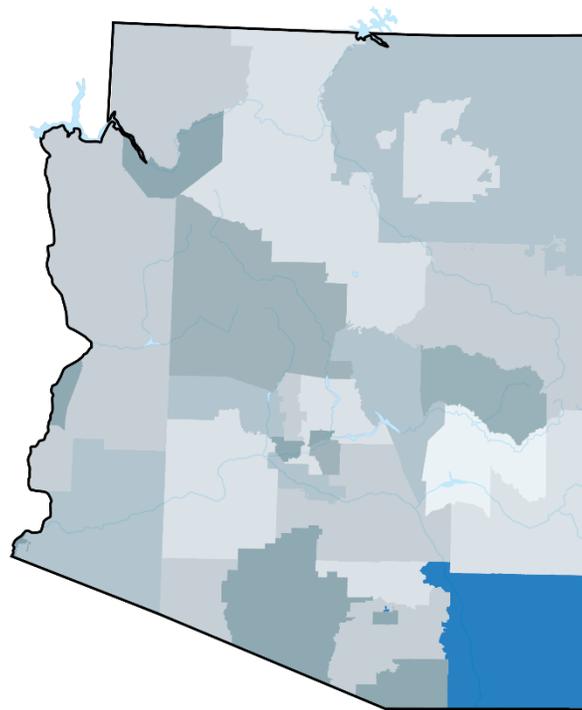




FIRST THINGS FIRST

Cochise Regional Partnership Council
Population birth through age 5: 8,908



State Fiscal Year 2025 Funding Plan

SFY 2024 – 2027 Strategic Plan Update

Presented to the First Things First Board
January 23, 2024



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.

Cochise Regional Partnership Council

Danielle Brownrigg, chair, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

Kalman Mannis, vice chair, at-large representative

Elisa Castro, child care provider

Peter Huisking, member of the business community

Anthony Reed, representative of a philanthropic organization

Terri Romo, public school administrator

Demetry Simonton, at-large representative

Diona Williams, early childhood educator

open, at-large representative

open, representative of the faith community

open, health services provider

Melissa Avant, regional director, First Things First

Kollean McMahon, administrative specialist, First Things First

Cochise Regional Partnership Council
Promoting Equity and Supporting Under-Resourced/Underserved Children and Their Families

Cochise County covers about 6,200 square miles located in southeast Arizona next to the Mexican border and New Mexico and is diverse in geography, population and ethnicity. The Cochise landscape consists of scenic country and mountains, is largely rural, consists of small towns with populations of less than 10,000 people and is known for agriculture, mining and tourism. Cochise County offers a wealth of pro-growth and development opportunities thanks to low taxes, land availability, affordable commercial space, high-quality healthcare and education, and easy access to Interstate 10 and rail transportation. In Cochise, there are five major hubs, Douglas, Sierra Vista, Benson, Willcox, Bisbee, each hub of the county has a different culture and the regional council continues to adapt programs and services to help accommodate the differences and provide inclusivity of all people and offers a family-oriented society.

Through the strategic planning process and examining the data, the regional council intentionally focused on targeting families with young children who are impacted by single parent households, homelessness, housing instability, domestic and intimate partner violence, mental health and adolescent pregnancy to promote self-sufficiency and wellbeing. Due to this data, there is a commitment to advancing equity by elevating the voices and perspectives of parents, grandparents, providers, community members and others with lived expertise with young children birth to age 5 in the Cochise Region.

The consistent themes presented by this process includes the need for an integrated closed-loop referral system, mental health services, parenting education, community resources, services, and access to affordable high quality childcare. The regional council was intentional in funding strategies that could affect each of these communities through a plan that promotes equity, supports low-income working families and promotes children's learning by improving the quality of early care and education and parenting programs that embed cultural responsibility to the under-resourced and underserved children and their families.

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

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$2,135,493	\$2,135,493	\$2,297,923	\$2,297,923
Population Based Allocation	\$1,407,432	\$1,407,432	\$1,407,432	\$1,407,432
Discretionary Allocation	\$728,061	\$728,061	\$890,491	\$890,491
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$979,283	\$798,689	\$525,490	\$205,271
Total Regional Council Funds Available	\$3,114,776	\$2,934,182	\$2,823,413	\$2,503,194
Strategies	Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted
Inclusion of Children with Special Needs		\$232,500	\$232,500	\$232,500
Quality First Academy	\$16,500	\$16,500	\$16,500	\$16,500
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$571,080	\$571,080	\$571,080	\$571,080
Quality First Scholarships	\$1,232,585	\$869,439	\$869,439	\$869,439
First Things First College Scholarships		\$10,800	\$10,800	\$10,800
Child Care Health Consultation	\$112,200	\$112,200	\$112,200	\$112,200
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$36,720	\$61,200	\$61,200	\$61,200
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000
Family Support Coordination	\$280,000	\$400,000	\$400,000	\$400,000
Parenting Education	\$119,000	\$119,000	\$119,000	\$119,000
Statewide Evaluation	\$95,423	\$95,423	\$95,423	\$95,423
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$20,000	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Media	\$14,634	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$5,000
Total	\$2,618,142	\$2,618,142	\$2,618,142	\$2,618,142
Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:*	\$496,634	\$316,040	\$205,271	(\$114,948)

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		96.35 %	96.35 %	96.35 %	96.35 %
% to Quality First**	20.03%	26.72 %	26.72 %	26.72 %	26.72 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	96.35%				
% to Quality First**	26.72%				

*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, and Child Care Health Consultation.

**SFY25 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE
COCHISE 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:

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. 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.

First Things First increased the Quality First Scholarship reimbursement rate to the cost of quality, informed by a study conducted in 2021, this increase will support a robust and stable network of child care providers and continue the reimbursement rate that providers were receiving through federal pandemic relief funding.

The Cochise Regional Partnership Council continues to support access to quality early care and education through Quality First center and home-based slots and Quality First scholarships. The regional council made it a priority for the region in understanding the decrease in federal dollars and future impacts on an intentional step-down in Quality First Scholarships. The regional council held an informative community meeting with Cochise child care educators to discuss the implications of decreased funding and adjustments to the Quality First Scholarships investments in SFY25. Our Arizona Department of Economic Security partners attended and helped providers understand how to be certified and how to help their eligible families apply for child care assistance. Throughout the upcoming year, continued efforts will be prioritized in building awareness on the three (Head Start, DES Subsidy and QF Scholarships) funding opportunities for caregivers to access affordable child care throughout the Cochise Region.

Challenges:

In SFY25, federal pandemic relief funding to support a statewide expansion of 413 programs to participate in Quality First will end, zero of which were located in the Cochise Region.

Reimbursing Quality First Scholarships at the 2021 cost of quality has resulted in less scholarships for the same amount of funding in SFY25. It is estimated that half the number of scholarships will be available at the current level of investment. In planning for SFY25, regional partnership councils had to consider the regional impact the reduction would have and make decisions to ensure that reductions in funding do not disrupt the system in significant ways. Long-term solutions will be critical as we move forward in a thoughtful, gradual step-down approach to child care scholarship funding and reallocate funds to other prioritized strategies throughout the next three years.

Changes:

The regional council opted to decrease Quality First Scholarships by \$363,146, based on the following data points to allow for funding of other regional priorities: cost of quality, children aging out to kindergarten, scholarship usage and the availability of other child care subsidies, (100% or below Federal Poverty Level, FPL = Head Start, 165% or below FPL, Department of Economic Security subsidies). The numbers below show the calculations based on the above opportunities for caregivers to access other funding sources. The regional council looked at data and could see where a 30% reduction would be manageable and would not disrupt the system in significant ways:

- Total of 164 scholarship slots for SFY24;

- Cost of Quality Reduction = 82 slots;
- Approximately 40 slots unused and over 32 children aging out to kindergarten;
- 95 children could be utilizing other funding sources; and less than 10% of scholarships going to infant care;
- 30% reduction = approximately 25 slots;
- Based on data of current usage 48 slots needed in the Cochise Region to maintain levels;
- The continued investment of \$869,439 will be serving current children (with a buffer) in the 165% to 300% FPL income levels.

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
Quality First Scholarships		
Funding Level Changes:	\$1,232,585	\$869,439

DESIRED OUTCOME: INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

Educating Families and Caregivers

- Parenting Education (prioritized)

Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources

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

Successes:

The regional council continues to implement two programmatic strategies and one systems change strategy in the area of family support, namely Parenting Education, Family Support Coordination and Family Support and Literacy Systems Change strategies. Strong coordination and collaboration efforts are still of high importance within these three strategies. Navigating and connecting families to resources is a high priority for the Cochise Region to increase the availability of and access to high-quality family support services, by linking families to other resources and supports to meet their needs. The Cochise Regional Council is working with Arizona’s new statewide closed-loop referral system Contexture/CommunityCares powered by Unite Us and funded by the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System. This system is designed to connect health care and community service providers to streamline the referral process, foster easier access to vital services and provide confirmation when social services are delivered. The Family Support Coordination Strategy aims to support families with more complex needs by assisting them in understanding, navigating and accessing services that promote family well-being. The expected result is that families are referred and connected to critical and timely services that meet their needs.

Changes:

To fully invest in this highly prioritized effort, the regional council planned to fund at \$400,000. While that could not occur in SFY24 due to partner obligations with the Department of Economic Security, the regional council planned to bring the funding level to its fully intended allotment for SFY25. The additional investment will aid in fostering the continued development of Family Support Coordination hubs throughout the Cochise Region. The coordinated hubs will be maintained in the five major cities/towns of the Cochise Region: Benson, Bisbee, Douglas, Sierra Vista and Willcox with current organizations such as libraries, clinics or community centers. The additional funding will allow dedicated staff that will aid families in obtaining resources when needed and allow full-time staff working on the ground throughout the entire county and utilizing the closed-loop referral system to engage families in accessing resources.

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
Family Support and Coordination		
Funding Level Changes:	\$280,000	\$400,000
Service Unit Change:	Number of families currently enrolled: 80	Number of families currently enrolled: 130
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"> o Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (prioritized) o Inclusion of Children with Special Needs (prioritized) o First Things First College Scholarships (prioritized) o Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized) 		
Challenges:		
<p>Post pandemic data shows many children in the Cochise Region are struggling with behavioral needs. In 2020, the most common types of disabilities for preschool children were developmental delays and speech/language impairments. For students in grades kindergarten to 3rd grade (within the region in 2020), 12% were enrolled in special education. There are 139 open dependency cases with a total of 219 children, as of April 2022. Of those 219 children, 109 are birth to age 5. Cochise top reasons for children entering care in 2021 were as follows: substance abuse, mental health issues (parents), neglect (general inability/unwillingness to provide for basic needs), domestic violence, unfit/unsafe homes (filth, deteriorating residences – not including homelessness). In this timeframe, 16 of the 88 new cases filed in 2021 mentioned medical neglect as the specific reason for a child entering care; defined as caregiver failed to ensure that the child’s behavioral/mental health needs were met. Finally, approximately 10% of the cases opened in 2021 were due to physical abuse and approximately 5% included sexual abuse.</p>		
Changes:		
<p>The regional council opted to fund Inclusion of Children with Special Needs as a new strategy for SFY25 for \$232,500 servicing 31 centers and homes enrolled in Quality First. The regional council will also work with school districts to refer children identified with special needs to support services and be able to identify gaps in follow-up referrals and program eligibility to ensure that developmental needs of children are being met.</p> <p>The regional council opted to fund First Things First College Scholarships for \$10,800 for SFY25 as the federal dollars covered the strategy in SFY24. This allows one scholar to finish their degree plan in SFY24 and allowing an open slot for other scholar in the Cochise Region in SFY25.</p> <p>The regional council opted to increase Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation by \$24,480 for two additional centers in the region. Increasing Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation in Quality First will aid in decreased frequency and intensity of children’s behavioral challenge(s) and increased self-regulation in young children.</p>		
Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
Inclusion of Children with Special Needs		
Funding Level Changes:	\$0	\$232,500
Service Unit Change:	-	Number of center based providers served: 31

First Things First College Scholarships		
Funding Level Change:	\$0	\$10,800
Service Unit Change:	-	Number of full-time scholarships for Bachelor's degrees: 1
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation		
Funding Level Changes:	\$36,720	\$61,200
Service Unit Change:	Number of center based providers served: 3	Number of center based providers served: 5

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)

Changes:
 The regional council opted to decrease Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness by \$15,000 due to not expending the entire amount in years past. They will monitor this line item for any needed changes in the upcoming years.
 The regional council opted to decrease Media by \$9,634 due to limited funding and location proximity to Tucson (TV ads) and the ever-growing social networks/blogs and social media. They will monitor this line item for any needed changes in the upcoming years.

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness		
Funding Level Changes:	\$20,000	\$5,000
Media		
Funding Level Change:	\$14,634	\$5,000

DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM

Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies

- Evaluation**
- Statewide Evaluation