

First Things First Governance System

2-101 Responsible Governance Statement

Preamble

We believe that every child in Arizona, regardless of circumstance, deserves the opportunity to arrive at school healthy and prepared to succeed.

Our role is to provide for the advocacy, public policy, means and programs to achieve this vision through a comprehensive, integrated, seamless, transformational approach.

All entities involved in governance of First Things First perform our roles in an open, transparent, responsible, cooperative and respectful manner.

We acknowledge our obligations under state law and will conduct business ethically and with integrity.

We value:

- Innovation
- Cultural responsiveness
- Collaboration
- Inclusiveness
- Accountability
- Accessibility
- Continuous improvement
- Quality
- Recognition of Arizona's unique population
- An iterative, dynamic approach to challenges and opportunities

The Five Components of the First Things First Governance System

- I. Responsible Governance Statement — straight-forward model that defines the rationale for governance and distribution of authority; the general tone of the Board's work.
- II. Duties — job description for the Board, ED, Staff and Organization, Regional Councils.
- III. Principles of Engagement—set of standards for behavior and conduct.
- IV. Priorities — set of results the Board identifies for its work over a specified time period.
- V. Assessment — willingness by the Board to hold itself vigilant and accountable to the intent stated in the four components and to learn from ongoing assessment.

General Responsibilities of the Board

The Board provides governance leadership, oversight, and vision to First Things First. The Board serves as the policy and oversight entity of First Things First and holds the ultimate responsibility and authority for its operation. We work in partnership with the Executive Director, staff, and other allies of First Things First. The Board achieves the mission and vision through a comprehensive early childhood system that values children as Arizona's greatest asset and recognizes families and communities at the center of decision-making. As both individual

supporters and governors, the Board facilitates the implementation of the First Things First Framework and Strategic Plan Roadmap.

The Board includes three members who are *ex officio* and as such are full members of the Board, as outlined in these governance documents. The only distinction in their responsibilities from other Board members is that they do not vote.

In the “Duties/Job Description” specific tasks of the Board are articulated.

Team Relationship of Board and Staff

This relationship is distinguished by the following characteristics:

- Board and staff always remember we are together, working as a team toward the same goals (for example, collaborative committee work).
- Board and staff operate with an expectation of and within a culture of mutual respect.
- Board and staff together foster cohesive relationships with other entities.
- Board and staff seek and value input from one another and acknowledge their interdependence.
- Board and staff consciously work on their relationship to produce a good model (of conduct, culture, results, etc.) for other First Things First entities to emulate.
- Board and staff acknowledge their mutual accountability (for example, the Board communicates the “why” of a certain policy; the staff communicates “why” they are implementing it in a way consistent with the Board’s direction).

The Executive Director is the conduit (major connecting point) between the Board and staff.

When necessary, individual Board members provide issue-related support, guidance, direction, and assistance to staff.

Together the Board and staff create a culture that balances independence and mutuality and is productive, efficient, energizing, and satisfying.

Team Relationship of the Board Chair and Executive Director

The Chair/Executive Director relationship is characterized by the following:

- This pair is the heart of the organization with critical, distinct and related roles that empower each other.
- Critical attributes include trust, communication, agreement on expectations, give and take, dialogue, working through difficulties, and balance between governance and management.
- Flexibility is needed as roles (leading, managing, communicating, and planning) are negotiated and executed.

- The Board Chair is chief supporter and partner of the Executive Director and the conduit between the Board and the Executive Director. Provides close up view of Executive Director's performance.
- The Executive Director is the Board's key staffer and chief operator of First Things First within a unique setting. (Role of chief liaison to the Board along with a close working relationship with the Chairman often develops into a personal relationship. At the same time the ED must respect the Chairman's authority and role.)

Operationally, the relationship is dependent on the following:

- Responsiveness of Board Chair to Executive Director and Executive Director to Board Chair.
- As a team we work on these areas:
 - Board managers:
 - Setting the agenda
 - Keeping the Board educated and informed
 - Utilizing the Executive Committee (Chair, Vice-Chair, Program Committee Chair and Finance Committee Chair)
 - Protecting the integrity of the Board
 - Lead Communicators

General Responsibilities of Staff

Staff will have the following responsibilities in the governance system:

- Implement and manage the vision, mission, outcomes, priorities, policies, and strategies established by the Board.
- Continually seek new, innovative activities and approaches in pursuit of the Board's mandates.
- Establish and reflect a culture of quality that is accountable to young children and their families.
- Respond to and be accountable to the Board's leadership, requests, direction, and feedback.
- Provide timely information, perspective, and strategy to the Board.
- Provide reliable research, data, program assessment, best practices, services, and views from activities in the field.
- Provide day-to-day effective management that is accountable to Regional Partnership Councils and the Board.
- Facilitate the Board's work (*i.e.*, staffing committees, facilitating their interaction, helping them be successful, developing policies for Board's consideration, deciding which issues/topics the Board is informed about).

Duties of staff are complementary to the governance and policy duties of the Board:

- Implementing organizational direction and strategy
- Deploying, securing, and accounting for resources.

- Managing day-to-day organizational life.

Staff knowledge and work demonstrates deep policy expertise and a standard of excellence.

General Responsibilities of the Working Groups

The Board may be asked by the Chair to chair a Work Group in the future.

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