

High-Quality Preschool Expansion in Pima County: A Collaborative Funding Model

Lisa Floran, Master of Public Health Student and Paul D. Coverdell Fellow



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
GRADUATE COLLEGE
Peace Corps
Coverdell Fellows

United Way of Tucson
and Southern Arizona



Background

Decades of research suggest that children in high-quality preschool programs see stronger health, academic, and career outcomes over the course of their lives. Benefits appear especially pronounced among children from low-income families, who enter kindergarten 14 months behind their peers in pre-literacy skills. Participation in preschool programs has also been linked to family and community benefits, with parents of enrolled children more likely to be in the workforce and communities seeing returns of up to \$13 for every dollar invested. Unfortunately, Pima County preschool participation rates lag behind the national average. And of the 13,000 Pima County preschoolers living in poverty, less than 1 in 4 were enrolled in high-quality preschool in 2018.

Past initiatives to expand preschool access in Pima County through tax increases or government funding alone have not succeeded, despite wide public support for early childhood education. In 2019, United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona (UWTSA) collaborated with The Preschool Promise to assess how a braided funding approach could make preschool expansion feasible. Braided funding weaves resources from multiple streams – city, county, state, federal, private – toward a common initiative, reducing financial burden for individual partners and building a sense of shared accountability and collaboration. UWTSA used the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) strategy to guide its exploration of braiding funding, working closely with leaders from past preschool expansion initiatives and focusing on existing resources.



Strategic Partnerships

UWTSA staff met with more than 50 local individuals, associations, and institutions to learn about their capacity for high-quality preschool in 2019. These conversations solidified a strong, diverse network of organizations and a shared commitment to expand preschool access through a defined plan.



School Districts

School districts are eager to expand existing preschool programs and create new ones.



Government Offices

Government agencies would appreciate the opportunity to collaborate and leverage resources.



Preschool Providers

High-quality providers express interest in expanding their services if funds became available.



Private Funders

Local philanthropists recognize the need for start-up costs, renovations, and teacher development.



Local Coalitions

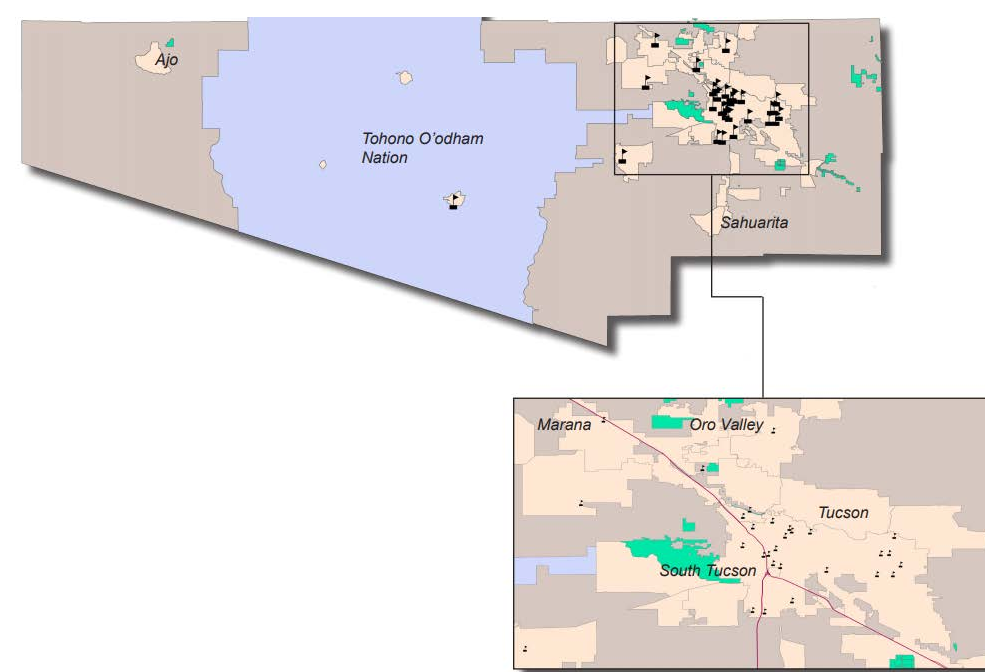
Advocates, nonprofits, and coalitions are interested in increasing support for the project across the community.

Potential Sites

Information about capacity and available space at existing high-quality centers was collected during partnership meetings. Partner recommendations, existing quality ratings, community median income level, and community need informed the selection of possible expansion sites.

As of January 2020, 18 community-based preschool providers and seven school districts have committed to serve 523 children immediately should funds become available. Proposed locations can be found in all six Pima County Supervisor districts and across seven cities and towns, including all six Tucson city wards.

Proposed High-Quality Preschool Expansion Sites, Year 1



Resources and Reach

Partnership meetings also informed a collaborative draft plan for expanding preschool access to at least 500 new students in the first year of the project and 1,000 new students within three years.

A braided funding model puts this goal within reach: as of January 2020, financial analysis suggests that more than 75% of the \$5.2m proposed budget has been secured.

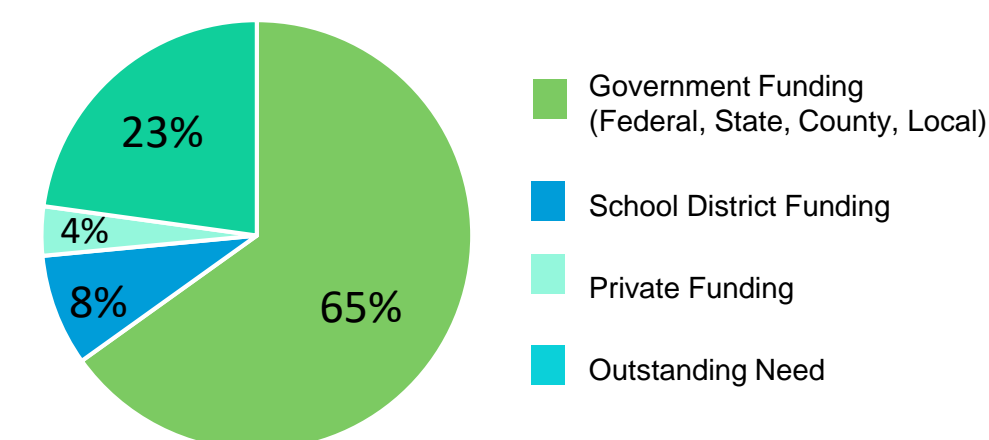
1,000

New seats in high-quality preschools for Pima County children over 3 years

+ 34%

Increase in the number of eligible Pima County children accessing high-quality preschool

Braided Funding Resources for High-Quality Preschool Expansion, Year 1



Next Steps

Response to the braided funding model has been overwhelmingly positive. It is clear that our community leaders value high-quality preschool, and a collaborative funding design makes implementation both appealing and possible. To ensure the project continues moving forward, the UWTSA team plans to focus on the following in 2020:

- **Fundraising and Resources:** Towns, cities, and local businesses have all expressed interest in collaborating on the project. UWTSA staff and partners will continue strategic meetings to explore how additional partners can best contribute and ensure all necessary resources are secured for year 1.
- **Partner Engagement:** Phase 2 will also require ongoing communication with committed partners to maintain transparency, keep all updated on progress, and solidify the contracts and intergovernmental agreements necessary to make the project a reality.
- **Statewide Advocacy:** The team will collaborate closely with Tempe and Flagstaff, two other Arizona cities implementing preschool expansion projects, and explore opportunities to encourage similar initiatives in other communities across the state.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to LaVonne Douville, Chief Impact Officer and Executive Vice President, and Allison Titcomb, Vice President of Community Development and Peace Corps Fellows Liaison, at United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona for their valuable input. This project also benefited greatly from graphics assistance by Rachel Gildersleeve and past research and reports by Nicole Fyffe (Pima County Administrator's Office), The Preschool Promise, First Things First, and the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at DePaul University.

References

Available upon request. Photo courtesy of United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona and all graphics publicly sourced.