

SUPERCARGING PEEPS

OCTOBER 23, 2025, MULTISECTOR CONVENING

Supercharge PEEPs is bringing together Pima County business owners, educators, nonprofits, philanthropists, and community leaders to solve one of the region’s most urgent challenges: access to high-quality, affordable childcare.

High-quality childcare is critical to workforce stability, economic growth, and family well-being. Yet in Southern Arizona, demand far outpaces supply, and funding remains limited. Supercharge PEEPs aims to change that — scaling our collective impact from \$1 million to \$10 million and ultimately with national funding support \$150 million in annual funding to make quality childcare accessible for working families.

Prepared by: Center for Economic Integrity

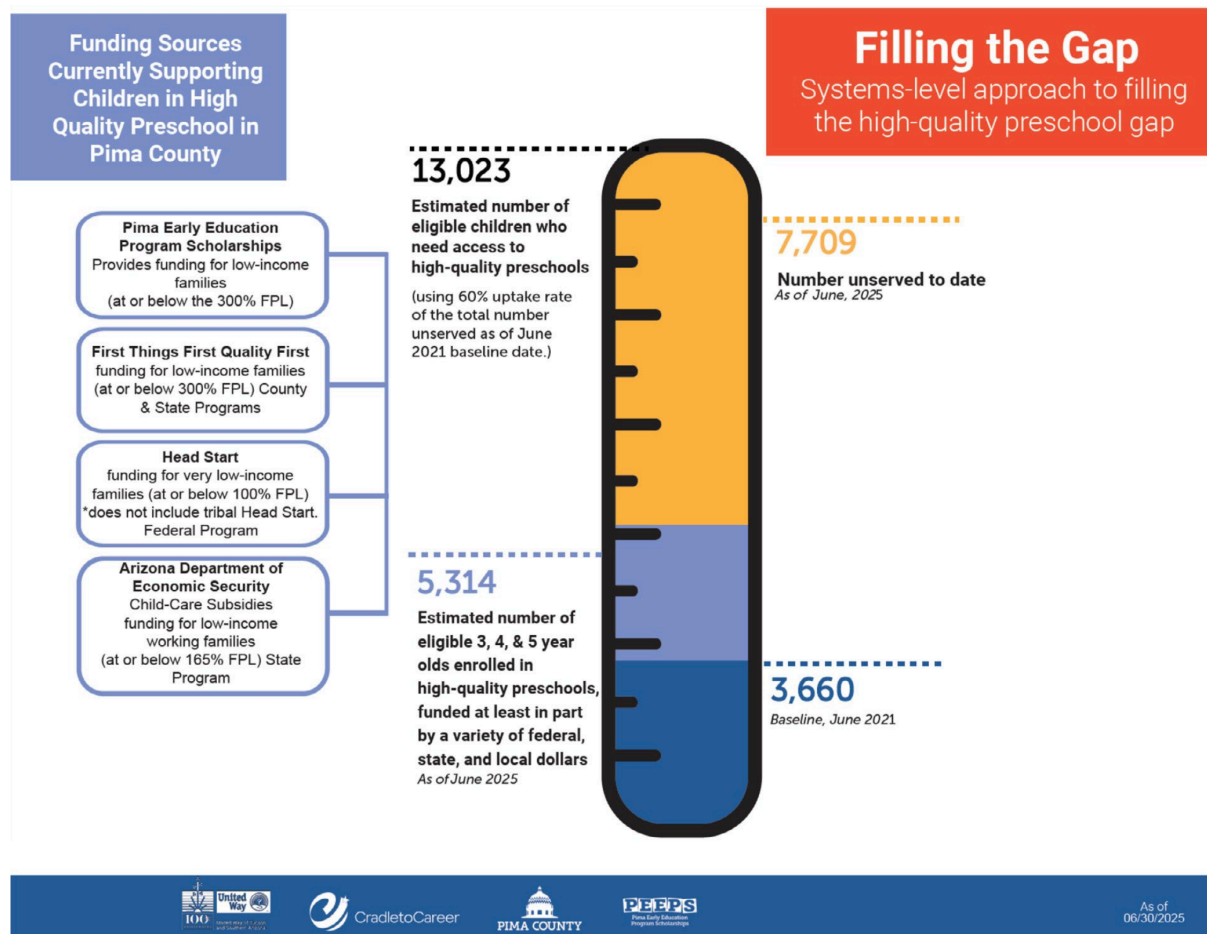
11/15/2025

Pima County, Arizona

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At the system level, PEEPs and other programs assisted 5,314 children from families with incomes at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level in attending high-quality preschool programs in Pima County. This means that **collectively PEEPs and our partners are serving about 41% of the need (5,314 out of 13,032).**



Source: [Pima Early Education Program Scholarships | FY 2024-2025 Annual Report](#) |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Pima Early Education Program Scholarships (PEEPs) expands access to high-quality early education opportunities for low to modest income families with children ages 3-5 by providing high-quality early education scholarships to eligible families.

PEEPs is a modest, primarily publicly funded scholarship program that leverages multiple funding sources (federal, state, local). PEEP partners with local school districts, the United Way of Tucson & S. AZ, First Things First regional scholarship funds, Federally-funded Head Start programs and other supporting providers to ensure that county contributions are maximized. Thus, PEEP ensures public funding is utilized to its maximum benefit as the “last dollar in” making up the difference in the costs associated with high-quality early childhood education.

High-quality Early Education (HQ ECE) is prohibitively expensive. The cost for one year of HQ ECE is the equivalent of one year of college tuition at a state university. For many families, HQ ECE is financially out of reach.

- Access to HQ ECE is a Workforce Development Issue
- Access to HQ ECE is a Regional Economic Development Issue
- Access to HQ ECE is an Employment Issue
- Access to HQ ECE is a Higher Education & Professional Development Issue
- Access to HQ ECE is a Community Issue
- Access to HQ ECE is a family and child welfare Issue

Most importantly access to HQ ECE is a proven intervention that interrupts cycles of generational poverty and is in alignment with Pima County & City of Tucson formally adopted [Prosperity Initiative](#).

It is incumbent upon all sectors in our region – public, healthcare, philanthropic, business, academic and nonprofit – to come together and devise a strategy to fully fund this vital program. Public sector dollars are insufficient to meet the need for more scholarship support and early childhood education delivery systems support. Multisector collaboration and funding sources are needed to “Supercharge” PEEP so that this highly successful program can sustainably expand into the future.

The Oct 23, 2025, multisector convening was the second of four planned convenings. This convening was solution-focused, leading to the formation of community-led working groups empowered to chart the initial course toward realizing the goal of expansion and sustainability.

“It has been very helpful being able to work while she is learning and at a great school” – PEEP Parent

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS PEEPS?

PEEPs is designed to assist children from income-eligible families to attend high-quality preschool at locations across Pima County. A wealth of data shows that investing in high-quality preschool provides short-term and lasting benefits to children, families, schools, taxpayers and the community. By actively collaborating with existing state and federal programs, the target is to assist all income-eligible families who want to send their children to high-quality preschool in Pima County.

In the Spring of 2021, the Pima County Board of Supervisors took bold action to create Pima Early Education Program scholarships (PEEPs). Initial funding consisted of \$10 million general fund dollars with a plan to transition to secondary property library tax funds. Using transition library tax funds was suspended due to a federal infusion of federal COVID dollars in 2022. Federal COVID dollars, known as ARPA, were utilized until this past FY budgeting cycle. PEEP is now funded as intended as part of the early literacy library taxing district.

[Source: <https://www.pima.gov/975/Pima-Early-Education-Program-Scholarship>]

HOW IS PEEPS CURRENTLY FUNDED?

Funding for PEEP is provided by Pima County's Library tax, at roughly \$10.75 million per year and additional funding is provided by the City of Tucson, Towns of Marana and Oro Valley, and participating school districts. Donations to the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona from individuals, businesses, and non-profits complement the program.

There are three components to the PEEP program: Free school district preschool classes, Quality First scholarships, and extended-day Head Start programming. Adjacent to these three components there is an opportunity to grow PEEP funding to support a non-Head Start classroom in partnership with Pima Community College.

A “Last Dollar In” Approach: The innovative ‘Last Dollar In’ approach allows PEEP to complement existing ECE subsidies such as scholarships from DES, Head Start, and Quality First by filling those other scholarship spots first. This approach helps ensure that PEEP funding is expanding the pool of children receiving support and fully utilizing available funds.

[Source: United Way Assessment of PEEPs]

OVERVIEW OF NEED

PEEP and other programs assisted 5,314 out of 13,032 children from families with incomes at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in attending high-quality preschool programs in Pima County. This means that collectively, PEEP and other community partners are serving about 41% of the need.

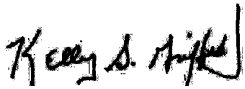
LOOKING AHEAD SUPERCHARGING PEEPS

PEEPs public funding sources have established a foundation for continued access to high-quality early education for a limited number of young children. However, public funding sources are insufficient to meet the current needs of families, employers, and the early education workforce into the future.

The business community writ large has repeatedly identified access to high-quality early childhood education as a key issue for current workforce recruitment and retention, as well as for workforce development into the future. The continued economic growth and development of this region will depend in part, on how well we address this ongoing need.

“It is incumbent upon all sectors within Pima County to come together, identify our collective capacity to supercharge and scale this highly successful program by inventorying and combining our assets, aligning our resources, and unlocking our collective efficiencies. We are all holding unique puzzle pieces and it is time to create a new picture so we can assemble those pieces. This report summarizes the second of a planned total of four community conversations to do just that.” -Cristi Street VP SALC (Southern Arizona Leadership Council)

You are invited to continue this conversation as we prepare to embark on a unique multi-sector, public/private partnership journey in the pursuit of “Supercharging PEEPs”.



Kelly S Griffith, Executive Director Center for Economic Integrity





METHODOLOGY

May 8, 2025, marked the start of a community-wide effort to “Supercharge PEEPs”. This first convening was primarily focused on listening and learning from leaders in various sectors, public schools, early childhood professionals, business, philanthropy, higher education, and nonprofits. Many interesting and innovative ideas were generated; these ideas were documented in a report and carried over to the second convening on Oct 23, 2025.

The methods utilized in both convenings included small group discussions. Participants were asked to self-select into groups with representatives from wide ranging sectors at each table. The sharing of ideas from different sector perspectives provided for a rich, creative exchange of ideas.

The second convening was October 23, 2025. Supercharging PEEPs event sponsors and content specialists contracted with a professional facilitation services team. Each table of participants was assigned its own facilitator. This professionally trained facilitator was a neutral convener and documentarian. This allowed content specialists who are part of the Preschool Promise Coalition to participate fully in the discussions and provide important information related to the program as part of the overall discussions.

The October convening had two separate small group breakout sessions. The first session enabled participants to review the ideas generated in the first convening and prioritize the most important elements. Prioritized ideas were then grouped into categories and reported out to the entire convening.

Participants were asked to self-select into a category in which they felt they could contribute the most. This resulted in the formation of five community-led working groups. These subgroups were asked to share contact information, identify a group leader and short-term tasks, and select a date/time for subsequent follow-up meetings.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IDEAS

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

The following discussion points were grouped together by topic:

COMMUNICATIONS

- Need an effective community-wide marketing campaign
- Communication and Awareness
- Strategic Messaging, Marketing & Outreach targeting a broader audience
- Build a compelling message for investment firms and donor-advised funds
- Full-time social media campaign (content & information), crowdsourcing, storytelling
- Decide on a marketing team/firm & create a marketing plan
- Leverage corporate relationships to amplify the message
- Identify regional & education ambassadors
- Identify who will manage/plan communications
- Hire a spokesperson
- Develop a Strategic Plan for communication that can be integrated into the plan
- Plan large-scale messaging events and forums
- Leverage Academic Partnerships to develop a strategic approach
- Establish media contacts
- Fundraising campaign: 250 people give \$250 ASAP
- Create a clear, concise, measurable “ask” statement
- Make the case, “Your zip code should not limit your future!”
- Use data to answer the question, “Why?” The ask is important
- Define what the ask is and who the audience is
- Acknowledge PEEPs success



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IDEAS

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

DIVERSE DONORS

- Dedicated reservation/allocation of corporate, trade associations, vendors, and nonprofits giving to PEEPS
- Tap into large (local) corporate donors – coordinate with birth-12th grade efforts
- Reach out to private philanthropic (Jim Click, Raytheon), Foundations & other entities
- Diversify funding streams orgs/individual/legacy & wills – 2 level strategy
- Create a \$25 million endowment fund that yields \$1 million annually for PEEPs
- GO BIG!
- Develop & implement a strategic fundraising plan that includes tactics that address all sectors & options and enumerates best practices from other jurisdictions
- Pursue State & National Funding
- Create infrastructure to keep, map, connect donors & prospective donors specifically for PEEPs
- Identify a clear connector & relationship with top 5 corporations in Pima County to begin conversations
- Identify “who” has the relationships to make the “ask”
- Identify a champion to create a matching fund for donors
- Create a plan with timelines
- Deploy a survey to prioritize most critical funding needs
- Research promising practices that include both policy (i.e. public funding streams) & impact investing (i.e. private funding streams)
- Create impact fees that AZ professional athletes pay towards early education



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IDEAS

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

TAX CREDITS

- Expand the use of 45F tax credit by modifying the law to use 45f for non-employees & to use 45F to purchase PEEPs scholarships for employees
- Develop an educational forum for businesses to learn about other tax incentives to support employees by contributing to PEEPS voucher scholarships for employees with strong media campaign & coordination w/Chambers & SALC
- Work on tax policy change to increase tax credit amount, ESA etc.
- Advocate for more clarity on Federal 45F tax credits
- Lobby the AZ State Legislature to allow voucher use for PEEPs
- Lobby AZ Legislature to increase state tax credits for HQ ECE [High-quality Early Childhood Education]
- Create clear marketing materials on tax credits and benefits for businesses
- Utilize local podcast episodes/radio segments to talk about tax credits for HQ ECE
- Promote existing opportunities to individuals & corporations
- Create marketing strategies to encourage individuals & businesses to make a tax credit contribution to PEEPs
- Educate business owners at Chamber of Commerce events
- Highlight business's contributions to PEEPs as an incentive to expand PEEPs capacity
- Amplify/Identify what entity is accepting individual tax credits contributions

Note: Tax credits, ESAs, and vouchers are currently only available for K-12 institutions.



SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IDEAS

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

ADVOCACY

- Outline actionable policy priorities
- Recruit a lead donor & lead spokesperson for advocacy
- Find a Tucson-based celebrity champion to be the face of the campaign
- Educate the community on the goals and evangelize
- Spotlight “testimonials” & highlight success
- Demonstrate how/where this type of effort has succeeded elsewhere
- Determine what resonates with decision makers at the policy level
- Create a common understanding
- Highlight “return on investment” ROI
- Have a clear goal in mind & break it down into incremental steps
- Find “fast wins” to create momentum
- Prioritize sequentially and keep it simple
- Create a timeline for tasks required to achieve policy outcomes



Supervisor Scott District 1

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION IDEAS

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

DATA COLLECTION

- Document best practices from other states to implement universal Pre-K
- Develop a process to collect data across the region of the programs & initiatives. Small & large organizations currently must address early childcare needs & how the PEEPs program can maximize those efforts as a model
- Identify a clear focus for the data collection – to track PEEPs scholarship recipients social/emotional/academic and health outcomes over time
- Agree on what kind of data is needed to make the case
- Determine what data is needed from providers to assess outcomes for children and families for private and public PEEPs funders
- Identify employers with work-life benefits such as childcare, sick child time off, elder care
- Assess ROI on work-related childcare subsidies for employer
- Identify current childcare options funded by businesses/organizations, or onsite at businesses/organizations
- Who is responsible for collecting data?
- Make data easy to distribute and accessible
- Include both qualitative and quantitative data
- What expert data collection help can be solicited & from where?
- Identify existing data (FTF, DES, Head Start, federal, state, local)
- Review reports from other states, US Chamber/Bipartisan Policy Center
- Optimize/Maximize data survey response rates
- Identify key groups to target for surveys (incl. sm. business groups)
- Determine the best ways to gather data
- Identify gaps in data collection & reporting



Supervisor Cano District 5 & Nicole Scott PEEPs program Manager

COMMUNITY LED WORKING GROUPS

WORKING GROUPS

The October Multisector Convening coalesced around (5) working groups. The working groups identified a group leader, near-future tasks, and an initial follow-up meeting date for the group. The recorded tasks are not all inclusive, and each group will draft their own comprehensive list of tasks, timelines, and people responsible.

- 1) Communications
 - a.) messaging
 - b.) communications strategic plan
 - c.) social media
- 2) Diverse Donors *
 - a.) tactics
 - b.) create a strategic fundraising plan
 - c.) infrastructure
 - d.) donor focuses/targets
- 3) Tax Credits
 - a.) messaging
 - b.) lobbying
 - c.) clarity
- 4) Make Our Case/Advocacy
 - a.) timeline & goals
 - b.) advocacy
 - c.) research
 - d.) list outcomes
 - e.) champion
 - f.) common understanding
 - g.) messaging
- 5) Data
 - a.) agree on what data is needed
 - b.) focus on data that makes the case for funding PEEPs

* The Diverse donors group identified the need for a database program & coordination with the communications working group

NEXT STEPS

FOCUS AND COORDINATION

- Disseminate this document to all participants
- Create a functioning listserv in which all participants can communicate and share information across working groups
- Enlist needed “experts” for follow-up video conferencing information sessions in support of working groups’ requests for background and clarity
- Provide a central point of contact for continued working group coordination, information gathering, and materials design
- Continue to solicit feedback and distill emerging ideas into a central depository, such as a shared Google Drive folder
- Provide additional logistical support for working group leaders upon request
- Begin preparations for a March 2026 Multisector reconvening



CONTACT

QUESTIONS? NEED MORE INFORMATION OR ASSISTANCE?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE SOUTHERN ARIZONA LEADERSHIP COUNCIL: <https://salc.org/peeps>

NICOLE FYFFE
COUNTY ADMINISTRATION
Tel (520) 724-8419
Nicole.Fyffe@pima.gov

NICOLE SCOTT
PEEPS PROGRAM MANAGER
Tel (520) 724-2696
Nicole.Scott@pima.gov

MONICA BRINKERHOFF A.V.P. ECE UNITED WAY S. AZ
ACCELERATE QUALITY FUND
Tel (520) 903-3939
mbrinkerhoff@unitedwaytucson.org

KELLY GRIFFITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
CENTER FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRITY
Tel (520) 250-4416
kelly@economicintegrity.org

PENELOPE JACKS CHAIR
THE PRESCHOOL PROMISE WORKING GROUP
Tel (520) 603-6911
penelope.jacks@gmail.com
Website: <https://www.thepreschoolpromise.org/PEEPS/>

