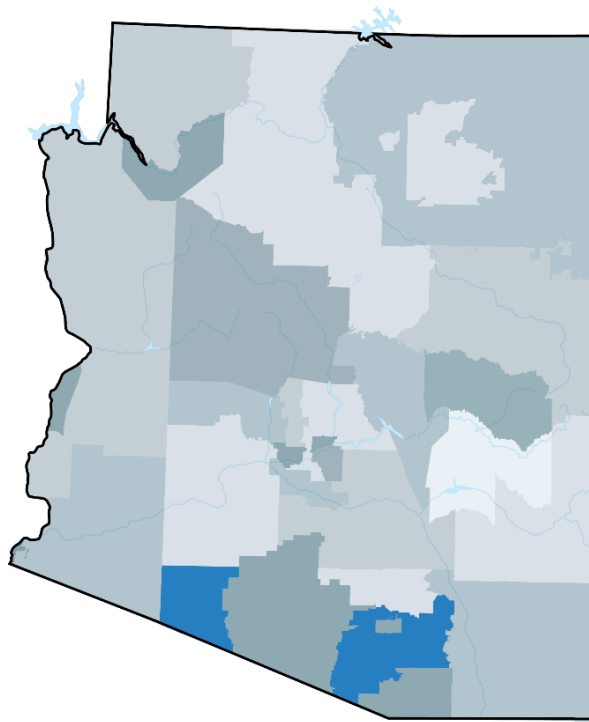


FIRST THINGS FIRST

Pima South Regional Partnership Council
Population birth through age 5: 23,941



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.

Pima South Regional Partnership Council

Letícia Luján, chair, member of the business community

Tami Bonesteel, vice chair, representative of the faith community

Dennis Billie, at-large representative

David Dumon, public school administrator

Connie Espinoza, early childhood educator

Scott Evans, representative of a philanthropic organization

Caroline Lewis, at-large representative

Toni Lopez Krause, child care provider

Javare’ Phillips, at-large representative

Open, health services provider

Open, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

Jaymie Jacobs, regional director, First Things First

Roxanne Ochoa, administrative specialist, First Things First

Regional Allocation and Proposed Funding Plan Summary SFY24 – SFY27
Pima South Regional Partnership Council

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$5,637,112	\$5,637,112	\$6,078,706	\$6,152,534
Population Based Allocation	\$3,766,660	\$3,766,660	\$3,404,531	\$3,766,660
Discretionary Allocation	\$1,870,452	\$1,870,452	\$2,674,175	\$2,385,874
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$1,074,264	\$743,990	\$246,500	\$190,376
Total Regional Council Funds Available	\$6,711,376	\$6,381,102	\$6,325,206	\$6,342,910
Strategies	Approved Allotted	Approved Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Projected Allotted
Quality First Academy	\$36,500	\$33,592	\$36,500	\$36,500
Quality First Assessment		\$305,846		
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$1,020,950	\$673,932	\$1,020,950	\$1,020,950
Quality First Scholarships	\$1,717,398	\$1,717,398	\$1,717,398	\$1,717,398
First Things First College Scholarships	\$86,400	\$86,400	\$86,400	\$86,400
Professional Development for Early Childhood Practitioners	\$412,500	\$412,500	\$412,500	\$412,500
Child Care Health Consultation	\$248,200	\$292,280	\$248,200	\$248,200
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$428,400	\$428,400	\$428,400	\$428,400
Family Resource Centers	\$1,000,000	\$1,060,000	\$1,060,000	\$1,060,000
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$120,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Home Visitation	\$1,520,000	\$1,520,000	\$1,520,000	\$1,520,000
Statewide Evaluation	\$255,488	\$255,488	\$255,488	\$255,488
Educational Promotion & Brand Awareness	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Media	\$29,653	\$29,653	\$29,653	\$29,653
Total	\$6,890,489	\$6,890,489	\$6,890,489	\$6,890,489
Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:*	(\$179,113)	(\$509,387)	(\$565,283)	(\$547,579)

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		96.29 %	96.29 %	96.29 %	96.29 %
% to Quality First*	15.62%	18.94 %	14.50 %	18.94 %	18.94 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	96.29%				
% to Quality First**	17.83%				

*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.

PIMA SOUTH 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 Pima South Regional Council developed the SFY24-27 Strategic Plan by diving deep into local needs and asset data, holding several in-depth strategic planning work sessions and conducting a community conversation to gain input from key community stakeholders in order to discover relevant opportunities for the region to address the greatest needs of children birth to age 5 and their families.

The Pima South Region is a unique mix of urban and rural communities. The region has a poverty rate of 28% with some rural communities at a poverty rate over 30%. The needs of the families are vast. Nearly one-quarter of children under 6 years old live in single-female households and/or are cared for by grandparents. While there are under-resourced and underserved children and families in the region, they also feel a strong sense of community. Based on this, the regional council approved several family support strategies for SFY24-27. The Family Resource Centers and Home Visitation strategies will start "where the families are at" by building upon each families' strengths, then establish stronger and more comprehensive supports and services for families. Both strategies adopt a multi-generational approach to ensure that all family members benefit from the services provided. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by families in the region's most remote and rural areas, for SFY25 and SFY26, the regional council has reallocated funds to extend support through the family resource centers, ensuring more families receive the support they need. Additionally, the funding of the program coordination specialist position will enhance the system's ability to serve families, particularly those with the highest needs, by creating a more seamless network of support.

The ultimate goal of the FTF Pima South Regional Partnership Council is to create a high-quality, interconnected and comprehensive early childhood service delivery system in the region that is family-driven, community-based and directed toward enhancing children's overall development.

SFY26 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE
PIMA SOUTH 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 State Fiscal Year 2024 (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 (DES) developed and facilitated information sessions and resources for Quality First participants to discuss the end of the federal funds and what State Fiscal Year 2025 (SFY25) would look like for their participation, whether continuing or not.

Seven regulated early care and education programs funded through the federal pandemic relief were able to maintain their Quality First Star Rating in SFY25.

At the end of SFY24, 96.3% of participating programs were achieving or maintaining quality levels.

From a systems perspective, the number of available high-quality child care scholarships in the region has increased through the Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPS), enabling more preschool aged children to benefit from quality early education. The integration of PEEPS with Quality First’s established infrastructure has streamlined the scholarship distribution process for child care providers, making it more efficient and accessible for both early care and education providers and families.

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.

From a statewide perspective, coordinated planning with DES allowed for 125 children (throughout the entire state) to transition from a Quality First Scholarship 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 Pima South Region, seven programs were funded through these federal relief funds. When the federal funds ended, four programs transitioned to regionally funded Quality First and the remaining three programs transitioned

to the Quality First waitlist. The programs that transitioned to the waitlist that have a Quality First rating anticipated to expire in SFY25 will be reassessed to continue to maintain a valid Quality First 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, including Pima South considered 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.

The demand for child care offered during non-traditional hours has risen in the region, particularly among construction and health care workers. Construction workers needing to arrive at job sites by 5 a.m. and medical personnel working 12-hour night shifts face a critical gap in child care coverage, as these hours fall outside traditional child care operations. Without reliable child care, many parents are forced to piece together makeshift arrangements, often relying on family members and friends. These types of informal care arrangements can be inconsistent and inadequate for both children and parents. Regional staff has begun addressing this need by exploring early-morning care options with home child care providers, while continuing to investigate additional solutions for extended-hours coverage.

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 Resource Centers (prioritized)
- Family Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized)

Successes:

The regional council provides a broad spectrum of family support services tailored to meet the diverse needs of the region. These services range from more universal offerings such as the Family Resource Centers (FRCs) Strategy to more targeted initiatives, such as the Home Visitation Strategy. The Family Support and Literacy Systems Change Strategy, aims to reduce barriers families face when accessing services by approaching the issue from a systems perspective in order to effectively connect them. This strategy is critical to the regional council’s broader mission of supporting families across the region.

Family Resource Centers:

During the first year of implementation, the grant partner effectively launched and operationalized three family resource centers (FRCs) simultaneously in Sahuarita, Altar Valley and Sunnyside. These collaborative FRCs serve as welcoming, safe spaces for families with children birth to age 5, offering culturally responsive services, information, and resources on parenting, self-help and community topics.

The FRCs utilize a comprehensive approach, including parenting education and family support coordination strategies. Through parenting education, parents and caregivers participate in classes to strengthen their role as their child’s first

and most important teacher. The family support coordination component helps families navigate additional resources and referrals, ensuring they receive assistance with fewer barriers.

The regional council recognizes that families in rural communities often face unique challenges in accessing essential services. These barriers include limited transportation options, greater travel distances to service locations, fewer local providers and isolated social networks. In response to these specific rural needs and to ensure equitable access to support services, the regional council allocated additional funding for SFY25 and proposes to continue in SFY26 to provide parenting activities in two new rural communities as part of the Family Resource Centers Strategy (FRCs). This targeted expansion aims to bring vital parenting resources directly into rural areas, reducing transportation barriers and strengthening local community connections for historically underserved families.

Family Support and Literacy Systems Change:

The intent of this strategy is use the expertise of a program coordination specialist to strengthen connections between early childhood providers and broader system stakeholders, identifying and addressing service gaps to ensure families are better linked to the resources that help their children thrive. This work reduces the systemic challenges in accessing support while promoting the resilience and well-being of families.

In SFY25, a family resource guide, available in both digital and print formats, was developed and is now being distributed to Pima County librarians, health care providers and professionals in child care and broader serving family support and community-serving sectors. This guide provides comprehensive information on early childhood programs, supports and services available across Pima County.

An opportunity emerged in early SFY25 to streamline the program coordination specialist efforts across the county, approved through an amendment to the SFY25 funding plan in December 2024. As a result, the Pima North and Pima South regional councils entered into a joint partnership and approved funding for one position to oversee the Family Support and Literacy Systems Change Strategy for both regions. This approach is designed to eliminate any regional boundary limitations fostering a more cohesive and unified support system for families across the entire county.

Challenges:

Home Visitation:

Several home visitation providers, part of the home visitation collaborative serving both Pima North and Pima South Regions, encountered staffing challenges, which led to occasional disruptions in service delivery for families. Program supervisors had been actively working to retain most families and prioritized the recruitment of additional staff to fill these gaps. The collaborative of home visitation programs conducted Continuous Quality Improvement efforts to assess in real time what the barriers and strengths of home visitation were in relationship to staffing retention and recruitment. This unique endeavor had been instrumental in making needed changes such as case load redistribution in order to better support families through home visitation.

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

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Professional Development for ECE Professionals

- Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (prioritized)
- First Things First College Scholarships (prioritized)
- Professional Development of ECE Professionals (prioritized)
- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

Successes:

Professional Development for Early Childhood Practitioners:

The regional council recognizes the importance of equipping early childhood professionals with the tools and skills needed for educators to offer high-quality learning experiences. This aligns directly with the strategic goal of strengthening the early childhood education workforce and improving the quality of early learning environments. To support this, the Professional Development for Early Childhood Practitioners Strategy uses a Community of Practice (CoP) model. Thirteen CoPs are offered, with up to 166 Pima South practitioners participating. The CoPs focus on topics such as diversity, inclusion with children special needs and trauma informed care, providing opportunities for professional development, shared best practices and community building coupled with the opportunity to apply newly learned theories and concepts through coaching by a CoP coordinator. Some CoPs also offer college credit and a pathway to a degree, furthering the strategic objective of building a highly qualified and sustainable early childhood workforce.

Challenges:

Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation:

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Strategy has delivered fewer Contract Service Units than expected, primarily due to challenges in hiring qualified mental health consultants, who are in high demand in the region. The recruitment and retention of home-based providers has required a culturally sensitive approach to address their potential apprehension about mental health supports. To address these challenges, First Things First program and regional staff have provided and will continue to provide technical assistance focused on culturally responsive recruitment strategies and reducing stigma around mental health services.

DESIRED OUTCOME: PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Building Awareness of the Importance of the Early Years

- o Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness (prioritized)
- o Media (prioritized)

Successes:

Media:

In SFY24, targeted media efforts in the Pima South 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 expands these efforts with targeted online media ads, 193 radio spots, ads placed on grocery carts in seven local stores and toppers and posters at five gas stations throughout the region.

Additionally, local newsletters like the *Fencepost* in Three Points and school district digital newsletters have been instrumental in effectively raising awareness about early childhood health, education and First Things First in the smaller rural communities of Pima South. These trusted sources have also been key in promoting family resource centers programming to a broader audience.

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Evaluation

- o 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.