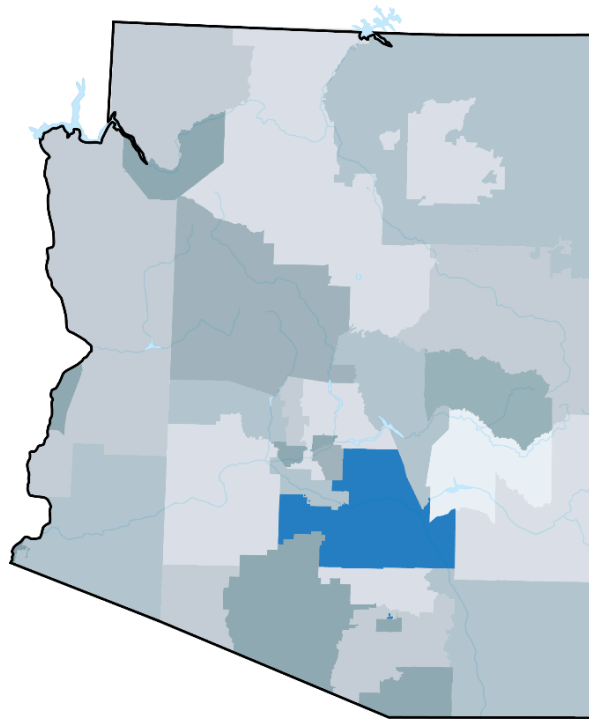


FIRST THINGS FIRST

Pinal Regional Partnership Council
Population birth through age 5: 29,475



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.

Pinal Regional Partnership Council

Jessica Morehead, chair, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

Deanna Smith-Stout, vice chair, public school administrator

Kelly Cota, early childhood educator

Sophie Dessart, member of the business community

Lisa Garcia, tribal public official/employee

Twila Ibarra, representative of the faith community

Michael Kintner, representative of a philanthropic organization

Jacqueline Mendes, child care provider

Robert Eli Richardson, at-large representative

Tara Walter, at-large representative

Melissa Zazueta, health services provider

Katrina DeVinny, regional director, First Things First

Lois Homewytewa, administrative specialist, First Things First

Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – SFY27
Pinal Regional Partnership Council

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$4,799,686	\$4,799,686	\$4,792,301	\$4,722,775
Population Based Allocation	\$3,889,957	\$3,889,957	\$3,515,975	\$3,889,957
Discretionary Allocation	\$909,729	\$909,729	\$1,276,326	\$832,818
Carry Forward From Previous Year	-	\$128,477	\$114,242	\$134,252
Total Regional Council Funds Available	\$4,799,686	\$4,928,163	\$4,906,543	\$4,857,027
Strategies	Approved Allotted	Approved Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Projected Allotted
Early Learning Systems Change	\$202,042	\$202,042	\$222,246	\$222,246
Quality First Academy	\$18,000	\$16,566	\$18,000	\$18,000
Quality First Assessment		\$88,077		
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$537,120	\$428,739	\$537,120	\$537,120
Quality First Scholarships	\$2,092,315	\$2,092,315	\$1,955,094	\$1,955,094
Child Care Health Consultation	\$122,400	\$144,138	\$122,400	\$122,400
Developmental and Sensory Screening	\$300,467	\$300,467	\$330,514	\$330,514
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$291,320	\$291,320	\$291,320	\$291,320
Oral Health	\$114,700	\$114,700	\$126,170	\$126,170
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000
Family, Friend and Neighbor Care	\$450,000	\$450,000	\$495,000	\$495,000
Home Visitation	\$428,043	\$428,043	\$428,043	\$428,043
Parenting Education	\$305,000	\$305,000	\$335,500	\$335,500
Statewide Evaluation	\$196,117	\$196,117	\$196,117	\$196,117
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Media	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000
Total	\$5,232,524	\$5,232,524	\$5,232,524	\$5,232,524
Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:	(\$432,838)	(\$304,361)	(\$325,981)	(\$375,497)

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		88.31 %	88.31 %	87.52 %	87.52 %
% to Quality First*	8.71%	12.94 %	11.26 %	12.94 %	12.94 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	87.92%				
% to Quality First*	12.52%				

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

*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.

PINAL 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 Pinal Regional Partnership Council works diligently to promote equity and support children who are under-resourced and underserved and their families in the Pinal Region. The SFY24-27 Strategic Plan helps to support this work by:

- The Oral Health Strategy will prioritize communities that have few or no pediatric dentists.
- Quality First Scholarships will target families in the gap between Department of Economic Security Child Care Assistance and being able to afford quality child care.
- The Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care Strategy will work to engage new kinship and home-care providers and is a good resource for non-traditional families such as grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Many of our strategies promote relationship-building. This is culturally appropriate and responsive to the Ak-Chin Indian Community, which has elected to participate in the Pinal Region.
- The strategies also promote and prioritize locations to be equitable with access for all persons regardless of physical ability and will continue to reflect the diversity of the Pinal Region in the funded strategies and our system building work.

SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE

PINAL 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)
- Early Learning Systems Change (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.

Three regulated early care and education programs (out of 18) 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.

At the end of SFY24, 95.9% of programs were achieving/maintaining quality levels.

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

Early Learning Systems Change:

The regional council is working to address the root cause of the child care desert in the region through the Early Learning Systems Change Strategy, working on the early childhood workforce pipeline. After collecting data, the grant partner shared preliminary findings with the regional council at their January 2024 meeting. Those findings included low teacher pay, lack of benefits and working conditions as the top barriers to attracting early childhood workers. The findings did include data showing that young people do want to stay in their communities and give back. In the fall of 2024, the regional council saw one of the grant partners' deliverables for a marketing campaign titled, "Shape Futures Campaign: Become the Ultimate Influencer with a Career in Early Childhood Education!" The

regional council expects this strategy to continue finding solutions for this deficit in the early childhood workforce in the coming years by expanding the audience and engaging youth, child care professionals and educators. As part of this systems work, this grant partner is working closely with the regional director and the statewide community engagement staff to hold presentations, roundtables and forums around the county to engage local government, business leaders and workforce/economic development staff in the need for child care and the issues surrounding the early childhood education system. This grant partner is also strengthening partnerships with Central Arizona College and high school career and technical education programs. They are attending high school career fairs to engage high school students and encourage early childhood education paths to increase the future workforce.

Challenges:

Quality First:

Federal pandemic relief funding to support a statewide expansion of Quality First ended before the start of SFY25. In the Pinal Region, 18 programs were funded through the federal pandemic relief funds which resulted in 15 participants who transitioned to the Quality First waitlist starting July 1, 2024. All programs moved to the waitlist that have a rating that will expire 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 (reduction of about 40%) for the same amount of funding from the previous year. For the Pinal region, the majority of scholarships are used for 3 to 5 year olds, not infants, so there were more slots available with less funding. 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 the 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:

The regional council increased the funding allocation by 10% for the Early Learning Systems Change Strategy to expand their work within the early childhood education system to further develop the workforce pipeline.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Early Learning Systems Change		
Allotment:	\$202,042	\$222,246

DESIRED OUTCOME: INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Educating Families and Caregivers

- Home Visitation (prioritized)
- Parenting Education (prioritized)
- Family, Friend and Neighbor Care (prioritized)

Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources

- Family Support Systems Change (prioritized)

Successes:

Parenting Education Strategy:

The Parenting Education Strategy began work in the Pinal County Detention Center with soon-to-be-released parents and pregnant mothers. This work is just beginning, but the strategy is finding people who begin the program while in the detention center are following up upon their release to continue the program with their children.

Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care Strategy:

The Family, Friend and Neighbor (FFN) Care Strategy grantee exceeded their contracted service units for SFY24 by 12%. Several FFN caregivers have noticed the lack of quality preschool in their rural areas and have the desire to fill the void through the Family, Friend and Neighbor Care Strategy, ensuring they can educate and prepare any child in their care for kindergarten.

Family Support Systems Change Strategy:

The Pinal Early Childhood Coalition (made up of school districts, public health, non-profits, child care centers, First Things First grantees, etc.), through the Family Support Systems Change Strategy, continues to find valuable and effective ways to meet the needs of service providers by streamlining services, closing gaps and working to build the early childhood system. The coalition’s current work focuses on building professional relationships to increase referral success through Tea Time at Two weekly meetings, kindergarten readiness, social media marketing, Week of the Young Child events and English as a second language supports.

This system change strategy has also begun work with existing family resource centers in the region to decrease the gaps in services, improve resource accessibility and cross-sector collaboration. The need for community and family supports is great in the Pinal Region and this work hopes to create true community hubs throughout the region in the coming years.

Challenges:

Home Visitation Strategy:

For the Home Visitation Strategy, hiring qualified family support staff has been a challenge, as well as enrolling parents and keeping parents engaged. The grantee has begun an intensive marketing plan with lots of support to hopefully better their outcomes. Recruitment and retention of staff, across the family support field statewide and nationally, has been an ongoing challenge that is not unique to the program nor the region.

Changes:

The regional council increased the funding allocation by 10% for the Parenting Education Strategy to expand their work with parents in the Pinal County jail and prison system. The regional council also increased the funding allocation by 10% for the Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Strategy as they exceeded their contracted service units and additional needs have been identified.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Parenting Education		
Allotment:	\$305,000	\$335,500
Service Unit:	Number of series completed: 72	Number of series completed: 79
Family, Friend and Neighbor Care		
Allotment:	\$450,000	\$495,000
Service Unit:	Number of Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregivers served: 250	Number of Family, Friend, and Neighbor caregivers served: 275

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)
- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

DESIRED OUTCOME: PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT.

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years

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

Successes:

Educational promotion and Brand Awareness:

The FTF Pinal Regional Partnership Council has begun to be very strategic and targeted with the use of these funds. For example, the books now being ordered for the region are specific and targeted for vulnerable populations in Pinal, such as foster children and children of incarcerated parents or caregivers.

Media:

In SFY24, targeted media efforts in the Pinal 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. Building on this success, the SFY25 media campaign will expand these efforts with targeted online media ads, 193 radio spots on a local station, ads placed on grocery carts in nine 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

Oral Health

- Oral Health (non-prioritized)

Identifying and Addressing Developmental Concerns

- Developmental and Sensory Screening (non-prioritized)

Successes:

The regional council continues to fund the Oral Health and Developmental and Sensory Screening strategies with both strategies exceeding their contracted service units for SFY24 by 47% and 36% respectively. The regional council believes these strategies are important and will help to educate parents and caregivers on developmental milestones and what to look for with dental, vision and hearing issues in young children. These strategies can also identify issues and offer education and referrals when needed. The Pinal Region has a lack of resources and access to medical care, oral health and developmental, hearing and vision supports and therefore both strategies are critical components in supporting young children and their families in the region.

Challenges:

The regional council is still seeing a shortage of doctors, particularly pediatricians, as well as pediatric dentists. In addition to these deficits, the Pinal Region still has very limited in access to therapies for children with developmental delays. The region’s grantees doing screenings in these areas offer education and information on existing resources including dental and medical homes.

Changes:

The FTF Pinal Regional Partnership Council increased the funding allocation by 10% for both the Oral Health Strategy and the Developmental and Sensory Screening Strategy, as they both exceeded their contracted service units and additional needs have been identified.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Oral Health		
Allotment:	\$114,700	\$126,170
Service Unit:	Number of children served: 660	Number of children served: 726
Developmental and Sensory Screening		
Allotment:	\$300,467	\$330,514
Service Unit:	Number of children screened: 1909	Number of children screened: 2100

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Evaluation

- Statewide Evaluation (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Statewide Evaluation:

The 2024 Regional Needs and Asset Reports were delivered in June 2024 and approved by the Board in August 2024.