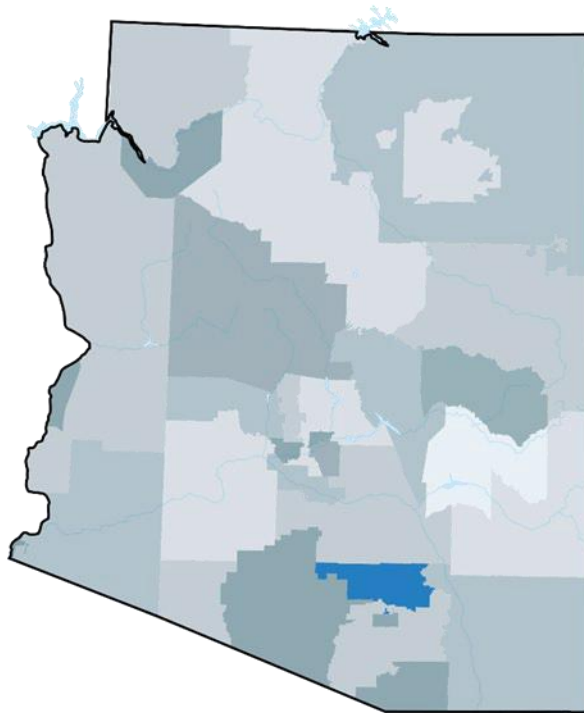


# FIRST THINGS FIRST

**Pima North Regional Partnership Council**  
Population birth through age 5: 42,552



## 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.

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### **Pima North Regional Partnership Council**

**Mandy Carlsen**, chair, health services provider

**Susan Shinn**, vice chair, public school administrator

**Katayoun Anderson**, representative of the faith community

**Tiffany Bucciarelli-Fay**, child care provider

**Eileen R. Caito**, at-large representative

**Brianna Chillious**, at-large representative

**Nicholas Clement**, at-large representative

**Heidi Hultquist**, representative of a philanthropic organization

**Whitney de Haseth**, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

**Amber Jones**, early childhood educator

open, member of the business community

**Amy Morales Baum**, regional director, First Things First

**Roxanne Ochoa**, administrative specialist, First Things First

**Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – SFY27**  
**Pima North Regional Partnership Council**

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
<b>FY Allocation</b>	<b>\$8,777,855</b>	<b>\$8,777,855</b>	<b>\$8,155,130</b>	<b>\$8,756,596</b>
Population Based Allocation	\$6,939,736	\$6,939,736	\$6,272,545	\$6,939,736
Discretionary Allocation	\$1,838,119	\$1,838,119	\$1,882,585	\$1,816,860
<b>Carry Forward From Previous Year</b>	<b>\$2,836,541</b>	<b>\$2,722,814</b>	<b>\$2,082,774</b>	<b>\$921,824</b>
<b>Total Regional Council Funds Available</b>	<b>\$11,614,396</b>	<b>\$11,500,669</b>	<b>\$10,237,904</b>	<b>\$9,678,420</b>
Strategies	Allotted	Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted
Quality First Academy	\$63,500	\$58,442	\$63,500	\$63,500
Quality First Assessment		\$5,132	\$60,000	\$60,000
Quality First Coaching and Incentives	\$1,706,960	\$1,630,200	\$1,706,960	\$1,706,960
Quality First Scholarships	\$3,730,630	\$3,840,405	\$3,780,405	\$3,780,405
First Things First College Scholarships	\$127,200	\$127,200	\$127,200	\$127,200
Professional Development for Early Childhood Practitioners	\$614,647	\$676,112	\$676,112	\$676,112
Child Care Health Consultation	\$431,800	\$508,486	\$431,800	\$431,800
Well Child and Family Care	\$600,000	\$251,295	\$251,295	\$251,295
Community Based Language and Literacy	\$274,647	\$302,112	\$302,112	\$302,112
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$120,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Home Visitation	\$2,100,000	\$2,310,000	\$2,310,000	\$2,310,000
Statewide Evaluation	\$363,624	\$363,624	\$363,624	\$363,624
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$18,500	\$18,500	\$18,500	\$18,500
Media	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$10,181,508</b>	<b>\$10,181,508</b>	<b>\$10,181,508</b>	<b>\$10,181,508</b>
<b>Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:</b>	<b>\$1,432,888</b>	<b>\$1,319,161</b>	<b>\$56,396</b>	<b>(\$503,088)</b>

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		90.53 %	93.96 %	93.96 %	93.96 %
% to Quality First*	18.35%	21.62 %	21.62 %	21.62 %	21.62 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	93.10%				
% to Quality First*	21.62%				

\* Per FTF 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.

## PIMA NORTH 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 Pima North Regional Partnership Council worked together to develop the State Fiscal Year 2024-2027 (SFY24-27) Strategic Plan, which included a deep dive into data and narratives with representation from under-resourced communities in the region as well as four specific strategic planning sessions. Through the data deep dive, the regional council identified a few key needs among children and families who are under-resourced and underserved. First, the strategic plan addresses one of the largest barriers, which is caregiver awareness and access to the early childhood system. Starting in SFY24 the regional council is funding a program coordinator specialist, working to create a more seamless system to better serve families especially those with the highest needs in the Pima North Region. Second, the Pima North Region includes many young children being raised in multi-generational families and households, the regional council is addressing this through the work of home visitation targeted for families who are at highest risk and need.

Economic hardships that families have faced through the past few years were also identified as a challenge. Data from the region highlighted that 25% of children under the age of 6 and their family live in poverty, and the average child care cost is 9% to 16% of the median household income. The high cost of child care is a barrier to children accessing care that helps children achieve long-term educational and health benefits. To address this barrier, the strategic plan sets aside over three million dollars to provide access to high-quality early learning for children and their families who live at or under 300% of the Federal Poverty Line.

Finally, the regional council identified that only 50% of children are meeting reading proficiency in the Pima North Region. To address this challenge, the regional council prioritized funding toward Community Based Language and Literacy Strategy, an approach that will target young children and families of highest need and meet them in trusted community places such as libraries and apartment complexes to provide opportunities to learn about the importance of literacy at an early age. This strategy includes a multi-generational approach, and provides grandparents raising their grandchildren, family caregivers and/or anyone who is helping to raise a child have access to the workshops conducted.

**SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE**

**PIMA NORTH 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.

Seven regulated early care and education programs funded through the federal pandemic relief funds were able to maintain their participation in SFY25 from existing vacancies in the region and the efficiencies from the revisions.

In SFY25, the Pima North Region maintained a similar number of centers (104) and homes (21) participating in Quality first with regional dollars compared to SFY24. The percentage of programs achieving/maintaining quality levels has remained consistent in the region, which shows the success of implementation among both the grant partner and participating early care and education providers.

**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.

Once again the regional council prioritized expanding and leveraging funds towards high-quality early childhood education in collaboration with community and system partners. At the statewide level, coordinated planning with DES and First Things First allowed for 125 children to be transitioned from Quality First Scholarships to DES Child Care Assistance in advance of the end of the federal funds. At the local level, in partnership with the Pima County Board of Supervisors, the Pima Early Education Preschool Scholarships (PEEPS) have expanded access to child care for over 1,900 children in Pima County. Another strength in the Pima North Region is that, in SFY24, participating DES Expansion sites were eligible for Pima Early Education Preschool Scholarships (PEEPS) for SFY25. These scholarships have allowed the Quality First centers and homes who were receiving First Things First scholarships previously, to continue to offer financial assistance to families. This coupled with First Things First-funded Rating Only opportunities during SFY25 for Quality First sites has allowed for participating programs to maintain a star rating, which allows for continued receipt of PEEPS scholarships for children.

In SFY24, the Pima North Region scholarship usage stayed high throughout the entire year. Historically, the region has seen a drop in usage during the months of June and July. Scholarship usage at such a consistent high level demonstrates that these dollars are being maximized to serve as many children as possible. Furthermore, this highlights improved overall access to care and year-round availability, which provides significant benefits to young children.

**Challenges:**

**Quality First:**

Federal pandemic relief funding to support a statewide expansion of Quality First ended before the start of SFY25. This resulted in 67 out of the 74 programs, previously supported through the federal pandemic relief finds, moving into Quality First waitlist starting July 1, 2024. All programs moved to the waitlist that have a rating expiring in SFY25 have the opportunity to be reassessed to maintain a Quality First 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 in the Pima North Region) for the same amount of funding from the previous year. In SFY24, 1,118 distinct children received Quality First Scholarships. In comparison, in SFY25, for the same dollar investment, 502 distinct children received Quality First Scholarships. In planning for SFY26, the regional partnership council considered the regional impact the reduction had and make decisions to ensure that additional reductions in funding do not further 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.

**Changes:**

**Quality First:**

New to SFY26, the regional council reallocated \$60,000 toward the Quality First Assessment Strategy. These funds were available from the Pima North and Pima South regions combining efforts to fund the program coordination specialist. The intent of funding the Quality First Assessment Strategy is to stabilize the number of available child care providers with a Quality First rating, demonstrating high-quality care. The regional council desires for a priority to be on DES Expansion sites with a Quality First rating that will expire in SFY26. A high-quality rating allows a provider to receive higher reimbursement rates from DES child care assistance and to remain eligible to receive funding through PEEPS, which allows for the provider to have more resources to provide high-quality care.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
<b>Quality First Assessment</b>		
Allotment:	\$5,132	\$60,000

**DESIRED OUTCOME: INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Educating Families and Caregivers**

- Home Visitation (prioritized)
- Community Based Language and Literacy (prioritized)

## Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources

- Family Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized)

### **Successes:**

The regional council identified the use of a multi-generational approach through the education and nurturing of the child and their family as a priority during the strategic planning process for SFY24-27. The regional council decided to continue to fund the Home Visitation Strategy and Community Based Language and Literacy Strategy for SFY26 to support this priority.

### **Home Visitation:**

The regional council continues to support the Home Visitation Strategy, which is evidenced-based and supports at-risk children and families in a variety of ways including parent coaching, building resiliency and referrals to other supports. During SFY25, the grant partner shared many success stories of how these programs deeply impact not only the child but the whole family. An example was seen through the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) home visitation program. Nurse-Family Partnership is one of the models of home visitation implemented in the Pima North Region that provides home visits by trained nurses to first-time, low-income mothers and their children. During SFY24, a parent with a child with special needs shared the powerful impact of having a nurse home visitor was for them. The nurse was able to connect the parent to helpful resources such as where to get laundry soap when they did not have the money to afford it, support scheduling appointments for the child's therapies and share resources such as library passes to the zoo so the family could have a joyful day out in the community. This holistic approach is exactly the intention of the regional council in supporting families with the highest needs in the community.

Increased efforts in the community to promote home visitation with pregnant women, where services have the potential for the greatest impact, have resulted in an increased number of referrals to the Nurse Family Partnership program. This has created a need for a waitlist for NFP and a reduction in the number of referrals going to the Parents as Teachers program. To address this increase in prenatal referrals, the lead grant partner has reassigned some of the contracted service units from the Parents as Teachers model to the Nurse-Family Partnership model to allow for more families to be served.

### **Community Based Language and Literacy:**

State Fiscal Year 2025 was the second year of implementation for Community-Based Language and Literacy Strategy in the Pima North Region. This strategy funds Story School, an interactive two-generation approach where children and families learn together through ongoing story time sessions. During these sessions, caregivers discover their ability to create a positive future for their children through literacy and language. The grant partner exceeded their contracted service units during SFY25 and held Story School cohorts at trusted community hubs including libraries in some of the most remote areas of the region and school district funded family resource centers in economically diverse areas. The grant partner was able to establish strong relationships with these hosting sites, which has resulted in a boost in program enrollment. Many of the cohorts are full and have a waitlist which shows the community engagement with the program. These systems wide collaborations support the greater system of early childhood services through connecting families to needed services.

### **Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:**

The regional council identified increasing the awareness of parents and guardians of young children about the early childhood system and access to services as a priority. This was due to data and narratives highlighting how challenging it is for families to connect to the services available in our community. To address this, the regional council hired a full-time program coordination specialist in SFY24 to implement the Family Support and Literacy Systems Change Strategy to support accessibility of services for families. This role works to help bolster the early childhood system by building more robust connections between stakeholders so that service gaps can be identified and remedied in the region. During the first year of implementation, this work involved building relationships with key stakeholders, taking

an inventory of available resources in the community for families with young children and led to the development of the first ever First Things First Pima County Family Resource Guide, which involved the collaboration of partners across the Pima North and Pima South regions. A positive outcome from this work was the creation of a digital map of all the known family resource centers in Pima North. The next step is for the program coordination specialist to connect with the different family resource centers to build a broader and more cohesive network of services in Pima North.

**Challenges:**

**Home Visitation:**

The Home Visitation Strategy, which is comprised of multiple models with a collaborative of partners, saw some partners experience a drop in family enrollment during SFY24. The lead grant partner noted staff turnover as one of the largest contributing factors to this challenge. Recruitment and retention of staff, across the family support field statewide and nationally, has been an ongoing challenge that is not unique to the programs nor the region. A collaborative of home visitation programs conducted Continuous Quality Improvement efforts to assess in real time what the barriers and strengths of home visitation were in relationship to staffing retention and recruitment. This unique endeavor had been instrumental in making needed changes such as case load redistribution in order to better support families through home visitation.

**Changes:**

**Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:**

At the beginning of SFY25, there was a staffing change for the Pima North Program Coordination Specialist. Seeing the county-wide opportunity to consolidate efforts and create a concise message, the FTF Pima North and Pima South regional councils engaged in a formal partnership to fund one person to fulfill the goals of this strategy for both regions. Families in Pima County tend to move from one part of the county to another or to live in a zip code that doesn't have access to a specific resource. The intent is that this will alleviate any FTF imposed boundary lines or region specific strategy parameters.

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

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Professional Development for ECE Professionals**

- First Things First College Scholarships (prioritized)
- Professional Development of Early Childhood Practitioners (prioritized)
- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)
- Systems Change: Pima JTED (unfunded)

**Successes:**

**First Things First College Scholarships:**

The 12 First Things First College Scholarships designated to bachelor's degrees were all utilized in SFY24. The scholarships continued to be fully utilized at the same level during SFY25. This strategy continues to be in high demand among early childhood educators in the Pima North Region.

**Professional Development of Early Childhood Practitioners:**

The Professional Development of Early Childhood Practitioners Strategy remains a priority of the regional council. This multi-regional professional development grant implements 13 Communities of Practice (CoPs) with a shared focus on evidenced-based practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice. The unique CoPs are highly sought after and cover a range of topics to support early childhood educators. Often the work of early childhood education can be isolating, the CoPs allow for practitioners to have a support system through monthly



meetings, mentorship, coaching and peer relationships in the day to day work of educating young children. This work directly addresses the regional council's desire to increase resources and support for early childhood educators.

**Systems Change: Pima JTED (Unfunded):**

The regional council continues to build partnerships through the Systems Change Pima JTED Early Childhood Education program as an unfunded systems building strategy. The Pima JTED Early Childhood Education program educates the next generation of early childhood educators through high school coursework specific to early childhood development and hands opportunities for future educators. This year the partnership between First Things First and Pima JTED strengthened. This included representation at their annual Advisory Committee Day, regular representation at the Business and Industry Committee and Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee, a growth in applications for internships for the Early Childhood Education program and exploration of the needs of the program to best support students entering the field of early childhood.

**Challenges:**

**First Things First College Scholarships:**

Data from the First Things First College Scholarships Strategy has encountered delays in its reporting. First Things First is working with the Registry developers to create new report templates and automate the reporting process to ensure timely receipt of the data moving forward.

**DESIRED OUTCOME: PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT**

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years**

- o Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness (prioritized)
- o Media (prioritized)

**Successes:**

**Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness:**

The regional council continues to prioritize increasing the awareness of FTF and FTF supported programming to the broader community. The allocated funds go towards a few intentional sponsorships in the community including Tucson Festival of Books. With over 100,000 people in attendance each year, the event is a prime opportunity to make connections in the community and share the importance of the first five years. In addition, the sponsorship dollars also support the Children's Museum which serves over 200,000 attendees at both locations throughout the year. This community partner frequently shares about the work of First Things First through their various channels of communication including giving FTF brochures during visits, regular social media recognition and acknowledgement on their website and donor reports. The partnership continues to grow through joint efforts that offer free days for the community to attend the museum and bilingual programming that attracts families from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds. A sponsorship new to SFY25 is with The Play District Tucson, a locally owned business, that is an online hub for discovering exciting things to do and places to eat, all curated with families with young children in mind. This sponsorship is for their annual Play-Palooza event that brings young families together. This strategy aligns with both the regional council's priority and statewide efforts to increasing awareness of parents/guardians of the early childhood system and access to services.

**Media:**

In SFY24, targeted media efforts in the Pima North Region raised awareness about the importance of early childhood development, connecting families to resources and empowering communities to support children from birth to age 5. Pima North saw an increase in earned media coverage regarding early childhood in SFY25. This success has been in part because of relationships developed in the community with local news partners and media dollars allocated by the

regional council. Investments in the SFY25 media campaign expands efforts with targeted online media ads, 193 radio spots, ads placed on grocery carts in six local stores and toppers and posters at five gas stations throughout the region.

**DESIRED OUTCOME: ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PREVENTATIVE AND CONTINUOUS HEALTH CARE**

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Health Resource Coordination**

- Well Child and Family Care (non-prioritized)

***Successes:***

The Well Child and Family Care Strategy saw great success during SFY24. This strategy enhances well-child visits and pediatric care by embedding Healthy Steps Specialists into clinical practice. Parents/caregivers benefit from the navigation support as well as services that provide them with knowledge, guidance and skills to improve child development. The grant partner met 200% of the contracted service unit serving over 800 children in one year. The top five referral areas for families were: child care assistance, baby supplies, food assistance, emergency assistance and housing/utilities assistance. The grant partner also reported great success in a screen time intervention program the Healthy Steps Specialists use with families. The team was able to highlight the positive outcome of this intervention at the Zero to Three/Healthy Steps national conference as a featured presentation.

***Challenges:***

A challenge noted by the grant partner was with data reporting, which was seen across the state with this strategy. There are many data fields for this strategy that are complex and nuanced between reporting for both First Things First and Healthy Steps. The grant partner worked with our data and evaluation team to find solutions and efficiencies.

**DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM**

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Evaluation**

- Statewide Evaluation (non-prioritized)

***Successes:***

**Statewide Evaluation:**

2024 Regional Needs and Assets Reports were delivered in June 2024 and approved by the Board.