

# **INTRODUCTION TO THE EVALUATION PROCESS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Evaluation Team is readily available to assist Programs and provide the tools needed to engage in a successful evaluation process. As the Program staff become more active in data collection, reporting and the evaluation process, they will be able to link the results from the evaluation process to the goals they have set for the Program.

When approached with care and diligence, the evaluation process can help highlight a Program's strengths and effectiveness, and provide evidence to leverage additional funds for sustainability. To justify accountability to the funding agencies, a Program will need to use the evaluation data to demonstrate that the Program has used dollars wisely in achieving the proposed outcomes. Programs can also use the data collected from their participants to gain insights on best and promising practices that are working well for their Program.

The evaluation process is designed to support Program accountability to First 5 Kern and First 5 California. In addition, the evaluative effort is also targeted on improving the Program's effectiveness in meeting needs of the local community.

## **EVALUATION GUIDED BY THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

The Strategic Plan provides objectives and specific outcomes (Result Indicators) in four Focus Areas: Health and Wellness, Parent Education and Support Services, Early Childcare and Education, and Integration of Services. It also sets the context and direction for the evaluation process. Programs determine which Focus Area, Objectives, and Result Indicators from the Strategic Plan correspond to the services they provide. Each Program then uses the selected Result Indicators to collaboratively develop a Scope of Work-Evaluation Plan (SOW-EP) with its assigned Program Officer and Research Analyst/Assistant.

## **SCOPE OF WORK – EVALUATION PLAN**

Each Program has a Scope of Work-Evaluation Plan. The SOW-EP serves as a plan by which the Evaluation Team will evaluate the outcomes of each Program's services. It also identifies the Program-specific services that match the Result Indicators and the alignment data necessary for appropriate outcomes evaluation.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ENTRY**

Data collection and reporting are part of the General Agreement requirements. These data typically reflect a Program's impact on children ages 0 to 5 and their families. The tools to support the data collection include:

- Core Data Element (CDE) questionnaire
- Birth Intake Survey
- Family Demographics form
- Surveys and assessments that correspond to a Program's specific services and milestones as defined in the SOW-EP.

The assigned Research Analyst/Assistant assists in setting-up data collection protocol, including a regular schedule for data submission. Data is entered directly into Grant Evaluation and Management System (GEMS) by the Program staff.

The GEMS data system is designed to meet the requirements of California's Proposition 10, Children and Families First Act of 1998. This technology supports a menu of available modules for the participant-level data collection and reporting functionality. The integrated data system allows First 5 Kern to determine the cumulative impact of its funded Programs.

A Research Analyst/Assistant and Program Officer will collaborate with Programs to set goals and assign milestones to help track progress toward contract goals. Data for the milestones are entered into GEMS and reported in the annual report. Please see the GEMS User Guide – Section II in this guide – for more data collection and reporting information.

### **Suggestions for Efficient, Effective, and Accurate Data Collection**

The care given to data collection lays the foundation for accurate reporting and representation of a Program's strengths and accomplishments. Program staff should pay close attention to data collection processes and data entry. The following tips will help ensure the integrity of the data provided:

1. Enter the data in a timely fashion. The quality and accuracy of data is significantly diminished if data are allowed to accumulate over the course of several months and then entered in a rush at the end of the quarter.
2. Accurate data is essential to the evaluation process and is directly linked to our ability to credit a Program's outcomes.
3. Assign a primary staff member for the data entry, and prepare at least two other staff members with equivalent training. This ensures that the Program can maintain consistent and accurate reporting in the event of the personnel transition.

GEMS Technical Support can assist with any questions about appropriate data entry.

### **PROTECTING PARTICIPANT'S PERSONAL INFORMATION AND DATA**

Data collected from individual clients and submitted to First 5 Kern for evaluation purposes are monitored by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at California State University, Bakersfield (CSUB), according to federal regulations under the auspices of the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services. The primary goal of the data collection protocol monitoring process is to protect individual rights in releasing the personal information.

### **Participant Consent to Share Personal Information**

Prior to providing their personal information, participants must be informed of the purpose and uses of their data. Once fully informed, participants must sign the *First 5 Kern Informed Consent to Share Personal Information* in order for their information to be shared with the Evaluation Team. The Consent form must be signed before the participant-level data is entered into GEMS. Participants have the right to refuse to share data or refuse to answer any questions. A client's choice to exercise this right shall not in any way hinder them from receiving First 5 Kern-funded services.

## **Confidentiality Training**

All Program staff members are required to attend Confidentiality Training with the First 5 Kern Communications Officer and sign the Kern County Children and Families Commission Program Staff Confidentiality Agreement. This training is provided to ensure staff understand and adhere to the data collection protocol approved by the CSUB IRB. Program staff members hired after the General Agreement start date must attend the Confidentiality Training, which is offered on a regular basis. The Confidentiality Protocol Manual is located in Section IV of this manual.

## **SITE VISITS**

Each Program is assigned a Research Analyst/Assistant to conduct site visits throughout the funding year. The site visits are designed to assist Programs with data collection and instrument design to appropriately measure outcomes. In particular, the Research Analyst/Assistant will cover the following elements with the Program staff during the site visit:

- Review Scope of Work-Evaluation Plan
- Assess the quality of data collection and management
- Assist with instrument design and implementation, if needed
- Monitor potential negative effects during data collection efforts
- Gather feedback for the annual report completed by the Evaluation Team.
- Provide recommendations, as needed

## **ANNUAL REPORT**

The Evaluation Team provides an annual report to First 5 Kern each fiscal year. The annual report offers a multi-dimensional assessment of the services provided by First 5 Kern-funded Programs, the characteristics of children and families served, and the impact Programs have on Kern County's children and families.

The annual report serves the following multiple purposes for Programs:

- Progress toward meeting annual goals and recommendations
- Demographic characteristics of the children served
- Identify participant needs through data observation
- Identify program strengths
- Identify persistent challenges
- Outcomes of service analyses, which may be used to leverage other funding.