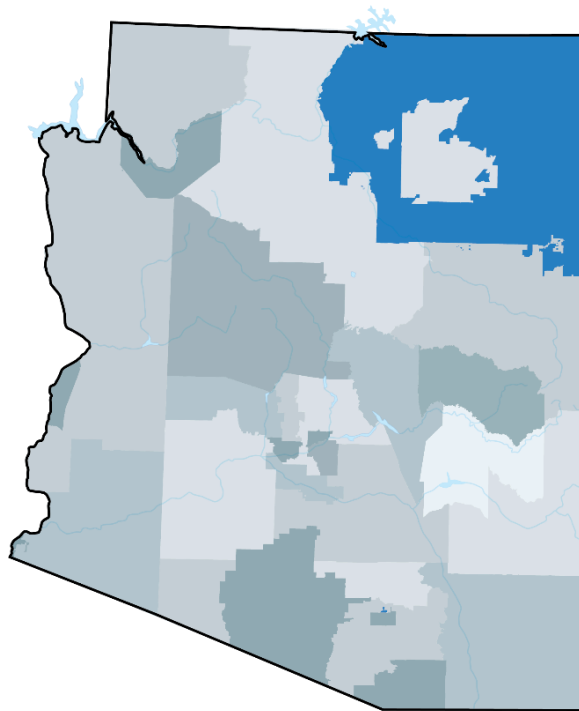




FIRST THINGS FIRST

Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council

Population birth through age 5: 8,377



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 Nation Regional Partnership Council

Patricia Gonnie, chair, child care provider

Candi Running Bear, vice chair, representative of the faith community

Victoria Begay, member of the business community

Rhonda Etsitty, at-large representative

Shannon Goodsell, public school administrator

Phefelia Nez, parent of a child age 5 years or

younger **Paula Seanez**, early childhood educator

Valerie Tsosie, representative of a philanthropic organization

Dawn Yazzie, health services provider

open, at-large representative

open, tribal public official/employee

Memarie Tsosie, regional director, First Things First

Jacquelynn Yazzie, administrative specialist, First Things First

Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – SFY27
Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$3,168,372	\$3,168,372	\$2,706,487	\$3,228,633
Population Based Allocation	\$2,052,740	\$2,052,740	\$1,855,389	\$2,052,740
Discretionary Allocation	\$1,115,632	\$1,115,632	\$851,098	\$1,175,893
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$6,123,692	\$6,142,593	\$5,710,025	\$4,815,570
Total Regional Council Funds Available	\$9,292,064	\$9,310,965	\$8,416,512	\$8,044,203
Strategies	Approved Allotted	Approved Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Projected Allotted
Early Learning Systems Change	\$258,750	\$279,750	\$279,750	\$279,750
Quality First Academy	\$13,500	\$13,127	\$13,127	\$13,127
Quality First Assessment		\$105,370		
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$471,750	\$411,906	\$517,276	\$517,276
Quality First Scholarships	\$1,920,152	\$1,767,000	\$1,767,000	\$1,767,000
First Things First College Scholarships	\$21,600	\$21,600	\$21,600	\$21,600
Child Care Health Consultation	\$111,500	\$134,597	\$134,597	\$134,597
Children's Health Systems Change	\$89,605	\$90,000	\$17,693	\$17,693
Developmental and Sensory Screening	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000	\$230,000
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$327,420	\$327,420	\$327,420	\$327,420
Family Support for Children with Developmental Concerns	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000
Nutrition and Physical Activity	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$110,000	\$110,000
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$65,395	\$80,000	\$145,000	\$145,000
Family Support Coordination	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000
Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000	\$190,000
Home Visitation	\$343,750	\$343,750	\$343,750	\$343,750
Language, Literacy and Culture in Tribal Communities	\$141,691	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$198,870
Needs and Assets			\$30,000	
Statewide Evaluation	\$134,071	\$134,071	\$134,071	\$134,071
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$28,653
Media	\$45,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Total	\$5,249,184	\$5,243,591	\$5,266,284	\$5,238,807
Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:	\$4,042,880	\$4,067,374	\$3,150,228	\$2,805,396

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		82.59 %	82.56 %	83.44 %	83.93 %
% to Quality First*	8.74%	11.36 %	12.68 %	12.62 %	12.69 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	83.13%				
% to Quality First*	12.34%				

* 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.

NAVAJO NATION 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 Nation Regional Partnership Council's priorities lie in areas where early childhood opportunities can be more accessible to children, parents and educators. This is a result of the regional council using a strengths-based and holistic approach based on the Diné Way of Life that focuses on the Four Directions of Wellness; social-emotional, intellectual, physical, community and relational wellness. This process also ensured strategies address the cognitive, physical, mental, emotional and cultural needs of children and families.

The regional council used formal and informal data and feedback processes to help inform the strategic plan. This included hosting the annual Diné Early Childhood Summit and using feedback from the Parent Panel to inform methods to increase access to services for families; and feedback from the Early Childhood Educators Panel to inform better professional development opportunities. The regional council reviewed the Navajo Nation Maternal and Children's Health Report, previous Regional Needs & Assets Reports, current strategy data reports and brought their shared expertise and knowledge to further inform the strategic plan. Additionally, the "Start with Equity: 14 Priorities to Dismantle Systemic Racism in Early Care & Education" report by the Children's Equity Project and co-authored by Regional Council Member Dawn Yazzie was used as a framework to further enhance and assess strategies for underserved and under resourced communities.

The entire strategic planning process resulted in funding new strategies that will equitably:

- Help families with complex needs by assisting them in understanding, navigating to and accessing services that promote family well-being. This individualized support will help families in their rural communities, as opposed to requiring them to travel to population hubs in the region where this type of support is currently concentrated.
- Increase access points of service by coordinating and collaborating with school districts and health care facilities in the region.
- Build on the region's strength of Indigenous language and culture to expand capacity for language preservation and traditional cultural practices in families' homes and early childhood settings.
- Increase access to more family care and home-based child care options, based on the Indigenous concept of kinship.
- Increase access to culturally responsive, high-quality professional development that is specialized based on the feedback of early childhood professionals and stakeholders in the region.
- Increase the number of qualified, culturally-competent professionals from the region who can provide specialty services in early intervention, special education, mental health and oral health.

SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE
NAVAJO NATION 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.

At the end of SFY24, 92% of participating programs were achieving or maintaining quality levels.

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

Early Learning Systems Change:

The program coordination specialist (PCS) continues to successfully implement the Professional Development, Navigation and Support for the Early Childhood Workforce aspect of the strategy. The PCS focused on collecting feedback from 88 early childhood professionals in the region regarding the requested professional development. Through this process, early childhood professionals identified 35 different topic areas. The PCS then prioritized the most requested topic areas (brain development, developmental milestones, classroom routines, addressing challenging behaviors) and created a four-part professional development training series. This strategy makes professional development more accessible by addressing the unique challenges faced by early childhood professionals in rural areas, where training opportunities are often scarce or difficult to reach. By localizing the professional development efforts, the PCS works to bring opportunities directly to the community, reducing the need for long travel or time away from work. By offering the training series in a format that is more convenient and tailored to the needs of early childhood professionals in rural areas, the strategy ensures that these individuals are not excluded from important opportunities for growth and development. The incorporation of Diné cultural practices further makes professional development opportunities more accessible by resonating with the region's values and traditions. Also ensuring the content is not only geographically but culturally appropriate. To date, the PCS has conducted outreach to 46 early learning programs, provided 26 trainings and served approximately 160 early childhood professionals.

Challenges:

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, the regional council 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 Arizona Department of Economic Security 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

- Home Visitation (prioritized)
- Language, Literacy and Culture in Tribal Communities (prioritized)
- Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (prioritized)

Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources

- Family Support Coordination (prioritized)
- Family Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized)

Successes:

Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFN):

This year, the grant partner implemented new and innovative approaches to the strategy than previous years. This included offering sessions within FFN providers' homes. While this takes more individualized time than sessions held in a community space, the grant partner has found success and increased engagement. Thirty-one out of 49 providers were offered sessions in their homes. In three communities, they established a cohort of providers that meet at one provider's home. In addition, this presents the opportunity for the children in their care to socialize and have playgroups. The number of sessions provided per week are also responsive to the cohort's preferences. For instance, one cohort prefers hosting two training sessions per week. And another cohort prefers to host training sessions on Sundays. While this is outside of the grant partner's regular scheduling, they have adjusted to provide the trainings according to the preference of the providers. FFN providers have expressed an increase in their skills. They are seeing children in their care increase their use of language, build their social-emotional abilities and are becoming more accustomed to daily routines.

Family Support & Literacy Systems Change:

This strategy area seeks to improve the understanding of available resources among system partners and establish better coordination with community partners to optimize service delivery to families and caregivers. Additionally, the strategy focuses on identifying and addressing barriers in the system to form a more collaborative, coordinated approach to early childhood services. The region's annual Diné Early Childhood Summit was held in August of the fiscal year. It continues to be a successful event for key community partners and decision-makers to convene and collaborate to improve early childhood and family services, early education, early care systems and child welfare. Four general sessions and three breakout sessions were conducted with 70 summit attendees. Attendees were asked to complete evaluations determining how well they understood the topic before and after the sessions. The largest increase in knowledge and understanding occurred in the Roundtable Discussion: Strengthening the Early Childhood System to Support Dine Families. Sixty-percent (60%) of attendees indicated they better understood the challenges and opportunities of the Navajo Nation early education, child care and social/human services system that affects or

supports collaboration. In this roundtable discussion, leadership from Navajo Nation Department for Child Care & Development, Navajo Nation Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services – Early Childhood Programs, Navajo Head Start, Navajo Indian Child Welfare Act Program and Navajo Nation Department for Self Reliance discussed their role in how they support families in the region and future opportunities to collaborate. One of the key takeaways reported in the evaluation was: “In spite of the challenges, community spirit is greater. Resilience and relationships are our renewable resources. Yet, disruptions and disconnects due to dysfunctions within the early childhood system and between partners/agencies continue to cause roadblocks for families. The partners here today recommend and want to collaborate and communicate and align more!” Programs who participated in the roundtable expressed interest in meeting quarterly to determine actions steps moving forward. In addition to this success, community conversations, partner feedback and parents’ lived experiences highlighted at the annual summit continues to inform the regional council’s strategic direction and helps guide continued systems change work.

Family Support Coordination:

Due to the rural characteristics of the region, families have very unique challenges in accessing services and basic needs. Many services in the region are concentrated in population centers in the region. This strategy seeks to meet families where they are, especially those with limited transportation or those who experience extra barriers to access services on their own. The grant partner has successfully supported to attain their short term goals. The grant partner has built relationships with various community partners. They have successfully helped parents of young children navigate employment and higher education opportunities; connect families to food, gas and firewood assistance; support parents to apply for a homesite lease with the Navajo Nation Land Office; help parents acquire car repair resources for transportation needs; assist families with non-emergency medical transportation for their children to regularly attend clinic appointments; and connect children to needed developmental, vision and hearing screenings. Many of these processes are very extensive and families can often feel intimidated by the process. This strategy continues to help refer and connect families with young children to services that support their overall well-being.

Challenges:

Family Support Coordination:

While Family Support Coordination has achieved significant programmatic successes, they continue to face challenges in hiring, with two staff vacancies remaining. These challenges are largely due to the complex hiring process within the Navajo Nation, which involves a thorough background check of tribal, municipal, county, state and federal jurisdictions. Given the sensitive nature of the positions, which involve working closely with families and children, this process typically takes between six months to a year to complete due to the process as well as the internal capacity of the Navajo Nation Police Department – Office of Background Investigations. These vacancies likely affect attaining the contract service units as the one family service coordinator has limitations on the number of families they can serve concurrently.

Changes:

Family Support & Literacy Systems Change:

The program coordination specialist position was originally funded 50% under this strategy and 50% under the Children’s Health System Change Strategy. Throughout this strategic planning cycle, it has been determined a majority of the program coordination specialist’s work, that requires funding, falls under Family Support. This includes salary; venue rental and speaker’s fees for the annual summit; and design, publication and printing of the annual family resource guide. This change also helps streamline the process to attribute budget line items to one strategy and limit the number of budget modifications that were previously needed each year.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change		
Allotment:	\$80,000	\$145,000
DESIRED OUTCOME: WELL-PREPARED, HIGHLY SKILLED AND APPROPRIATELY COMPENSATED PROFESSIONALS		
<u>Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies</u>		
Professional Development for ECE Professionals		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (prioritized) ○ Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized) ○ First Things First College Scholarships (prioritized) 		
<p>Successes:</p> <p>Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation: Despite summer break for most Pre-K programs at the beginning of the fiscal year, the grant partner continued services at 22 sites. The grant partner was invited to support summer school and kindergarten-transition programs in several school district Pre-K classrooms. Participation from Navajo Nation Department of Child Care & Development centers increased compared to previous years. The grant partner strengthened relationships with staff at these centers, leading to effective classroom observations and consultations. These consultations helped implement successful co-regulation practices for managing challenging behaviors in the child care centers.</p>		
<p>Challenges:</p> <p>First Things First College Scholarships College scholarships are intended to cover tuition, fees and books for scholars after all other resources have been used. Most scholars in the region receive a tuition waiver, Pell grant or tribal scholarship that completely supports their cost of tuition. Therefore, most of this strategy in the Navajo Nation Region is used to support scholar fees and books. This creates a discrepancy between the number of scholars awarded by the grant partner and funding expended. The regional council recognizes the need to continue funding this strategy to support scholar fees and books; however, it is challenging to expend the entire strategy allocation.</p>		
DESIRED OUTCOME: PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT		
<u>Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies</u>		
Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness (prioritized) ○ Media (prioritized) 		
<p>Successes:</p> <p>Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness: Through the Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness budget, the community engagement coordinator and regional director secured a booth at the annual Navajo Entrepreneurship Coalition conference. Staff was able to build awareness about the impact of early childhood on the business community and provide information about the current child care crisis. This event helped build the foundation for potential partnerships with the business community including Arizona Public Service, Dineh Chamber of Commerce, Navajo Nation Division of Economic Development, Navajo elected officials and tribal enterprise representatives.</p>		

When engaging Indian Health Service/638 pediatric clinics to share educational reinforcement items with families, a pediatric nurse identified the need for educational materials to inform families about local services. This prompted the regional director to create an advisory group of health professionals to guide the development of effective materials that promote local resources under the Family Support & Literacy Systems Change Strategy. The goal of the advisory group is to ensure the materials meet the needs of both the clinic and families.

Media:

In SFY24, digital media such as Google ads in the form of Google display banners have proved to be a successful media strategy for the region. Display banners target audiences based on demographics and specifications such as age, gender, parental status, etc. These visual ads boost brand awareness and drive traffic to the website. Google ads have also featured more tribal families, including one family from the region, which may increase the success of these ads. Outdoor ads continue to be a successful media strategy with consistent digital billboards at main intersections of population centers in the region. Building on this success, the SFY25 media campaign will expand these efforts with targeted online media ads, 192 radio spots on a local station, print ads in two local publications, ads placed on grocery carts in one local store (Winslow) and two billboards, one in Chinle and one in Chambers.

Challenges:

Media:

As the regional council reviews the proposed media campaign from the current vendor each year, there continues to be no grocery cart ads that are available in the region. The regional council supports grocery store ads, especially since most stores are located in population centers in the region and brand visibility would benefit. Despite this challenge, the regional council does fund grocery store ads outside of the region (Winslow).

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)
- Family Support for Children with Developmental Concerns (non-prioritized)

Health Resource Coordination

- Children’s Health Systems Change (non-prioritized)

Nutrition and Physical Activity

- Nutrition and Physical Activity (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Nutrition and Physical Activity:

After meeting with several entities to determine a grant partner who has the capacity to successfully implement the Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy, an intergovernmental grant agreement was successfully executed with University of Arizona Cooperative Extension-Apache & Navajo Counties. The grant partner has started implementation with all staff hired and is serving their first cohort of families.

Children’s Health Systems Change:

The program coordination specialist met with the Tuba City Public Library to identify their early childhood education professional development needs. This led to the identification of a need for speech and language developmental screenings. In response, the program coordination specialist facilitated a relationship between FTF grant partners and additional tribal, county and non-profit community resources to provide developmental screenings and additional

family support services at the library. This resulted in a seamless referral process, ensuring that children with identified developmental concerns were connected with local programs capable of providing ongoing support. The collaboration strengthened the community’s capacity to address developmental needs and fostered a more integrated support system.

Early intervention coordination meetings were initiated by the program coordination specialist after meeting with various entities in the Fort Defiance area. The purpose of the meetings is to help foster connections between the local school district, FTF grant partners and local pediatric clinic to discuss and enhance the developmental screening and referral processes for IDEA Part C. The role of FTF is to convene partners and facilitate the meeting. The first goal of the coordination meeting was to create an early intervention process map specific to the Fort Defiance area. This was achieved in November 2024. This is meant to increase the knowledge of services for parents and caregivers who seek resources for their children. The next goal is to increase communication amongst early intervention partners. This collaborative effort is facilitating stronger partnerships and improved service delivery, benefiting Fort Defiance area families by creating a more integrated and accessible early intervention system.

Developmental and Sensory Screenings:

Hearing and vision screenings have proved to be the most needed aspect of this strategy. Families often encounter challenges when seeking initial optometry or audiology appointments at their area Indian Health Services/638 facility. Families now have greater access to hearing and vision screenings since the grant partner offers community-based screenings and coordinates screening events with community partners. The grant partner also supports early learning programs who may have limited capacity in providing hearing and vision screenings. In addition to this success, the grant partner is conducting developmental screenings with child care facilities in the region. Child care programs are typically not required to provide developmental screenings; however, the grant partner has proved to be a valuable resource to promote screenings in child care. The grant partner is also working towards a partnership to provide developmental screenings at Women, Infant & Children (WIC) clinics in the region.

Challenges:

Family Support Children with Developmental Concerns:

In the early intervention coordination meetings, it was determined there was limited knowledge of the Family Support Children with Developmental Concerns Strategy and the specific population the grant partner serves. The regional director is working with the grant partner to bring more attention to this strategy and its intent to serve children who are not eligible for IDEA Part C or Part B services. The grant partner has been scheduled to present at the early intervention coordination meeting and the regional director continues to work with the grant partner to promote the strategy. An additional challenge that may also be affecting grant partner implementation is two staff vacancies.

Changes:

Children’s Health Systems Change:

As previously mentioned, the program coordination specialist position was originally funded 50% under this strategy and 50% under the Family Support & Literacy Systems Change Strategy. Throughout this strategic planning cycle, it has been determined a majority of the program coordination specialist’s scope of work, that requires funding, falls under Family Support. This change helps streamline the process to attribute budget line items to one strategy and limit the number of budget modifications that were previously needed each year.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Children’s Health System Change		
Allotment:	\$90,000	\$17,693

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Evaluation

- Statewide Evaluation (non-prioritized)
- Needs and Assets (non-prioritized)

Successes:

Statewide Evaluation:

The 2024 Regional Needs and Asset Reports were delivered in June 2024 and approved by the State Board in December 2024. A success of this process included a thorough review and recommendations by Navajo Nation Council Delegate Dr. Andy Nez. Honorable Dr. Nez has extensive credentials in academia and is a respected elected official of the Navajo Nation government. His review and recommendations have prompted the regional director to create an advisory group of community partners to inform the next Regional Needs & Assets Report process to be more culturally relevant and reflective of the region.

Changes:

Needs & Assets:

The regional council intends to conduct additional work such as the convening of an advisory group. The advisory group will include tribal leaders, public health, family support and early childhood partners. Their role will be to advise the regional council on relevant data indicators, offer feedback on the parent and caregiver survey/community partner focus groups, and ensure that the report is culturally responsive. This diverse group will help guide the council in compiling a report that reflect the needs and values of the community. The additional work also includes collecting primary data through parent & caregiver surveys and/or community partner focus groups. Funds from the region have been allocated to acquire a vendor to conduct the primary data collection, including securing approval from the Navajo Nation Institutional Review Board. This requires the vendor to acquire additional approvals from Navajo Nation Agency Councils and other tribal governing bodies.

Changes:	SFY25	SFY26
Needs & Assets		
Allotment:	\$0	\$30,000