



Strategic Plan and Long-Term Financial Plan

Fiscal Years 2023-2026



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Acknowledgements

First 5 Contra Costa is proud to share our updated Strategic Plan for 2023 – 2026, which reaffirms our commitment to ensuring all young children and their families thrive. This document is the culmination of data, input, insights, and recommendations that were gathered from multiple sources during an 11-month collaborative planning process. We deeply appreciate everyone who shared their expertise and perspectives with us. Our plan is better because of it.

First 5 Contra Costa Commission

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A Message to the Community

When First 5 Contra Costa adopted its last strategic plan in the fall of 2019, we had high hopes for the future and what we could accomplish. Although the projected decline in Proposition 10 revenue continued to present a strategic challenge, we were optimistic that decades of collective advocacy for policies and investments in early childhood were yielding tangible results at the national, state, and local levels.

No one could have ever imagined the disruption that was about to upend our community and change our lives forever. The health, economic, and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic rippled throughout our county, with the burdens of economic and housing instability, loss of child care, distance learning, social isolation, and mental health concerns falling heavily on families and the workforce who care for young children, particularly in communities of color that already faced barriers to accessing vital resources and opportunities.

For the last three years, our staff, Commissioners, partners, and community have been living and working in a constant state of change, upheaval, and uncertainty brought on by the global pandemic. Through it all, First 5 Contra Costa remained a steadfast anchor, connecting with and leveraging resources of community partners, ensuring that families received the support needed to survive. We are proud of our collaborative efforts to address urgent and emerging needs of families, as well as the new partnerships that formed as a result.

Although we are now in a “post-pandemic” era, these are still challenging times. High turnover in the workforce across all industries, widespread economic instability, mental health and well-being crises, a growing state budget deficit, and a looming recession continue to be significant concerns that impact young children and their families every day. These issues were top-of-mind throughout our strategic planning process.

Our new 2023 – 2026 strategic plan builds on First 5 Contra Costa’s 25-year history and experience as a funder, convener, advocate, and leader in early childhood systems, while elevating new or different roles and approaches that we must embrace in order to remain a viable, sustainable, and impactful organization. We view this strategic plan as a living, dynamic “roadmap” that will help us navigate both the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead. We are optimistic and excited about the road ahead and invite you to join us on this journey.

In partnership,



Dr. Ruth Fernández
Executive Director



John Jones
Commission Chair

Our Purpose

First 5 Contra Costa works to ensure young children are healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities. For more than two decades, we have worked to support countless children in our county in reaching their full potential by focusing on their most critical years of development – prenatal through age 5. Decades of research show that a child’s brain develops most dramatically during the first five years of life. During this critical period, a window of opportunity exists to help shape how a child’s brain matures and to lay the foundation for all of the years that follow. Safe, nurturing relationships, experiences, and environments in early childhood build healthy brains and lay the foundation for positive outcomes in health, learning, and well-being across the life course.

First 5 Contra Costa centers our work around equity and plays many roles to advance our:

Vision

Contra Costa’s young children are healthy, ready to learn, and supported in safe, nurturing families and communities.

Mission

To foster the development of our community’s children, prenatal through 5 years of age.

We know that in order to fulfill our vision and mission, we need strong early childhood systems that are grounded in a whole child/whole family framework, center families’ needs, and promote self-determination and power. However, historic patterns of racial and economic exclusion are embedded in the policies and systems that young children and families interact with every day, contributing to persistent differences in well-being outcomes based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and other social identities.

Knowing this, First 5 Contra Costa is committed to advancing **racial equity, diversity, and inclusion** in all we do. We strive to recognize and value diversity and inclusion within our organization, our partnerships, and the communities we serve. We use our resources and influence to increase equity, or fair treatment and access to opportunities, so that all young children prosper and reach their full potential. We prioritize **racial equity** in particular because young children and families in communities of color continue to be impacted by policies and systems that were designed to exclude people from opportunities based on their racial and ethnic heritage.



We keep racial equity, diversity, and inclusion at the forefront by embodying these **core values** in every aspect of our work:

- **Diversity & Inclusion** – We work to ensure the diverse values, voices, and perspectives of our staff, partners, and community members are heard, represented, and reflected throughout our work.
- **Equity** – We work to eliminate systemic and structural barriers that cause or contribute to inequities so that all children and families in our community succeed.
- **Cultural Humility** – We continuously reflect on the ways in which our beliefs, cultural identities, power, and privilege influence our actions and interactions. We maintain curiosity and an openness to learning from others' lived experiences and adapting our approaches.
- **Community Partnership** – We listen to and learn from families, organizations, and policymakers. We build relationships based on shared values, shared power, trust, respect, and a collective commitment to ensuring the health and well-being of all children.

These **guiding principles** serve as our compass, ensuring our actions and decisions are in alignment with our core values.

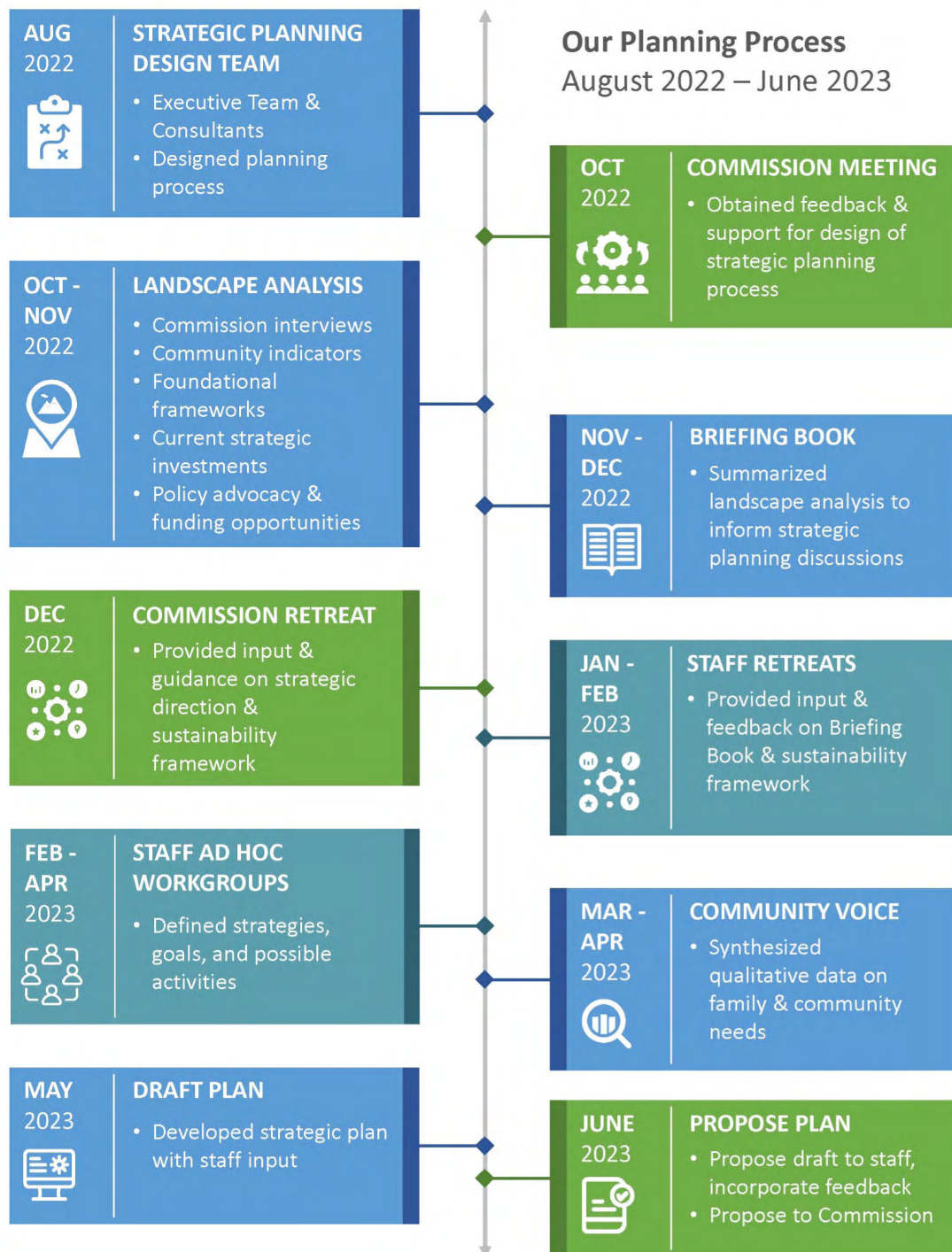
- We will prioritize our efforts and investments to focus on **eliminating disparities** and creating **equitable opportunities and outcomes**.
- We will contribute to strengthening and building **trauma-informed** early childhood systems that **prevent, treat, and heal** trauma and adverse childhood experiences.
- We will seek out and listen and partner with **diverse and under-represented voices**, with **shared power**, clear communication, and agreements as to roles and responsibilities, expectations, decision-making, and accountability.

First 5 Contra Costa was established in 1998 by the creation of California's Proposition 10. Like many county-level First 5 agencies, we have evolved from primarily being a funder of direct services in our earliest days, to now playing multiple, essential roles in building and strengthening the systems that young children and their families interact with in Contra Costa County, as described in our Theory of Change (**Appendix A**). We are a convener, an advocate, and an incubator.



Our Planning Process

In August 2022, First 5 Contra Costa began a collaborative, iterative strategic planning process that has been inspired and informed by a multitude of perspectives and data. The planning process unfolded in stages over the course of 11 months, as shown in the timeline below, with opportunities for staff and Commissioners to engage in thoughtful discussions about First 5 Contra Costa's strengths, priorities, efforts, investments, and impacts.





Our Changing Landscape

Our county and the context in which we do our work is constantly changing. Demographic shifts, community conditions, economic trends, and changes in the resources and services offered all impact our work. Key data trends and perspectives that informed this strategic planning process are highlighted below and described in greater detail in the First 5 Contra Costa Strategic Planning Briefing Book 2022.¹

Children and Families in Contra Costa County

Contra Costa is a large, diverse, and growing county, made up of multiple communities that have many strengths, as well as needs for support. As one of the Bay Area's fastest-growing counties, Contra Costa's population is nearly 1.2 million people – a 9% increase since 2011.² The county's ethnic diversity has also shifted in the last decade, with greater growth among African American or Black, Asian, Latino, Multiracial, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations (between 8-14%), compared to whites (3%).³ Over one-third (35%) of county residents speak at least one language other than English.⁴

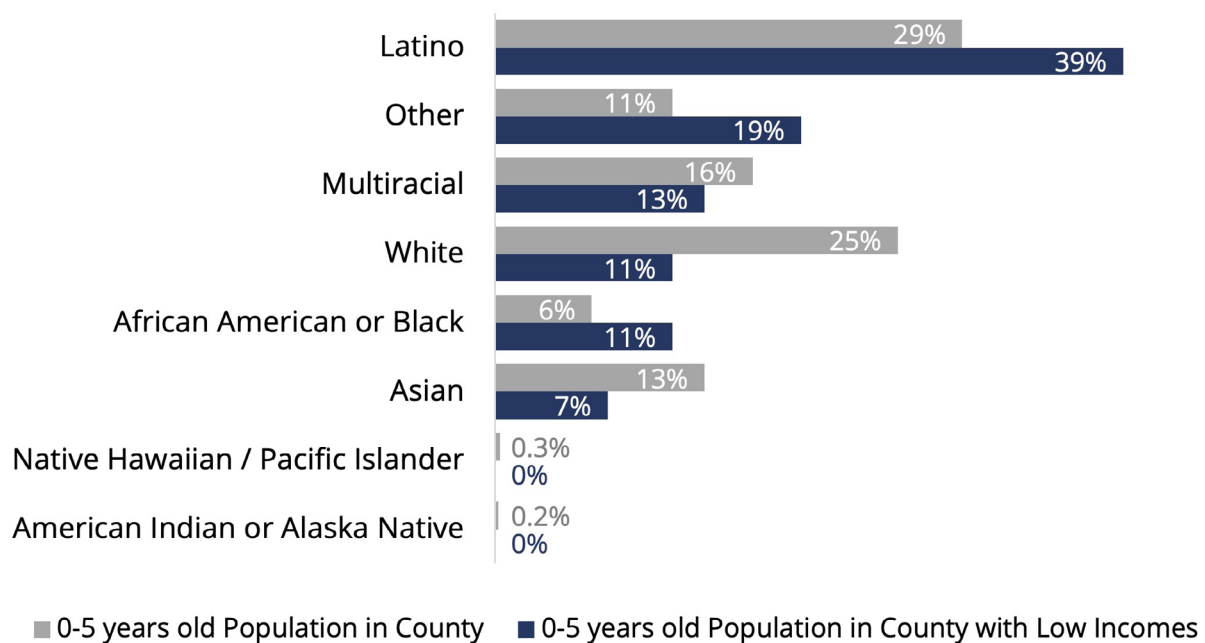
Although the overall county population is increasing, the population ages 0 to 5 is decreasing. In 2021, there were 73,113 children under the age of 6, a decrease of 9% since 2011 (80,111).⁵ The county's birth rate also decreased nearly 5% in the last decade, which has a direct impact on Contra Costa's allocation of Proposition 10 revenue.⁶

What the Data Tells Us

Too many young children and their families in our county are experiencing stress and adversities that can have lifelong impacts on their health, education, well-being, and economic opportunities. We aim to address these challenges in our ongoing work:

- In 2020, Latino and African American or Black children under age 6 in families with low incomes were over-represented among all families with children under age 6 with low incomes. For example, Latino children made up 29% of the 0-5 year old population in Contra Costa, yet they represented 39% of children under age 6 whose families had **low incomes** (at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level). This pattern was true for African American or Black children and children of Other (unnamed) ethnicities, too.⁷

- Children Under Age 6 in Contra Costa County by Ethnicity, 2020



Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2016-2020) Tables B17001B through I; Ethnicity and Poverty for County Number of individual children under 6 and number in poverty.

- Countywide, in 2021, 9% of families with children under the age of 6 lived in **deep poverty** (defined as 50% of the Federal Poverty Level, which in 2020 was an annual income of \$13,875 for a family of four).⁸ This is why First 5 Contra Costa has strategically located its five First 5 Centers in the areas with high concentrations of child poverty.

- Far too many of our county's low-income working families cannot access the quality child care they need. An estimated **19,400** children under the age of 5 who are eligible for subsidized child care cannot access spaces due to our county's low supply.

In 2022, this translated to about **90%** of children under the age of 3 who were **eligible for subsidized care without a program to enroll in**, and similarly **60%** of eligible 3 and 4 years old **not able to enroll**.⁹

In addition, there has been a steady exodus of child care providers from the field, either due to pandemic-related impacts on their business, burnout, or low wages. The mismatch between the supply of early care and education workers and demand for their services has created a child care shortage, which affects both families and employers.

- Only one in four children (**23%**) in our county who are enrolled in Medi-Cal managed care had a **developmental screening by their third birthday**, with lower rates of African American, Asian, and Latino children receiving screenings than white children.¹⁰
- **14%** of children (ages 0-17) in Contra Costa County have experienced **two or more adverse experiences** such as socioeconomic hardship, divorce or separation of parents, family violence, or parental incarceration.¹¹

What Families Tell Us

Many of the pressing challenges that families face today are not new but were exacerbated by the global pandemic and continue to have prolonged impacts that are still being felt, particularly among families of color and families with low incomes. In a survey of local families commissioned by First 5 Contra Costa in 2020, four months into the pandemic, common concerns cited by families included social anxiety and overwhelm, children's education/early learning and social isolation, loss of child care, and economic instability.¹² In a follow-up survey in Spring 2021, many survey respondents had been unemployed for over 6 months, and several cited a lack of child care as the reason.¹³





In fiscal year 2021-2022, families who completed a survey when they registered for services funded by First 5 Contra Costa ranked their child's development and behavior as their top concern, even above concerns about paying for basic needs. This was true among Latino parents/caregivers (the group with the largest number of respondents), African American parents/caregivers, and families in all regions except the central area of the county (who ranked paying for housing as their top concern). Paying for rent/housing, other bills, and child care were the next most pressing concerns among respondents.

These concerns are echoed in multiple reports and communitywide assessments, which were analyzed for common themes and synthesized for First 5 Contra Costa by Applied Survey Research (See **Appendix B** for more information).

Common themes about what parents/caregivers say they need include:



Removal of barriers and **increased access to health, mental health, and substance use services**, particularly for children and families who do not qualify for Medi-Cal



Increased options for quality, affordable, and accessible **child care**



Community- and school-based trauma-informed **mental health** resources for families with young children



Support to mitigate the impact of **social isolation** on children's development



Opportunities and resources to **learn about child development**, how to navigate existing services, and other topics that promote **child and family well-being**



Increased **voice and representation** in services and decision-making



Improved quality and access to services that are **culturally and linguistically responsive**



Our Evolving Role

Over the last 25 years, First 5 Contra Costa has evolved from primarily being a **funder** of direct services to playing multiple, essential roles in building and strengthening the early childhood systems that young children and their families interact with in Contra Costa County. As a **convener and facilitator**, we have developed strong cross-sector partnerships with leaders in education, health, and human services systems in the county. We have used our influence to **advocate** for sustainable and equitable systems changes that promote trauma-informed and healing-centered solutions. As a **backbone support and incubator**, we have co-designed transformational and innovative models that promote integration and are created by and for the community.

In recent years, First 5 Contra Costa has also honed its ability to serve as an **intermediary agency**, developing and implementing agreements to braid and blend public and private funding and “bundle” comprehensive services provided by partner agencies and providers. This approach builds shared responsibility among multiple funders to bolster, improve, and expand early childhood services and resources. It also allows First 5 Contra Costa to leverage our strengths and resources to increase our reach and impact, even in the face of declining Prop 10 revenue. This strategy will be paramount to our fiscal sustainability approach going forward.

Our Long-Term Financial Plan and Sustainability Framework

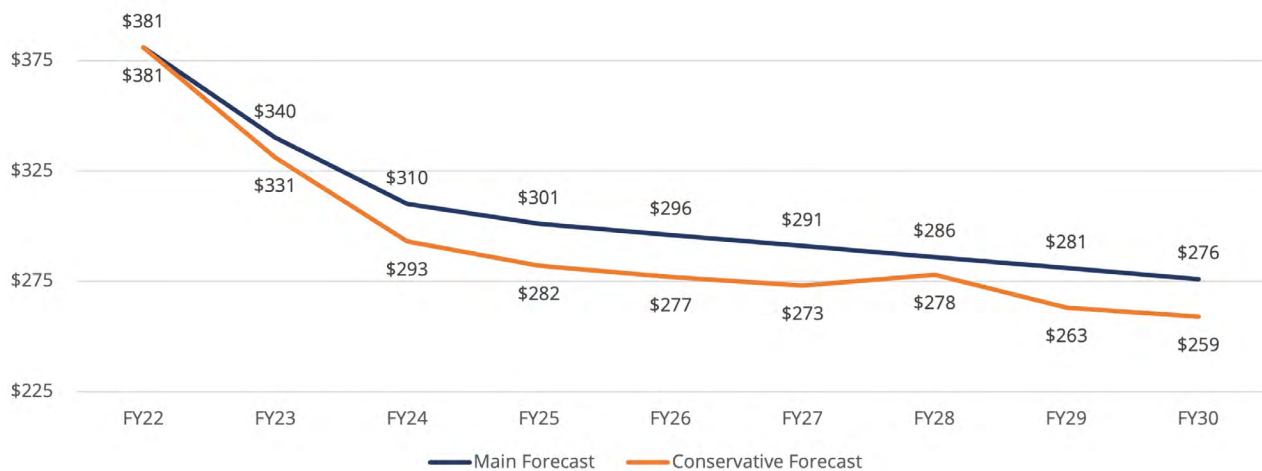
Proposition 10 Revenue Projections

While First 5 Contra Costa remains at the forefront of systems change for young children and their families, we also cannot escape the fact that Proposition 10 revenue, which is from state tobacco tax and is our primary source of revenue, continues to decline due to the steady drop in tobacco consumption. This decline will accelerate due to the recent passage of Proposition 31, which upholds state legislation that bans the sale of flavored tobacco products.

As of December 2022, revenue projections provided by Capitol Matrix Consulting show that Proposition 31, also known as the ‘flavor ban’, accelerates the annual decline in tobacco consumption by 7.5% per year in 2023-2024, the first full year the ban is in effect. This is almost double the projected 3.8% annual decline in tobacco consumption, absent the flavor ban.¹⁴

Statewide, Proposition 10 revenues are projected to decline at least 27% between 2021-2022 (\$381 million) and 2029-2030 (\$276 million) due to the flavor ban (see the blue line in the chart below). If the flavor ban and other factors continue to reduce tobacco consumption overall by 15% (which the Department of Finance assumed in the Governor’s 2022 May Revise of the state budget), then Proposition 10 revenues will decline more quickly — falling to \$293 million by 2023-2024 and further to \$259 million by 2029-2030 (see the orange line in the chart below).

State Tobacco Tax (Proposition 10) Revenue Projections With the Flavor Ban Compared to Potential Additional Decline Due to Reduction of Tobacco Consumption



Source: ‘Forecast of Revenues to the CA Children and Families Trust Fund (\$ Millions)’ based on Capital Matrix Consulting memo: Tobacco Tax Revenue Projections– California Children and Families First Trust Fund, Dec. 6, 2022.

The decline in Proposition 10 revenue has been known and addressed in previous strategic plans. However, it is worth noting that First 5 Contra Costa's annual Proposition 10 revenue is approximately 17% lower than it was a decade ago, and by the end of fiscal year 2025-2026, it will have decreased by more than 51% from its peak of \$12.8 million in fiscal year 2000-2001 (see illustration below).

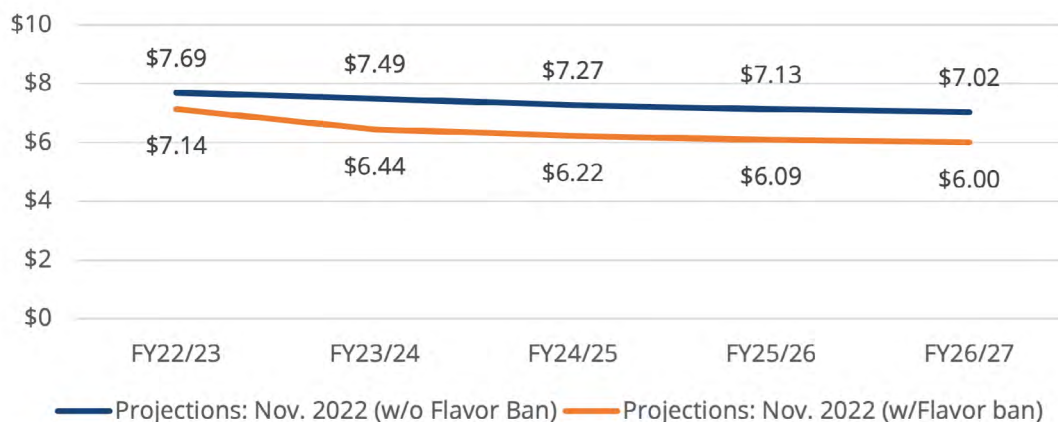
Contra Costa County Proposition 10 Revenue, Fiscal Years 1999 – 2026



Source: First 5 California Report based on Department of Finance published birth rate data, last updated May 2022 (2019 baseline).

In Contra Costa County, the impact of the flavor ban (Proposition 31) translates to an average additional loss of approximately \$1 million in Proposition 10 revenue per fiscal year instead of the previously projected 1.7% decline (see illustration below).

Proposition 10 Revenue Projections for Contra Costa County, With and Without the Flavor Ban (in Millions)



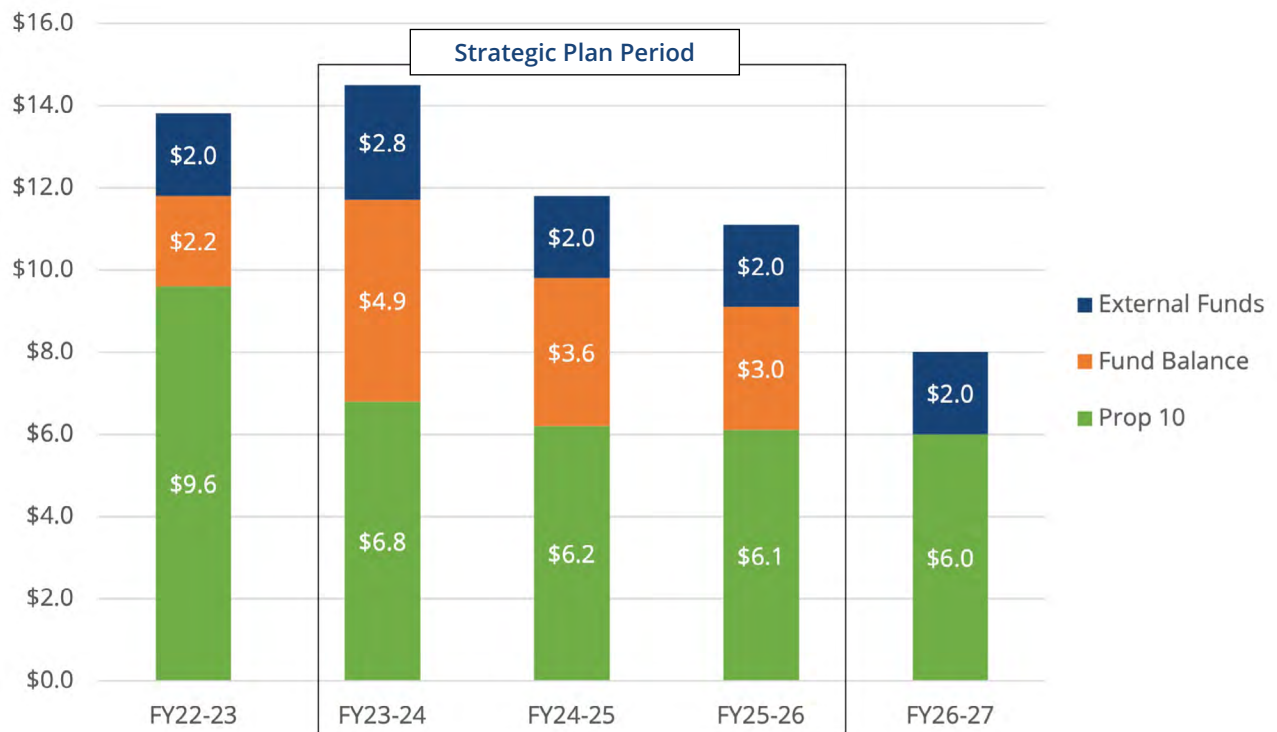
Source: First 5 California Report based on Department of Finance published birth rate data, last updated May 2022 (2019 baseline), updated Nov. 2022.

The good news is that during the 2020-2023 strategic plan period, First 5 Contra Costa avoided depletion of the Fund Balance as originally outlined in the plan. Strong fiscal stewardship, lower-than-expected expenditures during the first two years of the pandemic, and success in securing external funds (multi-year state grants and philanthropic funding) is anticipated to result in a Fund Balance of \$11.5 million as of the end of fiscal year 2022-2023. In fiscal year 2023-2024, the Commission will consider an allocation of some amount of the Fund Balance to re-establish a Reserve (Contingency Fund).

Illustrated below is a set of projections for each of the next three fiscal years of the Strategic Plan, based primarily on the most reliable set of information known at this time– which is Proposition 10 revenue projections (with the flavor ban). It also provides a conceptual near-term approach to fiscal sustainability. This approach assumes that First 5 Contra Costa will be awarded \$2 million annually in external funds during the course of the Strategic Plan period and will draw down the Fund Balance to close any gaps between projected revenues and expenses.

This Strategic Plan also includes conceptual fiscal sustainability approaches, which will be further developed into a 5-Year Sustainability Plan. Together, if successfully implemented, this Strategic Plan and the 5-Year Sustainability Plan could extend the organization’s life into the next decade. As with any relevant plan, numbers will be re-evaluated and updated annually, especially as a fund development strategy is developed, implemented, and realized.

Projected Revenue by Funding Source, Fiscal Years 2023-2026 (in Millions)





Redefining Sustainability

During the past two decades, First 5s across the state have prioritized resources and advocacy efforts to elevate the needs of families in their communities with children prenatal to age 5. Since its inception, First 5 Contra Costa has strategically focused on building, sustaining, and/or growing the Commission's investments in early childhood systems — over \$140 million over the last two decades. Now, faced with the accelerated decline in Proposition 10 revenue prompted by the flavor ban, First 5 Contra Costa is taking a bold approach to redefine long-term sustainability. This new sustainability approach reframes the paradigm of the doomed revenue cliff that has overshadowed First 5's destiny since its inception.

Instead, our new sustainability approach is based on the premise that a financially healthy First 5 Contra Costa is critical for the services and systems enhancements that our investments support. While the needs of young children prenatal to age 5 and their families will remain First 5 Contra Costa's priority, **ensuring the sustainability of our organization is imperative to achieve our targeted outcomes in the community.** Looking into the future, First 5 Contra Costa's sustainability approach strives to maintain a stable organization; build on and grow investments for young children and families in the County through public and private funding partnerships; and leverage the strengths and assets we have built over the years to continue to build the case and advocate for sustainable investments in early childhood.



Over the next three years, First 5 Contra Costa will allocate resources to develop and implement a 5-year Sustainability Plan. The plan will define multiple short- and long-term strategies and methods to identify and secure funding for First 5 Contra Costa and allow us to:

- Identify and pursue diversified revenue sources such as local taxes, fees, and other public revenue streams in addition to philanthropic grants, while also exploring ways to match and/or braid external funding with Proposition 10 funds through partnerships;
- Strategically and incrementally shift away from programs, activities, and services that are better aligned with local community partner organizations and that are outside the scope of First 5 Contra Costa's three focus areas;
- Join advocacy efforts led by the First 5 Association of California, the Bay Area First 5 Executive Director's Group, and other First 5 Network leadership to identify new and stable revenue sources for First 5 Commissions that leverage declining Proposition 10 revenue statewide;
- Use data to support and drive actions, including sustainability targets and benchmarks and return on investment; and
- Re-evaluate the amount to set aside in a Contingency Fund each year.

As we look to the future, we are energized by the **increased investments in early childhood systems and supports at the local, state, and national levels** — the result of many decades of collaboration and advocacy by First 5s and other early childhood champions across the state. President Biden’s proposals demonstrate his support of families with young children, and Governor Newsom’s bold vision of a “California for All” calls for a series of policies and investments to make California more affordable for families. Several of these promises are coming to fruition and will directly benefit children and families in Contra Costa County, including the ACEs Aware Initiative, Early Learning Master Plan, the Cradle-to-Career Education Data System, the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative, CalAIM (improvements to MediCal), the Family First Prevention Services Program, and more.

Locally, Contra Costa voters approved Measure X in 2020, establishing a countywide, 20-year, half-cent sales tax that is projected to yield \$100 million in annual revenue. Research, planning, and advocacy efforts co-led by First 5 Contra Costa, Cocokids, and the Community Services Bureau of the Employment and Human Services Department resulted in an annual, ongoing investment of \$6 million in early childhood education providers and systems.

While these new state and local policies and investments are significant and historic, they also represent a fraction of the resources needed to ensure that all young children and their families in Contra Costa have equitable opportunities to thrive.

Given this interplay of opportunities and challenges, First 5 Contra Costa must continue to play a consistent and visible role in ensuring that early childhood remains a budget and policy priority, and to demonstrate the impact of our investments on children, families, providers, and the broader early childhood system. We are ready to rise to the challenge, drawing on our deep experience as a funder, convener, advocate, and backbone entity to bring in new, diverse funding streams to bolster Contra Costa’s early childhood systems.



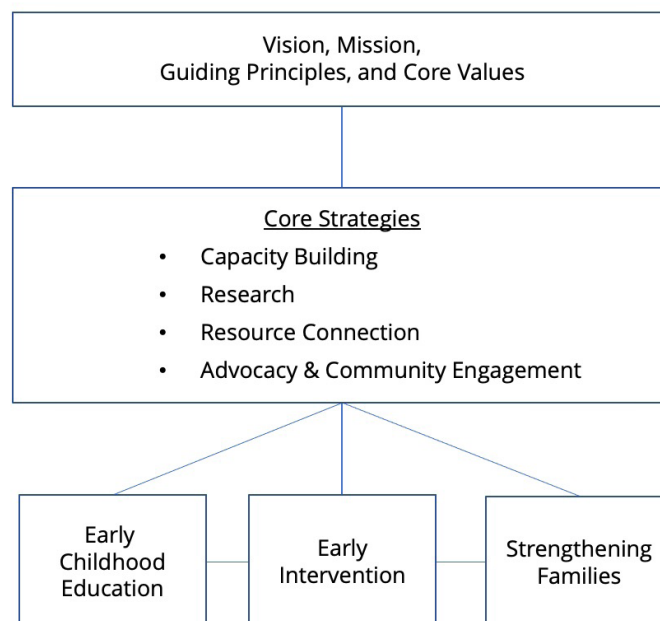
Strategic Roadmap

When First 5 Contra Costa was established 25 years ago, the influx of new money allowed us to use our resources to build or enhance programs and direct services that benefited individual children and families. As Proposition 10 revenue declined over the years, we have adapted our role, investments, and approaches while staying true to our commitment to create an enduring impact for the greatest number of young children in Contra Costa.

With each successive strategic plan, we have increased our emphasis on strengthening the systems that serve children and families and gradually reduced our role as a primary funder of direct services. Our 2020-2023 strategic plan called for a more intentional and explicit focus on changing systems to meet the needs of young children and their families. This has enabled us to continue growing and strengthening the early childhood support systems alongside our partners and to make the best use of our finite resources.

Over the next three years, we will concentrate our investments and efforts in three **focus areas** where First 5 Contra Costa can have the greatest and most enduring impact — Early Childhood Education, Early Intervention, and Family Strengthening — and effect change through our **core strategies** — capacity building, research, resource connection, and advocacy and community engagement — as named in our Theory of Change.

Key investments and efforts in our focus areas and core strategies are described in the following section. Achieving our desired results and demonstrating the impact of First 5 Contra Costa's investments will also require us to enhance our organizational culture, capacity, and infrastructure, in order to achieve our desired results.



Focus Areas

Early Childhood Education

Desired Result

Children are ready to learn

Why We Invest in This Area

The years between birth and age 5 are critical for brain development, and the ways in which parents and others interact with children during this time makes a difference in their future learning, behavior, and health. High quality early learning programs impact children's academic and emotional well-being in the short and long-term.



What We Do

First 5 Contra Costa invests in Early Childhood Education systems and supports to help ensure children have high quality early learning experiences that help them in school and in life. Through our targeted investments and partnerships, we aim to:

- Offer professional development opportunities for early educators, helping them continually assess and improve the quality of their service.
- Strengthen the systems that support early learning programs so that children — particularly children of color — are ready for kindergarten.
- Better understand and respond to the factors contributing to the county's early learning educator workforce crisis, such as low wages, lack of benefits, and difficult working conditions.

Early Intervention

Desired Result

Children are healthy and thriving

Why We Invest in This Area

Young children's earliest experiences and relationships shape the architecture of their brain, creating a foundation for their lifelong development. Children who engage with responsive, nurturing caregivers and who live in safe environments have a strong foundation for positive mental health, which fosters their physical, cognitive, and social development. Conversely, one of the most potentially harmful factors in a child's development is the effect of trauma and toxic stress, which can lead to children facing lifelong physical, behavioral, and emotional challenges.

Regular, evidence-based screenings that lead to connecting families to needed services can change children's developmental trajectory. Early identification leads to timely intervention during the most critical time of a child's development. Research shows prevention and early intervention not only can improve lifelong outcomes for children but also yield long-term economic benefits.

What We Do

First 5 Contra Costa invests in Early Intervention systems and supports to ensure that families have access to prevention and early intervention services that foster the optimal development of all children. Through our targeted investments and partnerships, we aim to:

- Build the capacity of professionals and the systems they work within to adopt proven prevention and early intervention approaches, such as evidence-based developmental screenings and connections to resources.
- Build capacity among public and private healthcare and social service providers to prevent, screen, treat, and heal childhood adversity and toxic stress.
- Advocate for practice and system changes and increased investment in preventative approaches.

Strengthening Families

Desired Result

Children are supported by safe, nurturing families and communities

Why We Invest in This Area

Research underscores the critical role that positive caregiver-child relationships and healthy family dynamics have on children, particularly in their early years. Families are their child's first and most important teachers and role models, with critical relationship building and brain development occurring in the first five years. Yet studies show that many parents and caregivers have limited understanding of how their interactions impact their children. Increasing parents' and caregivers' understanding of child development and parenting can lead to better child and family outcomes and prevent child neglect and abuse.

What We Do

First 5 Contra Costa invests in Strengthening Families systems and supports that connect families to resources and programs that focus on strengthening their ability to foster children's development, health, and school readiness. Through our targeted investments and partnerships, we aim to:

- Support the holistic needs of children and families by providing and/or connecting them to resources and community services.
- Enhance parents' knowledge of children's development and positive parenting practices that promote strong families.
- Foster parents' ability to advocate for themselves and their families and build a sense of community and ownership among families.

Core Strategies

Our core strategies are the actions we take to lead change within and across our three focus areas. These cross-cutting strategies are not specific to particular programs or initiatives. Rather, they define how we apply an integrated approach to our work and state our intentions for the next three years.



Capacity-building

We build capacity for systems change by identifying and supporting the professional development of our external and internal partners in the early childhood system. Our capacity building work supports the incubation, funding, and scaling of initiatives that advance equity, integration, healing-centered practice, parent voice, and power in our organizational and community systems.

Over the next three years, we will:

- Continue to uplift **parent** voice, leadership, and power in order to strengthen families' capacity to effectively navigate the early childhood system and advocate for their children's needs. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Enhance families' skills and knowledge in parenting, school readiness, resilience.
 - Support families in increasing their awareness of and ability to navigate systems that are critical to family support.
 - Enhance parents' capacity to advocate for themselves, their children, and their communities.
- Focus on building, strengthening, and sustaining the **early childhood workforce** through training, development, and implementation. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Develop in-depth training opportunities that deepen providers' skills and knowledge within the field.
 - Develop leadership opportunities for providers to gain skills and to incentivize them to provide quality services for families.
- Provide holistic capacity building support to the **system** that fosters effective cross-sector communication and collaboration with a lens of sustainability, equity, and social justice. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Invest seed funding to launch system building efforts that foster cross-sector communication and guide the system towards sustainability and equity.



Research

We facilitate collective learning about the problems we face and the solutions to address them by investigating and learning systematically. Our research work takes many forms and uses a variety of methods to advance inquiry, discovery, and solution-seeking.

Over the next three years, we will:

- Use a **Results Based Accountability** approach to better understand and communicate the impacts of our investments and efforts, particularly the young children and families that have been most impacted by disparities in our county. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Adopt performance measures and data collection tools that go beyond tracking inputs and outcomes, but that also aim to address impact. This involves shifting our standard questions of “How many people were served?” and “How well were they served?” to “Who was better off because of the program?”
 - Enhance the way we communicate the results of our evaluation efforts with our funded partners, systems partners, and the community so that we can all benefit from what is working and not working, and what we collectively want to explore further.
- Expand and enhance the **research methods** we use to ensure our efforts are centered around a whole child/whole family approach and are empowering to those in our community who have experienced historic and structural inequities. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Ensure our inquiry and research efforts are inclusive of ecological factors impacting families and young children, both in the present and in the past.
 - Adopt community-based and family-centered research approaches that provide mutually beneficial opportunities for engagement and learning and build power among participants.





Resource Connection

We strengthen competencies and community by creating access and opportunities for parents and caregivers to engage in services, programs, and opportunities that meet their needs and interests.

Over the next three years, we will:

- Continue to leverage our **Proposition 10 funding** to incentivize increased local, state, and federal investments in piloting new programmatic approaches to address service gaps in our early childhood systems. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Use our Proposition 10 funds to incentivize the county to invest more in services for children with disabilities by facilitating a community-based process to develop a multi-year approach to addressing the needs of children with disabilities and the service providers who work with them.
 - In partnership with the First 5 Network, identify gaps and needs in our county to support a thriving network of home visiting providers.
 - Foster and develop partnerships to ensure that the First 5 Centers remain an integral community connection for families.
- Partner with **families** to refine the cultural and linguistic relevancy of programming and outreach efforts focused on BIPOC families to ensure more offerings are meeting families' needs. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Learn from and build upon successful best practices in other communities.
 - Pilot new approaches to reach specific populations and adopt a continuous quality improvement approach to learn and refine.
 - Expand partnerships and approaches to effectively working with families of color to support the school readiness of children and their families.
- Recruit and engage more **service providers and partners** to engage in our networks and efforts to coordinate the early childhood systems. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Broker new partnerships within the health care system and behavioral health providers to support the mental health needs of children and their families.
 - Continue to recruit and engage the community partners in First 5-led coalitions that strive to integrate and coordinate services to families in the county.
 - Leverage the community knowledge and expertise to educate, support, and mentor providers entering the field.



Advocacy & Community Engagement

We build power for local, state, and national policies that nurture young children and their families. We do this through advocacy — supporting and taking action on specific causes or proposals — and community engagement — thoughtfully creating bi-directional communication and engagement with groups in a mutually beneficial way to strengthen a common shared outcome.

Over the next three years, we will:

- Thoughtfully engage those involved with and impacted by proposed policy or system changes to **inform the approach and outcome** and strive to ensure the process is mutually beneficial. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Create an agency-wide parent/caregiver advisory body that would: provide skill-building and educational opportunities for parents of young children to become advocates for themselves, their families, and systems change in our three focus areas; advise First 5 Contra Costa on our systems change work; and share lived experiences with others to help advance systems changes in our three focus areas.
 - Re-engineer how we collect and share stories about families' and service providers' challenges with the current fragmented early childhood systems to elevate their voices in our work.
- Create and identify avenues for parents/caregivers and service providers to understand their power and ability and opportunities to be **advocates for policy and systems change** in our three focus areas. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Identify lessons learned and best practices from our two decades of staffing various advocacy-related efforts and develop a playbook of effective approaches and lessons learned so others can benefit from our experiences.
 - Deepen our support for power-building efforts that directly advocate for changes to the policies and systems we are targeting through the work in our three focus areas, and transition out of direct, deep support for power-building efforts that are outside our agency's three focus areas.
- Champion **policy changes** and the **allocation of public resources** related to our three focus areas that will lead to the family and system outcomes in our Theory of Change. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Narrow the scope of our policy platform to a finite number of issues within each focus area to ensure we leverage our resources in the most strategic manner to achieve policy and systems change.
 - Host events and convenings for a variety of audiences to learn more about the need, rationale, research, and potential benefits related to the policy and systems changes we support.



Organizational Strategies

In addition to implementing our core strategies in our programmatic focus areas, First 5 Contra Costa will continue to build and strengthen our organizational culture and infrastructure. This will ensure alignment between our core values, guiding principles, and actions as stated in our Strategic Plan. Our organizational strategies are summarized within two workstreams: 1) People and Culture, and 2) Operations and Processes. These workstreams provide a bridge between our high-level strategic plan, agency-wide tactical plan, and department work plans. The following are examples of the internal work we need to do to reach the goals in our Strategic Plan.

People and Culture Workstream

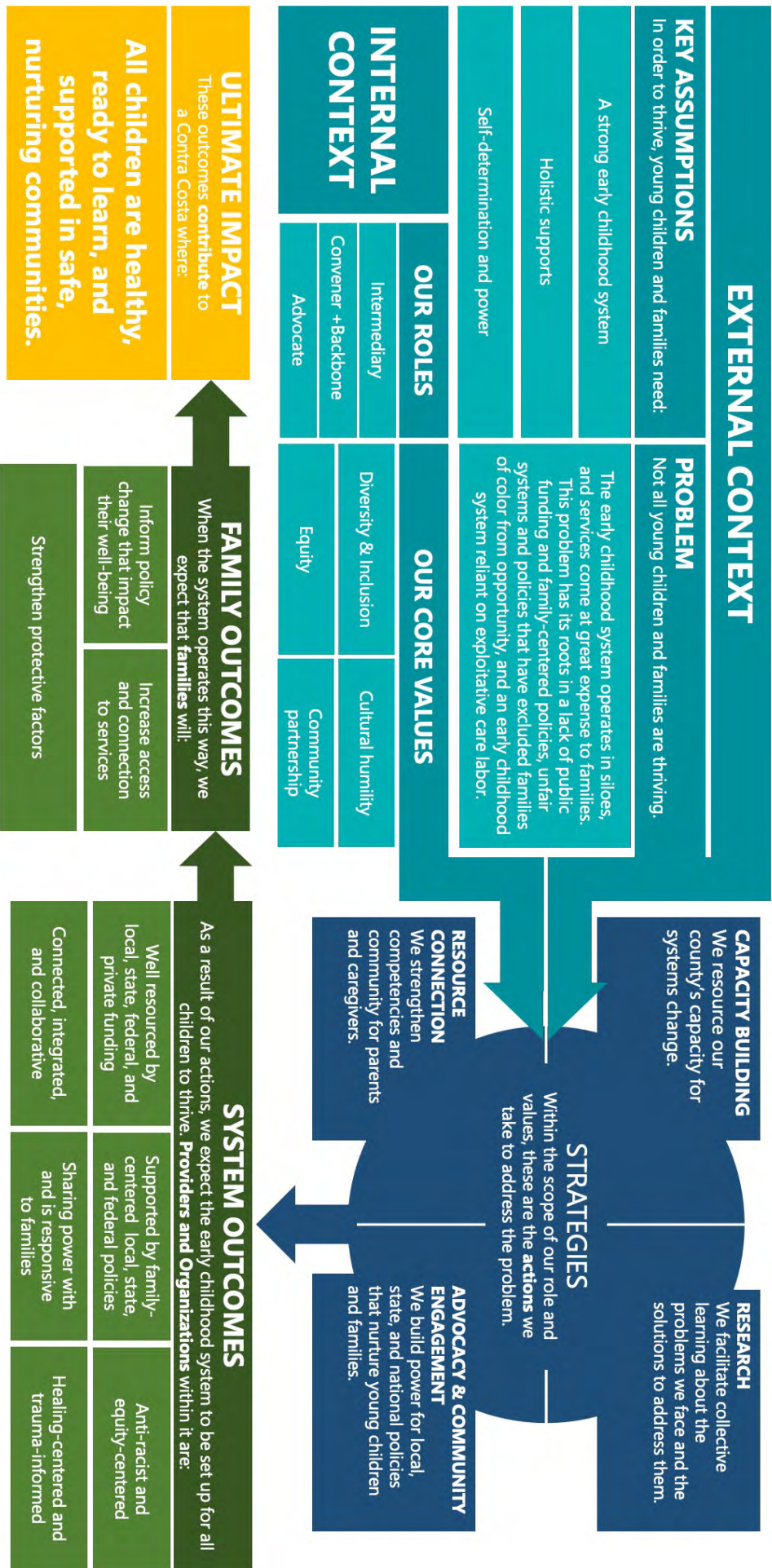
- Expand **professional development opportunities and resources** for First 5 Contra Costa staff that support our organizational goals while enhancing the knowledge and skills of our workforce, ensuring First 5 Contra Costa has the needed expertise and competencies to execute the strategic plan. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Invest in the capacity of staff to effectively work in partnership with families with a focus on equity and cultural humility.
 - Develop staff competency in fund development strategies to support program growth and development.
- Strengthen First 5 Contra Costa's **culture of inclusivity and belonging** that is reflected in its policies and communication, cultivates internal leadership, and increases employee engagement. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Increase staff capacity to share power within programs and practices.
 - Review existing internal policies and/or develop new policies with an intentional and explicit lens of equity and inclusion.

Operations and Processes Workstream

- Invest in necessary upgrades in **information technology** tools, software and technology equipment that supports effective and efficient communication, operations, and connection across internal and external stakeholders including First 5 Contra Costa staff, Commissioners, contractors, grantees, funders, families, community partners, and the public.
- Strengthen fiscal tools and update policies that safeguard **fiscal stewardship** and increase agility and adaptability necessary to administer and disseminate diverse funding streams.
- Preserve and leverage existing First 5 Contra Costa owned and rented **facilities** as welcoming, safe, and equipped spaces for collaboration, learning and co-designing of innovative solutions and models supporting young children and their families. Specific actions may include, but are not limited to:
 - Increase organizational capacity for language interpretation and translation for events, meetings and communications that promotes inclusion and accessibility.
 - Simplify contractual and grant making processes to reduce burden on community partners and staff.
 - Develop a Facility Use Fee schedule for First 5 Contra Costa's administrative office that will make the space accessible to early childhood partners, non-profit/community based organizations and local family serving entities.



Appendix A – First 5 Contra Costa’s Theory of Change



Appendix B – Family and Provider Voice in Local Reports and Need Assessments

First 5 Contra Costa commissioned Applied Survey Research to review, synthesize, and summarize data from seven recently published reports pertaining to what families in Contra Costa County need, including both family and provider perspectives. Needs identified in the reports by parents/caregivers and by providers are summarized below.

Child Care

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- Increased options for quality, affordable, and accessible childcare (heightened by pandemic-related closures)
- Access to childcare in response to pandemic-related school and childcare closures

Providers say families need:

- Increased availability, accessibility of high quality affordable timely childcare that addresses nontraditional working hours
- Childcare with a focus on serving both the parent and child together

Mental Health

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- Responsive, trauma-informed mental health resources for families with young children
- School-based mental health services.
- Removal of barriers to accessing mental health services
- Remediation of the impact of social isolation on children's development.
- Access to services for substance use and mental health issues for families

Providers say families need:

- Responsive, trauma-informed mental health resources for families with young children
- Culturally responsive mental health services
- Services to help families understand effects of trauma

Access to Health Care

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- The administrative burden of Medi-Cal-based eligibility addressed to increase access to services
- Options for students who do not qualify for Medi-Cal to access health care services, including therapy.
- Options to address the high cost of healthcare
- Access to the COVID-19 vaccine (in 2021)
- Better understanding of COVID-19 vaccine safety (in 2021)
- Barriers to receiving services for those without insurance removed

Providers say families need:

- Screening for early identification and intervention for developmental delays
- Mobile health clinics in schools
- Expansion and access to oral health services to all families
- Improved care coordination among providers

Family Support & Education

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- Better relationships with CBOs with families built on trust
- Opportunities and resources for parents/caregivers to improve early childhood knowledge and skills
- Support to address increased screen time for children due to the pandemic

Providers say families need:

- Opportunities and resources for parents/caregivers to improve early childhood knowledge and skills
- Support networks for families to help achieve work/life balance
- Bi-lingual or multi-lingual staff to help EL families
- Parent Advocacy groups to empower caregivers
- Provider Cafés to support caregivers
- Access to quality spaces for children to play

System

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- Confidentiality of client information and restricted information sharing with family members (specifically children and their parents)
- Improve the quality and access to services by reducing language barriers
- Discrimination addressed at agencies
- Increased voice and representation in services and decision-making
- Awareness of existing services and supports to help navigate
- Coordinated outreach and marketing to help them access services
- More workshops on a range of topics (related to cost-of-living issues, quality of life, child development, education issues, health, etc.)

Providers say families need:

- Nonprofits to support families and early childhood programs in county
- Funders to consider geography in determining population needs and solutions
- School policies to successfully prevent and remediate bullying and unfair treatment of children
- Local agencies to participate in collaborative groups
- Programs to increase capacity to support and sustain funding
- Program leaders and clients increase capacity to engage in advocacy work
- Family support to navigate complex systems and providers
- County level coordination and advocacy
- Resources for marginalized populations to address inequity in the county
- Awareness of existing services and to feel less stigma associated with accessing services

Housing

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- Access to affordable housing, including families who live in shelters, rent or staying with families or friends
- Housing that is safe and habitable
- The inequity of people of color paying more rent than white people addressed
- Housing stability for people of color

Providers say families need:

- Access to affordable housing

Income & Employment

Parents/Caregivers say they need:

- Opportunities to resume full-time employment
- Support for families who lost income due to the pandemic
- Support for families that lost childcare due to loss of or reduced income
- Job support, including finding a job, learning job skills, learning about career options, and internships
- The inequity of people of color and families with low income disproportionately affected by job losses addressed

Providers say families need:

- Well-paying jobs to meet high living costs
- Changes to the social service eligibility cliff to better support families

The table below summarizes details about the reports that were analyzed by Applied Survey Research.

Report	Year	Methods & Participants	Link
Assessment of Service Needs, Strengths, and Opportunities for Children, Youth, and Families in Pittsburg, California	January 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 informational meetings with stakeholders; 8 key informant interviews; 45 adult survey respondents; 58 youth survey respondents 	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1NrZXTGrucIZmlbOfw09TV0k3zFqLLRAj/view
Listening Sessions from Families Engaged with First 5 Centers by First 5 Contra Costa	November 2022		Not available online, available by request
Contra Costa County Community Network Focus Group Report - Co-creator Focus Group Report	October 2022	35 community residents participated in listening sessions	Not available online
Antioch CHANGE Report by First 5 Contra Costa	June 2022	1,032 residents completed surveys	http://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Antioch-CHANGE-Report-DIGITAL-FINAL-Eng-6.17.22.pdf
2021 COVID-19 Impact Survey Findings by First 5 Contra Costa	2021	533 families responded to survey	http://www.first5coco.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-Covid-19-Report-Full-8.3.21.pdf
ECCCA Community Needs and Opportunities Study by East Contra Costa Community Alliance	January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phone interviews with 10 ECCCA nonprofit leaders Focus group with 4 foundation funders 	https://www.ecccalliance.org/_files/ugd/6a0ae8_b85769930f704796804cbe57702fafea.pdf
Early Childhood Interviews and Listening Sessions by VIVA Strategy & Communications for the Margaret & Dean Lesher Foundation	January 2019	17 service providers in focus groups	https://www.ecccalliance.org/_files/ugd/6a0ae8_2eb9c607c1f14af6a666c109d743abb9.pdf

Citations

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- ² State of California, Department of Finance, E-2. California County Population Estimates and Components of Change by Year — July 1, 2010–2021, December 2021.
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- ⁴ Census/ACS Year 202 of 2016-2020 5-year estimates, Table B16009, Poverty Status by Language Spoken at Home, population 5 years and over.
- ⁵ As cited on kidsdata.org, California Dept. of Finance, Population Estimates and Projections; U.S. Census Bureau, Population and Housing Unit Estimates (Aug. 2021).
- ⁶ As cited on kidsdata.org, California Dept. of Public Health, Birth Statistical Master Files & California Vital Data (Cal-ViDa) Query Tool; California Dept. of Finance, Population Estimates and Projections; CDC WONDER Online Database, Natality Public-Use Data (Feb. 2022).
- ⁷ American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2016-2020) Tables B17001B through I; Ethnicity and Poverty for County Number of individual children under 6 and number in poverty.
- ⁸ American Community Survey 1-year estimates (2016-2021) Table B17024I; Population for whom poverty status is determined for individual children under 6 in Contra Costa County.
- ⁹ Contra Costa County: 2022 Child Care Needs Assessment, Contra Costa County Local Planning Council for Early Care and Education, Contra Costa County Office of Education, 2022.
- ¹⁰ Children Now, Developmental Screening and Well-Child Visit Rates for Children Enrolled in Medi-Cal Managed Care, by Race/Ethnicity, Measurement Year 2020; May 2023.
- ¹¹ As cited on kidsdata.org, Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the National Survey of Children's Health and the American Community Survey (Jan. 2021).
- ¹² First 5 Contra Costa: COVID-19 Impact Survey Findings, Applied Survey Research, 2020.
- ¹³ First 5 Contra Costa: COVID-19 Impact Survey Findings, Applied Survey Research, 2021.
- ¹⁴ Memo to The First 5 Association of California on Tobacco Tax Revenue Projections – California Children and Families First Trust Fund, December 6, 2022. Capitol Matrix Consulting.



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