First allows you to create numerous family compositions and shows variations in the cost of living in any Wisconsin county. In the example below, we have chosen a family (1 adult, 2 children) that resides in Rock County. Once you’ve selected a family composition, the model calculates that particular family’s “Basic-Needs Budget” so you can get an estimate of that family’s monthly expenses.

Policymakers and planners can explore alternative tax and benefit policies to see how they can improve economic incentives for the working poor.

Case workers and advocates can use FIRST as a budgeting tool for individual families to illustrate exactly how much that family will need to earn to meet their basic expenses and to demonstrate the effects increased earnings will have on a family’s receipt of specific subsidies.

FIRST’s designers incorporated rules from the Wisconsin Works (W-2), Food Stamps, BadgerCare, child care and federal housing assistance programs as well as up-to-date state and federal tax laws.

You are able to experiment with policy changes to see the impact of various tax- and family-support proposals on your first family. For example, you could make changes to Wisconsin’s child care subsidy program and compare the current policy to your proposed change to see how much additional discretionary income such a move brings to that family. You can also experiment with entire packages of policy reforms.
“A powerful tool for everyone who cares about making work pay in Wisconsin. Advocates, legislators and administrators alike can use it to test whether proposed reforms of our benefit and tax system actually help Wisconsin’s workers.”

–David Riemer,
Director of Administration, City of Milwaukee

“This tool makes it clear that earning more doesn’t always pay off… very useful for everyone from policy makers to concerned citizens.”

–Laura Dresser,
Research Director, Center on Wisconsin Strategy

“FIRST will be extremely useful for policy makers to adjust state programs and taxes to insure that work pays for low-income families.”

–Jon Peacock
Budget Project Director, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families

“Finally, an easy-to-use and easy-to-understand representation of the challenges families face as they move up the economic ladder.”

–Julie Kerkisick,
Executive Director, The New Hope Project

Presentations of the FIRST model are free and are being scheduled for now through this summer. The presentations can be designed specifically for your county.

To schedule a presentation, or to find out when IWF’s Vicky Selkow will be presenting the model in your area, call (414) 384-9094, or e-mail us at iwff@execpc.com

Disk copies of the model will be available for a fee by late May.