

Early Learning Challenge Fund  
Quality Pathways Grant  
Summary Analysis and Action Steps

**Early Learning Challenge Fund Overview:**

The purpose of the Early Learning Challenge Fund (ELCF) is to provide grants to the states on a competitive basis to:

- Promote standards reform of State early learning programs serving children from birth to age 5;
- Establish high standards of quality that integrates appropriate early learning and development standards across early learning settings;
- Fund and implement quality initiatives that improve the skills and effectiveness of early learning providers, exiting early learning programs that serve disadvantaged children;
- Ensure that more disadvantaged children enter kindergarten with the cognitive, social, emotional and physical skills and abilities to succeed in school;
- Increase parents' ability to access quality early learning programs across settings for their children.
- Improving the quality of early learning program services to low-income children is a priority.

**Current Status of Legislation**

The Early Learning Challenge Fund is included in reforms to the *Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act*, and was passed September 22, 2009, by the House of Representatives. Arizona Representative Raul Grijalva was a co-sponsor. Five of the eight Arizona House members voted "aye". After passage in the House, this legislation, HR 3221, was read twice in the Senate and was forwarded to the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pension Committee, where it is not yet scheduled for a hearing. Arizona Senator John McCain sits on this committee.

**Analysis of FTF Readiness to Secure this Grant Opportunity**

The provisions of the ELCF show close alignment with First Things First goals and strategic direction.

- Improving the credentials of early learning providers (and tied to compensation)
- Helping early learning programs meet and sustain higher program quality standards
- Provide financial incentives to early learning program to improve quality.
- Integrate State early learning and development standards into early learning programs.
- Building capacity to promote understanding of the early learning system including the active engagement of parents.
- Building the capacity of early learning programs to facilitate screening, referral, and provision of services related to health, mental health, disability, family support for children in early learning programs.
- Implementation or enhancement of State's data system for all agencies services children.
- Implementing a quality rating system.
- Development and implementation of measure of school readiness covering all domains of development.

FTF has the structure and operating capacity to qualify for Quality Pathways grant provisions.

FTF has the required match for this Quality Pathways grant.

- 10 percent in fiscal year one
- 10 percent in fiscal year two
- 15 percent in fiscal year three
- 20 percent in fiscal year four and subsequent fiscal years.

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As the State Advisory Council for Early Learning, FTF is well positioned to meet the planning and coordination provisions and requirements.

**Possible Challenges**

The provisions of this grant require a significant maintenance of effort:

1. There must be a significant increase, in comparison to recent fiscal years, in State expenditures on early learning programs and services. This requirement does not yet stipulate the fiscal years that will be considered.
2. The aggregate expenditures by the State and its political subdivision on early learning programs and services must be not less than like expenditures for fiscal year 2009.

These are also key points for educating Arizona's congressional delegation and their staffs on the hardship that Arizona may have in meeting this requirement due to the recession and budget crisis.

**Key Activities and Time Line Assuming Winter 2010 Passage**

Identify Key Advocates, Supporters, and Partners (December, 2009 through January, 2010)

- Identify "ask" and messaging for congressional delegation.
- Schedule meetings with Congressional delegation to review Arizona opportunities through Early Learning Challenge Fund. Potential ambassadors include FTF board members, FTF Council members, FTF staff, and community partners including John McDonald (Moses Anshell), Naomi Karp (NAEYC), and other statewide advocates and partners traveling to Washington, DC for meetings and events.
- Identify and contact key Arizona supporters to carry messaging and support FTF grant application.
- Identify additional Arizona partner agencies and organizations.

Coordinate and Communicate with Partners and Supporters (December 2009 through grant submission, 2010)

- Maintain contact with congressional delegation (and staff) and key supporters and follow the progress of legislation from passage to release of guidelines and grant submission.

Develop Timeline, Planning and Approach (January 2010 through March 2010)

- Establish planning group representing partner organizations and agencies, determine desired process for input and decision-making.
- Develop project scope and activities aligned with grant criteria.
- Determine timeline and process for grant development.
- Identify resources needed for grant development and grant writing

Proposal Writing and Submission (March 2010 through May 2010 or grant submission, 2010)

- Secure resources for grant writing.
- Establish timeline for proposal review and submission.
- Secure, finalize partner commitments for data, resources-project match, letters of support.
- Submit Proposal.