

First 5 California's *Kit for New Parents*

Lessons Learned About the Distribution of *Kits* Across the State



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Since 2001, First 5 California (F5CA) has provided children's books and other free resources to 5.4 million families across California through the *Kit for New Parents*. *Kits* are free to families, and contain two parenting information books, two children's books, and other flyers and supports for new parents and caregivers. This resource is available in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese. Families can order a *Kit* from F5CA (<https://first5parentingkits.com/>) to be shipped directly to their home, or they can also obtain a *Kit* from a local service agency or community organization (e.g., at the hospital when their baby is born, through a home visiting program, from a family resource center) that has ordered *Kits* in bulk for the community it serves. Some F5 County Commissions facilitate access to *Kits* by placing orders on behalf of families or local organizations.



This brief examines the distribution of the *Kits* to families across the state, highlighting findings from the *Kit for New Parents* Study. This study, which describes the distribution of *Kits* as well as the experiences and outcomes of families that received the *Kit*, is being conducted by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and its partners at Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) and Allen, Shea & Associates. Findings highlighted in this brief draw on analyses of *Kit* shipping records from the statewide *Kit* fulfillment center, and surveys and interviews with F5 County Commissions and local organizations that distribute the *Kit* to families. The Data Sources and Study Sample box at the end of the brief provides further details about these data sources. Findings presented here describe the *Kit*'s reach across California, promising strategies reported by F5 County Commissions and local organizations, and barriers to distribution. The brief concludes with recommendations for strengthening *Kit* distribution.

The Scope of *Kit* Distribution Across California

Using *Kit* shipping records from fiscal year 2021–22, we examined the recent distribution patterns of *Kits* across the state, including how the *Kits* are distributed across the various regions. Because county population size varies widely, we considered the number of *Kits* sent to each county in relation to the total number of children born in that county during the year.



**More than 80,000
Kits were sent out
in 2021–22 ...**

... and the vast majority were sent to local organizations to distribute to families.

83,074 *Kits* were sent from the *Kit* fulfillment center in response to requests via the F5CA website and the ordering website set up for organizations that want to receive *Kits* to share with the families they serve in their local communities. Almost all of these *Kits* (97%) are sent to local organizations for later distribution; only 3% are sent directly to families. Hospitals and other health care providers are the number one *Kit* distributors.



***Kit* distribution by
county varied widely ...**

... with a few counties receiving enough *Kits* to serve at least half of their families with new babies, but most counties receiving far fewer.

The number of *Kits* sent generally varied according to county size, with larger counties receiving more *Kits*. Overall, about a third of all counties received enough *Kits* in 2021–22 for more than 20% of the births in their county. Another third received enough *Kits* for 5–20% of their births, and the remaining third received enough *Kits* to serve fewer than 5% of families with new births (including six counties that received no *Kits* at all). Only nine counties received enough *Kits* for at least half of the families in their communities with new babies.

The Role of First 5 County Commissions in *Kit* Distribution

F5 County Commissions' involvement in *Kit* distribution varies widely, with some counties more engaged than others.

***Kit* distribution rates are higher in counties where County Commissions are more involved and lowest in counties where County Commissions are not involved.** High County Commission engagement includes developing a county-wide strategy for distribution, actively encouraging community partners, and providing guidance and training to organizations to enhance distribution. From 2020 through 2021, distribution rates among the seven interviewed counties that fit the high-engagement category ranged from 4% to more than 100%, with six of the seven counties having a distribution rate exceeding 20% of the number of births in the county. In contrast, *Kit* distribution rates for the medium engagement category ranged from 1% to 18%. The lowest distribution rates were found in counties that do not play an active role in *Kit* distribution (less than one *Kit* was distributed per 100 births [1%] during that period).

Most of the *Kits* ordered by organizations and families were in English (72.7%), but a quarter of the *Kits* ordered were in Spanish (25.2%).

This is consistent with the percentage of Spanish speakers in California (28.8%). Orders for *Kits* in the other available languages each represented less than 1% of all *Kits* ordered (0.8% Chinese, 0.5% Korean, 0.8% Vietnamese), consistent with lower percentages of speakers of those languages in California (3.4% Chinese, 1.0% Korean, 1.6% Vietnamese).¹

First 5 County Commission *Kit* Distribution Models in High, Medium, and Low Engagement Counties

High	Medium	Low
- Actively encourages community partners to distribute the <i>Kit</i> - Has a strategy to proactively distribute the <i>Kit</i> to families - Provides guidance and training to organizations to enhance distribution efforts	- Helps partners or families that request the <i>Kit</i> without actively promoting the <i>Kit</i> or establishing a county-wide strategy for distribution - May be working on establishing a county-wide strategy for distribution	Does not play an active role in <i>Kit</i> distribution

Successful strategies employed by County Commissions to increase the distribution of *Kits* include:

- Centralizing responsibility for *Kit* distribution and/or promotion to one individual or organization.** At least two counties, both with high distribution rates, contracted with a consultant or organization to lead distribution activities in their county. For example, First 5 Monterey contracted with a consultant to train partners, including hospitals and other community partners, to explain the *Kit* and interact with families during the distribution process. The consultant also distributes the *Kit* at community fairs.
- Implementing a strong marketing campaign.** In San Diego, the F5 County Commission supports distribution in several ways: by actively marketing the *Kit* to potential distributing organizations and individual parents/caregivers, distributing the *Kits* at community events and through other F5 services, and training organizations to distribute the *Kit*. For example, in addition to asking funded partners to distribute *Kits*, County Commission staff also meet with other community-based organizations and military offices, particularly large organizations, to promote the *Kit*.
- Developing partnerships with primary birthing centers.** County Commission staff from two small, rural counties discussed their success partnering with the primary birthing center in their county. As described by one staff member, "Without the birth center, we probably wouldn't be distributing them at all. Just because I don't know how else we would be connecting so well with all our families. That's just kind of a universal hub for new families." Respondents from large counties also highlighted this as an important distribution strategy to ensure that *Kit* distribution is "spread throughout the county."

¹ 2019 data from the Migration Policy Institute (<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/CA>)

Delivering *Kits* to California's Diverse Families

More than 500 organizations across the state distribute *Kits* directly to families. These local *Kit*-distributing organizations vary widely in their mission, their scope of services, and the families they prioritize for their *Kit* distribution efforts.

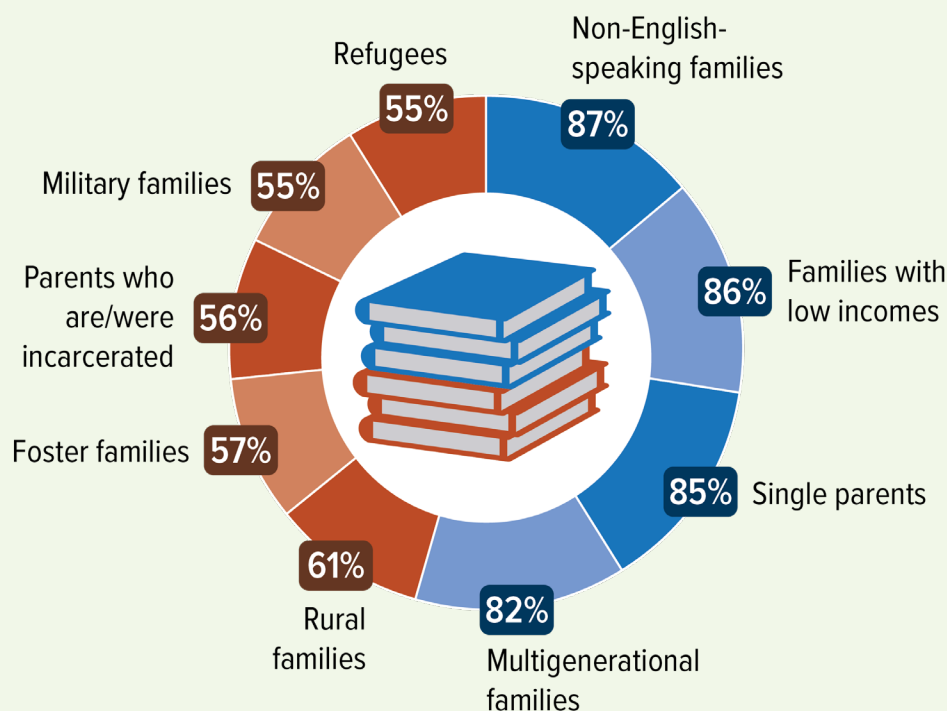
Most organizations reported that they take a universal approach to *Kit* distribution, rather than targeting particular populations. Four out of five organizations (79%) reported they distribute *Kits* to all families with young children that they serve. Other organizations indicated that they prioritize certain populations (e.g., families with low incomes) for *Kit* distribution.

Most respondents indicated that their *Kits* typically reach some priority populations, like low-income and non-English-speaking families. When asked which populations they were able to reach with their *Kits*, more than eight out of 10 survey respondents reported that their *Kits* reach the following populations: non-English-speaking families (87%), families with low incomes (86%), single parents (85%), and multigenerational families (82%).

Respondents were less confident that they were able to get *Kits* into the hands of other populations, like refugees, foster families, and rural families. Just over half of respondents reported that their *Kits* typically reached refugee families (55%), military families (55%), parents who are or have been incarcerated (56%), foster families (57%), and rural families (61%). Organizations also mentioned they were not able to reach families that spoke languages in which the *Kit* is not available (e.g., Arabic, Tagalog).

Most organizations do not document who receives the *Kit*, making an accurate accounting of *Kit* recipients impossible. While some organizations reported that they were not reaching particular populations such as refugee families or foster families, more indicated that they did not know if their *Kits* were reaching these families. Among organizations that responded to the survey, only 24% reported that they always collect and record demographic information (an additional 7% reported that they sometimes do). Without this information, it is difficult for organizations to say for sure who receives their *Kits*. When we interviewed organizations, we learned that those that do track demographic information use the data to inform their outreach efforts and future *Kit* orders.

Percentage of *Kit* Distributing Organizations That Report Successfully Reaching Particular Populations





Promising Approaches to *Kit* Distribution

Thoughtful distribution helps ensure the *Kits* get into the hands of families that need them. Below, we highlight a few promising practices that surfaced from interviews and surveys with *Kit* distributors.

Distributing at hospitals is an efficient way to reach new parents.

Hospitals are a prime hub for *Kit* distribution, given that most expecting and new parents pass through hospitals or birthing centers. Many hospitals that distribute *Kits* do so shortly after birth, before the family returns home with their new baby. Other hospitals introduce the *Kit* even earlier—to expectant parents who come in for prenatal checkups or who participate in their prenatal classes.

Discussing the contents of the *Kit* with families in person helps build interest in the *Kit*, which can increase their use of the *Kit*.

In-person distribution of *Kits* at group events (e.g., baby shower classes and parent meetings) or one-on-one meetings (e.g., intake appointments and case management meetings) was identified as a core strategy among many organizations because it allowed staff to walk families through the valuable resources in the *Kit*. Staff reported that this increased families' interest in and use of the *Kit*. In addition, organizations noted that families are more open to receiving and learning about the *Kit* items when they receive the *Kit* from staff they trust or with whom they already have a relationship.

Embedding *Kit* distribution in existing services allows organizations to leverage *Kit* resources to further support families.

Organizations we interviewed noted that the *Kits* sometimes serve as a starting point for conversations with families. Some reported using the *Kit* to introduce educational topics, such as early literacy and child development, and facilitate conversations between staff and families regarding topics and resources they are receiving through their organization.

***Kits* are sometimes used by organizations as a tool to draw families into their broader set of services.** Some organizations noted that displaying the items included in the *Kit* helps pique families' interest in the various resources. This includes displaying *Kit* items at tables/booths at community events as well as in libraries in high-traffic areas. Sometimes the *Kit* is framed as a gift and used as a talking point to draw families to an organization's booth, as one staff member noted: "We do have material on the table that is going to attract families with young children. And then, as they come and they ask about the services, then obviously we bring this as a great opportunity to present [the materials in the *Kit*]." Some organizations reported that this was also a great time to share other resources and supports available through their services.



Barriers to Expanding Access to the *Kits*

While many organizations we interviewed did not identify significant barriers to sharing the *Kit* with families, there is room for increasing access to *Kits*. In addition, some organizations identified challenges that are important to note.

The ordering process for *Kits* presents challenges for County Commissions and organizations. Survey findings reveal that organizations order *Kits* in several ways, including bulk ordering through their local First 5 Commission,² ordering individual *Kits* from the F5CA website on behalf of families, and bulk ordering *Kits* through the Compass³ website. Some indicated that the ordering options on the Compass website were particularly confusing, reporting that it was unclear how many *Kits* they were ordering or if they were scheduling the order for their desired arrival

date. In addition, staff from a couple of organizations were confused by the multiple emails and/or texts confirming their order.

Lack of storage space can pose challenges. For many organizations that distribute *Kits*, space is limited, and does not allow for the storage of large quantities of *Kits*. One organization mentioned that they “keep several boxes in our office and then we have the rest in storage.” Another organization solved their space problem by storing their *Kits* at the County Office of Education, but the transportation process was difficult. These storage limitations prevent organizations from ordering large numbers of *Kits* at one time.

Limited marketing and challenges in reaching some populations make expanding the *Kit*’s reach difficult. Several of the organizations we interviewed recalled prior First 5 California campaigns like the Talk-Read-Sing messages which were developed to encourage families to engage with their young child, and suggested that a similar marketing effort could help to expand awareness of the *Kit* as a resource for families. Increased awareness through multilingual marketing could also help organizations reach families that they currently struggle to reach. For example, some organizations reported challenges reaching BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) families due to language barriers and/or mistrust; one noted, “It’s always a struggle to get some of the BIPOC populations and get them to want to take our items and things, because a lot of times there’s just different barriers to wanting [to] trust the government and [these] kind of products.” More exposure to the *Kit* through the media and trusted sources could boost interest in and acceptance of the *Kit*.

² When F5 County Commissions receive requests for *Kits* from their local partner organizations, they order them through the Compass website on behalf of organizations.

³ The Compass website allows organizations to directly order *Kits* from ALOM, including bulk orders.

Conclusions and Next Steps

After 20 years of implementation, the First 5 California *Kit for New Parents* continues to reach a broad spectrum of California's families. In addition to F5CA, First 5 County Commissions and local service agencies and organizations play an important role in supporting access to the *Kit* for all families. This study found, for example, that *Kit* distribution rates are higher in counties where County Commissions are more involved. Local organizations in each county are instrumental partners in this effort, working on the ground to get *Kits* into the hands of families that could benefit from them. Lessons learned from this study apply to partners at each level of the system. We offer the following recommendations for consideration:

First 5 California can:

- Streamline and enhance functionality of the *Kit* ordering system and provide additional guidance to counties and local organizations on how to order *Kits*
- Share information about the promising practices that organizations throughout the state use to distribute *Kits* to families
- Create *Kit*-related marketing materials, training, and outreach tools to share with counties
- Consider using statewide advertisements and communication strategies focused specifically on the *Kit* to increase its visibility

First 5 County Commissions can:

- Expand partnerships with hospitals, birthing centers, and other large organizations that reach large numbers of new families
- Create strategic partnerships with organizations that serve families from underserved populations

Local organizations distributing *Kits* can:

- Leverage staff with similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds to connect with BIPOC families, refugee families, and other underserved populations as they distribute the *Kit*
- Build on statewide marketing efforts to expand access to *Kits* and draw in more families that need services
- Incorporate *Kit* distribution into existing services to leverage deeper conversations with families about parenting, child development, literacy, health, and well-being

Expanding the *Kit*'s reach across the state and ensuring all families that could benefit from a *Kit* receive one is an important goal for this initiative going forward. The *Kit for New Parents* Study is also examining the perspectives, experiences, and outcomes of families that receive the *Kit*, and will identify the benefits of the *Kit* and how it might be strengthened to better meet families' needs.

DATA SOURCES AND STUDY SAMPLE

The results presented in this brief draw on three primary data sources:

***Kit* Shipping Records** | F5CA provided shipping data from ALOM, the *Kit* fulfillment contractor, including how the *Kit* was ordered (through the family ordering site or the organization ordering site), shipping location (city and zip code), *Kit* language, and, for organizations ordering multiple *Kits*, basic information on each organization (name and type of organization) and the number of *Kits* ordered. For consistency, all single-*Kit* orders sent to a home address (redacted by F5CA) were classified as families, and all others as organizations. The number of organizations could not be confirmed due to missing identifying information. For this report, we analyzed data from fiscal year 2021–22 (July 2021–June 2022). Census data on population size were used to contextualize the results.

***Kit* Distributor Survey** | The F5 County Commission survey was sent to 71 individuals from 58 counties in February and March 2023, and in total, 61 individual staff from 52 counties responded. Respondents were identified by F5 executive directors, through the statewide *Kit* fulfillment center database, and through a Google search. We received at least one response from 90% of counties. In addition, an organization survey was administered in January 2023 to organizations that distribute *Kits* to families (excluding County Commissions). In total, 308 individual staff from 293 organizations responded to the organization survey.

***Kit* Distributor Interviews** | The study team conducted interviews with staff from 10 County Commissions and 26 organizations. This sample of *Kit* distributors reflects the diversity of the state's population. Interviews investigated how F5 County Commissions and local organizations began distributing *Kits*, what approaches and strategies they use to distribute *Kits*, how to improve *Kit* ordering or distribution, and what plans they have for *Kit* distribution in the future.