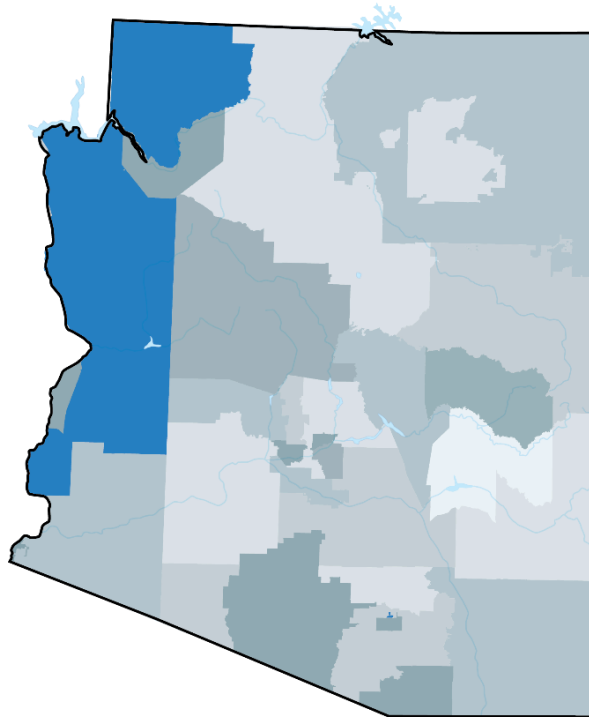


FIRST THINGS FIRST

La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council
Population birth through age 5: 11,193



State Fiscal Year 2026 Funding Plan

SFY 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan Update

Presented to the First Things First Board
January 21, 2025



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.

La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council

Lori Long, chair, representative of faith community

Kip Anderson, vice chair, at-large representative

Shawn Bristle, representative of a philanthropic organization

Andrea Helart, member of the business community

Michelle Jessop, at-large representative

Suzanne Leonelli, child care provider

Betsy Lewis, tribal public official/employee

Melissa Palmer, health services provider

Christy Rail, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

Carolyn Stewart, public school administrator

open, early childhood educator

Vanessa Sandoval, regional director, First Things First

Kimberly Corbin, administrative specialist, First Things First

Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – SFY27
La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$3,074,116	\$3,074,116	\$2,664,037	\$3,141,973
Population Based Allocation	\$1,942,344	\$1,942,344	\$1,755,606	\$1,942,344
Discretionary Allocation	\$1,131,772	\$1,131,772	\$908,431	\$1,199,629
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$1,648,480	\$1,516,442	\$1,154,872	\$399,724
Total Regional Council Funds Available	\$4,722,596	\$4,590,558	\$3,818,909	\$3,541,697
Strategies	Approved Allotment	Approved Allotment	Proposed Allotment	Projected Allotment
Quality First Academy	\$11,500	\$10,595	\$11,500	\$11,500
Quality First Assessment		\$39,976		
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$281,470	\$229,650	\$281,470	\$281,470
Quality First Scholarships	\$1,645,795	\$1,186,824	\$1,005,485	\$948,024
First Things First College Scholarships	\$21,000	\$21,000	\$21,000	\$21,000
Child Care Health Consultation	\$78,200	\$90,949	\$78,200	\$78,200
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$24,480	\$244,800	\$269,280	\$293,760
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$220,000	\$220,000	\$220,000	\$220,000
Family Support Coordination	\$480,000	\$477,000	\$477,000	\$477,000
Home Visitation	\$1,089,250	\$1,089,250	\$1,089,250	\$1,089,250
Statewide Evaluation	\$130,473	\$130,473	\$130,473	\$130,473
Total	\$3,982,168	\$3,740,517	\$3,583,658	\$3,550,677
Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:	\$740,428	\$850,041	\$235,251	(\$8,980)

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		96.72 %	96.51 %	96.35 %	96.32 %
% to Quality First*	8.50%	9.32 %	9.92 %	10.35 %	10.45 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	96.48%				
% to Quality First*	9.99%				

*Per FTF State Board direction, allotments reflect the budgeting of projected spending, therefore in some years' total allotments may exceed total means of financing. However, actual expenditures against the allotments are expected to be fully supported by revenues and each year the region is anticipated to end with a carry forward balance which is reflected in the subsequent year's carry forward balance.

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

LA PAZ/MOHAVE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

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 FTF La Paz/Mohave Regional Council hired a consultant to synthesize regional data, develop a region-specific parent survey, facilitate guided discussion groups with early childhood professionals servicing the region and conduct seven key informant interviews. The regional council actively participated in three workshops to identify their regional priorities by using the Elements of a Healthy Community model (the Elements of a Healthy Community model was designed and produced by Vitalyst Health Foundation in collaboration with community partners; the Elements are inspired by the work of the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) in order to address the regional gaps and barriers.

The regional council is addressing the needs of the region by focusing on targeted areas of the region in the following ways:

- Quality First Scholarships will meet the needs of families in the most rural areas of the region. The regional partnership council prioritized the six most rural zip codes in the region with child care centers to receive Quality First scholarships. The regional partnership council has given approval for 2-star rated centers to receive Quality First scholarships as they realize these centers are located in rural, isolated parts of the region.
- The FTF La Paz/Mohave Regional Council determined the need was to provide home visitation services in parts of the region where there are gaps in services. The regional partnership council shifted their approach from a universal approach to a targeted approach for Home Visitation. Their approach is to specifically address the gaps in services, focusing on areas where there is no home visitation available as well as meeting the needs of families with risk factors such as, lower-income families that might “slip through the cracks,” families where a livable income to meet basic needs is a stressor, families with multiple children under age 5, families with child developmental concerns and families isolated from necessary services. The regional council also determined that home visiting services would need to be implemented at the highest intensity of the program model that is awarded the grant, as the target population is for families with risk factors.
- Family Support Systems Change Strategy will continue the work of the Service Coordination Strategy from the past funding cycle. The strategy will move the foundational work established by the program coordination specialist throughout the region during the past funding cycle. The regional council has identified the need to add an additional program coordination specialist in consideration of the large geographic area to better support the system change work in the region. The two program coordination specialists will cover separate parts of the region in order to support the entire region in coordinating equitable access to health services, especially in rural areas, meeting the needs of families in rural areas through coordination of early childhood providers and school districts (center hubs of the community) to bring services into the communities.
- The FTF La Paz/Mohave Regional Council recognizes the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe as a nested integral part of the region. As such, the tribe has been purposefully included in the Family Support Coordination Strategy, as well as the Family Support Literacy Systems Change Strategy. The Fort Mojave Indian Tribe's Child Care Center, which holds a Quality Plus Rating, is the designated Quality First Center within the community. This inclusion emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity and intentional planning to ensure that the tribe's unique needs and contributions are fully considered.
- The FTF La Paz/Mohave Regional Council was able to closely analyze the region from multiple perspectives, including data from reports, community partner perspectives, key informant perspectives and perspectives of families. The regional council determined their priorities based on the information

and discussions they had. They were able to understand how the schools in the most isolated communities are the main trusted source for support and how essential they are in their communities. The regional council was able to pinpoint gaps in services and identify opportunities for both continued and new coordination efforts throughout the region's most isolated communities.

SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE
LA PAZ/MOHAVE REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

DESIRED OUTCOME: ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION.

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Quality First

- Quality First Academy (prioritized)
- Quality First Coaching and Incentives (prioritized)

Access to Quality Care

- Quality First Scholarships (prioritized)

Successes:

Quality First:

In SFY24, Quality First implemented a revision to the model resulting in service levels that are based on the needs of participating centers and homes, more targeted administration support and additional hours for Child Care Health Consultation.

Together, First Things First and the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) developed and facilitated information sessions and resources for Quality First participants to discuss the end of the federal funds and what SFY25 would look like for their participation, whether continuing or not.

At the end of SFY24, 90.6% of participating programs were achieving or maintaining quality levels.

One regulated early care and education program funded through the federal pandemic relief funds was able to maintain its participation in SFY25 from existing vacancies in the region and the efficiencies from the revisions.

Quality First Scholarships:

First Things First increased the Quality First Scholarship reimbursement rate to the cost of quality in SFY25, informed by a study conducted in 2021. This increase supports a robust and stable network of child care providers and continues the reimbursement rate that providers were receiving through federal pandemic relief funding.

Coordinated planning with DES allowed for 125 children statewide to be transitioned from Quality First Scholarships to Department of Economic Security Child Care Assistance in advance of the end of the federal funds.

The regional council has prioritized the most isolated, underserved zip codes within the region to ensure that the distribution of Quality First Scholarships to child care centers and preschool programs for eligible families responds efficiently and effectively to current regional needs. The regional council did so by prioritizing six zip codes (86021, 86432, 86436, 85334, 85348, 85357) across the region that face additional challenges such as not having DES offices within 20 miles of their sub-regional area.

Challenges:

Quality First:

Federal pandemic relief funding to support a statewide expansion of Quality First ended before the start of SFY25. In the La Paz/Mohave Region, 11 programs were funded through the federal pandemic relief funds which resulted in ten participants who transitioned to the Quality First waitlist starting July 1, 2024. All programs moved to the waitlist that have a rating expiring in SFY25 will have the opportunity to be reassessed to maintain a valid star rating.

Quality First Scholarships:

Reimbursing Quality First Scholarships at the 2021 cost of quality has resulted in fewer scholarships in SFY25 (approximately half the number) for the same amount of funding from the previous year. In planning for SFY26, regional partnership councils had to consider the regional impact the reduction had and make decisions to ensure that additional reductions in funding do not disrupt the system in significant ways.

First Things First and DES will continue to work towards ways to support access to quality early learning to ensure efficient use of funds to serve as many children as possible.

In addition to the Quality First Scholarship reimbursement rate increasing to the cost of quality, the regional council also had to consider their previous strategic decision to decrease the allotment to the Quality First Scholarships Strategy by 15% as part of a step-down approach over the SFY24-27 strategic plan. The impact of these two decisions has resulted in a significant drop in Quality First Scholarships across the region.

Although 46 scholarships were allocated across prioritized zip codes within the region, only 30.75 were currently in use as of September 2024. Targeted communities have reported challenges in utilizing additional scholarships due to a workforce shortage in their area. Many centers are unable to fill classrooms because of staffing limitations, which restricts classroom ratios and overall capacity to serve additional children.

Changes:

Quality First Scholarships:

The regional council has determined to continue their strategic step-down approach with allocations to Quality First Scholarships and is implementing an approximate 15% decrease in the allotment to Quality First Scholarships from SFY25 to SFY26. The regional council analyzed the effects of the State Board decision to move to the cost of quality coupled with the regional council's decision to continue moving forward with the original plan to decrease the allotment of funds to Quality First Scholarships. The regional council has prioritized the critical need to focus on other ways to support access to quality care in the region, such as building awareness of the usage of Quality First Scholarships and DES child care subsidies across the region. With the support of program coordination specialists implementing the systems change strategy, a La Paz/Mohave Child Care Support Team Cohort has been convened, which is made up of Quality First coaches, child care health consultants, Child Care Resource and Referral representatives, Quality First child care center directors, DES Task Force Team and FTF regional staff, in order to provide awareness and aim to increase usage of other supports for quality child care, such as DES child care subsidies in the region.

Child Care Crisis Task Forces have been established in collaboration with select members of regional partnership councils across two sub-regional communities, with additional sub regional task forces in development. These initiatives aim to promote community awareness and foster shared responsibility in addressing critical child care issues within the region. Efforts focus on highlighting the cost of quality child care and identifying barriers that prevent families from affording child care tuition.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Quality First Scholarships:		
Allotment:	\$1,186,824	\$1,005,485
DESIRED OUTCOME: INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES		
<u>Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies</u>		
Educating Families and Caregivers		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Home Visitation (prioritized) 		
Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family Support Coordination (prioritized) ○ Family Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized) 		
<p>Successes:</p> <p>Home Visitation: The FTF La Paz Mohave Regional Council’s strategy for home visitation services is a comprehensive effort to maximize outcomes, braid and blend services, and ensure equity while reducing service duplication. By strategically targeting the region’s three most isolated and underserved sub-regional areas, the council focused on areas where home visitation services were scarce or nonexistent without First Things First (FTF) regional funding. Requests for Grant Applications (RFGA) were released specifically for La Paz County and the Northern Strip (Colorado City and Littlefield/Beaver Dam), ensuring that services were directed toward communities in greatest need.</p> <p>The scopes of work outlined in the RFGAs were designed with clear goals: to provide an appropriate level of service intensity tailored to the needs of each sub-region. By including a 20% cap on the number of families that could be served in areas with existing home visitation services, the strategy ensures resources are concentrated where they are most needed. This targeted focus allows for the efficient use of resources, ensuring that outlying and underserved populations benefit from a higher intensity of services without duplicating existing programs.</p> <p>This approach not only maximizes outcomes by addressing gaps in service provision but also supports the seamless integration of different service offerings. By braiding and blending services across multiple programs, the regional council creates a more coordinated and effective support system that addresses the diverse needs of the communities, promotes equity, and ensures that no family is left behind due to geographic or service access barriers.</p> <p>The grant partner is currently implementing two home visitation models (Parents as Teachers program and Healthy Families program) to address the regional council’s priority in providing intensive home visitation services to address the needs of families most at risk. The grant partner has successfully established a presence within the targeted communities, fostering trust with community members and families.</p> <p>Recruitment and retention of staff across the family support field, both statewide and nationally, remain ongoing challenges that are not unique to this program or region. The grant partner has been managing steadily increasing caseloads, and both programs have experienced inconsistencies while striving to effectively meet the unique needs of each community.</p> <p>Family Support Coordination Both grantees have reported that they have successfully filled their previously vacant positions. This is a significant achievement for the region, where finding qualified applicants to provide services is often challenging. The successful implementation of the strategy relies heavily on these key roles to ensure that services reach communities effectively</p>		

Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:

In SFY25, the regional council and the FTF Hualapai Tribe Regional Partnership Council are collaborating on the Family Support and Literacy Systems Change Strategy. This strategic partnership connects families to essential resources through several key initiatives: the creation and regular updating of region-specific resource guides, the development of a coordinated referral system to direct families to the most suitable services, enhanced interagency collaboration, and education for early care, education, health, and family support providers on community resources to enable effective referrals.

Two program coordination specialists in the FTF La Paz/Mohave and Hualapai Tribe regions implement this strategy, working with partners in outlying La Paz/Mohave communities to establish resource hubs at schools, churches and other community gathering points. They also collaborate with mobile services to conduct health and developmental screenings, provide referrals, and organize “Play and Learns” —interactive educational events for children under 5 in partnership with early childhood organizations. Early childhood partners report that this approach has been highly effective in reaching outlying communities, building rapport, and enrolling families in needed services.

Within specific areas of La Paz/Mohave, these specialists are addressing misconceptions and low utilization of available resources, thus improving access to quality early care and education. They also lead initiatives such as Child Care Cohorts with center directors and a Home Visitation Coalition for program directors and supervisors, which includes training sessions tailored to the needs of home visitors.

The specialists have organized early childhood system coordination meetings in phases to raise awareness of the Elements of a Healthy Community model, focusing on the social determinants of health. This phased approach educates partners on their role in the early childhood system and emphasizes how each sector influences early childhood outcomes, ultimately addressing regional gaps and barriers.

Challenges:

Family Support Coordination

The Family Support Coordination Strategy, newly introduced in the La Paz/Mohave Region, faced a delayed implementation due to the two Requests for Grant Applications (RFGA) being awarded on September 1, 2023, two months behind schedule. Both grantees reported challenges in recruiting and filling positions essential for executing the grants, resulting in significantly low Actual Service Unit (ASU) numbers. Additionally, both grantees noted difficulties in establishing trust within rural communities and among community partners, who often perceive them as competitors to existing services.

Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:

One of these critical positions experienced multiple vacancies over the past year, with recruitment taking longer than expected. This role entails system-level responsibilities and significant travel across 11 sub-regional communities, requiring a candidate who can thrive in a fast-paced environment and effectively build trust with rural, high-risk communities and diverse stakeholders. Having the right candidate in this role is crucial for the successful implementation of systems change work, which requires a long-term approach and deep engagement within the region. Program coordination specialists must possess not only a unique skill set but also extensive regional knowledge and experience. The position was successfully filled as of July 2024, setting a strong foundation for advancing the strategy's goals.

DESIRED OUTCOME: WELL-PREPARED, HIGHLY SKILLED AND APPROPRIATELY COMPENSATED PROFESSIONALS

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Professional Development for ECE Professionals

- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (prioritized)

- First Things First College Scholarships (prioritized)
- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

Successes:

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

The grant partner is currently supporting six home visitation teams, meeting the target of six Contract Service Units (CSUs), and is additionally serving one extra team. Furthermore, the grantee is presently providing services to 14 child care centers out of the 17 CSUs.

First Things First College Scholarships

The two First Things First regionally funded scholarships currently in use represent a valuable success for the region by providing access to early childhood education for families who may otherwise be unable to afford it. These scholarships not only help families directly but also support local early care providers by increasing enrollment and funding stability, fostering a stronger foundation for the region's early childhood education system.

Changes:

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Strategy was introduced to the La Paz/Mohave Region with the support of the Arizona Department of Economic Security American Rescue Plan funding (DES expansion funds) during the four-year strategic planning process. This highlighted for the regional council the significant value the strategy brought to providers in the region. The regional council's goal was to ensure the continuity of mental health consultation services for early care and education programs beginning in SFY25, following the conclusion of DES expansion funding on June 30, 2024. Initially, the plan aimed to support mental health consultation for four home visitation programs in SFY24, gradually adding early care and education centers in subsequent years to allow the grant partner to build capacity in the region. However, increased funding allowed the grantee to extend services to 17 child care centers across the region.

During the new funding cycle, unexpected changes in the region’s home visitation programs prompted the regional council to adjust target service units to align with regional needs. Two additional home visitation programs were included, bringing the total to six. In collaboration with the grant partner, the regional council ensured that these adjustments would not disrupt services for current recipients and would best address regional needs.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation		
Allotment:	\$244,800	\$269,280
Service Unit:	Home visitation programs served: 6 Center-based programs served: 17	Home visitation programs served: 6 Center-based programs served: 19

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Evaluation

- Statewide Evaluation (non-prioritized)

Challenges:

Statewide Evaluation

The 2024 Regional Needs and Asset Report was delivered in June 2024 and approved by the Board in August 2024.