



# PARTICIPANT GUIDE

State Fiscal Year 2027\*

\* Effective 7.1.2026. Policies are subject to change and may be updated during the fiscal year. Please visit the Quality First extranet's resources page to ensure you have the most up-to-date policy information.

# Purpose of the Participant Guide

This guide outlines the benefits, policies and procedures of Quality First. The purpose of the guide is to help you understand your role and what participation includes.

## How to use the guide

The guide is a tool for you to use as a new participant getting started in Quality First and as an existing participant that may need to find answers to questions about participation, including:

- Understanding what to expect as a participant
- Understanding the process including assessment, rating and accessing additional support
- Learning about policies and procedures that you need to follow and understand throughout your participation
- Learning about system supports and resources available to you beyond Quality First

## Structure of the guide

Each section has information about the different parts of Quality First. Quality First policies are included throughout, in gray boxes. Processes are detailed immediately after the policy box if needed. Ideas for success are included in each section.

## What you need to know

The information contained in the Participant Guide is updated every year. As a Quality First participant, it is your responsibility to review and agree to the policies and procedures described in the guide each year. Policies are subject to change and may be updated during the year. To ensure you have the most updated information, visit the Quality First extranet's resources page for announcements and updates.

## For assistance and support

If you have any questions related to the policies or procedures, ask your Quality First coordinator or contact the Quality First team at [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org) or 602.771.5000.

To learn more, visit our website at [QualityFirstAZ.com](http://QualityFirstAZ.com) for information, answers to frequently asked questions and a blog with tips and inspiration.

Stay informed by signing up for the Quality First Update newsletter at <https://firstthingsfirst.us17.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=c9dcfd67a053c976593ec16cc&id=3d1cc1f8ab>.



# Highlights for State Fiscal Year 2027

The following information includes the major updates for state fiscal year (SFY) 2027 (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027). Please refer to the remainder of the Participant Guide as well as ongoing communication from Quality First for important information and updates.

## One Participant Guide

This guide now combines policy information for both Quality First participation types into a single resource:

- Section One- Applies to participants in both the Rating Only and Quality Improvement participation types.
- Section Two- Applies to participants in the Quality Improvement participation type only.

See page 5 for guidance on how to find out your participation type.

## Assessment Cycle Length (page 15)

Beginning with assessment cycles in SFY27, programs that earn a Quality Plus or Highest Quality (4-5-star) rating will move to a 36-month assessment cycle. Programs that earn a Rising Star, Progressing Star, or Quality (1-3-star) rating will continue on a 24-26 month assessment cycle

## CLASS 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (page 19)

Quality First is preparing for the transition to the updated CLASS 2nd Edition. For SFY27, First Things First (FTF) will continue using the first edition tools for star ratings. Assessors will begin dual data collection this year using both versions during Informal Assessments to give participants a preview of the updated tools.

## Rating Only Scholarship Eligibility (page 36)

Participants in both the Quality Improvement and Rating Only participation types are now eligible to receive a Quality First scholarship allocation (if funded by your local region).

## Coaching Agencies (page 80)

Southwest Human Development leads the administration of coaching and coordination statewide. They have updated their partnering coaching agencies to include Child and Family Resources and Easterseals Blake Foundation.

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# Looking Ahead: Preview for State Fiscal Year 2028

## SFY28 Participation Type Update (page 67)

Beginning July 1, 2027, Quality Improvement participants that have sustained a 4- or 5-star rating for two consecutive cycles will automatically transition to the Rating Only participation type. In order to give advanced notice, we have included information in this year's guide.



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## SECTION TWO: INFORMATION FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PARTICIPANTS

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# Do you know your Quality First participation type?

If you're not sure, here's a quick way to check:

1. Log into your site's extranet profile. For step by step directions on logging in, see the Extranet Guide on page 53.
2. See which version your site's profile looks like. You'll notice the following:

**Rating Only participants:**  
You will have a Coordinator assigned, but not a Coach or Child Care Health Consultant. Under QF Activities you will see "Status: Rating Only Enrolled Participant"

**QUALITY FIRST** Profile Summary

**PROGRESSING STAR** **★★**

**Phoenix Discovery Preschool**  
Address: 4000 North Central Ave Phoenix AZ 85012  
Regional Partnership Council: Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council  
Main Contact: Sarah Johnson 602-555-7890  
Provider Type: Center  
Provider Size: Medium

The rating that is posted is the program's official star rating. It is a public star rating.

**Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	E-Mail
Mental Health Consultant	Daniel Carter		AZTF\dcarter		dcarter@swhd.org
Coordinator Provider	Jennifer Lee		AZTF\jlee2		jlee2@swhd.org
Child Care Center Director	Sarah Johnson	Center Director	AZTF\sjohnson	602-555-7890	sarah.johnson@phoenixdiscovery.org
Main Contact	Sarah Johnson	Center Director	AZTF\sjohnson	602-555-7890	sarah.johnson@phoenixdiscovery.org
Primary Program Designee	Olivia Garcia	Assistant Director	AZTF\ogarcia	602-555-7890	olivia.garcia@phoenixdiscovery.org

**Site Details**

Provider Type: Center  
Contact Information:  
Name: Sarah Johnson  
Title: Center Director  
Phone: 602-555-7890  
Fax:  
Email: sarah.johnson@phoenixdiscovery.org  
Provider: DiscoveryPhoenix.org  
Website:  
Hours of Operation:  
Days From To

**Program Snapshot**

Size of Site: Medium  
Number of Active Staff: 12  
Number of Active Classrooms: 6  
Total Enrolled: 61  
Ages Licensed to Serve: 2 Yr Olds, 3 Yr Olds, 4 Yr Olds, 5 Yr Olds, Infants, Toddlers  
Number of Children who are Non-English Speakers:  
Spanish: 6  
Other: 0  
Language(s) Used for Instruction: English

**QF Activities**

Orientation Completed: Yes  
Orientation Completed Date: 4/15/2011  
Status: **Rating Only Enrolled Participant**  
Fund Source: FTF  
Assessment Cycle:  
Rating Renewal 6  
Assessment Completion Date: 6/23/2025  
Date Current Cycle Ends: 6/23/2027

**Quality Improvement participants**  
You will have a Coach and Child Care Health Consultant assigned. Under QF Activities you will see "Status: Enrolled Participant"

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**Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	E-Mail
<b>CCHC</b>	Alicia Martinez		AZTF\amartinez	6023410955	alicia.martinez@maricopa.gov
Mental Health Consultant	Daniel Carter		AZTF\dcarter		dcarter@swhd.org
Coordinator Provider	Jennifer Lee		AZTF\jlee2		jlee2@swhd.org
<b>Coach</b>	Marcus Brown	Quality First Coach	AZTF\mbrown7	602-816-3559	mbrown7@swhd.org
Child Care Center Director	Sarah Johnson	Center Director	AZTF\sjohnson	602-555-7890	sarah.johnson@phoenixdiscovery.org
Main Contact	Sarah Johnson	Center Director	AZTF\sjohnson	602-555-7890	sarah.johnson@phoenixdiscovery.org
Primary Program Designee	Olivia Garcia	Assistant Director	AZTF\ogarcia	602-555-7890	olivia.garcia@phoenixdiscovery.org

**Site Details**

Provider Type: Center  
Contact Information:  
Name: Sarah Johnson  
Title: Center Director  
Phone: 602-555-7890  
Fax:  
Email: sarah.johnson@phoenixdiscovery.org  
Provider: DiscoveryPhoenix.org  
Website:  
Hours of Operation:  
Days From To

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Assessment Cycle:  
Rating Renewal 6  
Assessment Completion Date: 6/23/2025  
Date Current Cycle Ends: 6/23/2027

Still not sure? Contact your Quality First Coordinator or email the First Things First Quality First Team at QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org.



## **SECTION ONE: INFORMATION FOR ALL QUALITY FIRST PARTICIPANTS**

This section applies to participants in both the Rating Only and Quality Improvement participation types.



# Introduction to First Things First and Quality First

## What is First Things First?

From birth to age 5, children's brains develop faster than any other time in their lives and set the foundation for future learning. That's why Arizonans created First Things First—a voter-initiated, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to prepare young children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond. Local regional councils, staffed by community volunteers, decide how funds are spent to support the healthy development and learning of Arizona's young children.

## Strategic Plan

In 2026, First Things First published an updated Strategic Plan to guide priorities and investments through state fiscal year 2030. Access to high-quality, culturally responsive early care and education was identified as the first of six desired outcomes. As First Things First's signature program, Quality First provides a system of support to help meet this goal.

To learn more about First Things First, our regional partnership councils, investments, latest news and more, visit our website at [FirstThingsFirst.org](https://FirstThingsFirst.org). To view the Strategic Plan, visit [FirstThingsFirst.org/what-we-do/publications/](https://FirstThingsFirst.org/what-we-do/publications/).



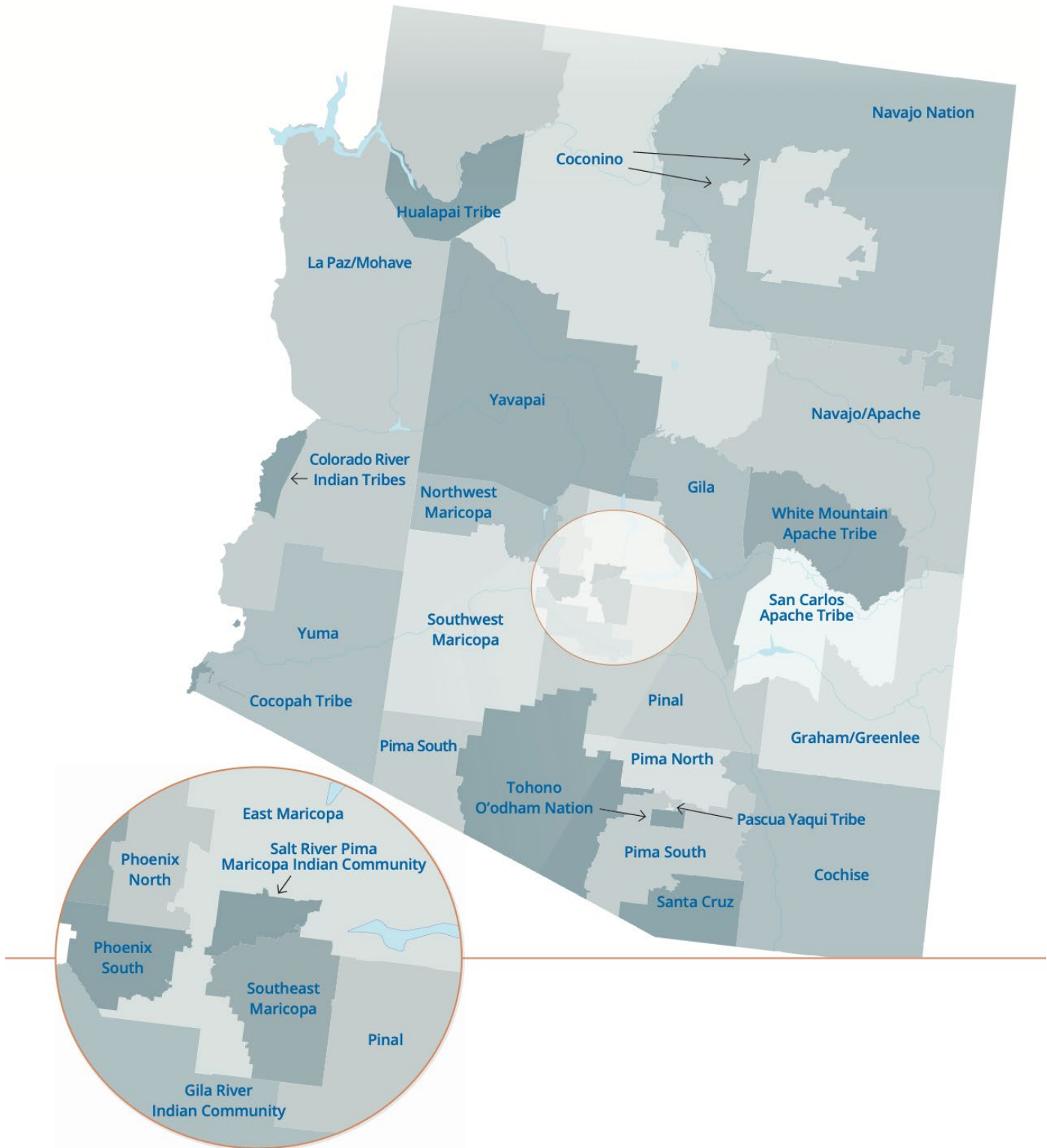
### Vision

All Arizona's children are ready to succeed in school and in life.

### Mission

First Things First is an essential leader and partner in creating a family-centered, equitable, high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, well-being, health and education of all Arizona's children, birth to age 5.

# First Things First Regions



My Program Region \_\_\_\_\_

To find your First Things First region, view your extranet profile or visit [FirstThingsFirst.org](http://FirstThingsFirst.org) and select “find your region.”



# What is Quality First?

Quality First supports early care and education programs across Arizona to improve the quality of their early learning programs for children birth to age 5. Our goal is simple: to help you help Arizona's children be ready to succeed in school and in life.

To reach this goal, Quality First uses assessment and rating results to tailor supports to meet your program's needs as funding is available.

## Rating Only Participation

This participation type includes support to help you sustain the quality practices you have already achieved. Support includes assessment and star rating, coordination, access to Quality First scholarships and enhanced DES reimbursement rates. (Please note, Quality First Scholarships are available only to 3-5 star rated programs, and are limited based on FTF regional funding. Enhanced DES reimbursement rates are available only to 3-5 star rated programs.) Rating Only participants with a 1-3-star rating are eligible to be selected for Quality Improvement participation depending on regional funding availability and prioritization.

## Quality Improvement Participation

This participation type provides support to help you establish and improve quality practices. In addition to what is included for Rating Only participation, Quality Improvement participants also have access to quality improvement coaching, child care health consultation, and funding for quality improvements.



# What Does a Quality Early Care and Education Program Look Like?

A high-quality child care or preschool setting has educators with expertise in working with young children, and a learning environment that nurtures children's healthy development, preparing them for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Quality child care and preschool settings build on standard regulatory practices to include:

- Nationally recognized health and safety practices that support children's healthy development
- Skilled educators who know how to turn everyday experiences into learning moments
- Environments that spark children's curiosity with a variety of learning activities, books and hands-on materials
- Opportunities for active play and exploration throughout the day
- Interactions and conversations that build language, thinking and social skills

## QUALITY EARLY LEARNING

This video describes a high-quality early learning setting and how this supports healthy brain development.



# Star Rating Scale



## STAR RATINGS

<b>RISING STAR</b>	<b>PROGRESSING STAR</b>	<b>QUALITY</b>	<b>QUALITY PLUS</b>	<b>HIGHEST QUALITY</b>																																				
 Commitment to quality improvement	 Approaching quality standards	 Meets quality standards	 Exceeds quality standards	 Far exceeds quality standards																																				
<b>ERS Average Program Score</b> 1.0 – 1.99	<b>ERS Average Program Score</b> 2.0 – 2.99	<b>ERS Average Program Score</b> 3.0 – 3.99 <i>No classroom score below 2.5</i>	<b>ERS Average Program Score</b> 4.0 – 4.99 <i>No classroom score below 3.0</i>	<b>ERS Average Program Score</b> 5.0 and above <i>No classroom score below 4.0</i>																																				
<b>CLASS Average Program Score</b> N/A	<b>CLASS Average Program Score</b> N/A	<b>CLASS Average Program Score</b> <table border="0"> <tr><td>ES</td><td>CO</td><td>IS</td></tr> <tr><td>4.5</td><td>4.5</td><td>2.0</td></tr> </table> <i>No classroom score below</i> <table border="0"> <tr><td>ES</td><td>CO</td><td>IS</td></tr> <tr><td>4.25</td><td>4.25</td><td>2.0</td></tr> </table>	ES	CO	IS	4.5	4.5	2.0	ES	CO	IS	4.25	4.25	2.0	<b>CLASS Average Program Score</b> <table border="0"> <tr><td>ES</td><td>CO</td><td>IS</td></tr> <tr><td>5.0</td><td>5.0</td><td>2.5</td></tr> </table> <i>No classroom score below</i> <table border="0"> <tr><td>ES</td><td>CO</td><td>IS</td></tr> <tr><td>4.75</td><td>4.75</td><td>2.25</td></tr> </table>	ES	CO	IS	5.0	5.0	2.5	ES	CO	IS	4.75	4.75	2.25	<b>CLASS Average Program Score</b> <table border="0"> <tr><td>ES</td><td>CO</td><td>IS</td></tr> <tr><td>6.0</td><td>6.0</td><td>3.0</td></tr> </table> <i>No classroom score below</i> <table border="0"> <tr><td>ES</td><td>CO</td><td>IS</td></tr> <tr><td>5.0</td><td>5.0</td><td>2.75</td></tr> </table>	ES	CO	IS	6.0	6.0	3.0	ES	CO	IS	5.0	5.0	2.75
ES	CO	IS																																						
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5.0	5.0	2.5																																						
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**ERS = Environment Rating Scales**

- ECERS = Early Childhood Environment
- ITERS = Infant/Toddler Environment
- FCCERS = Family Child Care Environment

**CLASS = Classroom Assessment Scoring System**

- ES = Emotional Support (Pre-K), Emotional and Behavioral Support (Toddler), Responsive Caregiving (Infant)
- CO = Classroom Organization (Pre-K)
- IS = Instructional Support (Pre-K), Engaged Support for Learning (Toddler)

ERS is not administered for Head Start/Early Head Start or nationally accredited programs. If the program does not meet the CLASS threshold scores for a 3-star rating, the program receives a 2-star rating.

Last updated on June 25, 2021

### How Ratings Are Calculated

To achieve a specific star rating, a program must meet or exceed all required program average and individual classroom score thresholds for that rating. Each column in the chart above outlines the requirements needed to earn each specific rating.



# The Quality First Participant

## The Role of the Quality First Participant

Thank you for being a part of the early childhood community in Arizona. As an early childhood educator, you are part of a very important profession. Quality First partners with you and your program in doing what you do best—providing quality early learning for the children in your care. As a participant, you know your program best: your values, culture, vision, and goals. To help you succeed, you will have access to resources and professionals to guide and assist you. With the support of your coordinator, you will be responsible for learning about and following Quality First policies and participation requirements to get the most out of your participation.

### Leader of the Process:

As the leader of your quality improvement process, you are the primary driver for change within your program. This means you will lead improvement efforts, communicate goals with your staff and families, and review your plans and progress regularly. You will take the initiative to share program updates or new areas where you want support with the Quality First professionals you have access to. When you have questions, review this guide and the resource documents. If you are unable to find the information you need, your Quality First coordinator or other technical assistance professionals are available to help.

*“I think one of the misconceptions is that Quality First is going to be the answer or the solution to make their [program] successful. But it’s a partnership. What you all provide is only as good as what we apply.”*

-Participant since 2018

## The Commitment to Quality

Planning for change is an important part of the improvement process. Improving quality will take time, effort and adjustments. Some of this will include identifying goals and action steps, motivating others and creating an environment that supports trying new ways of doing things. Remember—it takes time to implement new strategies. Adjustments to the plan and steps are part of the learning and change process. Your commitment through the ups and downs of this process is crucial.

## Market your Program with Quality First

You’ve dedicated yourself to delivering quality learning for children in your care. Now, it’s time to inform your families and community about your exceptional work. First Things First created a marketing toolkit to support you in doing so effectively.

To learn more about how to use this toolkit and its benefits, visit the [Quality First Marketing Toolkit Usage Guide](#).

# Strategies for Successful Participation

As the leader of your program and your quality improvement efforts, the following strategies will help you make the most of your Quality First participation:

**Select** a consistent individual(s) to lead your quality improvement efforts. Identify those in a leadership role who can make decisions about changes and communicate about the process.

**Schedule** time in your calendar to work with your staff on your quality improvement efforts. If you work with coaches or consultants, keep as many scheduled visits as possible to further support momentum and progress. Your leadership makes a big difference in how staff contribute to the success of your goals.

**Provide** educators time outside of the classroom to focus on their quality improvement activities.

**Create** an organizational system that is easy to access by staff and technical assistance professionals. Include all Quality First contacts, forms, reports and resources you may want to share with staff.

**Monitor** your goals regularly with your staff. The Quality Improvement Plan serves as a map for your improvement process. Regular monitoring helps you keep track of your progress.

**Arrange** time in your calendar to review and update information about your program, staff and contact information in the extranet and [Registry](#) on a monthly basis.

**Include** your staff and volunteers in your Quality First participation. Share information about your participation, Quality First policies and processes, and your goals with those working in your program. Include Quality First in your program's orientation for new team members. Visit <https://bit.ly/QFOrientation> for a series of short videos.

**Align** your policies, staff handbook and parent handbook with any new practices you put in place as part of your quality improvement efforts. Well-defined policies help sustain your quality improvements over time.

# Coordination

## The Quality First Coordinator

A Quality First coordinator is a central support for your program. Their role is to assist you in your participation—right from the beginning of your journey. They will be your first contact in Quality First, helping you understand what to expect right from the beginning, and helping you understand your role as a participant. They will complete the enrollment process with you, requesting any required forms or documents and assisting you with questions along the way. They will also act as an ongoing resource for your program, helping identify other programs or professionals who may support your quality efforts. With their support, you will be able to access additional services, tools or opportunities that could benefit the children and families you serve.

Coordinators have knowledge and experience in early childhood education, and knowledge of Arizona child care regulations, state standards, and community resources.

### The coordinator will focus on the following:

- Welcome and enrollment at the beginning of participation
- Extranet (Quality First data system), ongoing paperwork and general assistance throughout participation
- Help finding other resources for your program, staff, children and families
- Ongoing communication to see how your program is doing and what needs you may have

Coordinator assignments may change based on factors such as staffing changes, scheduling needs and to ensure the best fit.

## Administration of Coordination

Southwest Human Development leads the administration of coordination. If you have questions or feedback about coordination, please contact [QFCoaching@SWHD.org](mailto:QFCoaching@SWHD.org).

# Assessment

The Quality First assessment is a valuable tool that supports your program's continuous improvement. Its purpose is to provide objective, reliable insights into the daily experiences of the children in your care. You will gain a clear picture of your program—what is great about it and the opportunities to do even better.

**Quality First Assessment Policy:** Quality First assessments are a required part of participation. Assessment is designed based on high-quality standards using valid and reliable tools and conducted by highly trained objective observers.

- All Quality First participants will receive an initial assessment that will be used to calculate a rating. This initial rating is not public unless the participant earns a quality level (3, 4 or 5-star) rating.
- Following the initial assessment, all participants will receive regular renewal assessments to establish a public star rating.
  - Participants with a 1, 2, or 3-star rating will receive renewal assessments every two years.
  - Participants with a 4 or 5-star rating will receive renewal assessments every three years.

**Policy Update Notice (Effective July 1, 2026):** The three-year assessment timeline for 4- and 5-star ratings begins in state fiscal year 2027 (beginning July 1, 2026). If you are a current participant with a 4 or 5-star rating, your upcoming cycle end date is based on your existing two-year cycle date, which you can see in the extranet. The new three-year timeline will take effect *after* you complete your next assessment following July 1, 2026. At that point, your next cycle end date in the extranet will update to reflect a three-year window.

Failure to participate in the assessment process may result in disenrollment.

## The Role of the Quality First Assessor

Quality First assessors are experienced professionals in the field of early childhood and receive extensive training on the assessment tools to ensure they are measuring program practices accurately.

The assessment reports you receive provide important information for you to build upon your strengths and identify where you can do even better.

An assessor will visit your program to complete an assessment at the very beginning of your participation. This assessment provides a baseline of information that is the foundation for you to build upon. During the observation, the assessor will focus on keeping a professional stance at all times. You will see them moving around the learning environment, viewing materials and writing notes in order to gather as much information as possible, according to the tool being used. While the assessor is in your program, they will not start or extend an interaction with a child. At the same time, they will never ignore a child's question, curiosity or request for attention.

Quality First assessors are dedicated to the same measures of confidentiality as coaches and other technical assistance providers. They will always show respect in a professional manner.

Although the assessor will be collecting information during the visit, no feedback will be provided at that time. The written assessment results will be available in the extranet once reports have been completed and approved.

## Quality First Assessment Activities

The Quality First process begins with the initial assessment, which offers objective information to guide your quality improvement efforts. The results of the assessment will determine the initial star rating. This initial rating is not public unless the participant achieves a quality level (3, 4 or 5) rating. If a quality level rating is achieved, the rating will be public and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates. All renewal ratings are public.

**Before all assessment cycles, you will receive a phone call** - It is your responsibility to respond to the assessor within 72 hours of a phone call if they are not successful in connecting with you.

- Initial assessments are scheduled in advance for a mutually agreed-upon date and timeframe.
- For rating renewal assessments, the assessor will call two weeks before your cycle end date. You will be provided a timeframe (typically around three weeks) in which the assessment will be conducted. The assessor can come any day within these three weeks, other than specified blackout dates.

**The following is a list of important things to share with the assessor during the phone call:**

**Languages Spoken in Your Program** - Assessors speak a variety of languages and will be matched with the language most spoken in your program.

### **Children or Staff with Special Needs**

- Prior to assessing a classroom, the assessor will ask you if there are any enrolled children with an IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan), IEP (Individualized Education Plan), documented gifted needs and/or medically diagnosed conditions (i.e., asthma, diabetes, severe allergies) to determine if accommodations that are observed need to be taken into account. As this information is confidential, assessors will not need to view the individual children's plans.
- Accommodations for staff with special needs can be made by the assessor, as long as they do not affect the assessor's ability to use the tool as intended.

**Minimizing Stress for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma**- In some cases, unexpected classroom visitors can cause stress or reactions in children who have a history of trauma. Certain parts of the assessor's appearance can be changed to reduce the potential for a trauma response. This could include removing the name tag, removing the clipboard or wearing more casual clothing.

**Programmatic Philosophies or Practices such as Montessori, Parent Cooperatives, Student Teaching or Primary Caregiving**- Programmatic philosophies or practices that you would like the assessment team to be aware of must be identified in your parent/family handbook or in written policies/procedures that you share with families. The assessor may request to view this documentation.

**Recent Staffing Changes**- This information guides the assessor in determining whether or not a classroom is eligible for assessment. (For more information, see the Quality First Staffing Guide.)

**Blackout Dates** - You will have an opportunity to inform the assessor of dates that would hinder an assessment visit. For instance, days your program is closed, planned field trips, special events such as picture day, scheduled emergency drills, scheduled Quality First support team visits (including coaches and other technical assistance

professionals) and days when you will typically have low attendance or staff absences may all interfere with a proper assessment.

**Extranet Data** - During the call, the assessor will review your information from the extranet to determine how many classrooms/groups of children to assess and which tools to use during the assessment based on the age groups you serve. Please ensure your extranet data is reviewed and updated regularly; keeping this information current helps minimize the time the assessor needs to spend verifying and updating details during your call.

**Accreditation** - Head Start/Early Head Start and accredited programs will be assessed with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tools only. If the program does not meet the CLASS threshold scores for a 3-star rating, no Environment Rating Scales (ERS) will be completed, resulting in a 2-star rating.

# Quality First Assessment Tools

A variety of assessment tools are used to collect information about the average experience of the children in your program. Research shows that to accurately measure a program's quality, it is important to look at the environment and interactions. Assessors will select the appropriate assessment tool(s) to be used in your program's assessment based on Quality First policies and procedures.

## ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALES

(ERS; Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford and Debby Cryer) - measuring elements of a quality environment.

**Environment Rating Scale (ERS) Assessment Policy:** ERS Assessments will be conducted to assess early care and education environments. The ERS assessment will be conducted on-site for approximately three hours by a qualified assessor.

Head Start/Early Head Start and nationally accredited programs undergo additional assessment as part of the accreditation/monitoring process. Because these processes include review of the early care and education environment, participants that are Head Start/Early Head Start or nationally accredited will not have an ERS assessment conducted (a list of national accrediting organizations is included in the Resources section at the end of this guide).

Establishing high-quality learning environments has been shown to positively support the development of young children and their early education. The ERS are observational tools used to assess the quality of the environment in early care settings. Observations using the ERS provide a brief snapshot of the learning environment, as well as the children's experiences in that setting. There are three versions of the ERS used by Quality First. Each is designed to assess a specific age group and early care setting.

- **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (children from 3 to 5 years of age) (ECERS)**  
This scale is designed to assess the quality of preschool environments located in center-based child care settings.
- **Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (children from birth to 36 months of age) (ITERS)**  
This scale is designed to assess the quality of care environments serving infants and toddlers in center-based child care settings.
- **Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (children from birth to 12\* years of age) (FCCERS)**  
This scale is designed to assess the quality of the environment in family child care settings with mixed-age groups.  
\* While Quality First participation is limited to programs serving children from birth to age five, if children older than five are present during the observation they will be included in the assessment data collection, per tool guidelines.

More information can be found at <http://ersinstitute.com>.

## CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT SCORING SYSTEM

(CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2005) - measuring quality interactions

**Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) Policy:** CLASS assessments will be conducted to assess adult-child interactions. Programs must achieve a level of 3.0 or higher on the ERS assessment with no individual classroom score below 2.5 to have a CLASS assessment conducted (Head Start and nationally accredited programs will begin with a CLASS assessment). A CLASS assessment will be conducted by a trained assessor who will observe the classroom in four 20-minute observation cycles with designated scoring time in between. Programs that operate four hours or less will have modified observation cycles. In these programs, the assessor will complete four 15-minute observation cycles with designated scoring time in between.

Research shows that positive adult-child interactions in early care and education settings are a vital part of supporting children's learning and development. The CLASS is a system for observing and assessing the quality of interactions between teachers and students in infant, toddler and preschool classrooms. The CLASS measures social-emotional and instructional interactions in center and home-based programs. The CLASS looks at interactions that contribute to children's social skills and academic achievement. There are three versions of the CLASS used by Quality First. Each is designed to assess a specific age group.

- **Pre-K CLASS (children from 3 to 5 years of age)**  
This scale is designed to assess the quality of interactions within preschool environments.
- **Toddler CLASS (children from 15 to 36 months of age)**  
This scale is designed to assess the quality of interactions within toddler environments.
- **Infant CLASS (children from birth to 18 months of age)**  
This scale is designed to assess the quality of interactions within infant environments.

The most appropriate assessment tool for each age range will be determined using classroom rosters of enrolled children. The CLASS assessment will not be conducted during the same visit as the ERS assessment. You will be contacted if a CLASS assessment is required. More information can be found at <https://www.teachstone.com/class/>.

### Preparing for the next edition of CLASS

Quality First is beginning to look ahead to the newly updated, CLASS 2nd Edition. In state fiscal year 2027 (July 1, 2026- June 30, 2027) FTF will continue using the first edition CLASS tools for star ratings. In addition, data collection will begin this year using the updated editions. This effort will help inform whether updates need to be made to the star rating scale, while giving participants a valuable opportunity to see how your current practices map onto the updated tools.

Updated tool structure:

The 2nd edition condenses the system from three age groups and tools to two:

- Infant-Toddler (birth to age three)
- Pre-K (Pre-K- 3rd grade)

What to expect:

To support you through this transition, the Assessment Team will be conducting informal assessments using the updated tools. Assessors will work in pairs during these visits in order to collect data in classrooms using both versions of the tools.

If you are interested in being part of this data collection effort, see Informal Assessment on page 27 to learn more about the process and how to request an informal assessment.

# The Day of an ERS Assessment

When the assessor arrives, they will need to gather some initial information regarding the total number of children enrolled, the number of children in attendance that day, the number of children with special needs, children with allergies or dietary restrictions, the birthdates of the youngest and oldest child enrolled in the classroom selected, the outdoor space used by children and the staff assigned to each classroom/child care group.

At least one third of the classrooms in each age group (infants/toddlers and preschoolers) will be assessed. The assessor will use the guidelines below to determine the number of classrooms/care groups for each age group to be assessed using the ages of the children on the classroom rosters.

- 1-3 classrooms = 1 classroom assessment
- 4-6 classrooms = 2 classroom assessments
- 7-9 classrooms = 3 classroom assessments
- 10-12 classrooms = 4 classroom assessments
- 13+ classrooms = 1/3 of the number of classrooms

## For family child care homes

All areas of the home used by the children present on the day of the observation will be part of the assessment.

## For center-based programs

If more than one classroom is being assessed, the assessor will ask you to randomly draw which classroom will be assessed that day.

Each assessor will only assess one classroom per day.

- Adjustments to this practice may be needed due to program size, location, or other factors.

To maintain the integrity of the assessment, participants cannot choose which classrooms will be assessed.

## For all program types

The assessor will remain at your program for at least three hours when conducting the ERS assessment. They may stay longer if they need to gather information not collected during the first three hours.

The assessor will introduce themselves to staff upon arrival, but they are unable to answer questions or provide information during the assessment.

If the administrator has questions about the assessment process or activities on the day of the assessment, please ask them before or after the observation is conducted.

Assessors will move around the areas used for child care, collect data on materials, watch interactions and routines and write notes.

Once the observation is complete, the assessor will leave and begin scoring and report writing using the notes collected at your program.

The assessor is not permitted to share any results or information about the assessment with the program, nor are they allowed to provide technical assistance.

If all ERS score requirements identified in the Star Rating Scale are met, you will proceed with CLASS assessments. If no CLASS observations will be completed, you will receive notice via email when your assessment reports and star rating are complete.

# The Day of a CLASS Assessment

## When the assessor arrives

- Head Start/Early Head Start and nationally accredited programs begin their assessment process with CLASS.
- If more than one classroom is being assessed, the assessor will conduct a random draw to determine which classroom(s) will be assessed that day.

## For center-based programs

The assessor will determine the appropriate CLASS tool for each observation using the ages of the children on the classroom roster (Infant CLASS- birth to 18 months, Toddler CLASS- 15 to 36 months, Pre-K CLASS- three to five years). At least one third of the classrooms in each age group will be assessed. The assessor will use the guidelines below to determine the number of classrooms/care groups for each age group to be assessed.

- 1-3 classrooms = 1 classroom assessment
- 4-6 classrooms = 2 classroom assessments
- 7-9 classrooms = 3 classroom assessments
- 10-12 classrooms = 4 classroom assessments
- 13+ classrooms = 1/3 of the number of classrooms

## For family child care homes

The assessor will look at the ages of the children birth to five to determine which CLASS tool is appropriate in the setting using the following guidelines:

- If the expected attendance at the family child care home on the day of the assessment is made up of children between the ages of 3 to 5, the Pre-K CLASS will be conducted.
- If the expected attendance at the family child care home is made up of children between the ages of 15 to 36 months, the Toddler CLASS will be conducted.
- If the expected attendance at the family child care home is made up of children between the ages of birth to 18 months, the Infant CLASS will be conducted.
- If the expected attendance on the day of the assessment includes multiple age ranges, the Toddler CLASS will be conducted.

## For all program types


Each assessor will only assess one classroom per day.

To maintain the integrity of the assessment, participants cannot choose which classrooms will be assessed.

The assessor will remain at your program for approximately two to three hours, completing four CLASS cycles.

One cycle includes a 20-minute observation period immediately followed by a 10-minute coding period.

The assessor will conduct an additional cycle if any of the four cycles are less than 20 minutes in length, making the observation incomplete.



At the end of the CLASS assessment, the assessor will ask the staff in the classroom if there are any children with an IEP/IFSP present in the classroom just assessed.

Programs that operate four hours or less will have modified observation cycles.

- In these programs, the assessor will complete four back-to-back 15-minute observation cycles with designated scoring time in between.

Once the observation is complete, the assessor will leave and begin report writing using the notes collected at your program.

The assessor is not permitted to share any results or information about the assessment with the program, nor are they allowed to provide technical assistance.

You will receive notice via email when your assessment reports and star rating are complete. Your assessment reports and star rating will be shared with you via the extranet.

# The Assessment Process

The following are things that are important to know about the assessment process:

**Prepare Your Staff:** If you employ staff, it is important to prepare them for the assessment. The coach or coordinator can support a meeting to discuss the assessment process with the teaching staff. It is important to inform them that an assessment will occur as part of your participation, and remind them that the assessment will help them see strengths and areas of improvement.

**Classroom/Care Groups:** The classrooms/groups identified on the first day of assessment will be used throughout the assessment process.

- Quality First considers a unique roster of children assigned to a specific lead teacher or classroom space as an individual classroom/group.
  - For example, a program may have a single lead teacher with an a.m. class roster and a p.m. class roster. Each of these roster groups is considered an individual classroom/group.
- Assessors will verify this information over the phone and also in person on the first day of assessment at your program.
  - For programs in their initial assessment, the coordinator will assist you with entering this in the extranet.
  - For all assessments that follow, you are responsible for ensuring staff names are up-to-date in your program's extranet profile.

A **Staff Verification Form** is required to ensure that the staff observed are the typical staff assigned to the classroom and identified in the extranet. For Quality Improvement participants, this form may be used to verify staffing numbers for funding for staff recognition. This form will be signed by both the assessor and the site contact.

**Random Draw** - If your program has more than one classroom or grouping of children, the assessor will conduct a random draw with your assistance to determine which classroom/group will be assessed that day. The random draw will be witnessed by a member of your staff to ensure accuracy. The name and signature of everyone participating in the random draw will be collected.

- Random Draw Selection for Teachers in Multiple Groupings- To ensure a fair representation of practices program-wide, assessors will remove a teacher and their additional groupings from the random draw after the teacher is randomly selected once.
  - For example: Teacher Susie teaches two groups of children, one on MWF and one on T TH. Her MWF group is selected as part of the random draw. The T TH group would then be removed from random draw so she does not get selected more than once for assessments using the same tool.
- The total number of classrooms and age ranges would still be used to determine 1/3 of the open classrooms and the other teachers at that site would remain eligible for those additional observations.

**Eligibility for Assessment in 5-Year-Old Classrooms** - In center-based programs, if a majority of children in a classroom (51 percent) were born **on or after** September 1, 2021, the classroom **is** included in the random draw for assessment with one exception;

- Random draws that take place between June 1, 2026 and the start of the 2026-2027 school year **will not** include classrooms where a majority of the children (51%) have turned 5 years old, since those children will be starting

kindergarten in a few weeks.

**Assessor Objectivity** - Whenever possible, different assessors will conduct the observations for each of the assessment tools. This is to ensure objectivity for each observation.

**Multiple Assessors** - More than one assessor may attend during an observation visit for the purpose of training, reliability testing and/or to accommodate the size of your program. You will be notified in advance if this applies to your program.

**Summer Closures** - Quality First assessment is automatically deferred until 20 classroom days after the start of the following school year for:

- Participants operating\* on a nine-month, school-year calendar who become due for assessment on or after April 30 but before their summer closure begins, or
- Participants who become due for assessment during their scheduled summer closure.

\*The assessment team uses the information from your program's extranet profile summary to determine your dates of operation.

**Moving/Relocation During Assessment** - If your program moves to a new location in the middle of the assessment process, the assessment team will re-complete all of the assessments at the new location. Rescheduling of the assessments will be done on a case by case basis. If a program moves after the rating is final, the rating will apply until the next assessment cycle.

## Assessment Reports

An assessment report will be available online through the Quality First Extranet Assessment Summary tab and can be printed. Each classroom/care group observed will receive an individual report with scores related to each tool's indicators. You will find areas designated as strengths in your program as well as areas of opportunity for growth. The coordinator or coach can help you review the information contained in these reports. Make sure to celebrate the areas that you did well and use the information provided in the reports to inform your improvement planning.

Your program's assessment reports will remain confidential and are only available for review by you and the Quality First team. If you have a question about your report or if you find any information that seems inconsistent based on your program specifics, you may submit an Assessment Report Clarification Request Form. A copy of this form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources. The form can also be found on the Quality First Website's Program Updates Page by searching "participant forms."

**Assessment Report Clarification Policy:** To clarify content contained in an assessment report, assessment clarification is offered. The Assessment Report Clarification Request must be submitted within 40 days of the assessment results being approved. A response will be provided within 14 days as possible. All Assessment Report Clarification Requests must be sent via Word document to allow for timely response. PDF or scanned documents may require extra time to process. If the clarification warrants a change in scores, this will be noted in the extranet and the assessment report will be updated. Video or audio recordings or photographs will not be considered. The assessment process is conducted using live, on-site observations to capture the entire content of the learning environment and interactions.

# Star Rating

Your star rating will be available for viewing on the extranet's QF Rating Information- Provider tab when you receive the email notification that your star rating is finalized and the assessment reports are available for viewing.

- Your program will receive ongoing assessments on a regular basis to update your star rating.
  - Programs that earn a Rising Star, Progressing Star, or Quality rating (1-3-star), your program will be contacted for assessment every 24 to 26 months.
  - Programs that earn a Quality Plus or Highest Quality rating (4-5-star), your program will be contacted for assessment every 36 months.
- You will find your current assessment cycle end date on your program's extranet profile page.

**Public Rating Policy:** An initial rating is calculated for all participants. This initial rating is not public unless the participant achieves a quality level (3, 4 or 5) rating or if a participant achieves a 1 or 2-star rating and submits the Request for Public Rating Form. If a quality level rating is achieved, the rating will be automatically publicly posted and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for DES tiered reimbursement rates.

Following the initial assessment, all participants will receive subsequent regular renewal assessments to establish a public star rating. Regardless of star rating level, these subsequent ratings will be publicly posted and shared with DES for the purpose of qualifying for tiered reimbursement rates.

**Quality First** Profile Summary Site ID : 1099

**QF Test Training Site 1, Test/Training Site**  
 Address: 4000 N Central Ave Phoenix, AZ 85012  
 Regional Partnership Council: Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council  
 Main Contact: Test Provider Contact 602-555-1212  
 Provider Type: Center  
 Provider Size: Small

**Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	E-Mail
Main Contact	Test Provider Contact	Test Provider		602-555-1212	<a href="mailto:extranet@azftf.gov">extranet@azftf.gov</a>

**Site Details**

Provider Type: Center

Contact Information:  
 Name: Test Provider Contact  
 Title: Test Provider

**Program Snapshot**

Size of Site: Small  
 Number of Active Staff: 216  
 Number of Active Classrooms: 168  
 Total Enrolled: 573

**QF Activities**

Orientation Completed: Yes  
 Orientation Completed Date: 4/1/2011  
 Status: Data Not Verifiable  
 Fund Source: FTF

- Quality First
- Profile Summary
- Site
- Program
- Staffing
- Classroom / Family Group
- Orientation
- Acknowledgment
- Assessment Summary
- QF Rating Information - Provider
- QF Rating Assessor Checklist
- Activity Log
- Activity Log NEW
- Quality Improvement Plans
- Scholarships
- CCHC Clinical Pathways
- CCHC Activity Log
- Print Application
- QF Rating Administration
- Center Administration



**RATING**

**Not Yet Rated**

**QF Test Training Site 1, Test/Training Site**

Address: 4000 N Central Ave Phoenix, AZ 85012

Regional Partnership Council: Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council

Main Contact: Test Provider Contact 602-555-1212

Provider Type: Center

Provider Size: Small

My Providers

Print

**Assessment Data for Completed Cycles**

<b>Cycle</b>	<input type="text" value="Select cycle"/>	
<b>Completed Date</b>	<input type="text"/>	
<b>Cycle End Date</b>	<input type="text"/>	
<b>ERS Average Program Score</b>	<input type="text"/>	
<b>CLASS Average Program Score</b>		
<b>Emotional Support</b>	<b>Classroom Organization</b>	<b>Instructional Support</b>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>Star Rating</b>	<input type="text"/>	

**ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT POLICIES**

**Early Assessment Policy:** Participants may request to have an assessment conducted prior to the regular cycle. Requests are considered on a case-by-case basis, and are not guaranteed. Considerations for approval include the number of previous early assessments a participant has received, the volume of requests received, assessor availability, and funding availability. An early assessment may not be conducted if the assessment cycle is less than 18 months. The request will be reviewed to determine if this option is available, and you will be notified by the assessment team whether or not your request is approved. A response will be provided within five business days as possible.

**Assessment Deferment Policy:** Participants may request to have an assessment deferred due to unforeseen circumstances.

A request for summer assessment deferment may be submitted when a program has major programming changes during summer operation. Please note that if your program uses scholarships, a summer assessment deferment may impact your program’s scholarship eligibility during the summer. (See page 36 for more information about scholarships). School-year-only programs do not need to submit a Request for Summer Deferment Form.

All requests for assessment deferment must be submitted to the assessment program manager. Deferment requests will be reviewed to determine eligibility, and notification will be sent by email to the participant whether or not the request is approved. Deferment requests are not guaranteed and will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Newly selected programs in the initial assessment cycle may not request deferment.

**Informal Assessment Policy:** Informal assessments are offered to provide feedback outside of the standard assessment cycle. Informal assessment is offered based on the schedule and availability of the assessment team and is not guaranteed. Following the observation, the Main Contact will receive an email notification once the report(s) is complete. The informal assessment report(s) will be available in the extranet's assessment summary tab. The formal Quality First assessment process cannot be delayed or deferred due to a delay in informal assessment. Requests for informal assessment may not be approved within 6 months of a site's cycle end date.

Copies of the Request for Public Rating, Request for Early Assessment, Assessment Deferment Request Summer Deferment and Informal Assessment Request are available in the extranet under Quality First Resources. The forms can also be found on the Quality First Website's Program Updates Page by searching "participant forms."

# Strategies to Help Prepare for a Successful Assessment

In order to make the most of your Quality First participation and to help prepare your program for successful assessments, here are some ideas:

**Check out** the [Preparing for Assessment](#) checklist. It provides simple tips and resources to help you feel prepared and confident throughout the process.

**Review** the assessment tools. View online trainings to become oriented to the tools. Visit <https://www.azregistry.org/>, select “find training event” and search “Overview of the Environment Rating Scales” or “Overview of Classroom Assessment Scoring System”.

**Reflect** on daily practices. Educators can benefit from reflecting on their practices through the lenses of the assessment tools. Developed by Quality First assessors, the [Self-Reflection Guides](#) help you dive into the CLASS® and ERS tools. Use the guides independently or with the help of your coach and support team.

**Share** information about the assessment tools, potentially through staff meetings before the observation. Providing a copy of the assessment tool to your teachers helps build an understanding of what will be looked at during the assessment process.

**Update** your program information to make sure it’s current in the extranet and registry and that all class rosters are accurate. Gathering all the birthdates of the children in each child care group is helpful in planning ahead. Use the [Extranet Update Checklist](#) to help you.

**Talk with staff** about what to expect—how the assessor will be in the classroom, how long they will be there, what they will be observing and how to maintain a natural environment for the children.

**Talk to children** about the role of the assessor to help them feel comfortable with the assessor’s presence. You have the option of introducing the assessor to the children when they are ready to observe.

**Prepare** your families in advance by letting them know an assessor will be visiting your program. This supports their understanding of your commitment to improvement.

**Consider** the unique needs of your program in planning for your assessment. The assessor will ask about your program's specifics, such as language of instruction or a unique population served. Be sure to share this information with the assessor.

**Communicate** children's special needs. Although assessors will not need to look at the individual plans for children with special needs or special health care conditions, it is helpful to let them know so that they can focus on the environment in terms of the child's needs.

**Plan** your time so you are available in case the assessor needs additional information.

**Ask** the assessor if you are unsure about any part of the process before, during or after the assessment. Don't be afraid to speak up at any time. You can also ask your coach or coordinator if you need assistance.

# Additional Supports for Your Program

Beyond Quality First, you have access to other supports to strengthen your work with children and families and help your program run smoothly. Think of Quality First as your open door to Arizona's entire early childhood community.

## Regional Support Programs

These specialized programs are funded by First Things First (FTF) Regional Councils. They are available to providers operating in the specific regions listed below.

### Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (Smart Support)

*Funded by FTF regional partnership councils in the following FTF regions: Cochise, Coconino, East Maricopa, Graham/Greenlee, La Paz/Mohave, Navajo Nation, Northwest Maricopa, Phoenix North, Phoenix South, Pima South, Pinal, San Carlos Apache, Southeast Maricopa, Southwest Maricopa, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai and Yuma.*

*Additionally funded by the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation is also available statewide for DES contracted child care providing care for children in the child welfare system and/or offering infant or toddler care.*

Smart Support is an evidence-based strategy proven to support the social and emotional development of all children in care and help providers appropriately respond to children with behavioral challenges. Consultants work directly with educators to develop strategies to work most effectively with children in early learning settings.

Contact Smart Support at **1.866.330.5520**

*An example of services that might be provided through Smart Support would be training for educators on helping children to label emotions and creating helpful activities that assist children in learning how to deal with strong feelings.*

### Inclusion of Children with Special Needs (Inclusion Program)

*Funded by FTF regional partnership councils in the following FTF regions: Cochise, Northwest Maricopa, Phoenix North, Phoenix South and Yuma.*

Inclusion coaching addresses the need for quality early care and education for young children with special needs ages birth to 5. Specific focus is on improving skills of child care staff and providing training and assistance to support quality inclusive settings.

Contact the Inclusion Program via the contact information below:

#### FTF MARICOPA COUNTY REGIONS

Inclusion@SWHD.org

#### FTF COCHISE and YUMA REGIONS

928.248.5112 or email JSaletan@Blake.EasterSeals.com

*An example of how this specialized assistance could be provided would be to support children who may have difficulty communicating be successful in the classroom by using visual supports or other strategies. The Inclusion Program can also train staff on developmental screenings and provide professional development on a variety of topics related to children who have identified or suspected developmental delays.*

## Statewide Resources and Tools

These resources are available to regulated early care and education programs statewide.

### Early Childhood Resource Guide

A free digital guide is available to support Arizona's early childhood education providers. The Early Childhood Resource Guide includes tools and information to strengthen your program, support your staff, and engage families.

[View the Early Childhood Resource Guide](#)

### Early Childhood Business Solutions

*Free and available statewide to licensed or certified child care programs.*

Early Childhood Business Solutions (ECBS) partners with early care and education providers to help improve their business management practices and ensure financial success and stability. Services include business coaching, training, roundtable discussions, a support line and more.

Contact ECBS at **602.265.4768**

*An example of services that might be provided through Early Childhood Business Solutions would be individualized coaching to help a program director identify the true cost of care and use child care management software to manage budgeting and track operational information.*

## Empower

The Empower program, provided by the Arizona Department of Health Services, provides standards and guidance toward effective health practices in the early care and education setting.

**Empower Policy:** To help children and families lead healthier lives, participation in Empower is required of all Quality First participants. Participants are required to enroll in Empower and have a written policy and implementation for each standard. Empower standards support program health and wellness including nutrition, breastfeeding, physical activity, screen time, tobacco, oral health, sun safety, social and emotional development and staff training.

## State Standards

The Arizona Department of Education offers tools to support you in your efforts to make high-quality opportunities available to all students. The following tools are available free of charge and are excellent sources of information. Trainings are available online. Please visit the Arizona Department of Education website, <https://www.azed.gov/ece/professional-learning>, for more information.

### Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines

Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines are part of a continuum of early learning guidelines that provide a framework for understanding and communicating a common set of developmentally appropriate expectations for young children, presented within a context of shared responsibility and accountability for helping young children meet these expectations. Specifically, these guidelines describe expectations about what infants and toddlers should know and do across multiple domains of development during specific age ranges, as well as what adults can do to support children's optimal learning and development. (Click on the link below to access these guidelines.)

[Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines \(ENGLISH\)](#)

[Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines \(SPANISH\)](#)

### Arizona Early Learning Standards

The Arizona Early Learning Standards have been developed to provide a framework for the planning of quality learning experiences for all children three to five years of age. The standards cover a broad range of skill development and provide a useful instructional foundation for children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse abilities. The standards are intended for use by all those who work with young children in any early care and education setting in urban, rural and tribal communities. (Click on the link below to access these standards.)

[Early Learning Standards ENGLISH](#)

[Early Learning Standards SPANISH](#)

### Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Care and Education: Birth Through Kindergarten

The Program Guidelines for High Quality Early Care and Education: Birth through Kindergarten does not contain a list of requirements, but rather a set of recommended practices for programs to use as they strive for excellence in the care and education of young children throughout Arizona. This document is intended to provide guidance by delineating quality and providing a set of indicators that concretely describe what a program will look like when providing high quality early care and education for children birth through age six. (Click on the link below to access these guidelines.)

<https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/media/Program%20Guidelines%20for%20High%20Quality%20Early%20Education%203rd%20Edition.pdf>

# Professional Development & Workforce Resources

As an early childhood educator, you care about learning and growing in your work. As a Quality First participant, you have access to many professional development opportunities. These trainings help you build new skills based on the latest research, so you can better support your program, your staff, and the children in your care.

The Arizona Early Childhood Professional Development Network (Network) serves as a resource to build Arizona's early education workforce, promote the early childhood professional development system and share additional information that connects early childhood practitioners and others interested in the field with resources to advance their careers.

## The Network includes the following components:

- The Network [website](#) that includes information about professional development and training opportunities, career and higher education resources, and other information to assist early childhood professionals in keeping their skills and knowledge up to date.
- The [Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry \(Registry\)](#): A web-based system that enables early childhood professionals and those interested in an early education career to find and register for professional development opportunities, as well as keep a record of their experience, education, professional development and credentials in a central location.
- [First Things First college scholarships](#) for the early childhood workforce working directly with or on behalf of young children birth to age 5 to provide tuition, books and college/course fees at colleges and universities and/or the fees associated with obtaining a child development associate credential.
- The [Arizona Career Lattice](#): A tool that early childhood professionals can use for individualized professional assessment, setting professional development goals and documenting progress in their career development. The Arizona Career Lattice will be replaced with the [Educator Designation](#) in the fall of 2026.
- The [Arizona Workforce Knowledge and Competencies \(WFKC\)](#): A uniform set of expectations that identify the basic knowledge, skills and abilities needed for early childhood professionals including child care and preschool staff, early intervention providers and mental health, physical health and social services/child welfare professionals. The WFKC support implementation of quality services for young children and their families.
- A [Job Bank](#) for early childhood jobs submitted from employers using the [AZToolkit](#).

**Registry Policy:** Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry membership is required of all staff working with children in Quality First participating programs.

- The following staff are required to have a registry account: family child care providers and family child care staff that work with young children, center directors, assistant directors, teachers and assistant teachers.
- Program directors are required to request administrative access to view and manage their early education program and staffing information. Step-by-step instructions for requesting administrative access, submitting education documentation and more are outlined on the website at <https://azearlychildhood.org/about/using-the-registry/>.

# Support to help you prevent expulsions

Young children grow and thrive within stable relationships with caring adults. Maintaining stability in children's early learning experiences supports their development and their long-term success in kindergarten and beyond. Unfortunately, preschoolers are three times more likely to be expelled than students in kindergarten through grade 12.<sup>1</sup> This is often due to challenging behaviors that educators feel unequipped to handle. Nationwide, early childhood programs are developing policies to reduce and eliminate expulsion.

As a Quality First participant, your program has access to resources to help you support all children's success and reduce or eliminate expulsion from your program. Consultation, training and technical assistance helps you and your staff feel more equipped to respond to challenging behaviors in support of all children's success. For support in preventing expulsions in your program, access the resources below:

## Call a Specialist

- **Birth to Five Helpline**

*Available statewide to families, caregivers and professionals*

Contact the helpline:

- By phone at 877-705-KIDS (5437)
- By completing a request at [www.swhd.org/programs/health-and-development/birth-to-five-helpline/](http://www.swhd.org/programs/health-and-development/birth-to-five-helpline/)
- Via the Birth to Five Helpline app available in the App Store or Google Play

- **Expulsion Prevention Resource Consultants**

*Available statewide to all DES contracted child care centers and family child care homes*

Reach out for support and resources to promote early intervention to prevent suspensions and expulsions. Contact a resource consultant:

- By completing an Expulsion Support Request form at [www.azccrr.com](http://www.azccrr.com)

## Participate in Training and Technical Assistance

- **AZ Steps Expulsion Prevention Training and Technical Assistance**

*Available statewide to all DES contracted child care centers and family child care homes*

Southwest Human Development provides caregivers with skills and strategies they need to respond effectively to challenging behaviors. The training series offers opportunities to learn how understanding child development, attachment, trauma reaction and support of children's developing self-regulation skills can help reduce and prevent expulsion of children from ages birth to 12 years.

- Register online for training through the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry at [azregistry.org](http://azregistry.org). After logging into your account, select "Find Training Event" and select "Name/Description" and type "Expulsion Prevention" in the search bar. Click save and select course.
- Technical assistance is available to provide practical tips and strategies to use in your caregiving environment. For more information regarding technical assistance, please contact 602.633.8730 or [AZSTEPS@swhd.org](mailto:AZSTEPS@swhd.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Gilliam, W.S. 2005. Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems. New Haven, CT: Yale University Child Study Center. Available from [http://www.ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study\\_expulsion\\_tcm350-34774\\_tcm350-284-32.pdf](http://www.ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/National%20Prek%20Study_expulsion_tcm350-34774_tcm350-284-32.pdf).

# Strategies to Benefit from Specialized Assistance

Here are some ideas to help you make the most of the specialized assistance available to you as a Quality First participant:

**Find Programs** that provide specialized assistance services in your area. Visit [FirstThingsFirst.org](https://www.firstthingsfirst.org) and scroll to the “Find FTF Programs” search tool. You will be able to see results for services available for you, your program and the young children & families in your area.

**Talk** with your Quality First coordinator or coach to discuss your specific needs and areas of focus. Consider your goals and how specialized assistance can help you meet your goals.

**Include** the staff you work with when discussing your program’s needs and areas of focus. What would help them provide the best care to the children they serve? What types of assistance would support their teaching?

**Request** program supports that will assist you in your efforts. Coaches, coordinators and other technical assistance professionals are knowledgeable experts in their fields; however, you are the expert on your program. Let the support team know if there are areas where you would like assistance.

**Communicate** with families about the types of specialized assistance you are using in your program. Introduce families to your coach, coordinator and consultants who will be supporting your program as they may see them on a regular basis.

**Review** your program’s Registry information regularly to ensure your program and staff information is up to date.

The reports provide information about your staff’s professional development and education and are accepted by ADHS licensing and DES child care certification specialists. Review reports regularly to identify strengths and gaps in core knowledge areas (CKAs) in each staff’s records. This helps you create professional development plans to meet these needs.

**Ensure** your program’s entire classroom and administrative staff become members of the Arizona Early Childhood Workforce Registry. Make enrollment part of your new hire onboarding process, and show new staff how to use the registry to access professional development. They will have access to professional development, possible college scholarship opportunities and a place to document their education and professional development.

# Quality First Scholarships

Quality First scholarships support children to attend 3-, 4- or 5-star Quality First participants. Families earning at or below 300% of Federal Poverty Level are eligible to apply for Quality First scholarships.

Quality First scholarships are funded directly by regional partnership councils (council) based on their priorities. Each council conducts a strategic planning process that includes reviewing the needs and assets of the community to determine their investment in Quality First scholarships. If selected as a priority, the amount of funding will determine the number of Quality First scholarships available to be allocated to Quality First participants who have achieved a 3-, 4- and 5-star rating as of April 1. Not all Quality First participants will receive an allocation of Quality First scholarships.

**New for State Fiscal Year 2027:** Programs in both the Quality Improvement and Rating Only participation types are now eligible to receive a Quality First scholarship allocation (if funded by your local region).

Your scholarship allocation depends on your site details in the Extranet:

- **Year-Round Programs**

If you are a year-round program, your scholarships are available all year long. This also means you are eligible for Quality First Assessment during the summer. Please note that if your program uses scholarships during the summer, assessment cannot be deferred due to seasonal changes in your program's operations during the summer months. (For example, the program runs a summer camp using different curriculum or teaching staff.)

- **School Year Programs**

School year programs are only eligible for Quality First Assessment during the months they operate and may only use scholarships during the months they operate (as identified by their school year dates in the extranet).

The reimbursement rates and number of Quality First scholarships allocated to a participant can be found in your program's extranet profile under the scholarships tab. For more information about allocations, please contact [QFScholarships@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QFScholarships@FirstThingsFirst.org).

Participants receiving scholarships are required to maintain compliance with the Quality First scholarships policies and procedures identified through the contract with Valley of the Sun United Way. Failure to comply with the policies and procedures may result in termination from both the Quality First scholarships program and Quality First. For more information about Quality First scholarships contracting, reporting and reimbursement, please visit [members.azftfscholarships.org](http://members.azftfscholarships.org) or contact the Valley of the Sun United Way scholarships team using the contact information below:

**Valley of the Sun United Way - Scholarships Team**

3200 E. Camelback Road, Suite 375

Phoenix, AZ 85018

Participant helpline: 602.240.6325

Parent helpline: 602.240.6324 or 866.973.0012

[regionalscholarships@vsuw.org](mailto:regionalscholarships@vsuw.org)

Scholarships allocated to a program that includes religious instruction or worship as part of the program's activities will be transferable scholarships, meaning the family can choose to take their scholarship to another Quality First participant during the state fiscal year (July 1–June 30). Scholarships allocated to a program that does not include religious instruction or

worship as part of the program's activities will remain with the program for the entire state fiscal year, subject to available funding and reallocation for non-use.

Quality First scholarships are able to be transferred within multisite organizations that are located in the same region. This flexibility in allocation allows for the multisite organization to determine the distribution of scholarships to individual sites to maximize usage. To participate in this opportunity, identify your intent on your program's Quality First extranet profile, on the scholarships tab. Click "yes" in the box that indicates, "I want to participate in multisite distribution" for each site in your organization that you would like to move scholarships between. You will receive a confirmation and instructions when you are able to start multisite distribution.

**Extranet Quality First** Profile Summary Site ID : 1099

**QUALITY FIRST** FIRST THINGS FIRST

**RATING**  
Not Yet Rated

**QF Test Training Site 1, Test/Training Site**

Address: 4000 N Central Ave Phoenix, AZ 85012

Regional Partnership Council: Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council

Main Contact: Test Provider Contact 602-555-1212

Provider Type: Center  
Provider Size: Small

My Providers Print

**Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	E-Mail
Main Contact	Test Provider Contact	Test Provider		602-555-1212	<a href="mailto:extranet@azfff.gov">extranet@azfff.gov</a>

**Extranet Quality First** Scholarship Summary Site ID : 1099

**QUALITY FIRST** FIRST THINGS FIRST

**RATING**  
Not Yet Rated

**QF Test Training Site 1, Test/Training Site**

Address: 4000 N Central Ave Phoenix, AZ 85012

Regional Partnership Council: Phoenix North Regional Partnership Council

Main Contact: Test Provider Contact 602-555-1212

Provider Type: Center  
Provider Size: Small

My Providers Save Cancel Print

**Fiscal Year:** Fiscal Year 2023: July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023

**I want to participate in multisite distribution:**  Yes

**Total number of scholarships available:** 0.0

**Age Requirements:**

Of the 0 total number of scholarships available, 0.0 can be used for any child birth through age 5 (not in Kindergarten)

# Administrative Practices

This section explains the policies regarding your participation in Quality First. It is divided into three parts, based on the type of policy.

- **Basic Program Policies-** These are the policies you will use most often. They include policies about who can join, how to enroll, how funding works, and more.
- **Policies to Help Prevent and Respond to Challenges-** This section includes policies to help prevent and address challenges. They include policies on ethical conduct, confidentiality and reporting.
- **Policies to Address Concerns-** This section explains what to do if you have a question, concern, or disagreement. It includes steps for getting clarification, resolving issues, and filing an appeal if needed.

## Basic Program Policies

(Participation Eligibility, Enrollment, Funding and more)

### PARTICIPATION ELIGIBILITY

Early care and education providers that care for children ages five and under and are regulated by a monitoring agency are eligible for Quality First. Participants are required to remain in good standing with their regulatory body. Regulatory bodies in Arizona include the Arizona Department of Health Services Bureau of Child Care Licensing (ADHS BCCL), the Arizona Department of Economic Security Child Care Administration (DES CCA), and tribal or military oversight entities.

Early care and education providers must offer in-person care for children a minimum of 12 hours per week to be eligible to participate in Quality First's Quality Improvement or Rating Only participation types.

### PARTICIPANT ENROLLMENT

**Participant Enrollment Policy:** Enrollment begins after the Enrollment Agreement is signed by the participant, and all required documentation is submitted. Programs must be in good standing with their monitoring agency (ADHS, DES, military or tribal authority) in order to be enrolled.

*For participants in the Quality Improvement participation type:*

Child Care Health Consultation may not begin until after a program is officially enrolled. Funding may not be accessed until after enrollment is completed, assessment is completed, an initial star rating and level of support are assigned and for programs at the Pursuing and Achieving Quality levels, a Quality Improvement Plan is developed.

## **PARTICIPANT ACKNOWLEDGMENT/ PARTICIPANT COMMITMENT (applies to Quality Improvement participation only)**

You will have the opportunity to ask questions about the information in the Participant Guide to ensure your understanding before signing. This allows for ongoing discussion about the expectations of participation. Additional forms are required to access funding. (See Quality First Funding Policy on page 89.)

**Participant Acknowledgment/ Participant Commitment Policy:** To confirm agreement with all Quality First requirements and responsibilities, enrolled participants must review and acknowledge the Participant Guide Acknowledgment and the Participant Commitment within the first 90 days of each fiscal year of participation. Both documents must be acknowledged in order to access funds. Failure to comply with the commitments may result in a Targeted Support Plan and/or disenrollment.

## **PROGRAM DESIGNATION (applies to Quality Improvement participation only)**

At the beginning of your participation, you will complete a Program Designation Form. To make changes to your program's designated individual(s), submit a new Program Designation Form to the Quality First coordinator and update the contact information in the extranet.

**Program Designation Policy:** To support clear communication and participation in quality improvement, all participants must identify the key personnel who will be responsible for leading and coordinating quality improvement.

- **Main Contact-** Meets regularly with the Quality First support team and shares information with staff members.
- **Primary Program Designee-** Meets with the support team in the event that the main contact is not available.

You will receive communications such as emails and phone calls from Quality First. The Main Contact will receive newsletters and email updates and have their contact information posted on [FirstThingsFirst.org](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org) for families seeking care. The Scholarships Contact will also receive communications regarding Quality First scholarships, if applicable. Should you need to make changes to the Main Contact or Primary Program Designee at any time, please contact your Quality First coordinator and complete a new Program Designation Form as soon as possible. You may update the Scholarships Contact directly in your extranet profile, in the site tab.

## E-VERIFY AND LAWFUL PRESENCE

**E-Verify and Lawful Presence Policy:** To determine eligibility for funding, First Things First is required to collect documentation related to E-Verify Participation and Lawful Presence to ensure compliance with federal and state laws.

A participant that is an “employer” as specially defined in A.R.S. § 23-211 must provide proof to First Things First that the participant is registered with and participating in E-Verify. An E-Verify form will be provided to you by your coordinator. All participants must complete and return the form, but only “employers” must provide proof of registration with and participation in E-Verify.

When a participant’s child care program is owned in the name of an individual or a sole proprietorship, the owner must complete the Statement of Lawful Presence & Eligibility to Receive Public Benefits form and submit certain documentation establishing lawful presence and eligibility. First Things First will email you a link to the form if this applies to you.

## EXTRANET (DATA SOURCE)

The extranet is the data system used in Quality First. It is where you can find all of your Quality First information in one place and track your improvement data over time. This information is helpful in keeping up to date on staffing trends, enrollment changes and your movement in scores across time. The extranet is also used to determine funding for quality improvement or staff recognition, potential child care scholarship allocations and assessment scheduling, so the accuracy of this information is crucial.

**Extranet Update Policy:** To ensure accurate and up-to-date information, the Quality First extranet must be updated monthly by the participant. All Quality First participants are responsible for updating information in the areas of program information, child enrollment, identification of children with special needs, and staffing. Contact information in the extranet will be used for all communication.

You will receive an invitation to the extranet with your own personal login and password. If you have challenges logging in or navigating, help is available at [extranet@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:extranet@FirstThingsFirst.org). See the [Extranet Guide](#) section for more detailed information on using the extranet.

## LICENSE CAPACITY VERIFICATION

**License Capacity Verification Policy:** First Things First uses the participant’s license capacity data in the extranet as of April 1 each year to determine quality improvement benefits. All participants are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of the licensing data in their extranet profile. This includes the total license capacity and capacity for children ages birth to 5. Information about license changes, such a new license number and/or expiration date, must be submitted within two weeks of the previous license expiring. Information about changes in size and/or capacity must be submitted within two weeks of the change with the regulatory agency.

Please submit any license changes, and a copy of an updated license to the Quality First Coordinator.

## PROMOTING YOUR COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

Quality is an extremely important factor for families choosing a child care setting. Participation in Quality First is a clear sign to families that you are committed to improving the quality of your program to best serve the children in your care.

**Promoting Your Commitment to Quality Policy:** To identify active participation and the current star rating, participants must display their current star rating certificate in a location easily visible to families. Participants will receive a new printable certificate via email each time the program's star rating is updated. Participants may request to have a certificate printed and mailed to their program by emailing the Quality First team at [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org). The current star rating and certificate are valid until the program is reassessed and a rating is updated.

## OWNERSHIP CHANGE

**Ownership Change Policy:** To ensure accurate information about participant location and ownership, ownership changes must be communicated to the Quality First coordinator. Participants are required to notify Quality First of changes in licensing and/or ownership immediately and a new enrollment agreement must be signed by the new owner to ensure understanding of Quality First guidelines and responsibilities. E-Verify and Lawful Presence documentation will be re-gathered for the new owner.

All programs must remain in good standing and work with their regulatory agency to ensure that the proper paperwork has been filed and approved. Any change in information, including the issuance of a new license or modifications to program size or licensed capacity, must be communicated to the Quality First coordinator.

## RELOCATION/MOVING

If your program is considering moving to a new location, please contact Quality First to determine whether your participation is eligible for transfer.

The most important factor in whether your participation can transfer is the new location of your program.

**If your new location is in the same First Things First (FTF) region:**

If you'll be staying in the same FTF region, your participation will most likely be able to transfer.

Your Quality First coordinator will work with you to collect any required paperwork. If your program receives Quality First scholarships, your eligibility for scholarships and/or the number of scholarships may change, depending on regional priorities.

**If your new location is in a different FTF region:**

If you're moving to a different FTF region, your participation may not be able to transfer, or it may change.

Selection for Quality First in the new region depends on regional funding for Quality First, other funding sources, and regional priorities for selection.

Even if the new region has funding available, your participation type may change (for example, you may move from Quality Improvement participation to Rating Only) depending on funding in the new region.

If your participation cannot transfer, you will need to disenroll and apply for participation at the new location.

**What you need to do**

If you're considering a move, contact Quality First to let us know. First Things First can review your specific situation and provide guidance. Contact the First Things First Quality First Team at [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org) or 602-771-5000

## EXTERNAL FUNDING

**External Funding Policy:** External partners may provide funding to support Quality First participation in addition to the programs supported by regional funding plans. Externally funded participants have a finite period of funding determined at the time of enrollment. External funders pay for Quality First participation through a contract detailing the funding period, the terms of participation and the participating early childhood program(s). The external funder may choose to extend the funding period according to the terms of the contract. Early childhood programs that have participated through external funding are eligible to participate through regional funding after their external funding period is complete. Interested programs must reapply at [QualityFirstAZ.com](http://QualityFirstAZ.com).

## REGIONAL FUNDING

### **Regional Funding Policy:**

Arizona is divided into 28 [First Things First regions](#), each with its own FTF Regional Partnership Council. The regional councils fund programs and services for children birth to five based on the unique needs and assets of their communities. Quality First is one such program that councils fund. Some regions may choose to prioritize selecting programs in high-need areas. For more information about First Things First's regional governance and structure, [visit our website](#). First Things First reserves the right to alter or eliminate benefits at any time in whole or in part for any reason, including available funding, the availability of third-party service partners, the cost of services, the effectiveness of the benefits or changes in funding priorities.

For more information on First Things First (FTF) regional partnership councils and to find your local FTF region, visit: [FirstThingsFirst.org/regions/find-your-region](https://FirstThingsFirst.org/regions/find-your-region). Participants are encouraged to attend their local regional council meetings and become active in the process.

## TEMPORARY CLOSURE

**Temporary Closure Policy\*:** In the event of a short-term program closure or not serving children birth to age 5 on-site, temporary closure status may be requested to place a hold on Quality First services without disenrolling. A participant may request to have temporary closure status for up to 45 days; if the participant does not resume services after 45 days, disenrollment may result.

\*This policy applies to enrolled participants only. Newly selected participants must be open, serving children up to age 5 on-site and ready to participate in services at the time of selection.

Some examples of a temporary program closure include:

- Facility/property damage due to events such as natural disasters, fire, or flooding
- Health epidemic/personal medical conditions
- Lack of enrollment of children birth to age 5

In the event your program has an unexpected closure, you must complete a Request for Temporary Closure Form and submit it to your coordinator. Requests for temporary closure will be reviewed by First Things First. The Quality First coordinator will notify you whether or not the request is approved. Quality First scholarships and funding are not available while a program is in temporary closure status. If your program does not resume services after 45 calendar days, your ongoing enrollment will be reconsidered, taking into account any extenuating circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

## REDISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS

If your program closes, all materials purchased with your quality improvement funds are to be redistributed to other providers serving children in your region. The Quality First coordinator will provide assistance to you. If you will be disenrolling from

Quality First but continuing to serve children, you may retain the materials purchased with your quality improvement funds to support your work with children.

## **PARTICIPANT DISENROLLMENT**

**Participant Disenrollment Policy:** To end Quality First participation and related services, a disenrollment process must be completed. Upon disenrollment you are no longer eligible to receive any funds, including any unexpended funds remaining for the fiscal year.

- Programs may voluntarily disenroll by submitting a Disenrollment Form to the coach or coordinator.
- Involuntary disenrollment will be at the discretion of First Things First based on compliance with program requirements or in the event your program is funded by external sources and that funding ends.
- Programs disenrolling due to a business closure are to redistribute all materials purchased with quality improvement funding to other providers serving children in the region.
- Programs disenrolling from Quality First but continuing to serve children may keep the materials purchased with quality improvement funding to support their continued work with children.

# Policies to Help Prevent and Respond to Challenges

(Ethical Conduct, Confidentiality, Reporting and more)

## CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT (NAEYC)

The Code of Ethical Conduct provides guidance for the early childhood professional in working with families and young children. This code can help in making ethical decisions and in developing sound policy for your program. As a participant, you agree to use the principles and ideals of the Code of Ethical Conduct in your work with children, families, colleagues, and the community. The Code of Ethical Conduct can be found online at: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/position-statements/ethical-conduct>.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

**Confidentiality Policy:** All Quality First partners (coaches, assessors, child care health consultants, supervisors and other technical assistance professionals) are expected to maintain confidentiality about their work with the assigned participant. Program records, staff information, individual ERS and CLASS scores and quality improvement efforts are not made public, nor are they shared with individuals outside of First Things First, its contracted parties, and state agency partners, except as required by law and state regulatory agencies.

If you feel your confidentiality has not been maintained, please discuss this with the technical assistance professional or their supervisor to address the issue.

## CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORTING

**Critical Incident Report Policy:** For the purpose of documenting critical incidents, the Critical Incident Report is required for all Quality First technical assistance professionals. This policy applies to incidents that cause concern, including when a technical assistance professional witnesses an emergency, serious health or safety violations, or reasonably believes that abuse, neglect or child endangerment has occurred.

In the event of a critical incident, the coach or technical assistance professional will notify the on-site administrator or supervisor that a report will be made. If applicable, the appropriate authorities will be contacted (i.e. Department of Child Safety, ADHS, DES, or tribal authority) and a Critical Incident Report will be completed. A copy of the completed Critical Incident Report will be provided to you upon request.

## MANDATED REPORTING

As an early childhood provider, you are a designated mandated reporter by law (as outlined in A.R.S. § 13-3620). Mandated reporters are individuals who are obligated by law to report suspected cases of child abuse and neglect. In general, any person who has responsibility for the care or treatment of a child is a mandated reporter. Under Quality First policy, Quality First technical assistance professionals, including coaches, assessors and child care health consultants, are required to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect as well. Mandated reporter laws are designed to catch child abuse in its early stages so that children are protected from physical or emotional trauma. If you reasonably believe a child in your program is a victim of abuse or neglect, you are required to report this information to the Department of Child Safety or your local law enforcement authority, though a tribal social services agency may be contacted instead for a child who is a tribal member and who lives on a reservation. If you have an incidence of child abuse in your program, it is your responsibility to contact local law enforcement and your regulatory agency to make a report. For training on recognizing child abuse and neglect, contact your Child Care Health Consultant. Additionally, online mandated reporting training is available at <https://dcs.az.gov/report-child-abuse/mandated-reporter-overview-training>.

## REGULATORY STATUS

**Regulatory Status Policy:** To ensure all participants are in good standing with their regulatory agency, regulatory status is reviewed monthly. All participants are required to maintain regulatory status and remain in good standing to ensure compliance with state regulatory standards (ADHS, DES and/or tribal or military authority). If a program experiences an event that causes it to be placed in enforcement action with ADHS or on probation or suspension with DES, the program will not have access to funding for quality improvement or staff recognition nor receive reimbursement for Quality First scholarships during that time. While the program is not in good standing, its star rating will not be publicly visible on the First Things First website.

After First Things First is notified by the regulatory agency that the program is returned to good standing, access to funding and reimbursement for Quality First scholarships will be restored. Due to reporting timeframes between FTF and state regulatory agencies, there may be a delay in the time a program's regulatory status is updated by the regulatory agency and when First Things First is notified.

If a program is noted as not in good standing with its regulatory body for over 60 calendar days or if there is more than one incident in a 12-month period, participation may be terminated or a Targeted Support Plan may be started.

Your program's regulatory status will be monitored on a monthly basis. If your program has been noted as not in good standing, you will receive notification from your Quality First coordinator, coach or CCHC and the scholarships team (if applicable).

It is important for you to maintain open communication with the coach and other technical assistance professionals to help in supporting your compliance with state standards. Your licensing compliance officer or certification specialists are also available to support you in the process of creating a plan of improvement for your success.

## STAR RATING MASKING

**Star Rating Masking Policy:** In order to provide accurate information about quality levels of participating programs, First Things First may temporarily mask a participating program's rating from the extranet and [FirstThingsFirst.org](https://www.firstthingsfirst.org). Star ratings may be temporarily masked due to the following reasons:

- A participant is not in good standing with their regulatory agency
- A critical incident has occurred at the program and is under investigation by law enforcement or a state agency
- A participant is contesting their star rating through the Complaint or Appeals process
- After the rating was finalized and posted, a participant is granted a reassessment

In these instances, the star rating will only be masked until the situation has been rectified.

In limited situations, a star rating may be masked for other reasons as First Things First deems appropriate. During the masking, the rating will show as "Rating Unavailable" on the public website.

## TARGETED SUPPORT PROCESS (applies to Quality Improvement participation only)

**Targeted Support Process Policy:** A Targeted Support Plan may be opened to provide support to overcome barriers to participation and quality improvement. A Targeted Support Plan identifies barriers to quality improvement and actions to overcome them and sustain quality practices. At the end of the 90-day Targeted Support Plan timeframe, you and the technical assistance team will review the plan. This review will identify next steps and whether or not you will continue with Quality First. If you are not able to complete the steps of the Targeted Support Plan, you may be disenrolled.

As a Quality First participant, you lead your program's improvement journey, with help from your support team. You are responsible for following the policies and procedures in this Participant Guide, and the team is available to support you along the way. If you face challenges meeting these standards, your coach or support team will work with you to create a Targeted Support Plan. A Targeted Support Plan may be opened if your program has challenges as noted below:

**Participation Agreement** - As a participant, you agree to play an active role in the quality improvement process. This is outlined in the Participant Commitment. A Targeted Support Plan may be opened if you have challenges meeting the expectations in the agreement.

**Regulatory Status** - If your program is noted as not in good standing with its regulatory body for over 60 days or if there is more than one incident in a 12-month period, participation may be terminated or a Targeted Support Plan may be opened.

**Critical Incident**- If your program experiences a critical incident related to health or safety concerns, a Targeted Support Plan may be opened.

During the Targeted Support Plan, quality improvement funds spending is limited to purchases needed to support the focus of the plan.

# Policies to Address Concerns

(Clarification, Concern Resolution and Appeals)

## CLARIFICATION AND CONCERN RESOLUTION

The process for clarification, concern resolution, and appeal is outlined on pages 50-52. If you have questions about your assessment results and/or star rating, review your assessment reports with your coach, using the ERS tools, All About books and CLASS manuals to answer questions. If questions remain, you may initiate the clarification process by submitting an assessment report clarification request. The Assessment Report Clarification Request Form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources. If concerns persist after completing the assessment clarification process, you may submit a Request for Appeal.

If you have other concerns related to your Quality First experience, begin by speaking directly with the coach or CCHC working with your program. If your concerns persist after speaking with the coach or CCHC, contact a supervisor or program manager for support.

## INFORMAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION

**Informal Dispute Resolution Policy:** Informal Dispute Resolution is available to resolve concerns related to a participant's experience. If informal methods of resolving the issue have not successfully addressed the participant's concerns, a Quality First Complaint Form may be submitted to the Quality First Team at First Things First.

The Complaint Form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources. In the Complaint Form, you will provide a description of your concern and any attempts made to resolve the issue as well as recommendations of possible solutions.

A representative of the First Things First Quality First team will contact you to determine next steps to address your concern either over the phone or by scheduling a meeting with all involved parties, ideally within 14 calendar days of receiving the complaint. After the meeting, First Things First will make a decision and notify you within 14 days.

This informal dispute resolution process does not apply in the case of an enrollment termination.

## APPEALS

**Appeals Policy:** A participant may only submit a request for appeal within 60 days of being notified of a star rating or enrollment termination. The request for appeal must be submitted in writing to the Quality First Team at First Things First using the Request for Appeal Form. Once received, the Quality First team and the senior director for early learning, the chief program officer (CPO), and/or the chief executive officer (CEO) will review the request for appeal and provide a written response, which includes a scheduled meeting date, to you within 14 days of the receipt of the request. A copy of the Request for Appeal Form is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms Section under Quality First Resources. The form can also be found on the Quality First Website's Program Updates Page by searching "participant forms."

The Appeals Process only applies when a participant appeals a star rating or an enrollment termination. A participant must go through the Assessment Report Clarification Process before appealing a star rating. If you would like to discuss any other specific challenge that you are having, the clarification and concern resolution process is the appropriate route.

All Quality First services and benefits will end upon enrollment termination. If First Things First re-enrolls the participant in Quality First as a result of the Appeals Process, the participant may be eligible to receive financial benefits withheld during the period of termination.

While an appeal about a star rating is being considered, the participant's star rating will be masked from public view on the Quality First website.

If you are unsatisfied with the result of your request for appeal, you may request a formal hearing conducted by an administrative law judge with the Office of Administrative Hearings. First Things First will notify you in writing when the opportunity to request a formal hearing is available. After receipt of that notice, you will have 30 days to file a request for a hearing in writing. Refer to "Administrative Hearing" in the charts on page 50-51 under for more details.

## CLARIFICATION, CONCERN RESOLUTION AND APPEALS PROCESS

If you have questions or concerns about your participation in Quality First, options are available to you to have these concerns addressed. The processes for clarification, concern resolution, and appeal are outlined in the charts on the following pages.

If you have questions or concerns about

## Your Assessment Results or Star Rating

### Step 1:

#### **CLARIFICATION**

If you have questions about your assessment results and/or star rating, review your assessment reports with your coach, using the ERS tools, All About books, and CLASS manuals to answer questions.

If questions remain, you may submit a Quality First Assessment Report Clarification Request. The request must be submitted within 40 days of the assessment results being approved. A written response will be provided to you within 14 days of receipt of the request, as possible. (See Assessment Report Clarification Policy on page 24.)

If concerns persist after completing the assessment clarification process, you may proceed to Step 2, Request for Appeal.

**If you are unsatisfied with the results of Step 1, you may move to Step 2**

### Step 2:

#### **REQUEST FOR APPEAL**

The Request for Appeal Form must be submitted within 60 days of being notified of the star rating.

Once your request for appeal is received, a representative of the Quality First team will contact you to offer the option of an informal dispute resolution meeting or an appeal meeting, within 14 days of the receipt of the request.

If you participate in an informal dispute resolution meeting as a first step in response to your appeal, and you are unsatisfied with the result, you may proceed with an Appeal meeting. You will be contacted by First Things First to proceed.

To proceed with an Appeal meeting, the Quality First Team, the senior director for early learning, the chief program officer (CPO), and/or the chief executive officer (CEO) will review the Request for Appeal and provide a written response, which includes a scheduled meeting date. A Quality First representative, senior director for early learning, chief program officer, and/or the CEO will meet with you and provide a decision on the request for appeal. (See Appeals Policy on page 49.)

**If you are unsatisfied with the results of Step 2, you may move to Step 3**

### Step 3:

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING**

If you are unsatisfied with the result of your Request for Appeal, you may request a formal hearing conducted by an administrative law judge with the Office of Administrative Hearings.

First Things First will notify you in writing when the opportunity to request a formal hearing is available. After receipt of that notice, you will have 30 days to file a request for a hearing in writing. The request must include the name and address of the program seeking the hearing, the decision being appealed and a concise statement of the reasons for the appeal. The request must be provided to First Things First's main office in care of the general counsel.

Once a recommendation decision is made by the Office of Administrative Hearings, the First Things First Board will review the decision and take action to accept, reject or modify the recommendation. First Things First will notify you of the final Board decision in writing.

If you are

## Appealing Termination from Quality First

### Step 1:

#### **REQUEST FOR APPEAL**

You may submit a Request for Appeal of your termination from Quality First. The Request for Appeal Form must be submitted within 60 days of being notified of the termination.

Once received, the Quality First team, the senior director for early learning, the chief program officer (CPO), and/or the chief executive officer (CEO) will review the Request for Appeal and provide a written response, which includes a scheduled meeting date, to you within 14 days of the receipt of the request. A Quality First team member, senior director for early learning, chief program officer, and/or the CEO will meet with you and provide a decision on the request for appeal.

**If you are unsatisfied with the results of Step 1,  
you may move to Step 2**

### Step 2:

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE HEARING**

If you are unsatisfied with the result of your request for appeal, you may request a formal hearing conducted by an administrative law judge with the Office of Administrative Hearings.

First Things First will notify you in writing when the opportunity to request a formal hearing is available. After receipt of that notice, you will have 30 days to file a request for a hearing in writing. The request must include the name and address of the program seeking the hearing, the decision being appealed and a concise statement of the reasons for the appeal. The request must be provided to First Things First's main office in care of the general counsel.

Once a recommendation decision is made by the Office of Administrative Hearings, the First Things First Board will review the decision and take action to accept, reject or modify the recommendation. First Things First will notify you of the final Board decision in writing.

If you have other

## Concerns about Your Quality First Experience

### Step 1:

#### **DISCUSSION**

If you have concerns about your Quality First experience, begin by speaking directly with the coach or CCHC working with your program.

If your concerns persist after speaking with the coach or CCHC, contact a supervisor or program manager for support. Program contact information is available on the Quality First Extranet under Resources.

If concerns persist after discussing the issue with a program contact, you may proceed to Step 2, Informal Dispute Resolution.

**If you are unsatisfied with the results of Step 1,  
you may move to Step 2**

### Step 2:

#### **INFORMAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION**

You may submit a Quality First Complaint Form to the Quality First team at First Things First. In the Complaint Form, you will provide a description of your concern and any attempts made to resolve the issue as well as recommendations of possible solutions.

A representative of the First Things First Quality First team will contact you to determine next steps to address your concern either over the phone or by scheduling a meeting with all involved parties, ideally within 14 calendar days of receiving the complaint. After the meeting, First Things First will make a decision and notify you within 14 days. (See Informal Dispute Resolution Policy on page 48.)

# Extranet Guide

## Getting Started

As a participant, you will be invited to the Quality First extranet. You will receive an invitation email generated by your coordinator. Follow the link in the email to set up your extranet username and password.

### Logging On

Once you have created a username and password, access the extranet using this link:

<https://extranet.azftf.gov/extranet/Pages/default.aspx>

- Click “Log In”

Log In



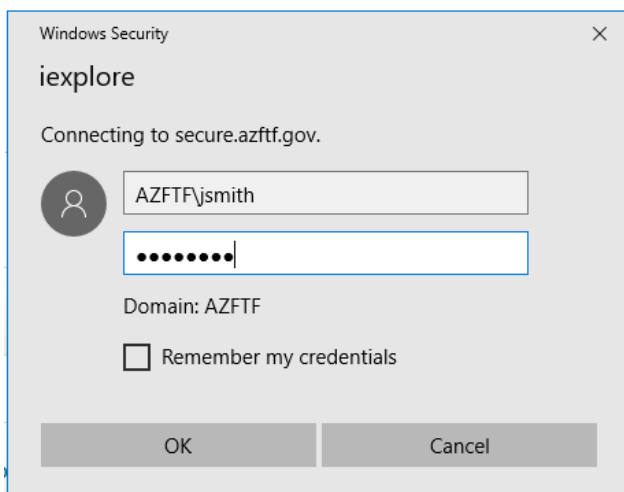
### Reset Password and Retrieve Forgotten Username

Please use the links below to Reset Password or to Retrieve Username.

To Reset your password, click on the link below and enter your USERNAME (AZFTF\jsmith)  
[Reset forgotten password](#)

2. Log in window will pop up to enter Username and Password.

- Username must include backslash (\); not a forward slash.
  - This is typically the first initial of first name and last name.
- Password is case sensitive
  - You will be sent a temporary password, which you can change once logged in. Passwords must be minimum eight characters and include at least one capital letter and one number.



3. Select "OK". You will be on the main dashboard. Select the Quality First logo.



4. Select the "Quality First Participants" link.

5. Click "Select" to access your profile.

6. You are now viewing your extranet profile. The first page is the profile summary.

# Profile Summary

The profile summary contains helpful data about your participation in Quality First. Let's take a look at what you can review on this page.

**Quality First** Profile Summary Site ID : 146

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**  
 Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85305  
 Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council  
 Main Contact: Steve 602-555-1000  
 Provider Type: Center  
 Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

**1 Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	E-Mail
Coach	Test Coach	Coach	AZFFUcoach	602-555-1212	coach@q1stf.gov
Mental Health Consultant	Test MHC	MHC	AZFFUmhcc	602-773-5100	mhc@q1stf.gov
COHC	Test COHC	COHC	AZFFUcohc	602-773-1111	cohc@q1stf.gov
Coordinator Provider	Test Coordinator	Coordinator	AZFFUcop	602-773-5100	coordinator@q1stf.gov
Inclusion Coach	Test Inclusion Coach	Inclusion Coach	AZFFUinc	602-773-5100	inc@q1stf.gov
Child Care Center Director	Test Child Care Center Director	Child Care Center Director	AZFFUqfcdirector	602-773-5100	qfcdirector@email.com
Child Care Center Director	Active Directory		AZFFUadirectory		adirectory@q1stf.gov
Main Contact	Steve	Test		602-555-1000	QFCDirector1@email.com
Primary Program Designee	Sally	Test		602-555-1110	qfcdirector@email.com

**2 QF Activities**

Orientation Completed: Yes  
 Orientation Completed Date: 1/1/2017  
 Status: Enrolled Participant  
 Fund Source: FTF

**3 Assessment Cycle**

Assessment Cycle: N/A  
 Assessment Completion Date: N/A  
 Date Current Cycle Ends: N/A

**4 Level of Support**  
 Achieving Quality

**Site Details**

Provider Type: Center  
 Contact Information: Name: Steve, Title: Test, Phone: 602-555-1000, Fax: , Email: QFCDirector1@email.com, Provider: http://www.qualityfirstaz.com

**Hours of Operation:**

Days	From	To
Monday	8:00 AM	6:30 PM
Tuesday	8:00 AM	6:30 PM
Wednesday	8:00 AM	6:30 PM
Thursday	8:00 AM	6:30 PM
Friday	8:00 AM	6:30 PM

School Year: Year Round

**Program Snapshot**

Size of Site: Small  
 Number of Active Staff: 1  
 Number of Active Classrooms: 6  
 Total Enrolled: 82  
 Ages Licensed to Serve: 2 Yr Olds, Infants, Toddlers, 3 Yr Olds, 4 Yr Olds, 5 Yr Olds

**Number of Children who are Non-English Speakers:**

Language	Count
Spanish	11
Other	6

Language(s) Used for Instruction: English

- 1. Current Users and Assignments-** This grid shows the staff you have identified as the contacts for Quality First, and contact information for the technical assistance professionals supporting your program.
- 2. QF Activities-** This section shows participation information, included whether your program has completed the orientation and enrollment process, as well as the source of funding for your participation.
- 3. Assessment Cycle-** This section tells what assessment cycle your program is in, when your last assessment was completed, and the time when your assessment cycle ends. The assessor will contact you to open your next assessment window within 2 months of the date current cycle ends.
- 4. Level of Support-** If you are a Quality Improvement participant, your program's level of support (Pursuing Quality, Achieving Quality or Continuing Quality) is displayed here. Your level of support indicates the amount of coaching and CCHC your program receives.

# Updating Your Data

## Monthly Extranet Updates: Why Your Data Matters

Keeping your Quality First Extranet data updated monthly is a core requirement of participation, but it is also so much more than an item on your to-do list. The data you enter gives life to the story of early childhood education in Arizona.

When you submit your monthly updates, you help in several ways:

- Help us advocate for you: FTF shares this data with state legislators and policymakers. It gives us the proof we need to advocate for the funding and services that support programs like yours.
- Show who is being served: Your updates show how many children, families and educators are being
- Inform local leaders: This information helps us report to FTF's regional partnership councils so they understand the current needs of families in your specific community.
- Keeping our records accurate: Consistent updates ensure we always have a reliable, up-to-date data. This information is vital for any future reports or studies that measure the success of Quality First.


Thank you for keeping our data accurate, and your work visible to those who make key state policy decisions!

## Follow the steps below to keep your data up-to-date.

1. Use the left navigation links to access each tab of your profile.

Quality First
<b>Profile Summary</b>
Site
Program
Staffing
Classroom / Family Group
Acknowledgment
Assessment Summary
QF Rating Information - Provider
Quality Improvement Plans
Scholarships
<b>Print Application</b>

## 2. Site tab

	<b>Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name</b>
	Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85205
	Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council
	Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000
	Provider Type: Center Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

Data was successfully saved

### Site Details

Organization Name	<input type="text" value="Quality First Test Center"/>
Provider Website	<input type="text" value="http://www.qualityfirstaz.com"/> <input type="checkbox"/> No Website Available
Provider Type	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Center <input type="radio"/> Home
Site Name	<input type="text" value="Center Site Name"/>

Please notify the Quality First Administrator ([qualityfirst@aztf.gov](mailto:qualityfirst@aztf.gov)) if the Organization Name or Site Name has changed.

Update your site's details, including your main contact and primary designee, scholarship contact, school year dates, hours of operation and more.

### 3. Program tab

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**

Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85205

Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000

Provider Type: Center

Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

#### Program Details

\* = Required Field

**Is the Program Regulated?**  Yes  No Please notify the Quality First Administrator ([qualityfirst@azhfi.gov](mailto:qualityfirst@azhfi.gov)) if the Program Regulation information for this site has changed.

If yes, please list all license and/or certification number that apply to your program.

<b>DHS License #</b>	<b>DES Certification #</b>	<b>Tribal #</b> <small>Certified or Regulated by a Tribal Entity</small>	<b>Military #</b>
DHS001010	P00010100	000	
<b>DHS License Expiration Date</b>	<b>DES Certification Expiration Date</b>		
1/1/2020	1/1/2020		

**Age Group(s) LICENSED to serve**

Please check ALL age groups your site is LICENSED to serve regardless of whether you have this age group enrolled.

- Infants
- Toddlers
- 2 Yr Olds
- 3 Yr Olds
- 4 Yr Olds
- 5 Yr Olds

Update your program details, including the target population(s) your program serves, curriculum, participation in other programs, and cost information.

### 4. Staffing tab

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**

Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85205

Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000

Provider Type: Center

Provider Size: Small

[My Providers](#)

[Save](#) [Cancel](#) [Print](#)

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

#### Staff Members

Click on "Add New Row" to enter staff information. Changes must be saved for each row before saving the entire page. Active is for Staff members who are currently Employed. Upon termination or resignation, please uncheck Active. Default view is only Active Staff. Please click "Display Inactive Staff" to view or edit staff marked Inactive.

Display Inactive Staff


First Name	Last Name	Maiden / Other Names	Position / Title	Months Employed	Active?	Create Date	Modified Date	Staff Details
Steve	Test		Director		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	4/17/2024 3:12:41 PM	6/26/2024 10:48:11 AM	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>
Sally	Test	Smith	Assistant Director		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6/26/2024 10:47:54 AM		<a href="#">Edit Details</a>
Jerry	Garcia		Lead Teacher		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6/26/2024 10:49:10 AM		<a href="#">Edit Details</a>
Juanita	Garcia		Lead Teacher		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6/26/2024 10:49:31 AM		<a href="#">Edit Details</a>
Jaylene	Smith		Assistant Teacher/Classroom Aide		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6/26/2024 10:50:09 AM		<a href="#">Edit Details</a>
Sonja	Test		Other Support Staff		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6/26/2024 10:48:37 AM		<a href="#">Edit Details</a>

[+ Add new row](#)

Review and update your staffing data as changes occur. Add new staff and indicate staff who are no longer at your program. Update wage and benefit information.

## 5. Classroom/ family group tab





QUALITY

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**

Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85205

Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000

Provider Type: Center

Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

### Classroom/Family Groups

Click on "Add Classroom" to enter individual classroom/family group information.

Classroom	Infants	Toddlers	2year-olds	3year-olds	4year-olds	5year-olds	Active		
1 - Infant Room	1	1	0	0	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>	<a href="#">Assessments</a>
2 - Toddlers	0	16	0	0	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>	<a href="#">Assessments</a>
3 - Two's Room	0	1	15	0	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>	<a href="#">Assessments</a>
4 - Three's Room	0	0	0	18	0	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>	<a href="#">Assessments</a>
5 - Four's Room	0	0	0	0	15	0	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>	<a href="#">Assessments</a>
6 - Five's Room	0	0	0	0	0	15	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<a href="#">Edit Details</a>	<a href="#">Assessments</a>
+ <a href="#">Add Classroom</a>									

Select "edit details" to update your classroom information, including language for instruction, group size, ratios, number of children enrolled, and more.

# How to View Your Assessment Reports

Once you receive the email notification that your star rating or informal assessment is complete, you may view your assessment reports. Follow the steps below to access the reports.

1. Log into the extranet and go to your site profile.

**Quality First Profile Summary** Site ID: 146

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**  
 Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85006  
 Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council  
 Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000  
 Provider Type: Center  
 Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

**Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	Email
Coach	Test Coach	Coach	AZTF1234	602-555-1000	testcoach@qf1st.com
Mental Health Consultant	Test MHC	MHC	AZTF1235	602-555-1000	testmhc@qf1st.com
CCHC	Test CCHC	CCHC	AZTF1236	602-555-1000	testcchc@qf1st.com
Coordinator Provider	Test Coordinator	Coordinator	AZTF1237	602-555-1000	testcop@qf1st.com
Inclusion Coach	Test Inclusion Coach	Inclusion Coach	AZTF1238	602-555-1000	testinc@qf1st.com
Child Care Center Director	Test Child Care Center Director	Child Care Center Director	AZTF1239	602-555-1000	testcccd@qf1st.com

**Site Details**  
 Provider Type: Center  
 Center: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85006  
 Contact Information: Phone: 602-555-1000, Fax: 602-555-1000, Email: info@qf1st.com, Website: www.qf1st.com  
 Hours of Operation: Mon: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Tue: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Wed: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Thu: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, Fri: 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM, School Year: Year Round

**Program Snapshot**  
 Size of Site: Small  
 Number of Active Staff: 1  
 Number of Active Classrooms: 6  
 Total Enrollees: 82  
 Age Ranges by Site: 27-36M, 37-48M, 49-59M, 60-69M, 70-79M, 80-89M, 90-99M  
 Number of Children who are Non-English Speakers: Spanish: 25, Chinese: 5  
 Language(s) Used for Instruction: English

**QF Activities**  
 Orientation Completed: Yes  
 Orientation Completed Date: 12/1/2017  
 Status: Renewed Partnership  
 Fund Source: PFD

**Assessment Cycle**  
 Assessment Cycle: Full  
 Assessment Completion Date: N/A  
 Date Current Cycle Ends: N/A

**Level of Support**  
 Achieving Quality

2. From the profile summary page, select Assessment Summary.

**Quality First Profile Summary**

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**  
 Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85006  
 Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council  
 Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000  
 Provider Type: Center  
 Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

**Current Users and Assignments**

Role	Name	Title	User ID
Coach	Test Coach	Coach	AZTF1234
Mental Health Consultant	Test MHC	MHC	AZTF1235
CCHC	Test CCHC	CCHC	AZTF1236
Coordinator Provider	Test Coordinator	Coordinator	AZTF1237
Inclusion Coach	Test Inclusion Coach	Inclusion Coach	AZTF1238
Child Care Center Director	Test Child Care Center Director	Child Care Center Director	AZTF1239

3. You will see a list of all the assessment reports for the most recent assessment cycle. Select "Full" to view each report.

**Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name**  
 Address: 123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85006  
 Regional Partnership Council: East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council  
 Main Contact: Steve Test 602-555-1000  
 Provider Type: Center  
 Provider Size: Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

Display older cycles

Assessment Type	Assessment Cycle	Observer	Date Of Observation	Classroom	Self-Contained Classroom	Status
CLASS	Rating (QF)	Kavita Agarwal	4/1/2024	1 - Infnt Room	Yes	Approved <a href="#">Full</a>

[Print](#)

4. To read sections of the report, select the section you wish to review. This will open the notes and scoring details of the section.

The screenshot shows the top header of the CLASS report for 'Quality First Test Center, Center'. The header includes the CLASS logo, site name, classroom '1 - Infant Room', and observation date '4/1/2024'. Navigation buttons for 'My Providers', 'Exit to classroom', 'View Score', and 'Edit Master' are visible. Below the header, four categories are listed: 'Cycle Observation Information', 'Emotional Support', 'Classroom Organization', and 'Instructional Support'. Each category has a 'Complete' status icon. A red arrow points to the 'Instructional Support' icon. Below these categories is a section titled 'Select the Item(s) you would like to print:' with four checkboxes: 'Cycle Observation Information', 'Emotional Support', 'Classroom Organization', and 'Instructional Support'. A note below the checkboxes reads 'Note: You may have to adjust your printer settings to fit to the page.' and a 'Print Selected Item(s)' button is present.

Additional Assessment Notes

5. To view or print the entire report, select the checkboxes in the middle of the page. This will create a file that you may print or save.

This screenshot is identical to the one above, showing the same report header and category status. However, in the 'Select the Item(s) you would like to print:' section, the checkboxes for 'Cycle Observation Information', 'Emotional Support', and 'Classroom Organization' are now checked. A red arrow points to the 'Classroom Organization' checkbox. The 'Print Selected Item(s)' button remains visible.

# How to View Your Star Rating Information

To view your star rating, log into your site's extranet profile. You will see your star rating at the top of your profile summary page.

Role	Name	Title	User ID	Phone	E-Mail
Coach	Test Coach	Coach	A2PFLcoach	602-959-1212	testcoach@qf1stf.edu
Mental Health Consultant	Test MHC	MHC	A2PFLmhc	602-775-9100	mhc@qf1stf.edu
COHC	Test COHC	COHC	A2PFLcohc	602-775-1111	cohc@qf1stf.edu
Coordinator Provider	Test Coordinator	Coordinator	A2PFLcp	602-775-9100	testcp@qf1stf.edu
Inclusion Coach	Test Inclusion Coach	Inclusion Coach	A2PFLinc	602-775-9100	inc@qf1stf.edu
Child Care Center Director	Test Child Care Center Director	Child Care Center Director	A2PFLcdirector	602-775-9100	cdirector@qf1stf.edu
Child Care Center Director	Active Directory	Active Directory	A2PFLadirectory		adirectory@qf1stf.edu
Main Contact	Steve	Test		602-959-1000	cdirector@qf1stf.edu
Primary Program Designee	Sally	Test		602-959-1110	cdirector@qf1stf.edu

To see your assessment scoring information, select QF Rating Information-Provider. This tab shows your site's average program scores as well as whether your program met the individual classroom score thresholds for each of the quality level ratings.

**Cycle**

**Completed Date**

**Cycle End Date**

**ERS Average Program Score**

All individual classroom scores at or above 2.5 (3 Star requirement)  
 All individual classroom scores at or above 3.0 (4 Star requirement)  
 All individual classroom scores at or above 4.0 (5 Star requirement)

**CLASS Average Program Score**

<b>Emotional Support</b>	<b>Classroom Organization</b>	<b>Instructional Support</b>
<input type="text" value="6.7"/>	<input type="text" value="6"/>	<input type="text" value="2.63"/>

All individual classroom scores at or above ES 4.25/ CO 4.25/ IS 2.0 (3 Star requirement)  
 All individual classroom scores at or above ES 4.75/ CO 4.75/ IS 2.25 (4 Star requirement)  
 All individual classroom scores at or above ES 5.0/ CO 5.0/ IS 2.75 (5 Star requirement)

**Star Rating**

You can view each individual classroom's assessment scores by opening each assessment report and selecting View Score.

# Troubleshooting Username and Password Issues

## Username and Password Error

Check that your username is being entered correctly.

The back slash is a “ \ ” and must be entered as AZFTF\username.

A common error is for users to put in their username with the forward slash AZFTF/username. This will cause an error.

## Forgot Your Username

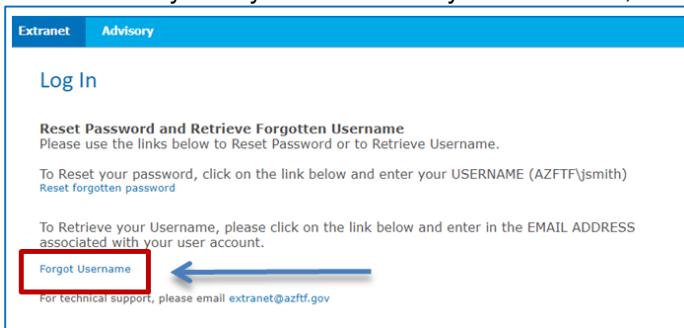
You can request to have your username sent to you via email by accessing the main extranet dashboard and selecting the [Forgot Username](#) link:

You will be asked to enter the email address that was used to provide your original username and password. Your username will be emailed to you.

## Reset Forgotten Password

You can reset a forgotten password by selecting the [Reset Forgotten Password](#) link.

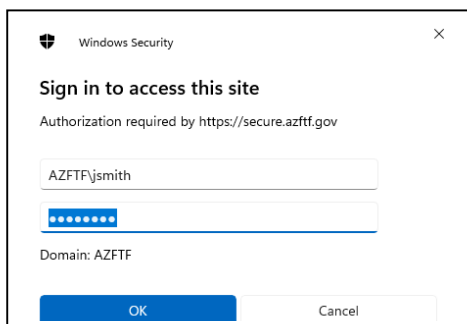
You will be asked to enter your username (AZFTF\username) that was provided to you. A temporary new password will be emailed to you. If you do not have your username, first follow the steps above to have your username emailed to you.



## To Change a Password (not forgot password)

You can change your password by logging into the extranet with your AZFTF\username and password. Once logged in, you will be at the main welcome page of the extranet. Select the Change Password link. You will be prompted to enter your current password and set a new password.

A new pop-up window will appear after you select “Change Password.” You will need to enter your username and your NEW password.



# How to Bypass the Security Warning Message

Below are steps for handling a security warning some extranet users are experiencing.

Google pushed out an updated security patch that is showing the unsecure message. Our system uses an older protocol, but our site is still secure and accessible. You may receive the security protocol message two to three times and will need to repeat this process.

The first warning will display. Select "Advanced"



Your connection is not fully secure

This site uses an outdated security configuration, which may expose your information (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards) when it is sent to this site.

NET:ERR\_SSL\_OBSOLETE\_VERSION



The next screen will display. Select "Proceed to extranet.azff.gov"



Your connection is not fully secure

This site uses an outdated security configuration, which may expose your information (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards) when it is sent to this site.

NET:ERR\_SSL\_OBSOLETE\_VERSION

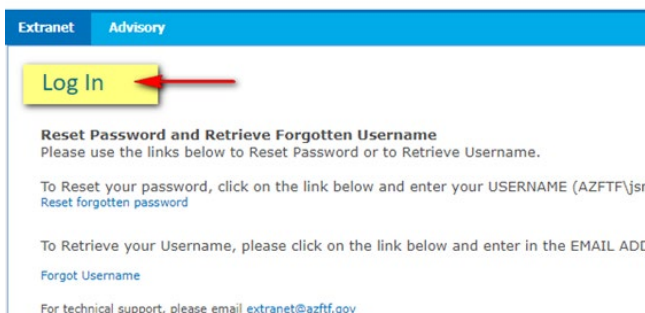


The connection used to load this site used TLS 1.0 or TLS 1.1, which are deprecated and will be disabled in the future. Once disabled, users will be prevented from loading this site. The server should enable TLS 1.2 or later.



The extranet homepage will display. Select "Log In"

## # FIRST THINGS FIRST



The warning page will display again. Repeat the same steps.



Your connection is not fully secure

This site uses an outdated security configuration, which may expose your information (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards) when it is sent to this site.

NET:ERR\_SSL\_OBSOLETE\_VERSION

Advanced

Back to safety

Your connection is not fully secure

This site uses an outdated security configuration, which may expose your information (for example, passwords, messages, or credit cards) when it is sent to this site.

NET:ERR\_SSL\_OBSOLETE\_VERSION

Hide advanced

Back to safety

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# How to complete the annual Participant Acknowledgment

(Quality Improvement participants only)

As a Quality First participant, you must review and acknowledge the Participant Guide Acknowledgment Form and Participant Commitment Form within the first 90 days of the fiscal year. To access the forms, select “Acknowledgment” from the left navigation menu.

<b>Quality First Test Center, Center Site Name</b>	123456 Test Center Phoenix, AZ 85205
Address:	
Regional Partnership Council:	East Maricopa Regional Partnership Council
Main Contact:	Steve Test 602-555-1000
Provider Type:	Center
Provider Size:	Small

The rating that is posted is the program's estimated star rating. It is not posted on the public Quality First website.

NOTE: Once you complete the form and save, you will not be able to edit again.

Fiscal Year:

## Quality First Participant Guide Acknowledgment

Quality First is a voluntary program supporting child care and preschool programs across Arizona to improve the quality of early learning provided for children birth to age 5. The Quality First Participant Guide provides a central source of information about the policies and guidelines that support your participation in Quality First. The purpose of the Guide is to assist you in understanding your responsibilities as a participant along with the roles and functions of the supports available to your program. Included with your Guide are resource documents that will provide you with additional guidance as you participate in Quality First. The information contained in the Guide is updated annually. As a participant, it is your responsibility to review and agree to the policies and procedures described in the Guide annually. If you have any questions related to the policies or procedures described in the Guide, please consult with your Quality First coordinator or coach, or contact the Quality First team at 602.771.5000 or [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org).

*Quality First es un programa voluntario que apoya los programas de cuidado infantil y preescolar a través de Arizona, para mejorar la calidad del aprendizaje temprano proporcionado a los niños y niñas desde el nacimiento hasta los 5 años de edad. La Guía del Participante de Quality First proporciona una fuente central de información sobre las normas y directrices que respaldan su participación en Quality First. El propósito de la Guía es ayudarle a entender sus responsabilidades como participante, así como las papeles y las funciones de los apoyos disponibles para su programa. Con su Guía se incluyen documentos de recursos que le proporcionarán orientación adicional mientras usted participa en Quality First. La información contenida en la Guía se actualiza anualmente. Como participante, es su responsabilidad revisar y aceptar anualmente las normas y los procedimientos descritos en la Guía. Si tiene usted cualquier pregunta relacionada con las normas o los procedimientos descritos en la Guía, por favor consulte con su coordinador o entrenador de Quality First, o comuníquese con el equipo de Quality First llamando al 602.771.5000 ó escribiendo a [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org).*

I, , acknowledge that I have received a copy of the SFY25 Quality First Participant Guide. I understand that this Participant Guide and the policies described within it replace any prior editions I have received.

*Yo reconozco que he recibido una copia de la Guía del Participante de Quality First del Año Fiscal del Estado 2025. Yo entiendo que esta Guía del Participante y las normas descritas en ella reemplazan cualquier edición previa que yo haya recibido.*

PLEASE READ AND INITIAL EACH ACKNOWLEDGMENT BELOW / POR FAVOR LEA Y PONGA SUS INICIALES JUNTO A CADA RECONOCIMIENTO A CONTINUACIÓN:

Fill out the form and select the green “save” button. Contact your coordinator if you have any questions about the information in the form.

## Need help? Contact us.

If you have questions or need assistance, contact the extranet support team:

- By phone at 602.771.5100
- By email at [Extranet@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:Extranet@FirstThingsFirst.org)

## **SECTION TWO: INFORMATION FOR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PARTICIPANTS**

This section applies *ONLY* to participants in the Quality Improvement participation type.

# Sustaining Quality: The Move to Rating Only in SFY28

Quality First wants to celebrate the incredible work of our highest-rated programs. Earning a 4- or 5-star rating is a huge achievement. Keeping that high rating over multiple years takes incredible dedication, hard work and leadership.

Due to your achievement and ability to maintain high quality practices, we recognize that you have built a culture of continuous quality improvement and have the skills necessary to thrive with minimal quality improvement supports.

***Beginning in State Fiscal Year 2028 (July 1, 2027) and continuing every year after, programs in the Quality Improvement participation type that have kept a 4- or 5-star rating for their two most recent consecutive assessment cycles will transition to Rating Only.***

## Reason for the change

First Things First is dedicated to targeting our resources where they can make the biggest impact. To do this, Quality First focuses our most intensive coaching and financial support on the programs that need the most help to reach a quality level. By moving participants that have consistently maintained high quality to Rating Only, we can open up resources for programs that need support the most.

## What if a program's rating slips?

We know that maintaining high quality is a continuous journey, and changes in quality happen from time to time. If a program is in the Rating Only participation type and their rating falls below a 4-star at a future assessment, support is available to help them get back on track:

- The program will be eligible to move back into Quality Improvement participation to receive coaching and child care health consultation support again.
- Returning to Quality Improvement participation is not guaranteed and depends on regional funding availability. Programs should expect a waiting period before an opening becomes available.
- Programs that return to Quality Improvement due to a decrease in rating will receive coaching and child care health consultation, but will not be eligible to receive quality improvement funding.

## New supports are coming soon

Moving to Rating Only does not mean that a program is on its own. First Things First is currently in the process of developing new tools and resources designed to support Rating Only participants. These digital and virtual supports are being designed to help you maintain the quality you have built over time.

We will share more details about these new resources and individual transition timelines in advance of the July 1, 2027 start date.

# Levels of Support

As an early childhood educator, you know that each child has their own unique learning needs. You meet each child where they are and provide the support to help them grow and learn to their fullest potential. Quality First’s goal is to support you, the early childhood educator, as you develop and grow your program to the highest possible quality. That means meeting you where you are and helping you reach your goals for improvement. That’s why Quality Improvement participation has three levels of support. Each level provides a system of support to match your needs on your quality improvement journey.



PURSUING QUALITY	ACHIEVING QUALITY	CONTINUING QUALITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1-Star Participants</li> <li>• 2-Star Participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-Star Participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4- and 5-Star Participants</li> <li>• All Head Start/Early Head Starts</li> <li>• Participants with Existing Internal Quality Supports**</li> </ul>
<p><b>HIGHEST LEVEL OF SUPPORT</b></p>	<p><b>MID-LEVEL SUPPORT</b></p>	<p><b>LOWEST LEVEL OF SUPPORT</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ COACHING (Quality Improvement Support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ COACHING (Quality Improvement Support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ COACHING (Quality Improvement Support)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ CHILD CARE HEALTH CONSULTATION</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ CHILD CARE HEALTH CONSULTATION</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ CHILD CARE HEALTH CONSULTATION</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ FUNDING (Quality Improvement Funds*)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ FUNDING (Quality Improvement Funds*)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ FUNDING (Staff Recognition)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ QUALITY FIRST COORDINATOR (Participation Support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ QUALITY FIRST COORDINATOR (Participation Support)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ QUALITY FIRST COORDINATOR (Participation Support)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ASSESSMENT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ASSESSMENT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ASSESSMENT</li> </ul>
<p>* Available up to 2 Assessment Cycles</p>	<p>* Available up to 2 Assessment Cycles</p>	<p>** Other enrolled participants with existing internal quality supports (e.g., coaching, health and safety support, etc.) that have achieved a 3-star or higher rating</p>

Movement between levels (as star rating changes) is expected

If a program decreases their star rating, moving to a new level, they will receive all supports **except** funding at the level they move to.

## Pursuing Quality

See page 70 for a list of support and services provided at this level.

Programs at this level are at the foundational stage of their quality improvement journey. They are working toward quality in their early learning settings. The goal of this level is to provide the highest amount of support to help programs make quality improvements that support the implementation of quality practices.

## Achieving Quality

See page 72 for a list of support and services provided at this level.

Programs at this level have achieved quality in their settings, but still have room to grow. The goal of this level is to provide a mid-level of support to help participants keep advancing their quality practices.

## Continuing Quality

See page 74 for a list of support and services provided at this level.

Programs at this level are focused on maintaining their high-quality practices. The goal of this level is to provide less intensive support as programs have capacity to sustain quality with minimal support.

### Important note about services and funding

As First Things First collects data to review the effectiveness of supports and monitors available resources, please note:

- The specific components within each level of support, including coaching hours, child care health consultation and funding amounts, apply to State Fiscal Year 2027 and are not guaranteed to stay the same in future state fiscal years.
- State Fiscal Year 2028 (SFY28, July 1, 2027- June 30, 2028) begins a new three-year funding cycle for First Things First. Because FTF funding is dependent on fluctuating tax revenues, budgets are re-evaluated and adjusted at the start of each new cycle to protect the sustainability of programs. Participant eligibility for funding, types of funding and the amount of funding available for SFY28 are not yet finalized.

# Pursuing Quality

## HIGHEST-LEVEL SUPPORT

### Who Qualifies

- ▶ Quality First participants with a 1-star or 2-star rating

### Your System of Support Includes:

- ▶ Coaching
- ▶ Coordination
- ▶ Child Care Health Consultation
- ▶ Funding
- ▶ Assessment

**You will have access to a team of experts to support you along your quality journey. This team will learn about your program and work together to help you along the way.**

### Coaching

You will receive regular, on-site coaching visits to support your improvement efforts. Your coach will help you set goals and put plans in place to reach those goals.

Program Size	Coaching Hours
Home (1-10 children)	48 hours annually (at least 2 hours monthly*)
Small center (1-50 children)	48 hours annually (at least 2 hours monthly*)
Medium center (51-150 children)	72 hours annually (at least 3 hours monthly*)
Large center (151+ children)	72 hours annually (at least 3 hours monthly*)

*\*To support continuous quality improvement, homes and small centers must participate in at least two hours of coaching monthly. Medium and large centers must participate in at least three hours of coaching monthly.*

### Coordination

Your coordinator will help along the way as you participate.

They will assist you with:

- ✓ Orientation and onboarding to Quality First
- ✓ Extranet (QF data system), paperwork, forms and general technical assistance to support participation in Quality First
- ✓ Help finding other resources for your program, staff, children and families



# Pursuing Quality

## HIGHEST-LEVEL SUPPORT



### Child Care Health Consultation (CCHC)

You will receive ongoing support from a specially trained health professional. Your CCHC provides recommendations and technical assistance in areas like nutrition, physical activity, disease prevention and more.

- ✓ Health and Safety Assessment
- ✓ Health and Safety Action Plan
- ✓ 15 hours of consultation quarterly (or 5 hours per month)

*Depending on your regional area and the population you serve, you may also have access to additional specialists in the areas of early childhood mental health and inclusion for children with special needs.*

## Funding

You will be able to make purchases for program quality improvements.

- ✓ Spent through support of the coach
- ✓ Based on program size and type

Program Size	Funding Amount per Year*
MEDIUM or LARGE CENTER 51-150+ Children	\$10,000
FAMILY HOME, GROUP HOME or SMALL CENTER Up to 50 Children	\$5,000

\*Up to two assessment cycles, which means after June 30, 2023, two completed renewal assessments or four years, whichever comes first.

## Assessment

Approximately every two years, you will receive your assessment and star rating. Assessment gives you a clear picture of your program—what is great and opportunities to do even better.

- ✓ On-site assessment
  - ▶ Environment Rating Scales (ERS)
  - ▶ Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- ✓ Written feedback reports to help you set goals

Questions? Contact the Quality First team at [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org) at 602.771.5000

Learn more at [QualityFirstAZ.com](https://QualityFirstAZ.com)



# Achieving Quality

## MID-LEVEL SUPPORT

### Who Qualifies

- ▶ Quality First participants with a 3-star rating

### Your System of Support Includes:

- ▶ Coaching
- ▶ Coordination
- ▶ Child Care Health Consultation
- ▶ Funding
- ▶ Assessment

**You will have access to a team of experts to support you along your quality journey. This team will learn about your program and work together to help you along the way.**

### Coaching

You will receive regular, on-site coaching visits to support your improvement efforts. Your coach will help you set goals and put plans in place to reach those goals.

- ✓ 30 hours annually
- ✓ Available to all program types and sizes

### Coordination

Your coordinator will help along the way as you participate. They will assist you with:

- ✓ Orientation and onboarding to Quality First
- ✓ Extranet (QF data system), paperwork, forms and general technical assistance to support participation in Quality First
- ✓ Help finding other resources for your program, staff, children and families



# Achieving Quality

## MID-LEVEL SUPPORT

### Child Care Health Consultation (CCHC)

You will receive ongoing support from a specially trained health professional. Your CCHC provides recommendations and technical assistance in areas like nutrition, physical activity, disease prevention and more.

- ✓ Health and Safety Assessment
- ✓ Health and Safety Action Plan
- ✓ 9 hours of consultation quarterly (or 3 hours per month)

*Depending on your regional area and the population you serve, you may also have access to additional specialists in the areas of early childhood mental health and inclusion for children with special needs.*

### Funding

You will be able to make purchases for program quality improvements.

- ✓ Spent through support of the coach
- ✓ Based on program size and type

Program Size	Funding Amount - per year*
DES Family Home (1-4 children)	\$600
DHS Group Home (5-10 children)	\$1,175
Small center (1-50 children)	\$2,050
Medium center (51-150 children)	\$2,950
Large center (151+ children)	\$4,700

*\*Up to two assessment cycles, which means after June 30, 2023, two completed renewal assessments or four years, whichever comes first.*

### Assessment

Approximately every two years, you will receive your assessment and star rating. Assessment gives you a clear picture of your program—what is great and opportunities to do even better.

- ✓ On-site assessment
  - ▶ Environment Rating Scales (ERS)
  - ▶ Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- ✓ Written feedback reports to help you set goals

Questions? Contact the Quality First team at [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org) or 602.771.5000

Learn more at [QualityFirstAZ.com](http://QualityFirstAZ.com)



# Continuing Quality

## ONGOING SUPPORT



### Who Qualifies

- ▶ Quality First participants with a 4-star or 5-star rating
- ▶ Head Start/Early Head Start participants
- ▶ Participants with existing internal quality supports that have achieved a 3-star or higher rating

### Your System of Support Includes:

- ▶ Coaching
- ▶ Coordination
- ▶ Child Care Health Consultation
- ▶ Funding
- ▶ Assessment

**You will have access to a team of experts to support you as you work to continue your quality practices.**

### Coaching & Coordination

Your coordinator will support your continued success. In addition to being your main person of contact, they will assist you with:

- ✓ Orientation and onboarding to Quality First,
- ✓ Extranet (QF data system), paperwork, forms and general technical assistance to support participation in Quality First
- ✓ Help finding other resources for your program, staff, children and families

As you work to continue your quality practices, you can request additional help from a coach.

### Child Care Health Consultation (CCHC)

You will receive ongoing support from a specially trained health professional. Your CCHC provides advice and technical assistance in areas like nutrition, physical activity, disease prevention and more.

- ✓ Health and Safety Assessment
- ✓ Health and Safety Action Plan
- ✓ 3 hours of consultation quarterly (or 1 hour per month)

*Depending on your regional area and the population you serve, you may also have access to additional specialists in the areas of early childhood mental health and inclusion for children with special needs.*

# Continuing Quality

## ONGOING SUPPORT



### Funding

You will have access to funding for staff recognition.

- ✓ Available to all program types and sizes
- ✓ Focused on staff employed at the program
- ✓ Direct payment to program following star rating achievement (approximately every 2 years)
- ✓ Based on star rating

Star Rating	Funding amount per staff*
5-star	\$1,000 per staff
4-star	\$500 per staff

*\*The number of staff in the following roles are used to calculate total incentive amount: Director, Assistant Director, Teacher and Assistant Teacher.*

### Opt-in Option for 3-star Programs

Some 3-star programs with existing internal supports will be eligible to opt-in to the Continuing Quality level. Programs that opt in to this level have access to funds to support quality improvements and will work with their coach or coordinator to make purchases in alignment with their Quality Improvement Plan.

Program Size	Funding Amount - per year*
DES Family Home (1-4 children)	\$600
DHS Group Home (5-10 children)	\$1,175
Small center (1-50 children)	\$2,050
Medium center (51-150 children)	\$2,950
Large center (151+ children)	\$4,700

*\*Up to two assessment cycles, which means after June 30, 2023, two completed renewal assessments or four years, whichever comes first.*

### Assessment

Approximately every three years, you will receive your assessment and star rating. Assessment gives you a clear picture of your program—what is great and opportunities to do even better.

- ✓ On-site assessment
  - ▶ Environment Rating Scales (ERS)
  - ▶ Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
- ✓ Written feedback reports to help you set goals

Questions? Contact the Quality First team at [QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org](mailto:QualityFirst@FirstThingsFirst.org) or 602.771.5000

Learn more at [QualityFirstAZ.com](http://QualityFirstAZ.com)



## Opt-in Request Option for 3-star Programs

**Continuing Quality Opt-in Policy:** Participants with a 3-star rating may request to opt-in to the Continuing Quality level of support if they have existing internal supports. Internal supports include but are not limited to health and safety support and coaching. Requests to opt-in will be reviewed by First Things First and/or the coaching agency, and a response provided within 21 days of the request. The participant's level of support will be reviewed annually or as needed, and may be updated as a result, as determined by First Things First.

If a participant's request is approved, the level of coaching and CCHC services will change immediately. Funding is not changed as a result of approval.

If a participant's rating moves below a 3-star, they will no longer be eligible for this option and will move to the Pursuing Quality level of support. A participant who has opted-in to the Continuing Quality level of support may not cite the reduced support as a rationale for an appeal of their star rating.

Head Start/Early Head Start programs with a 3-star rating are automatically included in the Continuing Quality level and do not need to opt-in.

To begin the request process, visit the extranet's Quality First dashboard in the forms section under Quality First resources and select the Continuing Quality Opt-In Request form. The form can also be found on the Quality First Website's Program Updates Page by searching "participant forms."

**Movement Between Levels Policy:** Programs in Quality First may move between different levels of support as their star rating changes. These changes affect the participant's Quality First services and funding. The timing of the change and whether it is an increase or decrease in level of support both impact what happens next.

Eligibility to receive funding at the Pursuing and Achieving Quality levels of support is limited to two assessment cycles or four years, whichever comes first, at each level.

#### When programs move to a less intensive level of support

(For example, moving from a 3-star to 4-star)

As programs increase their star rating, they may move to less intensive levels of support. When this happens:

- Coaching and CCHC services adjust within one month of the level change.
- Funding does not change immediately. In state fiscal year 2027, funds have allocated based on a data snapshot taken April 1, 2026.
  - If a program experienced a rating change *between April 2, 2025 through March 30, 2026* which placed them in a less intensive level of support they will be eligible for funds at the new level beginning July 1, 2026.

*For example, a program moved from 3-star to 4-star on June 10, 2025.*

- *They start receiving Continuing Quality coaching and CCHC services in July 2025.*
- *They continue to have access to quality improvement funds through state fiscal year 2026 (beginning July 1, 2025), based on their 3-star rating in the April 1, 2025 snapshot, if eligible.*
- *They will be eligible for staff recognition funds in state fiscal year 2027 (beginning July 1, 2026).*

#### When Programs Move to a More Intensive Level of Support

(For example, moving from a 3-star to a 2-star)

As programs decrease their star rating, they may move to more intensive levels of support. When this happens:

- Coaching and CCHC services adjust within one month of the level change.
- Funding remains the same for the rest of the state fiscal year, meaning the program continues to have access to the existing funds for the remainder of the state fiscal year.
  - If a program experienced a rating change *between April 2, 2025 and March 30, 2026*, that placed them in a more intensive level of support **they will no longer be eligible for funding**, starting July 1, 2026.

*For example, a program moved from 3-star to 2-star on September 15, 2025:*

- *They begin receiving Pursuing Quality coaching and CCHC services in October 2026.*
- *They continue to be eligible for quality improvement funds at the Achieving Quality level through fiscal year 2026 based on their 3-star rating in the April 1, 2025 snapshot.*
- *They will not be eligible for quality improvement funding in fiscal year 2027 (starting July 1, 2026).*

#### Eligibility After Returning to a Higher Level

- If, after a level decline from Achieving Quality, a program later returns to Achieving Quality, they may be eligible for funding again—if they have not already received funding for two assessment cycles or four years, whichever comes first, at that level.
- If, after a level decline from Achieving Quality or Continuing Quality, a program reaches Continuing Quality, they may regain access to funding at that level, following all other funding policies.

Coordination services do not change with a move to a new level of support.

# Coaching

## The Role of the Quality First Coach

Your Quality First coach is an early childhood expert who will be your partner in the improvement process. They will support and encourage you, and help you identify a vision for changes in your program along your improvement journey.

The coach makes it a priority to respect your program, its practices and culture. Coaches have a wide range of tools and are equipped to meet your unique needs in support of your goals.

### Your coach will focus on the following:

- Helping you review data about your program and set goals for improvement
- Partnering with you as you put goal plans into action
- Coaching as you and your staff try new strategies
- Meeting you and your staff in person through on-site, in-person visits
- Addressing new needs for support that may arise along the way

Coach assignments may change based on factors such as staffing changes, scheduling needs and to ensure the best fit.

## Quality First Coach Visits

Depending on your level of support, you will have access to coaching services as follows:

### Pursuing Quality

(Participants with a 1-star or 2-star rating)

Participants at this level receive the most coaching support, with regular, ongoing, monthly visits to support quality improvement. Visits may be scheduled according to your needs and priorities. Some months you may use more coaching hours, and some months you may use less. Meeting with your coach for the full annual hours and the required monthly minimum hours is an expectation of participation and will support progress on your goals. Coaches will accommodate requests for more hours as possible, balancing the needs and requests of all participants on their caseloads.

PROGRAM SIZE	COACHING HOURS
Home (1-10 children)	48 hours annually (with at least 2 hours monthly)
Small center (1-50 children)	48 hours annually (with at least 2 hours monthly)
Medium center (51-150 children)	72 hours annually (with at least 3 hours monthly)
Large center (151+ children)	72 hours annually (with at least 3 hours monthly)

## Achieving Quality

(Participants with a 3-star rating)

Participants at this level receive a moderate amount of coaching support. Visits may be scheduled according to your needs and priorities. Some months you may use more coaching, some months you may use less, and some months you may not need to meet with your coach. Participants receive 30 hours of coaching services per year, regardless of program size.

**Quality First Coaching Visit Policy:** To provide support for quality improvement efforts, regular visits with a Quality First coach are required at the Pursuing Quality and Achieving Quality levels of support. Your coach will work with you to create a schedule for visits. In the event you or another designated staff member is unable to meet for a planned visit, it is your responsibility to notify the coach in advance. Coaching visits are meant to support your program's progress toward your goals and regular visits support keeping you and your staff on track. There are programs waiting to participate in Quality First and repeated cancellations may result in a Targeted Support Plan to help you engage consistently and/or selecting another program to participate.

## Continuing Quality

(Participants with a 4-star or 5-star rating, all Head Start/Early Head Start participants, and 3-star participants with internal quality supports that have opted in to this level)

Programs at this level are focused on maintaining their high-quality practices. The goal of this level is to provide ongoing support to help programs sustain their quality. Participants at this level have access to coaching services upon request. To request coaching, first identify the area of focus where you would like a coach's support. Think about the types of coaching that may be helpful to you, such as training, observation & feedback, modeling, or side-by-side support. Contact your coach using the contact information listed on your extranet's profile page, under "current users and assignments".

Coaching visits may include but are not limited to meeting with the program director/administrators for planning and reviewing progress, observing and modeling in classrooms, providing feedback, opportunities for reflection and sharing resource materials. With permission from the participant, coaches may use digital video recording(s) to highlight successes and to provide staff opportunities to reflect on their practice and interactions with children.

After each visit, the coach will create a summary of activities accomplished and any plans for upcoming visits. A copy of the summary will be provided. This information is also entered in the Quality First data system and shared with First Things First to track quality improvement activities.

## Quality Improvement Planning

**Quality Improvement Planning Policy:** To document goals and action steps that promote high-quality early learning experiences for children, Quality Improvement Plans are required at the Pursuing Quality and Achieving Quality levels of support.

Every journey requires a roadmap. Your Quality Improvement Plan is the map that details the action steps, supports and checkpoints you identify to work toward your vision. Quality Improvement Plans are goals created by using information from multiple sources. These sources include your firsthand knowledge of your program's practices, informal observation(s) from

a coach or other technical assistance professionals and information gathered using valid and reliable tools (through assessment).

If you are at the Pursuing Quality or Achieving Quality level of support, a coach and other technical assistance professionals will assist you in documenting these goals and your progress. The Quality Improvement Plan form will be used. This plan will be uploaded to your program profile in the Quality First extranet where progress will be noted monthly as action steps are completed.

## Quality Maintenance Planning

Once your program reaches the Continuing Quality level of support, the focus of coaching support shifts from helping you improve quality to helping you identify how to maintain those high quality practices over time. At this time, you will have the opportunity to create a Quality Maintenance Plan (QMP) with the support of your coach and support team. The QMP is a tool to help you identify how to independently sustain the high quality practices you have worked so hard to achieve.

The QMP shifts your focus from improving quality to protecting it. It helps you look closely at what is already working well and protect those practices from disruptions, particularly during periods of transition or change. The plan builds the internal systems needed for stability, guiding your staff through proactive thinking about daily operations and sustainable routines. Ultimately, creating a QMP empowers your team to take full ownership of your success, to help your program remain a high-quality environment for children well into the future.

## Administration of Coaching

Southwest Human Development leads the coaching and coordination administration. They partner with two other agencies to provide these services: Child and Family Resources, and Easterseals Blake Foundation. If you have questions or feedback about coaching, coordination, or funding for quality improvement, please contact [QFCoaching@SWHD.org](mailto:QFCoaching@SWHD.org).

# Strategies for a Successful Coaching Partnership

Working with a Quality First coach and coordinator requires a commitment to strong professional working partnerships. Here are some tips to make the most of these partnerships:

**Introduce** staff and volunteers to the coach. This will help to establish a comfort level for coaching activities. Introduce the children to the coach as well to reduce any stranger anxieties.

**Notify** families that your program is participating in Quality First and that you will have visits from a coach. Families will appreciate knowing how these efforts can benefit their children.

**Talk** with the coach about the type of communication that works best for you. If you prefer to meet at a certain time or would appreciate regular phone calls, emails or text messages between visits, let them know.

**Plan ahead** for visits with questions, areas of focus for the visit or clarifications. This will save time during meetings so that you are ready to work on any activities you have planned.

**Communicate** with the coach about your preferences for support, your plans for change and how to involve staff. If you're unsure about how a strategy is working, or if you want to try something different, let your coach know. You and your coach can modify plans to meet your needs.

**Make a plan** to sustain the quality improvements you have made. Identify who will be in charge, how new practices will be included in staff training and what policies should be updated.

# Child Care Health Consultation

Child care health consultation is a part of Quality First intended to positively impact your program's health and safety practices, and includes required hours.

## The role of the child care health consultant

A child care health consultant (CCHC) is a specially trained health professional who provides recommendations and support to ECE providers through education and the identification of site-specific health and safety needs. The CCHC provides support by delivering comprehensive technical assistance through:

- Assessing the current health and safety practices of your program in order to identify strengths and opportunities for growth
- Working alongside you to develop health and safety goals and identifying the steps needed to reach those goals
- Providing onsite guidance and consultation
- Staff training on health and safety evidence-based best practices
- Assistance in the development of health and safety related policies and procedures
- Referrals to community resources
- Information to share with parents and children

**Child Care Health Consultation Policy:** Each Quality First participant will be assigned a child care health consultant (CCHC) once enrolled. Upon enrollment, participants will receive a visit from the CCHC to:

- Discuss CCHC service;
- Learn more about your program and its health and safety needs; and
- Schedule a time to begin your health and safety assessment process

Participants will receive a designated amount of CCHC consultation hours based on your level of support. During these hours, the CCHC will be working with you on completing your health and safety action plan and goals.

- Pursuing Quality will receive a total of 15 hours per quarter (three months) or 5 hours per month
- Achieving Quality will receive a total of 9 hours per quarter (three months) or 3 hours per month
- Continuing Quality will receive a total of 3 hours per quarter (three months) or 1 hour per month

You can seek more information on working with a CCHC by contacting the CCHC designated on your extranet home page.

# Collaboration

As you engage in the Quality Improvement participation type, you will work with a support team, including the Quality First coordinator, coach and child care health consultant. You will also have the opportunity to work with other technical assistance professionals who may include early childhood mental health consultants, inclusion coaches, ADE early childhood specialists, ADHS compliance officers, DES certification specialists and registry and college scholarship outreach coordinators.

This is not just a list of separate appointments to keep, it's a coordinated team build around your program and your goals.

## Joint collaboration activities may include:

- Joint visits with you, the Quality First coordinator or coach, CCHC and other consultants/technical assistance professionals
- Collaboration on goal setting, identifying action steps and planning visits
- Feedback and input on your program's strengths and opportunities for growth
- Sharing of training resources and materials
- Joint trainings, communities of practice, professional learning communities and other events focused on quality improvement goals

**Collaboration Meeting Policy:** Collaboration meetings are a part of participation in Quality First to coordinate services efforts to meet a common goal. For participants at the Pursuing Quality and Achieving Quality levels of support, collaboration meetings are required at least quarterly and will include the participant, the Quality First coach, CCHC and any additional technical assistance professional serving the program (such as inclusion coach, mental health consultant and ADE). For participants at the Continuing Quality level of support, collaboration meetings are an option and may include the additional professionals serving the program, as applicable. Documentation of the collaboration meeting will be shared with all participating members and added to the extranet activity log.

For participants at the Pursuing Quality and Achieving Quality levels of support, your support team will work with you to schedule a collaboration meeting each quarter. For participants at the Continuing Quality level of support, you may contact your CCHC, coach or coordinator if you have immediate needs or new priorities that you would like to discuss with the support team. Alternatively, the CCHC, coach or coordinator may suggest a collaboration meeting to support your program. During the meeting, you will discuss your quality improvement plans and any immediate needs or priorities with the team. One member will keep notes of the discussion and decisions made and provide you with a copy.

# Funding

Quality First provides financial support to eligible participants. Depending on your level of support, you will be able to use the funds in different ways to support your program's quality. How you use your funding will depend on your program's specific needs and goals. Some participants will access funding to focus on quality improvement while others will access funding to recognize staff. This section includes information on both types of funding.

Not all programs are eligible for funding. For program eligibility and requirements for funding, see [Quality Improvement Funds policy](#), [Staff Recognition Funds policy](#) and [Quality First Funding policy](#).

Funding amounts are budgeted annually per fiscal year (July 1–June 30). For state fiscal year 2027 (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027), funds are based on a participant's star rating as of April 1, 2026.

As First Things First collects data to review the effectiveness of supports and monitors available resources, the funding amounts listed in this guide apply to State Fiscal Year 2027 and are not guaranteed to stay the same in future state fiscal years. State Fiscal Year 2028 (SFY28, July 1, 2027- June 30, 2028) begins a new three-year funding cycle for First Things First. Because FTF funding is dependent on fluctuating tax revenues, budgets are re-evaluated and adjusted at the start of each new cycle to protect the sustainability of programs. Participant eligibility for funding, types of funding and the amount of funding available for SFY28 are not yet finalized.

## Funding for Quality Improvement

FOR ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS WITH A 1-STAR, 2-STAR OR 3-STAR RATING

Making improvements in your program can be challenging due to the associated costs, which may become a barrier in the process toward providing high-quality care. Participants at the Pursuing Quality and Achieving Quality levels of support have access to funding to help overcome these challenges. Quality improvement funding is designed to assist your program through your initial quality improvement efforts, offering support as you work toward your quality improvement goals.

Funds are accessed through the coach, according to your Quality Improvement Plan. Funds may be used to pay for the following types of expenses:

### **Materials and Equipment:**

If your program has a specific need for additional learning materials, equipment or furnishings, funds can be used to purchase these items.

### **Facility Improvements:**

Examples of facility improvement projects might include projects like permanent shelving, cement slab/bike paths, fencing, painting or carpet installation using licensed contractors. You will work with the coach to complete a Facility Improvement Request for approval of these types of projects. (The Facility Improvement Request is available in the extranet on the Quality First Dashboard, in the Forms section under Quality First Resources.) A check for payment will be made payable and mailed to the vendor delivering the service after it has been provided.

### Professional Development/Specialized Services:

Funds may be set aside to provide professional development opportunities for staff including regional and national conferences, professional development materials to be kept in classrooms or onsite, online trainings or payment for professional membership in early childhood organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the Family Child Care Association (FCCA), or consultation or specialized services focused on the topic of your program's quality improvement plan.

### PURSUING QUALITY

Participants with a 1-star or 2-star rating have access to the amounts listed in the chart below per fiscal year, based on program type and size. Funds at this level are available for two assessment cycles or four years, whichever comes first.

PROGRAM SIZE	Funding Amount per year
<b>MEDIUM or LARGE CENTER</b> 51-150+ CHILDREN	\$10,000
<b>FAMILY HOME, GROUP HOME or SMALL CENTER</b> UP TO 50 CHILDREN	\$5,000

### ACHIEVING QUALITY

Participants with a 3-star rating have access to the amounts listed in the chart below per fiscal year, based on program type and size. Funds at this level are available for two assessment cycles or four years, whichever comes first.

PROGRAM SIZE	Funding Amount per year
<b>LARGE CENTER</b> 150+ CHILDREN	\$4,700
<b>MEDIUM CENTER</b> 51-150 CHILDREN	\$2,950
<b>SMALL CENTER</b> 1-50 CHILDREN	\$2,050
<b>GROUP HOME</b> 5-10 CHILDREN	\$1,175
<b>FAMILY HOME</b> 1-4 CHILDREN	\$600

### 3-STAR PROGRAMS THAT HAVE OPTED IN TO CONTINUING QUALITY

Some 3-star programs with existing internal supports (e.g. coaching, health and safety support, etc.) are eligible to request to opt-in to the Continuing Quality level of support. Programs that have opted into this level will have access to funds to purchase materials, equipment, facility improvements, professional development and specialized services to support the participant's quality improvements in alignment with the Achieving Quality program size chart, directly above. Participants will

work with their coach or coordinator to make purchases in alignment with their Quality Improvement Plan. Funds are available at this level for two assessment cycles or four years, whichever comes first.

To access funds, contact your coach. You will work with your coach to identify the improvements you would like to make as part of your Quality Improvement Plan. Your coach can provide insights to help you decide what investments to focus on as part of the improvement process.

**Quality Improvement Funds Policy:** Funds are available to support quality improvement efforts for participants with a 1-star, 2-star or 3-star rating.

For participants with a 1-star, 2-star or 3-star rating, funds may be used to purchase materials and supplies that will enhance the learning environment, to offset costs of facility improvements and to support professional development opportunities for program staff. E-Verify documentation and/or Lawful Presence documentation must be completed and submitted (if applicable) for Quality First participation and to be eligible for funding. Each fiscal year, the Quality Improvement Funds Agreement must be completed and submitted to access funds.

Participants will place orders with their coach to access funds. To allow year-end processing and record keeping, Order Forms must be submitted by April 15.

# Funding for Staff Recognition

## FOR ELIGIBLE PARTICIPANTS WITH A 4-STAR OR 5-STAR RATING

Providing high-quality care and early learning takes intentional effort and dedication of staff each day. Yet due to limited investment in the early care and education system, early childhood professionals are often underpaid, with compensation that does not fully reflect the importance of their work. Quality First provides funding to help programs acknowledge this gap by recognizing and rewarding staff. Funding for staff recognition is designed to go directly to staff through a direct payment or bonus. Quality First also recognizes that some organizations may have policies that prevent bonuses. With this in mind, participants who are limited in their ability to provide a staff bonus may use the funds in other ways allowed by Quality First policies and their program policies to recognize staff.

To determine a participant's financial incentive payment for staff recognition, Quality First uses data in the participant's extranet profile as well as documentation completed during the assessment process. The number of staff is calculated based on the number of active staff\* in the following roles: director, assistant director, teacher, and assistant teacher.

Funds are provided via a direct payment to the participant site. Funds may be used to recognize staff in the following ways:

### **Staff Bonus:**

Funds may be used to provide a bonus to staff. Only staff who are employed at the time the funds are given out are eligible to receive a bonus.

### **Staff Appreciation:**

Funds may be used for purchases to provide professional recognition of staff. Purchases may include gift cards, meals, such as a luncheon or catered event to recognize staff or purchases that improve the staff environments, such as improvements to staff areas, materials to enhance staff space, or adult-sized furnishings or equipment. If a participant wishes to use funds for staff appreciation in any way that does not fit within these categories, they first must contact the coach agency for review and pre-approval in advance.

### **Professional Development:**

Funds may be used to provide professional development opportunities for staff including regional and national conferences, professional development materials to be kept in classrooms or onsite, online trainings, hiring a trainer or speaker or hosting a professional development event, or payment for professional membership in early childhood organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or the Family Child Care Association (FCCA).

**Quality First Staff Recognition Policy:** Funding is available for staff recognition at the Continuing Quality level.

Participants will receive a check or direct payment to use for staff recognition. Funds for participants with a 4-star or 5-star rating are to be used to recognize and reward staff that support the early childhood program serving children birth to five. Staff recognition may include staff bonuses, staff appreciation or professional development.

Participants subject to the policies of a tribe must defer to those tribal policies or approval processes, as applicable. Participants within tribes that do not allow an exchange of funds may access funds through the coaching agency.

Participants must complete and submit the Staff Recognition Funds Agreement and submit documentation as outlined in the Staff Recognition Expenditure Report Policy.

## CONTINUING QUALITY

Participants with a 4-star or 5-star rating have access to funding for staff recognition. These funds are issued in the fiscal year after the rating is earned, *but only if the rating is finalized by April 1 of the prior fiscal year*. For example:

- If a program earned a 4-star or 5-star rating between April 2, 2025- March 30, 2026 they will be eligible for staff recognition funding during state fiscal year 2027 (July 1, 2026–June 30, 2027) according to the chart below.

STAR RATING	Funding Amount per assessment cycle
4-star	\$500 per staff*
5-star	\$1,000 per staff*

- If a program earns a 4-star or 5-star rating between April 2, 2026- March 30, 2027
  - If it is their second consecutive 4-star or 5-star rating, they will move to Rating Only in SFY2028. See page 67 for more information. **Rating Only participants do not receive staff recognition funding.**
  - If they increase from a lower rating, or if it is their first ever 4-star or 5-star rating, **funding for SFY28 is not yet finalized. This information will be communicated in advance of SFY2028.**

**\*For Participants Receiving an Incentive Payment in State Fiscal Year 2027**, the number of active staff will be based on the number of active staff as identified above, as of the most recent assessment cycle completion date. Your program's extranet data and the staff verification completed on the day of assessment will be used.

**Staff Recognition Expenditure Report Policy:** To document all spending by participants receiving a direct payment, the Staff Recognition Expenditure Report is required. Participants must provide details about expenditures and maintain records of those expenditures. All funds must be fully expended by June 15. The Staff Recognition Expenditure Report must be submitted to the coordinator by June 30.

A program will not receive a payout until the Expenditure Report for the previous fiscal year(s) has been reviewed and approved.

To ensure funds are used in accordance with Quality First policies, Quality First may complete an onsite review of your program's records, receipts and items purchased with Quality First funds. If it is determined that funds were not used in accordance with Quality First's policies, future funds may not be accessible, you may be required to repay funds and/or your participation may be terminated.

Please submit the Staff Recognition Expenditure Report to the Quality First coordinator as soon as spending has been completed. If you have a regular meeting with an accountant or bookkeeper, this is a good time to review and complete this form. Timely submission of the Staff Recognition Expenditure Report supports the review and approval process. Review and approval must be completed before future funds are accessible.

# Additional Quality First Funding Policies

**Quality First Funding Policy:** Funding is available to eligible Quality First participants to support quality improvement and staff recognition. A participant's star rating and program type will determine the type and amount of funding available and how funds may be used. For new participants, funds may not be accessed until after enrollment is completed, an assessment is completed, a star rating has been calculated and, for programs at the Pursuing and Achieving Quality levels, a Quality Improvement Plan is developed.

Each year, you will need to complete and submit the Quality Improvement Funds Agreement or Staff Recognition Funds Agreement (as applicable), Participant Guide Acknowledgment and Participant Commitment to gain access to Quality First funds. To allow year-end processing and record keeping, order forms must be submitted by April 15. Quality First funds cannot be carried over from year to year if the full amount is unused.

## Funding Restrictions:

There are times when funding may not be accessible. This includes:

- when a program is not in good standing with its regulatory agency
- when funds are placed on hold due to a Targeted Support Plan
- when a program is subject to the [Movement Between Levels Policy](#) (see page 77)
- when a program has not submitted Expenditure Reports from a previous fiscal year
- when a program has submitted an Expenditure Report that shows under-expenditures or unallowable expenditures and funds have not been returned by the participant to the coach agency
- when a program reaches the funding time limits as outlined below.

## Time Limits on Funding Levels:

- Funding at the Pursuing Quality (1-2 star) and Achieving Quality (3-star) levels of support are time limited. Quality improvement funds are available for up to two assessment cycles, which means after June 30, 2023, two completed renewal assessments, or four years, whichever comes first.
- Deferments/Temporary Closures/Operational Calendars
  - Assessment Deferments and Temporary Closures will not impact funding access time limits.
  - Participants with an operational calendar that impacts their assessment timeline will follow the four state fiscal year time limit.

Funds are supplementary in nature and cannot be used to cover regular business operations cost (rent, utilities, insurance, etc.).

Funds may not be used for religious purposes or activities, such as faith-based curriculum, faith-based program accreditation, attendance at faith-based conferences, staff salaries for program time spent on religious instruction or worship, religious children's books or bonuses for staff whose predominant or sole purpose is religious. Funds may be used for facility improvements to buildings or rooms used for religious purposes only if the improvements will not substantially benefit the religious uses of the building or room, as determined by Quality First. Participants will be required to repay any funds determined to have been used for religious purposes or activities.

## FUNDING FAQs

### Funding for Quality Improvement

(Available to eligible participants at the Pursuing Quality and Achieving Quality levels of support)

- Q: Can I use funds to pay for my center or home license?**
- A:** No. Licensing fees are a regular business operations cost, and Quality First funds cannot be used for regular business costs.
- Q: What about appliances and other building needs?**
- A:** Funds can be used towards items that help keep the program running smoothly and are aligned with quality improvement efforts. Remember that improvements made to the facility that cannot be relocated offsite may have additional requirements for approval, per the Quality Improvement Funds Agreement that you sign.
- Q: What about paying for monthly bills like rent or electricity?**
- A:** No. Monthly bills for rent, electricity, insurance, etc. are regular business operations costs, and funds cannot be used for regular business costs.
- Q: Can funds be used for a holiday party for the children?**
- A:** No, funds are intended to be used to make quality improvements in accordance with a program's quality improvement plan. Investing in improvements that will benefit children over time, rather than a one-time event, will benefit children's learning into the future. Additionally, funds cannot be used to purchase any religious materials, including for holiday parties.
- Q: Can I use funds for facility improvements?**
- A:** Facility improvements and items over \$1,000 are subject to review and pre-approval. You may submit a request for a facility improvement using the Facility Improvement Request form. If approved, you must agree that FTF, the Quality First Coaching & Incentives grantee agency, and the coaching agency/coach will not be held liable if any materials or facility projects require additional maintenance beyond the amount of the funding payment, or if any damage occurs to the purchased materials or facility project. Additionally, if the facility project does not pass any health and/or safety facility inspections and/or any other type of inspection, FTF, the Quality First Coaching & Incentives grantee agency, and the coaching agency/coach will not be held liable. Certain projects are subject to additional review and approval; please refer to your Quality Improvement Funds Agreement and/or coach for more information.
- Q: Are there specific vendors I can purchase items from?**
- A:** Yes, Quality First has an approved vendors list. Approved vendors include: Alison Montessori, All About Books, Books 4 School, Books by the Bushel, Brooke's Publishing, Community Playthings, Constructive Playthings, Discount School Supply, Discovery Source, Exchange Press, First Book Marketplace, Home Depot, Kaplan, Kodo Kids, Lakeshore, Montessori Outlet, Montessori Services, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), Nature Explore, Office Depot/Office Max, Play with a Purpose, Staples, Star Bright Books, Teachers College Press, Teaching and Learning Stuff, Teaching Strategies, Teachstone and Zero to Three. Approved vendors may be updated periodically. Contact your coordinator or coach with questions.

# FUNDING FAQs

## Funding for Staff Recognition

(Available to eligible participants at the Continuing Quality level of support)

**Q: Can funds be used for staff salaries?**

**A:** Funding at this level is intended to recognize staff. Payment of a staff member's regular salary is not generally considered staff recognition. Payment for additional time off or for paid time outside of the classroom may be considered appropriate uses of funds if approved by the coaching agency.

**Q: Can funds be used for staff bonuses?**

**A:** Yes, funds at this level may be used to recognize staff via a payroll bonus or other financial recognition. Additionally, the following applies:

- Bonuses or other forms of financial recognition must be listed on the Expenditure Report with the staff member name and amount.
- Funding may not pay a bonus for a staff member whose main or sole purpose is religious.

**Q: Can funds be used for gift cards or meals to recognize staff?**

**A:** Yes, funds may be used for staff appreciation. Meals such as staff luncheons or catered events, or gift cards used to boost staff morale are allowed.

Gift cards should be treated the same as payroll bonuses or other forms of financial recognition and listed on the Expenditure Report with the staff member name and amount.

**Q: Can I use funds to recognize staff through professional development conferences?**

**A:** Yes, as long as the conference is not religious in nature.

**Q: What happens if a conference or professional development is canceled?**

**A:** You must report all cancellations to the Quality First coordinator or coach. If the vendor does not provide refunds, those dollars would be considered spent. If conference attendance or travel is refunded:

- Refunded expenses will not be included on the Staff Recognition Expenditure Report
- Those funds must be used for another form of staff recognition

**Q: What happens if my program does not spend all of our funds?**

**A:** Spending must occur within the designated timeframes. If it does not, you will no longer have access to your funds in the new fiscal year. Staff Recognition Expenditure Reports must be submitted by June 30, 2026.

The total purchases included on the Staff Recognition Expenditure Report must equal or exceed the annual staff recognition funding award. If your Staff Recognition Expenditure Report does not list items that equal the total amount of staff recognition funding you received or includes ineligible items that you and your coordinator cannot find a different eligible expense for, you must return any unspent funds before spending for the next fiscal year is allowed

# Participant Guide Resources

## Contact Page

Contact	Name	Agency	Phone Number	Email
Quality First Coach				
Quality First Coordinator				
Child Care Health Consultant (CCHC)				
Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant				
Inclusion Coach				
AZ Early Childhood Workforce Registry Outreach Coordinator				
ADE Early Childhood Program Specialist				
ADHS Licensing Compliance Officer or DES Surveyor				
Other				
Extranet User Name			Extranet Password	

# National Accrediting Organizations

Transcripts must be received from an accredited institution. “Accredited” means approved by the:

New England Association of Schools and Colleges,  
Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools,  
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools,  
Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges,  
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, or  
Western Association of Colleges and Schools

## National Early Childhood Education Accrediting Organizations

Association Montessori International (AMI)  
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)  
The National Early Childhood Program Accreditation Commission (NECPA)  
Association for Christian Schools International  
American Montessori Society (AMS)  
National Accreditation Commission for Early Care and Education (NAC)  
National Family Child Care Accreditation (NAFCC)  
Cognia

\*Head Start/Early Head Start programs also follow the same assessment process as an accredited program.