



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

From the Ground Up: Improving Child Care and Early Learning Facilities



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Overview

Increasingly, discoveries in neuroscience show that a child's earliest years are crucial to their social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, and that the settings in which they learn, play, and grow have an enormous impact on their future development. High-quality and developmentally appropriate environments promote healthy behaviors, independence, and social-emotional skills in young children. Yet, too often, the conversation about child care quality focuses on workforce and curriculum, and rarely does it include the physical environment in which children are cared for.

Nearly 15 million children under age 6 live in households in which all parents work, leaving these children in need of high-quality child care.¹ The physical infrastructure of these spaces has been long neglected, and parents are forced to place their children in substandard settings. It is critical to recognize that high-quality environments lead to better outcomes for young children and that the nation's children cannot wait for greater investments in early learning infrastructure that supports their development.

To support city- and local-level officials in addressing their child care facility-related challenges, this catalog provides examples of federal-, state-, and local-level models across government, philanthropy, and public-private partnerships.

Cover Photo: Mission Child Care Consortium, San Francisco, California.

Source: Low Income Investment Fund.

The Scope of the Problem

Working parents of young children need to be assured that their children are cared for in safe, developmentally appropriate, and high-quality settings. Children spend much of their time in child care programs, yet very limited data exists on the quality of these facilities—especially across health and safety standards. The research that exists, however, identifies an urgent need to address health and safety issues of early learning facilities—both center-based and family child care (also known as in-home child care)—so that they move beyond *good enough*.

Impact of Design Elements on Children

Early learning environments directly impact the development of young children.² While high-quality, developmentally appropriate settings can promote positive outcomes in children, substandard settings can lead to negative outcomes and hinder physical, behavioral, and cognitive development. Child care environments should be designed and equipped to help young children thrive and should include the following:

- Child-sized toilets, sinks, and other fixtures to help build competence, independence, and good hygiene practices.
- Bathrooms adjacent to classrooms and playgrounds to help build autonomy for children while allowing teachers to closely monitor bathroom activities.
- Windows in classrooms and common areas to provide children with natural light and allow them to orient themselves to the outside world.
- Entry ways, common areas, and hallways that are used as intentional spaces for early development and that foster engagement with other children and teachers.
- Appropriate acoustics that support positive effects on children's memory, attention, and academic achievement.
- Soothing colors, open spaces, and different types of lighting that are comfortable and homelike, and that are inviting to both parents and children.
- Playground and outdoor spaces that allow children to connect with nature and may lead to reduced rates of child obesity, depression, and attention deficit disorder.

The U.S. Department Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General, in an investigation across 10 states, found that 96 percent of child care programs receiving Child Care and Development Fund dollars had one or more potentially hazardous conditions, such as broken or unlocked gates, water damage, or chemicals within reach of young children.³ Furthermore, a 2011 statewide study conducted in Massachusetts found excessive levels of carbon dioxide in child care facilities throughout the state, as well as insufficient ventilation systems and furnishings that contained formaldehyde. The study also found that nearly 70 percent of programs lack classroom sinks, which has negative impacts on infection control and children’s hygienic practices.⁴

“An investigation across 10 states found that 96 percent of child care programs receiving Child Care and Development Fund dollars had one or more potentially hazardous conditions.”

The challenges plaguing child care facilities are part of a greater infrastructure problem in the United States. A recent investigation of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) found that decades of neglect of and underinvestment in public housing throughout New York City has led to crumbling and deteriorating buildings. With approximately 100 child care centers renting space from NYCHA, thousands of young children are exposed to hazardous conditions, including broken heaters, rodent infestations, mold, and lead paint.⁵

Another challenge many communities across the nation face is a shortage of high-quality child care programs. With less than 20 percent of those eligible for federal child care assistance receiving it, many families may have to place their children in substandard or potentially harmful settings to receive care. Alternatively, families may lose income and experience financial instability if they are unable to work due to a lack of high-quality child care options.



An outdoor play area with patches of grass and concrete slabs before relocating to a new space. Little Land of Love Learning Center in Kansas City, Kansas. **Source:** The Family Conservancy.

Exposure to toxins, including lead, has been a prevalent issue throughout the country with detrimental impacts to the development of young children. Currently, there are no federal requirements for early learning facilities to regularly undergo lead testing. In fact, only nine states and New York City require child care facilities to test their drinking water for lead.⁸



An electrical outlet protruding from the wall and covered with duct tape. **Source:** U.S. Department Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General.

While the challenge facing child care facilities is clear, the extent of the problem is unknown and exact estimates are difficult to determine without a nationwide needs assessment. Using available data, the National Children's Facilities Network estimates that the country would require \$10 billion to upgrade all child care facilities to professional-quality standards and at least \$17 billion to bring existing child care facilities up to best-practice standards.⁶ Similarly, a Federal Head Start Facilities Report profiled thousands of Head Start centers and found that it would cost an estimated \$1.1 billion to update the 2,201 centers that need improvements to address poorly maintained or unclean environments, lack of preparedness for fire and other emergencies, and other potential safety hazards.⁷

However, questions remain: How many child care facilities require renovations to meet basic health and safety standards? What types of renovations are necessary to ensure these facilities are developmentally appropriate for young children? And where are opportunities to build new child care facilities? A nationally representative assessment of child care facilities could determine the scope of the problem. In the meantime, ***the nation's children cannot wait***. They need healthy, safe, and developmentally appropriate facilities that can help them thrive.

Child Care: Financing a Broken Business Model

Child care providers are working within a broken system. Providing high-quality child care is imperative to ensuring the nation's children are safe, healthy, and learning, yet the high cost can prevent providers from running a sustainable business and is beyond what most working parents can afford. Moreover, child care providers earn a razor-thin profit margin, and often, providers are unable to prioritize the facility-related repairs, upgrades, renovations, and maintenance that keep children safe.

While some funding programs are available to providers in certain areas of the country, such as California, Illinois, and Massachusetts, many providers only have access to options that will drive them into deeper debt. Loans, for example, are a common way of improving facilities, but require business assets or collateral that child care providers do not have. Further, they may not have enough revenue for loan repayment fees and interest. Loan guarantees, grants, credit-enhancement programs, and tax credits are other ways of financing child care facilities, but providers lack expertise in navigating complex financing systems that can support business growth and sustainability.

A Shared Responsibility

Ensuring that early care and learning facilities are designed and equipped to facilitate children’s early learning cannot depend only on the child care providers themselves. Rather, it requires a wide array of expertise beyond child development, including—but not limited to—architecture, design, environmental health, business development, real estate, financing, landscape design, and community development. Bringing together these areas of expertise during the pre-planning and development phases of the facility design process contributes to stronger child care facilities, positively impacting child outcomes.

“The child care industry has contributed \$99.3 billion to the nation’s economic development.”

Early care and learning programs are also vital to a community’s development. Data show that the child care industry has contributed \$99.3 billion to the nation’s economic development, reinforcing its value and need for continued investment.⁹ The American Planning Association, a professional organization that creates stronger communities through urban planning, recognizes the role of child care in local planning efforts. In 1997, the association released a statement detailing their policy position on child care, which includes advocating for the inclusion of child care policies in local planning, amending local zoning ordinances to remove obstacles to family child care, and negotiating with developers to offer incentives to provide space for child care in commercial, residential, and mixed-use development projects.¹⁰

To help move this work forward and foster a shared responsibility for improving child care facilities, the Bipartisan Policy Center, in collaboration with partners across child development, finance, architecture, and community and rural development, created the Early Care and Learning Facilities Working Group. As a first step, the working group developed a [framework](#) for guiding investments and policy in early care and learning facilities. This framework stressed that while child care is important to children’s development, it is also essential to a thriving community and should be incorporated into greater economic and workforce strategies.

Federal Programs for Financing Early Learning Infrastructure

Several funding sources support providers in upgrading or rehabilitating their early learning facilities. At the federal level, programs that support child care infrastructure, ranging from financing center-based and family child care programs to addressing broader community and economic development challenges, are available. Many of these programs are highlighted below and are found across several federal agencies—including those in charge of health, education, housing, rural development, and treasury.

Department of Housing and Urban Development

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program

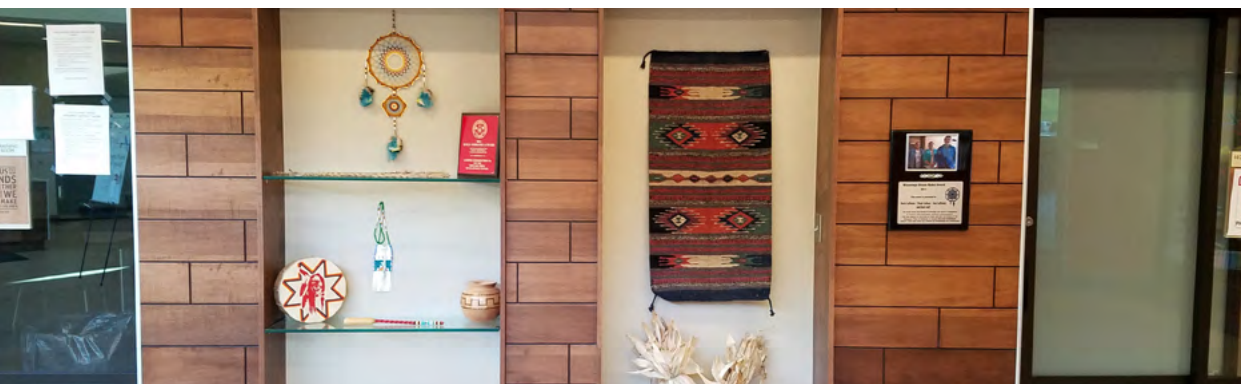
[CDBG](#) provides communities with resources to ensure decent affordable housing and job creation in areas of need. CDBG funds may be used for a wide range of public-service activities, including child care, and may be used to pay for labor, supplies, and materials, as well as to operate and/or maintain the facility in which the public service is located.

Department of Health and Human Services

Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)

[CCDF](#) dollars can be used to help programs and providers bring facilities into compliance with health and safety requirements. While minor repairs are an allowable use of CCDF funds, major renovations and capital-improvement projects are not.

[Tribal leaders](#), however, can use CCDF dollars for the construction of new child care facilities or for major renovations that include large structural changes. The Administration for Children and Families must approve the use of tribal CCDF funds for construction or major renovations. They can also use these funds to incorporate child-focused and culturally appropriate elements into construction work or renovation designs.



Source: Educare Winnebago.

Head Start

[Head Start](#) grant funds may be used to pay rent under operating leases and for minor repairs and renovations to early care and learning facilities. Other activities, including the purchase, construction, and major renovations of a facility, require a separate funding application. This guidance applies for Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships program.

Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships

[The Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships](#) program, launched in 2014, is a federally funded program that encourages grantees to layer child care and Head Start funding, and to leverage local resources to expand access to high-quality early care and learning for low-income infants and toddlers from working families. Grantees partner with local child care centers and family child care that agree to meet Early Head Start standards, and in exchange, child care providers receive access to critical resources, including coaching, assistance accessing higher education, and providing learning materials.

A 2019 BPC [study](#) highlighted several Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships and found that all those surveyed improved their facilities—including both indoor and outdoor learning spaces.

Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five (PDG B-5)

[PDG B-5](#) is a grant program that focuses on maximizing parental choice, improving transitions between early care programs and elementary schools, and improving overall quality of early care and learning programs. Established in 2018, the first year of PDG B-5 funded states to conduct a comprehensive statewide birth through age 5 needs assessment and strategic-planning evaluation, which included identifying and addressing the needs of early care and learning facilities.

Department of Agriculture

Community Facilities Programs

The [Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program](#) and the [Community Facilities Guaranteed Loan Program](#) provide grants, loans, and loan guarantees to eligible public bodies, community-based non-profit corporations, and federally recognized tribes to help build essential community facilities, including child care centers, in rural areas. Funds can be used to purchase, construct, and/or improve the facilities, purchase equipment, and pay related expenses.

The National Agricultural Library of the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides [informational resources](#) on starting a rural child care center, including funding programs that have been used to assist rural child care centers.

Economic Impact Initiative Grants

[Economic Impact Initiative grants](#) provide funding to assist in the development of essential community facilities, including child care centers, in rural areas with extreme unemployment and severe economic depression. Funds can be used to construct, enlarge, or improve the facilities, and grants may be made in combination with other financial assistance, such as the Community Facilities grant or guaranteed loan programs.

Business and Industry Loan Guarantees

[The Business and Industry Loan Guarantees](#) program strengthens the availability of private credit by guaranteeing loans for rural businesses. This program is available to for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, public entities, individuals, and federally recognized tribes in cities and towns with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. Loans can be used for business enlargement, repair, modernization, or development, as well as to purchase and develop land and to purchase equipment.

Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program

[The Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program](#) provides loans and grants to microenterprise development organizations, which are organizations that support small businesses with 10 or fewer employees. The Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program provides microloans to help small businesses start up and grow; it also provides training and technical assistance.

Department of Education

Child Care Access Means Parents in School Programs

[The Child Care Access Means Parents in School](#) program provides campus-based child care services for low-income parents enrolled in postsecondary education. Funds can be used to support or establish campus-based child care programs and may be used to serve the child care needs of students and of the community itself. Grant funds can support personnel, equipment, and supplies, and can be used for minor renovations and repairs to meet state or local health and safety requirements.

Environmental Protection Agency

Renovation, Repair and Painting

The [Renovation, Repair and Painting rule](#) requires that renovations of child-occupied facilities be carried out only by Lead-Safe Certified renovation firms, using certified renovators trained in lead-safe work practices. This requirement helps ensure that these renovations do not inadvertently contaminate a facility and expose children to hazardous lead dust.

Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program Drinking Water Grant

[The Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program Drinking Water Grant](#), authorized under the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016, is a noncompetitive grant program for states that supports voluntary lead testing in drinking water at schools and child care programs. Congress appropriated \$25 million for fiscal year 2019.

The Safe Drinking Water Act

The [Safe Drinking Water Act](#) ensures safe drinking water for the public by establishing minimum standards to protect tap water from contaminants—including lead—and requiring owners of public water systems to comply with these standards through regular monitoring and reporting. In December 2016, Congress made numerous revisions to the Safe Drinking Water Act through the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act, which authorized the new Lead Testing in School and Child Care Program Drinking Water Grant.

Small Business Administration (SBA)

The [SBA](#) provides resources to small-business owners or entrepreneurs—including child care providers. Resources that support small business owners include guidance on writing a business plan, calculating start-up costs, and funding a business. To further help small-business owners, the SBA helps match them with lending partners who can provide SBA-guaranteed loans, reducing the financial risk to the lender while making it easier for small businesses to get loans.



Newport YMCA, located in Middletown, Rhode Island. **Source:** Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

Department of Treasury

The Community Reinvestment Act

[The Community Reinvestment Act](#), passed in 1977, requires the Federal Reserve and other federal banking regulators to encourage financial institutions to meet the credit needs of the communities in which they do business, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. The act helps rebuild and revitalize neighborhoods by prohibiting banks from denying credit or increasing costs to residents in low-income and racially diverse neighborhoods.

Opportunity Zones

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 established [Opportunity Zones](#), which encourage long-term investments in low-income communities around the nation. Opportunity Zones provide a tax incentive for investors to reinvest their unrealized capital gains into dedicated Qualified Opportunity Zone Funds. While investors, developers, and local leaders consider investments in these under-resourced communities, there is a considerable need—and opportunity—to invest in child care facilities.

Community Development Financial Institution Fund

[Community Development Financial Institution Fund](#) was created to expand the availability of credit, investment capital, and financial services in distressed urban and rural communities. The Riegle Community Development and Regulatory Improvement Act of 1994 established the fund.

[The New Market Tax Credit Program](#), administered by the Community Development Financial Institution Fund, is a tool for financing real estate and other projects in low-income communities. Through the program, individual and corporate investors receive federal income tax credits in exchange for making equity investments in financial Community Development Entities, a financial intermediary. The Community Development Entities then invest in nonresidential businesses and real-estate projects, including child care facilities.

[Community Development Financial Institutions](#) (CDFIs), established as part of the CDFI Fund, are private, mission-driven financial institutions that provide responsible, affordable financing to help low-income and under-resourced communities achieve economic growth. CDFIs may be banks, credit unions, loan funds, or venture-capital providers that offer affordable financial products and services that meet the unique needs of economically underserved communities, filling the gap brought on by the lack of access to capital investments and financing for small businesses and community-development projects. See a full list of certified CDFIs [here](#).

A growing number of CDFIs recognize the critical role of high-quality child care in a community's economic growth. Several are highlighted below:



Infant Toddler Children's Center, located in Acton, Massachusetts. **Source:** Children's Investment Fund.

Children's Investment Fund—Boston, Massachusetts

[Children's Investment Fund](#) is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts, and serves non-profit early childhood education and out-of-school time programs across Massachusetts with facility-development and capacity-building support. The fund supports capital projects to improve early learning environments and trains providers undertaking facility construction and/or renovations through the [Building Stronger Centers Training Institute](#) and project-specific technical assistance.

First Children's Finance—Minneapolis, Minnesota

First Children's Finance (FCF), headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is a nonprofit financial intermediary that works in 12 states throughout the Midwest. FCF helps create systems and programs that address the business and financial needs of early care and education programs, as well as supporting access to capital for early learning facilities. In rural areas, FCF engages with communities to create rural child care improvement plans that increase the supply and sustainability of child care businesses. This includes the creation of family child care pods, where several family child care providers are housed in one facility. In urban areas, FCF provides business and financial services to child care programs and supports partnerships. As an example, an urban hospital and the YWCA partnered together to create a multi-cultural center that included 4 family child care bungalows. Each bungalow is operated by culturally specific providers, serving Native American, Hmong, and Somali children.

IFF (formerly Illinois Facilities Fund)—Chicago, Illinois

[IFF](#) is headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, and serves communities throughout the Midwest, including Indianapolis, Indiana; Detroit, Michigan; Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. IFF began financing and constructing child care facilities in 1992; it implemented the Chicago Children's Capital Fund in 2000. In 2016, IFF partnered with Kresge Foundation to launch [IFF Learning Spaces](#), a grant program that supports quality improvements to home- and center-based child care facilities in Detroit, Michigan.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation—New York, New York

[Local Initiatives Support Corporation](#) is headquartered in New York City, has offices in over 30 cities, and works in hundreds of rural communities throughout the country. The corporation’s [Early Learning Facilities Program](#) expands access to early childhood education by investing in high-quality, developmentally appropriate settings.

Rhode Island Child Care and Early Learning Facilities Fund—Rhode Island

The [Rhode Island Child Care and Early Learning Facilities Fund](#), operated by LISC, helps expand access to high-quality child care in low-income communities throughout Rhode Island. The fund offers funding and training options for providers, including technical assistance. In 2014, the fund conducted a [statewide needs assessment](#) of child care facilities and found that 69 percent of centers visited had some structural issues and 100 percent of playgrounds had safety issues.¹¹

“In 2014, the fund conducted a statewide needs assessment of child care facilities and found that 69 percent of centers visited had some structural issues.”

Low Income Investment Fund—San Francisco, California

[Low Income Investment Fund](#) is headquartered in San Francisco, California, and operates in Atlanta, Georgia; Los Angeles, California; New York, New York; and Washington, D.C. The program has invested \$153 million in child care facilities through the [Child Care Facilities Fund](#) in San Francisco, which offers grants, workshops, and technical assistance for providers to create and enhance child care spaces; the \$10 million New Market Tax Credit Fund, established in 2019, which will help San Francisco child care operators acquire and construct new child care spaces; the Revolving Loan Fund, which provides acquisition, construction, and term financing to build or improve child care facilities; and the Access to Quality Child Care Program, which provides \$9 million in grants, technical assistance, and training to increase the supply of child care services in Washington, D.C.

Reinvestment Fund—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

[Reinvestment Fund](#) is based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with offices in Atlanta, Georgia, and Baltimore, Maryland. In Philadelphia, Reinvestment Fund launched Fund for Quality, which helps child care providers expand their reach to more low-income families, and the *Early Learning Quality Fund* in Washington, D.C., which helps improve facilities to provide safe, high-quality early learning environments for infants and toddlers. Reinvestment Fund also partnered with Public Health Management Corporation and CoMetrics to create [Fiscal Hub](#), an online financial tool for child care providers, with support from the William Penn Foundation.



Children's Campus at San Francisco State University.
Source: Low Income Investment Fund.

Supporting Early Care and Learning Through State and City-Level Initiatives

Several states and localities have made public commitments to ensuring quality improvements for child care, including improved and expanded child care facilities. The initiatives below are examples of public investments that help address child care challenges.

State Initiatives

Arkansas: Act 131—To Encourage Child Care Facility Entrepreneurship in Arkansas

In February 2019, the governor of Arkansas signed into law a bill that encourages [child care facility entrepreneurship throughout the state](#). With the goal of alleviating the lack of high-quality and affordable child care facilities in rural Arkansas, the bill intends to ensure providers have access to information about licensing and financial support.

California: Child Care Facilities Revolving Loan Fund

[The Child Care Facilities Revolving Loan Fund](#) (CCFRF) provides funding to eligible child care programs for renovation and repair of existing facilities to make the buildings suitable for child care services licensure. CCFRF also provides funding for the purchase of new relocatable child care facilities for lease to school districts and eligible child care programs. Administered by the California Department of Education's Early Learning and Care Division, CCFRF funding is limited to existing child care programs that provide subsidized child care services. The 2017-2018 [annual report](#) highlights that since the fund was established in 1997, it has received 1,177 applications for funding of child care facilities and has executed 120 contracts for funding of new relocatable buildings, which has increased the capacity to serve over 12,500 children in California.

Maryland: The Family Child Care Provider Grant Program

[The Family Child Care Provider Grant Program](#), administered by Maryland's Department of Education, Division of Early Learning, provides support to registered family child care providers by offsetting some of the costs of opening a child care program. This program reimburses up to \$500 in expenses that a provider may incur to achieve or maintain compliance with family child care regulations, including small household repairs in approved child care areas and expenses related to local water, sewer, fire, and health requirements. To be eligible, a provider's annual income must not exceed 60 percent of Maryland's current state median income for the applicant's family size.



Cross Cultural Family Center-Mary Lane Infant and Toddler Center, located in San Francisco, California.
Source: Low Income Investment Fund.

Massachusetts: Early Education and Care and Out of School Time Capital Fund

[Early Education and Care and Out of School Time Capital Fund](#) provides grants of up to \$1 million to improve child care facilities that support low-income families. The Massachusetts legislature authorized the financing in 2013, recognizing the critical role that these programs play in health and sustainable community development. The capital fund was the first provision included in the state's \$1.4 billion housing bond bill to focus on early education and care. It was also the first time general obligation bonds were used for these facilities. Children's Investment Fund and its affiliate Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation oversee the program alongside the Department of Early Education and Care. In 2018, the program was reauthorized for an additional \$45 million for up to five years.

Washington: The Early Learning Facilities Program

The [Early Learning Facilities](#) grant and loan program, administered within the Washington State Department of Commerce and in collaboration with the Department of Children, Youth, and Families, supports additional high-quality early learning programs for low-income children. The program is an innovative partnership among government agencies, CDFIs, and affordable-housing developers. It helps the state-funded comprehensive preschool program and child care subsidy providers expand, remodel, purchase, or construct early learning facilities and classrooms necessary to support state-funded early childhood opportunities for low-income children.

Grants are awarded through a competitive application process, ranging from \$10,000 for pre-design grants to \$800,000 for facility renovation, construction, and purchasing. Applicants can also apply for a loan through a CDFI partner who has been contracted to support this work and bring in private match dollars. This contract is a partnership of the Washington Community Reinvestment Association, Enterprise Community Partners, and Craft 3.



Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center, located in Providence, Rhode Island. **Source:** Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

Local Initiatives

Lanesboro, Minnesota: Lanesboro Public Schools Child Care Program

In 1988, after the school board in Lanesboro, Minnesota—a town with approximately 800 residents—recognized a community need for child care, Lanesboro Public Schools opened the town’s only child care program using extra space in the school. It is reported to have been the first public school in the nation to open a child care program, and it is still thriving after 30 years of serving the community’s families. The child care center, currently serving approximately 60 children ages 6 months to 6 years during the school day, is housed in Lanesboro Public Schools and is supported by Minnesota’s school community service and general education dollars, which keeps prices down for families. Because the child care program is co-located with the public school, children and providers benefit from increased access to resources, support staff, and other services. In late 2018, the community voted to renovate Lanesboro Schools, including the child care center. [Renovation plans](#) include expanding to serve more children in the community as well as investing in solar energy to reduce electricity costs.

The model has been successful in Lanesboro due to decades of established trust between the residents and community leaders. Members of the community trust leaders to embrace change that can improve the community while ensuring that their traditions are not lost.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Child Care Facility Fund

[The Child Care Facility Fund](#) provides support to high-quality child care providers in Philadelphia for facility maintenance and improvement to maintain a high-level STAR rating in Pennsylvania’s Quality Rating and Improvement System Keystone STARS. Center- and family-based child care providers with a STAR 3 or 4 rating are eligible for the fund, which helps with minor to mid-level renovations and the purchase and installation of large appliances. The Child Care Facility Fund website also provides a list of resources for providers, including a list of contractors who recently completed projects, sample materials, and budget templates. This program is made possible by the city of Philadelphia in alignment with the city’s [early learning plan](#).

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Child Care Quality Fund

In February 2019, the mayor of Pittsburgh introduced the [Child Care Quality Fund](#), which will provide \$2 million to improve the quality of child care facilities around the city. Recognizing that only 18 percent of child care facilities in Pittsburgh have reached the high-quality designation of STAR 3 or STAR 4 in Pennsylvania's Quality Rating and Improvement System Keystone STARS, this program improves lower-quality facilities to meet higher-quality standards. The program will also make quality coaches available to work with child care providers on a plan to improve facilities to meet Keystone STARS quality standards in order to apply for grant funding.

Development Impact Fees

Many localities throughout the country impose development impact fees on new commercial and residential developments to compensate for the increased strain placed on public facilities after a community's new growth. Impact fees most commonly support roads, water and sewer systems, law enforcement, parks, libraries, and schools. Some communities also impose impact fees to support new child care facilities to accommodate new families and employees in these areas.

San Mateo, California: Development Impact Fees

Cities and counties throughout California are using development impact fees for child care. Based on the 1987 [California Mitigation Impact Fee Act](#), local agencies in California can impose onetime fees on new developments to finance public infrastructure, including child care. The child care development impact fees collected from new commercial and residential developments are used to extend loans and grants to construct, rehabilitate, purchase, or lease child care facilities.

Development impact fees vary by locality. [San Mateo](#), as an example, collects a development impact fee of \$1.08 per square foot on commercial developments that exceed 10,000 square feet. This fee applies to new developments, expansion of existing commercial developments, and commercial tenant improvements. Over \$2 million from these impact fees were recently offered, as forgivable loans, to community programs to create new child care spaces.

Innovations in Early Care and Learning Facilities

Stakeholders across philanthropy, businesses, and non-profit organizations have come together to address some of the challenges around early learning facility quality. The following are illustrative examples of philanthropic, private-sector, and public-private partnership programs that address aging infrastructure, health and safety concerns, and capacity building for early care and learning providers.

Improving Child Care Facility Quality Through Philanthropic Investments

The philanthropic community recognizes that investing in early childhood matters and that these investments see strong rates of return for individuals, communities, and the nation. Philanthropic organizations invest in children, families, and communities, as well as in innovative solutions to communities' most pressing child care challenges.

Hope Starts Here, W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Kresge Foundation—Detroit, Michigan

[Hope Starts Here](#), a joint initiative of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Kresge Foundation, is Detroit's community framework that prioritizes the needs of young children and families to create a brighter future for the city. The Hope Starts Here [framework](#), developed during a yearlong participatory planning and engagement process, identified six imperatives for creating a city that puts children and young families first, including promoting the health, development, and well-being of all children; supporting parents and caregivers as children's first teachers and champions; increasing the overall quality of programs; creating tools and resources to better coordinate systems that impact early childhood education; finding new ways to fund early childhood and make better use of current resources; and guaranteeing safe and inspiring learning environments.

From a facilities perspective, Detroit lacks a shared definition for "high-quality early learning environments" and also lacks a sufficient supply to meet the community's need. To address these challenges, the framework has a 10-year plan with a dedicated workstream focused on improving facility quality and leveraging available resources to increase the number of facilities. Success toward this goal will mean an increase in the number of providers reporting facilities conditions; an increase in the number of providers earning high-quality ratings; and an increase in the number of new high-quality early learning spaces and child care seats.

In 2018, the Heising-Simons Foundation, the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, and Foundation Center launched an [interactive map](#) of philanthropic investments in the field of early childhood. The tool estimates that private foundations have awarded more than \$6 billion toward improving early childhood since 2006, with **nearly \$520 million being invested in capital and infrastructure**—including capital campaigns, renovations, equipment, and facility maintenance.

Early Learning Quality Fund, Bainum Family Foundation— Washington, D.C.

The Bainum Family Foundation partnered with Reinvestment Fund and Public Health Management Corporation to launch the [Early Learning Quality Fund \(ELQF\) Program](#) in 2017. ELQF provides technical assistance and financing—including a \$3.8 million loan fund—to help both center-based and family-based child care providers serving infants and toddlers in Wards 7 and 8 in the District of Columbia make necessary improvements that meet the highest level of quality in the District’s new Capital Quality rating system.

ELQF uses a three-step process to help providers increase the quality of their early learning programs: (1) assessing providers to help identify areas for improvement; (2) providing training and technical assistance, with potential to access financing for facility improvements; and (3) making facility investments. Through the ELQF Project, Bainum Family Foundation released a [study](#) identifying child care gaps in the Washington, D.C., area and a child care facility [design guide](#).

IFF Learning Spaces, Kresge Foundation—Detroit, Michigan

Recognizing that tackling facility repairs and improvements may be overwhelming and burdensome for many child care providers, especially for programs with small budgets and few staff, IFF partnered with Kresge Foundation to launch [IFF Learning Spaces](#). This is a grant program that supports quality improvements to home- and center-based child care facilities in Detroit, Michigan, through facility assessments, repairs, and upgrades. The program also helps providers prioritize facility improvements, so the most pressing improvements can be made to improve both quality and children’s early learning experiences.

Since 2016, IFF has made 26 Learnings Spaces grants totaling \$1,096,049 in capital to early child care and education (ECE) providers serving a total of 1,525 children. A total of 106 new slots have been created through the program.



Before and after of a renovation of Little Scholars Child Development Center, located in Detroit, Michigan. **Source:** IFF.

Engaging the Private Sector in Improving Child Care Facilities

The private sector—including mission-driven, private non-profit organizations and for-profit businesses—is finding new and innovative ways to invest in child care facilities, including partnering with public-sector agencies to improve child care quality and increase access for families. Illustrative examples of private-sector engagement and community partnerships are highlighted below.

Community Resource Center Energy Project Partnership—East Liverpool, Ohio

The Community Resource Center (CRC) in East Liverpool, Ohio, provides low-income families with child care, as well as health and education services. Housed in a school building more than a century old, CRC struggled to afford its high utility bills—often exceeding \$2,000 monthly—a result of extreme temperatures during the summer and winter. In 2017, CRC reached out to community partners for support. Columbia Gas conducted an energy audit and identified several opportunities to improve energy efficiency in the building. Then, they connected with the Community Action Agency of Columbiana, Corporation of Ohio Appalachian Development, and American Electric Power to establish the [Community Resource Center Energy Project](#). Through this partnership, the programs worked to making improvements to the CRC, with each organization playing an important role. Columbia Gas and American Electric Power agreed to provide support using philanthropic funds for two hot-water heaters, six furnaces, air sealing, duct repairs, and over 10,000 pounds of insulation, as well as new energy-efficient LED lighting. The Community Action Agency weatherized and insulated the building with the support of the Corporation of Ohio Appalachian Development, who helped coordinate the project. In May 2018, the community celebrated the partnership's success, recognizing that without these investments, CRC would still be at risk of shutting down.

Dr. Jerry Hamm Early Learning Center—Coffeyville, Kansas

Located in Coffeyville, Kansas, a town of approximately 10,000 residents, the Coffeyville Coalition for Early Education (CCEE) supports working families by expanding access to high-quality child care for children birth through age five. CCEE, a nonprofit organization made up of business leaders and early childhood professionals, identifies short- and long-term goals and strategies for supporting early learning, which included a \$2.1 million expansion and renovation of the [Dr. Jerry Hamm Early Learning Center](#) to increase access to full-day child care for the community's working families.

In raising funds for the expansion, CCEE learned that the local business community was motivated to invest in early learning based on how access to full-day child care benefits their employees. Business leaders found that when employees are not struggling to find consistent, full-day child care, they are more engaged in the labor force. This helped raise funds from local businesses and philanthropy, including John Deere and the Coffeyville Community College Foundation. These resources, in addition to funds from the Kansas Early Childhood Block Grant, helped Coffeyville reach the \$2.1 million needed for the expansion.

The Dr. Jerry Hamm Early Learning Center, run by the Coffeyville School District, is now a 12-classroom facility that serves 220 children birth through age five. The center offers blended classrooms, to include Head Start, Early Head Start, and subsidized and full-pay child care, as well as a community health facility that provides physical and mental health services.

Early Learning Property Management—Atlanta, Georgia

[Early Learning Property Management](#) (ELPM) helps providers find the right spaces for their child care programs. ELPM works primarily in underserved areas in metro Atlanta, where providers can deliver high-quality child care to young children, birth through age 4, at free or reduced rates. They work with prequalified non-profit early care providers to evaluate existing space needs, explore available options to expand program services, and find buildings to renovate into high-quality early learning environments. ELPM helps raise the capital funds for the purchase, construction, and/or renovations, and offers affordable, long-term leases at below-market rates. ELPM uses the rent proceeds to reinvest back into the facilities to provide ongoing maintenance services and capital projections/repairs. The ELPM model has given child care providers the resources to deliver programs in rich learning environments that support high-quality early learning and where children benefit from caring relationships and nurturing program staff.



Before and after of a renovation of a closed school building into an early learning center. **Source:** Early Learning Property Management.

Investing in high-quality and culturally based child care programs for tribal communities is imperative to the lifelong learning and success of young children. Early learning programs that infuse traditions and languages of indigenous communities can help mitigate the effects of historical trauma and sustain Native culture and traditions.



Source: Educare Winnebago, located in Winnebago, Nebraska.

Educare Winnebago—Winnebago, Nebraska

In Winnebago, Nebraska, the Head Start program was originally housed in an old boarding school that needed continuous repairs, and the child care program was across town in a double-wide trailer. The community recognized that children were not thriving in these settings, so Head Start, child care, the school system, and Winnebago tribal members came together to plan how to best serve their children. With the support of Winnebago tribal leaders, they established a partnership with Educare Learning Network to create [Educare Winnebago](#), the first Educare school to serve Native American children and families.

Completed in 2014, Educare Winnebago combines the Educare model's best practices with activities that honor local culture and traditions. Children are taught in the native Ho-Chunk language in addition to English, and the school includes a cultural resource room that houses events and community college classes for parents. Educare Winnebago serves 72 infants and toddlers, and 119 children ages 3 through 5.

During the design phase, the community worked with an early education design team to help them understand the culture and traditions to incorporate into the facility design. They identified two themes: path and earth. Path represents the beginning of the Winnebago tribe's journey as a single tribe after their split with other Siouan tribes. Earth represents their respect for and dependence on the earth as vital to the existence of the Ho-Chunk people. The themes of path and earth were weaved into the design of Educare Winnebago as a physical pathway through the school framed by nature and sculpted earthwork. The pathway leads to a communal space adorned with cultural artwork representing the tribe and the Ho-Chunk culture.

MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership Collaborative “Pod” Model—Detroit Lakes, Minnesota

[MAHUBE-OTWA Community Action Partnership](#) is a private, non-profit organization that provides services to low-income families in Greater Minnesota, including Detroit Lakes, a town of fewer than 10,000 residents. A Head Start grantee, MAHUBE-OTWA has been linking Head Start and Early Head Start with family child care in a collaborative child care “pod” model since the 1990s.

Detroit Lakes Community and Culture Center approached MAHUBE-OTWA prior to the facility's renovation about using the space to provide their Head Start program. MAHUBE-OTWA chose to use this space in partnership with family child care providers. They first piloted with one family child care provider, and in time, contracted with three others. MAHUBE-OTWA leases the space from the city, and providers pay a small portion of the rent.

MAHUBE-OTWA encountered some hurdles when establishing the “pod” model. Specifically, they faced licensing issues, and they worked with legislators to add a provision that would allow a family child care provider to be licensed in a nonresidential facility if they offer child care in partnership with a community action agency.

Parents of young children may choose family-based child care for a variety of reasons, such as cost, convenience, or cultural traditions. In some rural communities, family child care may be the only option available. An estimate of 1 million family child care providers care for over 3 million children birth through age 5, making family child care an essential component of the early care and learning system.¹²



Natural Beginnings, Kalispell, Montana.
Source: MyVillage.

MyVillage—Bozeman, Montana

[MyVillage](#), founded in 2017 and headquartered in Bozeman, Montana, is a for-profit organization that helps new and existing providers run high-quality home-based child care businesses. Operating in Colorado and Montana, MyVillage creates communities of high-quality family child care through mentorship by early learning experts, and it provides best practices along with tools and resources for running a business—including billing, scheduling, enrollment, marketing, and financial management. Each member provider becomes a MyVillage franchisee with the flexibility to design their own program. Providers must structure their programs around basic tenants of quality that include licensure, participation in the state’s quality rating and improvement system, and use of approved curriculum. Following these guidelines, providers can design their program to meet the needs of their communities. In addition to helping providers run their own family child care business, MyVillage helps new providers start their business and assess what is needed to bring their existing homes up to meet state licensing standards.

New Provider Mini Grants, Child Care Connections—Montana

Child Care Connections in Montana supports the development of new providers—both center-based and family child care—across six of the state’s counties through [mini-grants](#). Due to a shortage of licensed child care in Montana, the goal of the grant is to increase the number of child care openings in licensed programs. Grant awards range from \$2,000 to \$3,000, depending on the type of provider, and funds can be used for facility repairs and upgrades to become compliant with licensing requirements as well as business equipment to support billing and enrollment. Funding is made available by Greater Gallatin United Way, United Way of Lewis and Clark Area, and the Park Community Foundation.

Nurtury Learning Lab—Boston, Massachusetts

[Nurtury](#), one of the largest providers of early education and care in the Boston area, operated a program out of the basement of a public-housing development from the 1960s through 2014. The center suffered from a lack of natural light, poor indoor air quality, crowded classrooms, and insufficient heating and cooling. In order to continue its commitment to serving families living in the housing development and in surrounding neighborhoods, Nurtury redeveloped property down the street from its existing program. With over \$16 million in financing from federal, state, and local sources, Nurtury constructed a state-of-the-art 22,000 square-foot center and a 12,000 square-foot outdoor play space to serve 175 infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In April 2017, the [Nurtury Learning Lab](#) received LEED Gold Certification and continues to deliver comprehensive services to families and their children.

Reeb Avenue Center—Columbus, Ohio

[Reeb Avenue Center](#) in Columbus, Ohio, houses the South Side Early Learning Center, with eight classrooms and an outdoor learning space for infants and young children. Residents of Columbus recognized a need for community revitalization after the closure of the South Side Settlement House in 2012. Champions, including former Mayor Michael Coleman, local business owners, and community members, led the vision to renovate a century-old elementary school that closed in 2009. After four years of planning and fundraising, the community raised over \$12 million toward their capital campaign, which included \$2 million from the state's capital budget, \$6 million from the city of Columbus, and donations from local businesses and families. Construction took one year, and the Reeb Avenue Center opened in September 2015.



Nurtury Learning Lab in Boston, Massachusetts, was located in a basement of a public housing development for years before moving to their new location. **Source:** Children's Investment Fund.

Rural Studio—Newbern, Alabama

[Rural Studio](#) is an architecture studio run by Auburn University in Alabama. It teaches students about the social responsibilities of the profession of architecture while also providing safe, well-constructed, and inspirational homes and buildings for underserved communities in rural Alabama. In 2018, Rural Studio partnered with [Capita](#)—a national ideas lab in Greenville, South Carolina, that unleashes big ideas to help children and families flourish—to develop a prototype of a house for in-home child care providers, called the Child Care Home. This Child Care Home will be an efficient, durable, and affordable home designed to meet the needs of family child care providers living and working in the rural South.

Many communities find that coordinating transit systems and child care is an efficient use of space. Transit hubs that include mixed-use space with commercial and residential real estate attract new transit users, residents, and businesses. Including child care is convenient for working families commuting to work and supports a community's economic growth.



The Rock at Stony Point Learning Center (formerly Little Land of Love Learning Center) in Kansas City, Kansas, before its relocation to a new space in a church with support of the Family Conservancy.

Source: The Family Conservancy.

The Metro Early Learning Center—Kansas City, Missouri

The [Kansas City Area Transportation Authority](#) established an early child care center and Head Start Program at the Metro Center Transfer Point, a major transfer point in Kansas City, Missouri. This program was established in a public-private partnership with KCMC, the local child development corporation. In 2002, the Federal Transit Administration provided \$2.2 million to build the exterior shell for the child care facility and a transit waiting area, and the local transit authority provided an additional \$560,000. The child care operator paid for all interior improvements, which cost \$656,000. The transit authority owns the building and the operator leases the space at a market rate.

The Rock at Stony Point Learning Center—Kansas City, Kansas

The Rock at Stony Point Learning Center in Kansas City, Kansas, is a true collaboration among community partners, including Early Head Start and Head Start, child care, and the faith community. The Rock was formerly the Little Land of Love Learning Center, a center-based program housed on a rental property in need of extensive facility improvements. The space was small and dark, and lacked child-sized fixtures to meet the children's developmental needs. The play area consisted of grass with patches of concrete slabs. The program served 23 children despite the great need for child care in the community.

The center director attended a recruitment event with [The Family Conservancy](#) (TFC), a community organization that helps children and families build better futures in Kansas City, and decided to pursue a partnership with TFC to provide Early Head Start services in the program. The partnership developed quickly, and together they decided that the best solution to address the facility issue was to move the program to a new site.

TFC partnered with the Rock Church of Nazarene to provide space for the child care program. Using Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership funds, the partners invested in facility renovations by a local business. Renovations took two months and included adding new walls to provide sound barriers between rooms; installing child-sized toilets and fixtures; replacing kitchen appliances, heating systems, and windows; updating equipment and furniture; and adding a fenced-in playground. The new center now serves 50 children, more than doubling the capacity of the previous center.

Through the Looking Glass—Berkeley, California

[Through the Looking Glass](#) (TLG)'s Early Head Start program, an inclusive program providing services to children under age three with disabilities or whose parents have disabilities, is located on the Ed Roberts Campus development at the Ashby BART station in Berkeley, California. The campus, an 80,000-square-foot fully inclusive and accessible transit hub, houses numerous programs—including child care, community supports, vocational training, technology adaptations, disability rights organizations, and a medical clinic—that support people with diverse disabilities. The location of TLG allows families with disabilities to receive other services within the same development.

“Through the Looking Glass is an inclusive program providing services to children under age three with disabilities or whose parents have disabilities.”

Established in 1982, TLG was first located in a converted garage, followed by a commercial space before relocating to the Ed Roberts Campus in 2010. To support the center's relocation to the new facility, LIIF awarded TLG a \$20,000 repayable planning grant through the Affordable Buildings for Children's Development (ABCD) Fund to cover the fees for the architect schematic and design. This grant also supported a child care consultant who helped build the budget and reviewed options for subsidized child care and Early Head Start funding. TLG and the six partners on the new site raised funds to meet the cost of renovations and construction, and LIIF closed the gap in funding for TLG's space by awarding them a \$100,000 facilities capital grant through their Child Care Facilities Fund, allowing construction to begin. In addition to these funds, TLG was awarded an Early Head Start grant with stimulus dollars to serve 24 infants and toddlers with disabilities in the new location, which also provided support for playground improvements.

TOP Early Learning—Wichita, Kansas

[The Opportunity Project](#)—founded by businessman Barry Downing, who believes that ensuring access to high-quality early learning experiences is the best financial investment for fighting poverty—is a non-profit organization that delivers high-quality early learning experiences to children in low-income families. The Opportunity Project established the first TOP Early Learning Center in 2003 in Wichita, Kansas, and by 2011, two additional early learning centers were built, providing full-day care to children ages 1 through 5 in low-income neighborhoods. TOP Early Learning serves approximately 600 children each year, providing them with research-based curriculum and materials, nutritious meals, and a safe facility in which to learn, including child-appropriate furniture, secure classrooms, an on-site tornado shelter, and annual inspections by the fire marshal and the Department of Health and Environment.



The Rock at Stony Point Learning Center, located in Kansas City, Kansas. **Source:** The Family Conservancy.

TOP Early Learning is a public-private partnership model that includes federal, state, and local-level funding, including Head Start and Early Head Start. Through the partnership, they also collaborate with community organizations that provide comprehensive health services to children and additional supports to children with special needs. In addition to providing high-quality early learning to young children, TOP measures its outcomes through ongoing student data collection in areas such as social development, language and literacy, and scientific thinking. A 2018 longitudinal study conducted by Wichita State University found that TOP graduates have higher attendance rates, are less likely to be placed in special-education classes, behave significantly better, and are more emotionally mature compared with their peers through 10th grade.¹³

“A 2018 longitudinal study conducted by Wichita State University found that TOP graduates have higher attendance rates, are less likely to be placed in special-education classes, behave significantly better, and are more emotionally mature compared with their peers through 10th grade.”

Building the Capacity and Technical Knowledge of Providers

Technical assistance and capacity building for child care providers is critical to fostering their role as business owners. Providers, especially those running small, center-based and family child care programs, can benefit from trainings that support finance, marketing, and grant writing. Some trainings also better equip providers to undertake major and minor facility repairs and renovations, as well as new construction. Providers also receive technical support and capacity building through the shared-service model, or networks of providers that pool funds to increase access to resources.

Building Stronger Centers Training Institute, Children’s Investment Fund—Boston, Massachusetts

At the Children’s Investment Fund, experience has shown that planning and support are crucial to ensuring that early care and learning providers gain the knowledge, skills, and professional consultants to plan a project with a strong likelihood of success. A key element is the four-day [Building Stronger Centers Training Institute](#), launched by the fund in 2001. Building Stronger Centers offers early care and learning providers in Massachusetts the knowledge and skills to undertake a large-scale capital project. The training includes all phases of the facility-development process and provides access to highly skilled consultants, architects, financing experts, and providers who have completed successful projects. The fund provides follow-up training, technical assistance, and access to financing for two years after participation in Building Stronger Centers.

Building Stronger Centers Training Institute: Desired Outcomes and Learning Objectives

Conceptual Planning and Early Feasibility

- Knowledge of the whole facilities-development process and each of its components.
- Understanding the roles of the development team members and how to select and manage consultants on the team.
- Understanding the organization’s financial capacity and what funders want to know.

Financing and Design

- Knowledge of key elements of high-quality early education and/or out-of-school environments.
- Understanding the design process and technical considerations to developing a facility.
- Knowledge of capital funding and financing resources and how to seek these resources.

Management of the Real Estate Development Process

- Understanding project leadership, tools to think strategically to move a project forward, and practice communicating the organization’s vision.
- Familiarity with the construction process and schedule, including key actors, regulations/approvals required, spending plan and ways to work with parents and staff.

Early Learning Ventures—Colorado

Early Learning Ventures (ELV), based in Colorado, is a non-profit organization dedicated to expanding access to quality, affordable child care. ELV recognizes that 85 percent of child care programs are small, independent businesses that lack the resources and infrastructure to invest in quality improvements. The ELV model equips child care providers with the tools and resources—including a robust web-based record-keeping and compliance management system, as well as financial services—that can improve quality, save time, and lower costs for providers, resulting in better outcomes for all children. Currently, ELV serves more than 600 child care businesses, benefiting over 40,000 young children—and provides a return of up to \$8 for each dollar invested in Colorado.

Opportunities Exchange

[Opportunities Exchange](#) is a non-profit consulting group that promotes the development of Shared Service Alliances by providing technical assistance to early care and learning providers interested in transforming their business to improve outcomes for children. Shared Service Alliances, a membership organization that facilitates shared services among members, allows providers to access resources, including billing and fee collection, payroll, and professional development.

Opportunities Exchange helps providers and communities interested in pursuing this resource by identifying the needs of member providers, identifying an Alliance Hub that will host the Shared Service Alliance, and developing a business plan and a plan for sustainability. They also offer [tools and resources](#), including a start-up guide, profiles of existing alliances, lessons learned, and templates.



East Bay Community Action Head Start Program, located in East Providence, Rhode Island. **Source:** Local Initiatives Support Corporation.

Quality Care for Children—Georgia

Quality Care for Children (QCC) manages the [Provider Resource Hub](#) (PRH), a membership-based shared resources platform that provides early care and learning professionals with administrative resources and cost-savings. PRH also offers workshops and trainings to help providers run their programs more effectively and efficiently. Specifically, the PRH provides administrative and human resource templates; budgeting and finance tools; a free child care job board; and discounts on classroom and business supplies and services that child care programs use.

To further support providers, in 2019, QCC created a new position, director of ECE business support services. This position is responsible for supporting improvements and increased use of the PRH, and providing business technical assistance to center directors and family child care providers. QCC is also piloting the ECE Business Leadership Training and Development Institute to help high-quality child care providers excel, grow, and sustain their business. Participating programs receive intensive, ongoing business technical assistance, as well as grants and assistance to migrate business operations to child care management software.

State Early Learning Alliance of New Hampshire

[State Early Learning Alliance](#) (SELA), supported by the United Way of the Greater Seacoast, is a shared services model for early childhood programs to strengthen business practices and enhance program quality in order to give children a better start. Currently, SELA members include 23 agencies that have a combined buying power of over \$30 million. Participating members see a number of benefits, including a network of providers, increased purchasing capability, and facilities management and support.

“State Early Learning Alliance members include 23 agencies that have a combined buying power of over \$30 million.”

The majority of SELA’s facility-related support is arranged through a contract with [Great North Advantage](#), a property management company that serves New Hampshire and northern New England. This partnership expands beyond early care and learning providers, providing SELA with greater access to preferred vendors, professional services, and cost-savings.

Conclusion

High-quality child care facilities, including both center-based and family child care, are critical to the safety, health, and development of young children. Yet, the physical infrastructure itself is often not prioritized as a component of quality. While the underinvestment in the structures and facilities requires an urgent solution, future investments should be strategic and thoughtful about the needs of children and families, providers, and communities.

“Using this catalog, communities can plan how to approach child care infrastructure investments and how to best overcome their child care challenges.”

The funding programs, innovative child care models, and community partnerships featured in this catalog demonstrate ways in which states and localities invest in child care facility improvements. Using this catalog, communities can plan how to approach child care infrastructure investments and how to best overcome their child care challenges. City- and local-level officials can begin asking and answering important questions that address the current state facilities in their communities, including which community partners are willing to advocate for and invest in child care infrastructure, and how to foster innovation in improving the quality and availability of these spaces.

Despite there not being a single solution to address facility challenges, the following underlying principles should be considered when investing in early learning:

Investing in early learning facilities supports children’s development.

The environments in which young children learn, play, and grow directly shape their development, especially during their earliest years. Access to safe, high-quality, and developmentally appropriate settings and equipment—including child-sized fixtures, appropriate acoustics and lighting, and dedicated spaces for play and engagement with others—helps promote children’s healthy behaviors and independence. Making investments that help providers exceed the basic health and safety requirements will result in strong outcomes for children.

Investing in early learning facilities helps communities thrive.

Early learning programs are an essential part of economic growth for families, communities, and the nation. When working families have access to high-quality early learning programs, parents can participate in the labor force, supporting their own financial security and contributing to their community's economic success. Recognizing that communities are diverse and require solutions specific to their needs, investments in early learning should be community-driven and community-led to achieve the most effective and sustainable solutions.

Investing in early learning facilities supports providers as business owners.

Financial programs that help improve child care facilities should recognize that it is often a for-profit business. Funding opportunities that are limited to non-profit organizations leave behind for-profit child care providers who are running their own business and also need resources to improve their facilities. Financial resources should also be made available to providers that help minimize their burden of debt. Many providers are small-business owners who may struggle to make repairs and renovations without falling into greater debt. Moreover, providers should have access to training programs and technical assistance to guide them in identifying and accessing financial supports for facility improvements, as well as in prioritizing which upgrades and repairs will have the greatest impact on children's outcomes.



The Rock at Stony Point Learning Center, located in Kansas City, Kansas. **Source:** The Family Conservancy.

Investing in early learning means investing in family child care.

Working families choose family child care for a variety of reasons—including cost, convenience, and culture—making these programs an important component of the early care and learning landscape. Similar to center-based early learning, family child care providers require infrastructure investments to address their facilities' needs, which may include minor repairs and renovations to meet state licensing standards. Family child care providers may also require support in addressing additional challenges, including local zoning ordinances and regulations set by home ownership associations.

Investing in early learning facilities requires multi-sector commitments and responsibilities.

Solutions to improving early learning facilities should include engagement from across sectors, including the philanthropic sector, the business community, the faith community, and federal, state, and local governments. Each plays an important role in creating funding opportunities for early learning facilities, conducting a needs assessment to identify challenges and possible solutions, and shaping policies to strengthen support for early learning providers. Collaborations across sectors and community partnerships also facilitate innovative and community-based solutions that aim to meet communities' needs.



The Rock at Stony Point Learning Center, located in Kansas City, Kansas. **Source:** The Family Conservancy.

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