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## **Introduction**

Pursuant to the First Things First (FTF) Tribal Consultation Policy and Arizona Executive Order (EO) 2006-14, Consultation and Cooperation with Arizona Tribes, FTF convened a formal consultation session on Thursday, September 17, 2015, for the purpose of engaging public policy makers at the tribal, state and federal level and promoting cultural responsiveness in our work.

First Things First is committed to meaningful consultation with Tribes through which elected officials and other authorized representatives of the tribal governments have the opportunity to provide meaningful and timely input regarding the development of programs, policies or procedures that affect Arizona's Tribes and Native American children and families.

The following summary reflects comments made and questions raised by Arizona's tribal leaders and their representatives/designees.

## **Participants**

### ***Tribal Leaders and Tribal Representatives:***

1. Louis Manuel Jr., Chairman, Ak-Chin Indian Community
2. Marie Antone, Councilwoman, Ak-Chin Indian Community
3. Deal Begay, Jr., Vice Chairman, Cocopah Indian Tribe
4. Dr. William Myhr, Education Director, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation
5. Roland Manakaja, Vice Chairman, Havasupai Tribe
6. Carlos Powell, Head Start Director, Havasupai Tribe
7. Sherry J. Counts, Chairwoman, Hualapai Tribe
8. Herman Honanie, Chairman, Hopi Tribe
9. Jonathan Hale, Council Delegate, Navajo Nation
10. Perry Shirley, Executive Staff Assistant to the President and Vice President, Navajo Nation
11. Flora Talas, Executive Director of Education, San Carlos Apache Tribe
12. Jeff Williamson, Superintendent, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community

### ***First Thing First:***

Janice Decker, Chair of the FTF Board; Nadine Mathis Basha, Member of the FTF Board; Sam Leyvas, FTF Chief Executive Officer; Karen Woodhouse, FTF Chief Program Officer; Michelle Katona, FTF Chief Regional Officer; Candida Hunter, FTF Senior Director of Tribal Affairs

In addition to tribal leaders and representatives, and First Things First representatives, attendees at the tribal consultation included representatives from the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona, the University of

Arizona, the Arizona Council on Indian Health Care, and the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.

### **Summary**

Although all of the tribal leaders addressed the consultation topics with regard to their specific communities, the discussion presented some common themes around Public Policymaker Engagement and Cultural Responsivity. In the policymaker engagement session, tribal leaders and representatives were asked to provide insight in to how FTF might better support them as early childhood policymakers and what the appropriate role might be for FTF regional council members in terms of sharing their early childhood expertise or experience with tribal, federal or state policymakers. During this session, many tribal leaders stated there is a need to educate policymakers and community members about the importance of early childhood and the work of FTF and suggested a variety of ways to do so, including attending tribal council meetings, community meetings and events.

In the cultural responsivity session, tribal leaders were asked to share their general insights and strategies used by their tribes to enhance cultural responsivity among the programs serving their communities to inform FTF's Continuous Quality Improvement efforts in this area. Tribal leaders shared how they are promoting the language and culture of their tribes. Tribal leaders also shared their successful experiences associated with First Things First in building awareness of early childhood and supporting the needs of children and families in their communities.

### **Comments/Questions/Concerns/Recommendations on Public Policymaker Engagement**

- Tribal leaders and representatives stressed the importance of attending tribal council meetings, community meetings and chapter meetings to share information about the importance of early childhood and the work of FTF.
  - Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale suggested presentations to the Navajo Nation Health, Education and Human Services Committee. He requested the committee receive reports and data and also suggested presentations to community constituents through chapter meetings and public forums.
  - Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Dr. William Myhr and Havasupai Head Start Director Carlos Powell suggested on-site visits to meet with the tribal council, education boards and community members.
  - Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Louis Manuel, Jr. stressed the importance of tribal priorities and the need to have a unified vision that supports the tribe. He emphasized the need for FTF to work collaboratively with local departments and to educate people at the local level to influence state policymakers.
  - Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale expressed the need for FTF to share position statements and resolutions regarding current and proposed legislation and policies.

- Tribal leaders and representatives expressed the importance of communication between the regional partnership councils and the tribal councils.
  - Cocopah Tribal Vice Chairman Deal Begay, Jr. shared his experience of serving as the liaison between the tribal and regional partnership councils and expressed the need to communicate through emails and in person. He also suggested FTF join state and/or federal collaboration meetings.
  - Hualapai Tribal Chairwoman Sherry J. Counts and San Carlos Apache Tribal Executive Director of Education Flora Talas stated the regional directors provide information on behalf of their regional partnership council.
  - Navajo Nation Council Delegate Hale suggested FTF regional partnership councils share their goals, successes and challenges with tribes and nations.
  - Navajo Nation Executive Staff Assistant to the President and Vice President Perry Shirley suggested FTF consult with tribes individually to determine the best way for the regional councils to engage with state and federal policymakers.
  
- Tribal leaders and representatives expressed the need for data to show outcomes of children beginning in the early childhood years through high school.
  - Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale stated the nation is looking at the bigger overall picture of tracking youth through their education system. The nation is working with Senator Carlyle Begay, state and public schools, and the Bureau of Indian Education, regarding the movement of their students, trying to track all students to ensure they do have a successful education history.
  - San Carlos Apache Tribal Executive Director of Education Flora Talas stated they want their children to pass assessments from early childhood through high school and make sure they are prepared for college.

Challenges noted by tribal leaders and representatives: policymakers not knowing the importance of early childhood and FTF; the need to continue educating others on the importance of early childhood; the decrease of tobacco tax revenue; tracking children and youth who move between federal, state and tribal schools; sustaining funding for early childhood; and, what works for one tribal community may not work for another.

**Comments/Questions/Concerns/Recommendations on Cultural Responsivity**

- Tribal leaders stressed the need to teach the language, culture and promote spirituality to ensure a strong foundation for children.
  - Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale shared the Navajo Nation Health, Education and Human Services Committee stresses the need for culture and language to be included

- when working with future generations. He also stated the culture and language are tied to self-identity and self-respect which will help youth move through the educational system.
- Hopi Tribal Chairman Herman Honanie believes there is a need to educate the “young youth” both academically and culturally by prioritizing language for success.
  - Tribal leaders shared their experiences of promoting the culture and language in their communities.
    - Hopi Tribal Chairman Herman Honanie stated the tribe is now operating six previous Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools. Their priority is to organize the structure of their schools and asked FTF to support their efforts in operating their tribal schools.
    - Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Louis Manuel, Jr. shared the O’odham language is being taught at the early childhood center by the Cultural Resources Department. This also provides an opportunity for tribal members and non-tribal members who do not speak the O’odham language to learn the language a well.
    - Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Dr. William Myhr shared their experience in developing a cultural committee who is responsible for developing a cultural strategic plan. The plan includes elders teaching language to preschoolers and kindergarteners and the culture will be infused into a wellness corps to support a community wide plan.
    - Cocopah Tribal Vice Chairman Deal Begay, Jr. shared the elders are teaching the language, dances and songs in the Head Start. The tribe hosts a cultural awareness day for non-tribal employees to learn about the Cocopah Tribe.
    - San Carlos Apache Tribal Executive Director of Education Flora Talas shared they are aligning standards between preschool, Head Start and child care to promote school readiness. A language immersion program is being implemented in two classrooms and children also take a pre- and post-test to measure outcomes.
    - Havasupai Tribal Head Start Director Carlos Powell stated the tribe is working to include a cultural teacher to work with the schools and the home visitation program. The tribe is also pursuing certifying cultural teachers.
    - Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Superintendent Jeff Williamson emphasized the local FTF regional partnership council is culturally responsive by supporting the tribe’s efforts and working collaboratively within the community.
    - Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale shared the Navajo Nation Department of Health has enacted policy to support cultural values of irrigating and farming and a 10-year wellness plan. The Culture and Language Act ensures the Navajo language is spoken during meetings.
    - Executive Staff Assistant to the President and Vice President Perry Shirley stated the Department of Dine Education conducted studies and developed a curriculum workbook to

teach the culture, language and traditions; at this time the nation is trying to approve the curriculum through the BIE to be taught in the schools.

- Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale emphasized cultural sensitivity is included in several professional development programs offered through the Navajo College. He also shared the Navajo Division of Education provides language training during the summer.
- Navajo Nation Council Delegate Jonathan Hale also suggested there be discussions with the aging program for elders to teach the language and culture to children.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Dr. William Myhr mentioned the four Pai tribes have a language coalition that meets once a month. They plan activities which include language camps and there is a certification through the Arizona Department of Education for Yavapai language teachers.
- Ak-Chin Indian Community Tribal Chairman Louis Manuel, Jr. stated their community provides cultural competency training for non-tribal members to learn about the community.
- Cocopah Tribal Vice Chairman Deal Begay, Jr. shared their community provides cultural competency trainings for non-tribal members to learn about the community. The tribe also coordinates with off-reservation schools to provide cultural learning opportunities for school staff. In another example, he said the tribe's MOU with Border Patrol, which defines the partnership between tribe and the agency, includes a requirement that Border Patrol staff receive cultural competency training.

Challenges noted by tribal leaders and representatives:teaching culture in context; children learning different dialects than what's taught at home; ability to utilize hiring preferences; federal and state regulations serve as barriers to teaching language and culture.

*This summary and a full transcript of the event will be available on the Tribal Consultation page of the First Things First website ([azftf.gov/tribalconsultation](http://azftf.gov/tribalconsultation)) in the coming weeks.*