



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

AGENDA ITEM: Define Issues and Key Focus Areas (Attachment 7)

BACKGROUND: As a starting point for the taskforce a set of issues and key focus areas has been identified for consideration. These five items were derived from the regional boundary reviews that took place in 2009 and 2011. The taskforce will have an opportunity to discuss these proposed issues and focus areas, and determine if any additions or changes are needed. The outcome for this agenda item is for the taskforce to approve a set of issues and key focus areas that will determine the direction for the regional boundary review and what data collection is needed.

DRAFT
Key Issues and Areas of Focus

I. The regional structure is largely serving its mandate, but there are challenges in practice

Considerable amount of support exists for the First Things First regional structure, particularly the value placed on dispersed, local decision-making.

Regional Councils are working together – which is one of the things making the boundaries work.

The boundaries have allowed different communities to move at their own pace and to really focus on the needs in a given community. Dividing into regions really helped areas define themselves.

Regions that are based on county boundaries seemed to be serving families well, though there can be challenges in meeting the needs of families at the edges of bordering counties.

Fragmentation of services is one potential by-product of such a structure, and that more intentional coordination of service and strategies could help mitigate that while maintaining the ability to meet local needs.

While it would be easier if everything was centralized, system building requires local civic engagement and coordination – and is challenging.

II. Assess more closely and systematically the desirability and feasibility of consolidating urban Regions

Having multiple regions in Maricopa and Pima Counties present some barriers to service delivery and to communication. The multiple regions in Maricopa and Pima County do not lend themselves to comprehensive implementation. Unless the regions choose to work together it can create isolated services being provided.

Regional boundaries do not necessarily align with where providers typically provide services. Multiple regions complicate provider efforts to participate and to respond to Requests for Grant Applications. With multiple regions, it is difficult for some providers to know which Regional Partnership Council to talk with about services.

Boundaries that result in school districts in more than one region or zip codes that overlap regions are viewed as problematic primarily for the collection of indicator data. Aligning with school district boundaries would diminish the ability to obtain community

wide demographic, health status and other indicators of early childhood development and health prior to entering school. It will be important to plan for data collection that can occur at the school, rather than school district level.

The boundaries require everyone to think about service delivery in a different way. In part this is a challenge for providers and, therefore the regions, as the need to shift the paradigm from centralized administration and service delivery to creating the locally driven system statewide is necessary.

Service and communication barriers could be overcome through intentional collaboration and coordination, though this approach also has challenges to implement. More systematic data gathering may help clarify what approaches, or set of approaches, can be used to refine the regional structure in urban areas.

III. Continue to review the rural regions to assess if boundary changes are needed to better align service delivery and increase opportunities for capacity building

Capacity building is the biggest need in rural areas: Stakeholders view the difficulties of providing services in rural areas as a barrier to best serving the families and children of Arizona. It is recognized that boundary changes would not resolve this, but that it tends to be an issue of service capacity.

For some of the more rural regions funding is not adequate to significantly impact the children and families. The frontier funding provided through the discretionary funding allocation helped address this issue.

Regions and communities identified for a closer look in past boundary reviews:

1. LaPaz / Mohave Region: The rural, eastern part of LaPaz County presents unique community engagement challenges to the LaPaz Mohave Regional Council

- Serving the vast geographic area of LaPaz and Mohave Counties presents its own challenges with communication and coordination with the smaller communities in the region. Significant progress has been made to achieve the engagement of people across the region; however the eastern part of La Paz County remains a challenge.
- When boundaries were set in December of 2007, creating a LaPaz County Council was considered but not recommended since the people in LaPaz County did not believe they could secure enough representation to create a Regional Partnership Council.
- The Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional Partnership Council serves all of the Town of Parker which includes both Tribal lands and LaPaz County land within the Town of Parker. The Colorado River Indian Tribes Regional

Partnership Council formally voted in June 2009 to maintain their current boundary which includes all of Parker.

- Most families in La Paz County give birth at Lake Havasu Regional Medical Center and people commonly commute for work between Lake Havasu (Mohave County) and Parker (La Paz County).
- There are a number of working programs and strong partnerships in both counties. Serving rural communities like Wenden and Quartzsite was prioritized by the Regional Council, so the amount invested in La Paz County with the current boundaries exceeds what the county would receive from the FTF population-based allocation formula if it were a separate region without CRIT.

2. *Queen Creek – Southeast Maricopa Region: The community of Queen Creek is split between the Southeast Maricopa County Region and Pinal County Region with most of the population living in Maricopa County.*

- Prior reviews looked into realigning all of Queen Creek with Pinal County rather than Southeast Maricopa County. In part, the issue with Queen Creek as part of the Southeast Maricopa Region was described as one of challenges in engaging representation of the community in the Regional Partnership Council processes.
- A review of population data as of 2006 indicated that 19,732 individuals live in the Maricopa County part of Queen Creek and 1,086 individuals live in the Pinal County part of the Queen Creek. The town of Queen Creek is physically located in Maricopa County.
- The Pinal Regional Partnership Council currently includes the Pinal County portion of Queen Creek in its planning processes and views this rural portion of Queen Creek as a population that is more aligned with Pinal County.

3. Winslow

- The boundary change under consideration was to move Winslow from Coconino Region to Navajo/Apache Region. Regional Council leadership for both Regions felt that the service barriers raised were primarily bureaucratic issues and that service to this community could be improved by actively engaging in strategy coordination and other collaborative mechanisms, such as joint contracting. They felt that this was an opportunity to provide a test case for cross-regional cooperation, and so consensus was to move forward without a boundary change.

4. Gila

- Respondents note that the Gila region has two main population centers (Payson area in the north and Globe area in the south) that are at some distance from each other and with few connections between them, making it somewhat hard to serve both northern and southern Gila County in a

proficient manner. Although a boundary change would not be appropriate at this time, it is important for this issue to be on the radar screen.

5. La Paz/Mohave, Coconino

- Both La Paz/Mohave and Coconino provide services to communities in the Arizona Strip north of the Colorado (e.g., Beaver Dam/Littleton, Colorado City, Cane Beds, Kaibab Paiute Tribe, Moccasin, Fredonia, and Page). Regional Council members and grant partners from both regions noted that these communities are difficult to serve because of their very isolated situation. They may benefit from discussions and coordination of services and strategies between the two regions.

6. Yavapai, La Paz/Mohave; Yavapai, Coconino; Yavapai, Northeast Maricopa

- There are three communities on the Yavapai borders that may be seeking services in other regions. Families in the Seligman area, near the Mohave border, are likely to seek services in Kingman; families in Ashfork may be going to Flagstaff, in the Coconino Region; and families in the Black Canyon City may be entering Maricopa County for services (with Northeast Maricopa being the closest region). Those children and families may be better served through collaborative approaches between those regions to assure that they are appropriately informed and served.

IV. Tribal considerations—need to understand impact on Tribes within regions if any boundary changes are recommended

Flexibility for Tribes to choose to be part of a county-based region, or to become their own region, is seen as a strength of the First Things First system.

Both Tribal and non-tribal stakeholders endorse the value of a system that recognizes that Arizona Tribes should have their own internal decision-making processes for deciding what best meets the needs of their children and families.

The Regional Councils have worked to ensure inclusion of Tribal areas that are part of their region and to engage the smaller communities in the discussions and planning for First Things First.

First Things First has throughout the state acknowledged that there are Tribal members of various tribes living in communities off defined reservation lands and that each FTF Region is to incorporate the needs of all families in their geographic area.

V. How to further promote within-region and cross regional coordination

The regional delivery model is seen to promote and facilitate within-region coordination among early childhood stakeholders, community partners' advocates and service providers, particularly in the more rural areas.

Regional council membership leads to phenomenal collaboration, with representation across service systems. Strong council leadership is key for facilitating coordination. When members can build personal relationships, it can provide a strong link to communities.

Coordination is a very positive strength of the boundaries when regional councils work to eliminate duplication and strengthen what is already there. It provides an opportunity to be creative and to maximize resources.

Geographic distance can be a hindrance, but many are finding ways to work around this challenge.

The number of regional boundaries may be introducing silos where there weren't silos before. Organizations and systems serving children are not as restricted in how they deliver services, and breaking up the county introduces restrictions in how they deliver services. Arbitrary boundaries limit collaborative effort—providers can become “territorial,” sometimes see “turf talk”

Regional Boundaries limit collaborations and established partnerships because many organizations that serve children 0-5 are not limited to one region but the focus and funding of the different regional councils many times varies from region to region.

In addition to affecting collaborations by service providers, it is hard for other community partners and for advocates to communicate and participate across multiple Regions. Concerns were raised about the difficulty of staying in touch with the activities of so many regional councils. This makes it difficult for partners to communicate FTF activities to their stakeholders and other early childhood advocates.