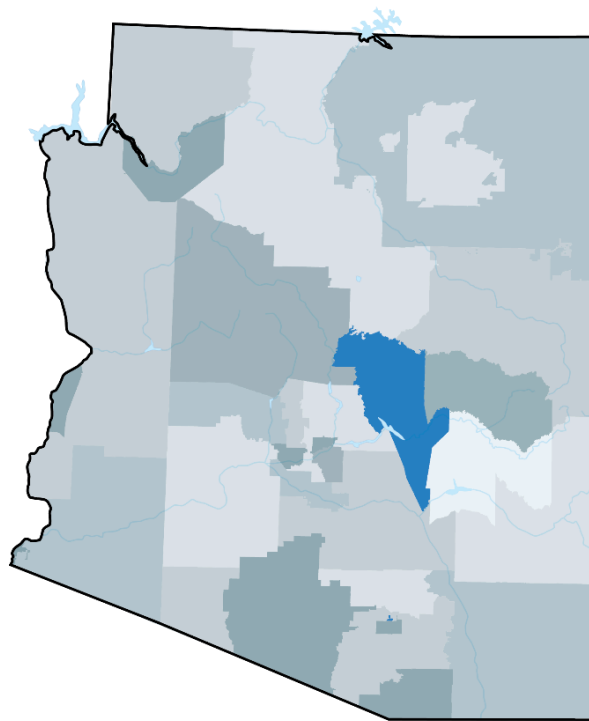


# FIRST THINGS FIRST

**Gila Regional Partnership Council**  
Population birth through age 5: 2,404



## 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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### **Gila Regional Partnership Council**

**Kristin Wade**, chair, health services provider

**Kayla Van Cleve**, vice chair, member of the business community

**Matthew Crespin**, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

**Richard Ramos**, public school administrator

**Pam Trobaugh**, early childhood educator

**Charles Proudfoot**, representative of a philanthropic organization

**Adrea Ricke**, at-large representative

**Fernando Shipley**, representative of the faith community

**Tashina Smith**, tribal public official/employee

**Melissa Ruff**, child care provider

**Atina “Tina” Mecom**, at-large representative

**Carolyn Haro**, regional director, First Things First

**Victoria Marin**, administrative specialist, First Things First

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

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
<b>FY Allocation</b>	<b>\$682,076</b>	<b>\$682,076</b>	<b>\$696,786</b>	<b>\$733,808</b>
Population Based Allocation	\$457,456	\$457,456	\$413,476	\$457,456
Discretionary Allocation	\$224,620	\$224,620	\$283,310	\$276,352
<b>Carry Forward From Previous Year</b>	<b>\$81,666</b>	<b>\$70,682</b>	<b>\$27,005</b>	<b>(\$1,964)</b>
<b>Total Regional Council Funds Available</b>	<b>\$763,742</b>	<b>\$752,758</b>	<b>\$723,791</b>	<b>\$731,844</b>
Strategies	Approved Allotted	Approved Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Projected Allotted
Quality First Academy	\$3,500	\$3,500	\$3,500	\$3,500
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$88,010	\$88,010	\$88,010	\$88,010
Quality First Scholarships	\$381,375	\$381,375	\$381,375	\$381,375
Child Care Health Consultation	\$23,800	\$23,800	\$23,800	\$23,800
Developmental and Sensory Screening	\$44,223	\$44,223	\$44,223	\$44,223
Book Distribution	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Parenting Education	\$130,000	\$130,000	\$130,000	\$130,000
Statewide Evaluation	\$30,472	\$30,472	\$30,472	\$30,472
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
Media	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$780,380</b>	<b>\$780,380</b>	<b>\$780,380</b>	<b>\$780,380</b>
<b>Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:*</b>	<b>(\$16,638)</b>	<b>(\$27,622)</b>	<b>(\$56,589)</b>	<b>(\$48,536)</b>

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		82.73 %	82.73 %	82.73 %	82.73 %
% to Quality First**	11.41%	14.77 %	14.77 %	14.77 %	14.77 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	82.73%				
% to Quality First**	14.77%				

\*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.

## GILA 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 Gila Regional Council has historically and currently promoted the concept that services be available to all children birth to age 5 and their families. The regional council has emphatically expressed that "the rancher living far outside of town" should have the same access to services that "folks that live in town" do. This desire was reflected in regional council conversation and the intention of each strategy specifying availability in both rural and frontier areas. It was discovered that having both in-person and virtual options for services works well within the region, as it affords service availability for families who experience transportation challenges and scheduling conflicts, thereby enabling accessibility that would not otherwise be available to them. Therefore, the regional council's intent is to provide services in as many formats as possible, including through the mail system for book distribution.

The regional council is aware of the needs of the many low-income families in the region. They have invested in Quality First scholarships to enable lower income families' accessibility to quality child care. They are also very aware that the region is designated as a child care desert and plan continued conversations regarding quality child care availability throughout the region. The regional council has also opted to target part of the Media Strategy toward targeted oral health education, inclusive of promoting the dental benefit that is available for children who are currently enrolled in Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).

This region is home to many different cultures including various ethnicities and rural/frontier locations. Each community within the region has a different culture and the regional council continues to adapt outreach to help accommodate the differences and be inclusive of all people. The Tonto Apache Tribe is a part of our community within the Gila Region. The regional council makes a concerted effort to consult with the tribe in ongoing efforts to promote health, wellness, access to quality child care, learning and screening services within the area. The regional council strives to work with each community in addressing unique needs that may be identified. It is the expectation of the FTF Gila Regional Council that all residents be served without discrimination.

**SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE**

**GILA 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. The revisions are anticipated to create efficiencies that allow more regulated early care and education programs to participate and continue the quality improvement trajectory that has shown consistent increases in quality rating over time. There are currently eight full-participation Quality First sites in the Gila Region (seven center-based and one home-based). Additionally, there are two homes that have been identified for rating only.

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 pandemic relief funds and what SFY25 would look like for their participation, whether continuing or not.

**Quality First Scholarships:**

First Things First increased the Quality First Scholarship reimbursement rate to the cost of quality, 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. Reimbursing Quality First Scholarships at the 2021 cost of quality has resulted in consistent scholarships for the same amount of funding in SFY26.

Coordinated planning with 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.

***Challenges:***

**Quality First:**

Federal pandemic relief funding to support a statewide expansion of Quality First ended before the start of SFY25. In the Gila region, two programs were impacted by the loss of the federal funds. One program was moved in to an open regionally funded Quality First slot and one program transitioned to the Quality First waitlist. The program that was moved to the waitlist will be reassessed in order 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 for the same amount of funding from the previous year. 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.

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

### Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

#### Educating Families and Caregivers

- Parenting Education (prioritized)

#### Language and Literacy

- Book Distribution (non-prioritized)

#### **Successes:**

##### **Parenting Education:**

For the Parenting Education Strategy, Arizona Youth Partnership provides the programming and uses Active Parenting – First Five Years as their curriculum. Parenting education is embedded in the Gila Region and is part of a continuum of parenting education opportunities that are available to our communities encompassing children from the age of prenatal to age 18. All caregivers of these children are eligible for parenting education through this continuum of programs. First Things First provides the program for caregivers of children birth to age 5, then provides a warm transition into the program that provides education for caregivers of elementary aged children. The regional council has prioritized providing service to all Gila communities from Strawberry, Pine, Star Valley, Payson, Rye, Tonto Basin, Young, Roosevelt, Globe, Miami, Dripping Springs, Hayden and Winkelman. The parenting education program provides service to all remote areas and also makes virtual classes available for those who have conflict with transportation or work schedules. The grant partner also provides childbirth education (through separate funding) which is a feeder program to the Parenting Education Strategy. Referrals are also received through the court system for families involved with the Department of Child Safety.

##### **Book Distribution:**

The Book Distribution Strategy is provided by the Gila County Library District which partners with the Dolly Parton Imagination Library and all local libraries in the region to provide the programming for this strategy. Their intent is to both educate families on early learning and to build home libraries in our communities. Children look forward to receiving books in the mail each month. It is a highly popular program within the region with books distributed each month directly to families. Their partnerships with many community organizations, including both hospitals and service organizations enable them to enroll many Gila children. Our regional council continues to partner with Read On Arizona for book distribution. Read On Arizona used federal COVID-19 relief dollars to pay for 12,546 books being distributed to just over 1,300 children enrolled in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library during SFY24. The partnership will be ending soon and the region will begin paying for the books once again. During SFY24, the books were funded through Read On and First Things First funded the administration, outreach and coordination of the program, therefore braiding funding and minimizing use of First Things First funds.

#### **Challenges:**

##### **Parenting Education:**

The Parenting Education Strategy grant partner reports transportation and work schedules are an issue for participation. The provider has tried to resolve this issue by offering some virtual opportunities. This option enables additional families to receive services that otherwise would not be able to participate and allows the provider to meet their contracted service units.

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

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Professional Development for ECE Professionals**

- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

**Successes:**

**Child Care Health Consultation:**

The University of Arizona Cooperative Extension – Gila, provides child care health consultation services to all seven regionally funded Quality First participants and will do so for any additional participant identified for the eighth slot.

**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:**

Information and promotional items for events and books are distributed in the community by First Things First, regional council members, grant partners and community partners. Information has been shared at the Payson Book Fair, National Night Out (Rock the Block) and at the Read On Express, which for our region are large events. In SFY24, the Payson Book Festival had 550 participants, of which 40 kids and 150 adults enjoyed the kids zone, which included book readings. Over 400 youth and 700 adults attended the Rock the Block event and the Read On Express in Globe. The Read On Express is literacy-based and includes story characters, story time with Mrs. Claus, a small train ride, a visit with Santa where children receive a book as a gift. It is held at the historic train station in Globe. Numerous local organizations participate in these popular events.

**Media:**

In SFY24, targeted media efforts in the Gila 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, ads placed on grocery carts in three local stores (Globe, Miami, Payson) and a digital billboard at a key location in Globe. This strategy provides brand awareness and drives consumers to our website.

Additionally, in collaboration with the Maricopa and Phoenix regions, a supplemental campaign featuring oral health information will also run targeted to families with young children, especially those enrolled in the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). The campaign will help to connect families to their AHCCCS health plan providers who serve Maricopa and Gila regions to learn more about children’s oral health benefits.

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

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Identifying and Addressing Developmental Concerns**

- Developmental and Sensory Screening (non-prioritized)

**Successes:**

**Developmental and Sensory Screening:**

University of Arizona Cooperative Extension – Gila staff are certified to conduct all screenings and provide service throughout the region. Based upon local needs, the Gila Region is working with small regional school districts who do not have current capacity to conduct sensory screenings. The grant partner is working with these school districts to increase their own capacity to eventually provide this service internally within the school district with collaboration through the Arizona Department of Education. In the last year, services were provided to more than their anticipated goal and it is anticipated that this will occur in SFY26.

**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.