

The Tasks Ahead:

*Strategic Choices for the Los Angeles County
Children's Planning Council*

The Cornerstone Consulting Group
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Introduction

High achieving organizations find that, to remain vibrant, they have to periodically reinvent themselves. This is not to suggest that these organizations tear away from their roots and discard their essential character. Rarely is such a drastic departure warranted or wise. Instead, successful organizations continually reflect on their history of achievement and build on the lessons they have learned along the way.

As the Los Angeles Children's Planning Council (CPC) completes its first decade, it is taking time to celebrate its accomplishments, acknowledge and learn from its disappointments and consider how, if at all, it should refocus its efforts in the second decade. The CPC is at a critical time in its continued development: it has recently replaced its founding Executive Director, it is about to celebrate a ten year anniversary, new leadership is coming to the fore as some long standing participants have reduced their involvement, the Service Planning Area (SPA) Councils which were created as a part of the CPC are showing growing pains, and many of the ideas that characterized the vision of the CPC – a focus on children; paying attention to outcomes; expanded use of data; service integration; inclusive processes that find room for community voices – have been accepted and become a part of a changed environment.

The Los Angeles CPC is, to our knowledge, the strongest and most influential cross-system vehicle advocating for reform of children's service systems in a major US metropolitan area. With relatively little resources, the presence of the CPC has quietly changed the discussion in Los Angeles County about children. As one key informant for this report noted, "The contribution of CPC has been to change what is considered common sense in county government." Common sense, ten years after the creation of the CPC, is now about service integration, decentralization, data driven planning, a focus on outcomes and inclusive decision-making. While a great deal more needs to be done to implement these ideas into daily practice, most agree that the concepts and ideas that have characterized the CPC are now deeply rooted in Los Angeles County.

The CPC has been largely responsible for a series of important changes in the County environment, helping to move the County:

- From independent County agencies working in isolation to agencies working closely together.
- From isolation from non-County agencies to multi-faceted, deep collaborations.
- From a focus on funder imposed processes to one on outcomes for children.
- From the collection and use of data to meet program requirements/reporting to using data to help make programs more effective
- From thinking and acting at a countywide level, to increased attention to services and interventions that reflect unique geographic circumstances.

Yet, some worry that the CPC may become a “victim of its own successes.” The environment of ten years ago has changed dramatically, in no small measure as a result of CPC efforts, and the precise role of the CPC in the next ten years is not entirely clear. What does the CPC do, now that the ideas it has championed have won the day?

The Cornerstone Consulting Group was asked by the Los Angeles County Children’s Planning Council to develop a document that would assist the CPC in charting its future direction. After ten years, it is possible to see both the important accomplishments of the past and difficult challenges that lie ahead. The CPC has built a reputation as an independent, objective body focused on planning for children’s services in Los Angeles County, and CPC members are committed to making the next ten years as productive and as useful as the first. Cornerstone is assisting the Council in forging this vision by helping to focus CPC member’s attention on strategic choices, challenges ahead, and strategies to overcome them. Our hope is that this report will be helpful to the CPC in framing the discussions and decisions that lie ahead.

Methodology

Cornerstone conducted a review of existing documentation about CPC activities and decisions, including CPC meeting minutes for the past year¹. After secondary data review, Cornerstone designed an interview guide to ask key stakeholders² to talk about their experience with the CPC, focusing on several general areas of discussion: their role on the CPC, CPC accomplishments and challenges, relationships among CPC members, and future goals. With the help of the CPC staff, Cornerstone identified key stakeholders and conducted several in-person and telephone interviews lasting from 30-90 minutes. All questions were open ended. Upon completion of the interviews, Cornerstone looked across the notes to find the themes on which to base this document.

A Brief History³

The Children’s Planning Council (CPC) was created in 1991 by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. The CPC’s principal charge was to coordinate planning and facilitate the increased coordination, integration, and accessibility of services toward improved conditions for Los Angeles County children. The formation of the CPC grew out of a need to focus countywide efforts for children and increase accountability for the millions of dollars spent on those efforts.

The environment within and around county government, pre-CPC, was described by one individual we interviewed in the following way:

- *People from non-county agencies were not welcome in discussions among the "county family" – community representatives were not even considered*

¹ Documents reviewed are listed in the Appendix.

² See Appendix for key informant listing.

³ A timeline of key dates can be found in the Appendix.

- *Every new pot of money was divided according to "the rule of five" (five supervisors, five pots)*
- *DCFS was the way that the county dealt with children's issues—although other departments had some programs, those department heads did not consider themselves as having much of a role in, certainly no accountability to, voices for children.*
- *Department heads competed with each other for Board attention. The heads of the five "major children's departments" (a notion promulgated by CPC) had never even met together – the first time was when CPC's Executive Director asked them all to lunch.*
- *Budget deliberations were conducted one department at a time – so department heads competed with each other for any discretionary funds.*
- *Data was not a key factor for anyone--it was something that lower level staff had to report to a funding source. One Supervisor wanted better information so she called for the establishment of an interagency data group (CASISAB) that encouraged the data folks to talk together, but made no headway at all in connection to their departments.*
- *The level of disconnection between program folks and budget and data folks within the same department was astonishing.*

The CPC was created as a public/private entity in order to maximize the reach and impact of coordinated children's services at both a countywide and community level. The Chair Pro-Tem of the Board of Supervisors was chosen to serve as the CPC chair, and the body of the group consists of public, private, and community representatives.

At its inception, the CPC identified seven principles to guide it in its effort to "transform family and children's services in Los Angeles County:"

1. Focus resources toward the **needs** of children, families, and communities.
2. Expand the use of **outcomes** data on effectiveness and efficiency to enhance services; such data should also be used to allocate resources among programs, agencies, and geographic areas to ensure public accountability for results, without prescribing the means to accomplish desirable outcomes.
3. Address the underlying and systemic **causes** of family and community problems such as poverty, not just their symptoms.
4. Strengthen **service capacity** at all levels through training and technical assistance; assure that staff and leadership are culturally responsive, reflective of neighborhoods, and effective in the changing service delivery environment.
5. Expand support for **family-centered** programs, especially those that address young families, beginning comprehensively at (and before) birth to produce better school-readiness outcomes.

6. Increase **incentives** and rewards **for youth** engaging in positive behavior.
7. Create new incentives for **partnerships**, rather than promoting isolated efforts that compete against each other for funding and staff attention.

The County Board of Supervisors adopted this statement of principles in November 1992. Shortly after its formation, the CPC created a private foundation to employ CPC staff and to manage and raise the public and private dollars funding the council.

The establishment of the CPC Foundation was an early innovation designed to maintain the public/private spirit of the CPC, to be the fiscal intermediary, and employer of the CPC staff. Early on, as a unique and unprecedented public/private entity within the county, the CPC began to experience difficulties with regard to handling and disbursing monies raised, having the authority to prepare contracts for services, and managing reimbursement procedures. Further, the CPC Executive Director's temporary status as an independent contractor to the county was under scrutiny. Without the creation of a new entity, she would eventually have to be hired as a county employee, thereby potentially compromising the CPC's objectivity. The situation raised the question as to whether the CPC could be "mission-driven rather than procedures-driven, within the county structure."

In July 1996, the CPC formed a separate, nonprofit entity – The Children's Planning Council Foundation, Inc. – to accept and manage all private donations. Establishing the CPC Foundation is seen as a positive compromise, a way to keep the CPC closely linked to county government without being fully a part of the government. Importantly, the independent status of the CPC Foundation allowed the CPC to circumvent the sometimes-cumbersome bureaucratic processes within the system. In September 1996 Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws were filed, and the Foundation defined its role as the fundraising arm of the CPC to augment Council work. Initially, all members of the Foundation were CPC members; later additional members with political clout were added, and the Chair of the Executive Committee was designated to serve on the Foundation Board.

In another major innovation – in response to an early finding that county departments used different regions for planning and that this was the single most important barrier to developing an integrated service delivery system – the CPC in 1992 put forth the idea of common points of demarcation in the county for planning and data alignment. To many it seemed that planning children's services at a County level, in a county larger than most states, was too imprecise and glossed over important community differences. In addition, the CPC noted that each department had different service areas, regional structures, and the data collected could not be merged or provide a comprehensive picture.

A workgroup was convened to examine county boundaries from a variety of viewpoints and developed rules for undertaking this examination. It considered several existing systems in the county as lines of demarcation. After close examination of these systems, the CPC found that the Department of Health Services' six regional areas met the majority of their criteria for dividing the county into regions (i.e. kept major geographic and ethnic communities intact; kept cities, police districts, and school districts intact—except for the City of L.A.; and were based on census tracts rather than zip codes). Later, based on the number of children and sheer size of the

county, it was decided to expand from six to eight regions. These eight regions, or service planning areas (SPAs), were approved by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 1993 and were to be used by major county departments for planning, coordination, and data collection.

In 1997, the Board of Supervisors approved the establishment of regional government-community partnerships in each of these eight regions in the county to provide a basis for more focused planning and service delivery. In addition, a ninth council – the American Indian Children’s Council⁴ – was formed to respond to the unique circumstances of this population. These Service Planning Area *Councils* were connected through the CPC to help advance the vision for children in Los Angeles County. SPA Councils built on the idea of sub-County planning/data collection areas and added a community “voice” and coordinating structure that would plan at the SPA regional level and provide community input into county decision-making. Primary activities of SPA Councils include coordinating regional community planning, contributing to priority-setting, and making recommendations about county policy and funding priorities. Representatives from each SPA Council now sit on the CPC.

Currently, the CPC has 43 voting members⁵, three full-time staff, and three volunteer subcommittees. Subcommittees are charged with specific tasks: the SPA Councils Operations Subcommittee works day to day with the SPA regional councils; the Data Analysis and Technical Assistance (DATA) Committee focuses on coordinating and improving data on children and families, and the Executive Committee handles the specifics of major CPC decisions and actions in between CPC meetings.

By the mid 1990’s the CPC had begun an array of efforts designed to clarify and enhance existing children and family planning activities. CPC’s work on several fronts began to cohesively outline a future plan for Los Angeles County, including defining outcomes and directions for child well-being; matching data across agency, area, and community; holding discussion about community planning; and modeling collaborative relationships. When TANF dollars became available in 1997, Los Angeles County was poised to undertake systemic action. At the same time, the Long-Term Family Self Sufficiency plan provided a major opportunity for the CPC to put their wealth of data resources to the test, especially within the recently created SPA Councils. Long Term Self Sufficiency funds were used to help support SPA Council activities and the County used the SPA Councils to help do community planning. The very existence of SPA Councils made a change in how the county worked with communities.

The CPC’s Accomplishments

The key accomplishments of the CPC are well documented⁶. The CPC began by defining a vision statement for Children in Los Angeles County. This vision – *Los Angeles County children should reach adulthood having experienced a safe, healthy, and nurturing childhood which prepares them to become responsible and contributing members of the community* –

⁴ For purposes of this report, reference to SPA Councils includes the American Indian Children’s Council

⁵ See Appendix for membership roster

⁶ Documents such as *CPC Firsts*, *The CPC Story*, and *Laying the Groundwork for Change* do an excellent job of chronicling the CPC story.

continues to direct the work of both the CPC and the SPA Councils, and guides the coordination of children's services countywide. Since then, the CPC has worked on laying the foundation for countywide collaboration, organization, and integration around priorities for children. Essential building blocks of CPC's efforts have been:

- Coordinated and focused data collection
- The idea that data should drive planning
- The establishment of common planning areas
- Increased collaboration between county agencies and between the county and the community
- An analysis of county budgets and spending for children
- Increased political awareness of the needs of children in Los Angeles County

Stakeholders interviewed for this report showed remarkable consensus around the accomplishments of the CPC in the past ten years. There was very little disagreement about what has been important in the work of the CPC, and then only in terms of relative emphasis.

Frequently, we heard that the CPC was responsible for a greatly increased level of attention to children's issues in the County, particularly in those departments not solely devoted to children's services. Over and over, we heard that the CPC has grown in credibility through their role as data collector and communicator, as liaison between county government departments and between county government and the community. The CPC is seen as the "incubator for new ideas and as catalyst for change." "The CPC," one key informant noted "is the place people turn for policy directions." Another suggested that "the main accomplishment has been the presence of dialogue around changing systems in the county for services."

With the ability to focus on clarifying the roles of county and community in making the vision for children tangible, CPC has been a catalyst, a facilitator, and a strategic thinking body for children's issues in Los Angeles County. The work on several important efforts has helped clarify the concepts of community planning in order to make them operational. For example,

- The CPC has lead efforts to define outcomes through five common outcome measures⁷ and indicators for children. This provided a tool that helped participants, across department lines, to see how their work was linked. The CPC's work supported the **Children's ScoreCard**, produced every two years.
- The CPC's work with county data helped create a template for looking at available county data and matching up systems of information. The formation of the **Data Partnership for Children and Families** will be a key resource to continue the focus on data-based planning.
- The CPC's work to define communities in planning services for children led to the development of **eight regional service areas**, and outlined the structure for starting these SPA councils and the American Indian Children's Council (AICC).

⁷ The 5 measures are: Good Health; Safety and Survival; Social and Emotional Well-Being; Economic Well-Being; and Education and Workforce Readiness.

- The CPC brought several county department decision-makers and private sector organizations together to create networks of resources throughout the county, leading to the formulation of **the county's first action plan** for children, youth, and families.
- The CPC's work analyzing county expenditures for children has led to the creation of the **Children's Budget**, and sets the stage for linking the budget to county performance and outcome measures.
- The CPC has spurred **continued collaboration** among county agencies and community partners. Such collaborative efforts have helped build the foundation for the county's recent **service integration** effort.
- The CPC's efforts to involve elected officials in the membership and processes of the council have brought **continued policy attention** to children's issues in the County.
- SPA Councils have been successful in establishing a **dialogue** between public and community agencies, thus changing the way communication is handled.

These efforts have established the credibility of the CPC, and helped to pave the way for future actions and a greater impact of efforts for children in Los Angeles County.

One individual noted that it is an accomplishment that the CPC has lasted a decade, as so often projects of this sort lose prominence and wither away after a splashy start. The CPC stayed broad in scope, resisting the temptation to get caught up in important but narrow projects and issues. CPC has modeled a framework for candid discussion between county and community, and has withstood outside scrutiny by living up to the task of being an objective, yet committed partner to children's issues countywide. It has developed into the broker between government, community and neighborhood – and instilled the feeling that community could shape policy, while helping government act more like a partner. Beyond simply lasting, the CPC continues to grow and evolve and remains a vital and influential force.

Key Components of CPC Success

Given the broad consensus that the CPC has had a tremendous positive impact on the children's services system in Los Angeles County, and promises to have an even greater impact in the future, what can be said about what was learned? What did the CPC do right that contributed to its effectiveness? Or, as we put it in our interviews, what would you tell a friend from another city, about to engage in a CPC-like enterprise, to do or not do?

Key informants in this process noted a number of important components to the CPC success:

1. The CPC effort has been “vision driven”

From the beginning CPC leadership has utilized guiding principles to ground its work and to remain consistent in its responses to the many issues and events of the last ten years. The vision, about what constitutes high quality children’s services and the role the CPC could play to improve them, is contained in the still relevant principles noted above.

2. Data has consistently been the centerpiece of the CPC’s work

Data has been at the heart of the CPC effort in a number of ways. First, the CPC established credibility by producing useful reports. Nothing enhanced the CPC’s standing more than its consistent production and use of data. Second, it began to model the collaborative behavior it espoused by sharing the data widely – open policies around data helped keep barriers down – all had access to it. One key informant noted “The CPC has generated more sharing of information and making information more public than in the past.” Not only did the CPC share data, it encouraged others to do so as well. Third, the focus on data kept the CPC “fact based” – it consistently used data to support its recommendations.

3. The CPC has enjoyed broad political support

A key to the CPC’s ongoing success, frequently noted, was the decision to rotate the chairmanship of the CPC, in annual terms. Each year the Pro Tem of the County Board of Supervisors, i.e. next year’s Board Chair, serves a term as Chair of the CPC. This structure has fostered broad support, has kept the CPC from becoming overly associated with any single Board member, and has assured that incoming County Board Chairs always have children’s issues and the CPC agenda freshly in their minds. At this time all of the Board members have chaired the CPC, all twice now. Rather than shy away from the political process, the CPC has recognized its importance in a reform effort and has embraced it.

4. The CPC has maintained a measure of independence

While closely associated with County government, and housed in the County administrative building, the CPC is in fact a public-private partnership. The creation of the Children’s Planning Council Foundation, which employs CPC staff, receives and disburses public and private funds, allows the CPC a sense of neutrality and autonomy, and some distance and objectivity. The Foundation structure also allows the CPC to move quickly to solicit funds, engage subcontractors and employ staff, avoiding the bureaucracy inherent in an enormous local government structure.

5. The CPC has remained focused on the big picture

From the beginning the CPC has been seen as a “picture” forum, looking at issues such as the budget process, data collection, service integration, community involvement. It has stayed focused on broad issues of planning, and has resisted the temptation to focus on important, although narrower, issues. It has, in addition, remained steadfastly focused on big changes in mainstream systems, rather than pilot projects and efforts impacting only a relative handful of children and families.

6. The CPC has recognized the importance of relationships

A key factor in the CPC effort has been developing and nurturing trusting relationships among the many players. CPC sought to create a culture of learning, trust, collaboration, and shared vision in which, as one key informant put it, “you leave your ego at the door.” Civility was built into the process, a non-critical atmosphere in which participants agreed to disagree and did not embarrass one another. This helped to create an atmosphere in which disparate interests and individuals could share the process.

A good deal of attention was paid to interpersonal issues, i.e. whether people were feeling left out, whether folks got a turn to speak. Participants engaged the CPC at a wide range of levels of involvement – some simply attended meetings while others, on a volunteer basis, pitched in at what seems to have been a near full time level. Yet the attempt to keep everyone on board, to bring everyone up to date, was seen as important and major time investments were made in keeping the participants together.

As we discuss later, some, in retrospect, now feel that the emphasis on civility, on getting along, may have come at the expense of engaging hard questions and fighting them through to agreed upon conclusions and compromises. But most agree that, certainly in the early years, the emphasis on consensus and team building was crucial to CPC survival and success.

7. The CPC stayed small

Through most of its early history the CPC amounted to “two women in the basement,” an intentionally under-staffed effort which, although tackling huge issues in a huge County, was itself small. The CPC operated in what has been described by insiders as a “stealth” mode, flying beneath the radar, a non-threatening, non-competing, non-ambitious, body whose staff and volunteer members would come to any meeting and offer endless help. This operating mode had a number of consequences, the most obvious being that the organizations who were the subject of the reform effort – county departments – did not become defensive, or as defensive, as is seen in most reform or service integration efforts elsewhere. In addition, the CPC, lacking staff, needed to turn to departments for deployed staff on projects, to depend on volunteers representing numerous segments of the community, to get things done. While it might have been easier to have a larger budget and staff to do the work, CPC leadership believed that the lean and mean style would ultimately produce broader buy-in to the CPC’s underlying principles.

As one major player put it, “the CPC’s function was to be the incubator and catalyst for ideas – it was never the idea to be a power player or empire builder.”

Knowing the lessons of the past can help, but cannot fully answer the questions that the future, in a changed environment, poses. As the CPC moves forward, new lessons, for new times, will emerge.

The Tasks Ahead

When asked about the CPC's future, most informants suggested, in effect, that the CPC do "more of the same, but differently." Most saw the CPC as remaining dedicated to achieving the same goals, but saw a need for new or refined strategies. The perceived need for different approaches arises not because earlier strategies are perceived to have failed. To the contrary, most see the need for change as arising out of a changed environment, changed – improved – to no small degree by the successes of the CPC in its first ten years.

One key informant noted that "people look at the CPC through their own lenses" and we found this to be true. For some the CPC is, or should be, a whistle-blower, a watchdog, identifying problems and calling the hard questions while letting the chips fall where they may. For others the CPC is a more passive vehicle for communication among organizations and institutions seeking to improve services. Still others see the CPC as creating the opportunity for grassroots voices to be heard, an agent for inclusiveness, community empowerment, and more democratic decision-making. For a large number of actors the CPC is a voice for objective, data driven decision-making, and is the primary source for non-biased information about Los Angeles children and children's services.

It is a credit to the CPC that it is perceived as having the capability and credibility to accomplish any of these things, much less all of them at the same time. But the CPC cannot, of course, be all things to all people and appearing to be so will certainly lead to disappointment, blaming, and eventual failure.

Instead, the CPC now faces a numbers of strategic choices. The choices it makes – how it positions itself; what issues it focuses on; how it structures its ongoing work – will to a large extent determine the course of the next ten years. The second ten-year paper is being written now. A number of major themes, issues and choices emerged that bear on the future of the CPC. Our discussion will focus on what we have categorized as seven, admittedly overlapping, primary issues:

1. The future role of the CPC
2. Positioning the CPC
3. New challenges
4. The future of SPA Councils
5. Resources, and the price of getting them
6. Representation
7. Leadership

1. The future role of the CPC

“More of the same, but different...” means both building on earlier successes and responding to changes in the environment. In reports done thus far by the CPC that speak to the future⁸ and in our interviews we heard a great many valuable insights and sound suggestions about how and where to steer the CPC in the 21st century.

Key informants frequently noted that many of the ideas encouraged by the CPC in the early 1990’s are now firmly rooted in the discussions and plans of Los Angeles County. The County has moved from a “growing awareness and consideration” stage in areas like service integration and focusing on outcomes to an “implementation” stage. New organizational structures at the County level – the Service Integration Branch, increasing attention to data issues, the IOG, the New Directions Task Force and others – are now playing a prominent role in moving the service integration and service reform agendas.

This suggests a new course for the CPC as well, moving from the promoter of new ideas to a new role, or set of roles, that should be carefully considered and clearly defined. What does an advocacy group do after its ideas have won the day? Should the CPC be a full participant in implementation activities or take a step back and play the role of helpful critic? Should the CPC focus its attention on new and different issues impacting the lives of children? Should the CPC, as some suggest, take on a more aggressive advocacy role?

Most of the current and former participants we spoke with see the CPC continuing to play the delicate role of supporting the County’s ongoing work from the stance of a not-quite insider. One key informant said “It is CPC’s job to raise the issues and keep an eye on the big picture.” A typical view was that “The next stage for CPC should be to continue what they’re doing, as the organizer, advocate, and planner for children – but not the doer. They should continue to state what’s happening around children and families, inform what data mean, and build connections with the community.”

The balance between “planning” and “doing” was on the minds of several participants. One expressed the need for balance by saying “CPC’s future role has to be about advocacy, negotiation, and mediation. Doing only planning will take them away from their strength. The moment they do services, however, it’s over.”

Some of the “planning versus doing” discussion was timely, coming at a moment when the CPC was adopting plans to focus attention on the area of “school readiness and school success.” While most favor this course, there is some wariness that a sharpened focus will carry dangers. Among the concerns expressed were “The CPC shouldn’t be responsible for an issue – their role is to collaborate and encourage” and “the CPC is vulnerable if they embrace something they don’t have control over – they are picking a direction, not a measurable indicator.” Yet, in the minds of others, the school readiness issue provides a valuable opportunity to demonstrate measurable change and to strengthen the ties between the many CPC constituents. Focusing on

⁸ See the summary of the June, 1999 Retreat, The CPC Story, and others.

one issue that cuts across all five outcomes gives CPC the opportunity to build on its work and demonstrate the power of joint, coordinated action and the opportunity to mobilize new and existing partners on an issue that is most present in the minds of the public.

The distinctions between these positions are subtle, complex, and typical of the difficult strategic and communications challenges before the CPC as it moves into its second decade.

2. Positioning the CPC

The CPC has generally been seen as a communications and planning bridge between County government and the larger community. As a public-private partnership it has the ability to reach out to the business community, to municipalities, to grassroots groups, faith based groups, the non-profit sector, schools, and others.

Some suggest, however, that the CPC has tended to be too much an insider in County matters, too defined by County events and unable, due to its reliance on trust, relationships and goodwill, to be a strong critic of County policy or performance. Several interviewees saw the CPC trading advocacy for access. One noted that “The CPC has not taken an advocacy role on some issues – county politics influence the actions of the council.” Another suggested that “CPC’s affiliation with the county will help them get things done, but they may be too enmeshed. Now inside the system, it becomes hard to challenge it – it’s a very delicate balancing act.”

On the other end of the spectrum, some County staff see CPC-related activities at the SPA Council level as not well enough aligned with the realities of County government. “The SPA Councils were envisioned to play a substantive role in achieving changes, but they haven’t done that. They haven’t been the locus of any decisions or recommendations within the county government.” SPA Council representatives see a disconnect from a different vantage point. “SPA Councils are not often invited into any kind of decision-making process until the last minute, when county needs input from the community – they get the “blessing” of the SPA Council and then go on about their business.”

We see the intermediary role the CPC plays as both difficult and important. If some County representatives see the CPC process as too focused on SPA Councils and SPA Councils not enough geared to the County process, and some in SPA Councils see the CPC as too much a creature of the County, then it may well be that the CPC is positioned just right. Close enough to County to have an influence, and close enough to community to help serve as a bridge.

But that is not an easy position to maintain, and as the County moves from planning to implementation it may become even more difficult. Implementation discussions will no longer be about broad directions but rather about plans that say how, and how much, and when. These issues will infringe on what are historically individual department prerogatives. “The CPC,” one insider noted, “will have to figure out how not to get chewed up by either the county or community.”

3. New challenges

In addition to adapting its role to a changing set of County and community realities, the CPC faces a number of exciting challenges and opportunities. Many call for the CPC to move in new directions that will broaden and deepen the scope of CPC activities and enhance the opportunity for even greater influence. Included on the list of “things to do in the next decade” are:

Outreach and relationship building

Many interviewees felt that, while the CPC has had significant successes in reaching out and bringing new voices into the children’s services discussions, much more needs to be done. Specifically noted was the importance of building stronger ties to municipal governments, universities, public schools and school systems, the business community, and expanding the CPC’s racial/ethnic membership. In addition, many felt that, although the creation of the SPA Councils represented a major step forward, there still remains much to be done to bring residents, youth, and others to the table(s) in an ever-widening discussion.

Impacting the County budget

Several key informants expressed the hope that, in its second decade, the CPC would build on its reputation and accomplishments around data and outcomes, and its development of the Children’s Budget, and merge those two interests. “It’s time for data investment to have a payoff,” one noted, while another suggested that the job ahead was “Linking budget to outcomes – showing effectiveness, moving resources – and adding a rational component to a series of political decisions. The ideology of this has been bought – it’s just seeing how it’s implemented.”

Impacting practice

Thus far, most would agree, the impact of the CPC has been felt largely at policy and administrative levels. Translating the concepts of service integration, a focus on outcomes, and other CPC themes into the day-to-day practice of social workers, probation officers, nurses, teachers and others who work with children and families is seen as a the next order of business. “Change in practice has not really happened yet – the CPC didn’t work at multiple levels simultaneously, and therefore, did not get to the front line – the agencies didn’t get there either. It took long enough just to get people talking and involved.”

While the bulk of the work to go from policy to practice will be borne by the County agencies and the networks of service deliverers, the CPC can play an important role in spearheading efforts to identify training needs, best practices, and resources, across departments and disciplines. Most importantly, perhaps, the CPC can be an articulate and consistent voice for the need to bring about changes in practice. As one individual expressed it: “The philosophical question is: How does this (planning) process make it better for kids? CPC has a significant role to play in this question, and it must be answered – to what extent has the council increased the coordination of services?”

Policy advocacy

While county government plays an enormously important role in service delivery in California, the county can only do so much. State and federal laws, regulations, reporting processes, and funding structures all play a role in either allowing or constraining county efforts to improve the effectiveness of services and the outcomes that result.

Several interviewees felt that a focus on state and federal policies has been a missing part of the CPC's reform agenda. Identifying barriers and suggesting legislative, administrative, and regulatory solutions is seen as a valuable contribution. A concerted effort, in tandem with the County's existing policy advocacy efforts, and working through Los Angeles County's elected representatives, might have a powerful impact on what can be done locally.

Training and sharing lessons learned

Part of CPC's role in the future depends on the successful translation of lessons learned from the last decade. This challenge must be accomplished on several levels – communication one-to-one across SPA Councils, communication between CPC and SPA Council members, and further dialogue to community from both CPC and SPA Councils. A strategy addressing ongoing, timely, and effective communication can go a long way toward building personal relationships among concerned parties and will reduce reinventing the wheel.

In addition, the various County departments face substantial training challenges as they move to implement new service delivery strategies that are built on the principles of service integration, outcome orientation, and other CPC inspired principles. Translating those principles into day-to-day practice, and preparing staff to operate in new ways, is a major challenge.

4. The future of SPA Councils

While the CPC was created in 1991, service planning areas were not created until 1992, and SPA Councils were not created until 1996. More than anything else, the people we interviewed wanted to talk about the SPA Councils. For some, the SPA Councils represent the crown jewel of the CPC's history and future, for others they are the Achilles heel. For many, the SPA Councils represent both the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity for the CPC.

The SPA Councils' major objective was to strengthen and unite area communities in the design and support of services for children youth and families. This infrastructure was conceived of as the intermediary link between countywide and local community planning. Guidelines for the creation of the SPA Councils intended the SPA Councils to assume major responsibility for comprehensive community planning for children, youth, and families. It was hoped this structure could be the forum where communities came together to define what needed to be done, and develop solutions. Though there was substantial skepticism at first about feasibility and implementation of the SPA Councils, there was great hope that this structure could produce significant benefit for both county and community.

Currently, SPA Councils are very much on people's mind for a number of reasons. For some, they are the future – questions about the next ten years quickly elicited responses about the further development of vehicles for community input and a process of community-level decision making. While the accomplishments of the first ten years are most often described by the impact of the CPC *inside* County government, for many the next ten years are seen as the time for building capacity in communities. Some go so far as to define the future of the CPC in terms of the support role it can play for the SPA Councils. "CPC's ongoing work will be the need to provide TA to SPA Councils and be the glue that holds the system of councils together." There is a wide range of ideas about *how* to increase the effectiveness of the SPA Councils, but near uniformity about their importance.

In addition, however, SPA Councils frequently came up because the relationship between some SPA Councils and the larger CPC and its staff has in recent months become increasingly contentious. Some see the CPC as bending over backwards and trying to accommodate the needs and views of SPA council Conveners, only to be met with hostility and mistrust. Others see the CPC as unnecessarily attempting to control the SPA Councils, as being too close to the County in its attempt to bridge between County and Community. Many likened the relationship between the CPC and some SPA Councils to the power struggles often experienced by parents of adolescents. As one SPA Council member put it, "we are now teenagers, and therefore, have different expectations and needs – we have become more feisty and particular over time."

For some, that feistiness translates into a circumstance described as "negative and vocal leaders have taken control, usually around mis-communicated perceptions" and "The CPC became the complaint branch for the county. For the last 6-12 months, meetings have been disruptive and the whole process has taken a negative tone."

While there are a number of views on what is at the heart of the growing incivility, most agree that the problems, although localized in only some of the SPA Councils, are serious, are having a corrosive impact on relationships, and may threaten the future of both the SPA Councils and the CPC itself if not effectively addressed. One key informant expressed the concern that "The SPA Councils are going belly-up, quickly." Another suggested that "The CPC has made a decision to invest in SPA Councils – losing their support would be fatal, and unkept promises would make CPC fail."

Our sense is that while personalities and personal styles are playing a role, the key underlying issue is that, at this point in the development of the CPC and the SPA Councils, expectations for the future are not clear and agreed on. It is not just a matter of two points of view, one held by CPC leaders and another held by the SPA Council leadership. To the contrary, there are numerous visions of the SPA Councils' future.

We believe the current tensions are to be expected and can be worked through. The differences noted are among people who have a common set of core beliefs about the tremendous importance of improved services for children and families, about the importance of accountability for results, and about the vital role a sub-County entity can play in making improvements. The devil, as always, is in the details.

As we talked with individuals associated with the CPC, we identified some areas in which visions of the SPA Council future do not yet quite line up. These, we believe, need to be the subject of ongoing discussion. They are complex issues, not to be decided quickly or easily, and perhaps a first step would be to assess whether this list contains the right questions.

- **Who should the SPA Councils represent?** For some, there is an over-representation of service providers in the SPA processes. “The people running the SPA Councils are service providers, therefore, they make the meetings and activities accessible to them – greater involvement from community, especially around decision-making, is simply not happening.” Others note that it is unrealistic to expect grassroots involvement in SPA areas that in some cases are the size of states.
- **The size of SPA Councils.** Nearly everyone agrees that the SPA areas are too large for some purposes and certainly too large for grassroots mobilization. SPAs include, in some instances, very disparate communities and neighborhoods and focusing below the SPA level is important. For many, the solution lies in part with the SPA Councils reaching out to, and forming alliances with, already existing groups in the SPA area. As one person noted – “the challenge is not sitting around one table, but in linking the tables.”
- **The extent of SPA Council autonomy.** How much will/should the CPC direct the growth and direction of SPA Councils? “This has been an issue all along. The issue of balance has always been a challenge – how do you respect an empowered community vs. making the vision of CPC with a focused agenda?”
- **How much variability among SPA Councils?** How different can/should SPA Councils be in terms of focus, structure, role, and expectations? How much difference is tolerable and beneficial? Should there be standards for SPA Council performance? “There needs to be a SPA Council capacity checklist that is objective and administered once a year.” “SPA Councils are all at different levels of skill and understanding about the concepts – and they have different agendas.”
- **Balancing planning and action.** As one key informant noted, “Another reality of community involvement is that often community wants to see action right away from the councils. They are not patient with the process that change often takes, especially policy changes.”
- **Resources over the long term.** How will funding for SPA Council activities work – will funds flow from CPC? Will SPA Councils be encouraged to seek independent funding? What are the resources needed for a successful SPA Council? Most agree that additional staffing is needed, but how much, with what backgrounds, to perform what duties?
- **The SPA Councils as advocates for change.** To what extent is it the role of SPA Councils to be activist advocates for change? What implications does an advocacy role, particularly an aggressive one, have for membership, funding, and autonomy issues above?

- **The SPA Councils and the County.** How can the SPA Councils best contribute to the County’s efforts to integrate and decentralize services? “Decentralization is taking place in county departments, and they need assistance about how to get SPA Councils in there to plan, advise, and participate in this process.” One suggestion for more effective integration of SPA Council and County activities has been the creation of an IOG at the SPA level as a step towards building decision-making capacity at the regional level.
- **SPA Council Accountability.** Now that the SPA Councils are underway, accountability – to whom and for what – is a critical consideration. As the process of establishing SPA Councils has unfolded, both the CPC and the SPA Councils must revisit their original goals and objectives in order to get clear about SPA Council accountability.

SPA Councils are seen by nearly all as a valuable part of the system reform picture and many are anxious to see them fulfill their potential as soon as possible. Some are impatient with the progress made to date. One key informant suggested that “There has to be a critical look at the role of the SPA Councils, and restructuring might be needed.”

In our view these young and somewhat fragile structures are today carrying the weight of too many goals, at least at this early time in their development. The CPC’s role, as we see it, is to manage the expectations around the contribution of SPA Councils, to lower the short-term demands while helping to clarify the longer-term vision.

5. Resources, and the price of getting them

As noted earlier, the CPC grew up as a small, low budget effort. The belief today, which we share, is that the explosion of interest in CPC ideas, the opportunity to play an important role in County implementation planning, and the growth and development of SPA Councils all demand expanded resources. Having made this much progress, the CPC cannot afford to remain as small as in the past.

An increased focus on fund raising is understood by CPC members to be a necessary evil and it is widely recognized that becoming a larger, better funded effort is not without costs. Some note that the “stealth” approach of the early CPC, seeking to influence events in a below the radar not-threatening fashion will become more difficult, if not impossible, as the CPC grows. “When the time comes to raise more money, then the CPC becomes more visible.”

Others note that the very process of fund raising can be time consuming and stressful, and the need to replace soft money to maintain a funding and staffing level may lure the CPC in directions that would be unwise. The CPC is committed to keeping public and private funding about equal, thus lending further difficulty to the fundraising process.

Several key informants noted the historic difficulty of raising money for planning activities. “Getting continuing funding to support their mission will be difficult in the atmosphere of instant measurable results. Real processes work more slowly.” We agree, and in a recent report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation on sustaining community efforts, we noted that “the very things that

everyone says you need to build to have a strong, community led effort – will, collaboration, data, strategic planning, grassroots support, organizational and individual capacity – are often the things that nobody wants to fund.”

Nonetheless, additional resources are needed and efforts are underway to raise funds. In the longer term, some suggest that the creation of an endowment to support the CPC would be ideal.

6. Representation

At both the CPC and SPA Council levels the CPC effort leans heavily on the idea of “representation,” i.e. the concept that designated individuals can effectively represent agencies, institutions, ethnic groups, and professional disciplines. The effort to assure broad representation of groups and points of view has been a strength of the CPC and has served it well.

In the future, however, some involved with the CPC see a need to foster increased participation and more involved membership. Others worry about how, as a practical matter, individuals can provide effective representation for an ethnic group or other sector of the community. This is not to suggest moving away from a representation model, but rather to suggest exploration of ways that the model might be strengthened, perhaps through increased ties with constituent organizations.

At the SPA Council level, as noted above, many see an absence of non-provider representation. “The SPA Councils are heavily networked, and it is hard for folks to break into them. There are legitimacy issues – community activists vs. community member vs. service provider.” Effective mobilization strategies, and increased linkage to already existing groups, may hold part of the answer.

7. Leadership

Studies of successful reform efforts invariably note the critical importance of dedicated, even inspired leadership. As is so clearly the case in Los Angeles County, these success stories are not only about ideas, policies, and resources. More than anything else they are about people. The many interviews we conducted are peppered with names of key individuals who have made invaluable contributions, as well as those who have volunteered their time and effort.

Inevitably, however, as is the case for the CPC, leaders move on and changed circumstances bring forth new leaders and new leadership challenges. The CPC has already managed a change in executive leadership early in 2000. But key informants stress that the CPC was never a one-person operation. To the contrary, many ascribed the progress of the CPC to the hard work, steadfastness, and sound decision making of a core of leaders that have made the CPC what it is today.

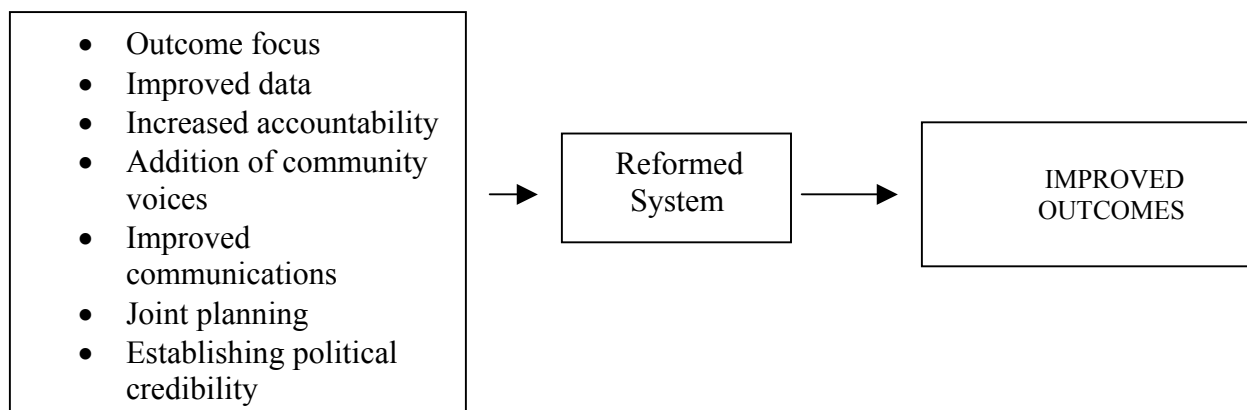
The CPC will need to find ways to continue to offer leadership opportunities, and preparation for leadership, to individuals coming from a range of institutional bases and bringing a variety of

skills. To manage the natural rotation of leadership, while cultivating/mentoring future leaders and, some suggest, involving youth. Balancing volunteer leadership with an anticipated increase in staff presence will complicate this challenge. So, too, will the added presence of municipal, school system and business interests, each with different perspectives and each needing a voice at the table. Attracting new leadership and weaving those individuals in with longstanding members, in ways that do not result in disruption will present an ongoing challenge.

8. Re-committing to a theory of change

As noted, the CPC effort has been vision driven from the beginning, built on the belief that the service system could be transformed and that transforming the system would result in better lives for the children of LA County.

The underlying “theory of change” for the CPC is that improvements in the service delivery system would result in improved outcomes for children. Visually, the theory might look something like the following:



As the CPC enters its next decade we believe it would be valuable to review the underlying assumptions that drove the first ten years and to consider:

- Whether the assumptions and beliefs are still believed to be valid or need revision.
- What has been learned about the level of change needed to produce a “reformed system.”
- What other issues, beyond service system reform, might impact on child and family well-being, and whether the CPC should have a role in addressing these.

One key informant suggested a “conducting lessons learned exercise once a year and utilizing those data to move forward.” While that sort of process, that frequently, might be difficult to manage, a reflective process at this juncture, resulting in a re-commitment to basic principles and refined strategies seems to us to be a valuable step towards a successful second decade.

Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council Timeline – Decisions, Formations, Actions

Pre-1990 committees: Los Angeles Roundtable for Children, The Los Angeles 2000 Partnership

- 1990 Blue Ribbon Committee recommends the formation of a public/private children's planning and coordination body. Sets mission, structure, governance and staffing.
- 1991 Board of Supervisors approves the creation of the Children's Planning Council
- 1992 CPC Vision statement created and approved
"Who Are the Children of Los Angeles?" Report
- 1993 CPC and Los Angeles Roundtable for Children outline outcome measures for children's score card
"How Are the Children?" Report
Eight Service Planning Areas Report
Formation of Inter-Ethnic Children's Council
- 1994 "Collaboratives for Children" Report
First Children's Score Card (produced jointly with United Way of Greater Los Angeles)
- 1995 "Defining Communities" Report – served as a framework for community planning and profiles
First Data Match Report
- 1996 CPC Foundation established
SPA Implementation proposed
Community Conditions for Children Score Card
Second Children's Score Card (by SPA and Countywide)
Profiles of Los Angeles County Report
Ethnic Community Profiles Report
Youth Participation and Youth networks in Los Angeles County Report
- 1997 Board of Supervisors approves the Service Planning Area Councils
Service Planning Area Councils established
Implementation of Welfare Reform
- 1998 Third Children's Score Card ((by SPA and Countywide)
"Laying the Groundwork for Change" Report – Los Angeles County's first action plan for children, youth and families
Board of Supervisors approves American Indian Children's Council
- 1999 Children's 20-Year Budget document created – 1980-1999
Proposition 10 Commission created
New Directions Task Force created

- 2000 Long Term Family Self-Sufficiency plan for supporting SPA Council infrastructure
Implementation Plan for Data Partnership for Children and Families created
Board of Supervisors creates Policy Roundtable for Child Care
Reflections on Collaborative Planning Report drafted
First Multi-Ethnic Children's ScoreCard created and released
- 2001 CPC establishes one common priority area of child well-being
CPC evaluates the system of SPA Councils
County's Strategic Plan includes section on Child and Family Well-Being; aligns
services and budgets to five outcome areas
CPC adopts new logo and approves communication plan
CPC publishes *Telling It As They See It: What Families Say About Receiving Services
from Multiple Agencies* (English, Spanish, and Vietnamese)
CPC reworks SPA Council Guidelines
Service Integration initiative begun
CPC/Prop 10/County partnership on Family Resource Centers
CPC Celebrates 10 Year Anniversary

Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council

Zev Yaroslavsky, Chair, Chair Pro Tem, Board of Supervisors
Yolie Flores Aguilar, Executive Director

Lauraine Barber, SPA 8 (South Bay/Harbor)
Anita M. Bock, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Honorable Bill Bogaard, League of California Cities
Barbara M. Boudreaux, Second Supervisorial District
Samuel Q. Chan, Ph.D., Asian Pacific Islander Community
Rose L. Clark, Ph.D., American Indian Community
Honorable Steve Cooley, District Attorney
Rodney E. Cooper, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation
Teresa A. DeCrescenzo, MSW, Third Supervisorial District
Nefertiti Edwards, Youth Representative
Mark Finucane, Director, Department of Health Services
Dorothy Fleisher, Southern California Association for Philanthropy
David W. Fleming, Business Community Representative
Carmella S. Franco, Ed.D., Los Angeles County Office of Education
Steven J. Golightly, Interim Director, Department of Public Social Services
D. Joy Gould, SPA 7 (East)
Bong Hwan Kim, City of Los Angeles, Commission for Children, Youth, and Their Families
Ellenor Hodson, SPA 3 (San Gabriel)
Donald W. Ingwerson, Ed.D., Superintendent, Los Angeles County Office of Education
David E. Janssen, Chief Administrative Officer
Loretta Jones, SPA 6 (South)
Rebecca Kilburn, Policy Roundtable for Child Care
Linda Lewis, Association of Children's Services Agencies
Jacquelyn McCroskey, DSW, Los Angeles Roundtable for Children
Sara Jimenez McSweyn, LCSW, SPA 4 (Metro)
David Myers, SPA 1 (Antelope Valley)
Honorable Michael Nash, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Court
Jose Orozco-Garcio, Youth Representative
Joy Picus, Board of Directors, United Way of Greater Los Angeles
Wendy Romano, Acting County Librarian
Governor Roy Romer, Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District
Liz Seipel, SPA 2 (San Fernando)
Richard Shumsky, Chief Probation Officer
Nina Aguayo Sorkin, Commission for Children and Families
Marvin J. Southard, DSW, Director, Department of Mental Health
Beatriz Olvera Stotzer, Latino Community
Nancy Tallerino, SPA 5 (West)
Janet Teague, Fourth Supervisorial District
Deanne Tilton, ICAN Policy Committee
Karen J. Williams, Ph.D., African American Community
Phillip L. Williams, Board of Directors, Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce
Vacant, First Supervisorial District
Vacant, Fifth Supervisorial District

Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council

Key Informant Interviews and Phone Interviews

In-person Interviews

Yolie Flores Aguilar
Sam Chan
Sally Coughlin
Elizabeth Diaz
David Fleming
Sid Gardner
Loretta Jones
Linda Lewis
Jacquelyn McCroskey
Sara McSweyn
Vivian Rescalvo
Jennifer Roth
Cecilia Sandoval
Sharon Watson
Toni Yaffe

Phone Interviews

Phil Ansell
Brian Cahill
Laura Escobedo
John Hatakeyama
Marge Nichols
John Ott

APPENDIX

Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council Documents Reviewed, listed in chronological order (where possible):

"The CPC Approach" Handout, "The CPC Story" Handout

County of Los Angeles Five Year Strategic Plan Goals and Strategies – Departmental Assignment Matrix

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CPC/AICC/SPA Councils Working Convention, Results of Discussions, **June 7, 2000**.

Evaluation of the Process to Establish The Service Planning Area Councils (for the period 11/97 – 4/00) Results, **July 2000**.

Los Angeles County System of Planning Councils – *Improving Conditions for Children, Youth, and their Families Work Session with CPC, AIC/SPA Councils, and IOG: Proposed Recommendations and Feedback*, August 2000, and Summary of Recommendations. **September 1, 2000**.

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Los Angeles County Service Integration Action Plan for Children and Families, **February 7, 2001**.

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