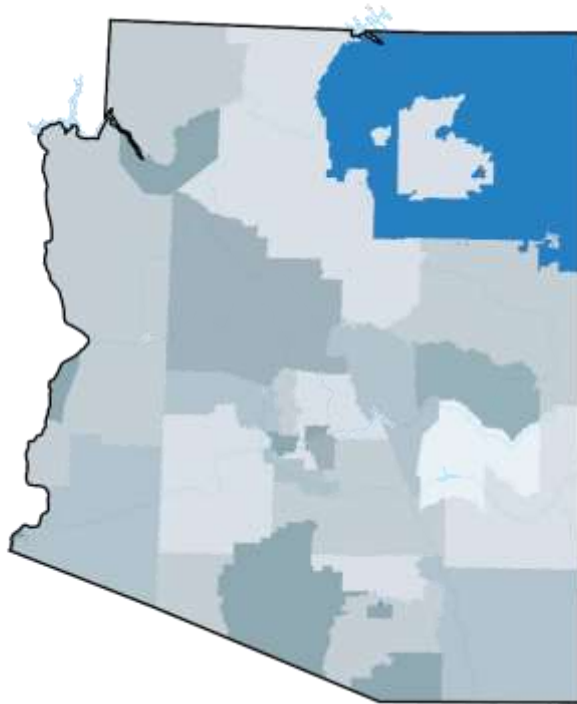


# FIRST THINGS FIRST

## Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council



### State Fiscal Years 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan

Presented to the First Things First Board  
January 10-11, 2023



### **Mission**

First Things First is an essential leader and partner in creating a family-centered, equitable, high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, well-being, health and education of all Arizona’s children, birth to age 5.

### **Vision**

All Arizona’s children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

### **Regional Partnership Councils**

First Things First’s statewide Board and its 28 regional partnership councils share the responsibility of ensuring that early childhood funds are invested in strategies aimed at improving educational and health outcomes for young children. Regional partnership councils identify the unique needs of their communities and decide how to best support young children and families in their areas. Regional councils, comprised of local volunteers, provide vision and leadership, governance and oversight. They identify, implement and fund strategies and build collaborations aimed at helping young children across Arizona succeed in school and life.

---

### **Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council**

**Cotillion Sneddy**, chair, at-Large representative

**Rhonda Etsitty**, vice chair, at-large representative

**Victoria Begay**, member of the business community

**Shannon Goodsell**, public school administrator

**Phefelia Nez**, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

**Candi Running Bear**, representative of the faith community

**Paula Seanez**, early childhood educator

**Valerie Tsosie**, representative of a philanthropic organization

**Dawn Yazzie**, health services provider

**open**, child care provider

**open**, tribal representative

**Memarie Tsosie**, Regional Director



# FIRST THINGS FIRST

## Equity Vision Statement

Advancing equity is essential to First Things First's mission and we aspire to embody our vision for diversity, equity and inclusion through all facets of our work.

To be effective partners and contribute to a world in which Arizona's children birth to age 5 of all backgrounds have access to high-quality early childhood experiences, we must create and maintain an equitable workplace, work in partnership with the communities we serve and ensure that our funding practices align with our equity-centered values, particularly focusing on those who are most in need.

First Things First recognizes the pervasive inequities historically and currently faced by the Black, Indigenous and Latino communities and all people of color, and we strive for a world in which they will thrive. We also recognize that individuals and groups have been marginalized due to factors such as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, mental and physical ability, national origin, income, language and religious affiliation and that people of color are particularly affected across these factors. We commit to increasing our understanding about these and all matters that create inequities and to bettering our actions internally and among the communities we serve.

This important work starts from within. As such, we strive to cultivate and maintain a workplace that:

- Reflects the diversity of our state within all levels of the organization (i.e., staff, leadership, regional partnership councils and state Board)
- Cultivates a community in which all members are welcome, seen, heard and valued
- Supports and expects each individual to engage in candid, introspective learning about equity and inclusion
- Engages an intentionally diverse, representative set of voices in key decision-making, centering on the voices of families and the community whenever possible
- Employs equitable workplace practices that yield high satisfaction, morale and career success consistently across all demographic groups
- Responds swiftly to address workplace inequities
- Ensures that our work as a funding organization – from planning to implementation to assessment – reflects our commitment to equity

Through our DEI strategic priorities and individual growth, we will be better able to meet the needs of Arizona's youngest children, serve as a trusted ally for equity and fulfill our vision that all Arizona's children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

*Approved December 2021*

**Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council SFY24 – 27 Strategic Plan**

Prioritized Strategy Areas	Strategy	Identified Need	Target Service Unit(s)* <i>*If applicable, identify targeted population and/or geographic areas</i>	Desired System Outcome
Quality First And Professional Development for ECE Professionals	Quality First Coaching and Incentives <i>(Statewide)</i>	1) Early care and education providers need supports to improve and main the quality of their programs. 2) Families lack access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education programs.	No TSU	Access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education.
	Quality First Academy <i>(Statewide)</i>			Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
Access to Quality Care	Quality First Scholarships <i>(Statewide)</i>	Low income families lack access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education programs.	No TSU	Access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education.
Educating Families and Caregivers	Family, Friend and Neighbor Care	FFN caregivers that provide child care in license-exempt home based settings need support and education in order to improve the quality of caregiving, interactions, and learning environments.	Number of Family, Friend and Neighbor care-givers served: 60	Information, services and support for families.
Educating Families and Caregivers	Home Visitation	Parents and families, particularly those who are at-risk, need information and support to increase their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to parenting and enhance their own health and well-being (e.g. managing stress, depression, accessing public support services, etc.). Additionally, access to regular screening for the early detection of children's developmental, vision and hearing impairments is a challenge.	Number of families currently enrolled: 55	Information, services and support for families.
Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources	Family Support Coordination	Some families experience challenges accessing timely and effective services to address their immediate needs.	Number of families currently enrolled: 100	Information, services and support for families.
Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources	Family Support and Literacy Systems Change <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	See Appendix A	No TSU	Information, services and support for families.

<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Child Care Health Consultation <i>(Statewide)</i>	ECE providers do not have enough access to information and guidance on how to implement consistent high-quality health and safety policies and practices.	No TSU	Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation <i>(Statewide)</i>	Early childhood professionals in child care centers/homes, home visitation, Family Support for Children with Developmental Concerns, and Family Friend and Neighbor programs need support in appropriately understanding, identifying and responding to the social emotional developmental needs and behavioral challenges of young children.	Number of center based early care and education programs served: 26  Number of Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care programs served: 1  Number of home visitation programs served: 1	Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Early Learning Systems Change <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	See Appendix A	No TSU	Information, services and supports for families.
<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	First Things First College Scholarships <i>(Statewide)</i>	1) Effective educational preparation provides those working in regulated early care and education programs the knowledge and skills to develop high-quality learning environments and support the healthy development of young children. 2) Teachers and directors working in regulated programs need financial support to achieve degrees in ECE.	No TSU	Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Professional Development for ECE Professionals</b>	Language, Communication and Literacy in Early Care and Education Settings	1) Early childhood education professionals have a gap in knowledge around language and literacy development and how to best support children’s language and literacy within the early education setting. 2) Parents and caregivers have a gap in knowledge around language and literacy development and how to best support children’s language and literacy within the home environment.	No TSU	Well-prepared, highly skilled and appropriately compensated professionals.
<b>Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years</b>	Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	1) Lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood health and development. 2) Lack of awareness of FTF as a trusted source of early childhood information and programs/services.	No TSU	Public understanding and support.

<b>Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years</b>	Media <i>(Statewide)</i>	1) Lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood health and development. 2) Lack of awareness of FTF as a trusted source of early childhood information and programs/services.	No TSU	Public understanding and support.
<b>Other Strategy Areas</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Identified Need</b>	<b>Target Service Unit</b>	<b>Desired System Outcome</b>
<b>Identifying and Addressing Developmental Concerns</b>	Developmental and Sensory Screening	1) For many children, developmental delays and vision/hearing impairments are not detected early due to lack of screening. 2) Many children with possible developmental delays, or vision/hearing concerns are not being referred to treatment providers.	Number of children screened: 200-400	Access to high-quality preventive and continuous health care.
<b>Identifying and Addressing Developmental Concerns</b>	Family Support for Children with Developmental Concerns	1) Many parents of children with developmental concerns do not have access to services and supports that provide them with knowledge, support, and strategies to strengthen their child’s development. 2) Children’s vision/hearing impairments are not always detected early.	Number of families currently enrolled: 60	Access to high-quality preventive and continuous health care.
<b>Health Resource Coordination</b>	Children’s Health Systems Change <i>(FTF-Directed)</i>	See Appendix A	No TSU	Coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive systems.
<b>Nutrition and Physical Activity</b>	Nutrition and Physical Activity	Some families and caregivers lack skills on how to implement healthy nutrition and physical activity practices in their homes.	Number of parents/caregivers who participated in the series: 75-100	Access to high-quality preventive and continuous health care.

**Please describe how the Regional Partnership Council’s SFY24-27 Strategic Plan promotes equity and support of under-resourced and underserved children and their families.**

The Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council’s priorities lie in areas where early childhood opportunities can be more accessible to children, parents and educators. This is a result of the regional council using a strengths-based and holistic approach based on the Diné Way of Life that focuses on the Four Directions of Wellness; social-emotional, intellectual, physical, community and relational wellness. This process also ensured strategies address the cognitive, physical, mental, emotional and cultural needs of children and families.

The regional council used formal and informal data and feedback processes to help inform the strategic plan. This included hosting the annual Diné Early Childhood Summit and using feedback from the Parent Panel to inform methods to increase access to services for families; and, feedback from the Early Childhood Educators Panel to inform better professional development opportunities. The regional council reviewed the Navajo Nation Maternal and Children’s Health Report, previous Regional Needs & Assets Reports, current strategy data reports and brought their shared expertise and knowledge to further inform the strategic plan. Additionally, the “Start with Equity” report by the Children’s Equity Project and co-authored by Regional Council Member Dawn Yazzie was used as a framework to further enhance and assess strategies for underserved and under resourced communities.

The entire strategic planning process resulted in funding new strategies that will equitably:

- Help families with complex needs by assisting them in understanding, navigating to and accessing services that promote family well-being. This individualized support will help families in their rural communities, as opposed to requiring them to travel to population hubs in the region where this type of support is currently concentrated.
- Increase access points of service by coordinating and collaborating with school districts and health care facilities in the region.
- Build on the region's strength of Indigenous language and culture to expand capacity for language preservation and traditional cultural practices in families' homes and early childhood settings.
- Increase access to more family care and home-based child care options, based on the Indigenous concept of kinship.
- Increase access to culturally responsive, high-quality professional development that is specialized based on the feedback of early childhood professionals and stakeholders in the region.
- Increase the number of qualified, culturally-competent professionals from the region who can provide specialty services in early intervention, special education, mental health and oral health.

**Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – 27**  
**Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council**

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$3,168,372	\$3,168,372	\$3,228,633	\$3,228,633
Population Based Allocation	\$2,052,740	\$2,052,740	\$2,052,740	\$2,052,740
Discretionary Allocation	\$1,115,632	\$1,115,632	\$1,175,893	\$1,175,893
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$5,814,853	\$5,609,378	\$5,176,810	\$4,804,502
<b>Total Regional Council Funds Available</b>	<b>\$8,983,225</b>	<b>\$8,777,750</b>	<b>\$8,405,443</b>	<b>\$8,033,135</b>
Strategies	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted
Early Learning Systems Change	\$258,750	\$258,750	\$258,750	\$258,750
Inclusion of Children with Special Needs		\$82,500	\$82,500	\$82,500
Quality First Academy	\$13,500	\$13,500	\$13,500	\$13,500
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$471,750	\$472,380	\$472,380	\$472,380
Quality First Scholarships	\$1,920,152	\$1,478,713	\$1,438,713	\$1,478,713
First Things First College Scholarships	\$21,600	\$21,600	\$21,600	\$21,600
Child Care Health Consultation	\$111,500	\$111,500	\$111,500	\$111,500
Children's Health Systems Change	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000
Developmental and Sensory Screening	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$327,420	\$327,420	\$327,420	\$327,420
Family Support for Children with Developmental Concerns	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000
Nutrition and Physical Activity	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$110,000
Community Based Language and Literacy		\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000
Family Support Coordination	\$400,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000
Home Visitation	\$343,750	\$343,750	\$343,750	\$343,750
Language, Literacy and Culture in Tribal Communities	\$141,691	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$200,000
Needs and Assets			\$40,000	
Statewide Evaluation	\$134,071	\$134,071	\$134,071	\$134,071
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000
Media	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$45,000	\$45,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5,249,184</b>	<b>\$5,249,184</b>	<b>\$5,249,184</b>	<b>\$5,249,184</b>
<b>Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended</b>	<b>\$3,734,041</b>	<b>\$3,528,566</b>	<b>\$3,156,259</b>	<b>\$2,783,951</b>

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		82.58 %	82.58 %	81.82 %	82.58 %
% to Quality First*	8.74%	11.36 %	11.38 %	11.38 %	11.38 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	82.39%				
% to Quality First*	11.37%				

\*Includes Quality First Academy, Quality First Coaching and Incentives, and Child Care Health Consultation.



**APPENDIX A**  
**SFY24 Funding Plan – System Change Planning Document**  
**Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council**

**Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council -  
 Early Learning and Children’s Health Systems Change**

**Problem to be solved and system to be changed / influenced**

*System Area:*  
 Professional Development, Navigation and Support for Early Childhood Workforce

*Problem to address:*

*Early Learning:*

Early childhood professionals work in various settings in the region, including school districts, tribal child care, home-based family & friend care, Head Start, libraries, early intervention and home visiting programs. Each setting has their own individualized professional development needs. One professional development model or curriculum does not fit all. In addition, online professional development opportunities become challenging with only 32% of residents in the region having access to both a computer and internet. Even in this case, internet is not always reliable and professionals sometimes depend on cellular data internet that is expensive.

In-person professional development opportunities are often hosted in concentrated areas of the region with early childhood professionals from rural areas traveling 45 or more miles for one session.

To address this need, the regional council has proposed a systems change strategy that focuses on Professional Development, Navigation and Support. This will be an FTF-Directed position that will focus on helping to remove barriers and connect professionals to resources, tools, training and educational opportunities. The position will work in partnership with school districts, tribal child care, Head Start, libraries, early intervention and home visiting programs to determine specific professional opportunities to support their needs. The position will coordinate professional development logistics with entities to bring opportunities to each setting in a way that is accessible to their professionals. In addition, training opportunities focused on the Navajo cultural perspective of early childhood development will be included to ensure professionals are culturally responsive.

*Children’s Health:*

In regards to early intervention services, data in the 2022 Regional Needs and Assets suggests it is likely children with developmental delays are being identified and diagnosed when they are older and in grade school. This indicates a number of children in the region may be missing out on early intervention when it can be more effective. By identifying these children early, intervention can help young children with, or at risk for, developmental delays to improve language, cognitive and socio-emotional development.

To address this need, the regional council has proposed a systems change strategy for professional development focused on child screening and assessment tools for medical professionals. With over ten health facilities serving the region, I.H.S/638 health facilities serve as community hubs where families regularly receive services. The regional council believes through this system change strategy; medical professionals can become a catalyst to implement screenings early in pediatric settings.

	<p><i>Geographic area:</i> Navajo Nation Region</p>
<b>Expected Impact</b>	<p><i>Target Audience:</i> Early Childhood Professionals Medical Professionals</p> <hr/> <p><i>Expected Impact:</i> <i>Early Learning</i> Increase access to relevant and culturally responsive professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals, thereby increasing the knowledge, skills and quality practices of professionals in early childhood settings that benefit young children in the region. <i>Children’s Health</i> Increase the knowledge and skills of medical professionals in the area of identification and referral of children with, or at risk for developmental delays so children may receive early intervention or family support services.</p> <hr/> <p><i>Timeline:</i> SFY2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FTF Directed position job posting, hiring and onboarding. Work plan created in coordination with Regional Director. Outreach to Early Childhood Professionals is conducted to determine needs. Work plan timeline further refined based on needs. Professional development coordination, navigation and implementation of opportunities in partnership with early childhood entities occurs. Outreach to Medical Professionals and I.H.S./638 health facilities begins.</li> </ul> <p>SFY2025</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work plan and timeline is updated to include Medical Professionals. Ongoing professional development coordination and implementation with entities continues.</li> </ul> <p>SFY2026-2027</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work plan and timeline updates completed annually based on needs. Ongoing professional development coordination and implementation with entities continues.</li> </ul>

## Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council - Early Learning Systems Change

<b>Problem to be solved and system to be changed / influenced</b>	<p><i>System Area:</i> Master's Degrees &amp; Educational Attainment Incentives</p>
	<p><i>Problem to address:</i> It is challenging for the tribe, school districts and health facilities to recruit qualified professionals who are from the region or are culturally competent to serve the needs of Indigenous families. This leads to the region's lack of services in specialty fields to serve children in the areas of early intervention, mental health and oral health. Positions in these fields continue to go unfilled around 20% of the time. To address this need, the regional council has proposed a systems change strategy to support Master's Degree Scholarships in specialty fields of need. In addition, the regional council is also supporting degree attainment incentives for bachelor's and Master's Degrees to encourage students to continue their education in specialty fields of need. Incentives will be awarded on a semester basis and will require recipients to attain a grade of "C" or above to be eligible for the incentive. The regional council recognizes professionals and students in the region encounter many barriers in accessing higher education. Funding this strategy enables professionals and students to take coursework leading to credentials and degrees in specialty fields while helping them to afford higher education and overcome barriers.</p>
	<p><i>Geographic area:</i> Navajo Nation Region</p>
	<p><i>Target Audience:</i> Professionals or students pursuing a bachelor's or Master's Degree in specialty fields that may include human services, social services, psychology, counseling, special education, speech pathology, physical therapy and other related fields.</p>
<b>Expected Impact</b>	<p><i>Expected Impact:</i> Increase access to special education and/or specialty services for children through the increase of qualified, culturally competent professionals in the early childhood and health field.</p>
	<p><i>Timeline:</i> SFY2024</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine Scholarship and Education Attainment Incentive application process and disbursement mechanisms.</li> </ul> <p>SFY2024-2027</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of strategy through SFY2027</li> </ul>

## Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council - Children’s Health and Family Support and Literacy Systems Change

<b>Problem to be solved and system to be changed / influenced</b>	<p><i>System Area:</i> Service Coordination</p>
	<p><i>Problem to address:</i> Families and providers are not aware of the available early childhood programs and family support services in the region. Coordination and collaboration among system partners needs to be enhanced to maximize resources and effectiveness so families have increased access and referral to services. To address this need, the regional council has proposed to continue to support the existing Program Coordination work plan, currently being implemented by a Program Coordination Specialist (FTF-Directed).</p>
	<p><i>Geographic area:</i> Navajo Nation Region</p>
	<p><i>Target Audience:</i> Early Childhood System Partners</p>
<b>Expected Impact</b>	<p><i>Expected Impact:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage and build relationships with early childhood system partners, tribal leaders and community leaders to identify needs and early childhood service or program opportunities to expand and enhance the early childhood system.</li> <li>• Improve system partners’ understanding of resources and identify community partners to better coordinate service delivery to families and care providers.</li> <li>• Convene health and early childhood system partners annually to determine best practices for early childhood education and care systems, early intervention coordination, and child health advancement.</li> <li>• Convene health and early childhood system partners annually to identify barriers in the early childhood system and determine solutions for better coordination and collaboration.</li> </ul>
	<p><i>Timeline:</i> SFY2024-2027</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annually update existing Program Coordination Specialist Work Plan, with specific coordination and collaboration with local Navajo Government entities (Chapters)</li> <li>• Annually plan and host the existing Diné Early Childhood Summit including providing a concluding Summit Report with findings and recommendations to the Regional Council, early childhood system partners and tribal entities.</li> <li>• Annually update the Navajo Nation Resource Guide and continue to regularly provide Resource Guide training to early childhood system partners</li> <li>• Monthly update of Navajo Nation Early Childhood Service Map (ArcGIS) and continue co-facilitating workgroup</li> <li>• Monthly participation and leadership in system partner meetings, including the Navajo Nation Early Childhood Collaboration Team.</li> </ul>