

### **Strategy 1: Expand Access to Quality Early Care and Education**

The La Paz/Mohave Regional Partnership Council will expand or establish new quality early care and education programs throughout the region for children age birth through five.

Access to child care is a great need through-out our large region. Some of our communities currently have no regulated child care. Without support for infrastructure, it will be difficult to bring quality child care to these communities. Other communities have sufficient capacity to serve children and ECE programs that are under-utilized.

Furthermore, many children and families living in the region experience tremendous need. In Colorado City, 28% of families with children under the age of 5 live in poverty (income below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level). In Lake Havasu, Kingman, Bullhead City and Parker, the figures range from 7 to 11 percent. Low income status may create barriers for families to have access to high quality early care and education. The average annual cost for an infant in full-time center care in Arizona is almost \$8,000. Full-time infant care in a family child care home is \$6,250. Full-time care for a 4 year old in center or home care is about \$6,400. This is 12% of the median family income of an Arizona married couple with children under age 18.

DES may provide Child Care Assistance for families participating in various DES programs. In those cases where there is an income eligibility requirement, family income cannot exceed 165% of the federal poverty level. It is generally recognized that 200% of FPL constitutes low-income. There are a number of low-income families who do not qualify for child care subsidy (either because their income is above 165% of FPL or because they are not DES participants) and, therefore, have difficulty affording quality child care. There are also situations when a child who no longer qualifies for DES subsidy leaves a quality center for a less expensive setting when the subsidy is no longer available.

In order to address the diversity in the region, the Council will consider a variety of approaches **to increase access and affordability to quality care**. First, the Regional Council, through an RFGA, will invite early care and education providers the opportunity to submit proposals to expand or establish new early care and education programs. These may include, but are not limited to:

Planning Grants: New or existing early care and education providers who are considering expanding enrollment to serve age groups not being served may apply for a planning grant to determine feasibility of construction and business sustainability. The planning grant can be used to conduct strategic planning, which may include business consultation to complete a business plan and market analysis. It may also be used to complete architectural drawings.

Accessibility Grants: New or existing early care and education providers who are considering expanding enrollment may apply for an accessibility grant if the addition of such care requires construction, renovation or purchase of facilities. The accessibility grant can be used for construction, land or building purchase or remodeling a child care center or family home. The applicant must have a 50% secured match in order to obtain this grant.

Quality Supplements: New or existing early care and education providers who expand care may apply for quality supplements to offset the higher cost of providing quality care. The purpose of this grant is to directly offset the increased cost of providing quality care so that charges to families remain affordable. An

example of a quality supplement may include a center or home will receive \$10 per day for each new infant or toddler slot that has filled. These must be new infant and toddler slots.

Second, in order to improve the Regional Council's understanding of how best to increase access and affordability to quality early care and education in the region, the Regional Council will participate in a cross-regional pilot study of multiple cost reduction and support strategies to inform future strategy development. The Council will work in partnership with the FTF evaluation division and an external contractor(s) to design and implement the pilot study. The RFGA will stipulate that the contractor(s) be responsible to the Regional Councils for frequent updates of progress. They will also be required to gain a working understanding of the region to assure the best possible results and fidelity to the study. In order to address the distinct geographic needs of the region, a **minimum of three regionally located centers or homes** will be selected.

The Regional Council may determine that additional funds are necessary to increase the number of centers/homes or families/children participating in the project. The estimated cost of participation includes:

- Financial assistance to create and/or expand access to quality ECE programs
- The administration of the pilot study and distribution of financial support
- Interviews with community members to establish need/demand as well as impact

In addition to the actual distribution of vouchers, scholarships, or financial supports to families or centers/homes participating in the project, additional analyses will be conducted. Ongoing analyses with families and stakeholders in the community will determine:

- What cost reduction or support strategy can most effectively reduce cost as a barrier to quality care for families in this community?
- What is the impact of the cost reduction or support strategy on parent perceptions of quality?
- What is the impact of the cost reduction or support strategy on access to early care and education in the community?

As efforts to improve the quality of early care and education are implemented in the region, additional attention will need to be paid to how quality interacts with affordability of care, and how strategies can best be designed to support families, especially low income families that chose quality care. In order to make sure grantees continue to move toward quality early care and education, grantees will be required to meet the following criteria:

- Accredited, or in the process of becoming accredited, through an AZ recognized national accreditation system OR
- Participating in **Quality First!** OR
- Participating in a demonstrated, recognized quality improvement program (AZ Self-Study, Tucson Hands-on Quality, Head Start PRISM, VSUW Professional Development Model) **and** commit to enrolling in **Quality First!** within 2 years OR
- Commit to enrolling in **Quality First!** within 1 year.

To support programs funded through this strategy, the Regional Council will also fund additional programs to enroll in ***Quality First!***

**Goals:**

FTF will improve access to quality early care and education programs and settings.

FTF will increase availability and affordability of early care and education settings.

**Key Measure:**

- Total number of children enrolled and vacancies in regulated early care and education programs as a proportion of total population birth to age five.
- Current cost of early care and education for families as a proportion of the median income for a family of four.

**Target Population:**

All children birth to age five in the region. Emphasis will be on areas lacking quality child care options and expanding services to reach populations not currently being served.

**Proposed Service Numbers:**

With the decision to move forward with this broad strategy, we are not able to determine service numbers at this time. The Council will establish service numbers based on review of proposals and final awards.

	<b>SFY2010</b> <b>July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010</b>
<b>Proposed Service Numbers</b>	<b>TBD</b>

**Performance Measures SFY 2010-2012**

- Number of new childcare slots available in regulated early care and education settings for children age birth to five
- Number of proposed new licensed child care settings /actual service number
- Number of proposed new certified home care settings /actual service number
- Number of child care settings expanding to provide infant and toddler care/actual service number
- Total number of children age birth to five served

**How does this strategy build on the service network that currently exists?**

This strategy will build on our assets by grants for planning, accessibility and quality improvements. It will also provide coaching and mentoring to support grantees in moving toward quality early care and education. It will encourage currently operating programs and centers to expand their services to include age groups not currently being served. A requirement for receiving FTF funding will be accreditation through an AZ recognized national accreditation system or enrollment in **Quality First!** in the second or third year of the grant cycle. This will provide new and existing ECE settings with the supports needed for continuous quality improvement.

**What are the opportunities for collaboration and alignment?**

Programs funded through this strategy will be required to be accredited through an AZ recognized national accreditation system OR enroll in Quality First! in the second or third year of operation. Additionally, the Regional Council will require a Coordination and Communication Plan from every grant applicant.

**SFY2010 Expenditure Plan for Proposed Strategy**

Population-based allocation for strategy	\$701,896
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**Budget Justification:**

The decision was made to allocate 26% of regional funds to this strategy.

\$251,896 – Planning, Accessibility and Quality Grants to ECE programs

\$300,000 – Participation of at least three regionally located centers in the pilot study, at a cost of approximately \$100,000 per program

\$150,000 – Enrolling grantees in **Quality First!**

The estimated cost to the region of enrolling grantees in **Quality First!** will range from:

Home: \$22,300

Small Center: \$28,600

Medium Center: \$31,000

Large Center: \$36,000