First Things First Early Childhood
Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel

Draft Minutes

March 12, 2012 – Day One

Call to Order
The meeting of the First Things First Early Childhood Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel was held on March 12, 2012, at 11:00 a.m. The meeting was held at the First Things First office, 4000 North Central Avenue, Suite 800, Phoenix, Arizona 85012.

Chairman Love called the meeting to order at approximately 11:15 a.m.

Members Present
Dr. John Love, Dr. W. Steven Barnett, Dr. Clancy Blair, Dr. Noel Card, Dr. Greg Duncan, Dr. Neal Halfon, Dr. Dawn Mackety, Dr. Pamela Powell, Dr. Catherine Snow, and Dr. Eugene Thompson.

Members Absent
Dr. Claude Goldenberg and Dr. Eva Marie Shivers

Chairman John Love called roll to officially open the meeting and then asked First Things First Early Childhood Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel (Advisory Panel) members and First Things First staff to introduce themselves. Chairman Love noted that the Advisory Panel is charged to make recommendations to the First Things First Board of Directors regarding evaluation efforts, and further reminded all in attendance about Open Meeting Law requirements.

Review and Possible Approval of January 5 and 6 Meeting Minutes
Chairman Love noted that the draft minutes from the January 5 and 6, 2012 meeting were available for review and approval. Dr. Catherine Snow moved that the minutes be approved with an amendment indicating that Chairman Love had asked the Advisory Panel members to provide individual feedback to him regarding their thoughts on evaluation design. Dr. Noel Card seconded the motion. Minutes were unanimously approved as amended.

Review of Agenda and Materials
Chairman Love also reviewed the plans for the day, including the agenda, and noted that the third meeting of the Advisory Panel will take place on April 30 and May 1, 2012, at which point the Advisory Panel will finalize their recommendations to be presented to the First Things First Board of Directors. Dr. Amy Kemp, First Things First Sr. Director for Research and Evaluation, provided an overview of all the meeting materials.

Chairman Love recessed the meeting at approximately 12:15 for a lunch break.

Chairman Love reconvened the meeting at approximately 12:50 pm.

Overview and Discussion of the First Things First Logic Model
Dr. Kemp provided a detailed overview of the Draft First Things First Logic Model.

Discussion of Goals for Evaluation
An extensive discussion ensued among Panel members with many questions asked and points of clarification made. Specific questions/topics included:

1. The challenge of not having a unit cost for the Family, Friends and Neighbors strategy and the variety of delivery options for this service. It was noted that the unit costs vary widely among grantees, depending on program implementation.

2. Advisory Panel members asked for an updated version of item 25 in the meeting notebook – "Financial and Service Detail on Funded Strategies in Excess of $2 Million" -for actual FY 2012 expenditures.
3. The challenges associated with not having unique child identifiers across data systems. It was noted that Advisory Panel members' ability to recommend an evaluation design depends on data availability and how data systems are connected. Dr. Kemp noted that discussions had begun with the Department of Education to link systems and that the application for the Race To The Top grant had resulted in productive initial conversations around an integrated database.
4. Advisory Panel members also discussed the budget breakdown between direct services and systems building expenditures. One Advisory Panel member noted that based on the data provided, it looked like approximately 45% of expenditures go to direct services.
5. Advisory Panel members reflected that the place to begin might be restructuring the logic model, making it more three dimensional, with high quality learning environments being the central focus and connecting the other linkages around this.
6. Advisory Panel members commented that the logic model looked good but questioned how it is known if specific programs, including Quality First, are optimally working?
7. Advisory Panel members discussed using prototype programs in different areas, looking at dosage and incentives, and a program evaluation approach.

Discussion of Regional Partnership Council Expectations of Evaluation

Chairman Love recessed the meeting at approximately 1:55 pm to break into three small groups with three to four Panel members, First Things First Regional Partnership Council members and First Things First staff. No break-out session was attended by a quorum of the Early Childhood Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel or a Regional Partnership Council. The break-out meetings were open for public attendance in person. Regional Partnership Council members were asked to reflect on the following questions from a rural perspective, an urban perspective, and a rural/tribal perspective.

1. From a Council perspective, do you have goals for evaluation that were not mentioned in the Panel discussion?
2. What goals do you think are most important?
3. What questions do you have about the work of the National Advisory Panel?
4. What other questions, concerns, or suggestions do you have?

Chairman Love reconvened the meeting at approximately 3:10 pm.

Discussion of Evaluation Approaches

Chairman Love and Advisory Panel members continued the discussion about evaluation approaches (item 7 on the agenda).

1. Advisory Panel members expressed interest in getting a better sense of the challenges to the Consortium efforts, First Things First concerns, challenges that could not be met, and lessons going forward. First Things First CEO Rhian Allvin noted that item 36 – "Summary of University Consortium Studies: Methodology, Analysis, and Quality Control" - provided a summary of First Things First concerns. She also elaborated on the history of First Things First, that there was a sense of urgency on the part of the Board and leadership to get up and running, establish Regional Partnership Councils and quickly implement an evaluation process. She also commented on the challenges of building a consortium of three universities to undertake the evaluation.
3. CEO Allvin also noted, in response to comments about the complexity of First Things First services, that there was tension between trying to provide services while simultaneously attempting to develop an early childhood development system. She also noted that many best practices come from local efforts. She further clarified that administration, human resources, and grants management processes are managed at the state level by First Things First. Programmatic pieces and most programs are provided by grantees through the grant application process or intergovernmental agreements.
4. Advisory Panel members questioned the feasibility of the scope of the initial First Things First evaluation and noted that it would be hard to find a vendor that could manage the data acquisition and analysis of a study of this magnitude.

5. Another Advisory Panel member expressed the opinion that the summary, at the end, is about methodological concerns and that operationally a number of measurement and learning systems need to be in place at First Things First.

CEO Allvin noted that First Things First now has data, collected as part of Consortium efforts, on over 7,000 children. She also offered the following evaluation questions that she would like to have answered:

- Does what First Things First does have an effect on kindergarten readiness, and does kindergarten readiness improve over time?
- Is First Things First affecting long-term outcomes (e.g. 3rd grade reading achievement)?
- Are there models and strategies that are particularly effective or ineffective?
- How can the information and findings be made relevant to program improvement?

Chairman Love asked Advisory Panel members to start making suggestions for evaluation efforts. Suggestions included:

- A summary of the BUILD Initiative approach to system evaluation that illustrated the parts of the "system" that might be included in evaluation efforts. The evaluation design is dependent on the part of the system being studied; the two basic questions for each part are, "Did the initiative do what it was supposed to?" and, "Did it produce its desired impacts?"
- Given the large amount of information needed and the difficulty securing it, perhaps First Things First should consider using administrative data (with common identifiers across programs) instead of survey data, making a significant effort to coordinate as many data systems as possible, as Florida and Illinois have done.
- With this type of rich database, the agency could do smaller-scale studies that link to a larger database to make population inferences. This would make future evaluation efforts much more efficient and enhance capacity long-term. First Things First could create a data center, an information platform to house state level data; program evaluation specific data; and systems and sector related data. It would mirror at the data level what First Things First is trying to do at the service level.
- An accountability system that addresses the status of children's programs and whether they are improving is needed to address the evaluation questions. From a public policy perspective, there is a need to show the status of a program at the beginning, during, and after implementation. This can inform discussion about improvements, even if it can't be proven conclusively if First Things First efforts caused the change.
- Another concern noted was the quality of data in currently existing data systems and the need to gather a lot of information on feasibility of obtaining and linking data across service and database systems. Much of the existing data is not owned or stored by First Things First. Starting with a small amount of data with accessible linkages could be a powerful initial step. First Things First should look to examples from other states and organizations that started small and included more data as more constituencies understood how valuable the data system would be. First Things First needs to target those data items big enough, important enough, and cost effective enough to be worth focusing on.
- The Advisory Panel noted the need for a quality assurance system/framework. One Advisory Panel member recommended systems for accountability, quality assurance, and child-level data.
- There is a need to have a measure defining quality as a first step and prerequisite to answering questions about whether efforts over time are changing outcomes, and then evaluation efforts can switch to theory/mechanism testing.
- Different evaluation designs can use and can collect data where communities are doing different things. This is not just a statistical question about how programs work, it's a design issue. There is a need to design studies that will address desired goals and identified outcomes.
- First Things First can also consider a birth cohort study. There was some discussion of embedding in a universal data system a more intensive longitudinal study, focused on a sample of children. A panel member questioned whether this would generalize to specific geographic areas and noted that it would

be enormously expensive.

CEO Allvin noted that pulling systems together is appealing because First Things First isn't operating with legacy data systems, as are other state agencies, but in a cloud environment. She further noted that any system created would have to be very transparent, allow parents to easily opt out if they wanted to, and to conform to data security protocols and privacy requirements.

One Advisory Panel member presented his thoughts about an evaluation approach that included three main topics:

- Achieving optimal developmental trajectories;
- Optimal school readiness; and
- System performance: a "Triple Aim" including child outcomes, family and community outcomes, and cost.

Advisory Panel members noted that mapping the multiple child and family data elements is helpful and that this model is strong in grassroots, bottom-up systems change. It was also noted that a group at University of California Los Angeles has just started mapping the data elements and determining what type of analysis can be done.

Chairman Love provided an overview of his discussion goals for day two of the meeting and asked Advisory Panel members to reflect on what kind of evaluative work to recommend to First Things First.

Chairman Love recessed the meeting at approximately 5:30 p.m.

March 13, 2012 – Day Two

Chairman Love resumed the meeting at approximately 8:50 a.m.

Members Present
Dr. John Love, Dr. W. Steven Barnett, Dr. Clancy Blair, Dr. Noel Card, Dr. Greg Duncan, Dr. Claude Goldenberg, Dr. Neal Halfon, Dr. Dawn Mackety, Dr. Pamela Powell, and Dr. Catherine Snow

Members Absent
Dr. Eva Marie Shivers and Dr. Eugene Thompson

Discussion of Evaluation Approaches

Chairman Love resumed the meeting with continued discussion of evaluation approaches and asked Advisory Panel members if there were any other key issues to have in mind as they moved forward.

Advisory Panel members asked for a summary of the break-out sessions with Regional Partnership Council members. Dr. Kemp agreed to send these summaries out with the meeting minutes. Advisory Panel members reflected that the calls were helpful, Council input is very important, and that ongoing conversation is needed with the Councils.

Advisory Panel discussion continued around the larger political context within which First Things First operates and concerns were noted that key contextual issues such as immigration and English language learning may impact access to services. The Advisory Panel agreed to return to this item once they get into specific evaluation questions.

The Advisory Panel returned to the discussion of linking data systems. CEO Allvin noted that other data collection agency partners have more antiquated systems, there is political reticence around gathering data, and that it would have to be phased in. The effort would take years and be expensive.

Other points raised included having a feasibility design meeting to address what a data center would look like, how it would evolve, and what could be learned from other states regarding their process. Advisory Panel members indicated that planning efforts should not focus just on rigor of data collection, but also on how the data will be used, made accessible, and mobilized to drive policy.

Other Advisory Panel members noted that simple analysis is still informative and powerful, even if causal impact cannot be determined immediately. Initially a database of administrative data should be thought of as a tool for answering descriptive questions. Focused descriptive data gathering was noted as a good place to start. An Advisory Panel member noted there are four different data pockets: administrative; longitudinal (potentially setting up in publicly funded child care centers); place-based data (from mapping data); and programmatic data (program evaluation) data. An evaluator could use longitudinal research and bring place-based and administrative data together to examine program evolution within the context of local changes. Advisory Panel members also noted the importance of developing capacity for research and analysis in Arizona as well as still considering the value of partnering with the universities.

An Advisory Panel member indicated that First Things First's evaluation agenda is very large and that there is still concern that "the plane won't get off the ground". He noted that the chances for getting the data needed are much better when the data system is designed to answer specific questions. It was further noted that development of a broad data system can be done at a reasonable cost and would provide a larger data set in which to embed larger studies. It would also provide a platform on which to construct the kind of dashboards the public wants. The ability to make causal inferences at the local level is quite limited. It has to be a different kind of analysis and interpretation of the data, based more on case study methodology. Even in the larger data system, sample sizes won't be adequate for most analyses at the local level. Case studies can supplement to help people make local decisions. The administrative data system needs to contain program data along with child-level data.

Chairman Love then refocused the group discussion to address CEO Allvin's key questions noted yesterday. Dr. Love reiterated the key questions and confirmed with CEO Allvin and the Advisory Panel the areas for focus are:

- Does what First Things First does have an effect on kindergarten readiness, and does kindergarten readiness improve over time?
- Is First Things First affecting long-term outcomes (e.g. 3rd grade reading achievement)?
- Are there models and strategies that are particularly effective or ineffective?
- How can the information and findings be made relevant to program improvement?

An Advisory Panel member noted that strategic thought needs to be given to where program expenditures are directed relative to what questions need to be answered.

CEO Allvin responded that the Board would like the Advisory Panel to provide recommendations on how to prioritize evaluation decisions. She also noted that the Board is anxious to re-engage in research and to move forward quickly.

An Advisory Panel member responded that the Advisory Panel could identify a number of these strategies and inform the Board about what benefits or advantages the strategies would provide, and then recommend what is needed to have in place to implement any of them with sufficient quality and credibility to get informed answers.

<u>Discussion with State Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal</u>
Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal joined the meeting and Chairman Love introduced him to the Advisory Panel and quickly briefed him on the meeting activities to this point. Superintendent Huppenthal presented his views on evaluation, the nature of the demographic and political climate in Arizona, the power of longitudinal analysis, and the findings of some national studies. Superintendent Huppenthal also noted the

sensitivities around how data will be used and the need to embrace the very best science. Superintendent Huppenthal indicated that he was amenable to merging Arizona Department of Education and First Things First data into one data system but had questions about how to create linkages, which agency will hold the integrated data, and what efforts will be in place to protect the data. He also noted the lack of available funding.

Chairman Love redirected the Advisory Panel discussion back to the topic of evaluation approaches and suggested a multi-layered approach. He further suggested that the final report to the Board should offer options (an array of studies) with the pros and cons for each, rather than one recommended solution.

Superintendent Huppenthal recommended that the Advisory Panel make a clear decision on the Consortium evaluation sample.

Discussion ensued about the possibility of First Things First embarking on a new longitudinal study and the feasibility of building on the sample collected as part of the Consortium's work. CEO Allvin noted that even if the existing Consortium data set could not be used for the longitudinal study, there is no reason they cannot be used in an administrative database. The panel requested additional information on the sample of data.

Deliverables for Next Meeting
The Advisory Panel directed First Things First staff to provide them with the following information prior to the next meeting on April 30, 2012:

1. Dr. Kemp agreed to send out the summaries of the Regional Partnership Council break-out calls with the meeting minutes.
2. Chairman Love will work with CEO Allvin and Dr. Kemp to get additional input from the Advisory Panel to create a matrix to determine the items that need to be accounted for to make an evaluation decision.
3. Chairman Love asked First Things First staff for detailed information on how the sampling was done, the completeness of the data, and the number of children with complete or missing data collected for the Consortium studies.

Next Meeting
The next meeting of the First Things First Early Childhood Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel will be held on Monday and Tuesday April 30 and May 1, 2012, at the First Things First office, 4000 North Central Avenue, Suite 800, Phoenix, Arizona 85012.

Adjourn
There being no further business the meeting adjourned at approximately 3:05 p.m.