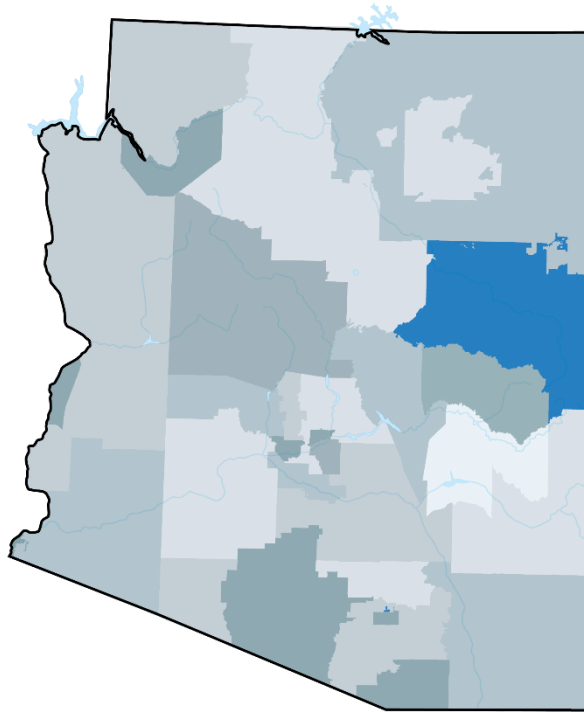


FIRST THINGS FIRST

Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council
Population birth through age 5: 5,345



State Fiscal Year 2026 Funding Plan

SFY 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan Update

Presented to the First Things First Board
January 21, 2025

FIRST THINGS FIRST

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.

Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council

Becky Benda-Dodd, chair, early childhood educator

Mary "Katherine" Larson, vice chair, representative of a philanthropic organization

Kimberly Avery, at-large representative

Elizabeth Bierer, health services provider

Claude Endfield, at-large representative

Karli Hueston, child care provider

Virginia Korte, at-large representative

Molly McGavock, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

Jeffrey Oakes, member of the business community

Open, representative of the faith community

Open, public school administrator

Michael Caruth, regional director, First Things First

Kymani Morris, administrative specialist, First Things First

Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – SFY27

Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council

| Allocations and Funding Sources | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| FY Allocation | \$1,510,461 | \$1,510,461 | \$1,231,670 | \$1,625,482 |
| Population Based Allocation | \$1,012,965 | \$1,012,965 | \$915,579 | \$1,012,965 |
| Discretionary Allocation | \$497,496 | \$497,496 | \$316,091 | \$612,517 |
| Carry Forward From Previous Year | \$239,791 | \$570,150 | \$460,279 | \$53,662 |
| Total Regional Council Funds Available | \$1,750,252 | \$2,080,611 | \$1,691,949 | \$1,679,144 |
| Strategies | Approved Allotted | Approved Allotted | Proposed Allotted | Projected Allotted |
| Early Learning Systems Change | \$521,403 | \$521,403 | \$521,403 | \$521,403 |
| Quality First Academy | \$2,000 | \$1,841 | \$2,000 | \$2,000 |
| Quality First Assessment | | \$6,015 | | |
| Quality First Coaching & Incentives | \$38,660 | \$30,389 | \$38,660 | \$38,660 |
| Quality First Scholarships | \$211,820 | \$211,820 | \$211,820 | \$211,820 |
| First Things First College Scholarships | \$43,200 | \$43,200 | \$43,200 | \$43,200 |
| Child Care Health Consultation | \$13,600 | \$16,015 | \$13,600 | \$13,600 |
| Children's Health Systems Change | \$45,200 | \$45,200 | \$45,200 | \$45,200 |
| Oral Health | \$170,000 | \$170,000 | \$170,000 | \$170,000 |
| Well Child and Family Care | \$650,000 | \$650,000 | \$650,000 | \$650,000 |
| Statewide Evaluation | \$67,499 | \$67,499 | \$67,499 | \$67,499 |
| Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness | \$12,000 | \$12,000 | \$12,000 | \$12,000 |
| Media | \$20,000 | \$20,000 | \$20,000 | \$20,000 |
| Total | \$1,795,382 | \$1,795,382 | \$1,795,382 | \$1,795,382 |
| Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:* | (\$45,130) | \$285,229 | (\$103,433) | (\$116,238) |

| Fiscal Year | 2020 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 |
|-----------------------|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| % to Board Priorities | | 48.05 % | 48.05 % | 48.05 % | 48.05 % |
| % to Quality First** | 3.35% | 3.02 % | 3.02 % | 3.02 % | 3.02 % |
| Fiscal Year | 4 Year Average | | | | |
| % to Board Priorities | 48.05% | | | | |
| % to Quality First** | 3.02% | | | | |

*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: The First Things First Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council recognizes the importance of aligning with the statewide strategic direction. However, the regional council continues to assess local needs and assets and significant capacity and infrastructure issues remain, including a region-wide child care desert with a critical lack of existing child care programs. The region continues its SFY26 funding plan with the same funding levels as the FTF Board-approved SFY25 plan and will continue to assess and look for future opportunities to continue to align more closely with the FTF Board's priority areas, particularly concerning Quality First and continues working to implement the Early Learning Systems Change strategy.

Through its Early Learning Systems Change Strategy, the council aims to further this support by targeting communities where families have limited or no access to early learning opportunities. Spanning a large geographic area, the Navajo/Apache Region includes numerous small, dispersed communities, such as Heber, Linden, Vernon, St. Johns, Alpine, Sanders, and Concho. Many families in these areas face barriers like distrust of government-funded programs and stigmas associated with participating in such initiatives. The total allotment for the Well Child and Family and Oral Health strategies accounts for 46% of the regional allocation and thus the 80% allotment threshold was not met.

The Navajo/Apache Regional Council is very cognizant of the disparities in early learning that exist in the region and recognizes that the region is a child care desert. The regional council has allotted over \$500,000 to the Early Learning Systems Change strategy with the intent to determine the best early learning support that can be offered to the youngest in the region with the First Things First strategies currently available. The regional

council intends to utilize the Early Learning Systems Change Strategy to understand how to best address and support early learning in the Navajo/Apache Region.

The greatest access that the regional council has to parents and caregivers of children birth to age 5 in the Navajo/Apache region is through health strategies, demonstrated by a consistent trend in data indicating a majority of families in the region take their young children for well child visits regularly. The Well Child and Family Care Strategy currently has over 5,000 children birth to age 5 enrolled, from two grant partners (Summit Healthcare and North Country Healthcare). Access to these families is building trust of First Things First and will build demand for additional family support programs such as Home Visitation and Parenting Education.

Navajo and Apache Counties have the highest rate of untreated tooth decay amongst young children in the state. Untreated tooth decay is a preventable issue with early screenings, fluoride varnish applications, parental education and regular dental visits at a dental home. Knowing this, the Navajo/Apache Regional Council has prioritized oral health as a regional priority and has chosen to allot \$170,000 to the Oral Health Strategy and \$40,000 to the Children's Health Systems Change Strategy. This approach, funding both Oral Health and Systems Change, will build upon the system level work that the regional council has funded over the past four years. Additionally, the systems change work will result in additional dentists in the region accepting AHCCCS and willing to see children under the age of five, making the necessity for the region to fund the Oral Health Strategy obsolete in the future.

NAVAJO/APACHE 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 Navajo/Apache Regional Council developed their SFY24-27 Strategic Plan, which promotes equity and supports under-resourced and underserved children and their families by identifying and prioritizing the most significant needs in the region.

The FTF Navajo/Apache Regional Council will advance diversity, equity and inclusion for all, especially for those who have been historically marginalized or underserved, by cultivating a culture where everyone can thrive. The strategic plan promotes equity, supports low-income working families through child-care financial assistance, promotes children's learning by improving the quality of early care and education and provides professional development opportunities for the early childhood workforce. The regional council's Early Learning Systems Change Strategy will expand that support by targeting communities where families have limited, or no, access to early learning opportunities. The Navajo/Apache Region is a large geographic area that includes many small, spread out communities such as Heber, Linden, Vernon, St. John's, Alpine, Sanders and Concho. Many of the communities in the region have hard-to-reach families who have a lack of trust of government-funded programs and stigmas in participating in programs of any kind. The intent of the regional council is to reach these families and determine, through an opportunity assessment, how best to support their early learning needs.

The regional council tends to prioritize communities in Apache County, which has the highest poverty level of any county in the state. The regional council knows that this is where most of our support is needed.

Additionally, the FTF Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council will promote health equity and support across the region by promoting positive oral, physical, mental and developmental health to uninsured and underinsured populations. Through the region's Oral Health and Well Child Family Care strategies, the regional council is ensuring that all families, regardless of income or geographic location, have access to preventative oral health screenings, timely developmental and sensory screenings, immunization, well-child visits, support in navigating the complex health system, access to parenting information and resources and access to developmentally-appropriate books.

The regional council members are committed to advancing equity for all children and families, especially those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality in the region by intentionally focusing on communities that are impacted by homelessness, housing instability, domestic and intimate partner violence, mental health and adolescent pregnancy to promote self-sufficiency and well-being. This will be achieved through the regional council's awareness strategies that will focus not only on promoting the importance of the early years, but also on building trust in First Things First.

SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE
NAVAJO/APACHE 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 Department of Economic Security 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.

The percentage of programs achieving/maintaining quality levels in the region has remained consistent at 100%, which shows the success of implementation among both the grant partner and participating early care and education providers. Of the ten QF participants, 6 are Head Start programs.

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 childcare providers and continues the reimbursement rate that providers were receiving through federal pandemic relief funding.

Coordinated planning with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) allowed for 125 children statewide to be transitioned from Quality First Scholarships to Department of Economic Security 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 Navajo/Apache Region, nine programs were funded through the federal pandemic relief funds, which all transitioned to the Quality First waitlist starting July 1, 2024. All programs moved to the waitlist that have a rating expiring 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

(approximately half the number) 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.

Early Learning Systems Change:

In SFY25, the regional council was unable to award all the funds allotted to the Early Learning Systems Change Strategy.

Given the significant challenges in collecting feedback from parents and caregivers about their childcare needs and preferences in the region, the FTF Navajo/Apache Regional Partnership Council allocated \$100,000 from the Early Learning Systems Change strategy to partner with The Morrison Institute for Public Policy. This collaboration aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how parents access childcare and the support systems they rely on when childcare is unavailable. A key finding from the study revealed that even if all licensed and certified center-based childcare providers (whether participating in Quality First or not) operated at full capacity, it would still fall far short of meeting the needs of families with both parents in the labor force or single-parent families working outside the home— offering only 978 spaces compared to the estimated demand of 2,737, according to data from the FTF Data Center. Moreover, this gap does not account for families where one parent remains out of the labor force solely due to the lack of available child care. In short, there is a substantial disparity between the availability of licensed or certified child care and the demand for such care in the Navajo/Apache Region. The insights from this study will be instrumental in guiding the regional council’s efforts to bridge these gaps and enhance access to quality early childhood care in the region.

During the SFY25 year, the regional council issued a Request for Grant Applications (RFGA) for Early Learning Systems Change: Start-Up and Expansion, allocating \$285,000 in funding. The aim of this initiative was to expand access to quality child care for children birth to age 5 by increasing the number of early care opportunities available to families within the region. However, despite the pressing need for child care slots in the area, the council received three applications, none of which were awarded funding. This outcome highlights the challenges in addressing the region's child care shortage. As a result, the regional council remains committed to continuing its efforts to improve and increase early care opportunities for families.

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

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Professional Development for ECE Professionals

- First Things First College Scholarships (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:

Media:

In SFY24, targeted media efforts in the Navajo/Apache 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, 192 radio spots on a local station and ads placed on grocery carts in four local stores (Holbrook, Lakeside, Show Low, Springerville)

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

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Oral Health

- Oral Health (non-prioritized)

Health Resource Coordination

- Well Child and Family Care (non-prioritized)
- Children’s Health Systems Change (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Well Child and Family Care:

The Well Child and Family Care grant partners have shown a strong commitment to supporting parents, as demonstrated by their administration of postpartum depression screenings, which exceeds the national average. This achievement highlights their focus on early identification and support for maternal mental health, accomplished despite challenges such as staffing shortages within the Healthy Steps program. Additionally, model enhancements, such as home visiting support provided by Healthy Steps specialists for families with higher needs, have further strengthened the program's impact. These efforts contribute to the development of a sustainable system of care that families in the region can depend on.

Challenges:

Well Child and Family Care:

Similar to the previous fiscal year, challenges affecting postpartum depression screening include a shortage of qualified providers in the region, turnover among medical staff at hospitals and clinics and frequent cancellations of well-child visits by parents and caregivers, where screenings are often conducted. Despite these obstacles, grant partners have made significant efforts to prioritize postpartum depression screening and have consistently exceeded the service units required in their contracts.

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Evaluation

- Statewide Evaluation (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Statewide Evaluation:

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