

Tribal Consultation Summary Report
May 1, 2025
In-person Consultation

Pursuant to the First Things First (FTF) Tribal Consultation Policy and Arizona Revised Statutes section 41-2051, FTF convened a formal consultation session on Thursday, May 1, 2025. The purpose of the consultation was to receive feedback to inform FTF strategic planning, to discuss the upcoming opportunity for tribes to elect how they choose to participate with FTF and to discuss opportunities to enhance the early childhood system.

FTF is committed to meaningful consultation with tribes through which elected officials and other authorized representatives of the tribal governments have the opportunity to provide meaningful and timely input regarding the development of policies or procedures that affect tribes in Arizona, specifically Native American young children and their families.

Participants

Tribal Leaders and Representatives

Delia M. Carlyle, Vice Chairwoman, Ak-Chin Indian Community

Verene Begay, Early Steps Program Specialist, Cocopah Indian Tribe

Dr. Victoria Corlett, Education Director, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation

Bernadine Jones, Chairwoman, Havasupai Tribe

Sybil Hanna, Councilwoman, Havasupai Tribe

Sally Tilousi, Representative, Havasupai Tribe

Jamalida Pujols, Head Start Director, Havasupai Tribe

Carrie Watahomigie, Executive Advisor, Hopi Tribe

Chira Walema, Day Care Director, Hualapai Tribe

Richelle Montoya, Vice President, Navajo Nation

Chris McIntier, Grants/Special Projects Administrator, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community

Patrick Andrews, Education Director, Tohono O'odham Nation

Madisyn Morgan, Councilwoman, Tonto Apache Tribe

Saundra Lopez, Early Childhood Coordinator, Tonto Apache Tribe

Ivan Walker Jr., Councilman, White Mountain Apache Tribe

Nancy Ruiz, Executive Assistant, Yavapai-Apache Nation

First Things First Board and Staff

Steve Lynn, FTF Board Chair

Francisco Muñoz, FTF Board Indigenous Representative

Marcia Klipsch, FTF Board Member

Hon. Richard Weiss, FTF Board Member

Melinda Gulick, Chief Executive Officer

Candida Hunter, Senior Director of Tribal Affairs

In addition, FTF staff and representatives from other state agencies and organizations were in attendance to observe the consultation.

SUMMARY

The purpose of the consultation was to receive feedback from tribal leaders and representatives on 1) strategic planning and 2) tribal participation in FTF. The following summary reflects input and suggestions provided by tribal leaders and representatives in attendance at the Tribal Consultation.

FTF Strategic Planning State Fiscal Year 2028

First Things First (FTF) was created by Arizona voters in 2006 to expand and enhance the early childhood programs and services that help young children arrive at kindergarten prepared for success. The statewide First Things First Board and regional partnership councils in local communities across Arizona share the responsibility of ensuring that early childhood funds are invested in strategies that will result in improved education and health outcomes for young children.

In June 2024, the FTF state Board began work on the next statewide strategic plan which will set the direction for the organization's work beginning in State Fiscal Year 2028 (SFY28). As the FTF State Board works towards developing this plan, there are several considerations. FTF is funded through a tax on tobacco products. As consumers have shifted from traditional tobacco products to new products like vapes, e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches, FTF annual revenues have decreased by nearly 40% - from \$165 million in state fiscal year 2008 to \$102 million in 2024. As funding continues to decrease, the FTF Board is considering consolidating strategies to better align with funded priorities.

FTF requested feedback from tribal leaders and representatives on the following:

- Partners serving young children and suggestions on where FTF should focus its work
- Conditions holding problems in place for babies, toddlers and preschoolers and opportunities/solutions to address the problems
- Conditions holding problems in place for early childhood professionals and opportunities/solutions to address the problems
- Ways to engage with tribal gaming enterprises and other tribal businesses or economic organizations to address child care workforce recruitment and retention issues
- Next steps for maintaining or expanding early childhood partnerships

- Additional information needed for tribes to consider supporting future legislation

Tribal leaders and representatives recommended that FTF focus efforts on improving outreach about FTF and early childhood resources, increasing the early education workforce and recruiting families for services. Challenges mentioned included the lack of supportive family structures to start healing, inadequate services for children with special needs, trust and relationship-building with families, awareness of services for families, and fear of the severe actions being implemented from the federal administration.

Opportunities and solutions that were recommended for FTF to focus on in tribal communities include collaborating with other early education providers, sharing professional development opportunities for early childhood educators, continuing to fund home visitation programs, and incorporating native language and culture into the parenting education curriculum. The lack of awareness of the early childhood profession, low wages, recruitment and retention continue to be challenges in tribal communities. It's important to partner with universities offering resources. It's also important to provide high wages, incentives and professional development to the current early childhood workforce. In addition, focus on building capacity by motivating community members to obtain their early childhood education credentials.

FTF was encouraged to continue to engage with tribal gaming enterprises and other tribal businesses or economic organizations and continue the discussion on childcare workforce issues, remind employers that child care is a need and to look into Prop 202 for funding. Additional information that is needed for tribes to consider supporting legislation include previous studies and reports to understand how much funding vaping tax could generate and to better understand previous legislation efforts. It was also recommended to provide in-person presentations about legislation to each tribe.

Comments and Suggestions for FTF's 6 focus areas

- Havasupai Tribe Councilwoman Sybil Hanna shared that their community is different from other communities. The building that is used by the FTF grant partner is small, crowded and is at max capacity. While a new facility would be a solution, there is no space in the Canyon. Resources and outreach would be beneficial for current families and new parents. Some families do not qualify for Head Start due to their income.
- Hualapai Tribe Day Care Director Chira Walema asked where language preservation and culture fall within the six prioritized areas. Staff answered that it is within Educating Parents and Families.
- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie shared that they have challenges with recruiting staff to provide services and recruiting parents who struggle with substance abuse to reap the benefits of needed programs.
- Havasupai Tribe Chairwoman Bernadine Jones agreed that their community shares the same issues on staffing, facilities, and getting parents to utilize programs. She shared her concern on the decreased revenue, how funding will be allocated to communities and what is FTF's plan to address decreased funding. In addition, she stated that because their tribal council members serve two-year terms, she hopes that something can be set in place before new tribal leadership take their seat so that their community can continue with receiving services such as home visitation. She added that they would like to improve their communication with FTF.
- Havasupai Tribe Representative Sally Tilousi thanked the FTF CEO for providing the information about the decrease in funding and shared that it will put their tribe at a disadvantage due to

their small population. She continued that there isn't enough funding and resources. Their tribe receives little funding from gaming and there's a great need for services and resources. They also hope to update their plan to include health for their birth to age 5 population.

- Cocopah Indian Tribe Early Steps Program Specialist Verene Begay mentioned that in addition to the six priorities, the focus on the family dynamic is important. The issues within the Cocopah community are different than other communities; however, depression, domestic violence, and other stressors are common core issues that affect families in Indian Country. Verene said in order to address those issues, there needs to be a focus on education and awareness for health and stressors.

Conditions that are holding problems in place for babies, toddlers, and preschoolers in tribal communities

- Havasupai Tribe Representative Sally Tilousi responded that it's difficult to address the higher-level needs when only the lower-level needs are being addressed. She mentioned that they need access to systems that are supportive and increase family structure for healing in order to address issues such as substance, lack of employment, and domestic violence.
- Ak-Chin Indian Community Vice Chairwoman Delia Carlyle stated that even though their community is close to the fastest-growing city, Maricopa, they are still experiencing a lack of services for children with special needs. They are working on finding readily available services and guidance from experts. She shared that it is frustrating when they cannot find needed services for families and their children. There is concern that their little ones with special needs are going into kindergarten without reliable and consistent services.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Victoria Corlett echoed that while there are resources available for families, there may also be a lack of trust. In order to remove the gap and provide resources to families in Indian Country, FTF needs to work with the partners to build trust and a relationship with the families. It's important that grant partners have experience with working with native families and if not, get their buy-in by building trust with them.
- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie highlighted the importance of bringing awareness of services that are available to children with special needs and federal programs that provide services for at-risk pregnancies. In addition, to bring awareness of the federal administration's severe actions for children with disabilities. She also suggested that FTF partner with FACE programs and/or share funding or resources and mentioned that parents need guidance on how to receive services because they might be young, intimidated or unaware of resources.

Recommended opportunities & solutions to better support young children and their families

- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie re-stated that informing young parents, foster parents, and grandparents of resources available to them is needed. For example, if they wanted counseling, finding ways to engage with them or bringing the resources to them could be helpful.
- Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya echoed the statement that bringing entities together to work toward the betterment of children is important. On Navajo Nation, they have their own early childhood education programs and partnerships with the surrounding states and she suggested that it would be good to work together, especially because of the decline in funding all around. The Vice President also recommended that FTF conduct outreach because not many people are familiar with FTF. Lastly, she mentioned that parents are working while grandparents are taking care of their grandchildren.

- Havasupai Tribe Councilwoman Sybil Hanna asked if there were benefits or incentives for staff working with young children to receive their degree or CDA credentials in her community.
- Hualapai Tribe Day Care Director Chira Walema thanked the FTF Quality First program. She stated that a lot of programs and services that FTF fund share resources and suggested tribal leaders learn more about access to programs. She shared that tribal communities can have a program coordination specialist to help identify all the resources available for young children. She also stressed the importance of home visitation in tribal communities which connect families to resources, such as AzEIP to bridge the gap.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Victoria Corlett agreed that home visitation is definitely the key to connecting families to resources. She also acknowledged that there are still barriers for families to connect with resources outside of the community. Outside service providers do not understand how the community works or they might not know how to approach the community. She also suggested families share their own story with FTF to understand the needs of families. This can help understand where they started, what they learned and how they've grown. In addition, this can help illuminate how they utilize resources and understand barriers and how FTF funded programs are helping families.
- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Grants/Special Projects Administrator Chris McIntier shared that their region funds parenting education in their community. She suggested the Nurturing Parenting for Teens curriculum incorporate native language and culture and be updated to include how teens are communicating today with social media.
- Cocopah Indian Tribe Early Steps Program Specialist Verene Begay agreed that home visitation is bridging the gap between resources and families and it is beneficial. She shared that Cocopah is a rural community and it has three separate reservations that are miles apart. She stated that having home visitors with a good heart can make connections for young children who live far from resources and need services such as special needs, hearing or vision screening.

Conditions that are holding problems in place for early childhood professionals in tribal communities

- Hualapai Tribe Day Care Director Chira Walema responded that low wage is a barrier and it is often difficult to hire well-trained individuals to work for low wages in tribal communities especially when they can get better wages in the city.
- Havasupai Tribe Chairwoman Bernadine Jones highlighted the need for better pay for staff in order to recruit and retain them, the challenge for agencies to create MOU or MOAs, and the barrier to obtain training for staff and new facilities. She mentioned that the tribe is currently dealing with the uranium issue and understands that education might not be a priority from the federal level. In addition, she spoke about entities who do offer their services will have limited time to conduct their work in the community and housing options for them aren't always available, especially during tourist season.

Recommended opportunities & solutions to better support early childhood professionals

- Navajo Nation Vice President Richelle Montoya replied that students are not aware of the early childhood education field. She suggested advertising the early childhood education profession and to possibly start at the middle school level.
- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie shared there are numerous entities, like universities, who are willing to provide resources and support to tribal programs. She is currently writing a grant to include recruitment of staff that offer services to birth to age 5 populations. She encouraged others to find solutions by partnering with other entities.

- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie also shared that it is important to grow-your-own because, when hiring people from outside of the community, housing is not available for them to stay. Therefore, she said it is important to motivate your own community to obtain early childhood education credentials, increase salary and incentives for them to stay in the field and advocate for the early childhood education field.

Ways FTF can continue to engage with tribal gaming enterprises and other tribal businesses/economic organizations to address child care workforce issues

- Havasupai Tribe Chairwoman Bernadine Jones replied that the revenue from gaming and tourism has declined due to the pandemic and flooding impact and the community utilizes the funds to prioritize their community needs. Because the tribal government manages gaming and tourist departments, she recommends that they continue to work with FTF on this issue. She also advised that other tribal leadership should look into the trust fund that the ITCA programs oversees for educational needs.
- Ak-Chin Indian Community Vice Chairwoman Delia Carlyle requested a report from the Child Care Forum. She also encouraged FTF to continue to be present and emphasize children are the future workforce and remind the gaming enterprises that those employed with the casinos may be in need of child care too.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Victoria Corlett suggested FTF apply for Prop 202 funding to help Native American children in the state and explained that the funding opportunity cannot go to a specific tribe.

Additional information for tribes to consider to support future legislation

- Ak-Chin Indian Community Vice Chairwoman Delia Carlyle asked why the vaping bill did not move forward given it is similar to the tobacco tax and if there is a study showing how much revenue could be generated from extending the tax to vaping products.
- White Mountain Apache Tribe Councilman Ivan Walker Jr. requested the reports and shared that he can advocate and write letters of support to the legislature.
- Tonto Apache Tribe Early Childhood Coordinator Saundra Lopez mentioned that this is the first time that they have heard about this issue and requested additional information on future legislation.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Education Director Victoria Corlett recommended that this information be presented to each tribe in-person because letters of support request might not go to the right person and the tribe may have specific questions.

Tribal Participation in FTF

By statute, the FTF Board completes an every-other-year review of regional boundaries. At this time, geographic regional boundaries are expected to be studied for the next two years and the Board will have the opportunity to redesignate geographic regional boundaries by January 15, 2028.

By March 1 of every even-numbered year, tribes with tribal lands in Arizona may decide if they want to participate in the geographic region or have their tribal lands treated as a separate tribal region. The next opportunity for tribes to make this decision is by March 1, 2026.

FTF has requested input from tribal leaders and representatives on the following:

- Information needed to help their tribe determine continued participation in FTF for the next two years and how they would like to receive more information from FTF

- What neighboring regional councils should consider as they make decisions about programs to fund and enhance the early childhood system and opportunities for the regional council to partner with the tribe
- Processes or relationships that can be defined within agreements

Tribal leaders and representatives requested additional information on participating as a tribal region or a part of a larger geographic region as well as examples of funding allocations. They also suggested when notifying the tribe of tribal participation decisions to copy respective committees. For future agreements with tribes, it was suggested to acknowledge the tribe's Institutional Review Board (if applicable) and the role they might or might not have with data proposals. In addition, it's important to recognize the established relationships between the regional council and the oversight committee(s), receiving information every year due to changes in tribal leadership, ensuring that data is protected when shared, understanding the tribe's limitations and specific requests and receiving data in quarterly reports.

As neighboring regional councils are making decisions about programs to fund and ways to enhance the early childhood system, they should consider tribal members residing in their regions, have good communication with tribal regions to provide services to their tribal members, and partner with tribes that are part of a larger geographic region to better support young tribal members.

Information needed to help determine participation in FTF

- The following tribal leaders and representatives stated the tribe would like to continue with their current participation:
 - Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews also shared that they have been committed to establishing a relationship with the regional council and director.
 - Hualapai Tribe Day Care Director Chira Walema also asked if revenue and funding cuts will impact boundaries for tribes in the future.
 - Cocopah Indian Tribe Early Steps Program Specialist Verene Begay stated they
 - White Mountain Apache Tribe Councilman Ivan Walker Jr. also requested a meeting between FTF and the tribal council.
 - Ak-Chin Indian Community Vice Chairwoman Delia Carlyle also stated the community is too small to have their own region. FTF staff attend council meetings to share information, provide updates and they work with the early childhood program.
 - Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie also replied that assessment of early identification of children is helpful and data collected over the last two years is utilized to improve their program.
- In addition, the following tribal leaders and representatives stated the tribe would like additional information:
 - Havasupai Tribe Representative Sally Tilousi stated that it would help to have financial information and learn more about the regional structure.
 - Tonto Apache Tribe Early Childhood Coordinator Sandra Lopez replied that the Vice Chairman and the school board for the tribe requested a presentation to receive more information about their participation options.
 - Yavapai-Apache Nation Executive Assistant Nancy Ruiz recommended that FTF provide the pros and cons in a presentation to both the council and child care department to make an informed decision.

Suggestions for how FTF can improve the notification process regarding tribal participation

- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie advised that when the notification letter is sent to their tribal council, the Health and Education Committee should also be copied.
- Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews said the Nation supports the current process of allowing the tribes to determine their participation every two years and the Nation is committed to remaining as their own region. He also acknowledged that the regional council and the regional director have been successful in communicating with the Human Resource Development Committee and Legislative Council and their positive relationship with the committees has helped to ensure the process is easy for their Education Department in moving forward.
- Tonto Apache Tribe Early Childhood Coordinator Saundra Lopez stated that she will share her contact information so she can present the information to their tribal school board and the council.

Considerations for neighboring regional councils to enhance early childhood system

- Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews responded that the majority of their enrolled members currently live off the reservation and most reside in metropolitan areas such as Tucson and the Valley. He continued that within the Education Department, they are committed to participating in tribal consultation with the surrounding school districts to provide child care information and FTF resources to share with their tribal members.
- Hualapai Tribe Day Care Director Chira Walema suggested it is important for FTF tribal regions to have good communication with nearby regional councils. It's important for the Hualapai region to have good communication with La Paz/Mohave because tribal members live in Kingman and it's a good way to refer their tribal members to services.
- Tonto Apache Tribe Early Childhood Coordinator Saundra Lopez acknowledged they have a small population of children, birth to age 5. Many utilize Quality First services in the Payson area and she would like to have additional information about the facilities/programs to better support parents.

Recommendations for what should be included in future agreements

- Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews shared that the Nation has an Institutional Review Board (IRB) which reviews proposals regarding data collection. The data that FTF collects is under the scope of the Education Department, IRB does not have to review their data collection request. He further stated that because of the established relationship between the regional council and the Human Resource Development Committee serving as the IRB's oversight committee, it makes it easier to collect and present data and obtain support of the report.
- Tonto Apache Tribe Councilwoman Madisyn Morgan stated that the tribe would like to receive information every year, instead of every other year because leadership changes yearly.
- Havasupai Tribe Representative Sally Tilousi asked if there is an existing MOU with the Havasupai Tribe and if so, if there is an opportunity to adjust the MOU.
- Hopi Tribe Executive Advisor Carrie Watahomigie advised to ensure that the confidentiality and privacy information are guarded when it is shared within the regions.
- Ak-Chin Indian Community Vice Chairwoman Delia Carlyle expressed her appreciation for when staff attend their council meeting to request the data and their understanding of the tribe's limitations and their specific requests when it comes to data. She also agreed that discarding detailed personal information after it has been used is a way to ensure that it is not shared with the public.

- White Mountain Apache Tribe Councilman Ivan Walker Jr. instructed that they would like to continue to receive data in the quarterly reports from the regional director.