



**FIRST 5 Santa Clara County
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)
RFP No. 23-001
Issued: March 13, 2023**

NOTE: If you download this RFP from the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County website, you are responsible for sending your name and e-mail address to the RFP Coordinator in order for your organization to receive any RFP amendments or bidder questions/agency answers.

PROJECT TITLE: Quality Matters Stipend Program

PROPOSAL DUE: April 19, 2023 at 4:00 p.m., Pacific Standard Time (PST)

ESTIMATED TIME PERIOD FOR CONTRACT: July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024

PROPOSER ELIGIBILITY: This procurement is open to Proposers that satisfy the minimum qualifications stated herein and are available for work in the state of California.

CONTENTS	SUBMIT PROPOSAL TO:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of Services • Request for Proposal Process • Instructions to Proposers • Evaluation, Selection and Award Process • Terms and Conditions 	Submission Link
	RFP COORDINATOR:
	Melissa Hong, Program Director melissa@first5kids.org Questions regarding this RFP may be submitted to the RFP Coordinator no later than March 22, 2023 2:00pm PST.
Attachment A: Cover Page, Narrative and Budget	
Attachment B: List of Eligible Trainings for Early Childhood Educators	

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1. SCOPE OF SERVICES

1.1 Background and Overview

A. Purpose

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County (FIRST 5) is seeking proposals from qualified agencies to provide project and program management services for implementation of the Quality Matters Stipend Program (QMSP), an effort within the Santa Clara County Quality Matters...a Strong Start for Kids (Quality Matters) initiative, co-led with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE).

The purpose of the Quality Matters Stipend Program is to promote continuous quality improvement in the field of early learning and care (ELC), by providing accessible career pathways and professional growth opportunities to those who work with young children, birth to five years old. This includes those who work in Center-based preschools, Family Child Care Homes, and license-exempt and informal care settings. The stipend program serves to incentivize, recruit, and retain professionals in the field of early learning and care and assist them in pursuing their career goals, including expanding their knowledge base, and/or attainment of a Child Development permit, degree, or credential.

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County intends to award one contract to provide the services described in this RFP.

B. Funding Availability

Funding is available through this RFP in the amount ranging between \$400,000 - \$700,000 annually for one year with an option to renew for 3 additional years based on program performance, continued availability of funding, and demonstrated community need. The amount set aside for this RFP described above does not include the individual stipends that will go out to participants.

Consistent with the intent of the California Children and Families Act of 1998, no monies from this program may be used to supplant state, county or local monies available to the agency for any purpose. Funds are not allocated for capital improvements.

C. Background on FIRST 5 Santa Clara County

In November 1998, California voters approved a \$.50 tax increase on tobacco products through the passage of Proposition 10, the Children and Families First Act. Eighty percent of these tax revenues are allocated annually to the 58 California counties to promote, support, and improve early development of children from the prenatal stage through five years of age. The remaining 20% of the revenues supports statewide programs and research. Each county established a Commission that has local authority over how to spend Proposition 10 revenue in accordance with the intent of the law.

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County is an independent, local public entity governed by nine Commissioners who represent county government, public health, social services, education, and early learning and care. The Commissioners are charged with upholding the intent of Proposition 10 and administering the funds to support and promote programs and services for children, prenatal through age 5, and their families.

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County's vision is that we will be a catalyst for ensuring that the developmental needs of children prenatal through age 5 are a priority in all sectors of the community.

To learn more about FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, please see our website at www.first5kids.org.

D. Background on Quality Matters...a Strong Start for Kids Initiative

In January 2012, California received a federal grant, Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) to help counties develop an integrated, high quality early learning system also known as a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Santa Clara County was one of sixteen counties in California to receive a four-year grant. Since 2012, Santa Clara County has developed a local QRIS that is focused on national quality standards in early learning and care environments, evaluating how well programs meet these standards, and supporting programs' continuous improvement efforts.

The last year of RTT-ELC in 2016 marked a transition period as new state funding opportunities emerged to sustain the implementation of QRIS. These included FIRST 5 California IMPACT, California State Preschool Program QRIS Block Grant, and Quality Counts California Block Grant. The goal of these grants is to increase the number of low-income families who enroll their young children in high-quality early learning programs.

Santa Clara County's implementation of its QRIS efforts is through the Quality Matters initiative. Quality Matters' projects and programs serve children birth to five years old in a wide variety of formal and informal, licensed and license-exempt early learning and care settings. These efforts have increased engagement with critical partners, including Family Child Care Home (FCCH) providers and Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) caregivers. To address racial inequities in the field of early learning and care, Quality Matters has evolved from focusing strictly on ratings to focusing on continuous quality improvements.

E. Background on Quality Matters Stipend Program (QMSP)

Funds from FIRST 5 California, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, and AB212 through the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) have supported the ongoing professional development of early educators in Santa Clara County for more than a decade. The first iteration of a stipend program in Santa Clara County was known as the Comprehensive Approach to Raising Educational Standards Plus (CARES Plus) Program that focused on improving the retention and training of qualified employees who work with children prenatal through five years.

In FY16-17, when the Quality Matters initiative transitioned from federal funding to state funding, CARES Plus transitioned into the Quality Matters Stipend Program (QMSP). Since then, QMSP has only increased the number of early learning and care professionals seeking professional growth opportunities.

The number of participating early learning and care professionals participating in the QMSP has steadily increased to more than 1100 individuals who enroll at the beginning of each fiscal year. The program has also expanded to serve more diverse participants, including family support specialists, parent educators and community workers at FIRST 5 Family Resource Centers and home-visiting professionals, who also support families with young children, birth through five

years. Currently, the following groups of professionals are eligible to participate in the Quality Matters Stipend Program:

- Early childhood educators: work in center-based preschools and home-based childcare settings. The individual educator or employer must enroll annually in the Quality Matters network to be eligible for the Quality Matters Stipend Program.
- Family support specialists/parent educators/community workers: work at FIRST 5 Family Resource Centers connecting families to resources that promote optimal child development, facilitate access to childcare, health and social services, and build strong communities.
- Home visitors: deliver support and services to families with young children in their home environment, focusing on the healthy development and well-being of young children and their families by providing them with information, resources, and support.

1.2 Operational Specifications

The contractor awarded this RFP will be expected to have the capacity to meet the operational specifications outlined below:

A. Staffing and Facilities

Employees demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting the professional growth of a diverse workforce in the field of early learning and care. Employees are proficient in the knowledge and skills required of those who work in early childhood education and child development. Familiarity with California's Master Plan for Early Learning and Care is highly recommended. Employees are knowledgeable about adult learning theory and professional development career pathways, including workshops, conferences, and online courses that may be incorporated as part of an effective stipend program. Staff will demonstrate the organizational skills and capacity to plan, coordinate, and implement a stipend program, including managing budgets, tracking participant progress, and ensuring program compliance and completion.

Staff will operate the QMSP in a way that centers diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) through their ability to interact with people from a wide variety of ethnicities, primary languages and cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. Staff will prioritize empathy, understanding, and active listening in all interactions, creating a safe and supportive environment for the diverse early learning and care workforce.

Allocation for direct staffing for facilities is available. The selected contractor may offer remote work options to employees or provide a workspace for employees assigned to this program. To support employees to be able to work remotely, the selected Contractor may need to provide:

- Adequate technology and equipment needed to perform job duties.
- Clear guidelines and expectations for remote work.
- Communication tools to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Flexibility in scheduling and work arrangements to accommodate ELC workforce needs.
- Training and support for effective remote work.
- Trust and accountability with remote work by providing regular feedback and opportunities for growth and development.

B. Project and program management services.

The selected contractor will offer program and project management services to ensure that the QMSP is well-designed, effectively implemented, and continuously improved to meet the needs of FIRST 5, Quality Matters, the ECE workforce, and advance the field of early learning and care (ELC). This typically includes the following activities: planning and design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, participant engagement, reporting and documentation, and continuous quality improvement. It is important to consider the unique needs, perspectives, and interests of the ELC workforce, who serve low-income families or marginalized communities.

C. Timeline

It is currently anticipated that more than 600 Center-based Program early educators, 350 Family Child Care Home early educators, 90 family support specialists/parent educators/community workers and 150 Family, Friend and Neighbor providers will be eligible to participate in Quality Matters in FY23-24. Therefore, the following tentative timeline has been suggested:

- June 2023: Contract finalized: Hiring, training, purchasing supplies
- July 2023 through September 2023: Training continues, set up online information platform, community outreach, develop policies and procedures
- October 2023 through April 2024: Provide training and technical assistance, advising, and navigation support.
- June 2024: Verify stipend eligibility and encumber funds to disburse stipends
- August 2024: Complete disbursement of stipends

Should there be a need to shift the timeline for program launch, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County will work with the contractor to develop an alternative suitable timeline.

D. Hours of Operation

Quality Matters Stipend Program staff may be required to work during non-traditional business hours to provide training, technical assistance, and other program supports. Often, the targeted workforce is only available in the evenings and on weekends because they work in early learning and care environments during regular business hours.

E. All Services Offered at No Cost

Participation in the QMSP is voluntary and free to any ELC professional who is actively involved in serving young children birth to five years and their families, provided they enroll in the Quality Matters network.

F. Removing Barriers to Participation

QMSP staff will develop and implement an outreach plan that strives to address barriers to participation that particularly affect historically under resourced and underserved populations, including technology concerns, language or cultural differences, or other barriers that might hinder participation in the program.

G. Participant Records

QMSP will use the California Early Childhood Education (ECE) Workforce Registry (Registry) as its primary database to record and track participants' eligibility for stipends. Any records submitted physically or electronically will meet confidentiality requirements for maintaining participant records. For the disbursement of a stipend, the contractor will collect IRS W-9 forms from participants using a secure web form.

If contractor is not familiar with the Registry or have not partnered with the Registry before, introductions will be made by FIRST 5.

H. Continuous Quality Improvement

FIRST 5 strives to provide the most relevant services, efficiently utilize resources, and provide high-quality programming that centers diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. To that end, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and Contractor will engage in a continuous quality improvement process and mutually agree to check in on a monthly basis to share feedback and updates. If it is determined that programmatic and structural changes are needed and can be implemented within the allotted budget, Contractor agrees to revise the work to provide the highest quality and most relevant services to the community.

I. Branding, Social Media, and Promotional Materials

The Quality Matters brand is preserved for use with the Quality Matters Stipend Program, including in any of the following activities: public relations, a non-FIRST 5 website, social media, and promotional materials. FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) jointly developed the Quality Matters logo and, along with a developed brand identity, will be used by the selected Contractor.



- **Brand Style Guide:** Review and follow the brand's style guide, which provides guidelines for the use of the brand's logo, typography, color palette, tone of voice, and messaging.
- **Brand Consistency:** Maintain consistency in the use of the brand identity across all materials, including public relations, social media, and promotional materials, to ensure that the brand is easily recognizable and consistent.
- **Approvals:** Obtain approvals from the brand owner or authorized representative for any materials that use the brand identity, such as press releases, advertisements, and social media posts, to ensure that they align with the brand's strategy and goals.
- **Attribution:** Properly attribute the Quality Matters brand identity and ensure that it is used in a manner that is consistent with the brand's guidelines and legal requirements.

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County provides expertise and assistance in identifying and promoting stories to multiple media sources, and publishes and highlights QMSP's successes on its website, newsletter, social media, and FIRST 5 Commission reports. Contractor will regularly submit content to FIRST 5 Santa Clara County staff to be included in FIRST 5 communications. FIRST 5 Santa Clara County staff will work with the Contractor to develop an agreed-upon frequency to post messaging and notices to social media platform(s).

J. Collaboration and Community Engagement

Effective services are dependent on ensuring that the Contractor is an active and engaged community partner. To that end, Contractor shall participate in selected community collaboratives to engage community partners, learn more about relevant community initiatives, and avoid duplication of services offered in the community. This includes attendance at countywide

collaborative meetings including, but not limited to: the Local Early Education Planning Council (LPC), Quality Matters Leadership Council, Early Education Consortium, Registry Workgroups, and more as identified by FIRST 5 Staff.

K. Data Collection and Evaluation

Contractor will be required to collect and report data to FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) on demographic information about QMSP participants, as well as performance and outcomes measures. Contractor will be required to submit relevant information for any statewide or local Quality Matters evaluations and reporting activities, and work directly with FIRST 5's evaluator to establish impact goals and metrics. Contractor will also be required to submit quarterly updates, in addition to a year-end program report. If FIRST 5 Santa Clara County obtains additional funding for the QMSP, additional data collection and evaluation may be required.

1.3 Quality Matters Stipend Program Services

A. Orientation, Registration and Enrollment

Contractor will implement a racial equity and trauma-informed approach to conduct outreach to the diverse early learning and care workforce, who consistently encounter barriers to accessing professional development opportunities. This effort will require thoughtful communication methods as well as sensitivity to the multi-cultural, multi-lingual ECE Workforce.

Contractor will develop and lead community orientations to increase participation in the QMSP effort. Employees will focus on supporting the workforce to persist and successfully earn professional development hours, college coursework units, higher degrees, child development permits, or a credential that helps individuals advance their career in the early learning and care field.

Contractor will promote the QMSP through various communication methods and highlight the benefits and values of the stipend program to target audiences. The QMSP application process will be streamlined using the California ECE Workforce Registry, and Contractor will provide ongoing support and technical assistance to participants to complete the registration process.

B. Professional Development Navigation and Advising

Contractor will operate a one-stop service platform connecting individuals in the field of early learning and care to events, news, resources and professional development opportunities including training or college coursework to promote professional growth. This includes publicizing key events and trainings on a collaborative Quality Matters calendar.

Contractors will identify and promote free trainings and college coursework that would benefit early learning and care individuals in pursuit of their ongoing professional development goals. This includes collaborating with local Higher Education Institutions.

Contractor will provide navigation supports to the early learning and care workforce through identification of professional development opportunities that build proficiency in California's

[Early Childhood Education Competencies](#) and strengthen skills that improve children's lives, enhance the quality of teaching practices, support parent engagement, and facilitate career advancement. Drop-in hours must be made available for individual one-on-one or small group support. Throughout the program year, Contractor will clearly communicate stipend completion deadlines.

In addition, Contractor may be asked to engage with the early learning and care workforce in-person by staffing a table in community spaces. This may include hosting a table at a FIRST 5 Family Resource Center event, and/or holding office hours at FIRST 5 or a local public library with advisory hours for individuals seeking support.

C. Capacity Building Opportunities

ECE Workforce Registry: Contractor will work closely with the California ECE Workforce Registry to develop a mechanism for administrators, training institutes, and/or qualified individuals to submit documentation to be identified as approved trainers for Santa Clara County. Contractor will also collaborate with state, regional, and local trainers to identify professional development opportunities for the early learning and care workforce.

Family Child Care Home Leadership Opportunities: FIRST 5 Santa Clara County has multiple initiatives focused on supporting the professional growth of Family Child Care Home providers, including the Quality Matters Early Learning Apprenticeship Program, Shared Services Alliance, Inclusion Collaborative Community of Practice, and others. Contractor will be responsible for outreach directly to Family Child Care Home providers, with a goal of increasing participation in the QMSP. An additional stipend may be offered to FCCH providers who serve as mentors to other FCCH providers. Contractor will be required to learn about the development of Santa Clara County's Family Child Care Home Network and other FIRST 5 initiatives that serve to strengthen FCCH providers across our County.

D. Workforce Database Management

Santa Clara County utilizes the California ECE Workforce Registry to track and promote the education, training and experience of the early learning and childcare workforce for the purpose of improving the quality of professional practices to positively impact young children's lives.

Contractor will:

- Encourage and provide group trainings or one-on-one support to individuals to utilize the California ECE Workforce Registry through provision of technical assistance to establish new accounts and/or support the upload of any documents, including college transcripts or other certificates.
- Promote existing Registry training videos developed by the California ECE Workforce Registry.
- Facilitate the ongoing transfer of information from the ECE Registry into FIRST 5's Quality Matters database system called Hubbe for ease of reporting and evaluation requirements.
- Collaborate with FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and SCCOE to share professional development data for QRIS and other system-level data analyses.

E. Verification of Professional Development Completion

Contractor will work with the Registry to review all QMSP online applications in the ECE

Workforce Registry to ensure they meet all required criteria for the stipend program, for either the college coursework or general training stipend.

In order to earn a College Coursework Stipend, individuals must:

- Complete a minimum of 3 semester units (4 quarter units) of college coursework, earning a grade of “C” or better, during the program year July 2023 – June 2024.
- Units must be taken in courses relevant to a career in early learning and childcare, and in most cases will contribute to the earning of a college degree or the obtainment/upgrade of a California Child Development Permit or California Teaching Credential.
- General Education and ESL/Basic Skills courses are also accepted in pursuit of an AA or BA degree, or higher.
- Courses must be taken through a nationally accredited college or university to be eligible for a college coursework stipend.

In order to earn a Training Stipend, individuals must:

- Complete a minimum of 21 hours of approved professional development during the program year, July 2023 – June 2024 from a FIRST 5 pre-approved list.
- If an individual would like to request stipend hours for an alternative training, they must submit a Training Approval Request Form, to be developed in partnership with FIRST 5 staff.

Upon verification that an individual satisfied all requirements to earn a stipend, Contractor agrees to notify individuals of their achievement and stipend via e-mail and/or phone/text.

F. Financial – Disbursement of Stipends

The Quality Matters Stipend Program is implemented through multiple, blended state and local funding sources. Understanding funding terms and limitations and prior experience with reporting and evaluation requirements of blending funding is a plus.

- Collection of IRS form W9 from all individuals who register for the QMSP.
- A safe, secure, and reliable method for issuing checks at scale in a short period of time.
- Ability to provide personnel to reconcile stipend issues, if any.
- Issue Tax Form 1099 to QMSP recipients according to US Tax regulations.
- Prior experience working with diverse micro-business owners such as Family Child Care Homes is a plus.
- Ability to track, monitor, and manage expenses associated with different grants.

2. REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL PROCESS

2.1. Eligible Proposers

“Proposer” is any entity that submits a Proposal in response to this RFP. Non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, and public and government entities are eligible to submit a proposal.

2.2 Mandatory Proposers’ Conference

Potential Proposers must attend a Mandatory Proposers’ Conference on Wednesday Thursday March 23, 2023 from 2:00pm to 3:30pm on Zoom.

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88131390131?pwd=ZDVuMHB4TmNndDVRVFpVZ0NYk5Gdz09>
Meeting ID: 881 3139 0131
Passcode: 320722

The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity for potential Proposers to ask specific questions about the project and to request RFP clarification. Potential Proposers may submit questions in writing before or during the conference (see 2.3 below). FIRST 5 will entertain verbal questions asked at the conference, but responses may be deferred and provided at a later date. Subcontractors may not represent a potential Proposer at the conference.

2.3 RFP Inquiries and Requests for Information

Inquiries regarding the RFP may be made by email prior to the Mandatory Proposers’ Conference or may also be made at the Mandatory Proposers’ Conference. Inquiries made outside of the Mandatory Proposers’ Conference must be emailed to the RFP Coordinator at melissa@first5kids.org with the Subject line: **RFP #23-001**.

All emailed inquiries must be received by March 22, 2023, 2:00pm PST. Emailed inquiries will be addressed along with all other inquiries at the Mandatory Proposers Conference on March 23, 2023. FIRST 5 will provide written responses by March 31, 2023 to each agency in attendance at the Mandatory Proposers’ Conference via email and on the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County website (www.first5kids.org).

2.4 Schedule of RFP Events

The following Schedule of Events reflects important dates for the selection process. All dates throughout this RFP are subject to change at FIRST 5’s discretion. Notice of any date change will be posted on FIRST 5 Santa Clara County’s website: www.first5kids.org

Events	DESCRIPTION	DATE
Request for Proposals Released	FIRST 5 issues RFP Packet and is available online at www.first5kids.org .	March 13, 2023
RFP Questions Deadline	Questions regarding the RFP may be addressed via email to melissa@first5kids.org .	March 22, 2023
Mandatory Proposer Conference	Mandatory Proposer Conference will be held virtually on Zoom : https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88131390131?pwd=ZDVuMHB4TmNndDVRVFpVZ0NYk5Gdz09 Meeting ID: 881 3139 0131 Passcode: 320722	March 23, 2023
Written Response	A written response to RFP questions is issued on FIRST 5's website.	March 31, 2023
Letter of Intent	A letter of intent is mandatory and required of all Proposers intending to apply for the RFP.	April 7, 2023
Proposal Submission Deadline	The completed proposal packet must be submitted through this link .	April 19, 2023 at 4:00 pm Proposals received after the deadline will not be reviewed or considered.
Interviews	Interviews for highest ranked Proposers may be conducted.	May 1 – 18 18, 2023
Notification of Recommendation of Funding	The selected proposal will receive an initial award recommendation by email. Those Proposers who are not selected to move forward in the process will also receive notice via email.	May 17 19, 2023
Appeal Process	Proposers who are not recommended for funding but who wish to appeal the decision have three working days from receipt of the email notifying Proposers of the initial award recommendation to file an appeal in writing. The written appeal needs to document the reason for the appeal and must be sent via email to: melissa@first5kids.org trena.hudson@first5kids.org and addressed to Trena Hudson, Executive of Early Learning and Care Strategies Melissa Hong, Program Director . Grounds for appeal are limited to a violation of a FIRST 5 Santa Clara County procedure, law, rule, or regulation regarding this RFP process. Appeals will not be accepted on any other grounds. Decision on appeal is final.	May 22 24, 2023
Commission Approval	FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Commission Approves Awards of Funding	June 22, 2023
Contract Development & Negotiations Period	Contract Development & Negotiations Period	June, 2023

Contract Start	Contract Term begins on July 1, 2023	July 1, 2023
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2.5 Proposal Submittal and Withdrawal

Proposer must fully complete the Proposal in the format required by FIRST 5 and respond to every question. Proposal must be submitted to the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County electronically using the [submission link](#) provided in this RFP.

Proposals shall not be hand-delivered or sent by regular mail.

FIRST 5 will not pay any costs associated with the preparation, submittal, or presentation of any Proposal. To withdraw a Proposal, the Proposer must submit a written request, signed by an authorized representative, to FIRST 5 Santa Clara County. After withdrawing a previously submitted Proposal, the Proposer may submit another Proposal at any time up to the deadline for submitting Proposals. Proposals submitted after the deadline will not be considered.

3. INSTRUCTIONS TO PROPOSERS

3.1 Mandatory Proposal Form

FIRST 5 has provided a Proposal Form (Attachment A) in an electronic format on FIRST 5 Santa Clara County's website. Proposers must fully complete and sign the Proposal Form, responding to every question, and attach all necessary requested documents. Proposers must fill in desired check boxes and adhere to page limits where indicated.

Failure to follow the specified Proposal Form and format may, at the FIRST 5's sole discretion, result in the rejection of the Proposal.

3.2 Budget Definitions

A. Personnel Costs must include positions, salary, period (months), and "FTE" (actual percentage of time devoted to the project) for each position. Salary and benefits must be pro-rated for non-full-time employees, if agency provides benefits to part time employees. Salaries are fixed compensation for services performed by staff that are directly employed by the Proposer and are paid for on a regular basis. Employee benefits and employer payroll taxes include employer's contributions or expenses for social security, employee's life and health insurance plans, unemployment insurance, pension plans, and other similar expenses that are approved by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County. These expenses are allowable when they are included in the grant award and are in accordance with the agency's approved written policies.

B. Salaries and Benefits of personnel involved in more than one grant or project must be charged to each grant based on the actual percentage of time spent on each grant or project. The annualized actual percentage charged for a particular position (e.g., Project Director) cannot exceed the annual percentage approved in the grant award. Similarly, the dollar amount charged for a particular position also must not exceed the dollar amount in the approved grant award. Functional timesheets or an allocation plan must be maintained which support the time charged to FIRST 5 Santa Clara County grants.

C. Operating Expenses are defined as necessary expenditures exclusive of personnel salaries, benefits and equipment. Such expenses include specific items directly charged to the project. The expenses must be grant-related (i.e., to further the program objectives as defined in the grant award) and be incurred (realized) during the grant period. FIRST 5 Santa Clara County

reserves the right to make the final determination if an operating expense is allowable and necessary.

D. Indirect costs are shared costs that cannot be directly assigned to a particular activity but are necessary to the operation of the agency and the performance of the program. The costs of operating and maintaining accounting services and administrative salaries are examples of indirect costs. For this program, indirect costs cannot exceed 15% of the total of Salaries and Benefits, and Operating Expenses.

4. EVALUATION, SELECTION AND AWARD PROCESS

4.1 Compliance

FIRST 5 will review all Proposals to determine compliance with basic Proposal requirements as specified in this RFP. Incomplete Proposals may disqualify the Proposer from further consideration in this process.

4.2 Evaluation Process

The evaluation process is designed to recommend award(s) of funding to the Proposer(s) that can best provide the Quality Matters Stipend Program in Santa Clara County. Proposals will be evaluated as set forth below.

An RFP Evaluation Committee (EC) will evaluate all Proposals. The EC will be composed of FIRST 5 Santa Clara County staff, community members, and other parties that may have relevant expertise or experience. The EC will score and recommend proposals in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth in this RFP. Evaluation of the proposals shall be within the sole judgment and discretion of the EC.

A maximum number of points will be assigned to each Proposal Element (Qualifications and Experience, Scope of Work/Program Description, QMSP Operations, Budget, and Underlying Principles) in the Proposal Packet as follows:

Proposal Elements	Maximum Score
Qualifications and Experience	25 Points
Description of Services/Scope of Work	20 Points
Data Collection and Evaluation	15 Points
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging	20 Points
Budget and Fiscal Responsibility	20 Points
Total Maximum	100 Points

4.3 Proposal Review Criteria

Item	Possible Points
Qualifications and Experience	25
Proposer clearly articulates the capacity of the organization to accomplish the services.	5

Contractor has appropriate experience in early childhood, family support services or other relevant field.	5
Contractor has organizational infrastructure that could support a program of this size and scale.	5
Contractor has experience developing and sustaining community partnerships.	5
Contractor has appropriate personnel plan to carry out the services.	5
Description of Services/Scope of Work	20
Contractor provides a clear description of the program design and implementation plan.	5
Contractor has an appropriate plan to outreach to and engage the full spectrum of early learning educators and providers.	5
Contractor demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the local community and/or an effective plan to quickly connect and integrate with the community.	5
The scope of work clearly outlines the activities, targets, and outcomes anticipated.	5
Data collection and evaluation	15
Contractor has a clear and appropriate plan for start-up.	5
Contractor has a clear and appropriate plan to ensure services are meeting the needs of the eligible professionals, participants and Quality Matters goals.	5
Contractor has a plan to effectively measure the success and outcomes of the program.	5
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging	20
Contractor demonstrates prior experience and understanding in diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB).	10
Contractor incorporates DEIB approaches in their program planning, implementation, and evaluation of services.	10
Budget and Fiscal Responsibility	20
Proposed resources are appropriate to carry out the project.	10
Resources needed to carry out the project are adequately described and clearly connected to the activities in the program description.	10
Total Possible Points	100

The EC may recommend funding for the top ranked Proposal or may recommend the top two ranked Proposals be forwarded to an interview. Interviews will be worth up to 100 points, which will be added to the score of the EC for the initial proposal for a total score out of 200 points. The top-ranking Proposer from the total of the two scores will be recommended for funding.

Final selection is at the sole discretion of the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County or its designee, which

reserves the right to reject any or all Proposals, or to make no selection based on this RFP.

4.4 Best Value

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County will select the proposal(s) that presents the best value and is most advantageous to FIRST 5's vision and mission to support young children prenatal to five years and their families, and the benefit to the early learning and childcare community. Accordingly, FIRST 5 may not necessarily award the Proposer with the lowest price proposal if doing so would not be in the overall best interest of Santa Clara County. FIRST 5 reserves the right to expand or reduce the proposed scope of work during the contracting process based on budget constraints and to award to a single or multiple Proposers.

4.5 Contract Award Process

- A. After the evaluation of proposals and final consideration of all pertinent information available, FIRST 5 will either reject all proposals or issue a written notice of intent to recommend funding to the Commission of the apparent best evaluated proposal(s). The notice shall not create rights, interests, or claims of entitlement in the Proposer(s).
- B. This RFP, its attachments, submitted questions and answers, and the proposals from the apparent best evaluated Proposer(s) shall be incorporated into the final contract.
- C. The apparent best evaluated Proposers should be prepared to enter into a contract with FIRST 5 Santa Clara County. Notwithstanding, FIRST 5 reserves the right to add terms and conditions, deemed to be in the best interest of FIRST 5, during final contract negotiations.
- D. Contracts must be fully executed before services can begin. Services cannot begin prior to the contracted start date.

5. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

5.1 Protests and Appeals

Following the release of the initial award recommendation letters, Proposers not recommended for funding have three working days to file an appeal in writing with FIRST 5 Santa Clara County. Grounds for appeal are limited to a violation of a FIRST 5 procedure, law, rule, regulation, or practice regarding this RFP process. Appeals will not be accepted on any other grounds. The appeal letter will be reviewed and a written decision on the appeal will be sent to the Proposer/appellant.

Appeal letter submittals should be addressed to:

[Melissa Hong, Director of Early Learning](mailto:melissa@first5kids.org)
melissa@first5kids.org

Trena Hudson, Executive of Early Learning and Care Strategies
Trena.hudson@first5kids.org

Appeals will only be considered if received by 5:00 pm on the appeal deadline date.

5.2 Reservations

- FIRST 5 reserves the right to cancel the RFP process at any time for any reason, even after review of all the Proposals, and is not responsible for any expenses incurred by a Proposer in developing an proposal.
- FIRST 5 reserves the right to reduce, amend, and/or rescind this RFP at any time prior to final execution of the contract.
- FIRST 5 is under no obligation to award a contract to the Proposer that presents the lowest cost or highest yield. Selection will be made based on overall evaluation of the Proposal and the best interest of FIRST 5 as determined by the review panel and the Executive Director.
- FIRST 5 reserves the right to request clarification from any Proposer on their Proposal.
- All Proposals become the property of FIRST 5.
- FIRST 5 reserves the right to accept all or a portion of any Proposal.
- All Proposals will remain confidential until a contract is negotiated, however, since FIRST 5 is a public entity, all Proposals can become public, with written request,
- after all successful contract negotiations.

5.3 Confidentiality

FIRST 5 Santa Clara County will retain a master copy of each response to this RFP. Responses will become public record after the award of a contract unless the qualifications or specific parts of the qualifications can be shown to be exempt by law under Government Code section 6250 et seq. Proposers may clearly label part of a submittal as "CONFIDENTIAL" if the Proposer agrees to indemnify and defend FIRST 5 for honoring such a designation. The failure to have so labeled any information shall constitute a complete waiver of all claims for damages caused by any release of the information. If a public records request for labeled information is received by FIRST 5, FIRST 5 will notify the Proposer of the request and delay access to the material until 7 working days after notification to the Proposer. Within that time delay, it will be the Proposer's duty to act in protection of its labeled information. Failure to so act shall constitute a complete waiver.

END OF REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS