Framework.
- Use an inclusive, data-informed process to select a family core result and indicators.

2. Gather the Story Behind the Data

- Engage diverse community members to gather input on your family core result.
- Discuss what has been learned and what additional questions have been raised.

3. Choose a Population Subgroup

- Use an inclusive, data-informed process to choose a population subgroup.
- Consider adding other indicators.

4. Identify and Choose Strategies

- Brainstorm strategies about what will work to improve your family core result, and use an inclusive, data-informed decision to choose strategies.
- Develop performance measures for each strategy.
- Participate in the First 5 LA funding process to hire an organization to implement the strategies.

5. Implement Strategies and Track Progress

They chose two indicators to monitor:

1. Percentage of parents who need childcare and who find it very or somewhat easy to obtain.
2. Percentage of parents who know where to go when they feel they need assistance helping their child learn.

Target Population: Families seeking childcare who do not qualify for subsidized services.

PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 2: Engaging multiple actors to understand others' point of views and identify allies.

- Community Partnerships were designed to engage multiple stakeholders and attract organizations serving families with young children.
- The LBD process' Step 2, "Gather the Story Behind the Data," required members to engage diverse community members (reflective of the income, race/ ethnicity, gender, family structure, etc.) to collect data documenting other residents' perspective on the issue through "parent cafés or family circles, one-on-one discussions, community surveys, or summits."

The Story Behind the Data. Best Start Palmdale members chose to conduct a survey, which they co-developed with their Learning Team, (consultants supporting their efforts). The tool was designed to answer the following questions for early education services (childcare and preschool), and family support services:

1. **Who** is accessing childcare? **Who is not and why?**
2. **What** is the type of childcare available?
3. **What** are the barriers to accessing childcare?
 - Is it based on where a person lives?
 - Is it because it's too expensive?
 - Is there a waitlist at the childcare center?
 - Do parents not know how to find childcare?
4. **What else** can we ask that can help us understand the problem?
5. They collected 238 surveys from parents and residents. The survey findings revealed some of the most significant barriers Palmdale residents face in accessing childcare include:
 - Unaffordable services (57%) because many do not qualify for government subsidies;
 - Long waitlists for services (56%);
 - Lack of awareness of existing services (43%);
 - Lack of services in geographically isolated areas within the BSP boundaries (e.g. there are 220 childcare providers in Palmdale, but only 8 in the Littlerock and one in Lake Los Angeles);
 - Lack of access to providers that speak Spanish; and
 - Limited public transportation in the area.

No other organizations or institutions have been interviewed at this point

PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 3: Thinking systematically and mapping the system.

- This was not a priority for the initial iteration of projects. All Community Partnerships were required to choose one family-level core results for their first project from three available options (as prescribed in the BSF framework). The idea was to provide an environment for developmental growth through implementation of a results-focused project that would allow members to strengthen families while building their infrastructure to reach higher-performing levels for community-level and systems change strategies. The table below provides a description of these core results, their definitions, and projects provided as examples.

The survey results helped Best Start Palmdale identify policy barriers at the state and federal level, as well as barriers accessing programs at the local level. Although typically the next step would have been to analyze the system, for Best Start the next step was to develop the strategies and activities. Consequently, the system was not analyzed or mapped until 2017, when the grantee was hired and the Capacity Builder was enlisted to support the project. Then Best Start Palmdale became connected to the Los Angeles Preschool Advocacy Initiative (LAPAI), “a cross-sector group of partners [whose] goal is to increase access to high-quality early childhood education (ECE) programs for children in underserved communities in L.A. County.” This led to being introduced to the Learning Policy Institute and the County of Los Angeles Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education, which provided insight on to the complexity of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) system at the state and local level. To explore the issue, the members from the Antelope Valley Community spent time learning the various sources funding the multiple ECE programs during the first community forum.

Please see Appendix A for a table illustration how ECE programs receive funding from many sources.

DOING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 4: Engaging partnerships and/or collaborations in developing a shared agenda for systems change.

- First 5 LA established the following requirements to ensure Best Start Community Partnerships would be Resident-Led:
 - All Community Partnerships must use the established frameworks to guide their work.
 - All Community Partnerships are supported by a Learning Team, formerly a team of consultants and now are teams of organizations referred to Regional and Local Networks.
 - Decision-Making Parameters:
 - All critical decisions need to be made at the Community Partnership level.
 - The decisions require input from diverse residents and stakeholders, reflective of the demographics in their Best Start Zone.
 - All Community Partnerships are parent/resident-led: 51% of members must be parents/residents, and at least 26% members must be parents with children ages 0 to 5.
 - Decisions (related to Learning by Doing) will be informed by data provided by First 5 LA.
- In practice, a great deal of decision making took place at Leadership Bodies, a smaller number of members often elected by the Community Partnership to process lower-level decisions and to provide recommendations on critical decisions.
- Given that most Community Partnerships did not focus on systems change strategies, their plans did not have advocacy strategies.

The survey results helped Best Start Palmdale identify barriers. Following that important step, the Community Partnership—which includes parents, residents, and representatives from organizations—developed these strategies:

Strategy 1: Advocate for changes in policies and funding allocations that limit access to preschool and childcare services to working families.

Strategy 2: Increase awareness of existing childcare, preschool, and educational services in Palmdale so families can learn about the availability of the services in the area.

Strategy 3: Create a team of information promoters and system navigators to deepen parent leaders' knowledge of social services and other resources in the area where they can help isolated families navigate systems and increase social connections.

The Community Partnership aimed to:

- Create a cadre of advocates that would lead the advocacy efforts;
- Build an informed community that would provide support to the advocacy strategy by mobilizing residents when needed;
- Increase awareness of the current early education resources or services available in the community in order to document the shortage and/or demand for services; and
- Develop a clear strategy to influence local and state decisions regarding early education policies and funding allocations impacting working families.

This plan was submitted in December 2014 and approved in February 2015. This triggered a process to procure a contract to carry out the work.

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Because First 5 LA is a public agency, the procurement of contracts is a lengthy process; for example, it took more than a year to select nonprofits. Community members from Best Start Partnerships were included as interviewers of nonprofit finalists. In Spring of 2016, Antelope Valley Partners for Health (AVPH), a nonprofit dedicated to improving health in the Antelope Valley, was awarded the contract, which started in July. AVPH is an umbrella organization strong in collaboration but needing more work to improve their advocacy. To lead the advocacy component of the project, they subcontracted with the Child Care Resource Center, which helps connect families with child care. However, the Best Start contract was the first time both organizations were leading a resident-led advocacy project. Given the background of the players, the advocacy strategies for systems change required by the contract was reduced down to three community engagement activities. None of these activities required engaging decision makers to establish relationships and seek change.

DOING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 5: Distributing leadership and accountability for change and results.

- Many projects were co-led with community members throughout the 14 communities, although there was great variation on the level of collaboration between members and nonprofits hired to implement the BSF projects.
- Members, especially residents, strengthened public speaking and facilitation skills, using their voice to share their testimonies.

In 2016, AVPH began implementation of Strategies 2 and 3, co-designing activities with the Learning by Doing Committee, which was composed of parents and residents from the Community Partnership and supported by AVPH staff.

Strategy 2: Increasing awareness of existing childcare, preschool, and educational services, achieved through four activities:

1. **AVBestStart.com**, a website which houses a growing list of Antelope Valley specific contacts, information and resources.
2. **“Ready for Kinder,”** a bilingual children’s wipeable booklet with activities and games for children that also contained information about community resources. This resource was well-received among community residents and was highly regarded by parents, schools, and organizations.
3. **Two AV Best Start Carnivals in 2017 and 2018.** In September 2017, the first AV Best Start Carnival was attended by about 1,000 community residents at Mesquite Elementary School, an event partner. Over 50 Best Start Palmdale members volunteered; the group considers this one of their greatest outreach accomplishments.

Strategy 3: Form a team of information promoters to help parents navigate systems and find resources for their family, including early education programs. The team successfully reached over 700 families within the Best Start Palmdale Zone. Many of them attended the community forums.

2017 Advocacy Projects: Advocacy Training—Spring and Fall

Members participated in two advocacy trainings. Each training consisted of seven sessions, with about 40 participants completing the training. The organizations used a curriculum provided by Parent Voices, a project of the California Child Care Resource & Referral Network.

1. **The Parent Voices Way.** Introduction to the mission of Parent Voices.
2. **Advocacy & You.** Learn key terms and different ways to get involved.
3. **How to Tell Your Story.** Develop your story and share it with confidence.
4. **How Government Works.** The budget process and how taxes are spent.
5. **Speaking to the Media.** Practice the power of your story.
6. **Systems of Oppression.** Learn different forms of oppression and ways to challenge them.
7. **Community Organizing 101.** Understand community organizing, practice conducting one-on-one conversations, and recognize the role you play as leaders in the community.

DOING SYSTEMS CHANGE

Element 5: Distributing leadership and accountability for change and results.

After the training some members participated in two meetings with elected officials and transportation system leaders, organized by First 5 LA. All speakers at meetings and at the forums were prepared by the Capacity Builder and/or by First 5 LA staff.

Local Legislative Visit—April 2017

First 5 LA coordinated a meeting with Assembly Member Tom Lackey and invited two parents and a childcare provider from Palmdale and Lancaster. The group discussed the “Governor’s budget proposal [which at the time proposed a] \$226 million in cuts to “pause” funding for 3,000 preschool spots and reneging on promises to increase rates to providers” (First 5 LA, 2017). The parents and the provider focused their testimony on how these proposals would affect them and the families they work with. The legislator was receptive to the message and interested in continuing his relationship with the partnership.

Transportation—August 2017

Another issue affecting both Best Start Communities in the Antelope Valley was the lack of public transportation, which hinders access to early education services and further isolates parents, leading to increased stress levels and possibly child abuse. For these reasons, the First 5 LA Program Officer supported the AV Best Start Communities in convening a meeting to connect families’ needs with local partners and decision makers in the AV Transit Authority. Another convening was being planned for 2018.

Community Forum I—July 2017

The forum focused on increasing awareness on the Early Childhood Education (ECE) system and the state of services in Los Angeles County and the Antelope Valley. It also connected Best Start Palmdale to coalitions and organizations working on this issue county and statewide; 170 persons attended the forum and the findings included:

- The ECE system is complex and parents are not fully aware of all their options. If they do not qualify for one program, they may not know to ask about others.
- Families do not have access to affordable child care and preschool services in the region.
- Families are forced to access preschool in one of seven school districts in the area, since their own districts do not offer any programs.

Community Forum II—November 2017

The goal of this forum was to build on the first event by providing data on local services and legislative updates. The event featured a panel with parents sharing how they became advocates. Everyone was encouraged to register to vote for the 2018 gubernatorial election.

Important Note: Although all activities hosted by AVPH were co-designed with the Learning by Doing Committee, many of the decisions were reported but not vetted through the Leadership Group or the Community Partnership. Consequently, some members did not feel ownership over the projects.

Theory: First 5 LA	Practice: Best Start Palmdale Case Study
DOING SYSTEMS CHANGE	
Element 6: Fostering a learning culture: Monitoring progress and adapting the plan based on what has been learned from implementation.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A learning culture was fostered in most Community Partnerships because the development of performance measures and evaluation for grantees was required. • Most Community Partnerships took time to self-assess and reflect on growth and performances in order to adjust annual goals and plans accordingly to achieve continuous improvement. • Both grantees and Community Partnership members need support in monitoring progress toward their goals by obtaining data from government agencies, and/ or hiring staff or consultants to help them reach their medium and long-term outcomes 	<p>Both trainings and community forums were evaluated by those participating. AVPH staff and the LBD Committee reviewed the evaluations and used the first forum and training to inform the second ones.</p> <p>Although several next steps were considered, including a legislative trip to Sacramento and doing research on transitional kindergarten and preschool seats available for children in local school districts, none were pursued by AVPH or First 5 LA because the grant and fiscal year were coming to an end. It is unknown if Best Start Palmdale continued with this project, as residents no longer felt an urgency over the topic and local organizations were not fully equipped or structured to move to systems change strategies.</p>

Lessons Learned and Recommendations from Best Start Palmdale

Despite community members' initial enthusiasm, the community did not advance the issue as initially planned and hoped. Multiple obstacles hindered the process:

Internal Factors Impacting the Project

1. **Neither the nonprofit organizations nor the community had experience leading resident-led advocacy projects.** Consequently, they were more successful in reaching out to residents, increasing awareness in their community, and providing an educational training than in leading the advocacy work. Given that AVPH's and CCRC's missions are more focused on collaboratives and service-provision, resident-led advocacy was perhaps not the best task for them. Although the implemented advocacy activities can serve as a foundation for future work, the nonprofits did not gain experience in several key areas, including:
 - Co-facilitating a process to review data and understand needs, assets, and root causes since this was carried out by the Community Partnership before the grant began.
 - Coordinating and preparing residents to engage decision-makers; because this was led by First 5 LA staff and the Capacity Builder, the nonprofit representatives were not present.
 - Thinking systemically; the forum format did not allow for a deeper discussion and analysis that typically takes place over several sessions with smaller groups.

Recommendations: Provide support through experienced staff and/or organizations with community organizing and public policy backgrounds is a must. Assuming this work will take place over multiple years, it would be wise to plan for and allocate funding in ways that could take this need into account.

2. **The length of the process truncated the rhythm and momentum of the project.**
 - The 18-month pause from planning to doing disrupted the analysis process. The community members initially leading the task did not get to think systemically and map the system.
 - Some of the leaders that championed the issue in 2014 stopped attending the Community Partnership in 2015 and 2016. They returned in 2017 and were key members in the LBD Committee that worked with the BSF grantee in planning all activities. However, during this absence, new leaders joined and led the Community Partnership. Because many had not been participants during the LBD process, they prioritized other issues.

Recommendations: The analysis process works best when done continuously over several sessions with smaller groups of leaders. If this work will take place over multiple years, investing in a cadre of highly trained group of community members might be preferable to lightly training large groups of residents.

3. **Learning that Palmdale School District (PSD) is a leader in providing holistic services to children in the area deprioritized the issue for the Community Partnership.**

In the course of partnering with PSD and working with parents whose children attend that district, the Community Partnership learned that PSD has invested in community engagement, unifying Black and Latino parents, providing preschool/TK services, and housing a Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) where children living in the Antelope Valley with special needs receive services. Through the community forums, the Partnership members learned that other surrounding districts (about six of them) rely on PSD to provide those services and have little else to offer parents. Therefore, if families want services, they have to access them through an outside district. Given the challenges with transportation and isolation, this step is not likely to happen. Although parents in Lancaster and Little Lake expressed interest in tackling this issue, the Best Start Palmdale Community Partnership is made up mostly of Palmdale residents; thus, the urgency to act diminished.

Recommendations: Different issues mobilize different residents. Allow Community Partnerships to develop multiple projects on issues related to their core result. Support the communities in reviewing data periodically, so they can monitor progress and re-assess priorities based on data and adjust as needed.

4. **Conflicting priorities and lack of support.**

First 5 LA approved the project, and its staff had expertise in developing policy positions, advocating for issues as an institution, and belong to various coalitions that address annual early education priorities. However, they address these priorities without directly engaging the community. Although they are supportive of Best Start communities advocating and tackling systems change approaches, First 5 LA is still learning what this type of endeavor entails.

Recommendations:

- The Learning by Doing process, encourages Best Start Communities to re-assess their priorities based on data routinely.
- Leverage relationships with LA County agencies and departments that have information and initiatives that may be in alignment with Best Start priorities. Making the connections can be helpful in advancing the community and systems-level work.
- Fund studies to produce data about the effectiveness of and support for Community Partnership's advocacy projects. Data projects can help groups build momentum, and provide facts that can be used along with testimonies to persuade decision-makers.

External Factors Impacting the Project

1. **Historical and political context in the Antelope Valley.**

Palmdale has a history of racism, including racism related to housing and policing that residents know and experience. , Additionally, despite growing Latino and Black populations, most institutions in the Antelope Valley are still led by Whites. This dynamic speaks to crucial issues of cultural relevance and imbalances in power that unfortunately cannot be fully addressed within this narrative. Although some advocacy organizations are beginning to establish offices in the area (e.g. the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, ACLU Antelope Valley Chapter, and Antelope Valley League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)) to combat discrimination and racial profiling by Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department, a conservative political ideology maintains the status quo.

Recommendations: Prior to taking on advocacy or systems change projects identified as priorities by residents, it may be best to hire a well-rounded team of community organizers and legislative advocates familiar with working with residents and stakeholders to support the work. It would be beneficial to have a window of time before ramping up the projects to research the above-mentioned dynamics; to research and analyze the specific issue or system they want to improve; to include time for relationship and team-building within Best Start; and for Best Start to develop alliances with key figures within and outside of the system they want to change.

2. **Lack of infrastructure and access.**

Palmdale’s challenges around accessible transportation is related to issues of infrastructure that many rural communities face. To achieve progress on increasing services in isolated areas, additional data on the number of programs and spaces in all school districts in the Antelope Valley would have been invaluable; however, data collection of this type was not approved by First 5 LA or partnering organizations. If this data had been gathered, there might have been a training for parents/residents on where to find & access this data, and how to use it to support their efforts. Partnership members also could have learned how to use relevant data to pressure local school districts to do more to serve the 0-5 population.

Recommendations:

- First 5 LA should continue convening the transportation agencies in the AV to improve the public transportation system in the area.
- First 5 LA could fund studies to produce data to support Best Start Community Partnership’s advocacy projects. Data projects can help groups build momentum and provide facts that, along with testimonies, can be used to persuade decision-makers.



Conclusion

The Learning by Doing capacity building process established a foundation for Partnerships to pursue systems change initiatives now and into the future. However, embarking on systems change work requires learning about what systems change is, analyzing the system they want to change, reflecting on one's role within the system and whether we are willing to change too, and assessing our willingness or ability to pursue the work. Impactful equity work is about changing the status quo, challenging accepted notions, and changing conditions to get different outcomes. In short, it is no easy task and there are many challenges to resident-led advocacy projects but there is also great opportunity. If the right combination of organizational and institutional leaders are willing to invest the time and risks to share power with residents, answers can be attained together to address root causes and realize systems change that can be sustained over time. As was the case in Palmdale, there are passionate leaders and advocates in every community who are willing to work toward creating sustainable change at the family, community, and systems levels.

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Appendix A

**Table 1
ECE Programs Receive Funding From Many Sources**

Program	Total Funding (2015–16)	Funding Stream	Funding Amount
Alternative Payment Program, CalWORKs (Ages 0–12)	\$1.108 billion ³³	State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$565 million
		Federal: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	\$381 million
		Federal: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$162 million
Head Start	\$1.065 billion ³⁴	Federal: Head Start Grants	\$998 million
		Federal: Early Head Start–Child Care Partnerships	\$67 million
California State Preschool Program	\$980 million ³⁵	State: California Proposition 98 General Fund	\$835 million
		State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$145 million
Transitional Kindergarten	\$665 million ³⁶	State: California Proposition 98 General Fund	\$665 million
General Child Care and Development (Ages 0–12)	\$305 million	Federal: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$184 million
		State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$121 million
Alternative Payment Program, Non-CalWORKs (Ages 0–12)	\$251 million	Federal: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$170 million
		State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$81 million
Special Education, Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Programs	\$232 million ³⁷	Federal: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B	\$97 million
		State: California Proposition 98 General Fund	\$75 million
		Federal: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part C	\$55 million
		State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$5 million
ECE Supports³⁸	\$172 million	Federal: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$52 million
		State: California Proposition 98 General Fund	\$50 million
		State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$49 million
		State: Proposition 10	\$21 million
California Home Visiting Program	\$32 million	Federal: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV)	\$32 million
Migrant Programs³⁹ (Ages 0–12)	\$29 million	State: California General Fund (Non-Proposition 98)	\$24 million
		Federal: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)	\$5 million
Title I District Preschool	\$13 million in reported funds ⁴⁰	Federal: Title I, Part A	\$13 million
Local First 5 Initiatives⁴¹	\$559 million	State: Proposition 10	\$559 million

Source: Melnick, H., Tinubu Ali, T. Gardner, M., Maier, A., & Wechsler, M. (2017). Understanding California's early care and education system. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Sources used within the chart include: Department of Education child development program reports and California child care programs local assistance—All funds reports, 2016–2017, California Department of Finance; Budget estimate methodologies for local assistance: May 2016 revision and Budget detail tables, 2016, California Department of Social Services; Justification of estimates for appropriations committees and Early Head Start–Child Care Partnership and Early Head Start Expansion Awards reports, 2014–2017, Administration for Children and Families; January 2017 EdBudget tables, California Legislative Analyst's Office; State tables by state, 2015–2017, U.S. Department of Education; Funding results data reports, 2015–2016, California Department of Education; 2015–16 Final budget summary, 2015–16, California Department of Finance; Local assistance appropriation table, 2015–2016, California Department of Social Services; Maintenance of Effort—Based on 2015 May Revision: Early Start and Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) with Early Start Restoration of Eligibility Criteria, 2015, California Department of Developmental Services; Signature program totals, 2015–16, First 5 California; MIECHV formula grant program and competitive grant program reports, 2016, U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health; Unpublished CAR Reports data from California Department of Education, Title I Program and Policy Guidance Office; First 5 Association of California. (2016). Investing in California's children. Alameda, CA: First 5 Association of California.