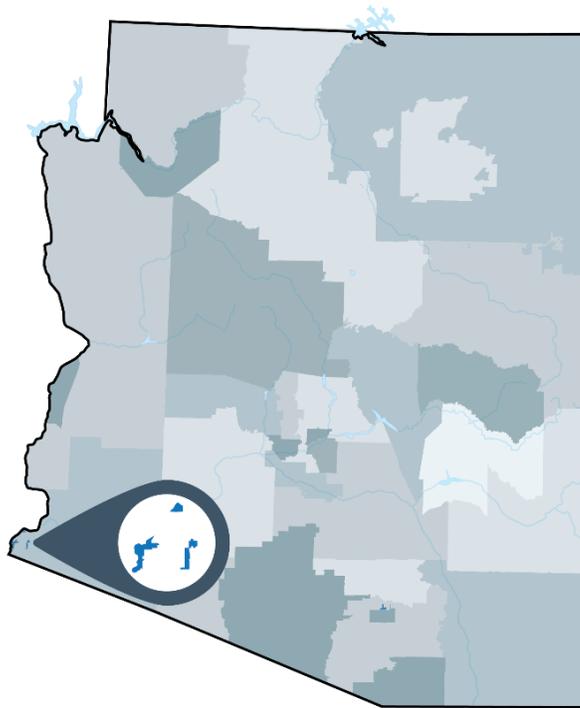




# FIRST THINGS FIRST

**Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council**  
Population birth through age 5: 149



## 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.

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### **Cocopah Regional Partnership Council**

**Esteban Escobar**, chair, representative of a philanthropic organization

**Wilana Ortega**, vice chair, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

**Sheena Alvarez**, at-large representative

**Joena Ezroj**, member of the business community

**Elizabeth Garcia**, public school administrator

**Diana Navarro**, at-large representative

**Tabatha Novotny**, child care provider

**Elizabeth Renaud**, early childhood educator

**June Stillings**, representative of the faith community

**Sheryl Taylor**, health services provider

**Paula Twist Koolick**, at-large representative

**Nohemi Ortega**, regional director, First Things First

**Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council**  
**Promoting Equity and Supporting Under-Resourced/Underserved Children and Their Families**

The Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council has developed the SFY24-27 Strategic Plan through a holistic approach that considered the most current and greatest needs of children birth to age 5 and their families. Major priorities were identified using the Elements of a Healthy Tribal Community framework (developed by Arizona’s Tribes in partnership with Inter Tribal Council of Arizona and Vitalyst Health Foundation 2020) and gathering data from formal reports, history and the cultural practice of storytelling and conversation. The identified priorities included supporting families and caregivers in parenting practices, healthy child development and transitioning to kindergarten off the reservation.

The strategies selected for funding respond to the multiple high risk factors of families of young children in the region. These risk factors include: 59% of children in the Cocopah Tribe Region are living under the poverty level, far more than the state (23%); 61% of households with children birth to age 5 are single female parent households or grandparents raising grandchildren; and, 25% of children in the region are overweight or obese. Also, the Cocopah Tribe region is comprised of three noncontiguous regions: The East, North and West Reservations, causing isolation between the three areas. Additionally, the region is facing a post pandemic crisis of high staff turnover, causing gaps and continuous changes in family support services.

Due to the compounding risk factors, every child in the Cocopah Tribe Region is in need of intensive services to support their early childhood development. The strategies presented in this plan are intensive and targeted to serve all children birth to age 5 and their families in the region, focusing on cognitive, physical and social emotional health and well-being. Furthermore, the regional council through a Family Support Systems Change Strategy will address staffing issues in the region with the goal of providing culturally appropriate, continuous and coordinated family support services.

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

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$150,001	\$150,001	\$150,001	\$150,001
Population Based Allocation	\$30,811	\$30,811	\$30,811	\$30,811
Discretionary Allocation	\$119,190	\$119,190	\$119,190	\$119,190
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$180,469	\$204,153	\$199,945	\$133,267
<b>Total Regional Council Funds Available</b>	<b>\$330,470</b>	<b>\$354,154</b>	<b>\$349,946</b>	<b>\$283,268</b>
Strategies	Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted
Quality First Academy	\$500	\$500	\$500	\$500
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$9,350	\$9,350	\$9,350	\$9,350
Transition to Kindergarten	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$30,000
Child Care Health Consultation	\$3,400	\$3,400	\$3,400	\$3,400
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation		\$6,120	\$6,120	\$6,120
Nutrition and Physical Activity	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$40,000
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$14,500	\$14,500	\$14,500	\$14,500
Home Visitation	\$106,580	\$106,580	\$106,580	\$106,580
Statewide Evaluation	\$6,229	\$6,229	\$6,229	\$6,229
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$210,559</b>	<b>\$216,679</b>	<b>\$216,679</b>	<b>\$216,679</b>
<b>Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:*</b>	<b>\$119,911</b>	<b>\$137,475</b>	<b>\$133,267</b>	<b>\$66,589</b>

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		63.79 %	64.81 %	64.81 %	64.81 %
% to Quality First**	0.00%	6.29 %	6.11 %	6.11 %	6.11 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	64.56%				
% to Quality First**	6.15%				

\* 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.

Justification for not meeting the 80% allotment to Board Priorities:

During the strategic planning process, the regional council was provided with information, guidance and technical assistance regarding the First Things First Strategic Plan, State Fiscal Years 2024-2027. This included the Board’s six priority areas and Foundational Guidance #1, #2 and #3 related to Quality First and Quality First Scholarships. The regional council understood the importance of aligning with the statewide strategic direction as they assessed data about local needs and identified priorities as well as strategies. Ultimately, the regional council was faced with significant capacity and infrastructure issues including a lack of existing child care programs i.e. a child care desert. As a result, the region did not meet the recommended funding level for the Board-identified priorities and supports funding other local priorities. The regional council will continue to assess and look for future opportunities to continue to align with the Board’s priority areas and support Quality First.

Last year, the Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council engaged in a thorough process for their SFY24-27 strategic plan. This year they continue to prioritize strategies that align with the Board priorities and, without taking away any focus from those important priorities, the regional council has also taken into consideration certain needs that were exasperated as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic, particularly in the area of health. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Strategy (NAPA) will be funded to address the high prevalence of childhood obesity in the region, estimated to be at 25% for children ages 2 to 5 years during 2020 (according to the 2022 Regional Needs and Assets Report). NAPA is also the continuation of a health awareness campaign funded by the Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership

Council during the SFY19-23 strategic plan. The campaign was a first step to address childhood obesity in the region. Now the region is ready to engage in more formalized nutrition and physical activity opportunities that will support families in leading healthy lifestyles.

Additionally, the Cocopah Tribe does not have its own school district or any K-12 school within its reservation, which means children entering kindergarten will experience leaving the reservation to enter a new public school system for the very first time. Kindergarteners and their families need support to make this transition successful. The Transition to Kindergarten Strategy will provide children and their families the opportunity to become familiar with the school system and school campus, to learn classroom routines, be provided with opportunities for socialization and learn about family involvement opportunities.

Of the eight strategies the regional council is proposing in the SFY24-27 strategic plan, it is only the two strategies described above and the statewide evaluation strategy which do not align with the Board prioritized areas. However, the data and context provided supports the regional council's recommendations to prioritize the need to implement the two strategies to support the healthy development and transition to off-reservation school systems for young children in the Cocopah Tribe Region.

**SFY25 FUNDING PLAN UPDATE / CHANGE TABLE  
COCOPAH TRIBE 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)

***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.

Cocopah Head Start, which is the sole Quality First provider in the region has advanced from a Progressing Star to a Quality Plus center. This is a significant achievement for the center after being in the 2-star rating for several years. The center has overcome multiple challenges including staff turnover, unavailable transportation for in-person teaching and continued fear from families to send children back to the classroom after COVID-19. Currently the center is fully staffed, providing in-person education and at full capacity, serving approximately 35% of all children ages 3-5 in the region with high quality education.

***Challenges:***

A significant challenge in early childhood programs has been staff turnover and retention, which was exasperated after COVID-19. The Tribe has worked closely with the regional partnership council and FTF staff to implement new staff recruitment approaches. These approaches include promoting a “grow your own” model, which encourages Cocopah members to pursue higher education. Academic counselors from the local colleges come to the reservation to meet with Cocopah members to support them with enrollment, selecting an education track, financial aid, and scholarship opportunities. The model also includes meeting individually with those tribal members who are already qualified for vacancies and discussing in detail the job responsibilities, discussing the impact they have in serving their community and encouraging them to apply.

In SFY24, 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 Cocopah Tribe Region. This will result in a number of current Quality First participants potentially being disenrolled and placed on the Quality First waitlist. Discussions are in progress at the statewide level to determine potential supports so that participants funded through expansion will not need to be disenrolled and put back on a wait list.

**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 Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized)

**Successes:**

After several months of a staff vacancy, the home visitor position for the program has been filled by a Cocopah tribal member. Historically, the position had been staffed by non-tribal providers, who would leave after a few months on the job. This constant staff turnover hindered the success of the program at all levels because of the importance of establishing trusting relationships with the families being served. The new home visitor, who is a well-known and respected Cocopah member, has been positively accepted by the families and is in process of obtaining model certification training and recruiting families for enrollment.

Under the Family Support and Literacy Systems Change Strategy, the Cocopah Family Coalition was established as the main conduit to convene family support professionals to collaborate and coordinate their services to better serve families. Additionally, this strategy supports providers in the region by providing culturally appropriate training and with creating opportunities to reflect with reliable community elders and leaders on the particular challenges faced when serving Cocopah families. The coalition aims to improve services delivery to families, through improved provider support in the region that will result in the implementation of best practices and staff retention.

The coalition held its first meeting in July 2023 and has met monthly thereafter. Approximately 15-20 Cocopah family support providers attend each month. The initial focus of the coalition meetings has included:

- Building trust among family support providers, which has been accomplished through team building activities and learning the scope, requirements and details about each of the family support programs available to Cocopah families.
- Completion of a baseline survey to aid in identifying priorities and develop action plans.
- Developing Cultural Competency through a panel interview with Cocopah elders and leaders and the introduction of the Cocopah Resource Page developed in collaboration with First Things First Tribal Affairs and Cocopah Public Relations.

**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)
- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

**Changes:**

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Strategy for home visitors will be added to the funding plan beginning in SFY25 to support home visitors in the region to strengthen their knowledge and practices to build resilience and learn how to support the wellness of the children and families they serve. The Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council identified this strategy as additional support to home visitors in the successful implementation of the Home Visitation Strategy and to aid in the retention of program staff.

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
<b>Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation</b>		
Funding Level Changes:	\$0	\$6,120
Service Unit Change:	0	1 Home Visitation Program

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

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Nutrition and Physical Activity**

- Nutrition and Physical Activity

***Successes:***

The nutrition and physical activity grant program is fully staffed, and staff have been trained in the Eat Healthy, Be Active curriculum. The first workshop cohort started in Quarter 2 of SFY24 with 20 participants.

**DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM**

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Bridge from ECE to Kindergarten**

- Transition to Kindergarten

**Evaluation**

- Statewide Evaluation

***Successes:***

The Transition to Kindergarten Strategy has been implemented by Arizona State University PBS and in collaboration with the Somerton School District and the Cocopah Tribal Health and Wellness Center. Since Cocopah children must leave the reservation for the very first time when entering kindergarten, the program has been successful in providing future kindergarteners and their families the opportunity to become familiar with the K-12 school system and school campus, and to learn classroom routines, socialize with other families and learn about opportunities for family involvement in elementary school.