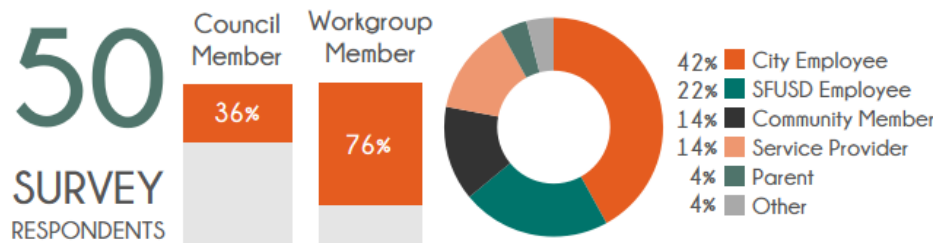# OCOF Preliminary Evaluation Findings *Draft*

By: Heather Lewis-Charp, Sukey Leshnick, and Shelley Kuang

In fall 2015, the Our Children and Our Families (OCOF) Council contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to conduct a process evaluation of OCOF implementation. The evaluation included observations of key meetings, a survey of Council members, and phone interviews with Council members. This evaluation brief highlights findings from the evaluation on key aspects of OCOF grant implementation, including organizational buy-in to the goals of OCOF, communication, participation and representation. It also includes a summary of key challenges and recommendations for OCOF to consider in the coming years.
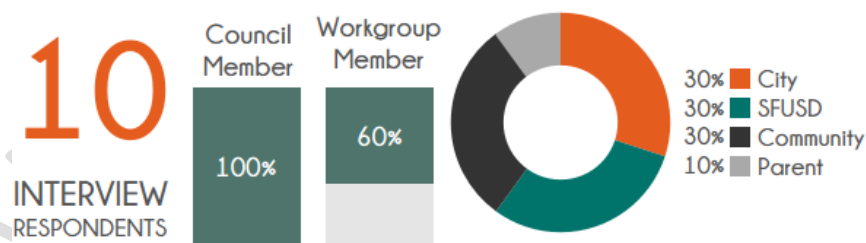
Data for this brief were drawn from (1) telephone interviews with 10 Council Members conducted between June and August 2016, (2) observations of 2 Council Meetings and 2 advisory meetings for the Five-Year Plan, (2) surveys to stakeholders from May to June 2016.

Below is a profile of the individuals who responded to the survey and participated in interviews. SPR attempted to survey all Council members, getting a response of 47% percent. The 10 interviewees were selected by OCOF staff to represent different perspectives and experiences on the Council. See Appendix A for the full survey results.

Survey Respondent Characteristics

50 SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Council Member: 36%
Workgroup Member: 76%

42% City Employee
22% SFUSD Employee
14% Community Member
14% Service Provider
4% Parent
4% Other

Interview Respondent Characteristics

10 INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

Council Member: 100%
Workgroup Member: 60%

30% City
30% SFUSD
30% Community
10% Parent

Shared Vision and Organizational Buy-In

> *There is common understanding, at a high-level at least, of what the Council is working to achieve. I think there are still different perspectives… [about] how the tangible work should unfold to achieve that vision.*

The evaluation results show that OCOF was successful at creating a shared "high-level" vision for the goals of the Council and at soliciting buy-in from the school district, key city agencies, and other key stakeholders to that high-level vision. Survey respondents and interviewees

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were confident that they understood the vision for OCOF and, when defining the vision, interviewees' responses showed a high level of consistency.

Interviewees perceived OCOF's purpose and vision to be focused on (1) increasing access to services for children and families, (2) improving alignment of services across the school district, city agencies and nonprofit organizations, (3) prioritizing and improving services for San Francisco's most vulnerable populations, and on (4) making San Francisco a more "family friendly" city.

Respondents valued the participation of city leaders, such as the major and superintendent. The superintendent, however, was perceived to be somewhat more engaged or committed to OCOF then the mayor. This is in part due to the major's attendance and visibility at the Council meetings. One survey respondent said bluntly, "make sure the major is actually there" and another complained about inconsistent attendance. Of the individuals who felt knowledgeable about the involvement of SFUSD and city agencies, 100 percent indicated that SFUSD was supportive of OCOF and only one person (a community member) disagreed about the level of commitment of city agencies.

Ninety percent of survey respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that leaders within their organization support their participation in OCOF. Only two people (one SFUSD employee and one city employee) indicated in the survey that they did not feel supported by their organizational leaders to participate. In contrast, nearly half of survey respondents indicated that they didn't know the degree to which *community organizations* are supportive of OCOF, a finding that is in keeping with interview findings about the limited role of community organizations to date.

Council members who are representing a constituency (e.g. youth, community organizations, parents, etc.) rather than an organization understood the vision for OCOF, but they were not clear about how they, as individuals, were contributing to achieving that vision. In particular, they expressed concern about their ability to effectively lift up and advocate for the constituency groups that they represent.
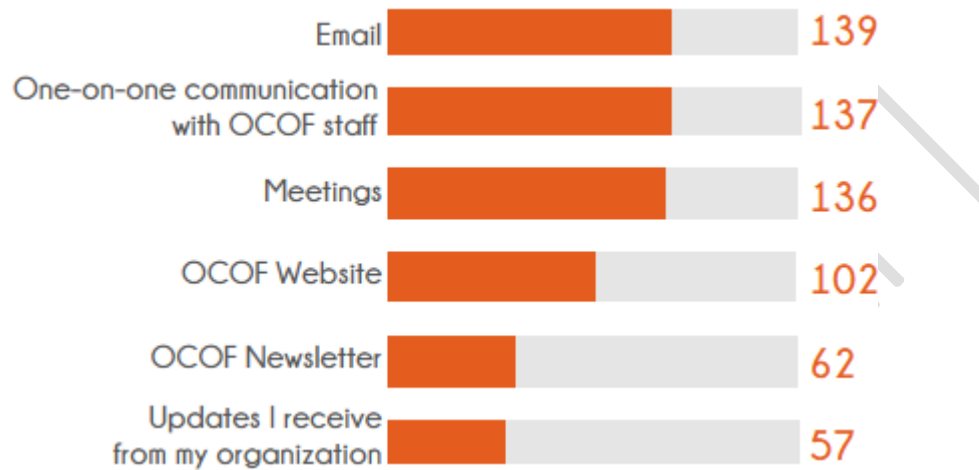
Finally, although most interview respondents were positive about OCOF's overall structure to date, there were a few that communicated skepticism about the ability of the Council to achieve its aims. One person questioned whether OCOF's "lofty Council" is fundamentally different from other Councils, committees, and task forces that have been put together in San Francisco over the years. The key question for these skeptics was whether key stakeholders will have the resolve and/or the attention span to actually make a difference. One respondent said a key concern is "our ability to be focused and disciplined enough to see a project through to the end."

Communication and Structure

Coordinating work across so many city agencies and the school district is a huge challenge. At the highest level, OCOF communicated with city leaders through three meetings of the full Council. The concrete work around the outcomes framework, five year plan, data working group, and service inventory were done in the workgroup meetings, which were held roughly every two months depending on the particular workgroup. Finally, OCOF staff members used

a variety of different strategies to keep Council and workgroup members up to date on the plan.

The figure below provides an overview of the feedback on the effectiveness of varied communication strategies. We weighted responses so that they could be easily ranked from most effective to least effective.[1] More detailed analysis of each communication strategy follow.

Strategy	Score
Email	139
One-on-one communication with OCOF staff	137
Meetings	136
OCOF Website	102
OCOF Newsletter	62
Updates I receive from my organization	57

Council Meetings

The survey asked about "meetings," but did not distinguish between workgroup and Council meetings. While the meetings were seen as one of most effective communication mechanisms, roughly one-quarter of respondents felt that they were only somewhat effective. It is notable that SFUSD and city staff members were more likely to see these meetings as effective or very effective than were other respondents.

The interviews and surveys revealed two divergent perspectives about the Council meetings. A good proportion of the interviewees felt as though the Council meetings were run flawlessly, because all the "pre-work" had been done by the time the meeting rolled around. For example, one respondent said, "staff beautifully execute those meetings." They appreciated the streamlined nature of the meetings.

In contrast, some felt that the Council meetings were far too scripted and wondered whether their role is just to "rubber stamp" what is coming out of the workgroups or to get "real commitments" by director-level staff members to shared goals. Because there were no decisions to be made at these meetings, these respondents felt that OCOF was not using the time and expertise of city leaders effectively. For example, one respondent said,

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[1] In the rankings, responses were given the following scores and then aggregated: disagree (-1), somewhat agree (1), agree (2), and strongly agree (3). Responses such as "not applicable" or "don't know" were given 0 points.

[The meetings] are too big and they're a little too scripted in terms of an agenda. There's not a real opportunity for cross dialogue at the highest levels…We have directors around the table, right, or department heads around the table: that is the opportunity to get their buy-in… and then take it to the next level… so, you agree with all these goals, how do you think you're contributing to the attainment of these goals now and what do you need to change in order to get closer?

Another person spoke of how the structure of the Council meetings does not encourage cross-agency exchange because staff from different agencies migrate towards those they already know and don't interact with one another. This individual went on to say, "We know what makes for effective learning, and the most effective cooperation and structure, but I don't see many of them being used at a Council meetings."

Workgroup Meetings

Sixty-six percent of survey respondents felt that the workgroup structure has been effective, while 18 percent did not. As was true of the Council meetings, city and district staff were more likely to see this structure as being effective. One survey respondent commented, "my workgroup was filled with intelligent hard working peple who had a lot of good ideas." Others, particularly those in the 5-year plan workgroup said that the workgroups had strong facilitation, which helped to strengthen collaboration and led to an effective use of time.

Those who were less positive about the workgroups generally were trying to navigate the different levels of "knowledge" in the room and the tension between having a substantive discussion and the tendency to get stuck in the "weeds." Several individuals noted that it was hard to fully prepare for these meetings and, as a result, attendees had uneven levels of knowledge. There were also several survey comments that the workgroups were "rushed" and that the time to complete the assigned task was "too limited." (This seemed particularly true of the Outcomes Framework group). Finally, several individuals noted that the service inventory and data group could use better facilitation.

Other Communication Vehicles

In addition to the Council and workgroup meetings, the evaluation team asked respondents to speak to the value of a range of different communication vehicles. Key findings are highlighted below:

- **One-on-one meetings with OCOF staff.** The survey results show that participants viewed the one-on-one meetings with staff as the most productive mode of communication. These were also mentioned several times by interviewees as being particularly effective. One interviewee, however, wondered at how time effective these meetings are and asked if small group conversations might be better. One survey respondent marveled at the diligence of staff in supporting these conversations but wondered whether the approach was sustainable.

- **Email.** Email received almost as high a score as did one-on-one meetings with staff, but interviewees were more mixed about their value. Workgroup members in particular were more likely to indicate that they were overwhelmed with email and found it difficult to absorb the information.
- **Website.** Roughly half of survey respondents described the website as effective or extremely effective. One respondent suggested that OCOF would benefit from an intranet site that could be a foundation for workgroup members to exchange information and that could possibly reduce the need to exchange so much email.
- **Newsletter.** Half of survey respondents indicated that they did not know about the newsletter, and another 18% felt that it was either not effective or only somewhat effective. The newsletter was not mentioned by interview respondents.
- **Organizational updates.** This category received the lowest score, mostly because 60 percent of respondents replied "don't know" or "not applicable" to the question. It is notable that, when asked about the specific work of the workgroups, several individuals who were interviewed said rather clearly that they were unaware of the specifics of the work or their staff members' assessment of how the work was proceeding. This suggests that there is room for improvement in the frequency in which organizations share information on the work of the Council.

Adequacy of OCOF Staffing and Support

OCOF staff consistently received high praise for their work organizing meetings, seeking broad input from key stakeholders, communicating about the goals of OCOF, creating useful products, and making sure "equity was at the heart of every conversation." One Council member noted how significant and useful it is to have permanent staff assigned to facilitate the effort, rather than outside facilitators. Similarly, 84 percent of respondents felt that current OCOF staff have the skills needed to design and implement appropriate strategies to support OCOF goals (the remaining 16 percent said they "don't know" if they have the skills). One survey respondent wrote, "staff are qualified and have created something out of nothing." Other words to describe OCOF staff members include "amazing," "clear," "capable," "impressive," and "effective."

Only roughly a third of survey respondents, however, felt that OCOF had *sufficient* staffing to coordinate all of the activities of the Council. Several Council members remarked at what an amazing job OCOF staff did *given* their limited staffing. So, while Council members are very impressed by what OCOF staff accomplished in Year 1 of the Council, they feel that they could use additional staffing support.

Participation and Representation

There were three inter-related themes that emerged as part of the discussion on participation and representation. The first is that, for the most part, respondents felt that the "right people are at the table" from city agencies and SFUSD to really move things forward. Key decision-makers are engaged at multiple levels, and as highlighted above, most survey respondents

and interviewees felt that their participation in the Council was supported by their organization.

Second, in keeping with the analysis highlighted above, several interviewees said that there is not enough time built into the process for Council members to talk with and build relationships with one another.

> *I think the right people are at the table. I feel a little bit that we're not working as a group as well as we could be. We don't meet that often, and I think there could be more interaction… between Council members.*

This theme was particularly strong among director-level staff who only attend the larger Council meetings, but it emerged among others as well.

Lastly, there was a nearly universal concern about when and how community members will be engaged around OCOF's goals. This included an emphasis on different communities, such as youth, African American families, representatives from community-based organizations that provide a lot of the services to families in the city, etc. Furthermore, although three-quarters of survey respondents said that there had been community input into the outcomes framework, almost all of the interview respondents felt that community members did not yet really have a voice on the Council itself and wondered aloud about how to include community member feedback in an authentic way.

Quality and Status of OCOF Products

Information on the quality and status of OCOF products is inconsistent. The survey asked respondents specifically about the outcomes framework, but not about the other core deliverables of Year 1 (five year plan and service inventory). Because the interviews did not ask explicitly on these tools, we were unable to get consistent feedback on them from interviewees. The write-in sections of the survey, however, were useful. Below is a summary of the feedback we were able to gather:

- **Outcomes Framework.** There was generally very positive feedback on the outcomes framework as 82 percent of respondents agreed that it was helpful to their work (a quarter "strongly agreed" that it was helpful). Three quarters also agreed that the framework had been informed by community input and when asked what went well with OCOF Year 1, a high number of survey respondents identified the outcomes framework as a "major success." Although there wasn't a lot of information in interviews specifically on the framework, a few voiced the concern that OCOF is taking on too much and that the focus will need to narrow as the work moves forward if OCOF is going to bring about real change.
- **Five-Year Plan.** The five-year plan was the focal point of feedback for those that wanted to make the road-map less "lofty" and more concrete (see challenges and opportunities for more detail on this). Several of those who served on this workgroup noted the high quality of facilitation.
- **Service inventory.** There was an acknowledgement that getting the service inventory out in Year 1 was a significant accomplishment, but really only the

beginning. One interviewee, referencing the service inventory website, said, "we have a beautiful website up, but are we actually reaching the families that we need to reach?" The issues related to the service inventory include "roll-out" to families, and also guidelines for what community-based organizations will be able to post services.

Challenges and Opportunities

> *There was a lot of real work done this year and so I'm just hoping that we keep up the momentum and excitement. I think as long as we keep setting these little goals, and we are meeting those, then we're going to keep up momentum and people are going to stay engaged.*

As the quote above indicates, one of the broadly recognized challenges for OCOF in the coming year is the need to keep up momentum and enthusiasm. At the same time, the workgroups need to slow down enough to have what one interviewee described as "the rich discussions we need to have." Interviewees and survey respondents highlighted the need to create space so that individuals not so engaged in city and district agencies have an opportunity to "speak up" and be heard to support "equity of voice." The following are core challenges and opportunities.

- **Actualizing and making concrete the core goals outlined in the "plan" to make a five-year plan**. One of the most common challenges raised by interviewees and in survey comments was that of bringing the work of OCOF, which one respondent described as a "lofty committee," down from the "30,000-foot level." There was a strong desire to bring that plan to life and many questioned the ability of the Council to create concrete and actionable goals and prepare a plan that will not just "sit on a shelf."

- **Balancing the need for inclusiveness with the need to get things done**. At the heart of the challenges surfaced by many interviewees is the tension between inclusiveness (i.e. the desire to ensure that all voices are heard) and the need to move quickly and effectively on key areas of synergy and cross-agency interest. The following quotes speak to this issue:

  > *It is a balance between wanting to make sure we have a broad cross-section of input but not having 150 people write a plan, right?*

  > *I wonder about our cultural sensitivity—just how inclusive we are being about getting the voices of those most vulnerable in the city… The Council members are sort of representing the groups we work with, but those groups aren't generally speaking for themselves.*

- **Focusing in on what can reasonably be influenced by the Council**. One respondent indicated that many of the goals outlined in the 5-year plan cannot be reasonably influenced by the work of the school system and city agencies. For instance, the goal of making San Francisco more affordable to live in for families is likely not within the reach of the Council to influence

because it is shaped by macro-economic forces and demographic trends. This individual suggested that OCOF make sure to focus on measurable and attainable goals.

> *Some of the goals are too broad and a little too overreaching and really have to do with both microeconomic and macroeconomic forces that the city agencies or the public sector really don't have any control over.*

- **Aligning resources across agencies and being clear on the implications of OCOF for agency budgets**. The theme of resources emerged repeatedly in interviews and survey comments as something of a "black box." People think that it needs to happen, but they aren't sure what it should look like. Some individuals talked about the value of aligning budgets, seeing it as the only real way to bring about institutional change. Some dreamed about a city-wide RFP process that would streamline funding opportunities and eliminate the need for community-based organizations to be responding to multiple RFPs. Finally, some talked about the complexity of aligning budgets and the challenges it will potentially represent in terms of competition between agencies. Regardless of the particular angle that respondents took on the issue, it was clear that it is something that OCOF will have to consider moving forward.

- **Separating out what is negotiable and what is not.** Each agency has its own set of expertise, and it is important for that be recognized as agencies (and community members, parents, etc) start to interact around the key outcome areas. One respondent felt that it is important to emphasize that there are some established standards for measuring, for instance, kindergarten readiness and that these standards are not up for cross-agency negotiation.

Recommendations

The following are key recommendations surfaced by interview and survey respondents that can help inform OCOF in the coming year.

- **Solicit more director-level input, through an "Executive Steering Committee" of the agencies most engaged with youth and families.** At least two of the directors interviewed felt in the dark about OCOF activities and would like to be more involved. Although they don't have time to participate in workgroup meetings, one suggested an executive steering committee that might provide them with an opportunity to have more substantive input.

- **Focus on encouraging discussion and exchange among Council members.** Several respondents spoke about the importance of building relationships between Council members, particularly at the director-level. A few suggested some smaller group discussions at the Council meetings.

- **Pick one outcome to "case study" cross-agency collaboration and what it might look like.** One survey respondent suggested that OCOF choose one question or concern to focus on for a case study, where departments would share data and conduct joint activities. This respondent suggested that this would help to concretize some of the conceptual goals of OCOF while also identifying challenges that need to be ironed out moving forward.

- **Take advantage of existing organizational and community meetings.** Many of the interview respondents emphasized the importance of "going to" community members rather than having community members come to OCOF organized events.

- **Develop a "cross-walk" of work being done by SFUSD and key city agencies.** Several individuals spoke to the variety of work being currently done by the school district and city agencies to move the needle on the key indicators included in the outcomes framework. These activities are at all different phases, and respondents said it would be wise for OCOF to capitalize on work that is already in motion. This may include, for instance, having staff from city agencies attend SFUSD meetings focused on attendance or truancy. In order to make this happen, there needs to be a thorough inventory of what is happening in SFUSD and city agencies, with a "cross-walk" that allows OCOF to recognize areas of synergy and the potential for shared action.

- **Draw on individuals who specialize in planning within each agency to assist with coordinating work across agencies.** In keeping with the recommendation above, several respondents pointed out that there are key staff in different departments that specialize in planning and that it may be useful to get these individuals together to think through issues of sequencing of activities, distribution of work, and allocation of resources, rather than asking the workgroup members to do that.

- **Consolidate emails into a weekly summary and create an intranet site.** Several individuals said that it was difficult for them to keep track of all the moving parts of the initiative, given the multiple emails that they received. One strategy that SPR has observed as being useful in other large collaborative projects is to condense all communication into a single communication that occurs at a set time every week. This consolidates information and makes it easier for an individual to find information when they are looking for it. One respondent also suggest an intranet site where individuals could reliably find all of the information they need to prepare for meetings, etc.

- **Engage minority and, more specifically, African American communities by reaching out to churches and other community groups.** One very consistent theme across interview respondents was the need for OCOF to engage more with the community. The African American population is seen as particularly important given the disproportionate number

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of challenges faced by the African American community in San Francisco. Respondents emphasized the importance of engaging the faith community, going to events at public housing and neighborhood block parties, attending school events, and so on. In sum, one respondent said, "*It is important to get the non-usual suspects… public meetings for public processes tend to attract a lot of the same players….We need to think…out of the box in terms of a public engagement strategy.*"

- **Use a variety of strategies to get community and Council member input.** Suggestions include using social media, surveys, and building on existing meetings. One interviewee suggested that OCOF should do short surveys of Council members to "check for understanding" and make mid-course corrections if needed.

- **Use a webinar format to prepare Council members for meetings.** Several Council members were honest about their inability to fully review and absorb written materials prior to the Council meetings. Two Council members suggested that a webinar or video format that quickly summarized key takeaways would be a more useful strategy for sharing information than expecting busy people to review a lot of written documents.

- **Glean lessons from collaborative efforts in other cities.** One survey respondent said that it would be useful to understand in more depth what other cities are doing and how San Francisco can learn from other efforts. Another suggested that, "regional and state initiatives to facilitate data sharing across agencies could be better leveraged."

Conclusion

In conclusion, there was a broad sense of recognition among Council members of the work that OCOF has done over the last year and the promise of OCOF for improving the lives of children and families in San Francisco. The following write-in response to the survey perfectly captures the complex set of tensions and forces that will influence OCOF implementation over the coming year.

> *The visionary aspect of this work—pulling together members from different agencies and departments to create a common framework for pursuing and measuring success—is deeply compelling. Department leaders have demonstrated commitment to the first year work with OCOF, and the Council has completed an impressive set of work. However, the demands of operating a large department are complex, and this complexity is multiplied when actions common to multiple departments are contemplated. To overcome this complexity, relationships among Council members will need to grow stronger and more open over time, as will joint understanding of the work we could share in common. --Survey respondent (SFUSD employee)*