



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Tribal Consultation Summary Report May 14, 2024 In-person Consultation

Pursuant to the First Things First (FTF) Tribal Consultation Policy and Arizona Revised Statutes section 41-2051, convened a formal consultation session on Tuesday, May 14, 2024. The purpose of the consultation was to receive feedback on strengthening the child care workforce in tribal communities and long-term solutions needed as tobacco funding for early childhood programs continues to decline.

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

Robert Miguel, Chairman, Ak-Chin Indian Community

Robert Valencia, Vice Chairman, Pascua Yaqui Tribe

Elizabeth Benitez, Tribal Administrator, Cocopah Tribe

Pamela Prasher, Child Care and Development Fund Program Manager, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community

Paul Russell, Vice President, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation

Ron Ritter, Department of Health and Human Service Representative, San Carlos Apache Tribe

Betsy Lewis, Director/Child Care and Development Fund Administrator, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe

Patrick Andrews, Education Director, Tohono O'odham Nation

Scott Crozier, Vice Chairman, Hualapai Tribe

Ivan Walker, Councilman, White Mountain Apache Tribe

Darrick Franklin, Department of Diné Education Senior Planner, Navajo Nation

Ophelia Tewawina, Child Care and Development Fund Program Director, Yavapai-Apache Nation

Lena Yellowhair, Navajo Head Start Mental Health & Disabilities Specialist, Navajo Nation

First Things First Board and Staff

Marcia Klipsch, FTF Board Member

Melinda Gulick, Chief Executive Officer

Francisco Muñoz, Indigenous Representative

Josh Allen, Chief Financial & Operations Officer

Stacy Reinstein, FTF Board Member

Candida Hunter, Senior Director of Tribal Affairs

Judge Richard Weiss, FTF Board Member

In addition, FTF staff, representatives from state agencies and other 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) strengthening the child care workforce in tribal communities and 2) long-term solutions needed as tobacco funding for early childhood programs continues to decline. The following summary reflects input and suggestions provided by tribal leaders and representatives who were in attendance at Tribal Consultation.

Strengthening the Child Care Workforce in Tribal Communities

For many families, child care plays a critical role in child development since families rely on out-of-home care. For years, child care accessibility, affordability and availability in Arizona was a simmering crisis. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a devastating blow to the child care system both nationally and here in Arizona, creating a child care crisis. In the early months of the pandemic, about half of Arizona's child care providers shut down. Many quickly re-opened thanks to emergency funding but severe staffing shortages continue to limit child care availability. Low wages and poor benefits are part of why there is a workforce shortage. As a result, many early educators have left the child care sector to work in other private sector jobs. FTF has facilitated a number of forums to bring people together to begin the important work of finding long-term solutions to Arizona's child care crisis. FTF also recognized the need to receive insight from tribal leaders regarding the experiences of their community to understand, and address child care needs.

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

- Challenges and successes experienced in hiring and retaining child care workers
- Ideas to support child care programs with resources to develop early care and education staff
- Advantages and challenges of providing tribal CCDF programs
- Barriers or challenges applying for state CCDF funds
- Informing local businesses and economic development organizations of the impact that child care has on the recruitment and retention of their workforce
- Ways for FTF to Partner with Businesses to Build Support for the Early Childhood System or FTF

Tribal leaders and representatives shared their challenges in hiring and retaining child care workers which included duration and requirements of background checks, the hiring process, low wages and lack of qualified staff. Successes mentioned in hiring and retaining child care workers are being able to offer competitive wages, professional development, career growth and exploration opportunities and scholarships. In addition, partnering with tribal colleges and tribal human resource departments on recruitment efforts and with law enforcement units on expediting background checks have helped. Suggestions to support child care workers and programs include the development of an early childhood development center for tribal communities, tribes could subsidize child care centers, expansion of continuous learning opportunities for in-home child care programs. Tribal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) programs provide the ability to meet the needs of the community, collaborate with other early childhood education centers and offer certificate programs for off-reservation child care services. Lack of infrastructure such as paved roads and available buildings are challenges in tribal communities. Challenges and barriers in applying for state CCDF funds are the differences in [state and tribal] fiscal years, concerns about additional reporting requirements, registering as a state licensed facility and, when the state is noncompliant, it also causes the tribal CCDF program to be in noncompliance. Suggestions for improvement include bringing awareness to child care rates, providing a list of nearby child care centers to the workplace, using local data to advocate for the importance of education and child care and developing partnerships with various schools are ways that FTF can inform local businesses and economic development organizations about the impact of child care on their workforce. In addition, ways to encourage businesses to partner with FTF to build support for the early childhood system or FTF include learning about tribal priorities, involving the regional council, partnering with schools and sharing information with gaming enterprises.

Challenges in Hiring and Retaining Child Care Workers

- Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina responded that in the majority of households in tribal communities, there are multiple families living in the home. To provide home child care that is eligible

for subsidies funded by the federal or state government, background checks are required. An interested provider may be disqualified because another adult living in the home does not pass the background check.

- Navajo Nation Head Start Mental Health & Disabilities Specialist Lena Yellowhair shared that the length of the hiring process and submitting on-boarding documents can take 3 to 6 months.
- Hualapai Tribe Vice Chairman Scott Crozier mentioned multiple challenges including a lengthy process for conducting background checks and hiring, high turnover rates and grandparents being the sole caretakers for grandchildren.
- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community CCDF Program Manager Pamela Prasher agreed that they also lose those who apply due to the background check process taking 3 to 6 months. The retainment of qualified staff to stay in the early childhood field is also a challenge.
- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews replied that the salary for child care workers has not increased with the rising cost of living, competing with salaries and increasing the workforce numbers are challenges.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell stated challenges include hiring qualified staff with experience, length of background check process, low wages and losing staff to other higher paying jobs.
- Cocopah Tribe Administrator Elizabeth Benitez added that lack of applicants is a challenge for their community.

Successes in Hiring and Retaining Child Care Workers

- Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Robert Miguel responded that offering competitive wages has been key to retaining staff and hiring community members has been helpful. Through funding from the tribe and gaming, they were able to provide funding for their early childhood and education programs.
- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews answered that supporting their child care staff with furthering their education has been instrumental in staff retention. The Tohono O’odham Community College is located near the child care center and tuition is waived for child care staff.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell shared that expanding their internship and job placement programs and encouraging staff to connect outside of work has helped with staff retention.
- Navajo Nation Head Start Mental Health & Disabilities Specialist Lena Yellowhair stated that their partnership with Navajo Technical University (NTU) has helped immensely with staff retention. NTU provides tuition payment and support for Navajo Head Start staff to continue their education in early childhood. In addition, Navajo Head Start encourages their staff to explore other positions within their organization and conducts staff recognition awards.
- Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina mentioned that they have a successful collaboration with their Human Resource Department and Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) program to find and hire qualified applicants. In addition, they work with their Detective Unit within the Police Department to conduct their background checks for newly hired staff and that process takes about three weeks.
- Fort Mojave Indian Tribe Director/CCDF Administrator Betsy Lewis added that working with the First Things First La Paz/Mohave Regional Council and Quality First have been helpful in providing resources and scholarships for teachers.
- White Mountain Apache Tribe Councilman Ivan Walker stated college courses are provided for high school students so they can receive their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential.

Ideas to Support Child Care Programs

- Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina said she would like to see an emergence of professional development centers for tribal communities.
- Navajo Nation Department of Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin recommended partnering with tribal colleges and universities to recruit tribal members to work within the child care system.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell suggested a lower teacher-to-student ratio and staff aides to offer support for teachers.
- Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Robert Miguel advocated for increasing or expanding resources and programs that provide education and learning at home for children.

- Pascua Yaqui Tribe Vice Chairman Robert Valencia shared that it is important to provide education, resources, and support for those who are working in child care centers and for young parents. He also proposed that tribes subsidize child care centers.
- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community CCDF Program Manager Pamela Prasher suggested opportunities for staff to receive respite care to retain workers.

Advantages and Challenges of Providing Tribal CCDF Programs

- Fort Mojave Indian Tribe Director/CCDF Administrator Betsy Lewis noted that the tribal CCDF funds their tribally owned child care center that can serve up to 65 children.
- Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina shared that it funds their tribally operated child care center and supports their local preschool centers to provide direct services to tribal members. They're able to personalize their programs to meet the needs of their members. She also highlighted that with the new final rule of the CCDF program, she hopes there will be lower child care costs, increased payments, feasible enrollment process, and expanded options.
- Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews emphasized the opportunity for tribal members to earn a living by owning home-grown businesses (home-based child care).
- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community CCDF Program Manager Pamela Prasher acknowledged the collaboration between the CCDF program, Early Head Start and Head Start programs that offer high quality child care in the community. The CCDF program also offers a certificate program which allows for families to choose child care off the reservation. They're looking forward to furthering their collaboration with CCDF for in-home child care providers in the community.
- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin shared that living in rural areas, inclement weather and unpaved roads are challenges that parents and grandparents experience trying to access resources and services for their children.
- White Mountain Apache Tribe Councilman Ivan Walker added that their tribe gets funding for their child care program. Lack of infrastructure and buildings for early head start programs are challenges experienced.

Barriers and Challenges of Applying for State CCDF

- Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews commented that the state does provide training, food programs and Title 20 to the Nation. However, differences between state, federal and tribal fiscal years makes it difficult for the Nation to pass budgets and provide services.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell shared that they are concerned with additional reporting requirements and registering their tribal child care facility to be state licensed.
- Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community CCDF Program Manager Pamela Prasher and Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina stated that when the state CCDF program becomes noncompliant their tribal programs become noncompliant.
- Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina also shared that applying for DES child care subsidy is a difficult process for parents. Additionally, it's challenging for parents to find state certified child care home providers that are offered by tribal members who can provide cultural teachings to their children.

Ways to Inform Businesses and Economic Development Organizations of the Impact of Child Care

- Tohono O'odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews shared the ways they communicate with their community, including their communication network, public service announcements, direct emails to the eleven districts, and social media outlets.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell proposed to bring awareness of the current rates of child care and provide a list of child care providers within close proximity of their workplace.
- San Carlos Apache Tribe Department of Health and Human Services Ron Ritter explained the need for early education and child care using the number of children in the community, number of Head Start openings, percent of children who go to secondary school, number of healthcare providers, and current minimum wage in the community.
- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin suggested developing partnerships with tribally-controlled, Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and public schools.

Ways for FTF to Partner with Businesses to Build Support for the Early Childhood System or FTF

- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews supports the idea of FTF regional council members partnering with local businesses to address the issue.
- Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Robert Miguel encourages outside entities to learn about the community and their priorities. This creates and builds strong relationships with the community. He also added that the Arizona Indian Gaming Association can work with FTF to provide a forum for a discussion with gaming enterprises and management in the near future.
- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin reiterates the importance of partnering with public schools to get local communities involved. He also requested that FTF continue this conversation during the Navajo Nation Early Childhood Summit so tribal departments and divisions can provide input.
- Pascua Yaqui Tribe Vice Chairman Robert Valencia suggested utilizing data to talk about the need and develop a video highlighting successful developments.
- Hualapai Tribe Vice Chairman Scott Crozier shared how it may be difficult to partner with tribal communities, specifically his community as it is miles away from the next town. He talked about the effort and desire to go out to meet communities and the importance of focusing on teaching traditional languages to young children.

Long-term Solutions Needed as Tobacco Funding for Early Childhood Programs Continues to Decline

FTF is funded through a tax on tobacco products and due to changes in smoking behavior as well as the emergence of tobacco replacement products (such as vaping), the resources available to do this work have significantly decreased. For almost a decade, the FTF Board has been able to backfill the revenue shortfalls and keep spending stable by utilizing its sustainable funds. Due to the expected ongoing decrease in tobacco revenue, the Board reduced program spending by \$10 million per year for the State Fiscal Year 2024-27 funding cycle. In addition, the Board is engaging with different stakeholders and audiences beyond early childhood to build awareness and seek support to address the decline in revenue which will lead to a decrease in programs and services provided to young children and their families.

As FTF engages in activities to address this need, FTF has also requested input from tribal leaders and representatives on the following:

- Ways FTF can sustainably increase funding into the early childhood system
- Other federal funding sources, specific to early childhood, tribes applied for and other ways (besides letters of support) FTF can support future applications
- Examples of how multiple funding sources have been braided to provide early childhood programs and services
- Businesses or entities FTF should engage with at a local, state and national level - both tribal and nontribal - to build support for the early childhood system or FTF
- Legislation or initiatives in the community, statewide or nationally that have focused on the early childhood system and what can be done to replicate it
- Recommendations for next steps for maintaining or expanding early childhood partnerships or programs in tribal communities

Tribal leaders and representatives recommended ways that FTF can sustainably increase funding into the early childhood system including tribal gaming revenue and taxing vape, marijuana and nicotine products. Other funding sources for early childhood education included the Maternal, Infant, Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV), Head Start, and Family and Child Education (FACE) programs. Coordination between FTF, Head Start, and CCDF programs allows for high-quality programming to be provided. In addition, collaborations between early childhood programs and non-early childhood organizations within the community are also ways existing programs and funding sources can be leveraged to provide early childhood services. Additionally, tribal leaders and representatives suggested partnering with Indian Health Services (IHS), improving coordination of services, learning more about early childhood organizations (state and nationally), developing panel sessions with grant partners, and working with the workforce development programs to expand early childhood partnerships and programs.

Ways FTF can Sustainably Increase Funding into the Early Childhood System

- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin suggested looking into tribal gaming revenue and vaping tax.
- White Mountain Apache Tribe Councilman Ivan Walker suggested looking into taxing medical marijuana.
- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews recommended taxing all nicotine and tobacco products.

Other Funding Sources for Early Childhood Education

- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell mentioned that they utilize the MIECHV program through the Administration for Children and Families.
- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin identified Head Start and [BIE] FACE programs.

Examples of How Multiple Funding Sources can be Braided to Provide Early Childhood Services

- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews shared the success of expanding services using FTF and Head Start funding.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell shared that FTF funded their home visitation program for almost 15 years and tribal CCDF provided financial assistance for child care for many years.
- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin pointed out the importance of identifying and unifying the existing early childhood programs and working to address limitations and barriers in providing services to the community.
- Yavapai-Apache Nation CCDF Program Director Ophelia Tewawina shared that it’s not just about accessing outside funding. Departments within their Nation collaborate. For example, the diabetes and health and wellness programs provide services to children and families at the child care center.
- Navajo Nation Head Start Mental Health & Disabilities Specialist Lena Yellowhair mentioned a FTF funded program conducts screenings for children who are missing their vision and hearing assessment and this coordination of service enables disability referrals to the local school district.

Expanding Early Childhood Partnerships or Programs

- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews mentioned the opportunity to participate as a region within their reservation and currently their community is focused on language revitalization efforts.
- Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Senior Planner Darrick Franklin promoted the idea of partnering with IHS to bring awareness on the need for early childhood education. He added the need for a system where parents can access information to continue needed services for their children when moving to another state.
- Fort Mojave Indian Tribe Director/CCDF Administrator Betsy Lewis suggested looking into the National Indian Child Care Association, state child care associations, what other states are doing (e.g., Tribal Child Care Association of California) and resources available.
- Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Vice President Paul Russell recognized FTF’s recent panel session with Southwest Human Development, this event enabled connections to be made between organizations to further assist families in the community. He supports additional panel sessions with grant partners to share information and resources.
- Tohono O’odham Nation Education Director Patrick Andrews shared his experience serving as the board chair with the workforce development program. The program offers support and has consistent partnerships with Native American Employment and Training Advisory Council. There may be opportunities to partner with the workforce development program due to the shared goals in recruiting people into the workforce.