



## FIRST THINGS FIRST

*Ready for School. Set for Life.*

### MEMORANDUM

**TO:** First Things First Board Members

**FROM:** Rhian Evans Allvin, CEO

**DATE:** Friday, September 16, 2011

**SUBJECT:** First Things First--Our First Five Years

During the next two meetings in September and December, the Board will engage in a facilitated dialogue to reconfirm and expand on the Board's vision for First Things First. It will include review, discussion and agenda setting related to the Board's role in governance and leadership. It will also provide the Board with an opportunity to set ambitious goals for advancing a broad and inclusive early childhood system in Arizona.

The timing for these discussions aligns with First Things First's fifth anniversary. On November 7, 2006 First Things First was passed by the voters of Arizona and set the wheels in motion to, for the first time in our state's history, work to build a comprehensive early childhood development and health system. Given our mission, it is hard not to see the parallels between the first five years of a young child's life and a similar developmental trajectory of an organizational life cycle.

As the Board works to chart a course for the next five years, I have provided some historical information to reflect on what has been accomplished throughout the past five years. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of our activities, rather a high level overview of our strategic accomplishments.

#### Governance and Decision Making

- Statewide Board was established, subsequent members have been appointed to the Board throughout the past five years.
- Board established 31 regional boundaries (including ten tribal council boundaries).
- Board and staff conducted community input and listening sessions across Arizona.
- Board engaged with consultants in 2009 and 2011 to revisit regional boundaries (per statute); in both instances recommendations were unanimously adopted.
- Board established Board Governance and Operations policies.
- FTF makes tribal government to government relations a top priority and has successfully engaged tribal government leadership throughout the past five years. This includes two formal tribal consultations.
- Regional Councils adopted governance policies and receive public meeting and conflict of interest training.

- Regional Councils conducted strategic planning to better determine and understand their local course of action.
- Two Regional surveys were completed in order to gauge the perceptions of council members and garner their input and feedback.

#### Financial Stewardship and Operations

- FTF concluded four successful audits with no findings.
- FTF recruited and retained highly competent, diverse staff from across Arizona and across the Country.
- Board reviewed complete Human Resource Tool-Kit. This makes FTF one of the only state agencies in government that conducts performance appraisals with uncovered employees. Items in the tool kit included:
  - FTF’s Mission, Vision, and Values
  - FTF Beliefs, Actions, and Performance
  - FTF Organizational Charts
  - FTF Handbook and Policies
  - Equal Opportunity Statement and Reports
  - New Hire Manager Checklist
  - New Hire Orientations (schedules)
  - Inventory Checklist
  - Employee Evaluations
  - Employee Recognition
  - Compensation
  - Training and Development
- Board adopted recommended sustainability plan that provides steady fiscal stewardship into the future.
- FTF aligned programs and operations to FY budgets adopted by the board, every year expending fewer administrative resources than budgeted.
- Board committed to complete financial transparency and launched a web page with comprehensive and regularly updated information about revenues, expenditures and programmatic priorities.
- FTF finalized an automation process within our grants management system has reduced the time for grantees to receive reimbursement. The average processing time was 24 days (with many exceptions extending well beyond this); this reimbursement now happens typically within 14 days (with few exceptions extending beyond 30 days).
- FTF successfully submitted 2 federal grant applications totaling \$2.7 million.

#### National Model for Policy, Program and Evaluation

- Following a seven month community stakeholder process, Board adopted the Arizona Early Childhood System Model (see board attachments).
- Following a ten month community stakeholder process, Board adopted 10 School Readiness Indicators.
- Councils completed and Board adopted three years (FY10-12) of regional funding plans allocating a total of \$371.3 million.
- Board adopted four years (FY09-12) of funding plans under its Statewide Program spending authority totaling \$52.2 million.

- Numerous programmatic accomplishments and milestones throughout the last five years in the areas of early learning, professional development, family support & literacy and children’s health (see annual reports).
- FTF has fully developed Standards of Practice for 41 of our 48 program strategies.
- In FY12, FTF has 136 grantees (under 272 contracts) across Arizona conducting programs and services for children birth to five.
- Board adopted Quality First—a child care quality improvement and rating system. Quality First has the highest tribal participation in Region IX and possibly the Country. In just two years there are 700 providers in Quality First, with 200 more slated to be added in FY12. Early gain scores indicate an average annual increase of a .5 star rating.
- FTF completed the following studies and assessments:
  - FTF Children’s Budget – summary of all state and federal fund expenditures for fiscal years 2005 through 2010 in the state of Arizona for children zero through five and their families (first Children’s Budget completed in 2010 with update in 2011).
  - Arizona Health Survey – a partnership with St Luke’s Health Initiatives to survey adult and child health behavior and status (completed 2010).
  - FTF Partner Survey – survey of early childhood partners’ perception of collaboration and quality in services for children and families (baseline completed in 2009 with follow-up in 2010).
  - FTF Family and Community Survey – survey of parent’s knowledge of child development and perception of the quality and access to early childhood services (baseline completed in 2009).
  - Statewide Needs and Assets Reports - Overall assessment of the current state of data on opportunities and challenges for children zero through five and their families (completed 2007 and 2009).
  - Regional Needs and Assets Reports - Overall assessment of the current state of data on opportunities and challenges for children zero through five and their families for each Regional Partnership Council (completed 2008 and 2010).
  - Cost of Quality – Economic and classroom data model of the projected programmatic costs of delivering early care and education at the five Quality First star levels (completed in 2011).
- Partner Grantee reporting:
  - Partner grantee reporting has developed in three primary areas: establishment of reporting requirements for FTF funded strategies, implementation and automation of data submission, and implementation and automation of data reporting. FTF has gone from having a few data reporting templates for limited expedited strategies in April 2009 such as Home Visitation, Child Care Scholarships, Food Security and Parent Education to 47 FTF strategies in FY12. Until 2011, data for more than half the reporting strategies were coming in via excel templates, however for FY12 all grantee reported data for all funded strategies will be coming directly into FTF PGMS system either via web-based data templates or as flat files submitted via File Transfer Protocol (FTP) into FTF data warehouse. In the last 3 years FTF has gone from creating all quarterly data reports manually to half of them being produced by data warehouse reporting system, and by FY12 Quarter 1 all data reporting will be automatized through FTF reporting center.

- External Evaluation:
  - FTF approved a proposal for External Evaluation with a tri-university consortium (The University of Arizona, Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University). In 2010 and 2011, data were collected on three studies: the Arizona Kindergarten Readiness Study, the Longitudinal Child Study of Arizona, and the Family and Community Case Studies.

Public Investment in Early Care and Education as a Statewide Priority

- In April 2010, Board adopted a three year strategic communications plan. This resulted in the launch of the Ready for School. Set for Life campaign. **FTF met or exceeded the Year 3 benchmarks in the first year of implementation for two of the three measures!**
  - **Increase the perceived importance of early childhood** - In our baseline research, 76% of Arizonans ranked early childhood education and health as important or very important. Our latest research indicates this percentage has increased to 80%, meaning that FTF met its 3-year goal in this area in the first year of implementation. Also of note is that the percentage of Arizonans who rank early childhood education and health as one of their TOP TWO issues increased from 15% in baseline to 18% this year.
  - **Increase total awareness of First Things First** –Our baseline research showed that 20% of Arizonans were aware of First Things First. Our latest research indicates that total awareness of FTF has increased to 34%, meaning that FTF exceeded its 3-year goal in this area in its first year of implementation.
  - **Increase support for FTF’s mission** –In our baseline research, 69% of Arizonans who were aware of FTF either strongly or somewhat strongly supported FTF. At the end of year one, that percentage had increased to 70%. Individuals aware of FTF who STRONGLY support us increased from 33% in the baseline to 45% this year.
- In November 2010, FTF successfully survived a ballot initiative that would have eliminated FTF and swept the tobacco revenue into the general fund. FTF and early childhood development and health were supported by more than 69% of voters.
- Board has approved four annual reports (2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011), all of which were presented to the Governor and Legislative Leadership.