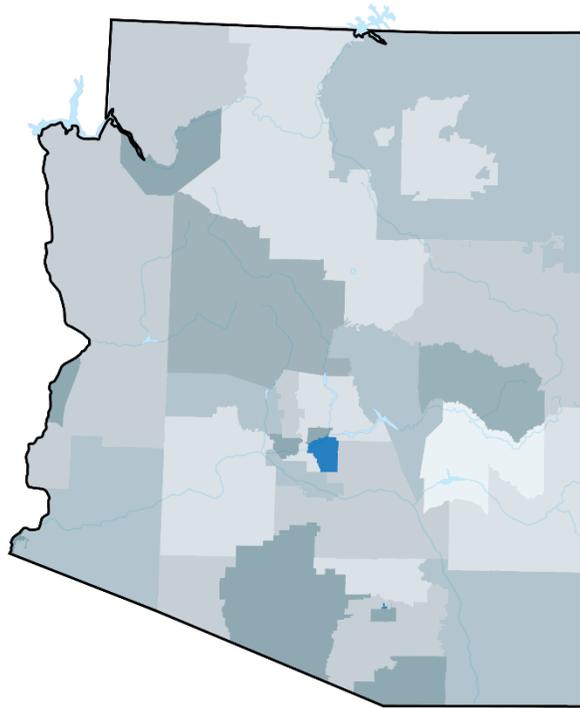




# FIRST THINGS FIRST

**Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council**  
Population birth through age 5: 68,744



## 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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### Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

**Shiloh Murillo**, chair, child care provider

**David Crummey**, vice chair, member of the business community

**Lisa Cartwright-Harris**, at-large representative

**Annapurna Ganesh**, early childhood educator

**Kimberly Hatt**, parent of a child age 5 years or younger

**Stephanie Montez**, public school administrator

**Mariko Whelan**, at-large representative

**Jeffrey Zetino**, representative of a philanthropic organization

open, representative of the faith community

open, health services provider

open, at-large representative

**Sheri Collins**, regional director, First Things First

**Jennifer Pike**, administrative specialist, First Things First

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

The First Things First Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council is committed to advancing equity. The Southeast Maricopa Regional Council's State Fiscal Years 2024-2027 Strategic Plan intentionally strives to put the most vulnerable children and families at its center, building on the existing resilience while recognizing the variety of factors that marginalize families from the early childhood system.

Using the needs and assets report and the family support community needs assessment, the regional council discussed how race, sex, gender identity, income, age, educational attainment, mental and physical ability, language and national origin impact access to and utilization of quality early childhood supports. The regional council used a Geographic Information System (GIS) to visualize this data and discussed differences in the needs of families based on where they lived in the region. Data and council members' experience highlighted that children living in West Mesa experience more marginalizing factors than other areas of the region.

To support the most vulnerable families, the Southeast Regional Council discussed at length how strategies could be designed to increase access to those most in need. For example, the regional council increased the number of family resource centers from two to five locations ensuring these centers are located in zip codes where families with the highest needs live. The regional council also explored how outreach efforts focus on reaching those most marginalized. As a result, the regional council continues to invest in home visitation while focusing outreach efforts in West Mesa to ensure families in that area are connected and know about these services. The Southeast Maricopa Regional Council considered new strategies that better support underserved communities. A new strategy in this strategic plan is Family, Friend and Neighbor Care. Some families cannot afford, or do not choose, to use formal child care for a variety of factors, including language barriers. Family, Friend and Neighbor Care will increase the quality of care for children in these settings. To address income barriers to access the formal child care system, the regional council continues to invest in Quality First Scholarships. These scholarships help families afford high-quality care for their children.

The Southeast Maricopa Regional Council's SFY24-27 Strategic Plan shows a commitment to equity that strengthens the early childhood system and its families in the Southeast Maricopa Region.

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

Allocations and Funding Sources	2024	2025	2026	2027
FY Allocation	\$11,311,839	\$11,311,839	\$11,310,565	\$11,310,565
Population Based Allocation	\$9,274,448	\$9,274,448	\$9,274,448	\$9,274,448
Discretionary Allocation	\$2,037,391	\$2,037,391	\$2,036,117	\$2,036,117
Carry Forward From Previous Year	\$3,655,218	\$4,521,361	\$3,931,249	\$2,269,660
<b>Total Regional Council Funds Available</b>	<b>\$14,967,057</b>	<b>\$15,833,200</b>	<b>\$15,241,814</b>	<b>\$13,580,225</b>
Strategies	Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted	Proposed Allotted
Quality First Increase		\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000
Quality First Academy	\$37,000	\$37,000	\$37,000	\$37,000
Quality First Coaching & Incentives	\$1,111,090	\$1,111,090	\$1,111,090	\$1,111,090
Quality First Scholarships	\$3,874,627	\$3,874,627	\$3,874,627	\$3,874,627
First Things First College Scholarships	\$216,000	\$216,000	\$216,000	\$216,000
Care Coordination Medical Home	\$250,000		-	-
Child Care Health Consultation	\$251,600	\$251,600	\$251,600	\$251,600
Children's Health Systems Change	\$74,999	\$97,666	\$97,666	\$97,666
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation	\$694,620	\$694,620	\$694,620	\$694,620
Oral Health	\$450,000	\$450,000	\$450,000	\$450,000
Family Resource Centers	\$1,650,000	\$1,650,000	\$1,650,000	\$1,650,000
Family Support & Literacy Systems Change	\$129,166	\$129,166	\$129,166	\$129,166
Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
Home Visitation	\$2,990,707	\$2,990,707	\$2,990,707	\$2,990,707
Home Visitation Coordinated Referral System	\$86,000	\$63,333	\$63,333	\$63,333
Partnering with Child Welfare Systems	\$16,666	\$16,666	\$16,666	\$16,666
Reach Out and Read	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000
Statewide Evaluation	\$469,679	\$469,679	\$469,679	\$469,679
Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Media	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$12,972,154</b>	<b>\$12,972,154</b>	<b>\$12,972,154</b>	<b>\$12,972,154</b>
<b>Total Unallotted/Unawarded/Unexpended:*</b>	<b>\$1,994,903</b>	<b>\$2,861,046</b>	<b>\$2,269,660</b>	<b>\$608,071</b>

Fiscal Year	2020	2024	2025	2026	2027
% to Board Priorities		90.12 %	91.87 %	91.87 %	91.87 %
% to Quality First**	10.74%	10.78 %	10.78 %	10.78 %	10.78 %
Fiscal Year	4 Year Average				
% to Board Priorities	91.24%				
% to Quality First**	12.23%				

\*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**  
**SOUTHEAST MARICOPA 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.

The Southeast Maricopa Region has 124 Quality First sites and a high concentration in Mesa with 47 sites. Fifty of the 124 sites are expansion sites funded with federal funds through the American Rescue Plan. Expansion sites participate in evaluation, rating and guidance toward quality improvement until June 30, 2024. These sites will return to the Quality First waitlist when federal funding ends. However, an additional \$250,000 was added to the SFY25 funding plan for Quality First in the Southeast Maricopa Region to absorb approximately eight Department of Economic Security/Division of Child Care (DES/DCC) expansion sites targeting zip codes with the highest need, including 85201, 85204, 85208 and 85209 in Mesa and 85233 in Gilbert.

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.

***Challenges:***

In SFY25, federal pandemic relief funding to support a statewide expansion of 413 programs to participate in Quality First will end, resulting 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.

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.

***Changes:***

An additional \$250,000 was added to the SFY25 funding plan for Quality First in the Southeast Maricopa Region to absorb approximately eight Department of Economic Security/Division of Child Care (DES/DCC) expansion sites targeting zip codes with the highest need, including 85201, 85204, 85208 and 85209 in Mesa and 85233 in Gilbert.

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
<b>Quality First Increase</b>		
Funding Level Changes:	\$0	\$250,000
<b>DESIRED OUTCOME: INFORMATION, SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES</b>		
<b><u>Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies</u></b>		
<b>Educating Families and Caregivers</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Home Visitation (prioritized)</li> <li>○ Family, Friend and Neighbor Care (prioritized)</li> </ul>		
<b>Navigating and Connecting Families to Resources</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Family Resource Centers (prioritized)</li> <li>○ Family Support and Literacy Systems Change (prioritized)</li> <li>○ Home Visitation Coordinated Referral System (prioritized)</li> </ul>		
<b>Language and Literacy</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reach Out and Read</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Successes:</b></p> <p>The Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council continues to place a strong emphasis on information, services and support to ensure all families know about resources, understand the importance of the early years and all children can access the support needed to be ready for kindergarten. Collaboration is among one of the biggest highlights in the region which increases the connection between families and support services.</p> <p>Below are two examples of community collaboration in two different strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care Strategy, a new SFY24 strategy, helps address the need to improve the quality of care, interactions and learning environments in license-exempt home-based settings. The current grant partner is working with one of the Southeast Maricopa regionally-funded family resource centers to provide services at the family resource center and to assist with recruitment of program participants.</li> <li>2. The Southeast Maricopa Home Visitation programs are working with the local libraries to assist in program participant recruitment. One program held two different socials at the Mesa Public Library during storytime. Families participated in storytime activities, explored the library and resources and learned about upcoming seasonal events. In quarter one, staff enrolled 50% of their families from the libraries.</li> </ol> <p>The Arizona Family Resource Network (AzFRN) convenes family resource centers from across the State in the effort to support their ongoing implementation. Program funding alongside regional dollars are being used to help support the work. There also is a new contractor that is facilitating the Network under the Family Support and Literacy Systems Change Strategy. Prevent Child Abuse Arizona is taking on this lead role in the facilitation and deliverables for the SFY24-25 contract to operate the AzFRN. Two new components within this contract include the implementation of the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support certification training as well as a Community of Practice for AzFRN members. The addition of these two new components will support resource center staff in their professional growth and development as well as support the effectiveness, quality and success of family resource centers.</p> <p>To increase referral collaboration opportunities, the Maricopa County cross-regional Home Visitation Coordinated Referral grant partner was added to the Unite Us/Contexture coordinated referral system platform – a closed-loop referral system supported by the Arizona Department of Health Services – Arizona Health Care Cost Containment</p>		

System (ADHS – AHCCCS). The platform allows referrals to be made securely from other organizations and for organizations to communicate regarding the referral status of program participants. So far, they have coordinated with health providers countywide through this system.

Home Visitation Coordinated Referral System staff conducted outreach in Maricopa County to recruit new home visitation programs to be a part of the coordinated referral system. This system is comprised of both FTF-funded and non FTF-funded programs. Three new home visitation programs are now part of the alliance group, and the grantee will continue outreach in the second quarter. These new home visitation programs invited the Home Visitation Coordinated Referral System team to present at staff meetings to learn more about the centralized intake process. Because of this proactive approach, they were ready to receive new referrals and reach out to the families as quickly as possible. This timely service delivery ultimately results in higher enrollment and engagement of families so they receive the benefits of the home visiting program.

**Challenges:**

Grant partners report recruiting staff and finding bilingual staff challenging due to ongoing pandemic issues and low wages. Grantees created recruitment strategies, like using different features on Indeed and ZipRecruiter to find suitable candidates. Grant partners are also providing incentives to employees.

**Changes:**

The Home Visitation Coordinated Referral System Strategy was reduced by \$22,667 due to the amount requested by the grantee in the RFGA response being lower than anticipated. The reduced amount is a portion of the funding for this multi-regional strategy including Northwest, Southwest, East and Southeast Maricopa as well as Phoenix North and Phoenix South regional councils. The total grant award for this strategy is \$380,000 or \$63,333 per region.

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
<b>Home Visitation Coordinated Referral System</b>		
Funding Level Changes:	\$86,000	\$63,333

**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)
- Child Care Health Consultation (prioritized)

**Successes:**

The Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program manager met with Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care program leadership to discuss initial preferences for regional implementation since Family, Friend and Neighbor Care is a new strategy for the Southeast Maricopa Region. By the end of quarter one, two new mental health consultants were identified to begin the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation program for the Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care program staff in the region.

**Challenges:**

Staffing for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation continues to be a challenge, but the grantee is actively working to hire more consultants to resume full implementation.

**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:**

Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council continues to invest in the Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness Strategy along with Media because a top priority is ensuring all families have information about resources and understand the importance of the early years. The First Things First branded materials help support community partners in the region who connect directly with families who have young children. The community engagement specialist placed some focus on the regional council's targeted, high-needs areas. For example, the community engagement coordinator made a new connection with the Mercy House in Mesa. The organization has wrap-around services for homeless or at-risk families. The new partnership provides an avenue to promote regional programs utilizing Educational Promotion and Brand Awareness materials.

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

### **Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

#### **Oral Health**

- Oral Health

#### **Health Resource Coordination**

- Children's Health Systems Change

### **Successes:**

In the past, expanding into Queen Creek has been a challenge since it was a more remote area and a community hard to engage due to lack of First Things First awareness. Recently, the Oral Health program staff worked at extending services into Queen Creek. They have found success in reaching the community by establishing a new charity dental partner (Atlas Pediatric Dental Care) to provide treatment and preventive care to children and adults without insurance. Also, the grantee held screening events in Queen Creek to raise awareness. At the Compassion Connect event, a one-day pop-up health clinic sponsored by local churches and medical organizations, staff provided free dental screenings for children and expectant mothers while finding opportunities to network and meet future potential partners.

The Oral Health grant partner also retained all of its current 25 dental providers that provided treatment and preventative care to children and adults without insurance.

Additional work within the Children's Health Systems Change Strategy includes the Early Childhood Nutrition Policy Team, and six regional Early Childhood Nutrition Teams. The Policy Team has created a food safety crosswalk that will target food safety practices and developmentally appropriate food introductions. This work will lead to resource creation for early care and education providers regarding developmental appropriateness of introducing foods, allergies, sensitivities, and supervision.

Each of the six regional areas within Maricopa County has created their own regional nutrition teams, composed of local partners and First Things First representatives working to establish goals and deliverables for their individual regional plans. Each plan will center around addressing food insecurity for families with young children. The six teams have been introduced to their new consultant and are meeting on a monthly basis to discuss collaborative efforts.

The Children's Health Systems Change Oral Health Strategy focuses on promoting medical-dental integration in health settings and oral health literacy, education and awareness for families with children birth to age 5. Representatives

and experts from the oral health field have convened and identified potential pilot efforts to promote medical-dental integration within health care / pediatric settings. First Things First has contracted with a consultant to lead a workgroup around these efforts and to partner with the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System and other health partners who could benefit from this integration work. A new oral health awareness campaign will be launched in Spring 2024 across Maricopa County that will feature an overall message to families on the importance of oral health for their child in the first few years of life and help connect families to local providers.

**Challenges:**

One historic challenge for the Oral Health program staff was securing future appointments with parents due to parents’ limited time at the end of visits, unanswered calls or low number of returned phone calls. However, the grant partner adjusted their program implementation to set expectations before their child’s screening begins, and they have seen more successful outcomes in follow-up appointments. To date, the Oral Health Promotora full-time position is vacant. Staff is also actively recruiting to fill the position.

**Changes:**

The regional council increased funding in SFY25 in the amount of \$22,667 to the Children’s Health Systems Change Strategy to expand on the Medical-Dental Integration pilot project(s) and awareness campaign.

**Health Resource Coordination**

- Children’s Health Systems Change

Changes:	SFY24	SFY25
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**Children’s Health System Change**

Funding Level Changes:	\$74,999	\$97,666
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**DESIRED OUTCOME: COORDINATED, INTEGRATED, AND COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM**

**Strategy Areas and Funded Strategies**

**Child Welfare Prevention /Intervention**

- Partnering with Child Welfare Systems Change

**Evaluation**

- Statewide Evaluation

**Successes:**

The grant partner, Maricopa County Juvenile Court, continues to train clinicians in Child-Parent Psychotherapy and will be starting a second cohort with a goal of training a total of 50-60 clinicians. The clinical director that oversees this strategy has also been working to organize a Circle of Security training for community providers that are working with families of infants and toddlers. This is the largest group of children to enter, remain and/or re-enter the child welfare system. Additionally, a group including the clinical director, juvenile court administrator and three judicial officers attended the Zero to Three annual cross-site meetings to align the Maricopa County Superior Court’s Cradles to Crayons Program approach with the Zero to Three Safe Babies approach and ways the judicial officers could apply the approach from the bench in their court hearings. One idea that has been acted upon is to develop a “court room training” where a judicial officer would invite all attorneys and staff who regularly appear in their courtroom to learn about the Cradles to Crayons approach and the services available to families. Scheduling is underway for Circle of Security trainings for 20 clinicians and 10 direct service providers from community child serving agencies. The clinical director continues to be involved in collaborative learning environments and community coalitions to address issues pertaining to families of young children including brainstorming possible causes for initial parental resistance in participating in services which can lead to noncompliance with case plans and lower reunification rates.