

Indiana Expedites Federal Pandemic Assistance Delivery to Child Care Providers with Resultant

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When the federal government implemented pandemic aid for COVID-19 in 2021, states had to figure out how to quickly determine eligibilities, disburse funds, and complete required federal reporting—all within a very tight timeline. Indiana has strong history of modernized agencies making data-driven decisions and knew they needed to implement an application process with key data points to deliver federal funds swiftly to those who needed them most. So, while most states scrambled to execute all of the evolving requirements due to a lack of agency modernization, Indiana called upon Resultant and other partners enabling them to quickly and effectively disburse grants.

THE PROBLEM

Historically, the inaccessibility of quality child care has hindered workforce development for families with young children—with a pronounced impact on women ([Center for American Progress](#)). Without access to dependable child care providers, families struggle to stay in or enter the workforce, and the economy stagnates. People who could under other circumstances pursue career objectives must opt out to care for their children while numerous positions in the workforce remain unfilled. Accessible, affordable, quality child care is essential for healthy children, healthy families, and a healthy workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic further burdened already strained child care systems worldwide. Child care providers—many of them small family businesses—reduced operations or entirely closed due to increased operational costs, health and safety concerns, and an inability to find and hire enough qualified staff members to keep the doors open.

The potential for relief came when the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) passed in March 2021. This broad-scale measure was designed in part to provide significant financial assistance to strengthen and sustain the child care market. A major piece of this assistance comes through child care stabilization grants: short-term funding for child care providers to stabilize their operations and build capacity for existing and anticipated child care enrollment demand.

The State of Indiana received over half a billion dollars to support Hoosier child care operations to be administered through the Office of Early Childhood and Out-of-School Learning (OECOSL).

The potential to bolster and positively impact child care across the United States with ARPA grant money is enormous. However,

as with many pandemic assistance measures, states were entering uncharted territory while federal guidance evolved. This volume of federal funding was unprecedented, and it came with a mandated and limited timeline for administration. Making use of those funds on time presented a challenge few states were ready to meet.

Another layer of complexity came from reporting requirements—the federal eligibility and data collection stipulations that OECOSL was not yet fully equipped to collect. Additionally, many child care providers are small-scale businesses that rely on paper records and have little experience interacting with a state agency regarding data collection or grant applications of this type or magnitude.

The stakes were high and time incredibly tight. OECOSL intended to apply its funds to bolstering child care programs with Build, Learn, Grow, and it had a deadline: Federal guidelines mandated half the stabilization grants be distributed by December 31, 2021. Any solution implemented to help OECOSL administer the funds needed to be quickly executed, simple by design, and extraordinarily user friendly.



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THE SOLUTION

OECOSL engaged its partners to support the successful design, development, testing, communication, outreach, and maintenance of both the grant application process and the technology solution to accompany it. They needed a portal through which child care providers could apply for ARPA grants while the agency collected, archived, and reported eligibility requirements and classroom and enrollment data. OECOSL knew the information they were gathering would have a direct impact on the future state of child care in Indiana and, as they found with other modernization projects, if the solution were scalable and adaptable it would continue to serve everyone in years to come.

A solution will be ultimately successful only if it is begun with end users in mind. Technology for technology's sake is doomed to failure, but people-first technology leads to superior outcomes. We begin every engagement with a detailed discovery phase, asking plenty of questions, listening carefully to the answers, and putting ourselves in the shoes of the people these solutions are intended to help.

Resultant was engaged in May 2021 to lead the design, development, and application launch of the ARPA grant portal project, and to support the Build, Learn, Grow partners in communications and market outreach.

GOALS ACHIEVED

1. Met federal guidelines and a higher state standard

The federal government provided application and eligibility guidelines but left room for states to determine how they'd distribute funds. Indiana's OECOSL wanted to give assistance to as many providers as possible; it also wanted to ensure they performed good stewardship of the grant money and hold providers accountable for funds received. The funds are specifically to be used in these categories:

- Meeting new health and safety standards
- Paying staff higher wages
- Hiring more teachers
- Lowering costs of serving new families

Building an ARPA portal presented two key challenges. First, OECOSL had no current ability to collect and process grant applications. In fact, much of the federally mandated data collected in the application process had never been recorded anywhere before. The ARPA portal would need to be robust and flexible so that this data could be used to later inform data-driven decisions. Second, electronic records and data collection aren't a prerequisite to quality care. Applicants would in many cases be sole proprietors operating out of their homes and would have to gather eligibility requirement documentation from scratch. OECOSL needed its portal and application to be as easy to use as possible.

2. Ensured connection and scalability

Where data was available, we worked to integrate it to provide a starting point. That first meant connecting the ARPA portal with **I-LEAD** (Indiana Licensing and Education Access Depot), the online Indiana child care licensing and documentation system that facilitates licensing, background checks, and professional development. This ensured providers could access the application securely, and in an online environment they were already familiar with. Next, leveraging the existing cloud environment the team previously implemented to support the development of data-driven applications across the agency by bringing data sources together, we connected to the State's Child Care Information System (CCIS) to prepopulate certain already-known data points. This connection would give starting data that applicants could validate or adjust if incorrect, ensuring an easier user experience. We gave the portal the ability to capture previously unrecorded user-provided information about operating staff levels, current enrollment, and enrollment capacity. Making the ARPA portal interoperable with other agency systems lays the groundwork for future scalability.

3. Built technology solutions to simplify and expedite

Resultant designed the portal application with both child care provider end-users and OECOSL staff in mind. The administrative back end of the ARPA portal allows State staff to track, review, and approve applications as they are submitted, streamlining that process and speeding up the time between application submission and fund distribution. Administrative staff also have a real-time metrics dashboard which ensures easy to access to data that is both used internally and reported as required to the federal government.

One of the most important aspects of the application is the integrated cost model, developed with input from OECOSL partners, that determines grant award amounts for each provider. Data from over 2,800 child care providers' initial application submissions helped Resultant validate and refine key model inputs, including:

- Whether providers are part of a meal program
- Provider staff size
- Providers' mortgage or rent costs
- Rate of pay, location wage index, and employee benefits
- Location real estate index
- Classroom capacity and enrollment information

OECOSL oversees child care subsidy, child care licensing, and child care resource and referral services. Its vision is that every Indiana community will have a strong network of early care and education partners and programs that support the child, the family, and local schools. OECOSL has a long history of partnering with numerous organizations and stakeholders—both public and nonprofit—working for the improvement of child care in the state. To manage and expedite the significant pandemic recovery funds, OECOSL created the Build, Learn, Grow program, integrating its many partners to help efficiently disburse funding in the interest of helping the early childhood industry in Indiana recover and grow.

THE OUTCOME

Having a clear picture from the beginning of what the portal should be and feedback from early users strengthened its launch.

The application portal went live in October 2021. The portal application system developed for the stabilization grant is designed to be reusable for other competitive or non-competitive grant application intake administration processes. This never-before-collected data will help to inform policy and make decisions to reform child care in Indiana.

For transparency and accountability, the Resultant business intelligence team designed, developed, and supported the launch of a publicly available **summary dashboard**, updated with near-live data as payments are disbursed to child care providers and a **summary infographic** showing results from all Build, Learn, Grow programs including the stabilization grants at the end of 2021.

Because of the classroom data that has been collected, the State and its partners now have access to pivotal information such as classroom slots, child care geographic and demographic data, and child care provider specific program participations that can help shed light on program accessibility and availability.

THE IMPACT

Funding disbursed with OECOSL's oversight through the ARPA portal has significantly and positively impacted individual lives, families, and the economy at large in Indiana. So far, approximately 3,000 child care provider applications have been processed and approved, with over \$420 million awarded to date in both disbursement rounds. The funding from this grant has assisted in a variety of provider expenses, including personnel costs, facility improvements and maintenance, COVID-19 safety actions, and mental health support.

While the federal government dictated certain eligibility requirements, above those, states have autonomy. OECOSL

is deeply invested in being a good steward of the funding, understanding that Indiana's child care ecosystem needed improvement before the pandemic hit, and that once the stimulus is gone there is still work ahead. Therefore, OECOSL implemented their own measure of accountability into funding disbursement.

The first round distributed grants for three months of expenses to approved applicants. For the second round, recipients must provide some additional data and proof of what they used first-round funding for. Approved second round grants cover five months' expenses.

Our goal is to use this funding to change the landscape of Indiana's child care market permanently for the better, empowering both providers and parents. It can produce monumental changes now and set us up for the important work that still waits for us.

NICOLE NORVELL
DIRECTOR, OECOSL

EARLY RESULTS SHOW TREMENDOUS GAINS MADE IN PART DUE TO THE SUCCESSFUL ROLLOUT OF THE STABILIZATION GRANT. WHAT WE'RE SEEING:



23.3%

Increase in capacity for Paths to Quality (PTQ) Level 4 programs



14.5%

Increase in children that can be served by Early Childhood Education programs



25%

Increase in the total number of children being served, which includes:

21% drop in unfilled openings for children

16.5% drop in open teaching positions

You can view the full Build, Learn, Grow 2021 Program Impact Report [here](#).