

## **Attachment #7**

First Things First External Evaluation Consortium  
*Collaborating with Arizona Native Nations*  
Fall 2009

**Background:** In November 2006, Arizona voters approved a proposition that led to the creation of First Things First, a statewide initiative to improve the lives of Arizona's youngest citizens. First Things First draws on revenue from taxing tobacco products. As the web site puts it, "First Things First focuses on programs and services that provide children with the best opportunities for school and life success. Funding decisions are based upon a robust process of review to ensure programs are supported by research, value the family and use approaches considered to be best practice. First Things First uses its funds to build, expand and sustain the early childhood development and health system. All children and families benefit."

Three key principles were included in the proposition. First, there must be local control for decisions made about using resources. Second, the program must have enough flexibility to serve the unique needs in our state. Third, all programs must be transparent and accountable.

Recognizing the importance of this third principle, the First Things First Board awarded an evaluation contract to a consortium of Arizona universities in 2009. The evaluation project is designed to examine the impact of this initiative across the state; it does not evaluate any specific project and it does not evaluate any tribal activity or practice. Instead, the evaluation will help demonstrate accountability: it will address the question of the impact of spending significant public funds on efforts to improve the lives of young children across the state.

### **Why should tribes participate in the evaluation?**

The evaluation project will answer a statewide question: what impact is there on the lives of young children when the state supports new and expanded initiatives in early childhood care, health and education? The evaluation team is charged with including Arizonans from all groups to ensure that the answer to that question does not leave out any of Arizona's children. Thus, tribal participation is important so that it is clear to funders and others whether all children benefit, and we don't want to exclude any groups. The principle on accountability means that continuing to have funds available may depend on showing that the program makes a difference. If it is not making a difference, we want to understand that as well.

### **What does it mean to participate in the evaluation?**

The consortium is examining the impact of First Things First through three basic approaches:

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1. The long-term impact of the programs will be examined by understanding how children's increasing opportunities change their well-being over time. By looking at a group of children from across the state at several points in their development (9 months, 3 years, kindergarten, third grade), we hope to learn whether or not children with access to more services have more growth. To do this, children will participate in an engaging set of activities with a trained community member helping. In addition, teachers and family members will answer some questions about the children.
2. Understanding of the general well-being of Arizona's children will be created through an annual description of readiness for some children entering kindergarten. Again, children will join with trained individuals to perform a set of activities that help us understand their readiness for success in school.
3. To understand projects in more detail, a smaller group of families and community members will participate in interviews to describe how First Things First is changing (or not changing) the opportunities for young children.

### **What will the evaluation activities be like?**

There are several commonly-used ways of understanding children's development. We have selected tools that have been shown effective with Native American children. The tools involve some observation of children by trained assessors, some activities on the part of children (such as playing with blocks), and some questions for teachers and parents. More information is available in the section on evaluation instruments from the FTTEE training manual (attached).

### **What is the timeline?**

The annual description of well-being based on the sample of kindergarten students begins in September and October of 2009. The community and family interviews begin in October of 2009. The long-term evaluation begins in the spring of 2010 with infants and preschool children and in the fall of 2010 with the kindergarten cohort.

### **Do all children participate in evaluation activities?**

No. In any given community, only a small percentage of the children will be involved. In order to get an accurate understanding of the impact of First Things First, children from various regions, programs and demographic groups will be evaluated by the team.

### **Who will be gathering information?**

The evaluation project will hire and train community members to gather information whenever possible. When such community members are not available, trained personnel from the project will work with community members to make sure that gathering information respects the unique nature of each community. Training will include information on confidentiality and working with children.

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### **How are the identities of children protected?**

No children are identified in the evaluation project. That is, we will report that a certain number of children from each demographic group participated, but no names or tribal affiliations will be given for any particular children. Specific schools and communities will not be identified in any reporting.

### **How does the tribe maintain ownership of information collected?**

In accordance with the First Things First Tribal Consultation Policy (see statement on data from First Things First Tribal Consultation Policy below\*), the First Things First External Evaluation team recognizes tribal ownership of data. The First Things First External Evaluation team will protect the confidentiality of individual data. Additionally, if any report or publication provides analysis of information specific to a tribe, the First Things First External Evaluation team will provide copies of the document before publication or dissemination.

\*“First Things First recognizes Arizona Tribes as sovereign nations which have the right to regulate research and data on their tribal lands. First Things First honors tribal ownership of data and recognizes communication is necessary with Arizona Tribes to determine what process/protocol is needed to obtain data. First Things First also recognizes the need for communication on the reporting of data. It is our intent to protect the confidentiality of individuals and all data gathered will be reported in the aggregate and held in strictest confidence. Steps will be taken to ensure that primary data collected from the Tribes is not transferred to any other party without formal agreement between the Tribe and First Things First. Moreover, First Things First will provide copies of draft reports, publications and final reports prior to publication and dissemination. First Things First recognizes that following tribal protocols ensures participation and involvement among the tribal leadership and communities in the work being completed by the Regional Partnership Councils and First Things First.”

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