The Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families (CEP)

Year 2 Evaluation Report

July 2, 2002

David Campbell
Joan Wright

California Communities Program
Department of Human and Community Development
University of California, Davis

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This evaluation was conducted under a contract with the five foundations that are sponsoring the Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families, including: David and Lucile Packard Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Miriam and Peter Haas Fund, Peninsula Community Foundation, and Walter and Elise Haas Fund. We are grateful to them for the opportunity to learn more about current civic engagement practices in California's diverse communities.

Our evaluation team included University of California academics from county Cooperative Extension (UCCE) offices in six of the eight CEP counties, and local consultants with early childhood and/or community planning expertise in the other two counties (Monterey and Santa Cruz):

Contra Costa: Shelley Murdock, 4-H Youth Development Advisor UCCE;
Monterey: Child Development Consultants Yvonne Ricketts (prior to 4/1/01), and Anne Sanchez (since 4/01/01);
San Diego: Martha Weston, EFNEP 4-H and Adult Coordinator, UCCE (until 3/01); (Pat Margolis prior to 5/00)
San Francisco/ San Mateo: Gloria Brown, County Director, UCCE; Faye Lee, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, UCCE;
Santa Clara: Estella West, Nutrition, Family & Consumer Science Advisor, UCCE; Fe Moncloa, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, UCCE;
Santa Cruz: Sue Pierce, Public Health Nutritionist;
Yolo: Rebecca Carver, 4-H Youth Development Advisor, UCCE.

Other contributors to evaluation include Cathy Lemp, who conducted participant interviews in English and prepared and edited participant interview reports, and Claudia Sandoval and Gloria Widner, who conducted participant interviews in Spanish.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families (CEP)
Year 2 Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

The Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families (CEP) is a collaborative project linking five foundations, eight local Children and Families Commissions in California, and the University of California. CEP's purpose is to 1) obtain the broadest possible public input in the creation of Prop 10 policy and programs; 2) stimulate civic dialogue about early childhood development; and 3) learn from the experience of Prop 10 funded Commission partners in Contra Costa, Monterey, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Yolo counties.

This is the second yearly evaluation report on CEP prepared by David Campbell and Joan Wright of the California Communities Program in the UC Davis Department of Human and Community Development. The purpose of the evaluation is to 1) describe how each of the eight participating counties have conceived and implemented civic engagement (CE), and 2) document observable outcomes of CE activities as they relate to project goals. This report draws on 148 meeting observations, a review of project-related documents, and 340 interviews with Commissioners, Commission staff, and public participants in Commission activities (35 conducted in Spanish).

Project Direction During Year 2

CEP partners committed themselves to local experimentation and cross-county learning guided by the following principles:

Wide Spectrum of Community Involvement—encouraging diverse participation in the work of the Commission; particularly to insure that "lesser heard" voices are involved;

Bridging Communities—Interaction and Connection—creating ongoing discussion in which bridges are built between and within diverse groups and individuals, creating mutual understanding, respect, and a sense of common ground and shared commitment;

Impact on the Commission and Community—finding ways to link the expression of public voice to Commission policies and programs, and to other means for supporting families with young children.

Building on the project's initial emphasis on disseminating techniques for convening, framing, and facilitating public dialogues, Year 2 emphasized building civic engagement infrastructure and experimenting with a variety of forms and tools for promoting civic engagement.

Forms and Tools of Civic Engagement Used by Local Commissions

Advisory committees: the most common form of CE, these vary according to who they advise, what they advise about, their composition, and their power and influence;

Community conversations: episodic meetings involving public input and/or dialogue that are designed to attract parents and community members (for example by providing child care, food and translation);

Community capacity building*:* leadership and organizational development initiatives designed to develop local partners with independent assets and resources to help achieve Commission objectives or in other ways to support young children and families;

Mini-grants: setting aside a portion of the local Prop 10 allocation to fund small grants for parent groups, small neighborhood organizations, or other non-traditional grant recipients;

Program design teams: giving parents and community members a role in the design of Commission funded initiatives and programs;

Citizen proposal review panels[1]: giving parents and community members significant roles in reviewing proposals for Commission funding;

Outreach workers: individuals hired to connect the Commission with particular segments of the community;

Requiring parent participation in funded programs: requiring Commission grantees to involve parents in the design, implementation, and/or evaluation of the services their children are receiving;

Community events and public relations: keeping the Commission in the public eye to encourage community awareness and involvement;

Providing tangible incentives for participation: providing public recognition, training, special access to decision makers, or financial rewards to encourage or reward public participation.

The Year 2 experience yielded a variety of working hypotheses about effective practices that enhance each of these forms and tools of civic engagement (detailed in Section II of this report).

[1] CEP partners have made no distinction between citizens and aliens in their work, desiring to be inclusive of ALL who reside within local communities. Accordingly, we have felt free to use the words "citizen" and "citizenship" in this document, trusting they will be understood not in their technical, legal meaning, but as designations that for centuries have been used to describe the democratic behaviors the project hopes to promote.

Project Outcomes Attributable to CEP

Creation of civic engagement infrastructure: All 8 counties now have significant Commission infrastructure devoted to CE, including paid staff, advisory committees, and various structures for involving citizens.

Inclusion of diverse publics: All the local Commission partners have conducted special outreach to diverse groups in many locations, made possible by CEP funds supporting culturally appropriate and bilingual outreach staff, translation services, child care, and food; low-income parents, teen parents, parents who are not English speakers, and others not usually involved have participated in public meetings and planning processes.

Increased Commissioner interest in and support for civic engagement: The fact that the local partners are part of CEP raises the profile and legitimacy of CE, increasing the support from Commissioners.

Enhanced cross-county sharing: CEP has created forums to bring together staff and/or Commissioners from the eight counties, expanding local options.

Increased statewide visibility and reputation as a resource: The CEP counties can document their public involvement (which other counties may not be able to do) and have gained a statewide reputation as a resource for civic engagement ideas.

Small but significant signs of citizen influence on Commission policy: While not the major factor influencing Commission decisions, civic engagement has yielded some tangible impacts, such as mini-grant funding, and investments in CE staff.

Public participants feel more connected to the Commission: Positive civic engagement experiences led almost all participants to express a sense of personal connection to the Commission, local staff members, and/or the mission of serving children and families. For some participants, raised expectations about what the Commission could deliver had the unintended effect of contributing to a sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of immediately visible results.

Local partners and citizens were exposed to practices associated with public dialogue: CEP was successful during Year 1 and 2 in assisting staff in *facilitating* and *convening* meetings that are open and respectful of diverse publics. These "exploratory dialogues" aired a range of perspectives and enhanced mutual understanding—of the issues and one another. It was more difficult to encourage *framing* practices that identified issues facing the Commission for community discussion, or to implement "deliberative dialogues" where probing of differences and surfacing of conflicts occurred, or where there was a sustained effort to work through disagreements or tradeoffs to generate specific advice for Commissioners.

Lessons Learned About Pursuing Civic Engagement

Leadership counts. The work of civic engagement is labor intensive, non-routine, and dynamic. It requires unusual degrees of local knowledge, clarity about purposes, an ability to both listen and lead, and thick skin, among many other skills and talents. The skills and abilities of the local CE leadership team is far and away the most important variable in determining success.

Forms of CE need to be adapted in a manner that is specific to a targeted segment of the public. Local CE staff members learned that it is not possible to engage the public in a generic way. Instead, they try to focus on particular segments of the public, figuring out why these segments would want to be involved with the Commission.

The necessary tension between listening and leading in implementing CE. Staff learned the need to balance the value of letting the public decide what they want to work on against the competing value of offering structured opportunities for public engagement in Commission related work.

The time required to implement CE strategies. It can take 1-2 years to get a major new civic engagement initiative implemented, and longer than that to assess outcomes.

Forms of civic engagement that involve sharing Commission power with the public elicit greater citizen commitment. When given real power and specific responsibility, citizens seem more willing to go the extra mile.

Parents of children 0-5 are a "moving target" for organizing CE. By the time early childhood programs are in place a high percentage of parents have "moved on" to the new issues awaiting their children in elementary school and beyond, or literally moved to a new community.

The Brown Act is an impediment to civic engagement. Whatever its merits, the Brown Act—California's open meeting law—is experienced primarily as an impediment to the deliberative work of local Commissions. It seems ironic that an act designed to increase public participation and confidence in government is now mostly experienced as a legalistic barrier to deliberative discussion and dialogue.

The need to clarify the ends toward which CE contributes. Everyone is for civic engagement in the abstract, but without specifying particular purposes for CE it is difficult to direct action, ground reflections, or evaluate success. CEP partners articulate a wide range of goals, all worthy but collectively too diffuse to focus the energy of project partners. During Year 3 CEP may wish to address this challenge by pursuing one or more of the following options:

- Set priorities among the various goals for CE held by project partners;
- Use program logic models to reflect on the utility of particular forms of civic engagement in reaching intended goals;
- Focus on involving citizens in program monitoring and evaluation.

The Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families (CEP)
Year 2 Evaluation Report

I. Evolution of the Project and Goals of the Evaluation

The Civic Engagement Project for Children and Families (CEP) is a collaborative project linking five foundations[2], eight local Children and Families Commissions in California[3], and the University of California. Beginning in fall 1999 the project has made funding, technical assistance, and other resources available to Prop 10 funded Commissions in Contra Costa, Monterey, San Diego, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Yolo counties.

This is the second yearly evaluation report on CEP prepared by David Campbell and Joan Wright of the California Communities Program, UC Davis Department of Human and Community Development. It is written from the perspective of our observations of CEP activities up to February 2002—the end of Year 2 of the project. The report is organized in three main sections:

> Section I—describes the evolution of the project and our purposes and assumptions as project evaluators;
>
> Section II—identifies the forms and tools of civic engagement being developed, including the ideas and expectations underlying the various tools, and examines what is being learned about their outcomes and the conditions that support or limit their applicability;
>
> Section III—offers an assessment of what CEP has made possible that would not otherwise have occurred, and frames options for focusing project energies to meet Year 3 challenges.

CEP provides an excellent opportunity to observe communities as they seek practical ways to involve diverse segments of the public in planning, implementing and evaluating a major social policy initiative. The need for such civic engagement is widely noted in contemporary civic and academic discourse, and rooted in our democratic heritage. But projects that seek to apply democratic ideals to concrete settings are rare, as is the chance to reflect carefully on their assumptions, activities, and accomplishments. We are grateful to the CEP funders and to the eight partner Commissions for providing a rich laboratory for learning.

---

[2] The five foundations are: David and Lucile Packard Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Miriam and Peter Haas Fund, Peninsula Community Foundation, and Walter and Elise Haas Fund.

[3] Hereafter when we refer to the Commission, or the local Commission, we are referring to that county's Children and Families Commission. Although there is one Commission in each California county, we have tried to avoid referring to the Commissions as "county Commissions" because many of them wish to emphasize that they are independent of county government.

CEP Goals

From its inception, CEP has contained elements of both an overall unity of purpose and diverse expectations, experiences, and approaches. This creative tension enables local civic engagement experiments to be shaped to local contexts and desires, sometimes at the expense of clarity about CEP's overall purpose and direction. The value of the project has been underscored by the fact that the funders and their local partners all have committed to participate in an additional year of funded activity, beyond the two years initially agreed upon.

The shared goals of the project have been articulated in somewhat different forms at various stages of the project. At the outset, CEP funders' stated goals were:

1. to obtain the broadest possible public input in the creation of Prop 10 policy and programs;
2. to stimulate civic dialogue about early childhood development a) to inform the Prop 10 policy process, and b) as a catalyst to strengthening an ongoing community network to support children's issues;
3. to learn from the experience of the pilot counties, gathering lessons applicable to the Prop 10 process in other counties and to the broader quest for more meaningful civic engagement.

The *October 2001 Project Overview and Initial Year 3 Plan* offers the most recent statement of project objectives, indicating that the central purpose of CEP is "to link diverse communities, especially 'lesser heard' voices, with policy-makers in the development of policy for young children and families."

During Year 2, funders, CEP staff, and representatives of the eight partner counties met (8/27/01) to articulate project objectives all partners could support. The three "core principles" or "guiding concepts" that emerged from this meeting were 1) involving a wide spectrum of the community, 2) bridging communities with interactions and connections, and 3) impact on the Commission. The precise meaning and implication of these principles is a matter of ongoing conversation within the project, but CEP partners view the meeting as having successfully reestablished a sense of shared vision and direction—one that is not exclusively top-down (i.e., funder-driven) or bottom-up (i.e., local-partner-driven) but rather a partnership based on a shared desire for experience-based learning.

The evaluation team was instructed to focus our descriptions and outcome assessments around the three principles. To provide some clarity about what success would look like if we found it, we have drawn on the CEP staff summary and on our conversations with project participants to create our own capsule summary of each of the three principles:

- *Wide Spectrum of Community Involvement.* The idea is to create diverse participation in the work of the Commission, and particularly to insure that "lesser heard" voices are involved. CEP funders and participants value diversity and believe that diversity has a variety of dimensions: geography, ethnicity, income, language, professional disciplines, organizational affiliations, family characteristics (e.g., children with

disabilities, homeless families, gay and lesbian parents), and different service sectors (government, nonprofit, for-profit).

- *Bridging Communities—Interaction and Connection.* The idea is to create ongoing discussion that builds bridges between and within diverse groups and individuals, creating mutual understanding, respect, and a sense of common ground and shared commitment. Without this element, diverse participation might simply create a cacophony of different voices with no sense of shared purpose or ability to cooperate to get things done.
- *Impact on the Commission and Community.* The idea is to link the expression of public voice to Commission policies and programs, and to other means for supporting families with young children. This can occur in various ways: by insuring that Commission policies and programs meaningfully reflect expressed public concerns and desires (both generally and with respect to specific issues); by making the Commission and its "organized publics" an advocacy force in the community; and by encouraging citizens to invest their own time and resources on behalf of young children and their families.

CEP's effort to link these three ambitious goals makes for a unique but difficult project. Projects that aim to increase outreach to diverse communities are common, but seldom do these also try to create mutual discussion and learning among diverse groups. Likewise, projects seeking to advocate or influence policy are quite common, but more typically involve the pursuit of self-interest by particular constituencies rather than a broad-based articulation of common ground. The integrative nature of CEP's approach is commendable and the challenges it creates—such as deciding where the small CEP staff should focus their energies and what results CEP's sponsoring foundations should expect from local partners—are formidable.

Project Evolution

Three major factors appear to have shaped the nature of CEP as it has evolved over the first two years. (1) The first factor was the need to adapt CEP to the necessarily rapid development of the local Commissions after the passage of Proposition 10 in November 1998. Starting from scratch, these Commissions have had to create infrastructure quickly to meet their mandate of dispersing millions of dollars in discretionary funding. The Commissions have a very high political profile, and Commissioners face pressures and constraints similar to those facing top officials in county government, including state and local statutory requirements, budgetary uncertainty, tight and somewhat unpredictable time pressures, and pressure from powerful community stakeholders. During Year 1, when the Commissions were preoccupied with creating state required Strategic Plans, CEP's role was straightforward: to provide resources to enhance the diversity of input and quality of dialogue accompanying the strategic planning process. During Year 2 the Commissions have been preoccupied with building infrastructure, hiring staff, managing grant programs, and otherwise implementing the ideas articulated in their strategic plans. CEP's role during this phase of local Commission development has been less clear, and local CE activities have become more diverse.

(2) The second factor was the effort to accommodate the concerns of the local Commission staff as they began to implement CE ideas in their local settings. By Year 2 most counties had their own CE staff in place, and a better sense of how they wanted to make use of CEP resources to foster their own forms of civic engagement. Feedback from the local staff led CEP staff to rethink how it was engaging with local partners and prompted the development of a less-directive and more learning-based mode of working together.

(3) The third factor was change in the staff hired to lead CEP, each of whom has brought different experiences and expectations to the work. The original Executive Director, Bonnie Bjerre, resigned in August 2001. A new Director, Cristina Rodriguez de La Mar, was hired in October 2001. Project consultant Susan Clark, who played a major ongoing role during Bonnie Bjerre's tenure and during the interim, remains involved with the project steering committee. Maria Rogers-Pascual, the project's diversity and communications consultant, was hired in November 2000 and has remained with the project, providing important continuity and working in close partnership with the new Executive Director.

The early importance of "dialogue." While it was not the only tool they recommended, the original CEP staff team focused much of their technical assistance work with local partners on defining dialogue and articulating why it is central to civic engagement. The thrust of these efforts is captured in two project documents: 1) "*Doing With" via Dialogue—Notes for CEP County Partners, 8/1/00*; and 2) *How the Civic Engagement Project Thinks About Dialogue, April 2001* (copies in Appendix I). The August 2000 document identifies "three essential elements of dialogue that distinguish it from other public discussions and needs assessment processes:"

- *Convening*—the "who" and "where" that creates a mix of participants that is representative of the county in an accessible and comfortable setting;
- *Framing*—the "what" that identifies the relevant issues facing the Commission from a public perspective;
- *Facilitation*—the "how" that allows diverse participants to develop trust and mutual understanding so they can work through the issues together.

In the April 2001 document the original CEP staff indicated that they viewed dialogue as "at the core of our work" because it creates new knowledge, connections and resources within the community. That document distinguishes "exploratory dialogue" that is more general in nature from "deliberative dialogue" that is oriented to specific decisions. In either form the role of the facilitator is critical, supporting the group in moving from "what I want" to "what we want" *and* "what are we going to do"—grappling with apparent contradictions and potential tradeoffs to generate common ground.

Phases of the CEP project. Three main phases of the project are discernible:

Phase one (roughly November 1999-August 2000).[4] This period marked the initial engagement with local Commissions during their strategic planning process. CEP was focused on improving the diversity of voices heard in public input and on holding dialogues that helped to process and more deeply understand that input. At this time local Commissions were just beginning to become familiar with the civic engagement concepts articulated by CEP staff, and just beginning to plan and create their own CE structures (i.e., staff, advisory committees). Most local Commissions had hired consultants for their strategic planning, and used CEP funds to supplement that effort, successfully broadening the scope of their outreach and the diversity of voices heard. As we noted at length in our Year 1 report, most also made a good faith effort to implement some form of dialogue based on ideas and technical assistance provided by CEP staff, on whom they relied closely for consultation.

Phase two (roughly August 2000-July 2001). This period covers the time after each county's strategic plan was complete until the middle part of Year 2, a period of considerable adjustment for CEP. No clear model for the post-strategic planning phase had been developed at the outset of the project, requiring staff to adjust quickly and adapt their plans to local Commissions that were at very different stages of development and different levels of comfort with CEP concepts. The CEP staff message to local partners began to emphasize the need to find roles for the public at various stages of the program design and delivery process (planning, proposal review, implementation, evaluation, etc.). Local partners, most of whom by then had dedicated CE staff in place, began to articulate their own desire to develop CE infrastructure and community capacity for the long haul. They started to develop their own forms and tools for civic engagement, and CEP staff looked for ways to integrate dialogue principles and standards (convening, framing, facilitating) into these forms and tools. The emphasis was on tools that facilitate mutual understanding as a basis for discovering common policy or community objectives.

Phase three (the period since August 2001). The hallmark of this phase is a new emphasis on cross-county sharing and learning, focused around the three guiding principles agreed to at the August 27, 2001 meeting. Developing the capacity of local Commissions to evaluate and reflect upon their own efforts is seen as a key strategy in sustaining civic engagement beyond the third year of CEP. Key questions include "Who leads in CE efforts, the Commission or the community?" "What are the Commissions doing to become more community-based?" and "What is the community doing to be more effective at influencing policy or promoting community action that improves the lives of children?" CEP staff see their primary role as facilitating this community-specific learning by identifying resources and providing forums for partners to meet and share experiences.

[4] The date at which strategic plans were formally adopted varied significantly among the eight counties, with the earliest—San Diego—in February 2000 and the latest—Santa Cruz—in December 2000. All but Santa Cruz approved plans by August 2000.

Choices facing local partners. Local Commissions faced a number of tradeoffs in marshalling their limited CE resources during Year 2, such as whether to:

- Subcontract/collaborate with existing community organizations or develop the Commission's own programs;
- Focus on "gathering publics" in large meetings or on developing the capacity of particular leaders selected from among the public;
- Deploy outreach staff by geography, by community sector (e.g., faith, business), and/or by ethnicity and language;
- Communicate CE activities/input to the Commission via staff reports, by direct presentations made by parents or community members, or by involving Commissioners directly in CE activities;
- Make continuous/integrated engagement of the community the goal or make use of episodic engagement (e.g., "tell us what you need and then we'll go about providing it");
- Engage people primarily in talk or engage them in some form of action or public work;
- Focus on organizing insiders for service integration or on organizing the "non-usual suspects;"
- Involve the public in one or two focused Commission priorities or keep the Commission priorities broad enough that many groups can find a way to plug in;
- Use CE mainly for defense (i.e., to increase the public support of Commissioner decisions) or for offense (making new things happen);
- Implement the selected strategies on many fronts at once or do one thing well before moving on to other priorities.

Use of CEP funds in Year 2

In preparing for Year 2, CEP staff stipulated that county partners that had not yet done so should 1) hire permanent staff dedicated to CE (as opposed to relying on consultants), and 2) create some type of group to advise the Commission about CE activities. The goal was to insure that CE functions were rooted in the infrastructure of the local Commission. Local partners responded favorably. By February 2002 (the end of Year 2) each county had a designated position for a full-time civic engagement coordinator, and had attempted some means to solicit community advice on their CE activities.

Table 1 shows the total amount of CEP funding provided to the local Commissions. According to county budget reports, approximately 75% of the Year 2 CEP funding provided to local Commissions was used to hire staff, including CE coordinators and—in some counties—additional outreach workers. Actual staffing patterns varied across the counties, as did the way in which CEP funding was blended with Commission or other funding to support staff salaries and other aspects of CE activity. About 10% of the CEP funds in Year 2 were used for temporary consultants. CE staff drew on the remaining CEP funds (approximately 15% of the total) to cover the costs of holding meetings, developing outreach materials, and (in a few counties) providing stipends for community participants.

Table 1. Amount of CEP funding received by each county

COUNTY	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Contra Costa	$83,000	$80,000	$100,000	**$263,000**
Monterey	$59,000	$75,000	(est.) $75,000	**(est.) $209,000**
San Diego	$100,000	$100,000	$120,000	**$320,000**
San Francisco	$80,000	$90,000	$54,000	**$224,000**
San Mateo	$75,000	$85,000	$100,000	**$260,000**
Santa Clara	$90,000	$100,000	$100,000	**$290,000**
Santa Cruz	$62,000	$90,000	(est.) $90,000	**(est.) $242,000**
Yolo	$61,000	$75,000	$78,826	**$214,826**
Total	**$610,000**	**$695,000**	**(est.) $717,826**	**(est.) $2,022,826**

Source: CEP project staff

The Year 2 Evaluation

Purpose and Methods. The CEP evaluation team[5] is expected to 1) describe how each of the eight participating counties have conceived and implemented civic engagement (CE), and 2) document observable outcomes of CE activities as they relate to project goals. We have used a variety of qualitative methods to obtain information, including meeting observations, phone and in-person interviews, and review of both local Commission and CEP documents related to the project. In order to keep the local experience in proper perspective, we also have attempted to stay informed of broader developments as Prop 10 has been implemented in California, particularly the actions of the State Children and Families Commission as those affect local Commissions.

The CEP project was originally slated to run from November 2000 through October 2001, but CEP staff sought and secured a no-cost extension of Year 2 until the end of February 2002. While we take into account the overall evolution of the project since it began in writing this report, we emphasize activities that occurred during Year 2 of the

[5] During Years 1 and 2 our evaluation team included UC academics from county Cooperative Extension (UCCE) offices in six of the eight CEP counties, and local consultants with early childhood and/or community planning expertise in the other two counties (Monterey and Santa Cruz). The local evaluation collaborators' role was to brief the lead investigators on the county context, record observations of a sample of Prop 10 CEP activities, record anecdotes and stakeholder opinions relevant to Prop 10 activities (collected in the normal course of business), and participate in periodic reflective conferences to share experiences and help interpret findings.

project. Most of the fieldwork on which this report is based was concluded by the end of December 2001, when the contracts for our local collaborators expired.

Key evaluation activities during Year 2 (Table 2) included:

- *Commissioner interviews:* Our research design called for yearly interviews with local Commissioners. Between April and July 2001 Joan Wright and David Campbell conducted phone interviews with 44 Commissioners, former Commissioners, or alternates in the eight CEP counties. We were able to speak with approximately 2/3 of the current Commissioners (interview protocol in Appendix II).
- *Local Commission Executive Director and/or Civic Engagement staff interviews:* Between February 26 and April 5, 2001, Joan Wright and David Campbell visited each county together and completed in-person interviews with executive directors and civic engagement staff (interview protocol in Appendix III). Similar visits to collect information and review drafts of our Year 2 county evaluation reports were conducted between January and March 2002.
- *Participant Interviews:* Between October and February we contracted with Cathy Lemp and Claudia Sandoval who conducted 132 interviews with public participants in local civic engagement activities, 22 of which were in Spanish (12 in a focus group setting in Santa Cruz). These interviews were tailored specifically to reflect the form of civic engagement in which participants took part (examples of interview protocols in Appendix IV).
- *Meeting observations:* We observed 52 local meetings, spread relatively evenly across Year 2. With a couple of exceptions, most of these field observations were completed by the end of December 2001, when the contracts for our county collaborators expired.
- *Review of documents:* For each county, we reviewed materials distributed at meetings; written reports or minutes of public meetings; planning documents including any updates to the Year 1 Strategic Plan; year-end reports to CEP on Year 2 activities; Year 3 CEP proposals, etc. We also reviewed CEP planning documents and reports.
- *Background data collection:* Using 2000 census data and other sources we updated social and demographic information on each county (see Appendix V).

Table 2. Year 2 Evaluation Activities by County

County	Meetings observed	Commissioners interviewed	Participant interviews (English)	Participant interviews (Spanish)	Total participant interviews
Contra Costa	12	5	13	5	18
Monterey	4	3	27	0	27
San Diego	5	5	14	0	14
San Francisco	3	5	19	1	20
San Mateo	6	7	5	4	9
Santa Clara	4	7	16	0	16
Santa Cruz	11	7	16	12	28
Yolo	7	5	0	0	0
Total	52	44	110	22	132

Over the course of the Years 1 and 2 we observed 148 meetings and conducted 340 interviews.

Basic Evaluation Questions. In summarizing the evidence from our Year 2 fieldwork, we have focused attention on the following questions:

1. What forms and tools of civic engagement did local Commissions use?
2. What ideas, expectations, and assumptions underlie these forms and tools?
3. What outcomes and conditions support or limit the applicability of these forms and tools?

Evaluator assumptions and interpretive lenses. The two investigators brought to the CEP evaluation both differences in perspective and some common understandings of the nature of civic engagement. Campbell, a political scientist, has long been interested in the public policy process, particularly in how citizen engagement and community organizing can advance the values of democracy, equity, and sustainability. Wright, an adult educator, has focused on the processes by which publics learn both the content of public policy issues and ways in which their own and others' preferences can be accommodated in mutually acceptable outcomes.

As the project was originally described to us, we expected CEP would permit observation of citizen input in one phase of the public policy process—the strategic plans required of every local Prop 10 Commission—and one primary form of civic engagement—variously known as public dialogue, civic dialogue, or simply, dialogue. We further expected to learn through our observations:

- how well dialogue could be used in groups as diverse as California communities;

- whether and how the content of the dialogue—the preferences and concerns articulated by participants—would influence the decisions of policy makers on the local Commissions;
- what participants learned about the nature (content) of policy choices facing the local Commissions; and
- what participants learned about the process of making their voices heard by the Commissions.

In many respects these were naïve expectations. From our current vantage point, CEP can be viewed as a county-by-county partnership that has supported local Commissions as they adapt or invent a variety of tools or forms of civic engagement. Depending on the county, we see these tools being employed at various stages of the program design process. In some cases they are used to promote direct community action to make life better for children and families rather than to influence the direction of Commission policies and programs. As the project has progressed, more attention has been given to creating institutions and structures for civic engagement that have the potential to continue after CEP itself ends.

We have planned and conducted a descriptive study, but have had to adapt our understanding of what it is we are describing in response to the project's evolution. During Year 1, we paid attention to the manner in which public meetings were convened, facilitated, and framed. In this Year 2 report, we have focused on describing 1) the evolving nature of CEP, and 2) the forms or tools of civic engagement as they have taken shape in various local contexts. In making this choice of emphasis we assume, correctly or incorrectly, that:

- CEP is not interested in gathering different publics together for conversation as an end in itself, but as a means to achieving policy influence or other forms of community change;
- it is important to attempt to identify links between what citizens are saying and what the Commission is doing, even when these links may be difficult to observe or have not yet had time to ripen fully;
- every form or tool of civic engagement carries with it a set of ideas (e.g., theory of change) that explains how the tool is expected to work, toward what desired ends, and under what conditions;
- it is useful for the evaluation to identify the ideas and expectations underlying the various tools and to describe the outcomes and conditions that support or limit their applicability.

Relevant literature. CEP is occurring at a time when there is a growing imperative to *do* something about the disturbing disengagement of ordinary citizens from the shaping of public affairs, and the dwindling ability of citizens to hold accountable powerful leaders and institutions. In California this imperative is given added importance by the increasing population of new immigrants and the challenge of conducting public life in a diverse, multi-cultural society. In describing and assessing CEP efforts, we have been informed by the literatures that examine previous civic engagement initiatives.

Over the last half of the 20th century, two basic forms of citizen participation (other than electoral participation) in governance have vied for prominence. One of the most respected students of citizen participation, Stuart Langton, labeled these as "citizen action" and "citizen involvement."[6] The former involves bottom-up strategies that attempt to organize independent citizen organizations that can press their issues and concerns to elected officials and other decision makers. The latter involves top-down efforts within public institutions that are motivated to improve programs and enhance their legitimacy.

More recent students of citizen participation have emphasized two somewhat new features: 1) the growing reliance on modes of governance that involve networks of public, private, and nonprofit actors, and 2) the attempt within these networks to create horizontal, collaborative structures where issues are resolved via dialogue and deliberation, rather than in a "command and control" or a "power politics" fashion.

Because CEP gives local partners freedom to pursue a variety of CE strategies and ideas, the project gives us the chance to learn about the "ideas in good currency" in the field. As Peters (1996, p. 128) notes, the problem for would be reformers is not a shortage of ideas, but "too many ideas and not enough systematic thinking about which ones were applicable to particular situations and whether the ideas were compatible with one another."[7]

Citizen involvement. CEP initiatives are "Commission-sponsored," rather than arising from independent citizen initiative. In this respect, the most important literature against which CEP results and learning might be compared is that which documented the citizen involvement efforts of federal and state agencies during the 1970s. These efforts arose in part as a response by government to vigorous community organizing by the consumer and environmental movements, neighborhood organizations, and other citizen action initiatives. During that time, the norms around citizen participation began to shift, and public officials began to see it as their duty to include some form of public input into their program planning processes—both to improve program effectiveness and forestall political challenges.

A number of key generalizations about how to make citizen involvement meaningful emerged from the study of those earlier programs.[8] These include:

1. Goals for participation must be specific, rather than vague and general.
2. No single technique is magical; the goals determine which of multiple tools to draw upon.
3. If citizen participation it to be meaningful it takes time to plan and organize prior to implementation.

---

[6] See his *Citizen Participation in America,* Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1978; especially chapter two.

[7] See Guy Peters, 1996. The Future of Governing: Four Emerging Models. Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press.

[8] This list is derived from Langton's summary of the literature.

4. Participation that is mandated or required, whether by government statute or foundation requirements, can never be equated with self-initiated action by voluntary associations.
5. In trying to get the attention of powerful decision makers, riots, rebellions, and other forms of civil disturbances are more effective than participation through traditional channels.

Public work. Schooled by the civil rights movement, Harry Boyte has developed a theory of democracy as "the unfinished work of the people," where citizens are co-creators of the public world. As Boyte puts it, democratic public work involves:

> …people's self-conscious work of "building the commons," our common world, material and social culture, that all depend on, from local libraries and schools, community fairs, and collective norms and rituals, to reforming institutions and society as a whole…It will also mean the reinvigoration of "publics" themselves, citizens who act in more public-regarding ways, who think of themselves in less personalized, aggrieved, and narrowly righteous ways.[9]

As it has matured, CEP is spawning efforts—either the work of moving the Commission and its decisions in the right direction, or that of creating direct citizen action on behalf of children and families. A number of potential pitfalls can divert efforts to mobilize citizens for public work. For example, Boyte notes that many public engagement processes stop at the visioning and strategic planning phase, failing to teach people the arduous political skills needed to turn visions into results.[10] These skills can't be taught in the abstract; they are learned as people commit themselves to tasks that cultivate their energies and sense of public-regardingness.

Another hypotheses about potential impediments to public work is the cultural idea that "sympathy for one another's feelings" is necessary in order to act in public. Richard Sennett argues that common feeling is too transient a basis on which to ground public action:

> In community groups, for instance, people feel they need to get to know each other as persons in order to act together; they get caught up in the immobilizing process of revealing themselves to each other as persons, and gradually lose the desire to act together.[11]

Boyte and Sennett both suggest an important distinction between efforts to demystify the system and engage citizens in existing public process, on the one hand, and efforts to change the system by introducing into public life the norms of personal sharing and community caring. Elements of both views have been evident in the course of CEP.

---

[9] "Public Work: An Interview with Harry Boyte," *Higher Education Exchange*, Kettering Foundation, 2000, pp. 43-44.
[10] See Harry Boyte and Nancy Kari, 1996. *Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
[11] Richard Sennett. *The Fall of Public Man.* New York, Vintage Books, 1978, p. 11.

Civic engagement. In an important chapter synthesizing the recent academic work on civic engagement, Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina identify three main theses about what is necessary to promote effective civic engagement.[12] The CEP experience embodies, to greater or lesser degrees, elements of all three of these approaches.

Social Capital. The most widely discussed recent theory—popularized by Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*—concerns the role of social capital in promoting civic engagement. Presented over-simply, the thesis is that people who interact regularly in face-to-face settings learn to trust one another and thus are better able to work together to solve collective problems. Unclear is whether the basic presumptions of this theory actually hold—whether increased face-to-face interaction really does lead to more effective governance.

Rational Choice. From this perspective, levels of civic engagement and resulting effectiveness are a function of the *incentives* that institutions and organizations create. These incentives may alter the pattern by which various groups perceive the advantage or disadvantage to themselves of taking part in governance. Unclear is whether providing these incentives alone is sufficient to increase the likelihood that the voices of the non-usual suspects will have an influence on policy. Nor does this model have a way to address the possibility that extreme voices—themselves attracted by the incentives—might have undue influence on decisions.

Historical-Institutional. This approach takes a power-politics perspective, arguing that CE levels and effectiveness depend on the degree to which the non-usual suspects are organized and have the resources (human, fiscal, organizational) to advance their interests in a political world that rewards those who can stay in the game over long periods of time. The assumption is that the disparities that the non-usual suspects face are not accidental, but are in the self-interest of the powerful and not likely to be given up willingly. Viewed from the historical-institutional perspective, the key issue will be whether any of the institutional infrastructure that CEP has helped to develop can actually serve the ends just described, rather than simply providing legitimacy for those currently holding power. The difference is between small-scale politics that may be quite participatory but relatively trivial, and a significant citizen politics that advances larger agendas and issues. For example, the question many CEP partners have posed to the public is: "How can we support children and families in our community?" This is a valuable question, and it fits with the intention to open a discussion that was not just about what the Commission could do but about what the community can do for itself. At the same time, asking the question in this way precludes asking a more pointed and directly political question: "What kinds of employment conditions and public supports are needed to make it possible for all working families to succeed both at work and in raising children?" One variable that will matter is whether the Commissioners and their staff conceive of a Commission in traditional terms—as a public grant-giving agency, or, as one suggested to us, as a sort of community foundation—or instead as something more like an insurgent advocacy force for children and families.

[12] See their edited volume, *Civic Engagement in American Democracy,* Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999.

Evaluation Challenges and Caveats. Our ability to describe and analyze what is occurring within and across CEP counties is limited by a number of factors, including:

Limited observation opportunities. CEP is not a single project but a cluster of eight county projects. Even within the counties, multiple strategies and activities are being pursued. Given the relatively modest resources available for the evaluation, and the lack of consistent communication protocols to make sure that we were informed of what was going on and when, we were not fully aware of all that was occurring.

Different perspectives among CEP partners on what success ought to look like. It is not surprising that our interviews revealed many divergent ideas about what successful civic engagement ought to look like and the key barriers or problems to be overcome, given the broad scope of project goals and the decentralized control over project activities. Differences of emphasis exist both within and between the various groups involved with CEP, including funders, CEP staff, local Commissioners, and local staff. We will explore the implications of this reality in greater detail in the conclusion of this report. At this point we simply note that without shared outcomes it is difficult to know where to look to determine if the project is succeeding.

Different frames of reference held by CEP partners regarding the nature of the evaluation. The primary audience for this evaluation, as we have designed it, is the group of funders on the CEP Steering Committee and the staff they have hired to implement the project. We hope to inform them by describing local projects and their outcomes in the context of the ambitious goals CEP originally set (e.g., influencing policy, creating ongoing civic dialogue). We should note, however, that local partners have expressed 1) concern that the evaluation will be used by the Steering Committee to determine future funding for their respective counties, and 2) their desire for more help in evaluating their local CE activities.

Terminological confusion. One of the things we have learned in observing CEP is that the vocabulary of civic engagement can lead to misunderstanding. We don't claim to have the only correct meaning of the following key terms, but here is how we are using them in this report:

- *Civic engagement.* Involving citizens in the planning, implementation, or evaluation of policy initiatives or community projects.
- *Outreach.* Efforts by public bodies to engage the voices of diverse citizens in their communities, often by focusing on hard-to-reach populations.
- *Public dialogue.* An approach to learning about public issues that emphasizes creating safe settings where diverse perspectives can be aired, learning occurs, and mutual understanding developed. Some forms of dialogue take the further step of developing agreements to act based on discovery of common ground, rather than on majority rule or power politics.
- *Public input.* A form of civic engagement that involves creating occasions to hear what different citizens think without the expectation that mutual learning will occur, perspectives will be broadened, or common ground will be discovered.

- *Community conversation.* A term used by many local Commissions to describe meetings involving public input and/or dialogue; we use the term to refer to meetings and events designed to attract parents and community members that are more or less episodic, consisting either of a single event or a brief series of events.
- *Public work.* Citizens acting together to build the common world on which all in the community depend, including material or social goods of some public value (e.g., building a playground, creating a resource directory).
- *Service providers.* Individuals affiliated with an agency or program (public, private or non-profit) that delivers services to the public.
- *Front-line service providers.* Individuals in service delivery agencies who come into direct contact with the public.
- *Parents and community members.* Key targets for CEP inspired outreach, we reserve these designations for members of the public who are not affiliated with a service delivery organization, except as potential clients. In some cases we use the term "ordinary citizens" as a rough synonym.

We are aware that our vantage point as evaluators is limited and that the evaluative tools at our disposal are not the type that supports definitive conclusions. Our goal is more modest—as Charles Lindblom put it in *Inquiry and Change,* it is "illumination without conclusiveness." Earlier drafts of this report have left many project partners feeling misunderstood and that their efforts have been insufficiently appreciated. We hope that this final Year 2 report corrects this unintended impression, but inevitably various partners in the project may not share some of the perspectives we advance.

II. Forms and tools of civic engagement in CEP Counties

A substantial shift took place during Year 2 in the variety of civic engagement forms and tools adopted by the local Commissions. During Year 1, most CE activities were discrete, one-time events, or a series of meetings that were linked in some fashion. Meetings were used primarily to gather input for local Prop 10 Strategic Plans. By contrast, Year 2 involved creating ongoing structures or processes for promoting civic engagement. The focus of our observations thus shifted away from looking primarily at how effectively meetings were framed, convened, and facilitated, and toward examining how the Commissions were developing CE forms and tools within their organizational settings.

In this section we describe the major forms or tools we have observed. The dictionary defines "form" as "one of the different modes of existence, action, or manifestation of a particular thing," and "tool" as "a means to an end." We will use the term "tool" to refer to specific techniques or methods, and "form" to refer to general strategies that might use one or more tools.

There are two main reasons—one empirical and one conceptual—for our decision to focus our Year 2 report around the forms and tools of civic engagement. The first reason is the evidence that these tools are the heart of what the eight local Commissions are doing to engage citizens. A fairly discrete range of concrete forms and tools have emerged, most of which are being experimented with in at least two or three different counties and some even more broadly. Commitment to share learning about these tools—rather than to a pre-set model or approach to civic engagement—holds CEP together during the current phase of the project.

The second reason for our choice is conceptual. Instead of relying primarily on government to solve public problems, the "new public administration" increasingly looks for solutions to come from networks of public, non-profit, and private actors. Unlike the traditional style of administration that relied on top-down hierarchies under the direction of agency heads, these networks are fluid and dynamic collectivities that must identify and activate the appropriate partners, and orchestrate their skills and resources to seize opportunities. As Lester Salamon has argued, the choice of a particular "tool for public action," and the specific ways those tools are defined, becomes increasingly important in this setting, structuring not only who will participate in a given network but also the nature of their interactions.[13] For example, a grant making process based on a request for proposals (RFP) produces different players and dynamics than an income support program, a training program, new regulations, or a voucher program.

By the same token, we believe that the local Commission's choice of civic engagement tools and the way it uses these tools are constantly defining which elements of the public are being activated and for what types of public work. We hope to increase awareness of the varieties of civic engagement tools, the challenges each poses for CE staff, managers,

[13] See Lester Salamon, ed., *The Tools of Government: A Guide to the New Governance.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

and enablers, and the limits on their applicability suggested by the outcomes and experience thus far.

In this section we describe the basic forms and tools of civic engagement used by local Commissions in Year 2. For each form we provide a basic description, examples of how it has been used in local settings, and emerging lessons about the conditions and practices necessary to make the tool effective. Keep in mind that the forms and tools are works in progress, and our descriptions and examples may be quickly dated. For the sake of brevity and clarity, we have been selective rather than exhaustive in choosing which local examples to describe. Our choice of examples is influenced by what local CE staff have indicated are their most important initiatives as well as by the availability of evidence from our first-hand observations and/or interviews.

Advisory Committees

This is a common and widely recognized form for civic engagement to take, but the familiarity of the term can belie the great range in the nature, composition, and functions of particular advisory committees, including:

- who they advise—some report directly to the Commission, some report to the Executive Director and/or staff;
- what they advise about—some deal solely with civic engagement while others address more general Commission functions;
- the extent of their power and influence—some make funding recommendations while others do not; some help plan and design programs while others "review and comment" after the fact;
- their composition— some have only service providers, others include parents or community members;
- what ancillary purposes they serve— some fulfill the Prop 10 mandate that each Commission have a community advisory committee, and some serve other purposes;
- whether they are "ad hoc" (brought together for advice on a specific program at one point in time) or continuous.

In some cases the line distinguishing an advisory committee from a Commission subcommittee is blurred; for example when there are community members that regularly participate in a CE subcommittee of the Commission. To illustrate the various distinctions and to underscore the dynamic development of advisory structures as Commissions move through different stages of organizational development, we will describe examples from three counties: Contra Costa, San Diego, and San Mateo.

Contra Costa. During Year 1 Contra Costa's Commission convened three advisory groups—composed mostly of recognized providers—one for health, one for early education and child care, and one for family support and parent education. It also had a small and very active CE "subcommittee" composed of a few Commissioners and Commissioner alternates, the Executive Director, and CE staff. During Year 2 they worked to broaden the participation of parents and other community members in their advisory structures. One major intended outcome was the creation of what were

originally called regional advisory committees, and later simply regional groups. The change in name was significant, representing a shift in emphasis from seeing these bodies primarily as means of providing input to the Commission to using them to incubate community-driven initiatives. At the same time, three community members of one of the regional groups began attending the CE subcommittee meetings, adding their voices to that group's deliberations.

San Diego. Very early in its Year 1 development San Diego's Commission created a large Technical and Professional Advisory Committee (TPAC), whose 15 members are drawn from recognized and visible service providers in the community. TPAC has the power to make formal recommendations to the Commission and is a major forum for deliberating overall Prop 10 strategy as well as specific programmatic initiatives. San Diego has experimented with two strategies to insure that TPAC (and through them the Commission itself) is in touch with the voices and concerns of parents, community members, and front-line service providers. One strategy is to hold one TPAC meeting per quarter in a different region of the county and to conduct a community conversation at the close of the formal TPAC meeting. The idea is to make TPAC more aware of community concerns and community members more aware of what TPAC is, who its members are, and what it is doing. A second strategy has been to develop a separate layer of advisory structures called Leadership Teams. These have been created to solicit advice on key Commission initiatives, such as school readiness, civic engagement, and evaluation. Membership on these committees includes representatives of government agencies, community and faith-based organizations, universities, the media, etc. There is little participation by non-affiliated parents or community members. The Leadership Teams report directly to the Executive Director, rather than to the Commission itself, thus avoiding Brown Act constraints.

San Mateo. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) was originally formed to give input and help develop the Year 1 strategic plan. A separate and smaller Civic Engagement Steering Committee was formed to advise the CEP project in the county. Beginning in spring 2001, these two committees were merged into a single group. During Year 2, membership in the CAC was open to any interested individuals, and consisted of those who self-selected to be a part of the meetings. The Executive Director and Civic Engagement Manager served as staff for the CAC, and regular participants included the Commission Executive Director, staff from the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center (a key partner in Commission civic engagement work), and representatives of a variety of community agencies and programs, both public and nonprofit. Meeting agendas were varied—with reports on Commission work, mutual sharing and learning, brainstorming future activities, solicitation of input on Commission initiatives, etc.

For example, the CAC discussed the use and distribution of the Kit for New Parents, which was later the focus of a good deal of local media coverage. During the latter part of Year 2, the CAC became a forum for public input into three Strategic Initiatives proposed by the Commission, each of which is expected to receive millions of dollars in funding. Some of the CAC feedback was technical and very specific, relating to subject matter in which members had particular interest. Other feedback suggested ways to leverage the

Prop 10 funds or ways to improve the overall integration of the service delivery system. The Executive Director took responsibility for distilling the comments from these meetings and reporting them to the Commissioners, noting CAC member priorities in her staff reports. As Year 2 drew to a close, the Commission and CAC were working on a set of recommendations to guide CAC's relationship to the Commission, criteria for membership, and other operating agreements.

Outcomes and lessons learned regarding advisory committees. The experience with advisory committees suggests that they normally elicit participation from recognized service providers more easily than participation by the diverse community participants CEP has targeted. Front-line service providers are also easier to involve than parents—especially in daytime meetings that they can attend as part of their job duties—and frequently bring a wealth of insight regarding the daily lives of parents and children. Still, a number of local Commissions have made special efforts to include parents and community members in their advisory structures with some success.

A paradox seems to exist with respect to advisory committees as forms of civic engagement. The more formal the advisory structure, the more power it tends to have but the less likely it is to invite the regular participation of parents and community members. By contrast, less formal advisory structures are more likely to be a welcoming setting for diverse participants, but tend to have less direct influence on Commission decisions.

Our observations of the local Commissions over the first two years make it quite clear that when major funding decisions are on the table, Commissioners quite naturally tend to seek and/or receive advice and recommendations from staff and key "insiders." Given this, a key concern is how to insure that these "insiders" are connected with, rather than insulated from, the public. In other words, "Who advises the advisors?" In this regard, the steps San Diego has taken to connect TPAC to community conversations, and the steps Contra Costa has taken to engage community members with their CE subcommittee, are evidence of promising practices.

Different forms of advisory committees create different settings for dialogue and deliberation. For example, a formalized body like TPAC is subject to the Brown Act because it reports directly to the Commission, and it must conduct business quite formally. By contrast, San Diego's Leadership Teams can operate less formally. Of course, important differences can also result from the ways meetings are conducted and facilitated, and from the effort made to elicit broad-based participation and to nurture mutual understanding and learning. Just as informality and inclusiveness do not necessarily go together, formal settings and procedures need not impede providing space for public voice, and can even facilitate it.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. The evidence suggests that advisory committees are effective as a CE tool when:

- the Commission is willing to delegate part of its decision-making power to an advisory committee, or at least to identify upcoming decision areas about which they are willing to entertain advice;

- there are clear agreements as to the function, membership, and role of the advisory committee, such as whether it can present formal recommendations directly to the Commission;
- interests and experiences of a broad array of providers and community people are represented, giving the committee public legitimacy and credibility;
- persons selected for the advisory committee understand the process and content issues sufficiently (including first-hand experience) to engage in informed deliberation and provide useful advice to the Commission;
- a safe and welcoming environment is created for discussion and continuing learning, so that newcomers are not intimidated;
- members of the committee are more interested in the well being of young children and their families than in the interests of the service sector and organizations they represent;
- the Commission makes resources (e.g., staffing, meeting space) available to enable the advisory committee to accomplish its work;
- there is a link between the Commission and the advisory committee that permits information to flow in both directions without distortion (or there is direct interaction);
- any review function of an advisory committee can be fulfilled in a timely manner.

Community Conversations

In this category we include meetings and events designed to attract parents and community members that are more or less episodic, consisting either of a single event or a brief series of events. Although they may lead to or be connected with more institutionalized forms of citizen involvement, they are not intended to create sustained civic engagement.

These events were the primary form civic engagement took in *all* counties during the formulation of Strategic Plans, but after that point an interesting pattern emerged. The four more populated CEP counties (Contra Costa, San Diego, San Mateo, and Santa Clara) made extensive use of community conversations, while the four smaller CEP counties (Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, and Yolo) did little continuous work in this vein. It is not completely clear why the larger counties made more use of this form of civic engagement; in part it may simply reflect their larger staffs, since the outreach and arrangements for these meetings is labor intensive. It may also reflect the fact the large populations in these counties cause the Commission to feel more insulated from parent and community voices.

In order to exemplify this form of civic engagement, we will describe its use by the Contra Costa Commission. We have chosen to describe their work in detail not out of disregard for the other counties, but because 1) in Contra Costa the community conversations were described to us by staff as the centerpiece of their Year 2 work, which was not the case in the other three counties using this tool, and 2) we were able to observe most of the Contra Costa community conversations first hand, and have considerable interview evidence (Commissioner, staff, and participant) on their intended

purposes and outcomes. We were able to interview a sample of 18 of the 169 public participants, 16 of whom were parents or community members rather than service providers.

Contra Costa Regional Community Conversations. During the summer of 2001 the Contra Costa Commission convened a series of regional (East, West, South, Central) community conversations centered on the question: "How can we make Contra Costa a better place for families with young children?" The initial round of meetings was held in June and July 2001, with two meetings (1 week apart) in each of the four regions. To encourage ongoing participation, $40 gift certificates to Target were given if an individual attended both sessions. Childcare and dinner were provided at all meetings, and simultaneous translation in Spanish/English was provided in the three regions where it was needed.

A variety of outreach techniques were used, including invitations (in English/Spanish) to those on the Commission mailing list; articles in local Mothers' Club newsletters; asking community agencies, child care centers and other associations to recruit participants; advertising in the community calendar section of the local newspaper; and connecting with existing email networks.

The staff report that summarized the regional meetings for the Commission indicated that the meetings were intended to enable:

- the Commission to learn more about parent concerns, so that Commissioners:
  - -get new ideas for programs
  - -make better decisions about policies and direction
  - -discover better strategies for doing outreach
  - -become more willing to share power with the community
- the participants to learn more about the Commission, so that participants:
  - -apply for Commission funds
  - -get involved with Commission committees, tasks, meetings, etc.
  - -become advocates for kids
- the regional groups to take shape, so that the groups:
  - -begin functioning as parent advocates
  - -help make Commission decisions (Parent grants, etc.)
  - -act autonomously but in relationship with the Commission

Outcomes and Lessons Learned. Contra Costa was very successful in generating participation from a diverse cross section of the community. The regional meetings succeeded in attracting large numbers of unaffiliated parents, with most attending both of the two sessions. According to our own observations and the testimony of meeting participants we interviewed, the meetings attracted audiences that reflected diverse segments of the respective regions. The meetings were conducted in a way that was comfortable to almost all of those we interviewed, a result supported by our own observations. All voices in the room were heard, if at no other time then at least during the introductions, when everyone had a chance to share not only their name but something related to their interest in young children. Particular effort was made to ensure

that Spanish speakers could participate in the meetings, with simultaneous translation provided in a way that was deemed satisfactory by all participants.

The decision of the Commission to hire outreach workers with credibility in their communities had a lot to do with the success. It was also due to the significant effort put into outreach using multiple strategies. The provision of $40 in Target vouchers to those taking part in both sessions probably upped attendance, though how much this was a factor is difficult to sort out. Our interviews with meeting participants reveal that a large majority (16 of 18) felt comfortable and satisfied:

> I think everyone was really voicing their opinions and speaking, and that's what made us want to stay on target with the time. Because we all had something to say.
>
> They were very accepting and they made everybody feel comfortable.
>
> I think that anybody that went, they would be satisfied that they did.
>
> I felt very comfortable and thought, "Finally! Now we'll be able to do something."

One exception was a white woman from a higher-income neighborhood:

> The other mom that went to the first meeting, she had made a comment to me … that she had felt uncomfortable in the first meeting. And she is kind of in my same situation—I'm a White woman, she's a White woman; we're both stay-at-home moms—and she said that she felt that when she went there, there were a lot of minority groups there … and she felt like she was out of place, like she had no business … to try to help people determine where funds go when she didn't have a need for that kind of thing. And I definitely came away with that same impression.

It is clear that different meeting participants carry different expectations regarding who should attend this type of meeting. Many told us they wished that "folks with real power, like public officials," would attend, because they have the ability to actually get things done. For others, however, the presence of more powerful insiders at a meeting was intimidating:

> Those people came to the table with an agenda. Already. And they had their minds set on how they were going to get a chunk of that money. And when you're just somebody's mom sitting there with no clue about government agencies and how they work and how they should work, and you don't have fancy Congressmen's names to throw around that you work for or that back you on this, or you have this initiative on the table, … that's really intimidating! So I was just like—I'm going to go home and bake cupcakes.

Energy was high in the meetings, as a sense of shared purpose was articulated, and the motivation to create changes was revealed. There was a strong sense of shared possibility among most attendees, one of whom summed up her experience:

> From the beginning, the Commission introduced itself, explained the goal of the meeting and what they [the Commission] could and couldn't do. The nice thing was that they just basically facilitated the discussion for the community. We were the ones who did the talking. They didn't stand up there and say, "Well, here's what we think," and get input; they had us talk to each other. It was wonderful…

Distinctions of class and race are part of what makes Contra Costa County unique, and present complex challenges and opportunities for staff leading civic engagement efforts. Here's how one participant described her experience in a regional meeting:

> One thing I started to realize, the biggest revelation for me, was that the things that I thought were like obstacles to raising kids or little problems—when I started to hear what the other people were talking about, it kind of seemed like everything that I ever thought about, or maybe the life that I live, is nothing compared to what the other people are experiencing. They were making it sound like there *weren't* playgrounds for their kids to go to, that it wasn't safe; they were talking about things like drugs. I live in a different world. I started to think that my purpose should be more to find some ways to help. I don't have it so bad compared to the things that I was hearing.

This remark describes a "moment of connection" or insight in which a more affluent resident begins to see the great need of her less affluent neighbors. This type of experience is one benefit of meetings in which diverse participation is sought out. But it also suggests challenges for those who would lead this type of civic engagement. For example, there is the challenge of insuring that a woman like this one doesn't simply retreat to her own world thinking she has nothing in common with those who "live in a different world" or of finding ways to provide a meaningful outlet for her desire to "help."

Another participant related a separate example of a cross-class, cross-race encounter:

> One of the ladies there, a Black lady, said one of the problems she felt was that there were no extra-curricular activities for the kids, no classes or things that they could attend, and I made the comment that in fact we do have a leisure services organization in town that provides what I consider to be a wonderful array of classes and stuff. And she just kind of rolled her eyes around at me like… I got the impression that she was trying to present an agenda and I had somehow squelched her thing and now she was mad because I was saying that there were things like that already in place.

We point out this example not to suggest that it is representative, but to indicate how challenging it can be to forge understanding, even among participants who share a common concern for children. Imagine the time it might take for even a highly skilled organizer or facilitator to help these two women see the validity of what the other is saying, rather than "talking past one another" as they appear to have done in this case.

We can point to a number of outcomes of the community conversations in Contra Costa that have either influenced the Commission or advanced the aims of "organizing publics" and "activating citizen energy." Two regional groups are now pursuing their own community improvement projects, and the CE staff members hope to use these groups to create sustained engagement of the community with the Commission. Three members of these groups are participating in meetings of the CE Advisory Committee. The number of applications to the Commission's Family Friendly grant program rose significantly, which staff members attribute to their Year 2 outreach.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Community conversations are effective in moving toward CEP goals when:

- staff, perhaps working with others, can insure that the conversations are framed, convened, and facilitated appropriately (e.g., providing food, childcare, translation);
- specific topics of discussion are identified before the community conversations are convened;
- the environment for conversation is safe, inviting and designed to encourage multiple perspectives;
- follow-up opportunities are provided that create ways for interested individuals to become involved on a more ongoing basis;
- comments, concerns, information and alternatives are accurately recorded and reported to participants and the Commission;
- the Commission does not ignore the feedback, but considers it carefully;
- participants in the conversations are kept informed about what is happening to the ideas they offered, and about any decisions/progress that have resulted.

Community Capacity Building

The sustainability of CE activities beyond the CEP grant depends in large part on developing the desire and capacity of community groups and their leaders to continue on their own. Local CE staff members expect this form of civic engagement will 1) insure that the Commission develops local partners with independent assets and resources that can help achieve the intended outcomes of the local Strategic Plan, and 2) make it more likely that community groups and organizations will use promising practices of civic engagement.

Community capacity building is a familiar term that can mean many different things to different people. To illustrate ways it is being practiced in CEP, we will describe the distinct approaches developed in San Diego and San Mateo. In each case, the capacity building work has been a major (though not the only) part of the local CE effort. Both Commissions contracted with a local community organization that is responsible for the capacity building work.

San Diego. A major investment of Civic Engagement Project funds in San Diego County is the Commission's contract with the Consensus Organizing Institute (COI) of San Diego State University to develop community leadership in three pilot community

collaboratives—the El Cajon Collaborative, the Murphy Canyon Military Family Cluster, and Reach Out to Families in South Bay. COI was guided by four goals:

- to identify and motivate a group of volunteer parents in each community to create positive change around Prop 10 opportunities and the Commission's vision of school readiness;
- to guide parents in the process of identifying community needs, generating solutions, and taking action on those solutions;
- to integrate involved parents in a meaningful way with the local collaborative and the Commission; and
- to develop parents and service providers who can and want to continue the community engagement effort using consensus organizing principles.

In each of the pilot communities a core group of 6-10 parents had been meeting weekly at the time Charles Jarman, COI Senior Project Manager, assessed the project in September 2001. These core groups have involved other parents in these weekly meetings and in community conversations on issues relevant to the work of Prop 10. The core parents have designed and conducted surveys in their communities from which to develop Community Action Plans and have begun to implement those plans, and each has held a well-attended Community Conversation regarding the Commission's Implementation Plan (May 2001). In El Cajon, the parents formed El Cajon Community in Action (ECCIA), sponsored a School Readiness Forum, and are recruiting additional ECCIA members.

Early in 2002 we interviewed four ECCIA participants in the El Cajon School Readiness Forum. The participants had clearly learned from their experience with COI. One of the questions concerned previous ECCIA meetings:

> We have had a lot of them. They have been on everything that involves 0-5. School readiness mostly because—if we get the funding—the ECCIA is doing a preschool directory. So we're focusing more on school readiness, but there have been a lot of issues that have come out of these meetings that we've had, where we've invited the community to come in and talk about [them].
>
> We as a group have put on several dialogues and forums on our own to try to address issues that are affecting parents here in El Cajon.

The parents have also learned how important it is to build connections to persons not previously involved:

> We're trying to widen the circle because we don't want to presume, certainly, that eight of us speak for the entirety of the local community.
>
> The more parents we get, the more empowered we become. And that, I think, is the message we were trying to send: "You don't have to be a cog in this system. You don't have to wander through like a tumbleweed, blowing wherever the wind blows you. Be pro-active! If something seems wrong, stop and investigate that! "

And they have learned the importance of personal contact in building those connections:

> That's the only way I got involved, was by word-of-mouth, talking with other people that are involved with the community and having them tell me, "Well, this is what we do. Would you be interested in something like that?"

> The reason why they knew what to expect—since we are doing the invitations face to face, they get a chance to ask any questions about how was it going to be run and what would it involve.

> We didn't do a mail-out at all; we got on the phone and then we went and met them somewhere. And we personally spoke with them, and that way they were very clear … Because we wanted them to come ready, with some ideas!

The parents have also gained participatory leadership skills:

> We all facilitated. We had agreed on the front end that we would all separate into a group so that participants could contribute without having the bother of taking notes. Because we wanted to hear what *they* had to say. When nothing happened initially, I started asking questions. And eventually people started talking and then it had its own force, and I was just a secretary at that point in time.

> We didn't really let on who all were members of the ECCIA until everything was over with. So that way people didn't feel intimidated by having one of us in the group. We were afraid that if we let them know who we were, then they would defer to us and have us facilitate, and we really wanted it to be more *them* than us.

They would like to work on a variety of projects on behalf of young children's school readiness:

> We are hoping to get Prop 10 money to put together a preschool- and kindergarten-readiness directory and to disseminate that to the families that have children between the ages of 0-5. We want to let parents know the kind of things they need to do now to kind of enrich their children's lives so that they can be well-rounded and ready for kindergarten.

> …a big giant book that tells parents what their rights are. I would want every parent to be aware of what their rights are and not be scared. And speak up!

Three non-ECCIA members who participated in the El Cajon meeting reflected on what was special in the experience:

> I think it was the ability of the actual parents or community people who had been involved in the program to articulate to the group how they had been empowered by the process. What was interesting is I had seen… worked with several of these

> parents who really have worked themselves into extremely strong community leaders and are taking on other initiatives--a jump-off from this process.
>
> What I thought was special was seeing a core group of people like this committee *really* making every effort to reach out to the community to make a difference. When I went to these little meetings in this lady's apartment, they really were doing everything that they felt to make a difference in this area and to get the community involved, and I think their effort was stellar.
>
> When I went to the one in El Cajon, I think [doing the community forums] really made the parents feel validated.

Outcomes of the COI work in San Diego. Contracting with the Consensus Organizing Institute to build local community capacity has been an effective way to increase the number of non-service providers that are engaged with the San Diego Commission, and the diversity of parents who take part. Participant comments on the diversity of the El Cajon forum included:

> We did [have both parents and providers]; however, the service providers were very small in percentage.
>
> About 60% parents, 40% professionals. Less than half were men, but it seemed like there were a lot of men there. There was a good mix of people; I think it was a good representation of our community, because we are very diverse here in El Cajon. I know we had members from our Hispanic community because we had our translators there. We had some single moms there.
>
> Who we did not [have] any of is our Arabic community. We have a large Arabic population. We are having incredible difficulties getting them to talk to us. And I think it's cultural; I don't think they trust us.

The testimony of participants in the El Cajon School Readiness Forums is strong evidence that these meetings increase understanding among participants and creates (especially in the El Cajon Community In Action group) a sense of common purpose and commitment. An El Cajon school official applauded the ECCIA's accomplishments and the COI's work in "providing the leadership and direction for the community people to get this going."

> They [the Commission] hired a professional group who actually took the committee members through this process and taught them the leadership skills. …… I know part of what some of the [ECCIA] members did was to survey all of the kindergarten teachers within our district. The parents had identified "critical needs" the parents saw in articulation between preschool children and kindergarten, and maybe some of the pieces that were missing out of the puzzle. And to garner more information, they had not only surveyed their community they surveyed our kindergarten teachers.

And the El Cajon community group is already taking positive action, even before learning whether the Commission grant they applied for came through. An ECCIA member reported,

> We're putting together—it isn't actually school readiness as far as academic for the new standards, but school readiness as to what we wished we had known about our particular school prior to our children starting school, so it's more school readiness as far as getting your child excited about kindergarten, going to meet the kindergarten teachers before the kids actually get to kindergarten, go check out the school so your child's a little bit more relaxed when they get there instead of, you know, a brand new environment. And so we put together a one-page sheet with the ten things that we felt was the most important ideas or suggestions as to readying your child in *that* respect other than just always academics.

It is clear that the Commission's investment in capacity building has paid off in activating community members who might not otherwise have become so involved.

Creating a sense of empowerment and the expectation for continuing interaction on behalf of young children can carry with it a feeling of responsibility for sustaining the effort. San Diego CE staff met with the parent groups and the Collaborative Coordinators to address sustainability, and San Diego applied and was approved as a Prop 10 Americorps pilot county with some parents serving as paid volunteer leaders. The Commission also included funds for parent involvement academies in their Year 3 CEP proposal, and made small grants to two of the three parent groups to implement their community projects.

San Mateo. San Mateo's primary civic engagement strategy has been to conduct public dialogues regarding early childhood issues, in partnership with the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center (PCRC). The number of these dialogues (over 91 since the CE Manager started work in summer, 2000) and the variety of groups, organizations and individuals involved is quite remarkable. The dialogues have been held over the entire two years of the CEP project.

San Mateo's core CE team has stressed that their primary purpose in sponsoring dialogues is leadership development: activating individual leaders and group constituencies that can advocate for the interests of young children and families. While they have been careful to document their work and provide regular reports to the Commission, they see the dialogues primarily as part of a longer-term strategy that may take five to seven years to show results, as leadership capacities of individuals and groups mature. The dialogues tend to be couched within what some have called a "personalist politics" framework, in which the emphasis is less on organizing citizen voice amidst complicated organizational processes and more on sparking committed action by individuals or grassroots groups. One participant captured the spirit of this approach when she said:

> The meeting stressed what we can be doing in our own neighborhoods, getting to know our neighbors' kids, smiling and being friendly.

A typical dialogue sequence comprised a four-part series with a set group of participants. One session involves "choice work" along lines used in Kettering public issue forums. The three choices (designed in consultation with CEP staff) to be considered were 1) improve community services for young children, 2) educate parents so they can help their children, and 3) make children a higher priority in the community. PCRC records indicate that 78% of the 500 dialogue participants attended at least two of the four sessions. Of the groups that agreed to host/hold a series of dialogues, 91% met at least three times. These groups are encouraged to continue meeting and discussing the issues on their own.

Participants we interviewed praised the quality of meeting planning and facilitation. Providers told us that attending was a way to stay informed about what was happening with Prop 10, to be aware of funding opportunities, to meet with new or established colleagues, and to provide input on Commission priorities. All the participants had good things to say about the way they were treated. They commented:

> "It made parents feel like they had a voice."
>
> "It felt good to be there, it was a comfortable setting to express my feelings."
>
> "These meetings really helped me grow."
>
> "I was exhilarated when I left. I attend a lot of meetings and I rarely feel that way."

While some dialogues gathered individuals who did not know one another, many were held with relatively homogeneous groups with a history. San Mateo CE staffers feel that this strategy is the best beginning point for involving many of the unaffiliated parents and other lesser-heard voices, individuals that are often less comfortable expressing themselves in more diverse public meetings. A staff member remarked, "a dialogue is an intense personal encounter with someone you trust," and the CE manager spends much of her time cultivating trust and personal relationships. Her initial phone calls are a form of outreach, seeking to convey the overall objective of helping young children and asking about the community members' concerns rather than selling them on the Commission and what it can do for them. Many dialogue participants who know her don't necessarily identify her or the dialogues with the Commission.

During Year 2 San Mateo did not attempt to hold dialogues in larger, more diverse group settings, but did hold some sessions that brought together two different pre-existing groups. For example, there were joint dialogues with two groups of family day care providers—one English-speaking and one Spanish-speaking—that previously had worked on parallel tracks but now are cooperating on grants. In another case, a high school social studies class on teenage pregnancy joined a group of teen mothers from East Palo Alto.

As we have found in other CEP counties, San Mateo participants expressed some concern with the lack of tangible links between their discussions at the dialogues and the Commission's work. While many praised the follow-up provided by CE staff in terms of meeting minutes or notes, they wished for more assurances that their ideas were going to be used by the Commission, or were creating tangible results.

> What are the tangible outcomes? I would like to see the gains made from Prop 10. They need to follow through on the priorities we discussed. I know it's a political decision, but I would love to see what happened.

> It would be nice to see the impact of our participation. They say they're open to ideas, but there is no follow-through. I'd like to see some accountability. For example, "Here is your idea, and here is how the Commission responded." I haven't seen anything tangible.

These comments suggest the gap between what some participants we interviewed want to see—short-term, tangible impact on the Commission and visible community results—and the primary goals and strength of the San Mateo CEP dialogues—long-term leadership and constituency development. The experience of an unaffiliated parent we interviewed provides moving testimony that a "one person at a time" approach to empowerment can have a significant ripple effect:

> As long as they keep providing transportation, I'll keep going. It's a very good thing. I have been able to help other women thanks to what I learned. I pass on information. I have friends who are afraid of the legal system but are in abusive situations. I've helped them go to school, get educated, get help, learn where to go.

Outcomes of San Mateo's capacity building effort. The public dialogues have engaged a large number of individuals from the community, including many unaffiliated parents. They have done a particularly good job of reaching the Latino community, drawing on contacts made by the bilingual CE Manager. Commissioners want to make the participation even more diverse, citing a number of geographic areas, ethnic groups, and social classes that have been less represented in the dialogues to date. San Mateo's small CE staff has already reached a remarkably large, diverse population: the dialogue work has exposed more than 500 individuals to a variety of ideas about how the community can better support children and families.

The dialogues were not designed to impact Commission policymaking directly, but they can and have inspired groups to act autonomously as advocates for children and families. CE staff cite a number of examples, including a series of modified dialogues that helped increase membership in a Fatherhood Collaborative; a group of non-parent caregivers who have been circulating a petition related to their goals; and increased unity and cooperation among English-speaking and Spanish-speaking family day care providers.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Capacity building efforts are effective when:

- the Commission can either partner with an existing community organization or use its own staff to create capacity;
- whoever leads the capacity building effort can strike a balance between being supportive and being directive;
- parents and other community persons can identify real and significant roles in which they can make a difference and exercise some autonomy;
- parents and other participants can learn by doing, gaining skills, knowledge, and experience under the coaching of a mentor while carrying out specific tasks;
- more formal training on specific topics (presumably at teachable moments) can supplement the on-the-job training approach of experiential learning;
- participants gain confidence as they experience success and perceive more areas in which they can make a difference;
- participants involve others and more people will want to be involved as their sphere of influence expands;
- there is both a weaning process in which the local community organization learns to operate without dependency on the mentor/staff, and a support process in which the community partner can call on a designated resource for periodic help;
- recognition of community partners by the Commission is frequent and genuine;
- visibility of active Prop 10 community partners is a stimulus to developing local partnerships in other communities or neighborhoods;
- (if influence on the Commission is an objective of capacity building work) the Commission allocates staff time to provide linkage between the partner organizations and the work of the Commission, and provides opportunity for shared activities.

Mini-grants

Four counties—Contra Costa, San Diego, San Francisco, and Santa Cruz—issued mini-grants during Year 2. The basic shared idea in these programs is to set aside a small percentage (ranging from 1-8% across the four counties) of the overall Prop 10 funding for small awards (from $500-$10,000 each). The funds are reserved for groups that are not traditional grant recipients, such as parent groups, small neighborhood organizations, or home-based childcare providers.

For example:

- The Santa Cruz Commission awarded $283,000 in more than 40 grants of up to $10,000 to family childcare providers and others throughout the county to purchase equipment and materials that directly benefit children. Outreach workers helped publicize the grants, and workshops during the application process built a sense of collaboration among participants and between participants and the Commission. Recipients expressed gratitude for the effort the Commission had made to include in its work people who had never previously received public funding.
- Two of the three San Diego groups with which the Consensus Organizing Institute had worked received grants for collaborative proposals for up to $10,000

each. The idea was to empower parents by giving them control over funds for projects they themselves had conceived and designed.
- Contra Costa's Family Friendly grant program engaged citizens and community groups in the Commission's work. The program—which awarded a total of $99,708 in its first year—is designed to empower communities to take grassroots action to improve the health and well being of children.

To illustrate the potential and challenges of mini-grants as a civic engagement strategy, we focus this section on the San Francisco Commission Parent ACTION Grant program, the focal point of their Year 2 civic engagement work.

San Francisco Parent ACTION Grants. ACTION stands for Achieving Change Together in Our Neighborhoods. The San Francisco program solicited parent-driven grant proposals in the range of $100 to $5,000. The Commission allocated a total of $170,000 to these grants. The grants were for "parent initiated and parent led projects that help improve the lives of young children 0-5, either by strengthening parents/caregivers' ability to support their young children, by building relationships among parents, linking parents to services, supports and activities in the city or by making neighborhoods young child and family friendly" (staff report to the San Francisco Commission, 8/01/01).

The grant process was explicitly conceived as a civic engagement strategy. Among the distinguishing characteristics in this regard are the following:
- The idea for having parent grants had emerged in Year 1 community conversations, so implementing this program was concrete public evidence that the Commission was listening;
- The Commission shared its power by granting a selection board made up entirely of parents the authority to recommend which proposals to fund (for an in-depth discussion of this feature, see the "Citizen Proposal Review Panels" section of this report);
- Commission staff (with CEP support) kept the application process as simple and accessible as possible and provided technical assistance (10 formal workshops were held for 125 individuals, plus individual assistance) so that both applicants and selection board members learned the new skills necessary to develop and judge proposals;
- The selection board, the applicants and the programs that were funded represent the diversity of San Francisco's population in terms of race, ethnicity, neighborhoods, and language.

The Parent Grant applications and information on how to apply for the Selection Board were released on April 30, 2001. The fact that both calls happened simultaneously contributed to the community perception that the program had real integrity. An aggressive outreach effort during the spring generated interest in the program, staffed primarily by the CE Coordinator with support from two bilingual consultants and from Maria Rogers-Pascual of CEP. Notices went to Family Resource Centers, Head Start Centers, San Francisco Unified Child Development Centers, subsidized child care centers, community based organizations, parent advocacy organizations, African-

American churches, etc. Public presentations were made to many of these groups, and announcements were made on ethnic radio stations. To insure that the process was open to all groups of parents, the guidelines allowed applicants to submit their proposals in any language, and technical assistance workshops were held.

By the June 7, 2001 deadline, 54 proposals were received, more than anticipated. After extensive review by the parents on the selection board, twenty-one projects totaling approximately $95,000 were approved without comment at the August 1, 2001 Commission meeting. Eighteen projects were denied funding, but encouraged to resubmit another application in the next round of funding. The other 15 applicants, with projects totaling $65,000, were given 90 days to revise and resubmit their proposals for funding during the first round. Eleven of the 15 submitted a revised proposal—reviewed by the CE staff—and were approved for funding at the January Commission meeting. The other four applicants had various reasons for not reapplying, including lead parents moving, time constraints, or simply deciding to wait until the next cycle. Unallocated funds from this round will roll over to next year's Parent Grant process, and all of those who did not receive funding this year were encouraged to reapply then.

The array of funded programs and projects is quite diverse. The report to the Commission (8/1/01) notes that 10 are primarily Community Building projects, 14 are Parent Support projects, and 10 are Activities with Kids—with many projects fitting more than one of these categories. The majority of the funded programs are existing clubs, support groups, parent advisory councils, etc., that will be able to strengthen their efforts with the new resources. Many are specifically funded to provide training or workshops for parents. In other words, the funds were distributed in a way that will help build neighborhood-level social capital and leadership, providing multiple occasions for bringing normally isolated parents together.

Parent ACTION Grant participant perspectives. We interviewed 6 selection board members, 6 successful applicants, 5 "revise and resubmit" applicants, and 3 unsuccessful applicants. These 20 individuals were nearly unanimous in their enthusiasm about the process. As one applicant put it:

> I think it's fantastic. Oh yeah, definitely. There's so many like grassroots parents groups that are running on shoestring, you know, no one's got extra money to pay for… to help these things go. You know, how much time do you have for bake sales and things? And then the other issue is, they're all volunteer-run and it's just a really… You know, even a small grant really helps. We're just going to be able to educate so many people in parenting with all these speakers, it'll just be very fantastic.

One of the applicants who was told to revise and resubmit was impressed with the attention she received from Commission staff:

> Carlos came a couple of weeks ago and met with us, and it was great because he actually came to the school. It all gelled and it all made a lot of sense to him. He

> was able to see the community, where we were talking about. So he was able to kind of look at it full circle and see how this was all going to fall together.

Creating a truly community-friendly process and pleasing all of the varied participants is not easy. Some of the steps staff members took to make the program accessible to first-time grant seekers or non-English speakers were tedious for some of the more experienced participants. Staff members and applicants report that procedures for getting funds from the city were cumbersome and challenging. CE staff members blamed the repeated delays in getting contracts signed on both bureaucratic requirements and the difficulties of contacting parents. Staff had to educate and adapt project leaders to the city process and vice versa, and spent considerable time negotiating agreements. For example, the city required all grantees to have a fiscal agent (the Commission helped facilitate this), something staff members did not originally believe would be necessary. The city cooperated by waiving insurance requirements and not requiring grantees to use the standard 40-page fiscal agreement.

Observable Outcomes and Lessons Learned. The fact that Commissioners in San Francisco and elsewhere have been willing to fund mini-grant programs is in itself meaningful evidence that civic engagement is being taken seriously. Despite the challenges in implementation, almost all those we interviewed expressed strong support for the program, and interest in participating again in the future.

> I think that the mini-grant process was great as far as start-up kinds of organizations and smaller community-type organizations instead of large non-profits. And you know, writing hundred thousand dollar grants and things like that. This was much more small and community-related. It would be nice to see more money available like that.

Both the Parent ACTION Grant selection board and the pool of applicants exhibited considerable ethnic and racial diversity. Men were the only group singled out by many interviewees as not being at the table. One goal of the grants was to reach beyond the usual grant applicants from established agencies, and catalyze new groups of parents to become involved with the Commission. This goal is difficult to realize, since by definition established agencies tend to be more likely to hear about and respond appropriately to grant announcements. The first year Parent Grant process made small but significant strides toward involving parents who were really new to this kind of funding process.

> The outreach was quite good for a first-time grant process. I mean there were a lot of applications submitted. Many from groups that were connected to organizations like child care centers, but there were a few who were like new parent groups who just sort of came up with an idea and submitted a proposal.

> It is something that people on the lowest income levels felt like they could aspire to.

> This was the first time our group of women had been part of this type of process. The women in this group are immigrant women, many who have lived in abusive situations. It was great! I could be totally myself. I could be a single mother and still be listened to.

Many of the grant applicants were affiliated with front-line service delivery agencies, which had heard about the program and encouraged them to apply. In some cases agency personnel took the lead on the proposal, in some cases parents themselves did. One applicant described her agency's process as follows:

> The people at the Child Development Center associated with the school district called the parents together when they heard about this opportunity and sold them the idea of going for a grant, with the Center doing most of the work. They don't really get too much funding from the school district and you know, so it was good to have… to do something. We had a meeting and the parents are all, 'Yeah, that would be a good idea.' … I think a big majority of the population at the Center is like, immigrants and so we talked about a lot of different things that we could do for the children. About 12 parents joined in applying as a group of parents. These were the parents interested enough to attend the meetings rather than a group chosen to represent the ethnic population of the Center. Many of the other parents work and a number choose not to be involved with the Center. I didn't go to any grant-writing workshops that may have been offered and had never written a grant myself, so we had a lot of help from the Center.

One selection board member felt that the preponderance of agency-driven proposals undermined the intent of the mini-grants:

> Many of these applications were agency-driven. The problem is that the agencies are the ones that see this and then they will go out and get certain parents to do this, but it is the agencies that are running it.

The Parent ACTION Grant process created a vehicle for a diverse group of San Francisco parents to work together out of a shared commitment to children and families. While the deliberations of the selection board focused on making funding recommendations, they were at the center of a larger set of conversations that the program catalyzed among parents and front-line agencies throughout the city. Successful grantees must attend two of six technical assistance workshops at which translation services and childcare are provided. Since grantees span a wide range of neighborhoods, staff report that these sessions are creating interesting cross-class and cross-ethnic sharing and connections.

One lesson that might be drawn from the experience with Parent ACTION Grants is that genuine efforts to share power with citizens take *more* staff time and energy. The Parent ACTION Grant process put a heavy demand on the small CE staff, whose engaging personalities and extensive community connections undoubtedly are part of the program's success.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Mini-grants are effective depending on:

- the willingness of the local Commission to set aside a portion of its funds for a small grants program;
- the availability of staff to manage the program and supply technical assistance to potential and actual applicants;
- the ability to gear the technical assistance so that a neophyte to the grant process could prepare an acceptable application;
- the capacity to encourage applications in languages other than English;
- the ability to assess whether and how the small grants are catalyzing community change related to Commission goals, with a ripple effect on community awareness and interest in young children (i.e., insuring that funded programs create desired results rather than a bad public image).
- staff ability to resolve the inherent difficulties of adapting standard bureaucratic practices (e.g. insurance issues, need for fiscal agents, reporting and accountability requirements) to small grants;
- the ability of the Commission to a) generate sufficient interest to attract proposals, and b) fund enough of the submitted proposals to avoid creating bad will in the community;
- setting up the process so that learning to apply and/or being funded leads grantees to get involved in other ways with the work of the Commission, or with advocacy efforts on behalf of young children in the community;
- the status gained by being a Commission grantee makes recipients an effective voice for the Commission with parents, peers, and others in the community;

Program Design Teams

This form of civic engagement involves citizens directly in the design process for Commission-funded initiatives and programs. It contrasts with the typical pattern by which staff members work independently to design programs after receiving input from community groups and direction from the Commission. Of the eight CEP Commissions, Santa Clara has been the most intentional about pursuing this form of civic engagement.

Santa Clara Commission staff called their program design teams "Community Design Work Groups." Each group consisted of about 50 persons representing various facets of the county's population. The groups engaged in small-group discussion to take a deeper look at questions related to proposed Commission initiatives, such as "What will be different if this program is initiated?" and "How does this proposed program address/support the guiding principles from the Commission's Strategic Plan?" The work groups specified questions that became the basis for focus groups conducted by CE Outreach Specialists in various sectors of the county. After hearing the suggestions from the focus groups, the work groups engaged in further deliberation and ultimately recommended program designs for Commission funding. Between design group meetings, staff members worked to incorporate the group's decisions into the initiative description.

The Work Group process has been used in designing a number of major Commission initiatives: Regional Partnerships; Early Childhood Institute for Professional Development, Planning, and Innovation; a Prenatal/Toddler Home Visitation Program; and a Childcare Database. For example, a Community Design Work Group was formed to design the process and program specifications for six Regional Partnerships and four School Readiness Partnerships. The School Readiness regions are based on four elementary school districts that qualify for the state's School Readiness Initiative funds on the basis of low test (API) scores. The Regional Partnerships are generally aligned with the County Supervisoral districts in Santa Clara County. The design work group specified that the Regional Partnerships have at least 51% of their membership from parents and the non-affiliated community rather than from provider groups. When this condition is met, they are granted autonomy to create a community-based plan and given access to substantial funds. For example, each Regional Partnership can propose a plan to spend up to $2 million in Prop 10 funds over a three-year period.

One Commissioner has been a continuing and dedicated participant in the Community Design Work Group, and a variety of other community meetings–and carries her enthusiasm for CE wherever she goes. Other Commissioners have attended one or more regional planning meetings, appearing (participants tell us) not as experts but as learners. Several of the persons we interviewed credit Supervisor Alvarado (chair of the Commission) with achieving this degree of community involvement in Prop 10 work.

> I can only say that the people behind the Commission, from Supervisor Blanca Alvarado to Jolene [Smith]… I could really feel that they're not doing it just because it is their job. They do it because it means a lot to them.
>
> I think people felt a lot of pride of actually seeing your politicians sitting down there working there with you, even though you might just be a common Joe Citizen. Either the politicians themselves were part of the group or their aides were. When you got introduced in the groups you'd hear, "Well, I work in Blanca Alvarado's office." I understand that that really does imply a significant amount of support.

We interviewed 16 of the approximately 50 participants in the Community Design Work Group that met three times—in February, March, and April of 2001. The design work group's purpose, as participants explained it to us, was to develop a program description that would subsequently be the focus of the Commission's Intent to Negotiate (ITN) funding process. Our interviews were intended to focus on the three work group sessions, yet 10 of the 16 persons with whom we talked were more interested in sharing their current involvement in the Regional Partnerships that have resulted from the work group's deliberations. In some cases it was difficult to help them distinguish between the design group sessions and the subsequent steering committee or Regional Partnership meetings since, from their perspective, they have been involved in a single continuing (though intermittent) process. Several respondents didn't recognize the name "Design Work Group" because—to their knowledge—that is not what the meetings they had attended last spring were called.

A number of participants were pleased to see how their Design Work Group efforts helped to shape the final Regional Partnership program design:

> I'm head-deep in the process right now. I'm meeting every week. And it's really great to see all the stuff that we had worked so hard on planning is now like what's in place. It's been a really very organized and professionally run program. I'm very impressed.

> I remember in some of the small work groups, some of the discussions that we had. In retrospect now, as I see the programs developing and evolving, I have in certain situations said, "Oh, yeah, I remember talking about this, way back when!"

Although service providers and others attending the meetings in their professional capacity were in the majority, respondents pointed out that they weren't seeing only the familiar faces of their colleagues in different organizations. The Commission got a lot of credit for reaching out to groups that don't normally attend such functions.

> [The CE outreach person] for the west side… has to get someone representing schools, she needs to get a representative from the faith community, from different ethnicities, from… She's got this little checklist of all these people she's supposed to go out and [invite].

At the very least, participants felt that the meetings offered them an opportunity to represent their own interests. Most of them also valued the chance to hear from other parts of the community and said that they had learned from the experience. Being heard and acknowledged generated a strong sense of satisfaction for some participants.

> I walked away with a more expanded network of people and I learned about resources I didn't know about.

> They have given an opportunity for those people who are working with a community, who have experience working with different groups in the community, a chance to participate. And they learn from these people who are actually working with different types of neighborhoods.

> I could see from week to week where the information that was presented at one session got integrated into the next so I think people really *did* feel heard.

Outcomes of Program Design Teams in Santa Clara. One consistent theme from the participant interviews was their appreciation of the tremendous effort given to making the Regional and School Readiness Partnerships truly a product of the persons who stand to benefit from community engagement in securing and leveraging Prop 10 funds. The persons interviewed also expressed appreciation for opportunities for themselves as human service providers to get to know other providers (often first-line service workers) with whom they had not previously interacted. They expressed diversity in many ways, including languages spoken, geographic areas represented, special interests, and ethnic

groups. Their awareness of diversity within the work group may be evidence of Santa Clara County's tradition of community involvement.

All the participants we interviewed appreciated the amenities offered and most were pleased with the consistent efforts made—e.g., articulating the purpose of each work group session at the beginning and summarizing key points at the end—to keep them feeling an integral part of the process. Although one or two respondents opted out of the process, the general impression was that the Commission made a good faith effort to let people know that their ideas and concerns were taken into account.

It is very clear that the Commission supports the idea of involving the community directly in program design. It has not been a simple or tidy process, nor does it promise to make the Commission's work easier—yet the Commission is investing part of its own funds in developing outreach staff capacity to build and sustain community capacity, to enhance what CEP funding has made possible.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Program design teams are effective when:

- Commissioners and staff are willing to share power to design programs with the community;
- Commissioners and staff are willing to invest the extra time it takes to involve community members in significant ways in program design;
- there are a sufficient number of skilled staff capable of orchestrating complex program design processes;
- staff facilitate the process by keeping good records of the deliberations, checking the accuracy of those records with participants, and providing information that might alter the direction of the group's planning;
- community members are sufficiently convinced that their voices will be heard and heeded so that they are willing to invest considerable time and energy in a process that will take time to bear concrete results;
- means are found to engage both traditional service providers and non-affiliated parents and community members in the process;
- Commission requests for revision of proposals or other deviations from the group's intent are clearly explained, with a chance for the group to defend its ideas;
- participants are informed of the final product of their work, and are recognized for their contributions;
- pre-existing power differentials between participants in the process do not preclude genuine listening to all perspectives;
- the decision-making process emphasizes the common good rather than the self-interests of the designers;
- the programs to be designed are backed with significant Commission funding, so that they can achieve meaningful change.

Citizen Proposal Review Panels

San Francisco is unique among CEP counties in having given parents a major role in recommending how a portion of Prop 10 funding is allocated. While the total amount of

this funding is a small slice of the overall Prop 10 allocation, it reflects a genuine commitment to power sharing with the public. Selection Board members took their roles very seriously, and they, staff, and applicants expressed a high degree of overall satisfaction with the review process.

Thirteen parents were recruited for the selection board, four more than originally sought. The selection board was composed of all women, six with children under five, two who were pregnant, and the rest with older children. They were ethnically diverse: 3 bilingual Spanish speakers, 2 bilingual Chinese speakers, 1 bilingual Filipino (Tagalog); 3 African American, and 4 white. Some of these individuals willingly gave up the opportunity to apply for a grant in order to help out with the selection process. No one on the selection board was eligible to apply, and the group followed standard city and state conflict of interest rules. Selection board members received a $200 stipend for their involvement in the process, which staff considered "well deserved."

In recruiting selection board members, the CE coordinator learned that it was important to stress that the time commitment being asked was limited, and that the amount of impact the selection board was going to have was significant. As a result, a three-meeting review process was set up, with a limited number of hours involved. However, once selection board members got involved, they relished their roles and wanted to spend more time on the process to insure that they could make a responsible decision:

> That's the only drawback to the whole process. I thought it was done way too quickly. We could've used more meetings to talk to one another.
>
> I would love to have more time between that intense weekend when we met with applicants and the meeting to make decisions. We had very little time to confer. It was very challenging. I would definitely add more time.

The three meetings originally envisioned lasted longer than initially planned. The first meeting, three hours in length, involved introductions to each other and the process, and a preliminary ranking of proposals. There was an extensive discussion of the criteria for the grants, during which members deliberated (and came to "own") the meaning of terms like "parent-driven" or "impact." The second meeting, about nine days later, was a six hour meeting on a Saturday, during which each review board member interviewed approximately four applicants and then met to re-rank proposals. The interview phase of the process was deemed particularly important, since it would enable individuals who did not write as well to have more of a chance than in a typical grant program that rewards those with grant writing experience and skills. The final meeting occurred the next Friday night for three hours. During this meeting the final ranking of proposals occurred, and a recommended "green" list of proposals was forwarded to the Commission for approval.

Selection board members we interviewed reacted to the process in distinct ways. One member, encountering a CE staff person in the community, said with great pride "I chose for you!" Another, somewhat overwhelmed by the responsibility, was glad that the Commission itself retained final decision-making authority:

> It was difficult to decide between some proposals. We were given instructions on how to process them. I think if we were just asked to see who would get money, and how much, that would have been challenging. We were not up to that. What we were ultimately doing and what we were told was that we were giving recommendations basically to the Commission that would make the final decisions.

A selection board member who had never reviewed grants before—but has helped to organize a parent advocacy group—was effusive about the sense of empowerment she experienced:

> Oh, man, it was a power trip. It was like the first time for me to participate in a selection process for a grant proposal. And I think that it made me richer for that experience, because now I know what foundations are looking for…I mean, I talk to people a lot, but to be given the power…the power of being the one to decide. It is very enriching, and it is fun.

Of course, not everything went smoothly the first time around. The unexpected success in attracting a large number of applicants complicated the review process by stretching the resources available for reviewing proposals and meeting with applicants. The most significant negative comments we heard—voiced by both the selection board and applicants—had to do with the fact that only one member of the selection board interviewed each grant applicant. Some applicants who perceived that their interviewer was unsupportive felt that this stacked the deck against their proposal. One described her reaction to the process as follows:

> No [we didn't go before a panel], and that surprised me. We met one-on-one with someone who seemed vaguely familiar with our proposal and had a list of questions from an apparent panel who had pre-reviewed it. But I didn't really understand their questions. It seemed strange then how people would be able to come back and make any kind of comparison or judgment; there'd been such a subjective process.

Most selection board members also felt that meeting one-on-one placed too much responsibility on one person, though at least one appreciated the chance to speak easily with applicants, and exercise power in making her recommendations.

Some selection board members were disappointed by the lack of follow up after the recommendation meeting. Although they were invited to the Commission meeting where the parent grants were approved (only three could attend), they felt abruptly abandoned after having been so deeply involved with the selection process. Many wished they had received a list of funded projects and more information about what was happening with the revision process.

Interviewees praised the Parent Grant idea as a way to move decision-making power to the community level, and support experimentation:

> It's very grass roots based. It's people from the community itself who are deciding on other people in the community, to help them start small, kind of risky ideas. Trying to improve things. It's not policymakers; I mean it's not rich, white men in Washington making decisions. It's people in the community itself.
>
> You can see how the community has some involvement in choice and selection of where this money is going. The people have some influence in the little spaces.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Citizen proposal review panels are an effective civic engagement tool when:

- potential participants know the nature of the work to be done, the time required, the multiple feedback loops involved, and accept those terms;
- parents and community members are sufficiently informed to be meaningfully involved in review decisions;
- the Commission trusts parents and community members to make wise decisions;
- the review process taps the special insights of parents and community members to make feedback more relevant to intended beneficiaries;
- proposal review teams can be recruited and conduct business without unnecessarily slowing the ability of the Commission to get programs funded and implemented;
- participants are kept in the loop: informed of the final product of their work and recognized for their contributions.

<u>Outreach Workers</u>

Outreach workers are individuals hired as part of the CE staff to connect the Commission with particular segments of the community. Local CE staff explain that the idea is to "go directly to the people" to avoid basing community input solely on feedback from a familiar set of community-based organizations and agencies and to establish deeper connections with particular segments of the community that steer clear of tokenism or a quick fix mentality.

Three local Commissions have used outreach workers extensively as a tool that supports a variety of forms of civic engagement:

- Santa Cruz hired eight outreach workers during its strategic planning work to conduct intercept interviews at locations like migrant housing units, pre-schools, shopping malls, and grocery stores. They were selected to represent the major neighborhoods targeted for CE activities. Most had a history of community involvement and are known in their communities;
- Contra Costa used outreach workers to invite community participation in their regional community conversations in Year 2 and to coordinate the follow-up activities of regional groups. They selected a Spanish speaker to work in the heavily Hispanic east county area and a black pastor to work in the Richmond area in west county.
- Santa Clara has made major use of outreach workers throughout its planning and program design processes, as detailed below.

Yolo's Commission did not hire outreach workers directly in Year 2, but provided $50,000 in funding for a partnership with the Sacramento Mayor's Commission, Sutter Health, Kaiser Permanente, Yolo County, and Yolo County Family Resource Center. The funding supports outreach to enroll uninsured Yolo children in existing health insurance programs. The partnership is having a serendipitous outcome in terms of local civic engagement, since it is paying for a community outreach worker (bilingual Spanish/English) who can work in partnership with the Commission's new CE Coordinator.

Santa Clara. The cornerstone of Santa Clara's civic engagement is building capacity among participants to sustain community involvement after outside resources dry up. Santa Clara hired and trained 15 CE Outreach Specialists that represent various segments—ethnic, class, geographic, special interests—of the community. These persons were originally hired for 100 hours to assist with the focus groups held in conjunction with Community Design Work Groups. Each outreach worker completed a comprehensive training program and received a certificate.

With the advent late in CEP Year 2 of four School Readiness and six Regional Partnerships, 10 full-time outreach specialists—selected in part for language skills and cultural understanding appropriate to the population(s) of their regions—were employed to reach out to community people not employed by or representing service providers and advocacy organizations. Each outreach specialist works with a staff Coordinator assigned to the particular partnership, under the overall supervision of one of two Community Outreach Coordinators. A few of the outreach specialists who worked on the 18 focus groups held as part of the Design Work Group process for the Regional Partnerships have been asked to continue, while others are newly hired.

The outreach specialists were trained in a variety of techniques for gathering data about assets, needs, and potential partners in their regions. Because each region must demonstrate that its plan was based on 51% community participation, this sometimes meant going directly to specific groups (e.g., homeless families, incarcerated parents) that could not be expected to attend focus groups or other community meetings.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned. Although we have had limited opportunity to observe the work of outreach specialists in Santa Clara County (and no opportunity to interview them about their activities), this approach has been very effective at overcoming language and cultural barriers to diversity and inclusiveness of participation in Commission activities. In effect, the outreach workers are human bridges that create interaction and connections that otherwise would not exist.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Outreach workers enhance civic engagement when:

- the Commission can identify the community segments in need of an outreach worker;

- the Commission commits funds to hire a sufficient number of outreach workers and decides which community segments will or will not be included in the outreach effort;
- choices are made about whether to base hiring workers on geography, ethnic groups, language groups, or all of the above;
- staff members can identify potential workers who combine community respect and local knowledge with an understanding of the Commission and its processes;
- provision is made for managing outreach worker training and supervision;
- criteria for judging the success of outreach workers' efforts can be developed.

Requiring funded programs to incorporate parent participation

Some Commissions, such as Monterey, have made Prop 10 funding contingent in part on providers having a mechanism in place for obtaining feedback from parents about programs and services. Many Prop 10-funded organizations in Monterey already have some form of parent group. Potentially, these groups could represent a major avenue for civic engagement, particularly since the parents involved already have a direct stake and special expertise—namely, their insight into the quality of the services their children are receiving. On the other hand, parent participation committees can sometimes become pro forma exercises that waste valuable time for busy parents.

The Monterey staff organized a Collaborative of representatives from the programs they had funded. In November 2001 we interviewed 17 representatives from the Collaborative, asking whether they have a parent involvement team for their own program, and about the benefits of involving parents and any drawbacks they had experienced or could anticipate.

Nine programs had parent committees in place at the time of our interviews, four formed in response to the Commission's requirement and five that were able to incorporate oversight of the Prop 10-funded activity into existing parent advisory groups. Of the respondents in the remaining eight programs, two felt that forming such a committee was not part of their obligation. Three had tried to form a parent committee but encountered barriers that had so far been insurmountable. Sometimes the problems are logistical—insufficient space, staff, or funds—and sometimes they are due to the nature of the program—finding a safe place or finding a time when enough of the parent participants aren't working. The final three programs without parent committees don't lend themselves readily to parent recruitment for a variety of reasons (e.g., because the mothers appear only at time of childbirth). Several participants said they were also sending one or more parent representatives to the Commission's Parent Advisory Council.

Of the nine programs with established parent committees, seven have given parents responsibility for making recommendations about program content and implementation, bringing up problem areas for discussion, and offering input on program expansion. One of these parent groups was also involved in conducting a needs assessment. The other

two programs have involved parent committees in making functional decisions about the program and in overseeing and participating in daily program operations.

The main difficulty respondents have encountered in holding regular meetings with their parent populations is that the meetings often collide with parents' other responsibilities. For fathers, the need to work long hours in the fields during planting and harvesting periods is a major obstacle. Participating mothers have a different set of challenges, best expressed by one of our respondents:

> … for them to come … they have to ask five people before they can make their decision: their husband, their children, the grandparent or the mother-in-law who might provide the child care when she's … at a meeting. It doesn't have that same kind of autonomy, say, for middle-class women who say, "I'm going to [do this] and it'll be simple because I can work it out." It's a very different perspective when you have someone from a different culture who says, "My decision has to be based upon if everybody agrees."

In addition, depending upon the nature of the program and the degree of chaos in the lives of the people being served, attending a meeting may be a very low priority—or drop off the list altogether.

> It isn't good intervention, if someone is homeless, to ask them to come to a meeting. It's tacky. Their needs have to take priority over the structure.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Requiring parent participation is effective as a civic engagement strategy when:

- parents know (better than providers) the benefits and burdens they and their children experience as recipients of services;
- there is a safe and receptive place for discussion to occur;
- the service providers (or an intermediary) will be able to translate parent views into meaningful and useful information for program development;
- the parents do not find the costs of involvement prohibitive.

<u>Community Events and Public Relations</u>

We include this category even though it involves the public in a relatively passive way (and overlaps with the other forms of CE already mentioned, each of which involves "events" and some type of public education) because we think it is important to acknowledge the deliberate efforts that local Commissions make to keep their work in the public eye and to encourage the public to participate in CE activities. This is accomplished by a variety of means, such as attending community festivals or fairs, lending the name of the Commission to collaborative work sponsored by other community organizations, involvement in media events and/or coverage, and holding "road shows" to explain the work of the Commission to various community groups. These activities can bear fruit later on, when the Commission seeks to recruit community members into more specific roles and activities. For example, the work Contra Costa's

CE Coordinator did in speaking to community groups in Spring 2001 helped set the stage for the successful turnout at the regional community conversations held later that summer.

Yolo provides an example of how diligent networking can bear fruit in the form of stronger Commission-community relationships. Since September, the new Executive Director has worked hard to be visible in the community, building relationships and supporting a number of community-led endeavors. For example, she represented the Commission at a local community meeting designed to show broad support for a foundation grant application. The meeting was highly successful, with an overflow crowd packing the local church. Similar support provided to residents in another small community was rewarded with genuine appreciation that the Commission is providing them with funds that meet needs they themselves have identified, rather than imposing programs in a more top-down fashion. In these and other ways the Commission is becoming known as a community resource. One indicator of this to Yolo staff is a sharp rise in the number of calls from the community seeking various forms of support and assistance.

Other Year 2 activities that have increased the Yolo Commission's public profile include handing out packets at the County Fair and a community Health Fair with lots of practical parenting information (in English and Spanish), and being featured in about four to six articles in one local (Davis) newspaper.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. This form of civic engagement is effective when:

- Commission staff participation is visible, noticeable, and interesting to a wide array of the people attending the event;
- this awareness creates a mental hook to which to attach previous and future information about Prop 10, the local Commission, and the importance of development in young children;
- awareness leads to increased interest and positive regard for young children, Prop 10 and the work of the local Commission;
- increased positive interest leads to greater advocacy and action on behalf of young children.

<u>Providing tangible incentives for community members to participate</u>

One theory of civic engagement emphasizes the role of incentives in determining levels of citizen participation.[14] These incentives might take a variety of specific forms, including public recognition, training, special access to decision makers, or financial rewards. The eight CEP counties have experimented with a variety of material incentives to help induce and reward participation by the public.

[14] See the helpful summary of Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina in *Civic Engagement in America*, chp. 1; Brookings Press, 1999.

The most basic and widely used incentive is financial remuneration, usually in the form of scrip or a gift certificate to a local store. For example, Contra Costa offered $40 in scrip to anyone who attended *both* of the two community conversations held in their region. Along with the tireless outreach work of the CE staff, these incentives contributed to high attendance in all regions, with the majority of participants attending both meetings. San Francisco offered $200 stipends to members of the Parent ACTION Grant Selection Board, money staff felt was "well deserved" given the large amount of time parents on the Board spent reviewing proposals.

All of the mini-grant processes can be viewed as providing a form of incentive that encourages parents and neighborhood groups to become involved in the Commission's work. In addition to their mini-grant program, Santa Cruz held a highly successful public event in February 2002 to honor local citizens for their work on behalf of children and families. It was the first time many had been honored publicly for their many years of dedicated community service. The event generated a tremendous feeling of camaraderie and good will, with likely spillover benefits in terms of how the Commission is perceived and supported by the public.

Working hypotheses about effective practices. Incentives enhance civic engagement when:

- they can be supplied with existing funds and resources;
- they encourage participation of those with something to contribute, rather than those who only want the reward;
- they build a spirit of teamwork and shared purpose, rather than a sense of special privilege or favor.

Observations concerning the forms and tools

The experience implementing the various forms and tools of civic engagement suggests a number of topics that warrant further discussion. These include:

The time required to implement CE. It can take 1-2 years to get a major new civic engagement initiative implemented, and longer than that to begin to assess its outcomes. San Francisco's experience in implementing their Parent ACTION Grant program is instructive. The Parent Grant process took almost two years from the time it was discussed in community conversations to the time the Commission was able to distribute funds to all recipients in the first round of funding. Their currently envisioned timeline for a "Parent Ambassador" program suggests a similar time frame. These long time frames run counter to the short-term time horizons facing Commissions, and the "get me results quick" mentality of many members of the public. The time required to ramp up with staff and program planning may suggest the need to rethink how funding for CE endeavors is allocated. It could be wiser to slowly increasing funding as local Commissions are more ready to begin implementing outreach and engagement strategies in a full-fledged fashion.

The need to adapt forms and tools of CE to specific publics. Part of what the local CE staff learned was that it is not possible to engage the public in a generic, "one size fits all" way. Instead, they try to focus on particular segments of the public, figuring out why these segments would want to be involved with the Commission. As one CE Coordinator puts it: "The way you reach parents and the way you reach the business community are very different; you cannot engage the public per se."

Tension between listening and leading in implementing CE. Some Commissions come up with intriguing strategies for implementing CE work, but then back away from them because they fear being too prescriptive. The gradual retreat of Yolo Commissioners and staff from the linking of CE to their single outcome strategy is an example. Some Commissioners and staff felt that channeling civic engagement into a single priority area violates the spirit of letting the public decide what they want to work on. But might the public not enthusiastically welcome Commission leadership to structure specific, meaningful civic engagement opportunities? The chance to participate and play some role in a community-wide effort, even one whose basic parameters have been set by the Commission, is a viable mode of civic engagement.

Sharing power elicits greater commitment of time and effort from the public. We observed that when given real power and specific responsibility, citizens seem more willing to go the extra mile. The eagerness of the San Francisco Selection Board participants to expand their time commitments beyond what staff originally envisioned stands in stark contrast to the experience in counties that held public input meetings, where doubts about continued involvement with the Commission were more likely to be expressed. It may be that San Francisco benefited from a particularly committed set of parents, but we hypothesize that the level of commitment may be proportional to the level of power and responsibility parents are granted.

Parents of children 0-5 are a "moving target" for organizing CE. Parents of children 0-5 are a somewhat ephemeral category of folks to try to organize; by the time early childhood programs are in place a high percentage of parents have "moved on" to the new issues awaiting their children in elementary school and beyond. Some also literally move on, taking up residence in a new community. Parents of school kids, many of whom have ties to younger kids and who have learned the system, may be a more fruitful organizing target. This is beginning to become evident as counties plan for the school readiness initiative.

The Brown Act is an impediment to civic engagement. Across counties the Brown Act keeps coming up as an impediment to the deliberative work of local Commissions. It seems ironic that an act designed to increase public participation and confidence in government is now mostly experienced as a legalistic barrier to deliberative discussion and dialogue. Because critics of local policy makers frequently use the Brown Act as a way to challenge their legitimacy, it must be taken quite seriously. Future research might look more focally at the self-defeating aspects of the Brown Act as it is currently being practiced, with an eye toward reforms that are friendlier to the spirit of deliberation while still protecting against serious abuses of power.

III. Project Outcomes and Challenges

Both the CEP funders and the local Commission partners understand that tracking the outcomes associated with various forms and tools of civic engagement strategies can be difficult, especially since many of the most important outcomes can take considerable time to be known or even knowable. Nevertheless, since both must make major funding and logistical decisions now, they are interested in any outcomes discernible as a result of their work to date. In this section we do our best to determine impacts on civic engagement within the counties that can be traced to CEP and to summarize the outcome evidence available to us.

Our assessment is suggestive rather than definitive, given the following:

- The state mandate that all local Children and Families Commissions include a community advisory committee and some form of public input into their strategic planning process makes it likely that CEP partners would have engaged in CE activities even without CEP assistance;
- The scope of our evaluation precludes a comparison with non-CEP counties, one way we might have been better able to isolate the independent contribution of CEP; and
- By the end of Year 2 many Commissions were putting significant amounts of their own funding into civic engagement work, further complicating an assessment of CEP's independent effect.

Keeping these caveats in mind, the following section documents tangible impacts that we are confident in attributing to CEP. In describing each outcome, we will briefly characterize the evidence of CEP success, the major factors or variables associated with the successful outcome, and the challenges or questions that CEP may wish to consider as it attempts to build on achievements thus far.

1. **Creation of civic engagement infrastructure**: All 8 counties now have significant Commission infrastructure devoted to CE, including paid staff, advisory committees, and various structures for involving citizens.

We have already documented in earlier sections of this report the significant progress made in creating infrastructure to support the work of civic engagement. We observed that by far the most important variable in determining success is the quality of the local Commissions' leadership teams—their skill, commitment and persistence. The work of civic engagement is labor intensive, non-routine, and dynamic. It requires unusual degrees of local knowledge, clarity about purposes, sensitivity to diverse populations, the ability to both listen and lead, and a thick skin, among many other skills and talents.

There must also be sufficient staff to get the job done, as well as other infrastructure to support the work (e.g., cooperating organizations, advisory committees, work teams). Critical factors include how many staff members are full-time, how well they are paid and supported, how experienced they are, and how well their style and backgrounds

match those of the groups to be engaged. In addition, it is hard to exaggerate the importance of tenure, particularly among senior staff members. We found that in most counties, any turnover in either the Executive Director or CE Coordinator positions resulted in a minimum of a six-month delay in program implementation and frequently interrupted the flow of work for up to a year.

Finally, it is important that the county has sufficient resources to tailor an infrastructure to the unique local circumstances. Ideally, a county would have a population large enough to qualify for maximal Prop 10 funding (some of which can be used to hire staff for outreach efforts) without the geographic size or population diversity that makes reaching the public difficult. For example, San Diego has the largest Prop 10 allocation of the eight CEP counties, but also a very large geographic area to cover and many ethnic subcultures. Santa Cruz has only one language group other than English speakers to focus on (Spanish), but also has relatively few funds to devote to outreach, requiring its Executive Director to take on significant outreach roles if the work is to get done. Among CEP counties, San Francisco and San Mateo approximate a fortunate balance between size/diversity and available Prop 10 funding.

Since significant amounts of CE staff support come from CEP funds, a key consideration for the future is how much of the staff base the Commissions can retain after CEP funding ends. This will be a much more difficult decision in the smaller counties, whose budgets provide less flexibility to hire staff.

2. **Inclusion of diverse publics:** All the counties have been able to conduct special outreach to diverse groups in many locations, made possible by CEP funds supporting culturally appropriate and bilingual outreach staff, translation services, and amenities that help make parents and other community members feel welcome at meetings and events, such as child care and food. As a general rule, the local Commissions were quite successful in achieving participation from individuals not normally involved in public meetings and planning processes, such as low-income parents, teen parents, and parents who are not English speakers.

Local Commissions usually consider two elements of diversity: 1) the first is assuring that parent voices are being heard, as contrasted to the voices of service providers for whom participation is more expected and routine, 2) The second is assuring that the mix of parents and service providers who are engaged fully reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the community, including non-English speakers. This latter thrust often overlaps with considerations of local geography and of social class, given the clustering of many groups in particular areas of a county and the variable costs of housing. CEP funding made it possible to hold meetings and events in many parts of counties, which would not have happened otherwise. When considering diversity in terms of existing stakeholders local Commissions take additional considerations into account, trying for a mix of professional disciplines and/or organizational affiliations (nonprofit, public, private). A number have also reached out to special groups, such as homeless families, or parents of children with disabilities.

Depending on county demographics and how many outreach staff they had available, different local Commissions targeted different groups of parents. The most common emphasis across counties was on engaging Latino parents, and almost all of the eight counties have at least one Spanish-speaking staff member doing community outreach. The focus on Latinos is clearly warranted; they are the single largest non-Anglo group in all of the eight counties except San Francisco. In the larger counties, where the local Commissions are able to hire more outreach staff, they made a conscious effort to insure that the staff reflected the diverse populations in the county. For example, Contra Costa made sure they had a Latino outreach worker in the east part of the county, and an African-American outreach worker in the Richmond area. Santa Clara had the biggest outreach staff, with culturally appropriate staff hired to reach a wide range of local groups, such as various Southeast Asian groups, Arab immigrants, and Ethiopians.

In Year 3, CEP partners may wish to reflect further on a number of questions and challenges suggested by the experience to date. These include:

Clarifying the purposes for which diversity of participation is sought. Local Commissions have welcomed diverse participation as a way to cultivate general awareness and support for what the Commission does. They have not, as a general rule, been very specific about what it is they hope to gain by engaging diverse groups. One Commissioner expressed frustration over the lack of clarity:

> I asked the question, "What is the purpose of civic engagement? Are we trying to find out what they think? Are we trying to have them identify problems that we are not aware of so we can address them? Are we trying to listen for maybe creative solutions that we have not thought of and ought to be considered?"

Among the ends toward which diverse participation might point are the following:

- Determine whether distinct groups have distinct agendas: e.g., different types of services desired, different modes of service delivery required, or different ideas about the relative priority of funding community-based projects rather than programmatic services delivered by traditional institutions;
- Clarify areas of conflict and consensus, given group distinctions;
- Build a sense of common identity and purpose that can be shared across cultural distinctions;
- Increase the legitimacy of the Commission in all segments of the community;
- Ensure greater use of funded programs by the entire intended recipient population;
- Identify barriers to accessing existing services;
- Build interest in community "do it yourself" efforts on behalf of children in particular population segments.

Depending on the specific ends desired, different forms and tools of CE may be more or less appropriate. For example, if the goal is identifying the agendas of distinct groups, it may be sufficient to conduct outreach and meetings with discrete groups one at a time. But if the goal is to create a common identity and purpose, or to clarify areas of conflict

and consensus, some way must be found to bring distinct groups together in a setting that supports the sharing of diverse perspectives and mutual learning.

Managing the tradeoff between hearing everyone with respect, on the one hand, and challenging ideas respectfully, on the other. Local CE staff made it clear that they believe that any attempt to improve the inclusiveness of public processes should enable members of the public to feel comfortable in speaking up and respected for their views. It is less clear how committed they are to mutual exchange by which initial perspectives are enlarged or challenged by encountering the ideas of others. For example, in many of the meetings we witnessed, facilitators avoided opportunities to pose issues and questions for group deliberation—they saw their role more in terms of making everyone feel welcomed and respected.

It can be argued that this is a necessary first step, particularly when trying to engage individuals with little experience in public meetings. Eventually, however, the CEP goals of influencing local policymaking or promoting civic dialogue cannot be achieved without bringing diverse voices together in a way that creates mutual engagement, learning, and change. Inevitably, this requires frank exchanges that surface conflict and disagreements. Building on its successes in making public participants feel respected and comfortable, CEP partners need to reflect on how they can best take the difficult next steps, moving beyond what makes people feel comfortable to consider what it takes to move the agenda forward. Even if partners prefer a cautious approach, the project would benefit from having local staff articulate why caution is preferred and how they see this approach leading sequentially toward the broader ends set for the project.

Accounting for the independent role played by class differences. Theda Skocpol has argued that achieving government policies that benefit young children depends on mobilizing "the missing middle"—the working parents of modest means who are attempting to raise children under difficult circumstances.[15] She believes that a consensus backing working family support policies (health care, child care, etc.) actually exists in the public but is being drowned out by the polarized voices of advocacy groups.

We observed that a focus on the needs of children and their families does have a unifying effect on diverse segments of the public. In addition, we have noted that CEP partners all state their interest in building a unified policy advocacy force through their Prop 10 efforts. On the other hand, class dynamics often undermine the sense of unity, and there is little evidence that an organized advocacy effort is germinating at the local level.

The major differences in perspective we heard in public meetings or participant interviews had little to do with the parent/service provider distinction, or ethnic distinctions per se, but instead stemmed from broad social class distinctions. For example, the lists of concerns generated by parents in wealthier communities typically differed in some substantial ways from those generated by parents in lower-income communities. The most obvious, and understandable, difference is the relative salience of

[15] See her *The Missing Middle: Working Families and the Future of American Social Policy.* New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000.

security concerns, and with the amount of public infrastructure that supports parents and children. Put over-simply, wealthier parents have access to safe playgrounds and a variety of child-oriented programs, and lower-income parents frequently do not.

In light of this evidence, CEP partners might fruitfully reflect on the following questions: What would it take to convene meetings where both the wealthy and the poor feel respected and comfortable? What can be done to lessen the chance that participants will retreat from those who "live in a different world?" How can Commissions structure meaningful outlets for the desire to "help" the less fortunate articulated by some meeting participants? These and related questions appear to us as ripe topics for further reflection among CEP partners. This conversation can build on the discussion that has already begun about involving the business community in a more significant way, along with earlier discussions about whether and how the local Commissions should target their funding to the populations in greatest need.

Reflecting on the vocabulary used in pursuing inclusiveness. While they provide useful and necessary shorthand, the terms used by CEP to characterize its goal of improving diversity can become traps if not used reflectively. For example, it has been useful to characterize the project as seeking to involve "parents" rather than just "service providers" in planning efforts, but the reality is that many front-line service providers often are not part of planning and program design processes and thus fit CEP's goal of including the "non-usual suspects." Likewise, there are service providers who are not connected with formal agencies, such as the family childcare providers that were recipients of Santa Cruz mini-grants. Many service providers are of course parents themselves, and many parents without children 0-5 nonetheless have important contributions to offer. Our point is not to suggest forcing terminological straightjackets on conversations in the project, but simply to applaud the nuance with which local staff use the convenience of ready labels without forgetting the complexity that lies behind them. Keeping that sense of nuance part of the ongoing project discussions seems a valuable means of insuring that the partners are reflecting carefully on their practices.

Other questions related to the diversity emphasis. With regard to any particular CE strategy, one would want to pay attention to whether the nature of citizen engagement was limited to the task at hand, or led to broader participation and interest in the policy and program development process. One hypothesis would be that forms of CE that give parents real power or a chance to create a tangible product—like the San Francisco Selection Board, or the Santa Clara Regional Partnerships—will have more success in eliciting ongoing participation.

3. **Increasing Commissioner interest in and support for civic engagement:** The fact that the local partners are part of CEP raises the profile and legitimacy of CE, increasing the support from Commissioners.

CEP has encouraged local Commissions to begin building infrastructure by which CE might be sustained. Almost all of the eight Commissions have put significant amounts of their own funds into the CE effort, in some cases going far beyond what would be

possible with CEP funds alone. For example, Santa Clara is investing millions of dollars in its Regional Partnership effort, which brings the community directly into the process of designing and funding new programs for local children and families.

Early in Year 2 we interviewed 44 local Commissioners, about two thirds of the total in the eight CEP counties.[16] As a group they vary widely in their enthusiasm for civic engagement and their level of expectations about what CE can accomplish. All, however, were grateful for the CEP funding and for the fresh perspective that CEP staff brought. They indicated that CEP "broadens their thinking" and "puts civic engagement on their radar screen" in a way that would not be the case without the project. A few point to specific links between CE and funding or policy decisions (such as the mini-grant programs), but most value it in more generic terms—particularly as a way to make the public more aware about what the Commission is doing and the good it is accomplishing.

Many Commissioners seem to value the direct encounter with the public more than filtered reports about what the public has said. It is the encounter itself that brings fresh perspective by temporarily bridging the distance between the life-worlds of most Commissioners and the life-worlds of most parents, particularly low-income parents.

> I think the civic engagement efforts that have been going on have been very useful for bringing individual voices forward so that they were faces and individual needs and commentary from the public. It has brought the public into the commission's both mind set and meetings in an organized kind of fashion. As opposed to public forums where whoever shows up gets to talk.
>
> What I really love to hear is when people come in and say, "You people aren't aware of a problem that is a great concern to the public." I'm just saying I would love to come away with a sense of "oh my god, there are all these things that I don't know about." That's what I would like to see civic engagement provide. And that is to help us identify problems that we are not aware of.

The inroads made with Commissioners are especially notable given the skepticism that many Commissioners have expressed about both the concept of CE (as they understand it) and the particular CE activities their staff are undertaking:

> I'm not sure how effective it's been in giving us any real sense of direction other than what we have originally worked out with our different community advisory groups.
>
> …it (CE) took a lot of energy and a lot of effort and I don't know how invested the people are that end up being involved in the process. I think we're asking a tremendous amount of people who are very busy with their lives, often single

[16] All current Commissioners were sent a letter inviting them to participate in a half hour phone interview. About a week later we followed up with phone calls to schedule appointments. A handful of Commissioners called back to decline our request, usually citing time demands or in some cases their "newness" on the Commission.

> parents, to invest a tremendous amount in talking. I think it's important to ask people what they think and to make sure that you're listening but an ongoing engagement, which is what CEP wants, is very, very hard.

One Commissioner who was more committed to CE saw its chief benefit as building a long-term advocacy group in the community:

> I think one of the particular values of the community involvement, community input, is the option and the opportunity for developing an advocacy group. I think many of the people being served are not accustomed to playing an advocacy role in terms of their overall numbers. There are obviously people within the group who have been advocates, but there is nothing like the numbers to really make the advocacy much more efficient. The parents are all so caught up in their day-to-day living and they are not accustomed to advocating.

One of the goals articulated at the outset of CEP was to influence the attitudes of Commissioners toward civic engagement. The evidence suggests that CEP has raised the profile of CEP, and provided legitimacy for staff to experiment with various forms and tools of civic engagement. A key question becomes whether Commissioners will find sufficient merit in the results of CE that they will decide to make a continuing investment of their own funds after CEP funding stops. CEP staff and local CE partners will need to reflect on how they can discuss with Commissioners the scope, focus, and objectives of future CE efforts.

4. **Cross-county sharing has been enhanced:** CEP has created forums that bring staff and/or Commissioners from the eight counties together, creating new options for local Commissions.

Local CE staff report that the most valuable aspects of CEP have been the chances to share experiences and ideas with their colleagues in other counties. While they have valued the speakers at cross-county CEP events, as the project has evolved they have been even more interested in having time to meet on their own, with plenty of time for informal sharing. During Year 3 CEP staff are hoping to become more intentional about nurturing this type of networking, taking their lead from the expressed interests of local staff rather than imposing top-down directives or vision. In practical terms this means providing meeting times and places, funding to support the travel of attendees, and securing technical assistance to help with problems identified by the local partners.

In effect, CEP has created a semi-formal network of Executive Directors and CE staff. A key question is how CEP can insure that cross-county forums create a safe space not only to share experience but to probe its meanings. The forums can be occasions to articulate the rationale behind the choices that local staff members are making, their expectations of what they do and do not want to happen, and the ways they are tracking outcomes. The trust that has been built over the course of the project should make it easier to encourage frank self-reflection in Year 3.

5. **Increased statewide visibility and reputation as a resource:** The CEP counties can actually document their public involvement (which other counties may not be able to do) and have gained a statewide reputation as a resource for civic engagement ideas.

Prop 10 mandated some form of public involvement in the strategic plans submitted to the state Commission by each county. Beyond this, local Commissions have been free to engage the public in whatever ways they choose. Few have had the resources or the inclination to experiment with civic engagement in the way CEP counties have been doing. Increasingly, CEP staff and their county partners are being called on for advice by other counties, or by various statewide groups that have been spawned as a result of Prop 10. A video documenting CEP debuted at the spring 2002 statewide Children and Families Commission statewide meeting, enhancing CEP visibility around the state.

This visibility provides an opportunity for CEP partners to reflect on what it is they have learned that may be helpful to other counties, and how that information might best be shared. CEP staff may wish to make this an explicit topic for the cross-county forums during Year 3. Thinking about how to share the CEP experience in written materials or at workshops could encourage project partners to think carefully about what they have learned that has value.

6. **Small but significant signs of citizen influence on Commission policy:** Most of the eight Commissions can point to tangible evidence that they have been responsive to public input.

CEP has sought to inform the Prop 10 policy process by encouraging the broadest possible public input and civic dialogue about the issues confronting young children and their families. This can occur in various ways: by insuring that Commission policies and programs meaningfully reflect expressed public concerns and desires (both generally and with respect to specific issues); by making the Commission and its "organized publics" an advocacy force in the community; and by activating citizen energy in ways that expand the total resources available for young children and families.

Between the time the strategic plan was adopted in Year 1 and the current date, these eight local Commissions have made decisions about how to allocate over $280 million dollars in Prop 10 funding (Table 3).

Table 3. Population and Prop 10 funding for CEP Counties

County	Prop 10 Funds (Prior to 99/00)	Prop 10 Funds (99-00)	Prop 10 Funds (00-01)	Prop 10 Funds (Total to 6/30/ 01)	Population
Yolo	1,072,036	2,196,425	2,081,060	**5,349,521**	158,900
Santa Cruz	1,811,668	3,711,813	3,299,063	**8,822,544**	253,400
Monterey	3,422,740	7,006,536	6,570,172	**16,999,448**	390,900
San Francisco	4,172,081	8,547,911	7,866,270	**20,586,262**	797,200
San Mateo	5,115,838	10,481,516	9,780,521	**25,377,875**	727,300
Contra Costa	6,258,100	12,821,867	12,060,263	**31,140,230**	932,000
Santa Clara	13,446,743	27,550,223	25,708,827	**66,705,793**	1,717,600
San Diego	22,118,464	45,112,238	41,874,362	**109,005,064**	2,883,500
8 County total	57,417,400	117,428,529	109,240,538	**283,986,737**	7,860,800
CALIFORNIA	226,824,793	546,680,442	506,076,706	**1,319,581,941**	34,036,000

*Sources for figures are as follows:

Prop 10 Funds: 2000-2001 amounts from Children and Families Commission Annual County Reports for Fiscal Year 2000-2001 and from the California Children and Families Commission at www.ccfc.ca.gov under County Fund Distributions under Annual Reports and Fiscal Issues

Population: July 1999, California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit. County Population Estimates and Components of Change, 1998-99.

A great many factors come into play in how allocations decisions are made, among them:

- The use of Prop 10 dollars to leverage additional funding for the community from various state, federal and private sources;
- The tendency for Commissioners to rely primarily on trusted insiders for advice;
- The current state budget crisis that will inevitably exacerbate the pressure on Commissioners to use these funds to backfill shortfalls in existing programs;
- Lobbying efforts by organized constituencies in the counties (e.g., child care workers, established agencies);
- The likelihood that local Commission autonomy may diminish as the State Commission prescribes particular initiatives.

When we first interviewed local Commissioners, they cited Prop 10 as a unique opportunity for counties to receive significant funds with few strings attached. There are signs that the amount of local autonomy may diminish over time, as the State Commission takes more leadership in defining the parameters of local action. The School Readiness Initiative is a case in point, where the promise of additional state funding has driven local Commissions to direct their activities toward the goals of the state program.

One immediate consequence for CEP is that the new school readiness money is being used to support a significant amount of local CE activity. This activity overlaps with other CE activities, providing the possibility of additional staff support but also potentially taking staff and public attention away from previously initiated CE efforts.

In this environment it would be unrealistic to expect a major CE impact on funding decisions, but there is tangible evidence of smaller but significant outcomes. The most obvious example is the willingness of some Commissions to set aside a percentage of their funding for mini-grant programs. Other examples can only be discerned by careful monitoring of Commissions over time. For example, in Yolo during Year 1 the public expressed concern for the issue of child abuse linked to parental substance abuse. When the Commission realized that the funds allocated to proposals generated by its first RFP did not adequately address this concern, they made sure to allocate funds for this purpose during Year 2. The result is a "single-outcome strategy" focused on reduction of child abuse.

Following are examples the type of impacts CE has had on local Commissions:

- In Santa Cruz evidence of CE impact on the Commission appears in several places. First, the final version of the Santa Cruz Prop 10 Strategic Plan contains a number of revisions in response to comments at the community meetings prior to the public hearing. Second, the decision to fund almost all of the mini-grant applications is evidence that the Commission considered these applications as an important voice of the community and responded as a partner in these efforts. The requirement for collaboration in the larger grant program is a third way in which the Commission is organizing publics—in this case service providers—to work together on behalf of young children and their families. System integration is both an intended consequence of and stimulus for collaborative service development. The open format of the Commission's proposal review meetings (and regular meetings), and the participation of Commissioners in community meetings and the CE Steering Committee, are gauges of the importance with which the Commission regards its accessibility to the community. It appears to take very seriously its avowed role of partnering with the community.

- In San Mateo, the input from the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) led to some adjustments in the strategic initiatives designed by Commissioners, and the public dialogues sponsored by the Commission help inspire local groups to act autonomously on behalf of young children and families.

- In Contra Costa two regional groups are now pursuing their own community improvement projects. Three members of these groups are now members of the CE Advisory Committee. Applications to the Family Friendly grant program are up significantly as a result of Year 2 outreach. As in other counties, the kit for parents of new babies was designed and distributed with the benefit of community input.

More generally, CE has enhanced the public visibility of all the Commissions, potentially leading to increased use of Prop 10-funded services.

7. **Public participants feel more connected to the Commission**: Positive civic engagement experiences led almost all participants to express a sense of personal connection to the Commission, local staff members, and/or the mission of serving children and families. For some participants, raised expectations about what the Commission could deliver had the unintended effect of contributing to a sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of immediately visible results.

The overwhelming majority of public participants we interviewed were pleased with the experience they had in a local civic engagement activity. They deemed the experience worthwhile, and indicated they would likely take part again in the future. The meetings and activities seemed to promote a sense that "we can do things," where "we" sometimes meant the Commission and sometimes the community. Many participants especially appreciated the personal relationships they developed with staff members or outreach workers. They liked the sense that "people in power know me and I know them," and were interested in maintaining those personal connections regardless of the ends those relationships might serve.

For a small but vocal subset of parents and community members who attended CE meetings, the lack of a direct link between what was articulated at the meeting and a tangible response by the Commission is a sore point. Of all the negative comments we received from participants, complaints about "results" or "follow through" were by far the most common. The following is a sample of typical remarks:

> There wasn't a response [to my recommendation] as to a confirmation one way or another. It was more, "Well, you know it's going to go to the Commission; the Commission will make the decision." The facilitator moved on then to another comment. You know, just moved the meeting along.
>
> The only thing about it [that she objected to] was the lack of follow-through afterwards, with the summaries that were promised. They didn't say how long it would take but they definitely did say that there would be something coming to us.
>
> That's what my criticism is—the final result. I have a feeling that the answer would be, "Well, it's an on-going process and a work-in-progress." But I'd like to see some action, too.
>
> Afterwards, though, I would have liked to have a little more follow-up. I know we had some conclusions drawn from various group meetings and it would have been nice to see that written out. And also, it felt like we had dug up a lot of problems and issues, but now where do we go? What would be the next step?

Instant results are hard to come by, yet without some sign of good faith many citizens quickly give up on the process. Members of the public are very "results-oriented," but that means something very different to them than what it means when the state and local Commissions use the term. The public participants we interviewed mean "show me soon

some tangible results in my neck of the woods so that I can trust that it is worth my time to take part in your process." The Commissions mean, "let's collect data to show that the major indicators are moving in the right direction, or that particular programs are doing what they say they are doing." Both forms of accountability have merit, but Commissions may need to be reminded of the importance of heeding the "people's version" if they want to sustain public engagement.

8. **Local partners and citizens were exposed to practices associated with public dialogue:** CEP was successful during Years 1 and 2 in assisting staff in *facilitating* and *convening* meetings that are open and respectful of diverse publics. These "exploratory dialogues" aired a range of perspectives and enhanced mutual understanding—of the issues and one another. CEP was less successful in encouraging *framing* practices that identified issues facing the Commission, or in implementing "deliberative dialogues" that worked through disagreements or tradeoffs or generated decision guidelines for Commissioners.

While it is clear that not all CEP partners share similar understandings of what dialogue is or why it is important, they do tell a more or less consistent story about what CEP was able to accomplish by introducing dialogue concepts and practices. Project partners quickly embraced practices associated with convening and facilitating meetings in an accessible manner where diverse participants are comfortable sharing; they were less quick to frame discussions around issues facing the Commission, or to use dialogues to work through contradictions and tradeoffs.

Nearly universally, the meetings we observed demonstrated the inherent value of exposing citizens to meetings where broad participation is encouraged, and everyone is listened to with respect. The ability to sit through this kind of meeting involves some openness and listening to one another, and generates a good deal of learning. For example, participants we interviewed often mentioned how participating in the Prop 10 meeting had made them aware of programs or services about which they had been previously unaware. Many of them spoke of having their eyes opened by hearing the concerns of other parents, particularly those who lived in very different circumstances from their own.

On the other hand, few of the meetings we observed went beyond the exploratory stage to promote deeper deliberation. Efforts to discover "common ground" often reasserted what was already obvious—such as "we all want what is best for kids," or, "our biggest issues are health, child care, and parent education." Over the course of the project, a number of factors influenced the attempt to introduce the various elements of dialogue, including:

Project timing. Prop 10 was originally deemed a good opportunity for experimenting with public dialogue because CEP could influence local Commissions at their formative stages. But the Prop 10 Commissions moved very quickly in the strategic planning phase, and the few months it took for CEP to get staff and ideas in place put it in the position of playing catch-up for most of Year 1. It was also the case that local Commissions viewed the strategic planning process primarily as a chance to hear from as many public voices

as possible, rather than as a chance to engage the public in winnowing ideas into more focused strategies. As local Commissions moved beyond strategic planning to program design and implementation, CEP lacked a clear intervention strategy.

Dialogue frameworks can be complicated to explain, demonstrate, and implement. The value of public dialogue is that it creates a different way of talking about public issues, but this also makes explaining dialogue complicated. As a local staff person put it, "Our facilitators generally have to do a lot of explanation of the framework itself—what it is, where it came from, why we were working this way—both before and during the dialogue. None of this is bad or wrong, it just requires a well-trained facilitator." San Mateo's local Commission found it took at least one preliminary meeting to begin introducing the framework and to encourage the group to feel comfortable with one another. They also found that it was very important to have facilitators who are truly in touch with the group, such as having a bicultural facilitator for a monolingual Spanish group.

Looking across the CEP counties, one lesson is that without in-house dialogue capacity—trained facilitators who are sensitive to the local community—it is difficult for the dialogue approach to take hold. Training in the methods of dialogue is needed to be able to communicate the principles and practices of dialogue to those who have little or no experience with the methods, or a robust concept of public life. But even a well-trained outsider (such as CEP staff) often does not have a clear enough view of the local situation to be able to ascertain if and how dialogue might be used effectively. The fact that San Mateo is the only CEP county continuing to use public dialogues extensively is no doubt a result of the commitment and in-house expertise that exists with a key Commission partner, the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center.

The public wants results, not talk. What motivates many parents to show up for meetings is the implied promise of short-term changes or benefits that they believe will improve the lives of their children. Whereas dialogue stresses a slow building of trust, and extended deliberation, the public often gets frustrated quickly if tangible results from conversations are not immediately forthcoming.

Dialogue requires champions in high places. The empirical literature on public dialogue is limited, but the cases that have been reported typically occur when a top administrator or public official champions some form of deliberative process. While CEP sought the buy-in of local Commissions to participate in CEP, they never got specific buy-in from Commissions or specific Commissioners to the use of public dialogue as a tool, as opposed to civic engagement as a priority. Much of the CEP training and technical assistance was directed at local Commission staff, rather than Commissioners, providing them with less opportunity to grow committed to the concepts.

The way Commissions approached their work. Prop 10 set up local Commissions as independent entities with ties to local government but with autonomy to adopt new ways of doing business. CEP sought to capitalize on this autonomy by "asking our county partners to approach their work on behalf of young children and their families by "*doing*

with" the public versus the more traditional service orientation of *"doing for."* To date, most Commissions have been preoccupied with translating Prop 10 funds into allocations that fund local services to meet the needs of children 0-5 and their families. In many respects their work still represents the traditional service delivery orientation, even though many of the Commissioners we have interviewed also believe that the Commissions should be a catalyst that encourages "community self-help" or "greater political advocacy by the public," and hope to move more in this direction as time goes on.

In framing questions for local Commissions to use in dialogues, the CEP staff did an admirable job trying to frame Prop 10 issues in a way that was sensitive both to where the Commissions currently were and where they hope to be in the future. One frame developed by CEP staff followed the traditional National Issues Forum model, presenting three major choices for discussion: 1) fill the service gaps, 2) help parents help themselves, or 3) change community priorities. The other frame consisted of a series of questions around which dialogue could occur, including:

- Should the Prop 10 funding be spent entirely on primary prevention or should funding be used to support a mix of prevention, intervention, and treatment activities?
- Should the funds be spent on a few high impact initiatives or spread across a wide variety of programs and services?
- Should strategy be driven by the desire to solve problems or to build on the strengths of families and children?
- Should funding be spent entirely on professional service delivery or should some funding be used to create community capacity to support one another at the neighborhood level?
- What is the appropriate distribution of funds across the four goal areas?
- Should all children and families receive services through Prop 10 funding or just those most in need?

These schemes were adapted for use in a number of local meetings, and deemed helpful by local staff or the consultants with which they were working. They were not, however, embraced by the local Commissions as a key strategy for informing their planning and decisions with citizen perspectives, or guiding their own deliberations. The problem was not in the quality of the framing, but in the fact that the framed issues did not represent issues which Commissions felt moved to consider at a time when 1) there was general optimism about what was possible given the large new source of funds, and 2) there was an unwillingness to foreclose any options or choices too soon in the process, especially given the high political profile of Prop 10 and the danger of alienating key constituencies.

The scope of the project. Given eight county settings and sets of actors, CEP staff were stretched thin in implementing dialogue. One question for CEP funder reflection is whether a more focused effort in a few counties might have yielded a better test of the degree to which dialogue tools and forms can influence real world policy deliberation. In any event, CEP staff faced a fundamental dilemma. If they articulated clear ideas about what dialogue should look like, and high standards for what it ought to deliver, they

risked alienating local staff and Commissioners who were unwilling to commit to ideas whose immediate value they did not see. If they took a more laissez faire approach that affirmed whatever local Commissions wanted CE to look like, they risked defaulting on the value of the project as an experimental test of key assumptions about public dialogue.

Evaluator Reflections: Options for Focusing CEP in Year 3

As CEP enters Year 3, project staff members have articulated a number of key objectives concerning their intended work with local partners, including:

- Creating forums (e.g., safe space and time) for cross county learning and reflection;
- Identifying resources and/or providing technical assistance that helps local partners build the capacity of the Commission and the community to continue pursuing civic engagement;
- Demonstrating the value added by civic engagement in terms that increase the likelihood that local Commissions will embrace and support CE after CEP funding ceases.

CEP has made significant progress in encouraging the development of the forms and tools of civic engagement described in this report. Realizing the promise of these tools, and making progress on the Year 3 objectives, will require greater clarity about the end or ends toward which these civic engagement tools are expected to contribute. The problem is not the absence of ideas about valued ends, but the presence of so many different ideas that the project partners have struggled to maintain a sense of unity and common purpose. When we asked, "What would success look like?" various CEP partners revealed an ambitious laundry list of desired ends, including:

- Prop 10 funds are equitably distributed in the community;
- Service delivery is integrated in ways sensitive to parent concerns;
- The capacity of the community to activate citizens grows, and public groups are acting on their own to help children and families;
- Delivery of particular programs or services is improved through parent feedback;
- Service providers better understand the values and priorities different ethnic/cultural groups bring to parenting issues;
- Business as usual in government is changed to incorporate civic engagement as a more routine practice;
- Reduced inequality of outcomes for children and families;
- Outreach strategies that work for specific populations are discovered;
- Commissioners come to value public participation;
- Mutual understanding increases despite the diversity of people and views in the community.

All these goals are worthy, but we question whether their combined weight is too much for one project to bear. In closing we would like to suggest three alternative approaches CEP might pursue in Year 3 to enhance its success by focusing project energies.

Priority setting by CEP partners. We are not sure how willing various CEP partners would be to narrow or prioritize among the desired outcomes listed above. If it can be

done, however, it would make it easier to focus the Year 3 work and evaluate its success. For example, cross county learning presumes that there is a common focus for the conversation. Having a discussion about what kinds of outreach strategies local partners are using, how those are going, and what is being learned, would be one valuable use of the limited time at cross county meetings convened during the year. But choosing that topic as a focus would preclude others being discussed at similar length. About what topics do the various partners most wish to learn?

Similarly, demonstrating the value of CE to Commissioners in terms that increase the likelihood of their continuing investment requires focusing on one or two CE outcomes that matter to the Commission. Year 3 is a critical time to begin this discussion with Commissioners. We are well aware that differences in Commissioner perspective may make this discussion difficult. On the other hand, local staff members now have more tools at their disposal, including a greater sense of what CE can and cannot do locally, and experience in convening and facilitating conversations with diverse groups. What do Commissioners most want CE to provide?

Finally, the objective of building community capacity will require answering the question, "capacity for what?" For example, if the focus is on promoting mutual understanding, capacity building will look quite different than if the focus is on improving program service delivery through parent feedback.

Use of program logic models to reflect on changes over the course of CEP. CEP began with two major goals—increasing public input and influence over local Prop 10 policymaking, and fostering civic dialogue about early childhood development. As Year 2 came to a close, two realities seemed clear: 1) there is no attempt being made to impose on local partners a project-wide strategy or approach for achieving these goals, and 2) local partners have not been asked to articulate a chain of logic indicating how the various CE strategies they *are* adopting are expected to achieve these goals, or other goals they have in mind.

Program logic models are a useful tool for clarifying the relationship of project goals, activities, and outcomes.[17] Supporting the local partners in developing a chain of program logic, and related indicators of success, would be one way CEP could gain clarity about the extent to which its original goals are being met, and the reasons and manner in which they are being modified, altered, or abandoned.

For example, it is no longer clear if influence over local Prop 10 policy decisions is still a goal of many of the local CE activities—many of which are focused on enabling community groups to act on their own to support children and families. The learning objectives of CEP would be enhanced by having discussion in which local partners articulate the reasons for the capacity building focus, and state if and how they see it achieving the goal of policy influence. Given the frank discussions in the project to date, and the funder commitment to open-ended inquiry, we are encouraged that this kind of

[17] For a helpful and user-friendly introduction, see United Way of America, *Measuring Program Outcomes: A Practical Approach*, 1996.

discussion can take place with genuine openness to articulate what has really happened, unconstrained by the burdensome idea that any changes made by local partners will be viewed as violating promises made at the outset of the project.

Focus on one stage of the policy process—evaluation. Another approach to focusing CEO energies in Year 3 would be to shift attention to involving the public in the monitoring and evaluation of Prop 10 funded programs. The major civic engagement initiatives being reported in the current public administration literature concern programs and techniques for involving citizens in performance measurement and program evaluation.[18] While we have heard many local staff members and some Commissioners indicate that they think there is a role for parents and the public in evaluating Prop 10-funded programs, there has been little if any experimentation of this type by CEP partners thus far.

We continue to believe this is a vital area for engaging the public, and an arena where CEP might choose to focus its effort with a potentially large long-term payoff. A focus on the role of citizens in evaluation could provide a focal point for cross county learning and capacity building assistance, and might also be seen as inherently valuable by Commissioners, increasing their public legitimacy by providing tangible evidence that they are seeking public feedback.

[18] On the importance of this work to civic engagement, see "Engaging Citizens in Achieving Results that Matter: A Model for Effective 21st Century Governance," by Paul Epstein, Lyle Wray, Martha Marshall, and Stuart Grifel; February 2000; American Society for Public Administration Symposium on Results-oriented Government. The idea is to engage citizens (in a variety of roles) in the process by which communities build linkages between how they measure performance and how they implement policy and public services. The report is available on-line at: <http://citizensleague.net/cl/SLOAN/cover.html>.

Appendix I. Project documents

"Doing With" via Dialogue
Notes for CEP County Partners – 8/1/00

In the Civic Engagement Project, we are asking our county partners to approach their work on behalf of young children and their families by *"doing with"* the public versus the more traditional service orientation of *"doing for."*

While it is not the only tool we recommend, dialogue is at the core of our work because it creates critical new knowledge and capacity to expand the insights and resources that can be brought to bear on the enormous range of opportunities embedded in each county's strategic plan.

I. Defining dialogue

In our trainings, we've focused on the three essential elements of dialogue that distinguish it from other public discussions and needs assessment processes:

- *Convening* – the "who" and "where" that creates a mix of participants that is representative of the county in an accessible and comfortable setting

- *Framing* – the "what" that identifies the relevant issues facing the Commission, presented in a way that is accessible to various publics

- *Facilitation* – the "how" that allows diverse participants to develop trust and mutual understanding so they can work through the issues together

II. Why dialogue is central to civic engagement

We see at least three interrelated benefits of dialogue (as defined above) that can aid the Commission – and the community – in progress toward their shared goal of improving the quality of life for young children and their families:

1. Creating New Knowledge with the Community

- Enhanced understanding of the issues by all participants
- New insights as diverse experiences and views are shared
- Fragmented sectors of the county help identify common ground on tough choices
- Low/no cost and non-agency solutions surfaced

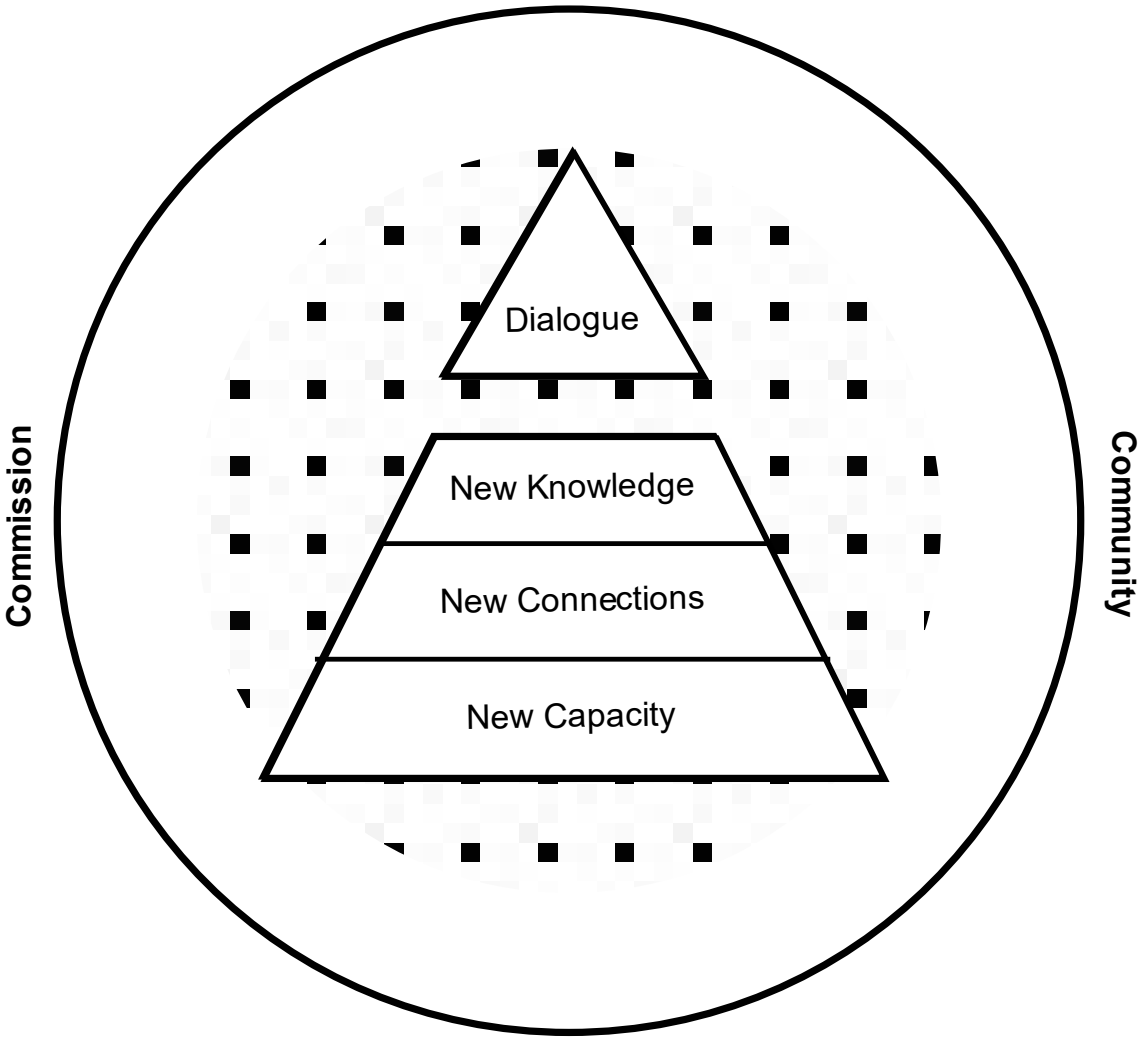
2. Creating New Connections/Building Community

- Creates mutual understanding and a shared sense of purpose
- Breaks down stereotypes and mistrust; develops empathy and respect
- A safe place to explore areas of disagreement on the way to common ground
- Bonds of community and collaboration are strengthened

3. Creating New Capacity/Resources in the Community

- Helps people see that they have a role in the issue
- Develops individual and community capacity
- Identifies potential leaders within a community
- Moves a community to action

The "Why" of Dialogue



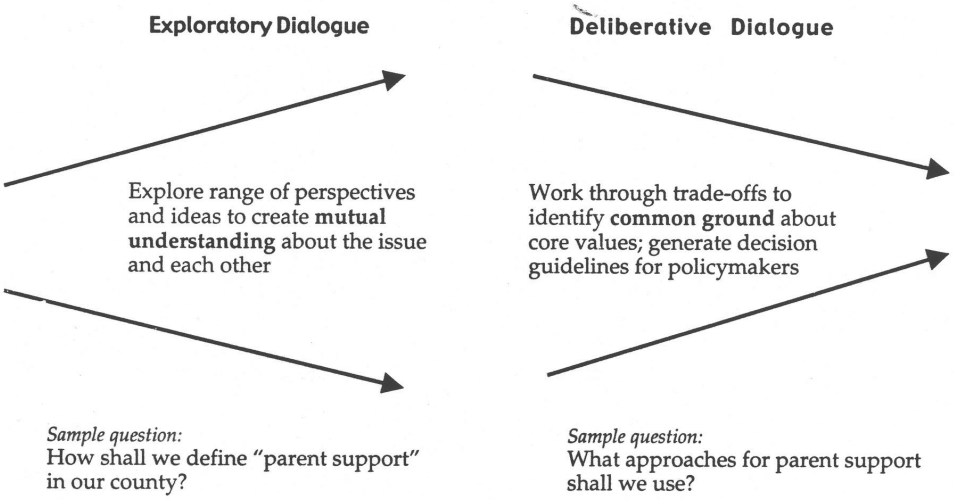
HOW THE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT THINKS ABOUT DIALOGUE
April 2001

Attributes of dialogue as defined by the CEP:

- The purpose and tone of the session(s) is open and collaborative; participants work to discover and define their common interests (rather than compete for airtime to promote a set point of view)
- Participants sit in a circle and interact with and learn from each other (instead of just focusing on the sponsor or facilitator)
- A "safe" environment and trust is created to allow a diverse range of experiences and perspectives to be explored, with all participants treated with equal respect
- The issue is framed so that it accessible to anyone in the community – rather than just for "insiders" – by focusing on underlying values more than technical specifics
- The facilitator supports the group in moving from what "I want" to "what we want" *and* "what are we going to do" – grappling with apparent contradictions and potential trade-offs to generate common ground

How CEP dialogue aids policy decisions:

- The dialogue can relate to the Commission's overall strategic plan or specific aspects of plan implementation or evaluation. Some dialogues may be more exploratory in nature, while others will be more oriented to specific decisions – but all dialogues operate on the idea of creating mutual understanding about the issue and each other.

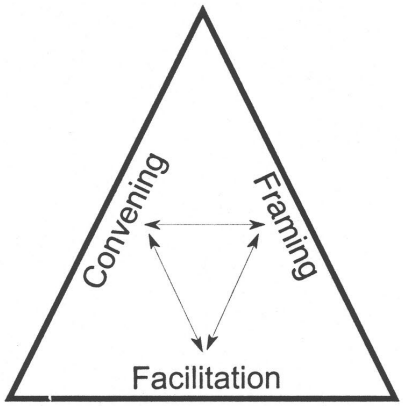


- The number of dialogue sessions required ties to the scope of the dialogue topic as well as the goals for the relationships to be formed by the attendees.

How the TA for these dialogues is organized:

The CEP has focused on three interrelated elements of dialogue that distinguish it from other public discussions:

- *Convening* – the "who" and "where" that creates a mix of participants that is representative of the county in a convenient and comfortable setting
- *Framing* – the "what" that identifies the relevant issues facing the Commission in a way that is accessible to community members independent of their background
- *Facilitation* – the "how" that allows diverse participants to develop trust and mutual understanding so they can work through the issues together



Typical outcomes of dialogues with these attributes:

The sponsors (in this case, the Commission) experience unfiltered community perspectives *and* insight into the community's common ground; often they end up with a better understanding of the issue plus a deeper respect for the capacity of community members to understand and address complex issues.

Participants develop mutual understanding about the issue and about each other:

- there is a healthy respect for the complexity of the issue and realistic expectations about what needs to be done/can be done
- people develop greater respect and empathy for others with different experiences and viewpoints; often stereotypes and misperceptions are broken down and participants express interest in continuing to get to know each other better

Participants see that resources of the whole community are needed and that they themselves have a role to play in the issue. Many participants find the experience of being listened to with respect as an important step in their own development as community leaders.

People gain an increased sense of possibility for positive change.

Appendix II. Year 2 Commissioner Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for our evaluation of the Prop 10 Civic Engagement Project in your county. Do you mind if we tape record this conversation for note taking purposes only? We do not attribute any comments from the interviews to specific individuals in our reports.

1. Apart from your work with the Commission, what do you do? [or for repeat interviews, "Do you still work with XXXX as you were last year?"]
2. How is the work of the Commission going?
3. What do you see as the most important achievements of the Commission to date?
4. What has been the most challenging aspect of the Commission's work to date?
5. What has been your personal role in CE this last year?
6. As you look back on the civic engagement activities in the past year, would you say they were worth the effort? Why do you say that?
7. Is there any aspect of CE that stands out as particularly useful to the work of the Commission?
8. Were there any parts of CE that you found counterproductive?
9. How do you envision the ongoing role of the public in the work of your Commission?
10. What would successful civic engagement look like?
11. How does your experience with CE in year 1 compare to any past experiences you have had?
12. What do you anticipate will be your involvement in the Commission's civic engagement in the next 6 months?
13. What have you learned so far about making civic engagement work in your county as a result of being involved with the CEP?
14. What did you find useful or troubling about the approach to CE that the CEP encouraged, or the TA they provided?
15. How successful do you think your efforts were to engage diverse groups in the work of the Commission? Why?
16. Have there been any surprises so far?
17. Is there anything else that we should know about what is happening in regard to Prop 10 or CE in your county?

Appendix III. Interview Protocol for Executive Directors and CE Staff

Introduction

1. Introductions/get acquainted

Our evaluation plan for this program year will involve interviews with staff, Commissioners, CE advisors, participants, and experts; observations of various meetings and events; document analysis; and collection of county data. We'd like to take a few minutes to find out how to best get this information from you.

Contact info

2. [Show list] *Any updates to staff and commissioner list?*
3. *Do you have a list of CE Advisory Committee Members?* If the committee is not yet formed, when do you expect it to be?
4. *Consultants:* Are you currently working with consultants/on what? If we wanted to talk to current or past consultants, how could we get that information?
5. *We'd like to get participant lists again this year. Will that be possible?* Probe for concerns about privacy, etc. and how they handle legibility problems?

Schedule of events: We would like to observe the following four types of events: Commission meetings; CE Advisory Committee meetings; CE activities varying by publics involved, purposes, and regional locations; and other events you suggest.

6. What is the best way to get information about the dates and locations of these events? From your web site? Do you have a list of events for the next few months available?

7. *Grants information*: What's the best way for us to get some basic information on the grants you funded, and contact information in case we want to talk to the project leaders?
8. *Additional Documents*: Do you plan use the web to post key documents, such as Commission meeting minutes; CE meeting notes; Strategic plans and allocation plans; RFP's and proposal score sheets; any county reports or data relevant to Prop 10? If not, what's the best way for us to get these?

Prop 10

9. I'd like to start by getting an update on how the work of your Commission is going. Probes:

   You've finished (or are working on) the Strategic Plan for the second year?

   You've completed (or are working on) the allocation of first-year funds?

   You have a process for monitoring the programs you've funded?

   You have a process for evaluating funded programs?

You have a process for reporting to the State Commission?

10. What are your strategies for financing? Do you have plans to leverage Prop 10 funds with other funds? Have you adopted any strategies from the UCLA Policy Brief?

11. What do you see as the most important achievements of the Commission to date?

12. What was the most challenging aspect of the Commission's work to date?

13. Do you personally have any dreams that you'd like the Commission to accomplish this year? Does the Commission share your dreams?

Civic Engagement

14. What was your role in CE last year?

15. As you look back at the CE activities last year, would you say they were worth the effort? Why do you say that?

16. Is there any aspect of CE stand out as particularly useful to the work of the Commission?

17. Is there any part of your county's CE activities that you found particularly counterproductive to the work of the Commission?

18. [show cycle of the planning process] Where in this cycle do you expect to engage different publics? In what ways? What do you hope to get out of this type of CE?

19. What have you learned so far about making CE work in this particular county?

20. What is the most important advice you would give another county designing CE related to Prop 10?

Follow-Up and Conclusion

21. [Insert questions following up on their Year 1 Report and/or Strategic Plan and CE Plan – the focus of these questions will be challenges]

22. The CEP was designed to enhance what you normally do in your county planning processes. There have been CEP meetings and workshops for all counties involved, technical assistance, and an external evaluation. What has been the relative utility of each of these components? Please give us positive feedback as well as suggestions for improvement of any of these components.

23. Is there anything you would particularly like us to look at in the evaluation this year?

24. Is there anything else we should know about what's happening in regard to Prop 10 and/or related CE in your county?

Appendix IV. Examples of Participant Interview Protocols used in Various Counties

CE PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS, YEAR 2

At the initial contact:

Hi, my name is _____ and I'm working with the UC Davis research team that is studying the Prop. 10 Children and Families Commission in Santa Cruz County. I believe you've recently received a letter saying that we'd like to talk about your experiences with the Commission's mini-grants, including the application workshops. This would be a telephone interview at your convenience; takes about 20 minutes. Can we set up an appointment to have this conversation?

Just prior to the interview:

Before we begin, do you have any questions about who we are and what we're doing? [Explain.] What you say to us is confidential but, with your permission, I'd like to tape it so that I don't miss anything.

1. The mini-grant application workshop you took part in --
   How did you hear about it, and who contacted you [outreach worker? commission staff? friend? at work?]
   Did you go to more than one work group?
   How many other persons were in the workshop you attended?
   What was the meeting like—was it all presentation? Was there time for questions and answers?
   Were refreshments provided? Was child care available?
   How long did the work group last?
2. How diverse was the group of folks who attended the work group with you?
   What proportion of the participants had applied for grants before?
   Was the climate one in which anybody would have felt comfortable, or do you think it might have been off-putting to any particular groups?
3. When you attended the workshop, did you get background information about Prop. 10, the Children and Families Commission, what had already happened in Santa Cruz County?
   By the end of the workshop, did you feel ready to apply for funds?
   Did you know what to expect if you decided to apply for funds?
   Did you need additional assistance in filling out the application?

4. Did you think the mini-grant application work group was worthwhile? Why do you say that?
   Did you feel that you learned anything you didn't know already?

5. Looking back on the whole process, was it worthwhile? Why do you say that?
   How might it be improved the next time around?
   Would you encourage other groups to apply for mini-grant funds?
6. How have you used the grant money you were awarded?
   What difference will your grant make in the lives of young children and their families? Do you have any examples so far?
7. Are the families you serve involved in planning or giving feedback on your program?
   Why/why not?
8. Would you say that the commission should continue the mini-grant process and keep putting energy into it?
   Why do you think it is of value to the community as a whole?
9. Have you picked up any indication that mini-grant recipients are beginning to think about working together to make things happen rather than expecting "the government" or the commission to fix community problems?
10. If it were up to you, what would you like to see happen next in your community with Prop. 10 funds?
    What would you like to do yourself to help make this happen?
11. That's about it, except that we have a few general questions about you if that's all right.
    In what part of the county do you live?
    How long have you lived there?
    Do you have children? What are their ages?
    Do you work outside the home? What kind of work do you do?
12. Anything else you think we should know?

Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me. You've really been a big help.

CE PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS, YEAR 2

Monterey County - CE Steering

Hi, my name is _____ and I'm working with the UC Davis research team that is studying the Prop 10 Children and Families Commission in Monterey County. I believe you've recently received a letter saying that we'd like to talk with you about how the Children & Family Commission can work toward getting more community engagement in the county's Prop 10 work. This would be a telephone interview at your convenience; takes about 20 minutes. Before we begin, do you have any questions about who we are and what we're doing? [Explain.] What you say to us is confidential but, with your permission, I'd like to tape it so that I don't miss anything.

1. You have been asked to serve on a Community (civic) Engagement steering committee…

   What is your connection, if any, to the work of the Monterey County Children & Families Commission? How would you describe the work of the Commission? As far as you know, what will the Steering Committee do?

2. What will it take to make it possible and worthwhile for you to serve on the steering committee?

   Probes: Hold meetings on a particular day or time of day? Serve refreshments? Have child care? Conduct the meeting in Spanish and English? Location? Content and frequency of meetings?

3. What does "community engagement" mean to you?

4. What benefits do you see in involving parents and other members of the community in Prop 10 work? Do you see any drawbacks?

5. Have you had any experience in getting parents to come to community meetings?

   If they have: Have you had success in getting parents to come? What seems to make a difference? Was their participation worth the effort it took? Why do you say that?

   If they have not: What do you see as good ways to get parents to turn out for meetings, to get involved?

6. Is there anything about Monterey County that makes it especially easy or especially difficult to involve members of the community?

   How do you think the Commission might reach out to persons who are not ordinarily involved in community life?

   What strategies do you think the Commission should use in building community engagement?

7. We have a few personal questions if you don't mind answering them.

   In what part of the county do you live? How long have you lived there? Do you have children? What are their ages? Do you work full-time or part-time at your job?

8. Anything else you think we should know about Monterey County, or Prop 10, or the needs of the county's young children and their families?

CE PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS, SAN FRANCISCO
******APPLICANTS******

At the initial contact:

Hi, my name is _____ and I'm working with the UC Davis research team that is studying the Prop. 10 Children and Families Commission in San Francisco County. I believe you received a letter from us, followed up by a post card saying that we'd like to talk about your experiences with the Parent ACTION Grants. It's a telephone interview at your convenience; takes about 20 minutes. Before we begin, do you have any questions about who we are and what we're doing? [Explain.] What you say to us is confidential but, with your permission, I'd like to tape it so that I don't miss anything.

1. **The Parent ACTION grant process you took part in --**

   How did you hear about it?

   What made you decide to apply for a grant? Did you apply alone or with partners? Who did you partner with? Was it the first time you had applied for a grant?

   Did you attend meetings or workshops to learn how to prepare an application?

   We know that some people have done community work before and for some, it's their first time. Have you had experience with this kind of community involvement before?

2. **When you began the grant process,** were you given background information about Prop. 10, the Children and Families Commission, what had already happened in San Francisco County?

   Did you need assistance in filling out the grant application? Were you told anything about needing a fiscal sponsor?

3. **The grant you applied for - -**

   What was it for? What do you call your project?

   What would you say your immediate and long-term goals are? What will "success" look like? Do you have any examples so far?

   How much money did you ask for? How will the funds be used?

4. **The interview process - -**

   What was that like? Did you go before a panel? If not, who did you talk to? What sorts of things did they ask you—about yourself, about the grant, about the people you plan to serve?

   If you were waiting with other applicants to be interviewed, would you say they represented a cross-section of San Francisco County residents, ethnically and economically? Were any groups omitted, do you think?

   Have you heard of something called an "Action Network"? Do you know what it is? Do you know anything about mini-grant recipients networking together or working together in any way?

5. **Was your application successful?** [Ask this even if we know the answer, as a lead-in.]

If yes: **Did you get exactly what you asked for?** When do you expect to receive the funds? What difference will your grant make in the lives of young children and their families? Do you have any examples so far? Are the families you serve involved in planning or giving feedback on your program? Why/why not?

The orientation meeting you went to after being told you were approved -- what was that like? How many people attended with you? Would you say that they were first-time grant recipients?

If no: **Were you told why your request was not approved?** Do you feel that the selection process was a fair one? Can you appeal the Selection Board's decision? Do you think you will try to do your project anyway?

If maybe: **How were you informed that you could resubmit your proposal?** Were you told what the Selection Board wanted you to change or given any assistance in rewriting your application? How have you changed your proposal? When will you know if you were successful the second time around?

5. **Looking back on the whole grant application process - -**

Would you apply for Prop. 10 funds again? If not, why not? If so, what would you do differently next time?

Are the reporting procedures difficult, do you think?

How might the process itself be improved the next time around?

6. **Should the commission should continue this mini-grant process?** Why do you think it is of value to the community?

7. **Do you have some thoughts about what should be done with San Francisco County's Prop. 10 funds in the future?**

8. **We have a few general questions about you** if that's all right.

In what part of the county do you live?

How long have you lived there?

Do you have children? What are their ages?

Do you work outside the home? What kind of work do you do?

12. **Anything else you think we should know?**

Thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me. You've really been a big help.

Appendix V. Social and demographic data on CEP Counties

Table 4. Economic Indicators

County	Per Capita Income ($)	Per Capita Income Rank	Poverty Rate (% change 96-99)	Child Poverty Rate (% change 96-99)	Living Hourly Wage For Single Parent Family
Yolo	23,188.00	20	14% (-2)	22% (+2)	$18.59
Santa Cruz	29,406.00	9	12% (-1)	19% (+1)	$25.99
Monterey	25,747.00	14	15% (+1)	24% (-2)	$19.05
San Francisco	40,357.00	2	12% (0)	21% (0)	$25.99
San Mateo	39,989.00	3	6% (+1)	9% (+1)	$25.99
Contra Costa	33,869.00	5	8% (0)	14% (+2)	$25.99
Santa Clara	37,856.00	4	8% (-1)	14% (+1)	$25.99
San Diego	24,965.00	17	13% (-3)	20% (-3)	$21.16
CALIFORNIA	26,314.00	-	15%	23%	$20.89

*Sources for figures are as follows:

Per Capita Income: 1997, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Personal Income and Per Capita Personal Income by County, 1995-97.

Per Capita Income Rank: County Ranking of all 58 California counties by per capita income. 1997, US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis. Personal Income and Per Capita Personal Income by County, 1995-97.

Poverty Rate: Estimates for percentages of people of all ages in poverty in California. 1998, US Census Bureau from income reported in the March 1999 Current Population Survey (released 12/01).

Child Poverty Rate: Estimated percentages of people under 18 in poverty in California. 1998, US Census Bureau from income reported in the March 1999 Current Population Survey (released 12/01).

Living Wage for Single Parent Family: Hourly wage needed to meet cost of living in state or region of the state obtained from "Making Ends Meet: How Much Does it Cost to Raise a Family in California," California Budget Project. September 2001. Single Parent family is defined as one parent and two children. These numbers assumes 40 hours/week, 52 weeks/year of work.

Table 5. CEP County Languages Spoken and Racial/Ethnic Make-Up*

County	# of non-English Languages	White	Hispanic	Asian	African American	Native American
Contra Costa	12	66%	13%	11%	9%	1%
Monterey	3	47%	38%	8%	6%	1%
San Diego	4	61%	24%	8%	6%	1%
San Francisco	9	41%	16%	33%	10%	0%
San Mateo	9	54%	21%	20%	5%	0%
Santa Clara	10	51%	23%	22%	4%	0%
Santa Cruz	1	71%	23%	4%	1%	1%
Yolo	11	86%	22%	9%	2%	1%
STATEWIDE	8	52%	29%	11%	7%	1%

*Sources for figures are as follows:

Languages Spoken: Number of languages other than English spoken by 1% or more of the English-learners in the California public schools. 1999-00, California Department of Education. English Learners in California Public Schools, by Language and Grade.

Racial/Ethnic Make-Up: Percentage of total county population in each category. 1997, California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit. Race/Ethnic Population Estimates: Components of Change for California Counties, April 1990-July 1997.

Table 6. CEP Racial/Ethnic Make-Up for Children 0-5*

County	White	Latino	Asian	African Amer.	Native American	Pacific Islander	Mixed Ancestry	Other Races
Contra Costa	45%	28%	9%	10%	0.3%	0.4%	7%	0.5%
Monterey	24%	66%	4%	2%	0.3%	0.4%	4%	0.2%
San Diego	39%	40%	7%	6%	1%	0.3%	6%	0.3%
San Francisco	28%	23%	31%	9%	0.2%	0.9%	7%	0.6%
San Mateo	39%	32%	18%	3%	0%	2%	7%	.05%
Santa Clara	32%	34%	26%	2%	0.3%	0.3%	6%	0.3%
Santa Cruz	46%	46%	2%	0.7%	0.4%	0.07%	4%	0.4%
Yolo	44%	43%	6%	2%	0.5%	0.2%	5%	0.3%
California	32%	48%	9%	6%	0.5%	0.3%	4%	0.2%

*Sources for figures are as follows:

Racial/Ethnic Make-Up for Children Under 5: From Children and Families Commission County Annual Reports for Fiscal Year 2000-2001 and/or California Commission for Children and Families website www.ccfc.ca.gov. These figures were compiled by participating counties from the 2000 Census.