

## Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits

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February 1, 2006

FIRST 5 Commission  
4000 Moorpark Ave Suite 200  
San Jose, CA 95117

Dear Commissioners

The Silicon Valley Council of Nonprofits is the voice for over 185 nonprofit agencies in our community. Over the last couple of months we have become keenly aware of agency concerns regarding the FIRST 5 RFQ application and process.

SVCN believes that it is important that the Commission understands some of the underlying problems and concerns that led to our meetings with FIRST 5 staff. Over 30 nonprofits have contacted SVCN either through lengthy emails, phone calls or meetings to discuss problems they are encountering in the FIRST 5 funding process. The issues have been emotionally charged and filled with frustration by agencies trying to figure out, interpret and meet the requirements of the RFQ to serve the targeted population of children and their families.

SVCN has met with Jolene and key management staff to discuss our concerns and to seek quick resolution to some of the overriding nonprofit issues. FIRST 5 staff have listened, responded and worked with us, thoughtfully as we have tried to clarify, simplify, working through this RFQ processes.

What we are hearing is that this has been a very complicated process and emotions are running high. There was a significant disconnect between the FIRST 5 expectations and the ability of the service providers to meet the funding plan for services of FIRST 5 for children 0-6.

The collaborative meetings have become very time consuming. We estimate it has taken at least 60 hours per agency in each collaborative, with an average of 400-600 hours in collaborative planning alone. There may be up to 15 collaboratives in the works. Additionally, many agencies were not able to become part of a collaborative for a variety of reasons. We appreciate FIRST 5 clarifying how an agency can apply to become part of the single qualified service provider.

FIRST 5 staff has clarified their position on leverage in their recent memo to consider demonstrated effort and we are pleased with that accommodation. Agencies are really stretching to make the leveraging work but costs are too low to deliver the services they want. However, the Commission should be aware that the leverage may not be attainable as outlined in the RFQ.

We appreciate FIRST 5 stipulating that these costs or the target number of children are negotiable. There is great concern over the outlined cost structure for the targeted number of

children. The ability for lead agencies and their partner agencies to cover costs may not be realistic.

We are pleased FIRST 5 has explained that they will enter into discussion with the Partnership's Lead Agencies regarding how to provide "missing or unavailable" core services. This issue has created much consternation within the nonprofit community. We strongly believe that since collaboratives have spent hundreds of planning hours, these collaboratives should work with FIRST 5 to determine how best to address any identified gaps including how to fund the services.

There are additional issues that the target geography, that it may be too narrow and disproportionately impact services in West and North Santa Clara County. There are also concerns over the discontinuation of previously funded FIRST 5 services that also need to be addressed.

Overall, on behalf of our agencies we want to state this RFQ plan was overly expansive, confusing and the turnaround time was too quick for agency's to digest, respond and develop appropriate responses. There was insufficient training or clarity on how to put the RFQ together, how to organize collaboratives, or develop good strategies. Universally, from experienced large agencies to small grassroots nonprofits, all had difficulty in responding to this RFQ.

We request the Commission:

- In the interest of continuous improvement FIRST 5 should conduct a full and extensive evaluation of the RFQ process to learn how to improve their RFP-RFQ system for the future.

- Continue to work in stronger partnership with nonprofit agencies to improve FIRST 5 systems for implementing services.

- Review their targeted implementation plan and make adjustments as needed to reflect nonprofit service provider input while addressing FIRST 5 priority consumer service needs.

- Review the need to extend the RFQ deadline again to allow for agencies to adequately respond.

SVCN is ever mindful that this is a partnership between FIRST 5, service providers, the community, and clients. The goals are laudable and we are committed to working toward achieving a better community for children under 6 and their families. We appreciate FIRST 5 staff responsiveness to many of our issues, which have been clarified. FIRST 5 staff has agreed to meet with SVCN on February 13, to discuss the RFQ Panel Review process and again prior to releasing the forthcoming RFQ for Community Engagement services. FIRST 5 demonstrated a willingness to work more closely with SVCN, to review their processes and to work toward developing a better method for the future.

Sincerely

Patricia Gardner  
Executive Director

Cc: SVCN members, First 5 staff, interested partners