

Arizona Statistics:

State Population	6,626,624
<i>(2013 estimate)</i>	
0-5 population	6.7%
<i>(2012 estimate)</i>	
Poverty level	17.2%
<i>(2012 estimate)</i>	
# of local collaboratives	31
State/Local Collaborative Total Funding:	\$130 million
<i>(estimated for FY 2014)</i>	

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Arizona's First Things First Initiative

In November 2006, Arizona voters passed [Proposition 203](#) by a landslide, - a citizen's initiative that funds quality early childhood development and health through an \$.80 per pack tax on tobacco products. Voters approved that these funds go directly to support the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board (otherwise known as First Things First).

Designed to be a voluntary early childhood system, Proposition 203 included the following principles:

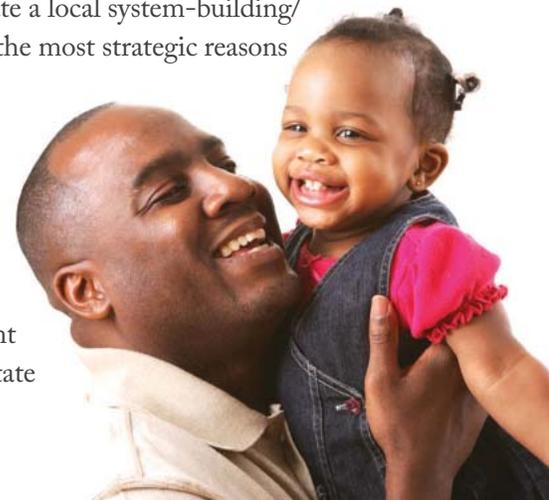
- **Local Control:** Local community leaders must come together to plan and administer what works best in their community.
- **Flexibility/Diversity:** The initiative must be flexible enough to accommodate the unique demographics of the state.
- **Transparent and Accountable:** The early childhood systems work must be understandable and held accountable for outcomes.

With its passage, Proposition 203 created a new state level board known as the Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board. The Board subsequently adopted the name First Things First (FTF) as an uplifting reference to the voter-enacted initiative and to exemplify the importance of early childhood and its vision that "All Arizona's children are ready to succeed in school and in life."

The funding from Proposition 203, which averages approximately \$130 million per year, supports both the work of FTF at the state level and the 31 regional partnership councils.

In designing the ballot initiative and the system they wanted to create, Arizona leaders thought it imperative to incorporate a local system-building/local decision-making approach. Among the most strategic reasons for this included the following:

- Arizona is a state with a strong commitment to "local control." It was essential that First Things First reflect that commitment.
- Arizona is extremely diverse demographically. While it was important to have a statewide systems approach, state





- Our partners, regional council members, staff and board reflect the diversity of our state and are our most valuable resources. We must develop and maintain a culture of strong collaboration and cooperation both internally and externally to best provide essential family supports while providing increased opportunities for young children to enjoy success in school and life.

State-Level Governance

Proposition 203 established a state agency to be led by the Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board. (For brevity, the board and state agency hereafter will be referred to as FTF.) There is no 501(c)(3) entity. All funds generated by Proposition 203 are administered by the state agency which, in turn, must follow all applicable funding regulations. There has been some discussion about creating a 501c3 for fundraising purposes but, to date, that has not occurred.

Under the statute, the FTF state board is comprised of nine members chosen to represent the state’s diversity. In addition, the Directors of the Department of Economic Security and Department of Health Services and the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or their chosen designees, serve as non-voting *ex officio* members. The appointees include men and women, Democrats, Republicans and an Independent from six counties. Each member brings experience in early education, K-12 education, health care, juvenile justice, higher education, philanthropy, business and/or Tribal government. All members are appointed by the governor and confirmed by the State Senate.

The state board’s central focus is to determine policies and approve funding to build on or improve the programs, services, and resources already available in the state to support young children and their families. The state board created an early childhood system framework, establishing goals and a set of school readiness indicators. The regional partnership councils - comprised of parents, educators, community leaders, development experts and health care professionals - would decide the best strategies for using FTF resources at the local level to support the needs of young children in their communities.

leaders also recognized that what worked in one region might not work in another.

- First Things First is about more than “pushing funding and programs” from Phoenix (the state capital) to local communities. It is about a cultural shift and local buy-in. While the regional model adds a layer of complexity, it also adds an essential layer of engagement. As noted by former FTF Executive Director Rhian Evans Allvin, “This paid off in spades when we were referred back to the ballot” (as a result of legislative action threatening to take FTF resources).

Rhian Evans Allvin, one of the founding leaders of the Proposition 203 initiative and, later, Executive Director of First Things First, noted, “In general, the art and science of the work is navigating through what should be the statewide system and what should be left up to the local control of regions.”

FTF’s core values include the following:

- We must use culturally responsive practices. Every person we work with and every person working at First Things First has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
- We must maximize benefits to children and their families through continuous improvement and innovation.
- We must demonstrate that our work truly improves the lives of children and their families, and promotes support for investing in early childhood development and health.
- We must be strong stewards of public and private funds and demonstrate transparency and sound financial management.

“ In general, the art and science of the work is navigating through what should be the statewide system and what should be left up to the local control of regions.”

State-Level Funding

Proposition 203 created a tax on tobacco products that is used to fund FTF. The annual support from this tax is approximately \$130 million, with 90% of the funds directly supporting programs for young children and families and 10% dedicated to administration of FTF. Arizona communities, through the regional partnership councils, receive 81 cents of every dollar generated for FTF. The amount of money allocated to each regional council is based on the number of children birth through age five in its community - with extra consideration given for children living in poverty.

As of 2013, five years since the launch of FTF, \$630 million has been allocated as a result of the taxpayer approved tobacco tax. Listed below is a breakdown of how these funds have been used:

Community Awareness	3%
Coordination.....	1%
Evaluation	5%
Family Support.....	27%
Health	14%
Professional Development	6%
Quality and Access	44%

While the vast majority of funding under FTF goes directly to regional allocations, Proposition 203 also allows for funding to support statewide initiatives. From FY 2009 - 2012, \$44.7 million was allotted to statewide programs and services for children and families. These will be discussed later in this profile.

While the overall funding being generated under Proposition 203 is significant, it only averages \$225 per child (ages 0-5) in Arizona. Given the cuts the state legislature has made to early childhood funding in recent years, it is not nearly enough for all that must be accomplished. What is significant about this funding is that it is more flexible than funding most states have available to dedicate to early childhood. Moreover, few states have this level of dedicated funding to support early childhood programs and system building at the discretion of local communities.

State-Level Staffing

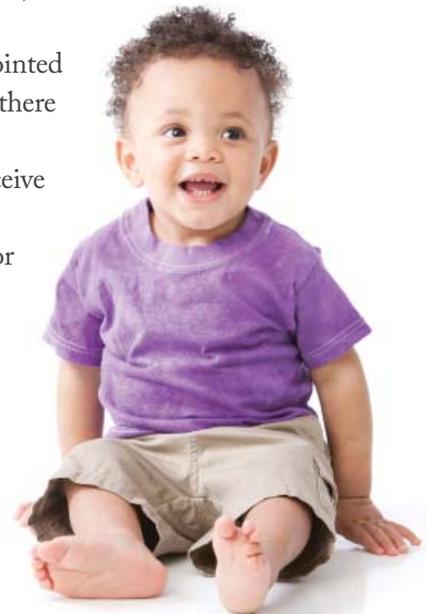
FTF has a staff of approximately 150 people that work at the state level but whose focus includes both state and local activities. Staff responsibilities range from program and evaluation to finance and administration to communications, parent awareness and community outreach. Approximately 60 members of the FTF staff are responsible for support of the regional partnership councils. There also is staff focused at the state level on early learning, health and family support. Some staff members also administer the state-level initiatives.

Advocacy

FTF's communication strategy centers on community outreach and engagement - getting the public and community leaders engaged in the importance of building a system to support the health and development of young children. FTF's communication strategic plan defines the target audiences for community outreach and engagement. Regional council members primarily work to engage their legislators through participation in site visits to programs funded by FTF, getting them to see the importance of early childhood investment and the results occurring in their own legislative districts. An effort is also currently underway through a partnership with BUILD Arizona to create stronger business engagement in early childhood policy.

Local Collaborative Overview

FTF was approved by the voters in November 2006 and was launched in January 2007 when the tobacco tax approved by Proposition 203 went into effect. The regional partnership councils, under the timeline established by Proposition 203, were appointed in April 2008. As of 2013, there are 31 regional partnership councils. These councils receive an annual allocation from FTF and are responsible for making recommendations to the state board about how these resources will be used to support a comprehensive early childhood system for their region.



Prior to appointing the regional councils, the state board had to determine regional boundaries as required under the statute. Much consideration was given to the best strategy for determining local boundaries, with FTF staff and board members considering a range of existing options including school district boundaries, county lines, child population, etc. Arizona Tribes determine if they want their tribal lands designated as a separate region or as part of a larger region. In the end, the state board established 21 regional boundaries. Ten tribes decided to establish their tribal lands as separate regions and, thus, FTF established ten tribal regional partnership councils. In December 2007, a total of thirty-one regional councils were created with regional board members appointed for each regional partnership council in April 2008.

Geographic boundaries for the regional councils are reviewed every two years. In the first two reviews since the regional councils were established, there have been only limited changes. In the most recent review of the regional boundaries, three regions were consolidated, thereby reducing the number of councils to twenty-eight. This will go into effect in 2015. Under statute, during the bi-annual regional review, the designated tribes in Arizona also have the option of determining whether their tribal lands will remain as separate regions or become part of a region. As of 2013, no changes have been made to the tribal regional councils.

Local-Level Governance

Each Regional partnership council is comprised of eleven volunteer positions under Proposition 203. Eight of the seats must be filled with a parent of a child who is five years old or younger, a child care provider, an early education provider, a health representative, a school administrator, a member of the faith-based community, a business representative and someone involved in

philanthropy. There are three at-large seats with no specific background required although, if a tribal nation is part of a region, a public official or employee of the tribe will fill one of the council seats.



Regional council members are appointed through an application process that can be downloaded from the [FTF website](#). Information on how to apply can be found by clicking on the following:

- [Regional Council Member Job Description](#)
- [Regional Council Member Application Guide](#)
- [Regional Council Member Recruitment Flyer](#)

The decision was made by the state board to have local council members apply for their positions because the voters had approved FTF and the philosophy was that it is important for Arizonans to understand that they have the opportunity to serve on a regional council and make an impact on the lives of young children and families. Positions are designated to be filled by individuals that represent specific “categories,” as previously noted. The challenge sometimes is in filling these specific categories. For instance, one regional council had a vacancy for nearly three years because it could not fill the “early education provider” slot. Under the definition, it needed to be someone who provides early childhood professional development instruction, including but not limited to community college and university level instructors or administrators and other professional development organizations. The position was finally filled but some local council members have suggested that the “categorization” of regional board members should be more flexible in order to avoid such problems in the future.

Once community members apply to serve on the regional council, they go before an interview panel that is comprised of regional council members and a community member. The interview panel then makes a recommendation, which is submitted to the state board for final approval.

The role of the Regional Councils is to:

- conduct a regional assessment of assets and gaps in early childhood programs and services;
- formulate a regional funding plan to address high priority needs;
- solicit grant proposals from potential providers of needed services;
- review grant proposals and recommend grant awards to the state board;
- implement or monitor funded programs;
- increase parents’ and providers’ knowledge of early childhood development and health programs; and
- solicit private funds to enhance additional programming.

The expectation of Arizona leaders in designing Proposition 203 to create regional partnership councils is that they would play a central role in promoting a common vision of early childhood across the state and would become a strong voice for children in their regions. They also anticipated that they would be instrumental in identifying where the current early childhood development efforts need to be better integrated and coordinated and that they would help link state and local government, communities and families in the development of a comprehensive early childhood system. While Arizona is still early in its history in the development of FTF, it is clear that its vision is becoming a reality through the creation of these strong regional partnership councils.

Local-Level Staffing

The regional councils have no hiring authority. All regional staff is hired by and works directly for FTF at the state level. When there is turnover, regional council members may be asked to serve on the interview panel during the hiring process.

Most regional councils have a full time staff member and some administrative support. With the exception of the three Phoenix area regional councils whose staffs work in the FTF offices, regional staff members have offices in their regions. Their role is to support the regional council members, lead the collaborative efforts across their regions, serve as a liaison between the state and local boards, bring information and resources to the region, organize regional council events and meetings, speak at community meetings and events, administer the grantmaking process, etc.

Numerous regional councils have also chosen to fund a position called “Parent Awareness and Community Outreach Coordinator.” Community outreach is a component of FTF’s communications plan; to implement this work, many regional councils have funded an outreach position. This position focuses on increasing the awareness and importance of early childhood. The outreach staff targets various populations, conducting presentations, attending events and providing various trainings. They enlist champions who can then be called upon to carry out various efforts to promote awareness of the importance of early childhood.

Local Funding

Regional funding allocations from FY 2010-2012 ranged from \$245,147 for the Cocopah Tribe region to over \$45 million for the Central Phoenix region. Allocation of resources to each region is based upon the following formula:

- Thirty-five percent of program funds must be allocated based on population of children aged five and younger;
 - Forty percent of program funds must be allocated based on the population of children five and younger whose family income does not exceed 100 percent of federal poverty guidelines; and,
 - Twenty-five percent of program funds may be used by the state board to fund regional programs without consideration of regional population.
- These funds are to be used solely to support implementation of each regional council’s strategic plan. All administrative costs related to the regional council are funded separately by FTF at the state level. Each regional council funding allocation also includes support of the overall FTF evaluation.



Numerous regional councils have also chosen to fund a position called “Parent Awareness and Community Outreach Coordinator.”

Funding allocations can vary from year to year for regional councils. The allocations are set by population and poverty using census data so the allocation can change if the population changes. The state board also has discretionary dollars that it allocates. The board has followed one policy in the allocation of those resources to date, resulting in greater continuity in the regional allocations. The state board does have the ability to change its use of these funds to be more targeted and this could, at some point, impact the current level of regional allocations.

Local Grantmaking

Regional councils are asked to put together a three-year strategic plan and to then use this plan to allocate resources within their communities towards the goal of a comprehensive early childhood system. Using this plan, requests for grant applications (RFGA) are posted annually to the FTF website and service providers submit applications and budgets in response. These applications are evaluated in a competitive process that



Technical Assistance and Support to Regional Councils

FTF's technical assistance supporting regional councils includes monthly "in service" professional development opportunities for all regional directors. These opportunities cover key issues and topics that range from statutory requirements related to FTF funding to assisting regional councils on systems building approaches versus simply funding individual programs. Other topics include program strategy development and implementation, understanding effective practices and public outreach and engagement. FTF also offers opportunities to regional directors to develop strong leadership, facilitation and collaboration skills to better support their regional council efforts.

FTF provides an orientation for new regional council members. It holds regular webinars for regional council members to share information on effective practice topics or other issues, such as governance of a regional council. FTF staff also creates opportunities to get input and feedback from regional council members on key state-level issues including, most recently, FTF's evaluation plan. An annual summit is also held, to which both regional council members and grantees are invited.

Most recently, FTF leaders have undertaken an assessment of what leadership and learning should look like and what should be available to a regional council. State leaders want to assure consistency in offerings and support for regional council progress.

One of the key technical assistance strategies developed by the state level staff is the [FTF Strategy Toolkit](#) that includes information on over 70 strategies and is organized into sections reflecting the goal areas of First Things First. Each strategy section contains information pertinent to strategy implementation, including research evidence, the FTF Standard of Practice, and costs or considerations. This toolkit describes strategies currently implemented through regional and state program funding and partnerships and is broken down into the following categories:

- Quality and Access
- Health
- Professional Development
- Family Support
- Evaluation
- Coordination
- Community Awareness

includes regional council and community members and state staff. The regional partnership council then makes recommendations to the state board about which applicants should be funded out of their regional allocation. Successful applicants are awarded grants based on their ability to provide the required services and achieve the desired outcomes for young children as well as their ability to provide the comprehensive financial accountability required by FTF. Each grantee must then submit quarterly progress reports that outline the number of children and families served as well as narrative information about the impact of those services. Funded programs range from those that engage in home visiting to parent education programs, health and developmental screening programs, etc. Regional councils may also fund statewide strategies such as participation of child care programs in the state's QRIS, T.E.A.C.H.® scholarships to local child care providers, and salary supplement programs for child care teachers that meet specific education levels.

The challenge of housing FTF within a state agency can be seen in the local grantmaking contracting process. Regional councils must start their grantmaking process six months in advance in order to assure that contracts are in place by the start of the new fiscal year. This is understandable given how many contracts must be administered across 31 regional councils at the start of each fiscal year. FTF is trying to find strategies that might alleviate some of this work and/or reduce the lead time necessary to complete each contract.

A regional council member was effusive in her praise of FTF staff and board members and the support they provide to her council. She said that they were extremely responsive in meeting with them on a variety of issues and providing ongoing technical assistance where needed. She was impressed by their willingness to devote so much time to her council. State staff and board members regularly come to meet with her regional council, providing advice and responding to their questions and concerns.

“ A regional council member said she was impressed by FTF staff’s willingness to devote so much time to her council.

Regional council members find FTF staff to be extremely responsive to their requests and appreciate the effort they make to come to council meetings-- it is a three-hour drive to Nogales. This is a region that can feel ignored by the state because it is so far from Phoenix, but that is not the case with FTF. Staff members frequently make the drive, participate in meetings and provide extensive support to the regional council’s work. The same is true of state board members. This has been extremely important in cementing a positive relationship between the state and local boards.

Regional Council “Snapshot” - Santa Cruz County Regional Partnership Board

Santa Cruz County is in a rural and remote corner of Arizona. It has the highest percentage of teen-aged mothers in the state, high poverty and high unemployment. The regional council has an office in Nogales, Arizona and is supported by a full-time director, as well as support staff. The regional council has eleven members, as designated by the FTF state board. They hold a regular monthly meeting but may also meet more than once in a month during their allocations process. The council also has numerous committees that meet in between monthly meetings. These include an events committee, grant review committee and board recruitment/selection committee. Members of the regional council also may serve on state board committees. While this is extra work in an already busy schedule for individual members of the regional council, it is important to help inform state-level decision making.

Santa Cruz County leaders are committed to the work of First Things First. For example, the local school superintendent comes to many of the meetings and activities and is very supportive of the direction being taken. Others are equally committed. Resources are coming into the county to do things that have never been possible and this is exciting.

Among the projects regional councils fund are child care program participation in the QIRS to improve child care quality; three new family resource centers that are the hub for many programs and support to families; a home visitation program; and an oral health program.

The remoteness of Santa Cruz County can also present a challenge when filling local regional council positions. For example, it took three years to fill the early educator position. That position finally was filled, but the time it took to do so speaks to the lack of capacity in the county and the need to further develop the infrastructure to support its local systems building efforts.

Statewide Initiatives Funded at the State and Local Levels

As previously noted, in addition to the allocation of resources at the local level, funding has been set aside at the state level to build key components of the early childhood system that can then be accessed by the regional councils through their funding allocations. Early in the strategic planning process for FTF, the state board agreed to fund the following state-level initiatives:

- **Quality Improvement and Rating System (QIRS)** - This initiative establishes a quality improvement incentive for child care centers and certified child care homes and a rating system for parents to be able to evaluate the quality and range of options for child care settings. QIRS standards are built on the foundation of child care licensing requirements. Additional quality improvements are then mandated beyond what is required in licensing.
- **Child Care Health Consultation** -The FTF state board established funding for child care health consultation as a component of the QIRS.
- **Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.®)** - Under the early strategic plan for

FTF, funding was set aside for T.E.A.C.H.[®] as the comprehensive statewide scholarship system to improve quality in the early care and education professional workforce.

- **Statewide distribution of Parent Kit** - The purpose of the Parent Kit is to help parents understand that healthy parenting practices during early childhood are critical for children's positive development and to provide information and resources that prepare parents to make informed decisions about the care and development of their young children. All parents of newborns in Arizona now receive this parent kit, which is available in both English and Spanish.
- **Public Awareness** - State FTF leaders emphasized early on the need to build greater public awareness of, and support for, investing in early childhood as foundational for improved outcomes for children and families. Funds are dedicated at the state level to support greater public awareness. Regional councils may then choose to fund public awareness coordinators as part of their regional allocation plan.

The infrastructure for these initiatives was developed and funded at the state level. Each regional council is then able to fund the statewide initiatives to support their local early childhood system building efforts. For example, they would use a portion of their FTF allocation to fund participation of child care programs in the QIRS or a specified number of teacher scholarships under T.E.A.C.H.[®]

Performance Measurement

Although First Things First services have been available for only a few years, their impact has been tremendous. In FY 2012 alone:

- 5,806 children were able to access or remain in a child care/early education program.
- 3,166 more children were able to access preschool programs in both school and child care settings.
- 61,126 parents of newborns received an Arizona Parent Kit before they left the hospital. The kit includes critical information about healthy parenting practices and how to support their baby's early learning.
- More than 41,500 Arizona children received improved childcare from better-trained teachers in more nurturing, literature-rich learning environments through Quality First!



- 8,701 families received home-based services to strengthen their families and support their child's early learning and health.
- More than 26,390 fluoride varnishes were applied to the teeth of young children, improving oral health and well-being.
- 466,453 food boxes were distributed to help families with children aged five or younger have access to nutritious food.

These "output" statistics are important for any early childhood initiative to report, as it takes a long time to show real change in the system or actual child outcomes. For the long term though, state leaders wanted to put in place a system of evaluation and benchmarking that would allow them to measure progress under FTF and to better understand what was working and what was not. To that end, they established the FTF Early Childhood Research and Evaluation National Advisory Panel to provide recommendations to the state board on developing a comprehensive statewide and regional research and evaluation framework. The twelve nationally recognized panel members' expertise included: evaluation design and methodology; Native American early education; placed-based systems level evaluation; school readiness; state prekindergarten evaluation; special needs; and health. Additionally, Arizona early education experts participated to ensure that a unique state-specific perspective was included. The panel engaged in extensive discussion and worked collaboratively with FTF staff to define an overarching, long-term view of evaluation. Just as there is no single approach across FTF programming, the panel recommended that FTF evaluations should constitute a family of studies that reflects this same complexity and flexibility. The panel also developed a set of recommendations for both a short- and long-term

agenda to study the processes and intended outcomes of FTF, with a focus on evaluation efforts in high priority programming areas.

Arizona also has a set of 10 school readiness indicators as part of the statewide strategic framework and FTF has established state benchmarks for each indicator. Regional Partnership Councils must target at least three school readiness indicators and set regional benchmarks. By 2020, the goal is to look at how each region is meeting the benchmarks. These target benchmarks are not tied to local funding allocations; there are no performance measures that councils are specifically required to meet.

Pros and Cons of the Arizona State/Local Model

Pros

- There is tremendous benefit in working from both the state and local level in developing the early childhood system. The state has been able to put an infrastructure in place that allows it to create state-level system components that communities can then access.
- The partnerships developing at the local level as a result of the system being created in Arizona will be a major component of the state's ultimate success in building a strong and effective early childhood system. While it takes time to build and strengthen those partnerships, the return on investment is enormous. Communities are now beginning to talk less about how to fund programs and more about what the community needs are, how to address those needs and strengthen services and, lastly, the role of funding.

Cons

- The state legislature tends to see the FTF funding as the way to pay for its early childhood state obligations. Legislators cut nearly the entire child care subsidy budget, expecting that FTF would cover those costs with its funding. They also eliminated funding for the state's pre-K program. How can programs be scaled up when the fabric of the early childhood system is ripped apart by such significant funding cuts?



Regional Partnership Councils must target at least three school readiness indicators and set regional benchmarks.

- There are constant tensions related to state vs. local control and what is meant by “state” and “local.” The goal, of course, is to maintain a balance, but the perception of what that balance should be varies.
 - It takes a *long* time to build infrastructure and move a system forward. FTF gave itself a year in the timeline under Proposition 203 to get things up and running; that was not nearly enough time. Decisions had to be made and resources expended without a full sense of the statewide strategic direction and how regional councils could align in that direction. This resulted in a number of directional changes later and likely created frustration among the regional council members. Moreover, the state did not even have the infrastructure set up to fully support the regional councils in the early days of development.
- Because the state agency is embedded in government, there are bureaucracy barriers to efficient allocation and use of FTF funding. The request for proposal and contracting process may take nearly six months once a regional council determines how it will use its annual allocation. The state and local boards are not able to be as quickly responsive as they would like because they must go through the state process to make changes in the use of their resources.
- While there are benefits to having a state-administered system with local decision-making, it also means that each regional council must use the state systems for contracting, data and financial reporting. Such a state-administered system has to be set up as “one size fits all” in terms of the business systems of the process. Regional councils must find a way to make their needs fit within the realities of the state reporting and contracting systems.



Major Accomplishments

- In just over five years, 31 regional councils have been established. More than 300 individuals at the community level are focused on how to improve and support the health and development of young children.
- In just over five years, Arizona has created a state infrastructure to support the development of the state's early childhood system. This has included not only support to communities in their local decision-making process but also the creation of key components of the system for communities to access, including initiatives such as the quality improvement and rating system and T.E.A.C.H.®
- Despite the excessive state funding cuts to early childhood services in recent years, FTF has been able to at least maintain the system and minimize the harm to children and families.
- Partnerships are being established and are working at the local level in a way that would not have been possible prior to the development of FTF, ranging from partnerships with the health system to coordination among various family support agencies, to stronger connections with school districts.
- The partnerships with the tribes and the service delivery that is now possible in the tribal regions is significant.



Despite the excessive state funding cuts to early childhood services, FTF has been able to at least maintain the system and minimize the harm to children and families.

- ability to blend and braid funding to support the early childhood system. Having flexible funding that can be the bridge between multiple funding streams and that can fill gaps in services is essential to building an effective and efficient early childhood system.
- States must come at this work from a systems approach, not one that asks what programs should be funded.
- Creation and funding of an infrastructure at the local level to support local decision making and implementation of programs is essential. The kind of changes that are needed do not occur without this infrastructure.

Key Components to Success at the Local Level

- It is essential that the state mandate representation of the community on local boards, including participation by schools, business, the faith community, etc. All voices must be at the table. This might not happen if diverse representation were not mandated.
- A local council will not succeed without strong investment and engagement by local council members.
- Staffing of a local council is essential. Local board members are volunteers with already busy schedules. The kind of change necessary requires adequate staffing to support the work of the regional council.
- Flexible funding is needed to be the bridge between other funding streams and the creation of new programs in a local community with gaps. If the community is simply given funds to implement a specific type of program mandated by the state, it will not be nearly as effective as a program in which community members have identified a need and identified the right strategy or program to meet that need.
- To make the change that is necessary, local council members should be people that are good at collaborating and well-positioned in their communities.

Key Components to Success at the State Level

- Having a statewide strategic framework from which to make decisions is critical. You need a roadmap from which to work at the state and regional level. Without that roadmap, individually funded disconnected programs exist without moving a state forward towards a system that can result in real change and positive child outcomes.
- Partnerships with state agencies are critical. While FTF has resources, it cannot build the early childhood system or make the changes that are needed without strong partnerships across state agencies.
- A dedicated revenue stream with allocation flexibility at the state and local level is essential. Federal funding streams bring numerous requirements and, generally, narrow foci for how they can be used. This limits the





Lessons Learned

- Do not underestimate the importance of bringing regional councils together for professional development, particularly on issues related to the development and running of an effective governing board, principles of governance, etc. The governance structure is important and not everyone you appoint will have the same level of experience. Provide professional development to your local board members.
- Developing communication systems between the state and regional boards is essential. Work out those practices early in the development of local councils. It can forestall potential problems and tensions.
- Building relationships between the state and local boards should be a high priority. Local board members place a high priority on visits by state board members to their regions as visits help them see that decision-making should not be a “one size fits all” process.
- Creation of a statewide framework for the development of the early childhood system is essential. Not everyone understands what it means to build a system. It is important to take this abstract vision of a system, make it more concrete and involve all partners in the development of a plan that is transformative.
- Make sure adequate data is available to use in decision-making and, early in the process, think about what data you will want in the future and what is needed to get that data. At the same time, have realistic expectations about what is possible to access in terms of data and how it can be used.
- Have realistic expectations when you are getting started. It takes time to develop the infrastructure. Rural communities, for example, may be starting from scratch in building the infrastructure to support a new program and that takes time.

- The change that is necessary requires support at the local level. Provide funding to staff the local-level work. Local board members are volunteers with busy schedules. While they are committed, their time is limited. Staffing is essential.
- Invest the time to build the infrastructure and capacity building - at the state and local level.
- Study the work in other states and learn from their strengths and weaknesses and lessons learned. There is no need to start this work from scratch when there is so much to be learned from those who are already engaged in similar efforts in other states.
- “Visibility” by state level staff and board members at the local level is very important. State leaders need to see the faces and experience the needs and realities of each region of the state. Local board members and staff will see this as a true collaborative partnership if they see that state board members and staff are making an effort to understand the work in their regions. This will reduce inevitable state and local tensions and is an important part of the communication process.

Interviews

Michelle Katona, *Chief Regional Officer*, Arizona Early Childhood Development and Health Board

Karen Woodford, *Vice Chair*, Santa Cruz County Regional Partnership Council

Resources

- [First Things First website](#)
- [Proposition 203](#)
- [First Things First 2013 Annual Report](#)
- [First Things First Strategic Plan \(June 2012\)](#)
- [FTF Strategy Toolkit](#)
- [Regional Council Member Job Description](#)
- [Regional Council Member Application Guide](#)
- [Regional Council Member Recruitment Flyer](#)