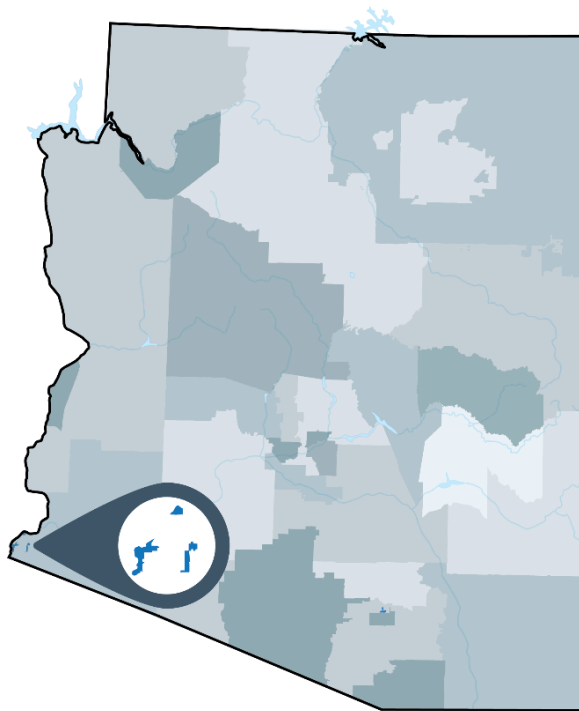




FIRST THINGS FIRST

Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council
Population birth through age 5: 146



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.

Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council

Wilana Ortega, chair, health services representative

Elizabeth Renaud, vice chair, early childhood educator

Esteban Escobar, representative of a philanthropic organization

Diana Navarro, at-large representative

Tabatha Novotny, child care provider

Vertunia Mae Olea, at-large representative

Marisol Penuelas, member of the business community

June Stillings, representative of the faith community

Senda Thundercloud, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

Paula Twist Koolick, at-large representative

Open, public school administrator

Nohemi Ortega, regional director, First Things First

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

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$150,001	\$150,001	\$84,738	\$150,001
Population Based Allocation	\$30,811	\$30,811	\$27,849	\$30,811
Discretionary Allocation	\$119,190	\$119,190	\$56,889	\$119,190
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$180,469	\$207,428	\$198,734	\$129,263
Total Regional Council Funds Available	\$330,470	\$357,429	\$283,472	\$279,264
Strategies	Approved Allotment	Approved Allotment	Proposed Allotment	Projected Allotment
Quality First Academy	\$500	\$466	\$500	\$500
Quality First Assessment		\$4,429		
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$9,350	\$4,921	\$9,350	\$9,350
Transition to Kindergarten	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Child Care Health Consultation	\$3,400	\$3,434	\$3,400	\$3,400
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation		\$6,120	\$6,120	\$6,120
Nutrition and Physical Activity	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$14,500	\$14,500	\$14,500	\$14,500
Home Visitation	\$106,580	\$106,580	\$106,580	\$106,580
Statewide Evaluation	\$6,229	\$6,229	\$6,229	\$6,229
Total	\$210,559	\$216,679	\$216,679	\$216,679
Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:*	\$119,911	\$140,750	\$66,793	\$62,585

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		63.79 %	64.81 %	64.81 %	64.81 %
% to Quality First**	0.00%	6.29 %	4.07 %	6.11 %	6.11 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	64.56%				
% to Quality First**	5.64%				

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

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

Justification for not meeting the 80% allotment to Board Priorities:

During the strategic planning process, the regional council was provided with information, guidance and technical assistance regarding the First Things First Strategic Plan, State Fiscal Years 2024-2027. This included the Board’s six priority areas and Foundational Guidance #1, #2 and #3 related to Quality First and Quality First Scholarships. The regional council understood the importance of aligning with the statewide strategic direction as they assessed data about local needs and identified priorities as well as strategies. Ultimately, the regional council was faced with significant capacity and infrastructure issues including a lack of existing child care programs i.e. a child care desert. As a result, the region did not meet the recommended funding level for the Board-identified priorities and supports funding other local priorities. The regional council will continue to assess and look for future opportunities to continue to align with the Board’s priority areas and support Quality First.

The Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council continues to prioritize strategies that align with the Board priorities and, without taking away any focus from those important priorities, the regional council has also taken into consideration certain needs that were

exasperated as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, particularly in the area of health. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy (NAPA) will be funded to address the high prevalence of childhood obesity in the region, estimated to be at 25% for children ages 2 to 5 years during 2020 (according to the 2024 Regional Needs and Assets Report). NAPA is also the continuation of a health awareness campaign funded by the Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council during the SFY19-23 strategic plan. The campaign was a first step to address childhood obesity in the region. Now the region is ready to engage in more formalized nutrition and physical activity opportunities that will support families in leading healthy lifestyles.

Additionally, the Cocopah Tribe does not have its own school district or any K-12 school within its reservation, which means children entering kindergarten will experience leaving the reservation to enter a new public school system for the very first time. Kindergarteners and their families need support to make this transition successful. The Transition to Kindergarten Strategy will provide children and their families the opportunity to become familiar with the school system and school campus, to learn classroom routines, be provided with opportunities for socialization and learn about family involvement opportunities.

Of the eight strategies the regional council is proposing in the SFY24-27 strategic plan, it is only the two strategies described above and the statewide evaluation strategy which do not align with the Board prioritized areas. However, the data and context provided supports the regional council's recommendations to prioritize the need to implement the two strategies to support the healthy development and transition to off-reservation school systems for young children in the Cocopah Tribe Region.

COCOPAH TRIBE 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 Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council developed the SFY24-27 Strategic Plan through a holistic approach that considered the most current and greatest needs of children birth to age 5 and their families. Major priorities were identified using the Elements of a Healthy Tribal Community framework (developed by tribes in Arizona in partnership with Inter Tribal Council of Arizona and Vitalyst Health Foundation 2020) and gathering data from formal reports, history and the cultural practice of storytelling and conversation. The identified priorities included supporting families and caregivers in parenting practices, healthy child development and transitioning to kindergarten off the reservation.

The strategies selected for funding respond to the multiple high risk factors of families of young children in the region. These risk factors include: 59% of children in the Cocopah Tribe Region are living under the poverty level, far more than the state (23%); 61% of households with children birth to age 5 are single female parent households or grandparents raising grandchildren; and, 25% of children in the region are overweight or obese. Also, the Cocopah Tribe Region is comprised of three noncontiguous regions: the East, North and West Reservations, causing isolation between the three areas. Additionally, the region is facing a post pandemic crisis of high staff turnover, causing gaps and continuous changes in family support services.

Due to the compounding risk factors, every child in the Cocopah Tribe Region is in need of intensive services to support their early childhood development. The strategies presented in this plan are intensive and targeted to serve all children birth to age 5 and their families in the region, focusing on cognitive, physical and social emotional health and well-being. Furthermore, the regional council through a Family Support Systems Change Strategy will address staffing issues in the region with the goal of providing culturally appropriate, continuous and coordinated family support services.

SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE
COCOPAH TRIBE 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)

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.

The Cocopah Head Start is the sole Quality First provider in the region and a Quality Plus-rated program continuing to receive individualized support to maintain quality practices. Quality First incentives have been used for staff as part of the center’s staff retention plan.

Challenges:

Quality First:

Staffing continues to be an issue for Cocopah Head Start. It is difficult to find staff who meet qualifications, and also difficult to retain staff. In addition to using Quality First incentives and as part of the Cocopah Regional Partnership Council “grow your own” effort, representatives from the local community college are providing in-person support to Head Start staff who need to complete their Child Development Associate (CDA).

DESIRED OUTCOME: INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Educating Families and Caregivers

- Home Visitation (prioritized)

Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources

- Family Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized)

Successes:

Home Visitation:

After more than one year of vacancy, the home visitation grant partner filled the home visitor position by a tribal member. This individual is well-known and respected by the community; families have been more receptive to enrolling in home visitation services. Within eight months of hiring, the new home visitor increased the actual service units from zero to eight families out of the 15 contract service units. Additionally, feedback from a recent survey conducted with families in the region highlighted the trust parents and caregivers have in the home visitation program staff and expressed how their participation in the home visiting program has helped them learn and connect

to other services. This success also highlights the importance of the “grow their own” model that the FTF Cocopah Regional Council promotes among FTF funded programs.

Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:

As part of the Family Support Systems Change work, the Cocopah Family Coalition continues to meet regularly to advance the following three priorities:

Priority 1: Development of a referral system – To enhance cross departmental collaboration and connect families to appropriate services, a referral form was developed; and approval from the Cocopah Tribal Council was obtained to pilot the form in 2025. Upon the completion of the one-year pilot, further discussion with both Regional Council and Tribal Council will take place to determine next steps and potential for the use of a more robust referral system.

Priority 2: Improve family engagement in programs and services – in addition to the development of the referral form, a community wide survey was conducted to identify challenges families have around enrolling in services and how these challenges can be addressed by service providers. The results of the survey identified transportation as a main challenge as well as not knowing the available programs, or having timely information about programs and events. These results have been presented to the Cocopah Tribal Council who has agreed to partner with the coalition in addressing these challenges.

Priority 3: Improve awareness and communication of programs and services with families – currently most of the information regarding programs and services available to Cocopah members is disseminated via social media and via a mailed newsletter. There is a high number of grandparents raising grandchildren, who do not use social media, and also some members who have limited access to social media, who need to receive the information in a different format. To address this the Cocopah Tribal Council and the Cocopah Housing Department have partnered with the Family Support Systems Building Coalition to install flyer tubes in all Cocopah residential homes to ensure service providers can deliver information to all Cocopah members.

Additionally, the regional council aims to “grow their own” early childhood and family support professionals through the efforts of this coalition.

Challenges:

Home Visitation:

The home visitation grantee was not able to meet the target service units due to staff transition. However, as noted above, after hiring new staff, they were able to recruit and enroll more families and move in the right direction.

Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:

The efforts of the Family Support System Building Strategy/Cocopah Family Coalition are closely connected to partnering with the Cocopah Tribal Council. As the members of the coalition work to advance the priorities identified; guidance and approvals must be obtained from the Tribal Council. This process takes time and the work of the systems building coalition in the region respectfully advances at the pace and guidance from the tribal council.

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

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Professional Development for ECE Professionals

- o Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (prioritized)

- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

Successes:

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Strategy for home visitors was added to the funding plan beginning in SFY25 to support home visitors in the region to strengthen their knowledge and practices to build resilience and learn how to support the wellness of the children and families they serve. The FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council also identified this strategy as an important additional layer of support and aid in the retention of program staff.

Challenges:

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:

A challenge of the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Strategy is the lack of mental health professionals in the region. As a result, consultation is being provided by a provider from outside of the region. To address this challenge, and ensure the provider understands the community and can provide culturally appropriate support, an initial orientation was provided consisting of a tour of the reservation, a visit to the Cocopah Museum highlighting the Cocopah Tribe’s history, government and way of life and an overview of the strengths and needs of the families enrolled in the Home Visiting Program.

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

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Nutrition and Physical Activity

- Nutrition and Physical Activity (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Nutrition and Physical Activity:

The Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy was implemented in the Cocopah Tribe using the Eat Healthy Be Active curriculum. Workshops were delivered during monthly parent night meetings in partnership with the Cocopah Head Start. Families reported they were able to learn new healthy recipes and nutritious food they were not exposed to before to support the healthy development of their children and family.

Challenges:

Nutrition and Physical Activity:

Due to staff changes, workshops were paused for a period of time which created a pause in services, resulting in not all families completing the workshop series. For SFY25, the Cocopah Tribe is exploring a partnership with a local rural health clinic to have registered dieticians deliver the workshops in the region.

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Evaluation

- Statewide Evaluation (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Transition to Kindergarten

The Transition to Kindergarten Strategy is implemented by Arizona State University PBS in collaboration with the Somerton School District and Cocopah Head Start. Since Cocopah children must leave the reservation to attend school for the first time when entering kindergarten, the program has been successful in providing future kindergarteners and their families the opportunity to become familiar with the K-12 school system and school campus, as well as learn classroom routines, socialize with other families and learn about opportunities for family involvement in elementary school. A total of 50% of the total children attending Kindergarten in the region were served. Additionally, the grantee introduced the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) parent curriculum to replace the Project LAUNCH wellness curriculum that was previously being used in response to Cocopah Regional Council intent to address wellness topics with parents. Triple P is an evidence-based program that provides parents with simple and practical strategies to help them build strong, healthy relationships, confidently manage their children’s behavior and prevent problems from developing.

Statewide Evaluation:

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

Challenges:

Transition to Kindergarten:

Due to transportation barriers and despite various efforts made by the grantee, transportation continues to be a challenge for families to attend the program in a school outside the reservation. The grantee will continue to support families to find transportation and/or look to partner with a local agency that can provide this service. It is important to note transportation is a region wide challenge, and it is being addressed as a systems change effort in collaboration with Cocopah Tribal Council.