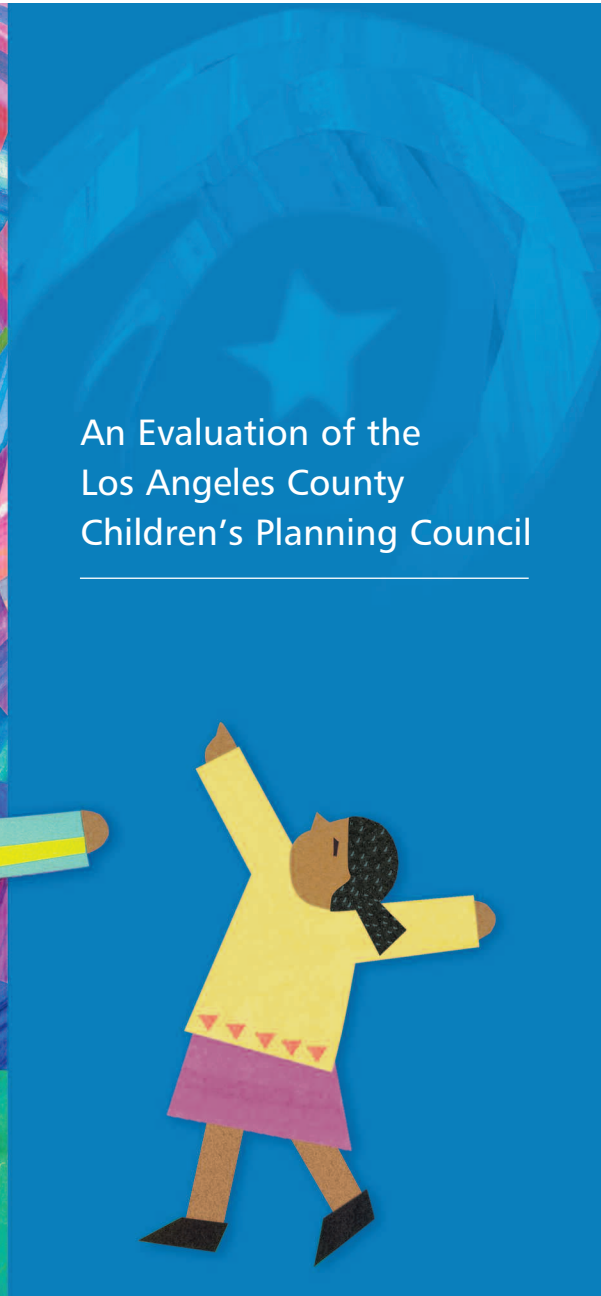


Building Bridges, Charting Change:

Achievements & Challenges for the Children's Planning Council



An Evaluation of the
Los Angeles County
Children's Planning Council



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by

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Publication Support by Cornerstone Consulting Group, Inc.



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Table of Contents

Introduction3

Methodology7

Findings11

Conclusions & Recommendations31





Introduction

“CPC works to build stronger and more effective systems that serve families and children, create and strengthen linkages between government and community, and improve planning efforts to facilitate actions that enhance child and family well-being throughout Los Angeles.”

Communities across the country have long attempted to integrate and otherwise reform their human services systems, often to little effect. The impetus for these changes comes from a commonly held set of observations about the characteristic weaknesses in traditional human services systems. Most thoughtful observers note that services are too often provided by a number of separate agencies and programs, each designed to address a part of the perceived problem, which creates a confusing and costly approach to service delivery that is too fragmented to be effective. The system is often seen as providing too little, too late, and at too great a cost.

The need for change is further driven by the growing recognition of the complexity of social problems – the multiple problems of substance abuse, poverty, inadequate housing, health problems, domestic violence, and unemployment are often evidenced in a single individual, family, or neighborhood. The nature of these problems calls out for new ways to manage services, to communicate between county departments, and with non-county organizations and programs. The need to communicate and coordinate across sectors – between government, academia, and business, for example – is seen as critical, especially as the demand for services increases and resources become ever more scarce.

INTRODUCTION

The root of much of the difficulty in providing effective human services lies in the structure of the system, which is characterized by bureaucratic demands and overlapping and sometimes conflicting responsibilities. To make matters worse, human services are supported by dozens of funding streams, each with its own requirements and representing a unique set of policy goals.

Importantly, the voices of community residents, clients, professionals outside government, and the general public are rarely heard in the critical discussions in which decisions are made about what services to provide and how to provide them. The direct experience and views of the persons served by the system are rarely a part of the decision-making process. In many communities, the human services system and its decision-makers are often seen as a distant, not always well-intentioned force.

Los Angeles County's innovative and now long standing answer to a number of these challenges is the Children's Planning Council (CPC). Nothing quite like the CPC exists in any large county in the United States and the CPC is often looked on as a model effort. Given its public/private status, the CPC is able to act as a neutral convener and has gained a reputation for bringing credible data and collaboration to planning and decision making.

The CPC was established in 1991 by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to serve as its primary planning body on issues pertaining to children and families in the County. It was created as a joint public/private collaborative body that would bring together key individuals in county government, private organizations, business, and community members to represent and address the needs of the County. The Board's initial and primary goal was for CPC to integrate health and human services at the County level for children and families.¹

As CPC developed, an additional, complementary goal was adopted: to find ways to include individuals and organizations at a sub-county level in the decision-making processes around human services. To that end, in 1997 CPC created a system of nine regional councils, one in each of the eight Service Planning Areas (SPA) of the County and a Countywide council representing American Indian children. Known as the SPA/AIC Councils, this vehicle serves as a bridge between County government and the community, representing community-based organizations, neighborhood groups, businesses, cities, schools, and County and city government agencies among other entities.

Most recently, another complementary aspect of CPC's work has gained prominence. Building on the work of a number of SPA/AIC Councils, CPC is now also focused on community engagement and community organizing, and on the strengths and assets of residents to improve conditions in communities and for children and families.

¹ The Cornerstone Consulting Group (2001). *The Tasks Ahead: Strategic Choices for the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council.

Although CPC has undergone many changes since its inception, it remains committed to its collaborative origins and to the mission it was charged with in 1991. Its aim continues to be to improve the lives of children and families through encouraging partnerships, community building, collecting and promoting the use of data, developing resources and tools, and a commitment to outcomes and results. CPC works to build stronger and more effective systems that serve families and children, create and strengthen linkages between government and community, and improve planning efforts to facilitate actions that enhance child and family well-being throughout Los Angeles.²

In 2002, CPC reorganized its work around the 2002-05 workplan, which expanded its theory of change to include three key “arenas of action.” Until that time, CPC saw systems reform as the primary approach to better outcomes for LA County children. The revised theory of change added “strengthening the capacity of community to act on its own behalf” and “building a countywide commitment to outcomes.” This reformulation represented an important change in thinking. CPC’s view is that systems change alone will not yield better outcomes for kids and that progress in all three arenas is essential. CPC established working committees to help keep focus and attention on these three arenas.

Now, three years into the workplan, CPC has commissioned an evaluation and taken the opportunity to stop, assess its progress, and consider necessary changes in direction or strategy. The evaluation presented in this report was conducted by Public *Works*, Inc., with publication assistance from the Cornerstone Consulting Group, Inc.

² Children’s Planning Council – retrieved January 5, 2005, from <http://childrensplanningcouncil.org/about/vision.asp>



Methodology

“Respondents were asked to reflect and provide input on the overall success of CPC, as well as areas to improve.”

Public Works, Inc. examined the Children’s Planning Council’s overall impact since the adoption of its new workplan with the overarching questions: is CPC accomplishing what it wants to accomplish and how can it do a better job? A primary purpose of the evaluation was to examine whether CPC has been influential in bringing change over time.

Public Works, Inc. is a Pasadena-based non-profit organization dedicated to working with schools, government, parents, and communities in the areas of accountability, assessment, and evaluation services. The evaluation design utilized here was based on the requirements set forth in the RFP developed by CPC.



METHODOLOGY

The evaluation examined systems and community change at the County and SPA level through the impetus of CPC. Key questions asked are identified in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. Evaluation Research Questions

Overarching Questions:

- Have new/different/better behaviors from government entities occurred and have these actions resulted in improved lives for children and families?
- Have new relationships been built and/or existing ones significantly enhanced?
- Have communities/residents mobilized in ways that are intended to improve children's lives?

Sub-questions:

- Where has CPC been most successful and why?
- What are/have been the areas of greatest challenge?
- Are there examples of challenges overcome that might offer guidance in the future?
- What characteristics/attitudes/structures have contributed to beneficial change, and which of these works against CPC?

A contact database was developed and evaluation instruments were designed in collaboration with CPC. Given the nature of CPC and its broad range of participants, an extensive pool of key informants was developed from a number of different vantage points (Table 2). Written surveys, telephone interviews, in-person interviews, and focus groups were employed to draw information and observations.

Surveys were administered via mail in November 2004 to over 500 potential respondents identified as "involved" CPC stakeholders. A total of 175 completed surveys were returned for a 33% response rate, which is adequate for a community survey of this type.

From the list of involved stakeholders, CPC was asked to select 30 to 40 individuals for in-person interviews. These individuals represented a range of key stakeholders that are or were actively involved in CPC, many of whom have participated on CPC committees and in the leadership of the organization at both the County and SPA/AIC Council levels. Public Works, Inc. conducted a total of 36 in-person interviews with these key stakeholders between November 2004 and April 2005.

From November 2004 to January 2005, more than 60 SPA/AIC Council members were contacted by Public Works, Inc. to participate in a 45-minute phone interview. These interviews focused on the impact of and relationship between the CPC and the SPA/AIC Councils. Forty-six interviews were completed for a response rate of 77%.

TABLE 2. Involved CPC Stakeholders	
Committee Members	Key Stakeholders (not necessarily on committees)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPC • Executive Committee • Foundation Board • Strengthening Community Capacity (SCC) Committee • Transforming Systems Committee • Building Countywide Commitment to Outcomes (BCCO) Committee • Data Partnership Committee • Service Planning Area & American Indian Children (SPA/AIC) Councils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors’ Deputies • Chief Administrative Office • Service Integration Branch • New Directions Taskforce • Interagency Operations Group • Youth Engagement Taskforce • LA City Commission for Children, Youth & Their Families • CPC staff (administration and field) • Involved Consultants • Children’s Health Initiative • Foundation Consortium • Annie E. Casey Foundation • Marguerite Casey Foundation • The California Endowment

Phone interviews were also conducted with 11 stakeholders who were knowledgeable about CPC’s work but not directly involved with the Council. These interviews typically lasted 30 to 40 minutes and focused on the work of CPC in order to better understand the depth and breadth of CPC’s influence across Los Angeles County.

Finally, Public Works, Inc. held two focus groups. The first was with CPC Hall staff (program and administrative staff), which lasted an hour and covered staff views on topics from CPC staffing to the successes of the organization. Another one-hour focus group with Field staff (staff to the SPA/AIC Councils) was conducted covering similar topics.

Based on the written survey of involved stakeholders, it is possible to generally describe CPC “membership” as follows: nearly a third (31%) of CPC stakeholders (52 persons) have been involved with CPC for 5 years or more, with 43% (72 persons) involved 2 years or less. Most first became involved because of professional assignment or duty (59% or 100 persons), or professional interest (34% or 58 persons). Most stakeholders participate at either (rather than both) the CPC Council or SPA/AIC Council level.



Findings

“While key informants were overwhelmingly positive about the work of CPC thus far, it was also noted that there is much remaining to do.”

The evaluation sought to determine whether the work of CPC had changed behaviors, strengthened relationships, and helped to mobilize communities to improve the lives of children. Overwhelmingly, the data suggest that those closest to the work of CPC believe such changes have indeed occurred. When respondents were asked what has *not* been useful, County leadership mostly stated “CPC is on track” or that it is all useful to different stakeholders. The few that were no longer involved or not as committed expressed a low level of tolerance for process, saying that “it is too much process and not enough outcome [for] the amount of planning and numerous meetings that occur in/by the CPC.” Approximately half of all respondents wished for a truer community engagement process of “not just the same organizations, but individuals affected by the system.” Most were very pleased with the balance between process and outcome and recognized that the improvement of systems has to have a large process element to it.

Given the nature of CPC, with broad community involvement, the evaluation reached a wide range of stakeholders at the County and SPA/AIC level. Respondents were asked to reflect and provide input on the overall success of CPC, as well as areas to improve. Stakeholders were willing and eager

FINDINGS

to share their opinions and stories about CPC, with a clear intention to continue and deepen the important work on children and family issues. Despite the range of stakeholders, there was a great deal of consensus about CPC's contributions and the observations below were echoed time and time again in the in-person and telephone interviews, as well as in the written survey.

1. CPC has had considerable influence and impact.

Over and over, CPC was described as having the ear of the Board of Supervisors. CPC has gained momentum and increased political and financial support for the work. It is often the first organization consulted to provide insight and direction on children's issues, and the entity individual Supervisors turn to for their own particular requests for answers on key questions and support on initiatives that require community involvement. CPC serves as an umbrella structure for input, advocacy, and policy direction on a wide range of children's issues, from school readiness to foster care to youth engagement to health insurance for families.

The CPC leadership is frequently described as well-respected and widely viewed as knowledgeable and committed to children's issues by all stakeholders. The organization and staff in particular have a strong relationship to the Board of Supervisors, demonstrated in presentations to the Board, requests for information, and delegation of initiatives and activities to CPC. The Council is known for high quality staff, support on data needs, and balancing public and private involvement.

Key informants see the results of CPC work in the changes made in County departments – increased use of data, greater engagement of community, increased accountability, etc.

*“CPC has changed the common sense within the County.
At the beginning the ideas of ‘focus on outcomes and more likely to achieve it,’
and ‘using data is key to getting better outcomes’ were all alien.
Now everybody agrees with these concepts and does not argue about it.”*

New relationships have been formed between County and city governments, between County agencies and CPC, and between County agencies and the community. Generally, there have been increased linkages between community agencies, and communication and collaboration were seen as improving in the 2002-2005 timeframe. Also, data sharing relationships have been created. County level leaders interviewed attributed these changes to CPC. Now that leadership has bought into these new behaviors and collaboration, County leaders are implementing change in their own agencies through community

engagement processes, data collection to align with SPA boundaries, and customer service training for line and management staff. Respondents note that most of this work would never have “taken off” without CPC, and point to specific outcomes attributed to CPC:

- Agencies and communities defining their goals and work through a common language;
- The agreement across agencies to utilize the five outcome areas, which assist in finding common purpose to collaborate and leverage work;
- The ability to share data and better understand the families and children being served and needing to be served;
- Moving toward outcome-based contracting;
- Modeling and providing models for community engagement;
- Creating common boundaries through SPAs for common data, forums for community engagement, and geography to naturally link services; and
- Development of the Children’s ScoreCard and Children’s Budget for common usage and discussion.

When asked whether County departments had changed as a result of CPC, most survey respondents felt that they had, although greater change in some departments and less in others was reported (Table 3). Frequently, some respondents were not sure about some departments – the breadth of CPC is such that respondents often knew more about some parts of the system and of CPC work than others. At the high end, for DCFS, seven times as many respondents saw “Great to Some” change as saw “No change.” More than a third of the respondents were unable to assess changes in the Board of Supervisors, but among those who had an opinion, nearly three times as many saw change rather than no change.

TABLE 3. Government Entities in terms of new, different, or better behaviors as a result of CPC work (N = 175)				
Government Entity:	Great to Some Change	No Change	Unsure	Did not Answer
Department of Children & Family Services	56%	8%	24%	12%
Department of Health Services	54%	7%	26%	13%
Department of Mental Health	55%	7%	26%	12%
Department of Public Social Services	51%	9%	29%	12%
L.A. County Office of Education	42%	13%	31%	13%
L.A. County Chief Administrative Office	38%	10%	37%	14%
Probation Department	37%	15%	33%	14%
Board of Supervisors	37%	14%	36%	14%

FINDINGS

When asked to identify what they considered to be CPC's greatest accomplishment, most respondents pointed to data, common goals, and collaboration. Based on the stakeholder survey, respondents reported their opinion on CPC's greatest impact at the County level. The CPC-related activities/decisions/actions that have had a significant impact on how the County does business on behalf of kids, families, and communities were ranked by 146 respondents as follows:

1. Data on the well-being of children is collected and shared (71.9% or 105 persons).
2. The County's Strategic Plan now includes a goal (Goal 5), which holds County departments accountable for improving on the five outcomes of child well-being (60.3% or 88 persons).
3. Many County departments have aligned to the Service Planning Areas (54.1% or 79 persons).
4. County contracts now require agencies to collaborate; County representatives now have a vehicle to hear from the community (the SPA/AIC Councils) (51.4% or 75 persons).
5. The County has now added the Children's Budget as an addendum to the County's Annual Budget (47.3% or 69 persons).
6. County departments (e.g. DPSS and DMH) are using processes to engage community stakeholders in prioritizing budget allocations (42.5% or 62 persons).
7. The County of Los Angeles has expanded the types of sites where a mother can drop off her newborn without fear of prosecution (e.g. Fire Stations) (41.1% or 60 persons).
8. The County now has a process (Performance Counts!) to hold managers accountable for work, which was partly influenced through experience with the ScoreCard and other key indicators (32.2% or 47 persons).

2. CPC's work on key outcome areas has been a major contribution.

A frequently referenced achievement of CPC is the consensus County agencies and organizations have reached regarding the five outcome areas of child well-being: good health, economic well-being, safety and survival, social and emotional well-being, and education/workforce readiness. County agencies now include these outcomes as a requirement in contracts with community-based organizations and have shaped the countywide Children's Budget to these areas. Some respondents note that the discussion has moved from what outcomes can be agreed on to, instead, improve service in the common outcome areas.

3. CPC's impact in the three arenas of action and its cross-cutting data work is predominantly rated "medium to high" in helping to improve children's lives.

Respondents mentioned that CPC has transformed and helped shape the thinking and viewpoints of people concerning the issues related to children and families, increased collaboration overall, developed good products and initiatives, and achieved real, tangible results. Respondents of the written survey were asked to rate on a scale of 1-3 (1 = low impact and 3 = high impact) the level of impact they believe CPC has had in the following areas and, further, to assess the level of progress in more specific activities within these areas (Table 4):

- Transforming County health and human service systems that serve children, youth, and families
- Strengthening community capacity
- Building a countywide commitment to the five outcomes
- Data

In nearly all instances respondents felt the level of impact was either "medium" or "high." For most items, the medium plus high categories represented 70% - 80% of respondents. Scores in the "low" range were most frequently below 10% of respondents.



FINDINGS

TABLE 4. CPC Impact in the Three Arenas of Action and Data Work (N=175)					
Area of Work:	Low Impact	Medium Impact	High Impact	Not Sure	Did not Answer
<i>A. Transforming Systems</i>					
Increased system capacity to strengthen and support children & families	7%	37%	32%	16%	8%
Increased capacity to focus on results and accountability	11%	30%	38%	13%	8%
Increased communication and/or collaboration across County Departments	7%	28%	45%	12%	8%
Leveraged funds across the County	16%	27%	14%	31%	11%
<i>B. Strengthening Community Capacity</i>					
Resource sharing	4%	38%	41%	10%	7%
Increased knowledge of community engagement strategies	6%	35%	46%	7%	6%
Increased collaboration between communities and government	8%	33%	42%	11%	6%
Increased communication among regional County departments	6%	39%	30%	18%	7%
New or stronger relationships fostered between residents, community-based organizations, and County government agencies that serve children and families	10%	42%	33%	8%	7%
<i>C. Building a Countywide Commitment to Outcomes</i>					
Increased number of stakeholders that are committed to <i>all five outcome areas</i>	6%	38%	33%	16%	8%
Enhanced knowledge regarding the well-being of children and families	3%	33%	52%	5%	7%
<i>D. Data Partnership</i>					
Development of data sharing relationships	5%	33%	41%	13%	9%
Increased data availability	7%	24%	51%	10%	7%
Increased capacity to access and utilize data	7%	28%	43%	14%	8%

Within **Transforming Systems**, respondents felt CPC has had the highest impact in increased communication and/or collaboration across County departments, and increased capacity to focus on results and accountability. In interviews, those that thought CPC has made the most progress at the County and SPA/AIC level since 2002 in the arena of Transforming Systems explained that they had seen increased communication and collaboration between County and community agencies, something that had never happened before. These transformed systems are seen as resulting in better services.

Within **Strengthening Community Capacity**, the objectives receiving the highest scores were increased knowledge of community engagement strategies, and increased collaboration between communities and government. Based on the open-ended responses, most saw the development of the SPAs and SPA/AIC Councils as an important mechanism to engage the community and provide better services. Not only has community outreach increased, they note, but community capacity has also been built through the networking and collaboration of numerous community agencies, which has helped with information dissemination and resource sharing.

CPC's impact on enhanced knowledge regarding the well-being of children and families was the highest scoring of all objectives, which is included in **Building Countywide Commitment to Outcomes**. Respondents who felt CPC had made the most progress in this area frequently viewed CPC as establishing clear commitments to the outcomes and increased stakeholder involvement at the CPC and SPA/AIC Council levels. Notably, CPC has been credited with maintaining a strong County focus on child and family well-being, including encouraging the Chief Administrative Officer and Board of Supervisors to include a section in the County's Strategic Plan dedicated to the well-being of children and families.

CPC's contribution on the three objectives in the **Data Partnership** were all seen as having "high impact," particularly the increased availability of data. Many respondents thought the Data Partnership gave CPC credibility and directed the focus of work on many different levels – within CPC, at the County, in the SPA/AIC Councils, and in respondents' own organizations. The information provided by the Data Partnership was described as being very accessible, useful, and easy to understand at both the County and SPA level.

There were very low percentages reporting "low impact" on any of the objectives. The 16% (28 persons) rating low on "leveraged funds across the County" stands out and may reflect a lack of information or understanding about this objective. Almost a third of respondents to this question indicated they were "not sure," which was twice as high as the next closest area. The survey results mirrored the interviews in relation to leveraging funds.

FINDINGS

In response to an open-ended question, many of the respondents who listed Transforming Systems as the arena of action that had progressed least did so because of the nature of the task. To them, transforming systems is such a challenging task that it is expected that not much would be accomplished in this area, at least not yet. Others had a different and more positive view, mentioning that other County departments have taken over the task of transforming systems and thus, CPC no longer needs to do this work.

4. CPC has fostered increased collaboration between County agencies and between County agencies and communities.

County-level interviews were supportive of CPC's mission and noted CPC's important role in prompting collaboration at the County level. Over time, intensified during the 2002-2005 time period, County agencies were described as working more collaboratively. Noted were community engagement decision-making processes and increased use of outcomes and data, e.g. outcome-based contracting and the use of the Children's ScoreCard. This change was frequently attributed to stronger and more collaborative leaders at the top management level at County agencies and to CPC bringing County leadership together to discuss common ground, common goals, and joint initiatives.

“Collaboration is no longer a buzz word. Most agencies now would not think of not talking to other agencies before they start a new program. In this increase of collaboration between government and non-profit agencies, we truly see these folks as partners and making decisions together—not just people focused on their agenda/their group's agenda, but working together.”

County leadership and SPA/AIC Council members reported that new relationships have been built across and between all sectors - public, private, and community in recent years. These new relationships have allowed for a considerable amount of networking and better communication between various agencies. Some said this has resulted in less duplication of efforts and better services being provided.

Survey respondents, when asked whether new relationships have been built and/or existing ones significantly enhanced because of the work of CPC, saw some differences in the level of achievement – strengthening some relationships has proven more difficult than others. Of the 134 respondents:

- 62.7% (84 persons) saw relationships between governmental agency and private/non-profit agency representatives improving as a result of CPC's work.



- 60.4% (81 persons) saw improvements in the relationships between private/non-profit agency representatives and communities.
- 59.0% (79 persons) saw relationships among governmental agency representatives improved.
- 49.3% (66 persons) saw improved relationships between governmental agency representatives and communities.
- 42.5% (57 persons) saw improvement in relationships between community members/residents.

Overall, respondents noted that government entities became more willing to collaborate and communicate with community agencies during the 2002-2005 timeframe. It was noted that government agencies have a greater respect for community agencies. Some stakeholders believe that improved interactions between public and private organizations have resulted in better services for clients, allowed for the leveraging of resources, and promoted data sharing.

5. CPC has made the availability and use of data an important component in children's services planning.

When CPC began in 1991, the availability of data, let alone the possibility of sharing data or using data, were nearly non-existent. In 1993, CPC created the Data and Technical Analysis (DATA) Committee. This voluntary group of community members and researchers began the task of asking "what data do we wish we had" and "where do

FINDINGS

we get it.” Over time, the DATA Committee became the Data Partnership, which produces CPC’s flagship product, the Children’s ScoreCard. Almost all persons interviewed and surveyed referenced the Data Partnership and the Children’s ScoreCard. Data is available and shared across the County in increasingly positive ways to improve service and serves to tie departments and agencies together in common cause.

One of the greatest accomplishments mentioned again and again by the County leadership was that “we are all talking the same talk now” and that CPC has helped develop a common language throughout the County, that this is historical in nature. When asked to elaborate, most point to the same parts that make the whole of “common language:”

- Focused on the same five outcome areas for children and families throughout the County: good health, economic well-being, safety & survival, social & emotional well-being, and education/workforce readiness.
- Conversation has moved from “we can’t share data” or “it can’t be measured” to the understanding that data are essential, programs must be measured, and data should be shared and used for improvement.

6. CPC regularly produces publications to increase knowledge on issues related to children and families.

As mentioned above, one of CPC’s most prominent and widely utilized data products is the Children’s ScoreCard, which is published every two years. The most recent report was published in October 2004, and covers a five-year period, showing data trends in the five outcome areas, as well as by region, race, and age.³ CPC also releases other reports that help to forward systems change and community efforts toward the five outcome areas and engagement of parents, residents, and youth.

7. CPC has successfully promoted the importance of community engagement.

CPC is frequently credited with increasing the County’s focus on community engagement. In recent years, CPC has been focused both on efforts related to integrated services and on efforts to promote community engagement. CPC, through the creation and support of the SPA/AIC Councils, has raised the level of interaction or engagement between County government and community human service providers to new levels across the County. In turn, SPA/AIC Councils have reached out to individuals and grassroots groups, seeking to make the process even more inclusive and to emphasize the

³ Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council (2004). *Los Angeles County 2004 Children’s ScoreCard*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council.

relationship-building aspect of community building and organizing, as well as deepening efforts to help parents, residents, and youth become the best advocates they can be on behalf of children and families. There is a wide range of community/resident involvement in the SPA/AIC Councils. Engaging residents is challenging work and takes concentrated effort over a long period. Not surprisingly, some SPA/AIC Councils have experienced frustration while others boast of community members who have learned to organize and advocate for themselves.

In 1999, encouraged by CPC, the County began a process of community engagement as part of the decision-making related to distribution of funding through the Long-Term Family Self Sufficiency Plan (LTFSS). This process, conducted by the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), changed the paradigm in some County agencies of how community engagement can be achieved at the county level. The LTFSS experience took community engagement discussions beyond advocating for its importance and demonstrated that community engagement was practical and could be accomplished. At the Department of Mental Health (DMH), a similar community engagement process has been used. CPC's development of the SPA/AIC structures provided a vehicle through which County departments can engage the community and allow the voice of community to be heard.

In the in-person County leadership interviews, the LTFSS process was constantly highlighted as a dramatic shift in how some County agencies make decisions by engaging the community first. On the other hand, in the written survey, only 10% (15 persons) of CPC involved respondents pointed to LTFSS as one of the most useful CPC activities or initiatives, and SPA/AIC Council telephone interviews rarely acknowledged the process as a major shift. This difference in emphasis on community engagement at the County and SPA/AIC level reflects differing perspectives on the outcomes of this process. Indeed, while those in government saw this as a monumental step forward in how the County engages community in decision-making processes, some members of the community did not see the process go far enough.

“We used a new form of engagement and stakeholder input to prioritize how money should be spent in communities (LTFSS). I was skeptical at first. It was a massive undertaking that in the end was well-worth it for the community buy-in and new found trust. Mental Health is now using a similar process.”

FINDINGS

A report on the LTFSS experience notes that “the process succeeded by several objective measures, and created a politically viable way for the Board of Supervisors to make difficult budget choices” but that “whether the process succeeded is far less clear from the relative perspectives of the different stakeholders.”⁴ CPC’s involvement in the LTFSS process is widely praised. Ott’s report suggests that CPC brought order out of chaos and that CPC’s involvement:

- Demonstrated the value of a relatively neutral voice in the process;
- Invited the creation of a particular space, with facilitation support, for disparate community voices to come together to reconcile their divergent perspectives into unified positions; and
- Created a distinction between the process by which community representatives could develop a unified voice, and the process by which this voice could then be integrated into deliberations with County government representatives.

Finally, in the timeframe of the workplan 2002-2005, youth in communities have been effectively mobilized through Youth Advocacy Programs/Youth Collaboratives/Youth Councils. These Councils are designed to teach youth leadership skills, improve their self-esteem, and increase their involvement in the community. The youth help put on programs on issues pertinent to teens and even become mentors for their peers. CPC has had a strong emphasis on including the voice of youth and empowering them toward action in their community.

“The work is very difficult work. Having an entity focused on community engagement is useful and needed to push for client-centered service.”

8. SPA/AIC Councils are continuing to develop.

Overwhelmingly, SPA/AIC Council members mentioned that CPC has been most helpful to their Council by supplying high-quality staff and consultants to support SPA/AIC Council work and events, help them refine their focus, and provide leadership in forming and executing work plans.

Many Council members believe that the work of the SPA Councils has been able to accelerate in recent years because of the availability of staff (in addition to the volunteers) and funding. In particular, CPC’s funding assistance, data access, and willingness to address issues on a local level have all helped to better educate the community on the

⁴ John G. Ott & Associates (2004). *A First Step Toward Inclusive Governance? An Analysis of the CalWORKs Prioritization Process in Los Angeles County*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council.

resources available to them. SPA/AIC Council members also appreciate the community and agency connections and networking that CPC has made possible and encouraged.

Overall, the most common accomplishments mentioned by the SPA/AIC Council members have been the Councils' abilities to bring people together through community outreach, bring public and private organizations together to improve the lives of families and children, and the collaboration among and across many different types of organizations. This has been accomplished through events focused on youth, community, child care, health care, school readiness, and advocacy for the homeless. Across the Councils, key accomplishments noted include:

- Bringing people together through community outreach;
- Bringing public and private organizations together to improve the lives of families and children; and
- Collaboration among and across many different types of organizations.

SPA/AIC Council involvement has allowed for networking and relationships to be built. Members mentioned that CPC has been a forum for them to receive information about what is happening in their community and discuss resources available. The networking and relationship-building that has occurred because of CPC has also made a big impact on member's organizations. It has helped them to be more informed on what the changing needs of the community are and assists in directing their programming and focus. In turn, referrals are better and there are more opportunities to leverage resources. Lastly, these members' SPA/AIC Council involvement has connected their organizations to the County at large, and in some occasions publicized their mission and services.



FINDINGS

SPA/AIC Councils self-reported a wide range of accomplishments, dramatizing their unique interests and working styles.

- **SPA 1:** Their ability to bring many different groups/people together. The youth events they have put on that have empowered youth to advocate for themselves have also been very successful.
- **SPA 2:** Their ability to organize better as a SPA/AIC Council, which has given them a mission and purpose as well as renewed motivation. Because of their convener, they have been able to put on a lot more community events to fit their refined vision.
- **SPA 3:** Their ability to continue benefiting their community. They have been very active and put on various youth advocacy programs, child care provider events, health care conferences, and have advocated for the homeless. SPA 3 Council is also proud of bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders to represent all the needs of the community.
- **SPA 4:** Their ability to bring together the many different health care providers in their area is, according to members of SPA 4 Council, their greatest success. Also, they value the relationships that have been built in and across the community to work on school readiness and health issues. They created two taskforces on these two topics.
- **SPA 5:** Their ability to have effective community outreach. The community outreach they have accomplished, through SeptemberFest, providing emergency services, and working with education programs, has been a big achievement.
- **SPA 6:** Their ability to develop a kinship care process (working with DCFS to educate the community on what kinship care is and the benefits of the system) in their community was a chief accomplishment prior to this Council's dissolution. Since then, their ability to overcome the dissension and the re-establishment of their Council as they move toward the future was mentioned as a success.

- **SPA 7:** Their level of investment in community outreach. The amount of involvement and commitment from all the partners involved in the SPA/AIC Council (parents, Council members, agencies) that allowed for great community outreach events has been SPA 7 Council's greatest success.
- **SPA 8:** Their ability to focus on School Readiness. The biggest success has been their School Readiness Conferences because they educate the public and are able to bring people together from all areas of the community.
- **AIC:** Their ability to establish their identity as a separate, independent Council with their own agenda was mentioned as one of their greatest successes. Also, bringing focus to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and other American Indian/Alaskan Native-focused initiatives have also been successes as well as the AIC Council's accomplishment in research collaboration.

In addition to these accomplishments, members' SPA/AIC Council involvement has resulted in people from all different types of organizations coming together to accomplish the same goal. It has helped organizations to be more informed about the changing needs of the community and assists in directing their programming and focus. Referrals are better and there are more opportunities to leverage resources.

Informants were asked to identify CPC-related activities/decisions/actions that they believe have had a *significant* impact on how communities interact with each other and with government on behalf of kids, families, and communities. Respondent's answers are ranked as follows:

1. There are networking opportunities with other community agencies (76.6% or 111 persons).
2. There is a vehicle/space for community leaders to come together, partner, learn, and network (i.e. the SPA/AIC Councils) (71.0% or 103 persons).
3. There is data available to help communities plan, organize, and take action (66.9% or 97 persons).
4. There are opportunities for community leaders to interact with County officials (through committees, workgroups, convenings, etc.) (61.4% or 89 persons).

FINDINGS

5. The following three items were ranked equally at 53.8% (or 78 persons):
 - There is data available to help agencies write grants;
 - There is information available (via reports) that brings light to critical issues of child well-being, collaborations, etc.;
 - There are opportunities for engaging community (parents, residents, youth) and building capacity in communities.
6. There is greater focus on outcomes and results for community agencies and groups (53.1% or 77 persons).
7. There are leadership opportunities through the various CPC committees and events and through the SPA/AIC Councils (41.4% or 60 persons).

Despite the progress of the Councils, however, some SPA/AIC Council participants suggest that their particular Council often lacked focus and leadership. Some expressed the view that SPA/AIC Councils consist primarily of volunteers who often have difficulty in devoting enough time to the Council's work, particularly since their work is unpaid by CPC and usually interrupts their regular workday. This makes it difficult for leaders to do their job well. When SPA/AIC Council members do meet, the meetings are described as often being unfocused, and some members feel the SPA/AIC Councils are not able to get much accomplished.

In addition, some suggest that improvements can and should be made in communications between CPC and the SPA/AIC Councils. Members noted that often CPC (Hall staff) and Councils (Field staff and volunteers) were not well-informed about each other's priorities and progress. Many members seemed uncertain about the connection between CPC and the SPA/AIC Councils. The Council Field staff is seen by some as "trapped in the middle" and playing the difficult role of bridging gaps. Many SPA/AIC Council members felt they had very little input or control in meeting the needs of their community because CPC had become very directive and taken away their independence and autonomy. These SPA/AIC Council members feel that CPC should give the SPA/AIC Councils more autonomy and freedom in uncovering and addressing their individual communities' needs.

A majority of SPA/AIC Council members, however, agree that CPC processes have been successful in bringing together different types of organizations from all sectors to work on children's issues, and encouraging more communication and collaboration among these agencies.

9. Having the CPC structure with SPA boundaries is a monumental success for the County, but will need constant re-tooling.

Most of the County leaders interviewed focused on how CPC is working, and that there will always be challenges in balancing the overall CPC with individual SPA/AIC Council



interests. As such, they focused on the need for autonomous SPA/AIC Councils in order to remain truly grassroots and focused on community and neighborhood issues.

Operating at both the central and more local SPA level, CPC will always experience tension between standardization versus autonomy, volunteer-driven versus staff-driven, and responding to funding streams versus responding to grassroots needs. Despite periodic tensions, there is a great deal of fundamental consensus among CPC participants in all roles and settings. Participants at both the county and SPA level were in agreement on the following fundamentals: the existing SPA/AIC structure and boundaries; inclusion of both staff and volunteers; the need for both autonomy and standardization in SPA/AIC Council work; and that advocacy, process, and product should be present at both the County and SPA level.

“A continuing challenge for CPC will be managing relationships between participants at the SPA/AIC level and those at the County level. The tensions, pulls and tugs, and need to accommodate differing views are inherent in the ongoing planning and development process, and the presence of these tensions is not new or unexpected.”

FINDINGS

10. Continuing challenges remain.

While key informants were overwhelmingly positive about the work of CPC thus far, it was also noted that there is much remaining to do. CPC and its allies face a number of ongoing challenges going forward. Several such challenges were noted in interviews and/or the survey:

- **Staying comprehensive, yet focused.** By definition, CPC’s mission is broad, if not all-encompassing. Issues facing families and children are manifold and the relationships between issues – health, education, poverty, or domestic violence for example – are complex. Informants note that CPC must continually work to stress the big picture; to encourage broad, ongoing involvement; to balance countywide concerns with those more important in local communities; and to bring the discussions back to children and families and attaining better outcomes.
- **Building and maintaining relationships and commitment.** Actors in the CPC process bring differing agendas and points of view, and bring varying levels of knowledge to the table, yet all must be accommodated. Remaining broad and inclusive is a continuing challenge and a constant struggle for CPC. In addition, because CPC is an “open system,” there is frequent turnover at the County and community level. This creates a constant need to “bring people up to speed” on the work of CPC, recruit stakeholders, and welcome new faces. This turnover results in re-treading old issues and a constant process of redefining.
- **Balancing process and product.** Most respondents believed the committee structure at the CPC level is working, but that the committees have changed over time. Some look back to a time when CPC was a more volunteer-run organization, and feel that volunteers were more involved in decision-making and implementation then. Some indicate that CPC has become more staff- and accomplishment-driven, with more being done by staff between committee and Council meetings. For some this is a positive while others worry. For CPC, blending and balancing broad participation with getting things done efficiently will always be a challenge.
- **Dealing with geography.** LA County is the most populous county in the nation and is larger than 42 states. It encompasses an area of 4,084 square miles and consists of 88 cities and numerous unincorporated areas. The eight Service Planning Areas have been an effective mechanism for grouping service delivery areas in manageable ways, but it is important to note that the SPAs themselves are huge —SPA 2 is larger than 16 states; SPA 3 larger than 14; SPA 8 larger than 13⁵. Consequently, key informants noted that the difficulty of coverage and adequate inclusion will always be a challenge in Los Angeles County.



5 Jacquelyn McCroskey, DSW (2003). *Walking the Collaboration Talk: Ten Lessons Learned from the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council.



Conclusions and Recommendations

- ▶ *Maintain Balance*
- ▶ *Move Strategically to
Community Building*
- ▶ *Rethink the CPC
Structure*
- ▶ *Bring Data to
the Next Level*

When feedback is overwhelmingly positive, the temptation is to recommend just continuing on. For most observers, CPC is on the right track and even those who find fault with aspects of the work are complimentary about the overall effort. Yet, clearly, CPC's work is not done – there are too many children and families in Los Angeles County whose well-being is threatened.

CPC has never been static and it must continue to grow and develop to effectively address the vital issues ahead. The following thoughts note some of the difficult challenges ahead confronting the Children's Planning Council.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Importance of Maintaining Balance

CPC stands at the crossroads of a number of important ideas and concepts, including some which may at first appear competing – grassroots versus top down; human services versus community organizing; centralized versus decentralized; countywide versus neighborhood based; comprehensive versus targeted; process versus product; staff versus volunteer. For each point of view there are strong advocates who believe that their way is the best way, if not the only way, to improve the life circumstances of children and families. Adherents of one point of view or another frequently set up a false dichotomy and then ask CPC to choose.

CPC's important role is and has been to bring balance to these discussions. To recognize that these “choices” are not mutually exclusive and that the holders of these varying views need not be continually at odds. CPC should not rely solely on reformed human services, nor reject the value of human services entirely – the services are a necessary but not sufficient contributor to child well-being. CPC needs to continue to recognize the legitimate and important interests and responsibilities of County government, as well as the needs, desires, and views of the recipients of services and families in general.

This evaluation, as will any evaluation to come, has determined that there are issues on which there is less than 100% unanimity. That is not a problem with CPC. Rather, it is the reason for CPC to exist!

As McCroskey notes:

Organized as a forum for learning and discussion, the Roundtable created a culture of trust and shared purpose. Its lasting legacy is that a very diverse group of local leaders concerned about children and families began to see each other as partners with a common purpose, rather than as competitors pursuing their own agendas. Although there are still organizational agendas, turf issues, and heated discussions on all kinds of issues, there is also a shared sense that we can't meet the needs of children and families in L.A. by focusing on one agency or one sector or one discipline at a time. Working together is the only way to get where we need to go.⁶

CPC's existence keeps the disparate views at the table, it helps to find positions that accommodate multiple interests and it assures that individuals, organizations, and sectors – who share common goals – work to find common solutions. Were CPC to become excessively doctrinaire, for it to become too much the holder of one or another point of view, would threaten the coalition so carefully built and render CPC ineffective.

⁶ Jacquelyn McCroskey, DSW (2003). *Walking the Collaboration Talk: Ten Lessons Learned from the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council*. Los Angeles, CA: Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council.

2. Moving to Community Building

When asked to identify what CPC ought to be doing that is not a central part of the current focus, many respondents suggested a greater emphasis on community and neighborhood engagement. In a number of different ways respondents asked “How do less well-organized community members have a voice? What is the model to get all levels of community involvement, including the block/neighborhood club?” Expressing a common view, one respondent said “CPC has had a role in defining community engagement. CPC and the County now need to make it an inclusive process for community members at every level. Less formal systems MUST be recognized and have input into SPA Councils.” “We need the community brought forward—families, clients, neighbors, not just agencies, direct service providers, or community based organizations.”

As noted, CPC has recently added this new dimension to its work. In addition to a focus integrating health and human services at the County level and finding ways to include individuals and organizations in the decision-making processes around human services, CPC is now also focused on community building and community organizing. For the reasons noted above, CPC should assure that the additional focus complements and adds to its historic mission and does not detract from it.

It needs also to recognize, and to articulate, the very real limitations it faces when moving to a community building and community organizing agenda. Starting from a countywide base, with limited resources, in a county the size of a state and with the sub-county planning areas, the SPAs, averaging in excess of 1,000,000 people, it is unrealistic to expect CPC to take on a direct community organizing role in every neighborhood of the County. As such, it would be prudent for CPC to identify strategic opportunities in communities, partner with existing groups, be clear about the results it wants, define measurable goals and objectives, and make the direct link to improving conditions for children and families so that it stays true to its mission.

3. Rethinking the CPC Structure

The CPC structure is unique in its model of combining County level and grassroots reform through staff and volunteers as well as government and community-based organizations. CPC is quasi-governmental, a non-profit, and a collaborative; is a work in progress; and will always be in a state of defining and re-defining itself.

With the addition of a now deeper focus on community building, CPC should review its structure, including the membership of the Council, committee structure, the staffing pattern, the SPA structure, the role of data, and other facets of CPC. There is a strong desire at the SPA/AIC Council level, in particular, to discuss and define the roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers. In addition, there is a need to clarify the structure

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

and goals of both CPC at the Hall and in the field in order to be more efficient and collaborative toward the same cause. Without pre-judging the findings of this review, it may well be that the current structure is not effective for getting down to a neighborhood and community level and that new structures need to be built.

Further, new questions need to be raised: What are the implications of a community building focus for how SPA/AIC Councils function? Given a community building focus, who needs to be involved (at both the County and SPA levels) who has not been involved before? How should the addition of community building change the deployment of CPC resources and alter the day to day work of CPC staff? What are the expected results and how do we measure progress in this new area?

4. Bringing Data to the Next Level

Again and again, respondents stressed the importance of CPC's focus on data. The presence of reliable data on the well-being of children has been an important advocacy tool, has helped to allocate resources and guide policies, and has been an important ingredient in fostering collaboration among agencies and organizations. The CPC's influence in this area has been so deep that it is not an exaggeration to say that the use of data has "changed the way we do business."

After taking a moment or two to celebrate the many data-related accomplishments, CPC should consider how it can build on its history and get to the next level. Two mutually supporting paths seem open:

1. The first is to continue to work towards tying outcomes and budgeting together, i.e. using ever improving outcome data to help decide, for example, what programs and efforts should receive funds and what issues require what level of response. This is not to suggest that budgeting will ever become a wholly mathematical enterprise. Budgets arise out of a political process and will always be affected by values and personal perceptions. But better data can and should help to rationalize the budget process and CPC is uniquely positioned to develop ways of bringing data to the debate. No one, anywhere, has reached the full potential of this kind of process and the CPC can show the way.
2. The second path is to assure that communities are engaged in data development efforts. Data is an important tool in decision-making processes and if communities are without data, or unable to use it effectively, their point of view will be weakened. CPC and the Data Partnership can make an important contribution to community empowerment by fostering the development of community level capacity to understand, collect, present, and use data effectively. Democratizing the world of data is important work that is consistent with CPC's history of promoting collaboration and strengthening community capacity.

It is hoped that the results of this evaluation will assist all the stakeholders involved in CPC at the countywide and SPA/AIC Council level to improve the work of CPC. The structure, goals, and actual work of CPC is very complex and ambitious. With its commitment to open discussion and a continuous improvement model, CPC will make a difference in small and large ways for the welfare of children and families in LA County. Continuous tracking of progress and mid-term adjustments will be essential to the achievement of outcomes. We are all counting on CPC's success.



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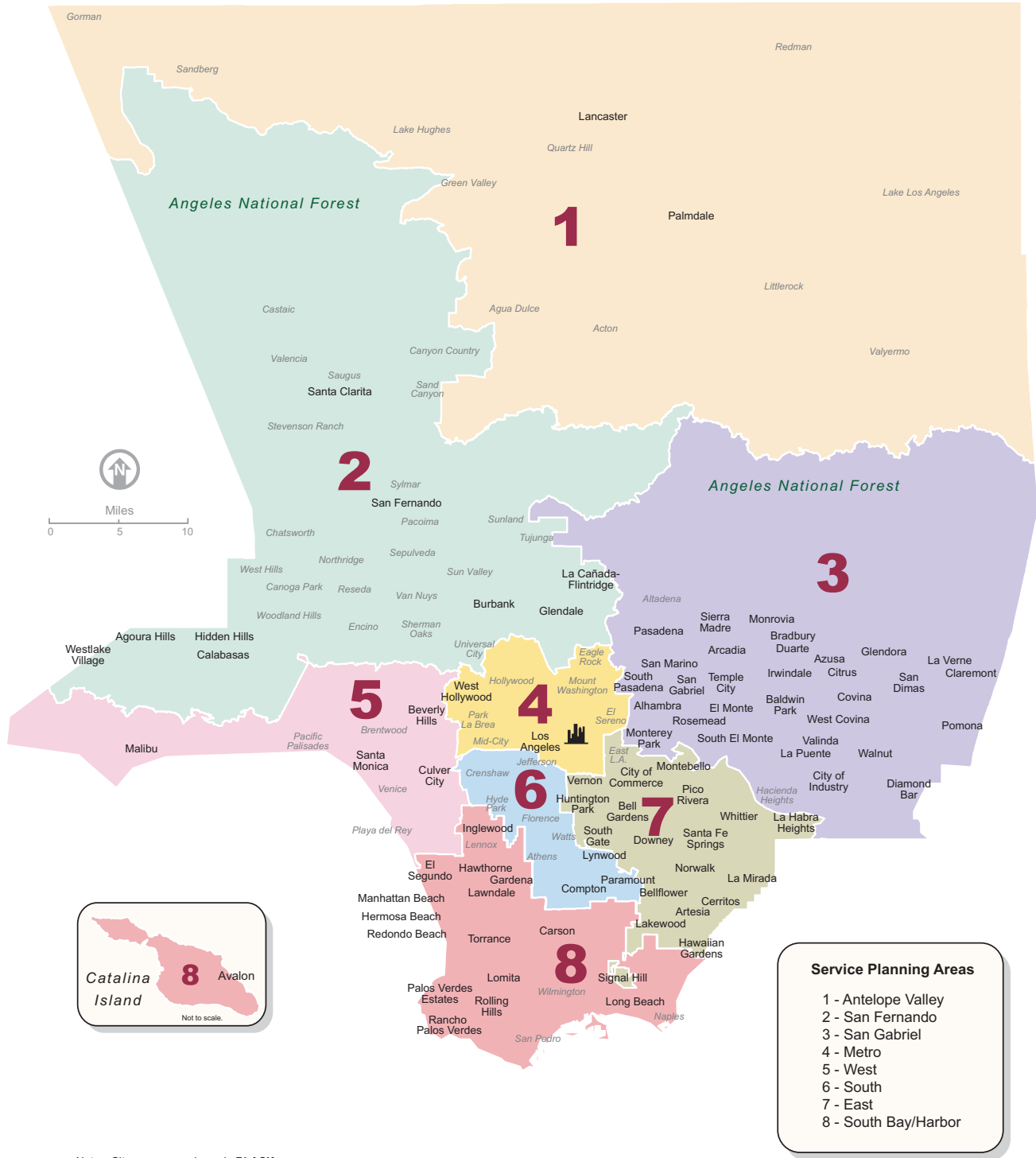
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