



First 5 California—Strategic Plan 2019–2024





First 5 California—Strategic Plan 2019

INTRODUCTION

The California Children and Families Commission and staff of First 5 California are pleased and proud to present the agency's 2019 Strategic Plan. This five-year plan (2019–2024) is a reflection of the remarkable evolution of First 5 California and its work since its inception.

First 5 California, a state agency, was created in 1998 with the passage of Proposition 10, a state ballot initiative passed by California voters. Prop 10 secured a new and dedicated funding stream to support early education and health programs, services, and resources specifically for young children prenatal through age 5 and their families. It was enacted into law as the California Children and Families Act of 1998 ("the Act") in Health and Safety Code, Sections 130100-130155.

The 2019 Strategic Plan represents a blueprint for the State Commission's investments and the agency's primary programs, partnerships, services, outreach efforts, and advocacy. The plan builds on the strengths of First 5 California's 2014 Strategic Plan, while reflecting current direction from the Commission. It also incorporates the in-depth input and feedback from First 5 county commissions, numerous stakeholder groups in early childhood education and health, partner state agencies, and California families.

First 5 California's administrative resources and declining revenues are key challenges for the Commission's future work. Despite these challenges, however, its efforts and investments strive to be the most impactful and achievable. The Commission continues to support and advocate for the strong start our young children deserve to optimize early childhood health and education.

The Act uniquely positions First 5 California to collaborate with the Governor, Legislature, and other partners to engage in outreach and communication to the public about the importance of investing in early childhood to optimize future life success.

A fundamental objective of First 5 California remains to ensure all parents giving birth in this state, and particularly those living in poverty, receive critical information about early brain development in their babies' first months and years of life, along with providing them with comprehensive information about what they can do to shape and enhance their children's physical, emotional, and educational well-being and future.

The First 5 Network

First 5 California is part of a larger statewide network. The Act established the State Commission, as well as local commissions in each of California's 58 counties, noting the intent that "this system should function as a network that promotes accessibility to all information and services from any entry point into the system." The First 5 Network supports the state's early childhood systems to ensure children prenatal to age five are safe, healthy, and ready to succeed in school and life. This collective statewide effort is grounded in the intent of the Act, rooted in the science of early brain growth and healthy child development, and focused on the whole child.

The Network strategy seeks to coordinate respective roles for the 58 county commissions, the Association, and First 5 California in policy, advocacy, and systems building. Additionally, it contributes to the common language, framing, and resources necessary to advance systems change at the state and local levels. As a voice for California's youngest children, the Network brings together partners, fosters collaboration, and leverages multiple funding sources to strengthen systems of care through communication, advocacy, collaboration, skill building, innovation, and learning.

As a partner in the First 5 Network, First 5 California has an important role in amplifying the work of its local counterparts, creating a more cohesive First 5 narrative, supporting local efforts to collaborate with state agencies, advocating for policies and investments that support children and families, and building public awareness and support around the early experiences that result in healthy child development.

The evolution of the First 5 Network, First 5 California, and the 58 First 5 county commissions includes the stark reality that the primary funding source for the First 5 Network (the additional tax on tobacco products generated by Prop 10) has been in decline for well over a decade. This trend is indicative of a positive health outcome—that the state's smoking rates and tobacco use are in decline, which is one of the intended outcomes of Prop 10.

However, the steady revenue decline also means the First 5 Network must seek new and innovative approaches to continue its important work on behalf of California's youngest children and their families. It means leveraging precious dollars, while prioritizing investments to better ensure that programs, services, and other targeted efforts designed to serve the whole child result in wide-reaching, positive outcomes of the greatest impact. It means finding new and sustainable sources of funding and resources through strategic partnerships and collaborations with other agencies, organizations, and foundations. It calls for coordinating, aligning, and streamlining high-quality efforts to most effectively and efficiently serve *all* of the state's youngest children, each of whom deserves this level of attention and support from the moment they are born. And through this collaborative work and commitments, our collective efforts will ensure that by the time young children enter the classroom, they will be ready to learn and thrive.

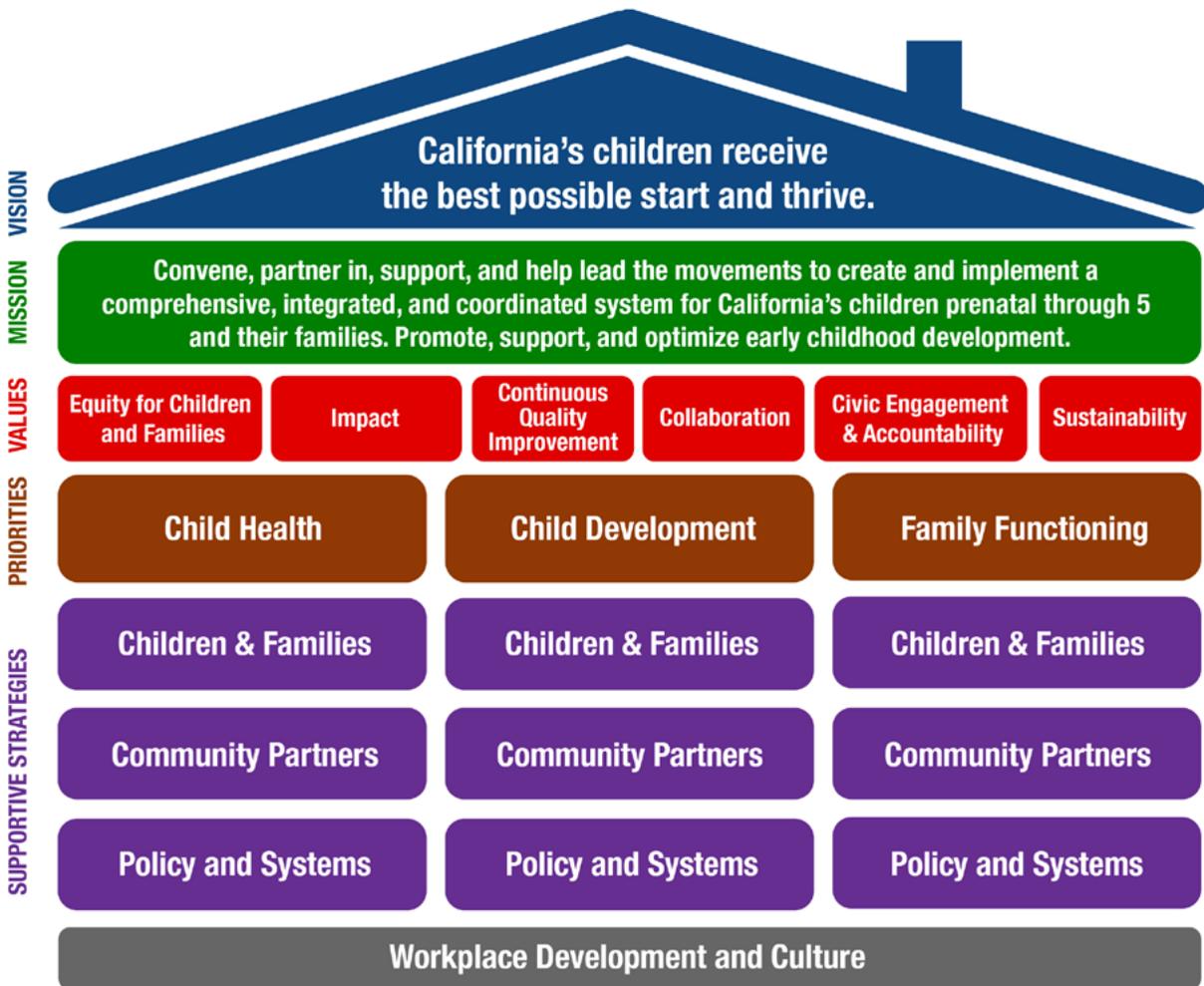
Development of the 2019 Strategic Plan

The 2019 Strategic Plan was developed through a year-long, comprehensive process designed to gather information and feedback from State Commissioners, county commissions, First 5 California management and staff, state agencies, and a variety of key stakeholder groups and thought partners from around the state. This process allowed First 5 California to assess its contributions in the areas of child health and education, better understand how its work and leadership are perceived, and identify future opportunities for creating even greater impacts.

Through in-depth interviews and discussion groups, First 5 California stakeholders provided information and valuable feedback regarding First 5 California's strengths, opportunities, challenges, and investments. This input informed a process in which First 5 California staff from across the organization drafted a Strategic Plan framework and set of priorities, worked in topic-specific workgroups to develop components of the plan, participated in staff planning sessions, engaged with State Commissioners, and iteratively crafted the 2019–2024 Strategic Plan.



Content and Structure of the Strategic Plan



The above diagram represents an illustration of the framework, or “structure and foundation,” of the Strategic Plan and the primary focus areas of First 5 California’s efforts. The Priorities and Supportive Strategies, representing the content of the plan, are described below.

STATEMENTS OF STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Strategic Plan begins with First 5 California’s **Vision** and **Mission** statements, which have not changed from the 2014 and 2017 Strategic Plans. First 5 California’s **Values and Guiding Principles** form the foundation for all its work. A key value, upon which all others are based, is **Equity for Children and Families**.

PRIORITIES AND SUPPORTIVE STRATEGIES

Sections I through III of the Strategic Plan highlight First 5 California’s key areas of focus and work, all of which are reflected in the following three overarching **Priority Areas** derived from the Act:

Child Health	Child Development	Family Functioning
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The **Supportive Strategies** listed in each Section represent the primary work and key activities that will be developed and implemented by First 5 California around each of the three Priority Areas during the next five years.

It is important to note that many of the listed Supportive Strategies actually support more than one Priority Area. For example, the *Talk. Read. Sing.*® campaign serves to promote all three Priority Areas: Child Health, Child Development, and Family Functioning.

The Supportive Strategies, described in detail in Sections I through III, are designed specifically to support the following entities and efforts, as defined below:

Children and Families	Community Partners	Policy and Systems
Target populations for First 5 California program investment, support, and messaging, including children prenatal through age 5 and their families, along with their early learning caregivers in all setting types	State and local entities, including, but not limited to, First 5 county commissions; educational, advocacy, governmental, community-based, health-related, and family-focused foundations and nonprofits —each of which plays a role in or complements goals that align with First 5 California’s vision and mission	Communication, advocacy, legislation, research, and evaluation efforts designed to catalyze public will and investment in systems that support the optimal development of the state’s children and families

Priority Area Examples are included at the end of Sections I through III as *illustrative* projects or programs First 5 California may implement following adoption of this Strategic Plan.

FIRST 5 CALIFORNIA WORKPLACE DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE

Section IV of the Strategic Plan highlights First 5 California’s internal organizational structures and interpersonal practices that guide the day-to-day operations and internal considerations of the agency. These practices foster a positive and productive environment to support First 5 California’s work and promote the successful implementation of the plan.



First 5 California— Vision, Mission, and Values/Guiding Principles

VISION

California's children will receive the best possible start in life and thrive.

MISSION

First 5 California will convene, partner in, and help lead the movement to create and implement a comprehensive, integrated, and coordinated system for California's children prenatal through age 5 and their families. It will promote, support, and optimize early childhood development.

VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The values and guiding principles highlighted below are woven into the fabric of all efforts undertaken by First 5 California. Key among them—a value from which all others emanate—is **Equity for Children and Families**.

- **Equity for Children and Families:** First 5 California places the needs of children prenatal through age 5 at the center of its work, and will do so in equitable, and culturally and linguistically effective ways. It prioritizes equity in all policies, practices, investments, and partnerships to help all of California's children (and their families) achieve their full potential. First 5 California believes all children deserve high-quality early learning experiences and differential supports, both in health and education, based on their individual needs and abilities. Honoring families' cultures, languages, and the ways in which children learn and grow yields economic and civic benefits. The practice of equity is necessary to close—or better, to *prevent*—the achievement gap. First 5 California is committed to using data to identify and address inequities, advocate for just and fair policies, and maximize investments to eliminate disparities in order for all families to thrive, and so children will attain optimal social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Impact:** First 5 California strives to create positive impacts and outcomes through investments based on scientific research and best practices, employing evaluation and data to monitor and assess the effectiveness of its activities.
- **Continuous Quality Improvement:** Within the changing context of broadened and improved understanding about the importance of supporting a child's earliest years, First 5 California remains dedicated to building integrated, continuously improving, innovative, and cost-effective programs, policies, and systems to maximize investments that result in the highest quality services for children and families.
- **Collaboration:** First 5 California facilitates and participates in partnerships across disciplines, First 5 county commissions, state and local agencies, and stakeholder groups.
- **Civic Engagement and Accountability:** First 5 California supports and advocates for public policies and increased resources to improve outcomes and support systems for children prenatal through age 5 and their families. It is accountable to the people of California for the responsible and effective use of public funds.





Section I—Child Health

Priority Area I: Child Health

GOAL: All children thrive by achieving optimal health prenatal through age 5.

State Commission Guidelines from the Act specific to **Child Health** describe the following key areas of work:

The provisions of child health care services that emphasize prevention, diagnostic screenings, and treatment not covered by other programs; and the provisions of prenatal and postnatal maternal health care services that emphasize prevention, immunizations, nutrition, treatment of tobacco and other substance abuses, general health screenings, and treatment services not covered by other programs

In alignment with the Commission Guidelines, and in coordination with the First 5 Network, state agencies, and other key stakeholders, the work of First 5 California over the next five years will be driven by a comprehensive focus on child health. First 5 California is working strategically to realize its vision of a future in which all young children have access to the full spectrum of health care services, receive timely developmental screenings, and are referred to appropriate developmental services when services are necessary. These efforts will support targeted policy, programs, and systems based on needs to improve the health and well-being of children prenatal through age 5, with the goal of ensuring they are healthy and ready to succeed in school and life.

Supportive Strategies: Child Health

I. A. Children and Families

- Support children prenatal through age 5 and their families through culturally and linguistically appropriate investments to ensure adequate healthcare resources and preventive services, along with the dissemination of information about available state and local programs designed to optimize and sustain the health and well-being of young children.
- Support resources, programs, and systems for developmental monitoring, screenings, and assessments with appropriate follow-up services.

I. B. Community Partners

- Collaborate in and support efforts to improve access to the full spectrum of health care services (developmental, mental health, behavioral, oral, vision, and physical) for all young children.
- Collaborate to ensure children from birth through age 5 with special developmental, mental health, behavioral, and health care needs receive all essential services.
- Collaborate in public education and outreach efforts to parents and families regarding access to a range of health resources and programs, including trauma-informed services, for young children.

I. C. Policy and Systems

- **Communication:** Build public engagement in, invest in, and support the optimal health, well-being, and development of young children using research to ensure equitable outcomes for all. Key work in this area includes statewide campaigns to inform the public about early brain development and the critical role parents and other caregivers of young children play in that development through regular, caring verbal engagement with children from the moment they are born.
- **Advocacy and Legislation:** Develop and implement a policy platform to advocate for and influence positive change for the health of children prenatal through age 5 using research and best practices, which include, but are not limited to:
 - » Protecting access to health care for children and families, while supporting coordination across health care systems to ensure affordable and comprehensive health insurance coverage and services for all children from birth through age 5 and their mothers.
 - » Supporting and promoting universal developmental screenings, assessments, referrals, and treatments.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Support research, evaluation, and data collection capacity. Communicate findings to support policy, practice, and equitable access to the appropriate services, programs, and resources necessary to improve the health and well-being children prenatal through age 5 and their mothers.



PRIORITY AREA EXAMPLES

To promote and support child health, First 5 California will support resources, programs, and activities such as:

- Smoking cessation helpline (1-800-NOBUTTS) and website (www.nobutts.org)
- *Kit for New Parents* health information about children birth through age 5
- *Talk. Read. Sing.*® campaign
- First 5 California Parent Website (first5california.com)
- Training on developmental screenings and referrals
- *Help Me Grow* developmental screening and assessment networking
- Collection and sharing of data regarding California children (e.g., California Health Interview Survey, or CHIS)
- *Essentials for Childhood Initiative* (a collaboration with the California Department of Public Health and the California Department of Social Services to raise awareness and commitments to promote safe, stable, and nurturing environments for children and families)
- Advocacy for health access and collaboration (e.g., prenatal care, perinatal mental health care for mothers)



Section II—Child Development

Priority Area II: Child Development

GOAL: All children birth through age 5 have high-quality, nurturing environments that ensure their learning readiness.

State Commission Guidelines from the Act specific to **Child Development** describe the following key areas of work:

The availability and provisions of high-quality, accessible, and affordable child care, both in-home and at child care facilities, that emphasizes education, training and qualifications of care providers, increased availability and access to child care facilities, resource and referral services, technical assistance for caregivers, and financial and other assistance to ensure appropriate child care for all households

In alignment with the Commission Guidelines, and in coordination with the First 5 Network and other key stakeholders, the work of First 5 California over the next five years will continue to embrace a comprehensive focus on child development efforts to ensure all children have equitable access to quality early learning settings and enter kindergarten learning-ready. The vision is for the work of First 5 California to address the whole child, informing and supporting families on all they need to know and do for their young children to ensure their optimal health and well-being. Additionally, First 5 California's efforts will support the development and sustainment of a well-trained and sufficiently prepared workforce, striving to ensure young children have access to high-quality early learning settings that prepare them to enter school well-prepared and able to succeed.

Supportive Strategies: Child Development

II. A. Children and Families

- Support children prenatal through age 5 and their families by providing culturally and linguistically effective resources, knowledge, and opportunities for young children to develop the skills necessary to achieve their optimal potential in school and life.
- Support workforce quality in all early learning settings with the dissemination of evidence-based professional development resources and standards-based coaching and training to promote optimal outcomes for children birth through age 5.

II. B. Community Partners

- Lead, support, and collaborate with partner groups on statewide efforts to create and align goals and priorities for early learning and systems building, including higher education and other state partners.
- Strengthen the capacity of First 5 county commissions and other local partners to accomplish specific goals and address collaborative early childhood systems building.
- Strategically fund and co-fund, align resources, facilitate the exchange of information and best practices using research and evaluation, and seek new opportunities to maximize positive impacts for children and families.

II. C. Policy and Systems

- Communication: Increase public awareness through education and outreach to inform parents and the public about the importance of investments during a child's earliest years (prenatal through age 5) and available child development information and services. Through public education and outreach campaigns, First 5 California will disseminate specifics regarding programs, resources, and other efforts supported by the agency and available to children and families across the state.
- Advocacy and Legislation: Develop and implement a policy platform to advocate for and influence positive change for children birth through age 5, including, but not limited to, the following:
 - » Expand access to quality early care and education programs for children from birth through age 3.
 - » Support the implementation of high-quality universal preschool access for all low-income four-year-olds, and high-quality kindergarten and transitional kindergarten statewide.
 - » Support a process to define, measure, and achieve learning readiness for all California children prior to kindergarten.
 - » Support and advocate for the needs of dual language learners and their families.
 - » Support a high-quality early learning workforce through strengthened qualifications, compensation, stability, diversity, and robust professional development systems.
 - » Promote statewide access to and participation in quality improvement systems.
- Research and Evaluation: Support research, evaluation, and data collection capacity. Communicate findings to support policy, practice, and equitable access to the appropriate services, programs, and resources necessary to improve the health and well-being of mothers and their children prenatal through age 5.



PRIORITY AREA EXAMPLES

To promote and support child development, First 5 California will engage in projects and activities such as:

- IMPACT 2.0
 - » In partnership with the California Department of Education, support Quality Counts California (QCC) in systems development through the following activities:
 - ◇ Data systems for quality rating and improvement systems (QRIS) and the early childhood education (ECE) workforce
 - ◇ Training and technical assistance (T&TA) infrastructure for assessments and coaching
 - ◇ Leadership development training
 - ◇ QRIS Rating Matrix
 - » Support local consortia quality improvement efforts in early care and education settings in which quality is not sufficiently supported through other state and federal funding streams (e.g., non-subsidized center-based and family child care; and alternative settings, such as family resource centers and family, friend, and neighbor care).
 - » Ensure equitable statewide participation through specialized support for counties and regions with fewer resources, including small and rural counties.
 - » Coordinate with state agencies and other state-level partners.
 - » Evaluate funding outcomes.
- Small Population County Funding Augmentation (SPCFA)
- Public Education and Outreach
 - » *Talk. Read. Sing.*® campaign
 - » First 5 Express
 - » Multi-media outreach (e.g., television, radio, social and digital media, outdoor media)

- First 5 California Parent Website (first5california.com)
- Dual Language Learner Pilot Study
- Family engagement
- Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8 (TWB8)
 - » Higher Education supports for ECE in California
- Reimbursement rate improvement
- Early childhood education workforce development policy
- Address “gaps” for key policy data (e.g., early care and education access, financial costs; workforce characteristics; future needs).
- Support the collection and integration of longitudinal child data to inform research and policy (e.g., a statewide Early Childhood Integrated Data System).





Section III—Family Functioning

Priority Area III: Family Functioning

GOAL: All families have the knowledge, skills, and resources to support their children's optimal development.

State Commission Guidelines from the Act specific to **Family Functioning** describe the following key areas of work:

Parental education and support services in all areas required for, and relevant to, informed and healthy parenting

In alignment with the Commission Guidelines, and in coordination with the First 5 Network and other key stakeholders, the vision for the work of First 5 California over the next five years will highlight a focus on family support and engagement. In tandem with the Network and other partner agencies, First 5 California will continue to prioritize its strategic and comprehensive efforts to ensure all families have equitable access to information, resources, services, and programs designed to optimize their children's learning, health, and overall well-being.

Supportive Strategies: Family Functioning

III. A. Children and Families

- Support, engage, and strengthen families and communities through family-friendly and culturally appropriate information, resources, and opportunities designed to educate and assist in the nurturing, caring, and providing for children's optimal health, success, and well-being.

III. B. Community Partners

- Provide statewide leadership within the First 5 Network in the development of a support system to serve children from birth through age 5 and their families, along with communities around the state, resulting in collective and sustainable impacts. Key statewide collaborators include, but are not limited to, transitional kindergarten through grade 12, child welfare, public health, and community-based organizations.

- Collaborate to promote a statewide infrastructure in community settings to engage families living in poverty and who have risk factors with innovative, culturally sensitive, and linguistically appropriate ways to enhance their children’s safe and healthy development.

III. C. Policy and Systems

- **Communication:** Increase public awareness about the importance of investments in young children and families, highlighting that parents are their children’s first and most important teachers. The dissemination of information on early brain development and the importance of investments to support children and their families during the earliest months and years of a child’s life are primary in this effort.
- **Advocacy and Legislation:** Develop and implement a policy platform to advocate for and influence positive change for children prenatal through age 5, such as:
 - » Supporting effective parent education and engagement in a variety of areas, including parent awareness about early brain development, through strategic statewide efforts, such as the *Talk. Read. Sing.*[®] campaign.
 - » Supporting the sustainability of family resource centers and other comprehensive community hubs for integrated services for children and families, which may include trauma-informed care and mental health services.
 - » Increasing supports for breastfeeding, paid family leave, and baby-friendly policies for all families in all settings.
 - » Expanding voluntary home visiting programs.
- **Research and Evaluation:** Support research, evaluation, and data collection capacity. Communicate findings to support policy, practice, and equitable access to the appropriate services, programs, and resources necessary to improve the health and well-being of mothers and children prenatal through age 5.



PRIORITY AREA EXAMPLES

To promote family functioning and engagement, First 5 California will develop and promote projects, resources, and activities, such as:

- *Talk. Read. Sing.*® campaign
- First 5 California Parent Website (first5california.com)
- Information on parenting in the *Kit for New Parents*
- Messaging to parents about early brain science by partnering with other state agency programs (e.g., Women, Infants and Children program, or WIC, of the California Department of Public Health)
- Small Population County Funding Augmentation (SPCFA)
 - » Strengthening Families Framework (Five Protective Factors)
 - » Evidenced-based programs for parenting
- Family engagement as part of IMPACT 2.0
- *Essentials for Childhood Initiative* (described in Section I)
- Policy and advocacy for:
 - » Home visiting
 - » Family leave policies to support parent-child bonding
 - » Breastfeeding supports
 - » Supporting family resource centers



Section IV—First 5 California Workplace Development and Culture

Based on the input of First 5 California’s staff and managers, the Workplace Development and Culture section of the Strategic Plan highlights the interpersonal dynamics and practices that guide day-to-day operations and internal considerations of the agency. These practices foster the creation and maintenance of a positive and productive work environment to support successful implementation of the plan. Accordingly, First 5 California values and promotes the following:

Development of internal structures and processes

- Collaboration and team development among State Commissioners, managers, staff, and external partners
- Integrated and transparent approaches to internal planning, communication, and decision-making at each organizational level
- Continuous improvement through the use of technology, reflective practice, planning, metrics, annual work plans, surveys of staff satisfaction, and review meetings focused on progress made on the implementation of the Strategic Plan
- Opportunities for ongoing professional learning and growth
- Opportunities for professional development to understand, assess, and promote equity in policies, practices, investments, and partnerships
- Consistent project management and business processes that reflect manager delegation and staff autonomy, while maintaining adaptability for change and creativity

Positive relationships and supportive culture

- A healthy, positive, inclusive, and respectful work environment
- Recognition and appreciation for staff dedication, innovation, and excellence
- Trust that staff will take ownership of and be accountable for appropriately assigned projects

- A positive “customer service” mindset for internal and external interactions and relationships
- Demonstration of internal values by celebrating diversity, accomplishment of goals, and achieving a collegial work environment through team building
- Job satisfaction—Employees are invested in and proud of work and accomplishments, while feeling their work is valued and important to the success of projects and agency goals

