REPAIR AND RENOVATION GRANT
SUMMATIVE EVALUATION REPORT

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Luminary Evaluation

PAACT
PROMISE ALL ATLANTA CHILDREN THRIVE

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Executive Summary

In 2022, Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens announced the city of Atlanta's $5 million commitment to PAACT: Promise All Atlanta children Thrive. He also issued a challenge to Atlanta Public Schools and community donors to collectively raise the remaining funds needed to reach a $20 million public-private investment goal. PAACT, convened by GEEARS (Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students), is a collective impact initiative of public and private partners with a shared vision to improve learning, health, and well-being outcomes for Atlanta's youngest children and their families. Three goals drove this historic investment: 1) strengthen child care quality and capacity by addressing child care facility repair and renovation needs; 2) increase early childhood education (ECE) affordability and access through scholarships for families, and 3) bolster the ECE workforce through retention and professional development supports. The first goal was pursued through the Repair and Renovation Grant, which is designed to fund improvements of up to $75,000 for child care facilities, including center-based providers and family child care learning homes (FCCs).

Figure 1: Before and After Pictures of a Playground Surfacing Project

PAACT served as the program convener and implemented the Repair and Renovation Grant with multiple partners, including the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta (CFGA), Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF), Reinvestment Fund (RF), Early Learning Property Management (ELPM), Quality Care for Children (QCC), and the City of Atlanta. In July 2023, Luminary Evaluation was engaged as the program's independent evaluator to answer key questions about the program's processes and outcomes. Luminary utilized a theory-driven, mixed-methods approach to generate findings and recommendations that articulate the program's implementation and outcomes.

Specifically, this summative evaluation report, issued in September 2025, provides an overview of participating grantees and program reach, as well as outcomes and achievements. It also examines implementation strengths, challenges, and lessons learned, and offers recommendations for future iterations of the program, as well as lessons for the field. The report also presents methodological details around data sources and analysis.

The evaluation highlights the Repair and Renovation Grant's success in improving the safety and quality of 57 child care facilities across the City of Atlanta between September 2023 and August 2025. While the program faced several implementation challenges the evaluation finds that the program demonstrates evidence of facility improvements that have immediate impacts on safety and program quality, as well as early evidence of strengthened business sustainability for grantees. The evaluation also finds that, despite funding-related compliance challenges, the collaborative public-private funding models implemented through this grant program enabled the City of Atlanta to address child care facility challenges on a large scale.

Grant Impacts at a Glance

- **57** providers funded
- Up to **$75,000** per project (**$4.275 million** total investment)
- Projects spanned **7 major facility improvement categories** (playgrounds, kitchens, HVAC, safety upgrades, interior and exterior improvements

The following themes emerged in response to the evaluation's key evaluation questions and are discussed throughout the findings section of this report.

- **Facilities Improvements.** The PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant supported physical transformations that grantees believe have strengthened their teaching and learning environments, as well as enhanced business sustainability.
- **Recruitment.** Grantee recruitment was efficient and resulted in a broad applicant pool.
- **Application.** Many interest holders described Part I of the Repair and Renovation grant application as a relatively easy, straightforward process.
- **Technical Assistance.** Technical assistance mitigated implementation challenges, helping grantees complete projects that may have otherwise stalled.

- **Contractor Communication.** Complicated contractor-grantee interactions were identified as an implementation challenge that often required technical assistance providers to step in and keep projects on track.
- **Project Management.** Given the increasing demands that technical assistance providers experienced as their role evolved into one of construction project management as opposed to project guidance and advice, key lessons were learned.
- **Grantee Capacity-building.** Grantee capacity building and learning about how to engage in and manage repair and renovation projects were observed, but this growth likely did not equip grantees to manage projects from start to finish independently.
- **Public/Private Partnership.** The public/private partnership structure of the Repair and Renovation Grant demonstrated how multiple funding sources could be leveraged to strengthen impact, while surfacing important lessons learned for future investments.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were developed to inform future iterations of the project and offer insights and lessons learned for the field and other communities seeking to implement a public-private repair and renovation model.

- **Program Planning & Structure.** Consider a longer program planning period, and define partner roles and decision-making responsibilities upfront.
- **Contractor Engagement & Retention**. Build and maintain a larger list of approved contractors, recruit specialty contractors, address the contractor administrative burden, and consider "bundling" projects together to attract contractors with greater capacity.
- **Technical Assistance.** Clarify the level of project management expected of technical assistance providers, offer onboarding training, and require more onsite visits and consistent staffing.
- **Grantee Capacity Building.** Differentiate supports by grantee readiness, formalize grantee training sessions, and standardize a financial/business baseline requirement.
- **Compliance & Procurement.** Balance compliance with flexibility, pilot alternative procurement pathways, and formalize a structured project scoping phase prior to project launch.

Introduction: Program Background

High-quality early learning experiences are dependent on many factors. To name a few, skilled educators, thoughtful curricula promoting language and social skill development, and safe, engaging physical environments. Research has often referred to child care facilities as a "third teacher," exerting significant influence on children's health, safety, and learning experiences (Erickson, 2020). High-quality physical environments have been shown to reduce challenging behaviors and encourage young children to build confidence and independence. They also contribute to higher levels of staff satisfaction and retention (Wells, 2015; Erickson, 2020).

Yet, across the United States, child care facilities have long suffered from chronic underinvestment and often demonstrate characteristics of disrepair. A series of health and safety audits conducted by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services in nine states and one territory found that 96% of the child care providers inspected had one or more instances of safety hazards and non-compliance with state health and safety requirements (2015). Widespread deferred maintenance is often observed among child care providers, impacting the spaces where young children spend their time. Some of the common challenges that providers consistently face include issues with HVAC systems, flooring, playgrounds, and other high-cost items essential to children's health and safety (Build Up California, 2020).

While several barriers deter child care providers from addressing facility repair and renovation needs, the most significant continues to be a lack of funding and access to capital. Child care providers typically operate with tight profit margins, with most for-profit programs reporting margins of less than 1% (Grunewald & Davies, 2011). Many child care programs struggle to cover the true cost of care, leaving them with very limited reserves for capital improvements. Family child care providers face additional hurdles due to renting, zoning, or landlord restrictions (Barrow et al., 2021).

In recent years, the message that child care facilities are not amenities, but core infrastructure to local communities, has gained momentum. Policymakers and advocates have increasingly recognized that high-quality child care is not only critical to children's development, but also to the community's economic vitality. They have also begun to realize the longstanding underinvestment in the physical spaces early learning programs occupy as compared to K-12 facilities. Historically, K-12 schools have received dedicated state and local funding for facilities, whereas child care facilities have primarily relied on a patchwork of private and philanthropic dollars (Erickson, 2020; Burnner & Vincent, 2018). As the COVID-19 pandemic upended public spaces, highlighting unsafe ventilation, limited indoor space, and sanitation challenges, it became a catalyst for new funding directed toward child care physical environments (Barrow et al., 2021). Highlighting the importance of addressing public health and safety, the Federal government issued unprecedented relief funding, including $39 billion in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) child care stabilization and discretionary funds (First Children's Finance & NCFN, 2024). States tasked with distributing this funding often partnered with local intermediaries to launch dedicated facilities grant programs. These programs were frequently framed as economic recovery and workforce retention strategies (Rosch et al., 2022).

In Atlanta, the PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant emerged as part of this broader national movement to invest in child care infrastructure. In April, Mayor Andre Dickens announced a historic $20 million public-private investment in PAACT's city-wide alliance. The investment's purpose was to increase access to high-quality, language-rich early learning environments. Mayor Dickens challenged private foundations, business leaders, and philanthropists to join the City of Atlanta in collectively meeting this commitment with matching funds. Figure 2 illustrates the public/private three-part $20 million investment strategy in early childhood education (ECE).

Figure 2. PAACT ECE Investment Strategy

The purpose of the Repair and Renovation Grant was to leverage federal relief funding with philanthropic dollars to revitalize child care environments, both as a child development imperative and a collective impact strategy to strengthen local infrastructure. The Repair and Renovation model was unique among other facilities projects being pursued across the country due to its localized, blended funding approach. The program would support two types of renovation and repair projects: those funded by public sources and those primarily funded by private philanthropic dollars. To carry out this vision, PAACT convened a team of partners who would support the implementation of the program.

Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS): GEEARS is an advocacy and policy organization that serves as the backbone organization for PAACT. Its work primarily focused on advocating for early childhood policies and investments at the state and local level, conducting research and public awareness campaigns to elevate the importance of early learning, and convening coalitions to align public, private, and philanthropic partners around improving early childhood outcomes.

PAACT's role in the Repair and Renovation Grant was to convene and coordinate partners, provide community engagement and advocacy, serve as a project liaison to partners, and build and maintain engagement with grantees.

Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta (CFGA): CFGA is a regional philanthropic institution that stewards charitable funds and works with donors, nonprofits, and civic leaders to advance equity and Opportunity across metro Atlanta. CFGA served as the fiscal agent and grant administrator for the Repair and Renovation Grant. It oversaw the distribution of grant funds and supported program compliance efforts and activities.

Low Income Investment Fund (LIIF): LIIF is a national community development financial institution (CDFI) that invests in affordable housing, schools, early care and education facilities, and other projects that promote equity and economic mobility.

Reinvestment Fund (RF): RF is a mission-driven financial institution and CDFI that connects communities with capital, partnerships, and research to build strength and equity, including financing early childhood education facilities. RF played the same technical assistance role as LIIF in implementing the grant program.

LIIF and RF served as technical assistance providers for 45 publicly-funded grantees, guiding them through project planning and compliance processes, facilitating project progress, and collaborating with the project team to help solve problems and address challenges.

Early Learning Property Management (ELPM): ELPM is an Atlanta-based nonprofit that develops, renovates, and maintains high-quality early learning facilities to expand equitable, safe, and nurturing spaces for young children. ELPM provided technical assistance and full project management services for 12 grantees supported by private dollars.

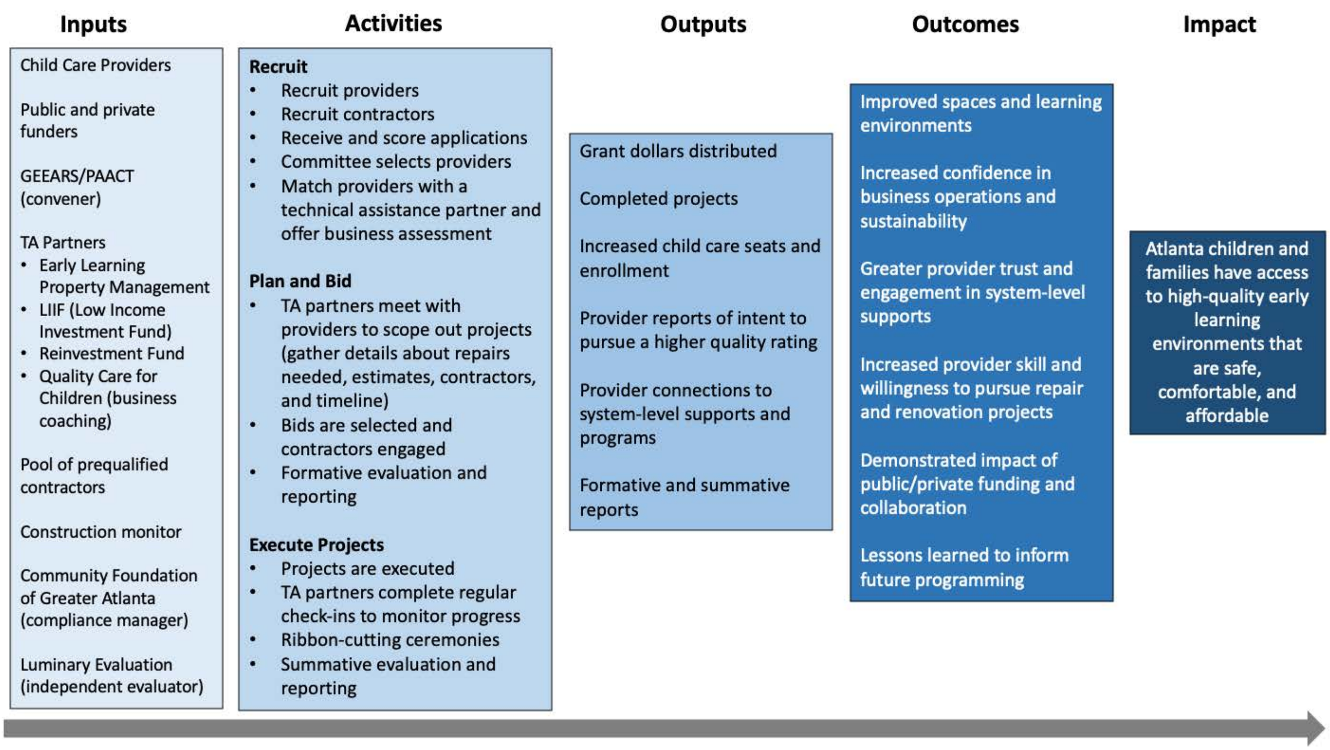
Quality Care for Children (QCC): QCC is a Georgia-based statewide nonprofit organization that supports child care providers and families with several programs including child care referral services, child care provider training and business coaching, child care food program, early Early Head Start, Quality Rated Support, the Provider Resource Hub, Boost Child Care Scholarships, Emergency Child Care, and Georgia Parent Power messaging. QCC offered business assessments to grantees to help them identify opportunities to strengthen their business operations and sustainability.

Luminary Evaluation: Luminary is a national program evaluation firm that helps organizations design rigorous data collection methodology, measure impact, and strengthen outcomes. Luminary served as the independent evaluator for the project, conducting both formative and summative evaluations to document results, measure outcomes, and identify lessons learned that can inform the field and future iterations of the program.

Program Design

The Repair and Renovation Grant offered up to $75,000 in grants to eligible licensed child care providers for critical repairs and upgrades. Unlike other facilities-focused initiatives, the grant program was intentionally limited to repair and renovation, rather than expansion. The program was designed to help providers address safety concerns, deferred maintenance, and improvements to current classrooms and playspaces. The grantee experience began with recruitment into the program. After filling out an application, each applicant was scored based on eligibility criteria. Selected grantees were then matched with a technical assistance advisor, who worked with each grantee to identify the projects they wished to address with the grant. Grantees were also referred to QCC to initiate a business assessment. A procurement process was then undertaken to select a contractor to complete the project. (Details regarding the procurement process can be found on pages 38-39 of this report.) Once a contractor was selected, construction began, and technical assistance advisors worked with grantees to monitor construction progress and facilitate communication between grantees and contractors as needed. Figure 3 presents the Repair and Renovation Grant logic model, illustrating program elements from inputs to anticipated long-term impact. The model highlights the mobilization of public and private resources to advance equity, sustainability, and access across Atlanta's child care system.

Figure 3. PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant Logic Model



Evaluation Methods

The evaluation utilizes a theory-driven, mixed-methods approach to collect and synthesize quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 (Fall 2023 - May 2024) consisted of a formative evaluation, which focused on grant planning and implementation processes from the perspective of key interest holders. A summative evaluation (Phase 2) was conducted from May 2024 to August 2025. The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the outcomes and impacts of the Repair and Renovation Grant, document implementation strengths and challenges, and generate lessons learned to inform future child care facility improvement initiatives.

The following **Key Evaluation Questions** guided both the formative and summative evaluations.

- How have the grant-funded improvement projects and support services contributed to child care business sustainability?
- How did the grant impact program quality across participating providers?
- Did the project result in increased access to quality child care for children and families across the city of Atlanta?
- How effective were provider engagement and recruitment strategies? Did they result in equitable access?
- What challenges did providers face as they underwent their renovation and repair projects?
- How did technical assistance and support help them navigate these challenges?
- What best practices were discovered, and what improvements could be made to grant processes and procedures? (e.g., application, scoring, selection, award, TA matching, reporting, etc.)
- What was the efficacy and impact of collaborative public/private partnerships? What best practices and lessons learned can be shared with the field?
- What opportunities exist to refine grant program design and implementation?

Data Sources

The following data sources were accessed to inform the findings of the summative evaluation.

- **Administrative Data:** The PAACT project team provided the evaluator access to grantee application documents, award records, project documentation, program progress monitoring documents, and compliance monitoring reports. Complete administrative compliance data was available for the 45 publicly-funded projects served by LIIF and RF, and periodic project status reports were available for privately funded projects served by ELPM.

- **Surveys:** A grantee survey was administered post-program to capture experiences, outcomes, and overall satisfaction with the program. This survey was developed in collaboration with the PAACT project team. It was offered to all 57 grantees as they completed or neared completion of their projects. It was open from January 2025 through August 2025.

- **Interviews:** One-on-one interviews were conducted with project interest holders and grantees. The purpose of these interviews was to gather individual perspectives on program implementation and impact. Formative evaluation interviews were conducted primarily with program staff, leadership, and technical assistance partners. The summative interviews included program staff, leadership, technical assistance partners, contractors, and child care providers. Interview protocols for both rounds of interviews were developed collaboratively with the PAACT team. Formative interviews were conducted in March 2024, and summative interviews were conducted from February through August 2025. (Grantees were invited to participate in interviews upon completion of their project or as they neared completion.)

- **Focus Groups:** Focus groups were conducted with child care providers to provide valuable opportunities for collective feedback in a group setting. The focus group protocol was developed in collaboration with the PAACT team. The focus groups were held in July 2025.

- **Artifacts and Documents:** The evaluator reviewed project-related materials that provided additional context for program design and implementation. These included recruitment flyers, outreach emails, media coverage, informational materials, compliance workflows, meeting agendas and notes, and project management tools. These artifacts provided insight into how the program was communicated, managed, and adapted throughout the grant period.

Evaluation Participants

To ensure that findings reflected the broad range of perspectives from project interest holders and grantees, the evaluator worked with the PAACT team to draw a purposive sample for qualitative data (interviews and focus groups). The survey draws a convenience sample, as all grantees were invited to participate, and the perspectives collected are those of the individuals who opted to respond. To encourage participation, all grantees who were interviewed or attended a focus group received a gift card incentive. Those who responded to the survey were entered into a raffle for a gift card. Tables 1-2 present the interest holders and grantees sampled for the evaluation.

Table 1. Evaluation Sample: Grantee Survey Respondents

Invited Grantees	Respondents (n)	Response Rate	Procurement Phase 1	Procurement Phase 2	ELPM
57	35	61%	50% (17)	29% (10)	21% (7)

Table 2. Evaluation Sample: Interviews and Focus Groups

	Formative Interviews	Summative Interviews	Focus Group Attendees
Grantees	NA	17	6
Technical Assistance Providers	6	6	NA
Project Staff and Leadership	3	2	NA
Contractors	NA	2	
Other Partners or Project Interest Holders	5	NA	NA
Total	14	27	6

Although participation varied across data collection methods, the combined sample provides a sufficient representation to inform the evaluation findings, reflecting the breadth of perspectives engaged in the program. Additionally, the data collected from sampled grantees was combined with full administrative compliance data for the 45 publicly-funded projects served by RF or LIIF, as well as status reports for privately funded projects served by ELPM.

Data Analysis

Once all data were collected, qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately and then together. This process of triangulation allowed for multiple points of perspective and strengthened the credibility and validity of the findings.

Quantitative data from the survey and administrative data were analyzed descriptively, using frequencies and percentages to summarize grantee experiences, program outcomes, and project characteristics. Interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding was conducted inductively to identify emergent themes. These codes were iteratively refined, clustered into categories, and then synthesized into themes in response to key evaluation questions.

Findings from the reflexive thematic and quantitative analyses were compared and synthesized to identify points of convergence and divergence across the data sources. This process yielded evidence-based themes that highlight program outcomes, implementation strengths, challenges, and lessons learned.

Limitations

While the evaluation design utilized multiple methods and data sources to strengthen validity, there are several limitations that should be noted when interpreting the findings. Interviews and focus groups were drawn from a purposive sample of grantees and interest holders. Participation was voluntary, which has the potential to introduce self-selection bias, as those with strong feelings, either positive or negative, may be more likely to respond. Data collection occurred as projects were completed or near completion. While this timing ensured that providers could reflect on their experience during grant implementation, it does not fully capture the longer-term impact of the program on business sustainability, program quality, or child outcomes. Therefore, the evaluation findings reflect short to medium-term outcomes, rather than longer-term systemic changes and impacts. Another consideration relates to the limitation in administrative data. Comprehensive compliance and monitoring data were available for the 45 publicly-funded projects managed by LIIF and RF, while the same data for the 12 privately funded projects managed by ELPM were more limited. This is because the privately funded projects were not subject to the same compliance requirements necessitated by the Federal funding source. This resulted in some instances where analysis of outcomes across the complete set of grantees was limited to the 45 publicly-funded grantees. Finally, the PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant was designed and implemented in the local context of Atlanta, Georgia. While the findings offer valuable insights into outcomes and provide useful lessons learned, they should not be generalized to other cities and conditions without considering the differences in local contexts and conditions.

Evaluation Findings

The summative evaluation findings are presented in three parts. Part 1 is a brief overview of demographics and characteristics of the child care programs served by the grant. Part 2 presents grant outcomes and achievements, highlighting successes and discussing evidence that demonstrates improved facilities and progress toward enhanced child care business sustainability and program quality. Part 3 examines the strengths, challenges, and lessons learned from grant implementation.

Part 1: CHILD CARE PROGRAMS SERVED

The PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant served a total of 57 child care programs (including 53 child care learning centers and four (4) family child care learning homes) in the City of Atlanta. Forty-five (45) grantees were supported primarily with public funds, and 12 grantees were supported by privately-sourced project funding. The grantees were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) serve children from 0 to 4 years old, 2) are located in the City of Atlanta, 3) participate in Quality Rated, Georgia's quality rating and improvement system, (QRIS), and 4) accept families who are low income (e.g., CAPS, Early Head Start, BOOST).

Table 3 presents demographic data and program characteristics collected during the initial application process. Most of the grantees operated as for-profit entities (76% public, 67% private). Grantees also reported offering service specializations for children and families. Over half of grantees supported by publicly-sourced funds reported serving children with special needs (53%) and culturally and linguistically diverse families (56%). One-third (33%) of privately funded grantees reported offering these services. Almost all grantees (96% of publicly-funded and 100% of privately funded) reported serving children from families experiencing economic hardship. Offering alternative hours, beyond traditional care hours (e.g., weekends, early mornings, evenings), was reported by 31% of publicly-funded grantees and 100% of privately funded grantees. Almost all grantees reported offering family-friendly supports, such as transportation, meals, clothing, or tuition assistance (96% of publicly-funded grantees and 100% of privately funded grantees).

Demographics of program leadership indicated that most applicants were female (82% publicly-funded grantees, 92% privately funded grantee) and identified as Black, African-American, or African (86% publicly-funded grantees, 100% privately funded grantees) and as of non Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx decent (93% publicly-funded grantees, 100% privately funded grantees).

At the time of application, the majority of grantees had two-star Quality Ratings (64% of publicly-funded grantees and 67% of privately funded grantees). Self-reported program enrollment data at the time of application indicated that less than half of all grantees were fully enrolled (40% publicly-funded grantees, 42% privately funded grantees).

Table 3. Grantee demographic characteristics

	Public Funding (n=45)		Private Funding (n=12)	
	n	%	n	%
Provider type				
Centers	42	93%	11	92%
Family child care homes	3	7%	1	8%
Organization type				
For-profit	34	76%	8	67%
Non-profit	11	24%	4	33%
Service specializations				
Children with special needs	24	53%	4	33%
Families that are culturally and linguistically diverse	25	56%	4	33%
Children in foster care, experiencing homelessness, or families participate in CAPS, TANF, or SNAP	43	96%	12	100%
Care offered during alternative hours	14	31%	12	100%
Family friendly supports like transportation, meals, clothing, or tuition assistance	43	96%	12	100%
Gender*				
Female	37	82%	11	92%
Male	8	18%	1	8%
Race*				
Black, African-American, or African	38	86%	12	100%
White	2	5%	0	0%
Asian or Asian American	3	7%	0	0%
Indigenous, First American, or Native American	1	2%	0	0%
Ethnicity* (select all that apply)				
Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	1	2%	0	0%
Non-Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	42	93%	12	100%
Prefer not to answer	2	4%		
Quality Rating Level (at time of application)				
3 stars	6	13%	0	0%
2 stars	29	64%	8	67%
1 star	8	18%	4	33%
Rating Unavailable**	2	4%	0	0%
Enrollment Status (at time of application)				
Fully enrolled	18	40%	5	42%
Not fully enrolled	27	60%	7	58%

*Reported for the individual completing the grant application (typically program owner, executive director, or manager).

**Providers participating in Quality Rated, but ratings were unavailable at the time of data reporting.

As shown in Figure 4, the Repair and Renovation grantees were geographically dispersed across the City of Atlanta, with clusters of programs concentrated in the central and southern neighborhoods.

Figure 4. Map of PAACT Repair and Renovation Grantees

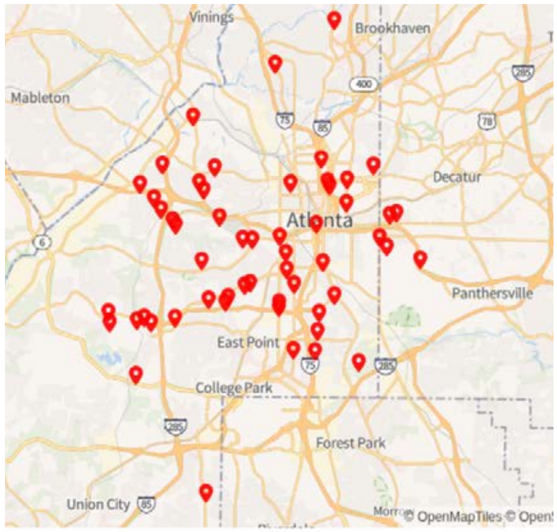
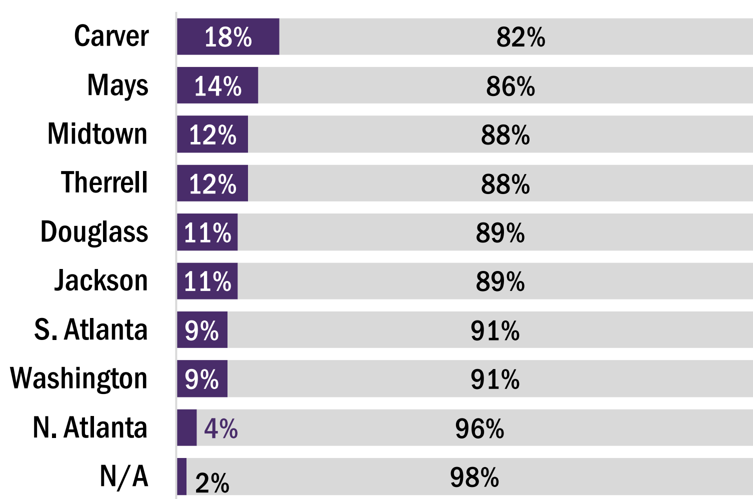


Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of grantees across Atlanta Public Schools (APS) high school clusters. The program reached providers in nearly every cluster across the city. The largest portion of grantees was located in the Carver cluster (18%), followed by Mays (14%), Midtown (12%), and Therrell (12%). This indicates that the strongest representation of grantees was from the South and West Atlanta communities. The fewest grantees (4%) were located in the North Atlanta cluster.

Figure 5. R&R Grantees were distributed across nearly all Atlanta Public Schools high school clusters. (n=57)



PART 2: PAACT REPAIR AND RENOVATION GRANT ACHIEVEMENTS

Key Evaluation Questions

- How have the grant-funded improvement projects and support services contributed to child care business sustainability?
- How did the grant impact program quality across participating providers?
- Did the project result in increased access to quality child care for children and families across the city of Atlanta?

The PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant supported physical transformations that grantees believe have strengthened their teaching and learning environments as well as enhanced business sustainability.

Throughout data collection, interest holders consistently emphasized the program's ultimate achievement: creating improved teaching and learning environments for the children and families served by **5,772 slots** across 57 grantees, as well as for the teachers and staff who support them.

Existing Program Conditions Before Repair and Renovation Grant

In their applications, many grantees described facility conditions that negatively impacted child development, health, and safety. They reported operating their child care programs in older buildings as a strategy to keep their rent or mortgage payments down. Some of these buildings were repurposed schools or other structures that had undergone several previous ownership changes. Grantees noted that their facilities had been subject to numerous "do-it-yourself" projects and remedies over the years, initiated either by themselves or by prior owners. For example, one grantee interviewed described the challenging condition of her outdoor play space:

> "It's just some wonky things in the building, one of which being the stairs to access the playground are really large...and concrete...Little legs you know, they weren't safe. Some of the railing we'd filled in with different materials over the years, but we didn't have anything permanent to protect the students from holes in the railing as well. And there was like a grass area, but then there was also a concrete area where they would ride their bikes and things that had sharp edges." - child care provider

Grantees also reported years of deferred maintenance because they lacked the financial resources to cover regular repair and renovation projects. They found themselves working around repairs, which often meant unused classroom space and a reduced number of children and families that could be served. For example, one grantee discussed water damage that resulted from frozen pipes that had burst two years ago. The program's owners did not have the funds to repair the damage, and as a result, one of their afterschool rooms remains unused. She described the daily shifting of children to "work around" the room.

> "It's in the room that we used to use for after school, and so we had to bring them up to our main building...we just had to make arrangements. "In the afternoon when school age comes in, we just have to move kids around so we have space for them because my afterschool room got all messed up."
> – child care provider

Grantees reflected that deferred maintenance and unaddressed renovation needs sometimes result in citations, fines, and loss of business. Analysis of Part 1 Repair and Renovation Grant applications revealed that, at the time of program entry, approximately half (49%) of grantees reported active, unaddressed safety hazards in their facilities.

Repair and Renovation Grant Projects Pursued

Grantees pursued a wide variety of repair and renovation projects, often completing more than one project under their award. To understand this diversity, the evaluator identified the multiple projects pursued as part of each grantee's single award. In total, the grant program supported 210 individual scopes of work. Analysis indicated that many grantees prioritized high-traffic areas, which receive the most use and are subject to wear and tear. Interest holders emphasized that chosen projects were not 'nice to have upgrades', but rather were critical to child health and wellness, effective teaching and learning, and sustainable business operations.

Analysis of grantee final inspection reports revealed that the most popular type of project pursued was floor replacement, a scope of work observed among 22 grantees. This includes projects solely focused on replacing floors throughout a center or a home facility or replacing floors as part of another project, such as a bathroom or kitchen renovation. Conversations with interest holders revealed that a floor is considered one of the most heavily used elements of a child care environment and also one of the most expensive to replace due to the cost of materials and installation. The second most popular project selection was outdoor fencing, followed by wall/ceiling repair and HVAC system replacement.

Figure 6. Before and After Photos of a Floor Replacement Project

Figure 7. Before and After Ceiling Repair Project

Again, as evident from the list of projects and supported by qualitative perspectives of interest holders, the repair and renovation scopes of work supported operational needs which grantees would have struggled to meet had they pursued these projects without grant assistance (Table 4).

Table 4. Repair and Renovation Projects Selected

Fifty-seven (57) grantees pursued diverse repair and renovation scopes of work tailored to their individual needs. The most popular renovation project was **floor replacement**, observed in 22 grantees' projects.

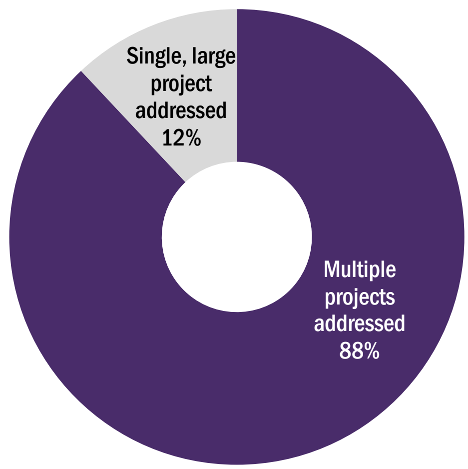
(n=57 total grantee awards comprised of 210 individual scopes of work)

Observation Frequency	Repair and Renovation Activities
Most Frequent (22 grantees)	• floor replacement (22)
Observed Frequently (11-12 grantees)	• outdoor fencing (12) • wall/ceiling repair (12) • playground surfacing (11) • door repair/replacement (11) • new playground equipment installation (11) • HVAC system replacement (10)
Somewhat Frequent (5-8 grantees)	• lighting replacement (8) • new kitchen appliance(s) (7) • new bathroom fixtures (7) • interior painting (7) • roof replacement (6) • gutter repair/replacement (6) • window replacement (6) • exterior painting (5) • kitchen cabinets installation (5) • turf installation (5)
Less Frequent (1-4 grantees)	• parking lot repair/repaving (4) • accessibility equipment (4) • drainage (4) • concrete replacement (3) • storefront facade repair/replacement (3) • kitchen countertop replacement (3) • bathroom expansion/full renovation (3) • exterior sign (2) • plumbing repair (2) • security camera installation (2) • classroom cabinets installation (2) • enclosed patio/porch (2) • alarm system installation/upgrade (2) • water fountain replacement (2) • fire panel upgrade (2) • reception desk replacement (1) • kitchen equipment replacement (1) • tree removal (1) • electrical panel replacement (1)

	• removal of invasive plants (1) • structural repair (1) • siding replacement (1) • classroom countertop replacement (1) • carpet replaced (1) • porch/patio expansion/full renovation (1) • awning installation (1)

As illustrated by the table above, Repair and Renovation Grant funding allowed child care programs to address multiple needs. Most grantees (88%) addressed multiple projects on their wish list (Figure 8). The seven grantees who pursued one primary scope of work were typically focused on larger projects, either in a single location or throughout a facility. These projects included two complete kitchen expansion/renovations, a new playground, an HVAC system replacement, and two playground surfacing projects.

Figure 8. 88% of providers pursued smaller projects within their funded scope of work, while 12% used the funding to accomplish one major project. (n=57)



Repair and Renovation Grant Benefits

Given the volume of need among programs for repair and renovation projects, grantees were not able to address all existing issues. However, they were able to prioritize larger scopes of work that would likely not have been possible without the grant. As one grantee noted:

> "Large projects with that type of price tag, like $75,000 and up. Those are things that you dream about being able to do, but likely don't have the operating budget to do. Of course, there were ideas of things that we could do to make the building more engaging, but this was specifically about safety and health. And so, there were things on our radar that we knew that we'd love to do but just didn't have the funding to do it." – child care provider

According to the survey, 93% of respondents (n = 30) with completed projects reported that their repair and renovation project improved their program's space and learning environment. During interviews and focus groups, immediate benefits of projects focused on the following areas: 1) addressing safety issues and supporting child wellbeing, 2) addressing issues stemming from deferred maintenance, 3) improving teacher spaces, 4) enhancing teaching and learning environments, and 5) improving program marketability. These benefits are clustered into five main areas, summarized in Table 5 with illustrative quotes from grantees.

Table 5. Examples of Repair and Renovation Grant Benefits

Benefit	Construction Project	Illustrative Grantee Quote
Addressing safety issues and supporting child wellbeing	Floor replacement	"You're not tripping because we had some floors that were messed up and so even just by fixing that you don't have to worry about if you're going to stub your toe. That makes your environment for learning better."
Addressing issues stemming from deferred maintenance	Floor replacement, HVAC system replacement, kitchen cabinets, bathroom fixtures, roof replacement	"I was able to do something that let's be honest would probably have taken me ten years to do all of those things through saving...It would have taken me forever to do the much needed repairs."
Improving teacher spaces (contributing to better educator retention and wellbeing)	Floor replacement, kitchen renovation	"Before our teachers never had a place to just kind of sit down and work on their lesson plans or have time off during their lunch break...We've got a space where multiple teachers can sit and do some work and take their training without people constantly microwaving food in the background or washing dishes...We created cabinets off the staff lounge so that we were able to organize all of our things better. So when there is less clutter and when you have less clutter, there is less stress on teachers and you're able to find things a little more easily. So I

		think that was the biggest impact, that it helped the look and feel of the school, but also created a dedicated space for our teachers."
Enhancing teaching and learning environments	Wall repair, facade replacement	"The grant allowed us to enclose three learning spaces dedicated to our youngest learners. The project reduced the noise level and created an optimal learning environment for children that were easily districted by external noises that may disrupt the classroom. The classroom enclosure...[has allowed] for a quieter learning environment for our youngest learners."
Improving program marketability	Playground surfacing	"I think that the playground is now more of a selling point than it was before. I mean, it was a lovely outside area that had equipment, but again, we're a smaller facility. I think the pour and play kind of gives it a more professional, commercial kind of look in addition to it being very safe. It looks really inviting, and I feel like often when we're doing tours, parents are like, 'wow, this playground is really nice!"

Figure 9. Before and After Photos of a Porch Enclosure Project

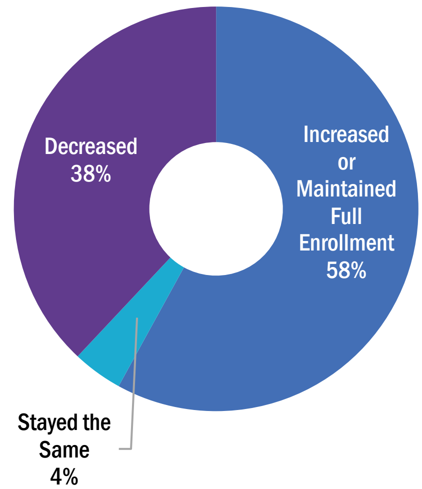
In addition to the immediate benefits described above, other desired outcomes of the Repair and Renovation Grant include improved enrollment, greater capacity to serve more children, and improved quality, as indicated by higher Quality Ratings. Early evidence from grantees and partners suggests progress in these areas. For example, some programs reported enrollment increases since entering the program, enhanced business confidence, and motivation to pursue higher quality ratings. While these encouraging observations align with the goals of the Repair and Renovation Grant, it is essential to note that they cannot be causally attributed to the grant alone; rather, they are emerging outcomes that the grant may have influenced.

The survey results provide several key indicators that suggest progress toward these outcomes. Each alone does not necessarily indicate progress, but claims become stronger when data points are considered together and triangulated with qualitative outcomes gathered from interviews and focus groups.

Enrollment Changes: Among the 26 grantees who shared their current enrollment levels, 58% of grantees reported either increasing enrollment or maintaining full enrollment. In contrast, 42% reported that enrollment remained the same or decreased. Among those reporting increases (n = 13), changes ranged from 1 to 118 additional children enrolled, with most grantees reporting gains of between 6 and 24 children. Among those reporting decreases (n=10), declines ranged from 3 to 88 children, with most decreases between 10 and 20 children (Figure 10).

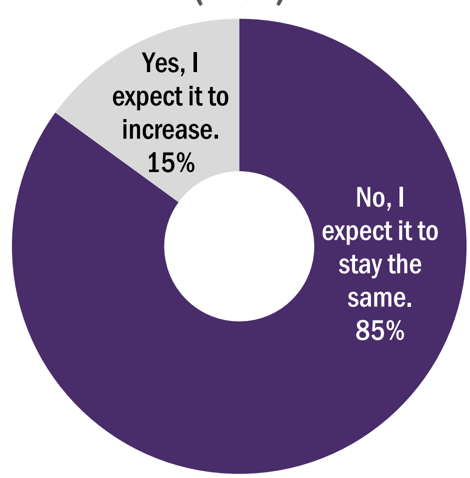
While enrollment changes varied widely across grantees, the majority surveyed increased enrollment or maintained full enrollment. The alignment of these positive changes with the timing of the grant, along with qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups, suggests that the grant may have played a role in supporting grantees in stabilizing or growing their enrollment. Other factors, including staffing challenges, changing economic conditions, and shifts in demand, have the potential to contribute to upward or downward progress in enrollment, so the data should be interpreted as suggestive rather than causal.

Figure 10. 58% of survey respondents report that the either maintain full enrollment or increased enrollment, while 42% decreased or stayed the same. (n=26)



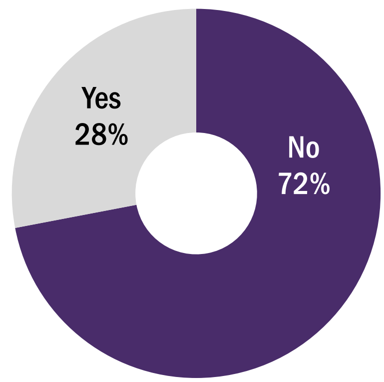
Licensed Capacity: A longer-term goal of the Repair and Renovation Grant is for programs to serve additional children and increase their licensed capacity. This increase would occur in response to renovated spaces that could safely and comfortably accommodate more children. (Throughout the data collection, there were many examples of grantees describing the inability to fully utilize available space because of safety or repair issues that needed to be addressed.) While most grantees surveyed did not report increases in licensed capacity during the grant period, 15% (n = 34) expect to increase their licensed capacity within the year (Figure 11). Four of these grantees reported that they expect their licensed capacity to increase by 50, 70, 97, and 189 slots, respectively, for a total of 406 additional slots. While most surveyed grantees did not report licensed capacity changes during the grant period, the small group of grantees anticipating substantial increases indicates that improvements from the program may have helped grantees access previously unusable space and contributed to conditions for meaningful capacity growth.

Figure 11. Most survey respondents do not expect their licensed capacity to change within the next year. (n=34)



Service Levels: Surveyed grantees were also asked to share whether or not the grant made it possible for them to serve more children within their current licensed capacities. Again, most surveyed grantees (72%) answered "no", while 28% answered "yes" (n = 32) (Figure 12). This may indicate that providers were more focused on improving the quality of their current space rather than the physical expansion of their current footprint.

Figure 12. 72% of survey respondents report that their R&R project did not make it possible for them to serve more children within their current licensed capacities. (n=32)



Quality Ratings: Surveyed grantees were asked if their star rating through Quality Rated changed after completing their project. They were also asked if they plan on pursuing a higher star rating through Quality Rated this year. Most grantees (90%) reported that their rating remained the same after their project. However, of the 26 respondents who do not already have a three-star rating, 88% indicated that they plan to pursue a higher star rating this year (Figures 13-15).

Figure 13. Most survey respondents reported a 2 or 3 star Quality Rating at the end of the program. (n=32)

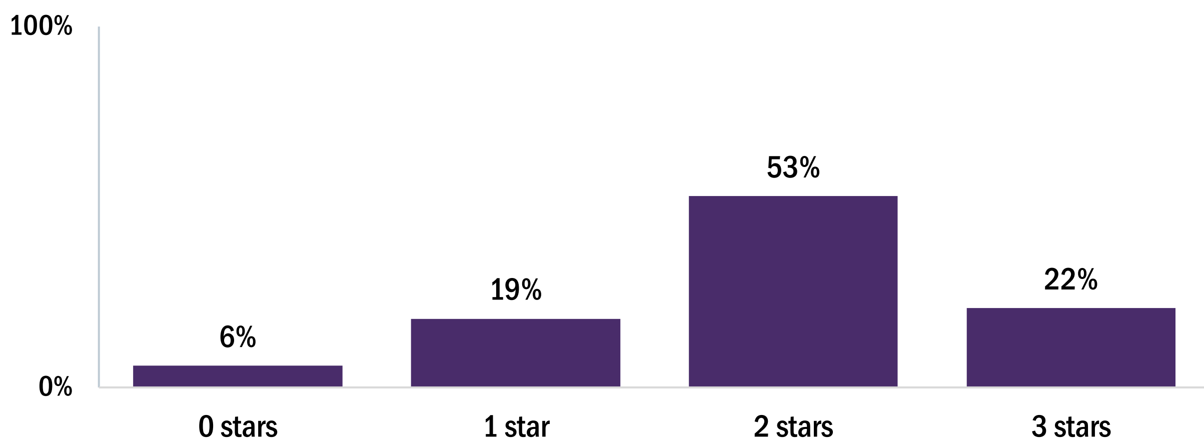


Figure 14. 90% of surveyed providers reported that their Quality Rating level stayed the same this year. (n=31)

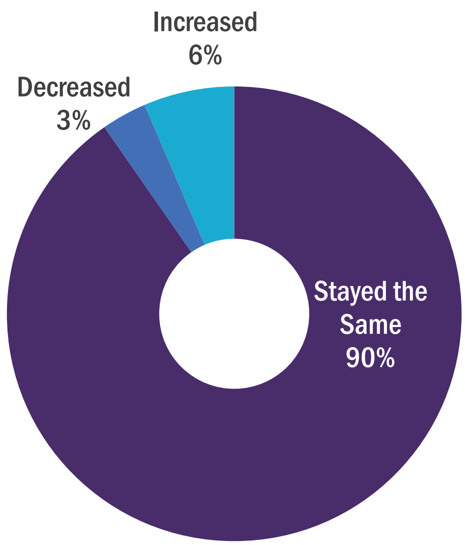
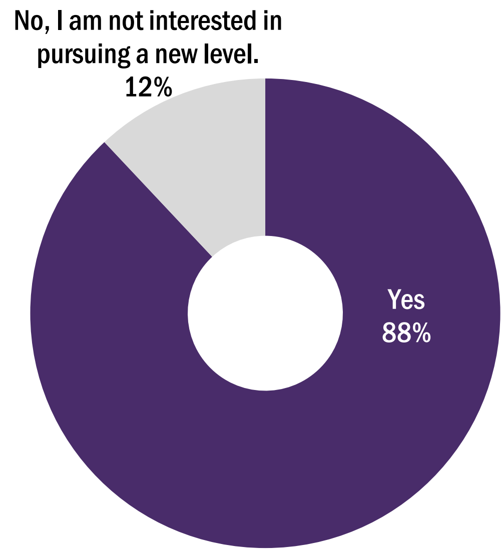


Figure 15. 88% of survey respondents that do not have a 3 star Quality Rating report that they are planning on pursuing a higher level. (n=26)



Considered together, grantee feedback regarding project impacts on enrollment, capacity, service levels, and quality suggests that while the program may not have produced immediate expansion in the number of children served, safety and quality improvements have positioned grantees to strengthen their Quality Rated star levels. Grantees anticipate that increases in enrollment and service levels will follow as quality improvements translate into greater marketability. Two grantees interviewed summarized this perspective, sharing how important a quality environment is to prospective families and the negative impact that an unkept environment can have.

> "You know, when it comes to advertising and bringing parents on tour, and they are walking to a room that's been revitalized and is a new product, it gives you a new appearance. That will help as a selling point along with we've been here for...almost three decades. So when you do these things, it just gives you that longevity to be around and be competitive as well."
> – child care provider

> "If you have a building that looks shabby, people don't feel as confident about you. They don't want to pay as much, and also they don't feel as safe having their kids there." – child care provider

PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS LEARNED

This second results section focuses on grant implementation processes. As noted in the introduction, the Repair and Renovation Grant is a unique, collaborative model that leverages a combination of public and private dollars to achieve improvements in child care facilities at the municipal level. Given the nascent nature of the model, its structure and programmatic elements were innovative and somewhat untested. While implementation challenges emerged throughout the grant period, the lessons learned serve as a foundation for future public/private child care facilities funding initiatives in Georgia and beyond.

Key Evaluation Questions

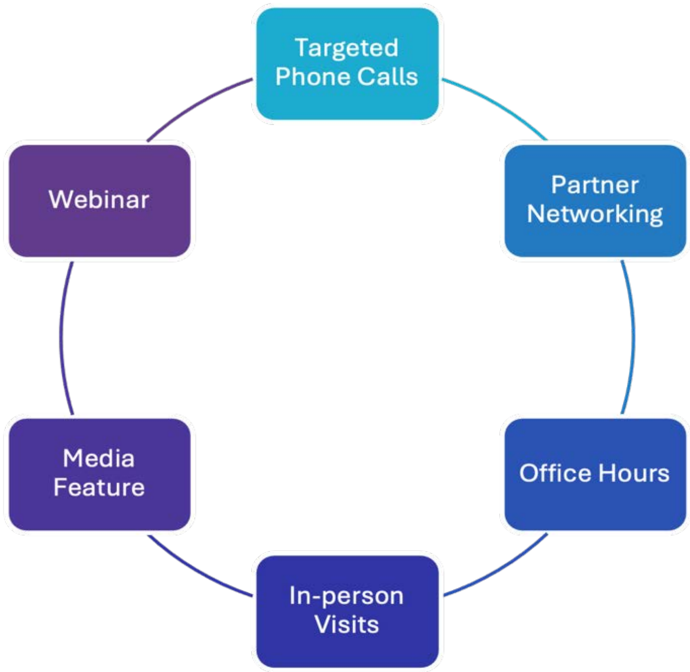
- How effective were provider engagement and recruitment strategies? Did they result in equitable access?
- What best practices were discovered, and what improvements could be made to grant processes and procedures? (e.g., application, scoring, selection, award, TA matching, reporting, etc.)

Grantee recruitment was efficient and resulted in a broad applicant pool.

PAACT maintains an active network of child care providers throughout Greater Atlanta. The collaborative leverages its affiliation with GEEARS and partnerships with provider-serving statewide organizations such as the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), Bright from the Start, and local community-based entities to reach providers with new opportunities. Most grantees interviewed and surveyed reported that they first learned about the Repair and Renovation Grant opportunity through an email blast. Some received an email from PAACT directly, and others reported an email from Bright from the Start, including information about the grant.

In addition to outreach emails, several other recruitment methods were employed to reach child care providers beyond those immediately connected via email. They included a webinar, media features on the local news station, open office hours, networking with local partners, and social media posts (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Child Care Provider Recruitment Strategies



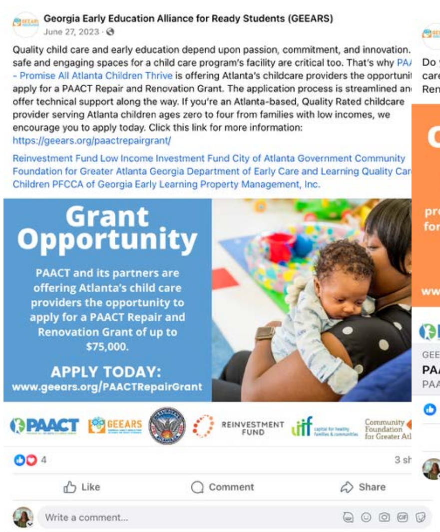
Webinar: Hosted by PAACT, a webinar took place on July 11, 2023, at 7:00 p.m. It provided providers with an overview of the grant, eligibility criteria, processes, and guidance on how to connect with application assistance.

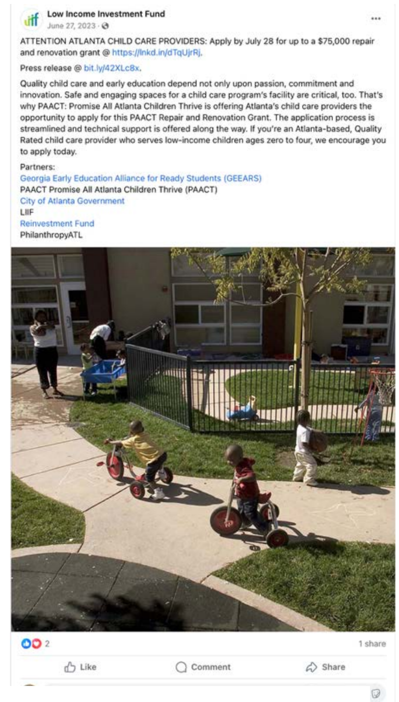
Media Feature: Aired on *Good Day Atlanta* on July 25, 2023, and featured Janean Lewis, City of Atlanta, Senior Policy Advisor, and Lawrence Smith, Program Manager, Early Childhood Education at Reinvestment Fund, discussing the grant opportunity.

Office Hours: Two open office hour sessions were held to answer specific questions and provide small-group application support.

Partner Networking: Interest holders and community-based organizations were asked to share the opportunity with their networks. Partners include: PAACT partners and advisory board, GEEARS board, Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Association of the Education of Young Children, and the City of Atlanta, led by the mayor's office.

Social Media: The grant opportunity was posted on all PAACT and GEEARS social media channels, as well as on the channels of project partners.

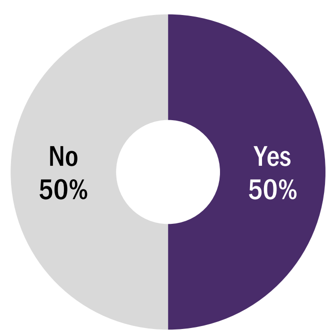




PAACT and GEEARS staff members also made targeted phone calls to eligible providers who may be interested in the grant. The rationale behind these calls was to speak with providers who may not be as connected through email or might be hesitant to apply and are in need of individualized support and reassurance. In total, staff placed 129 calls between July 6 and 11, 2023, which generated 86 conversations and 35 voicemails.

Recruitment efforts resulted in a total of 124 Repair and Renovation Grant applications received during the summer of 2023. Of these applications, 57 were approved and awarded, a 45.97% acceptance rate. According to the survey (n = 32), half of the Repair and Renovation grantees had never applied for and received grant funding before (Figure 17). This indicates that multimodal and individualized recruitment efforts may have encouraged providers to connect with newly realized grant-funded support.

Figure 17. Half of survey respondents reported that they had never applied to and recieved grant funding prior to the R&R grant. (n=32)



While the response to the Repair and Renovation Grant opportunity was strong among center-based programs, only four of the funded programs were FCCs. Interest holders posited that the lower FCC participation rate was due to a smaller initial pool of eligible FCC providers than center-based providers. To be eligible for the grant, FCC and center-based providers had to be 1) located in the City of Atlanta, 2) be a Quality Rated program participant, 3) serve children from ages zero to four, and 4) serve low-income families. As of August 31, 2023, of the 24 FCCs identified, only two did not apply who appeared to be eligible. Table 6 summarizes the eligibility and application status of the 24 identified FCCs in the Atlanta area.

Table 6. FCC Eligible and Ineligible Applicants

Application Status	Eligible FCC Applicants	Ineligible FCC Applicants (No QR or CAPS)
Did not apply	2	11
Applied, scored below cutoff	3	2
Previously served	2	0
Funded	4	0
Total	11	13
Grand Total of All FFCS Identified	24	

Many interest holders described Part I of the Repair and Renovation Grant application as a relatively easy, straightforward process.

Grantees accessed the Repair and Renovation Grant by completing an initial online application process. The applications were collected through the Submittable grant application platform, provided by LIIF, and exported for review and scoring by the full team (PAACT, LIIF, Reinvestment Fund). This initial application was designed to take applicants no more than 30 minutes to complete, asking them to confirm their program's eligibility, share basic program and demographic information, and provide brief narratives describing the project they would like to pursue and the anticipated impact on their program. Refer to Figure 18 for a detailed list of information collected during the initial application.

Figure 18. Part 1 Application Information

Repair & Renovation Application Information: Part 1

- License number
- Contact information
- Program enrollment status
- Characteristics of children served (special needs, cultural and linguistic diversity, foster care, homeless, receiving public subsidies)
- Program offerings of family-friendly supports
- Amount of project funding needed
- Anticipated project categories
- Brief narratives describing:
  - How funding will be used
  - Benefits of projects to families
- Program administrator demographic information (gender, ethnicity, race, estimated annual gross income or revenue)
- Certifications and permissions (accuracy and completeness of application, permission to share application information, photograph and video release, and intention to remain open and participating in Quality rated for the next two years)

Once the application period closed, the team then executed a four-step collaborative scoring and review process to select the final grantees. Figure 19 details this scoring process.

Figure 19. Repair and Renovation Grant Scoring Process

1. Eligibility Verification

- Two team members reviewed each applicant's eligibility related to Quality Rated status, City of Atlanta address, and population served. The team verified Quality Rated status for any providers not publicly listed by reaching out to the provider, DECAL or both. This information was not scored but ensured eligibility.

2. Application Review

- Two team members reviewed each application per the scoring rubric/guide and submit individual scores.

3. Review Panel

- A review panel consisting of PAACT, LIIF, and RF met to discuss applications with scoring discrepancies, those above/below the funding threshold, and those for whom a scoring discrepancy would likely result in a funding determination. The panel settled on a final score for each application in question and created the final list from those scores.

4. Notification

- Selected providers were notified. Any unfunded were told that they were not currently funded but would be eligible for future funding opportunities.

Each application was scored using a structured rubric that assigned points based on how well each application aligned with program eligibility and priorities (Figure 20). The rubric consisted of several criteria, and totals were weighted to reflect funding priorities such as serving low-income families, addressing urgent health and safety needs, and improving the quality of teaching and learning environments.

Figure 20. Repair and Renovation Grant Scoring Rubric

Points are awarded reflecting both the program and the desired project.

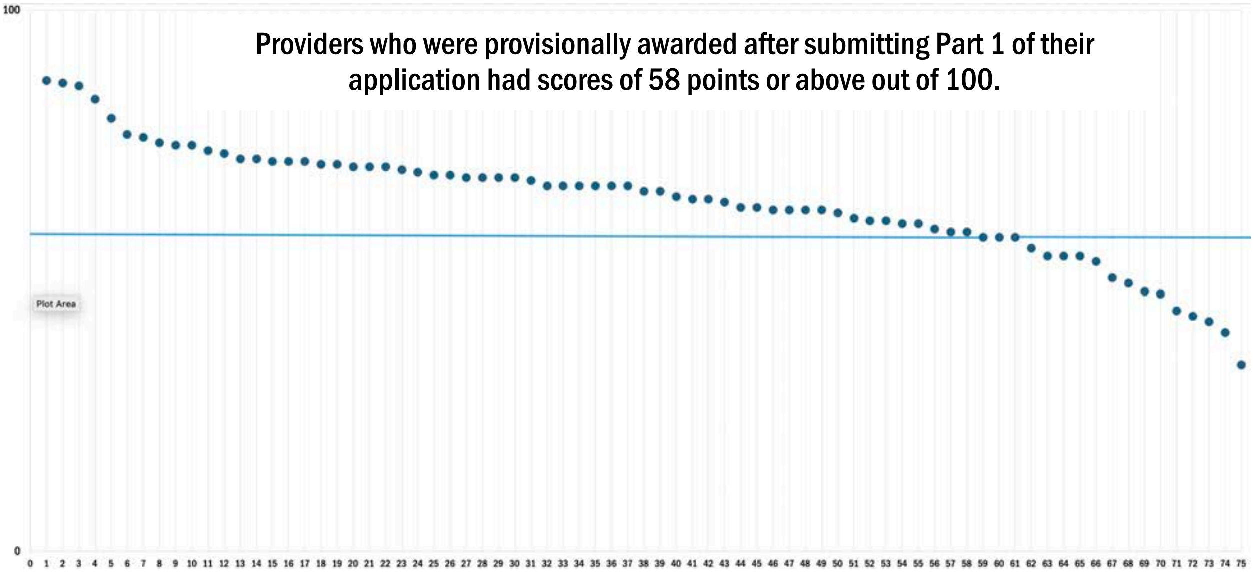
Points totals are weighted to reflect R&R funding priorities.

Criteria guide the scorer as they assign points to each element.

Program/Project	Application Scoring Rubric	Max Points	% Section Points	% Total Points	Criteria
Program	Program is located in a targeted neighborhood by income	10			Significant = 10 points ; Some = 5 points ; No = 0 points
Program	Program is located in a targeted neighborhood by supply gap	10	20%	10%	Significant = 10 points Some = 5 points No = 0 points
Program	Program serves infants and toddlers	8	16%	8%	Yes = 8 points No = 0 points
Program	Program serves: -children with exceptional needs -migrant children -unhoused -dual-language learners -CPS or foster care	12	24%	12%	Yes = 12 points No = 0 points
Program	Program offers alternative hours (either non-traditional or drop-in care)	4	8%	4%	Yes = 4 points No = 0 points
Program	Program offers family supports	6	12%	6%	Three or more (6 points) Less than three (3 points) None (0 points)
Project	Applicant has sufficiently demonstrated that the project fits within the scope of RFA requirements and that the project will be impactful, timely, viable and be successfully completed.	15	30%	15%	Extremely viable = 15 Somewhat viable = 10 Concerns about viability = 5 Not viable at all = 0
Project	Project promotes learning environment	7	14%	7%	Yes = 7 No = 0
Project	Project promotes community well-being	5	10%	5%	Yes = 5 No = 0
Project	Project address health and safety	8	16%	8%	Yes = 8 No = 0
Project	Project addresses licensing violations or quality rated barriers	8	16%	8%	Yes = 8 No = 0
Project	Project addresses accessiblity	7	14%	7%	Yes = 7 No = 0
Subtotals	Program points	50			
	Project points	50			
	Total points	100			

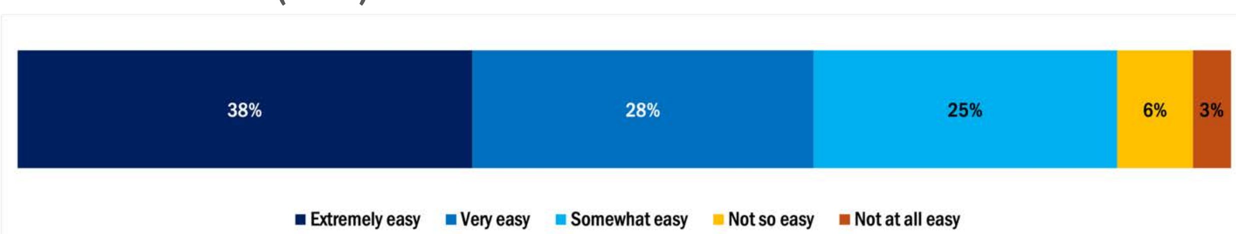
The grant rubric was designed to ensure fair and independent review of each application. Its weighted point structure guided scorers to consider both the provider's overall program and the proposed renovation project. Six of the twelve criteria focused on the child care program, while the other half focused on the proposed repair or renovation project. A total of 86 providers were scored using the rubric. Scores ranged from 34.5 to 87. The cutoff score was 58, as illustrated in Figure 21.

Figure 21. Score Distribution for Part 1 Applications



Many interest holders found Part 1 of the application process straightforward to complete and did not create significant administrative burdens for grantees. According to the grantee survey, 91% of the sample (n = 32) reported positive levels of ease when completing the application (Figure 22).

Figure 22. Overall, how easy was the application process for the PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant? (n=32)



Key Evaluation Questions

- What challenges did providers face as they underwent their renovation and repair projects?
- How did technical assistance and support help them navigate these challenges?

Technical assistance mitigated implementation challenges, helping grantees complete projects that may have otherwise stalled.

While some grantees reported mixed experiences with technical assistance, the majority viewed it as a critical support. Among surveyed grantees (n=31) 84% felt their technical assistance provider was very or extremely helpful, while 97% believed they were at least somewhat helpful (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Helpfulness of technical assistance provider (n=31)

Interviewed grantees also emphasized the importance of technical assistance. They explained that construction projects are complicated, especially when interacting with contractors. Many had never had the resources to pursue a construction project before, so they were unaware of how to proceed. One grantee described her positive experience, which she attributed to technical assistance support:

> "The [technical assistance advisor] was really, really accessible. [Technical assistance advisor's name] kind of held our hand through some things that we didn't understand. They were kind of like an advocate for us. With the final walk-through, making sure everything was correct before the final payment was dispersed. [Technical assistance advisor's name] was awesome. I don't think it would have gone as smoothly without their support." – child care provider

Some grantees who had previous experience with receiving grants appreciated the more intensive technical assistance offered by the Repair and Renovation Grant and felt it made a positive difference in implementation. One grantee served by ELPM reflected:

> "I've been through a lot of grant applications, implementation, and reporting. I felt like this was really well done, and having the technical advisor was really good because a lot of the time you may be awarded grant money, but you're kind of on your own." – child care provider

While there were many examples of positive experiences with technical assistance, there were also challenges discussed by grantees and project interest holders. Some of these challenges were project-wide, spanning technical assistance providers, while others were specific to individual technical assistance organizations.

One element that interest holders perceived as both a strength and a challenge was the operation of multiple technical assistance models within a single grant program. The approach to technical assistance was not a prescribed model that all three technical assistance providers executed. Instead, each partner entered the project with the flexibility to bring their own approaches. Responsible for twelve projects funded through private dollars, ELPM took on the role of project manager, working directly with contractors to develop project scope and oversee project progress. LIIF and RF supported 45 publicly-funded projects. Initially, the two organizations envisioned a technical assistance model in which they would serve as guides to grantees, rather than acting as direct project managers. A interest holder described their previous experiences with facilities projects that they anticipated would be relevant to the Repair and Renovation Grant:

> "Our model gives the provider more autonomy in making decisions and also gives them some more responsibility for facilitation. We are not as involved because the provider chooses the contractor. The provider negotiates with the contractor, and the provider is the one who is ultimately ensuring that they get what they want, and we can step in as needed, but the assumption is that the provider is driving this." – project interest holder

As the grant program progressed, the project team adapted the technical assistance support for publicly-funded projects from capacity-building support to more direct project management. The PAACT team also took a more involved role in the day-to-day construction project management than initially envisioned. They increasingly took on the decision-making for publicly-funded projects, creating checkpoints for technical assistance organizations and issuing approvals for next steps. While PAACT always envisioned itself as a collaborative partner and connector in the work, the role of decision-maker evolved in response to project challenges.

Interest holders reported that this shift was necessary to address ongoing difficulties related to contractor communication, work quality issues, compliance needs, and lagging project timelines. They also emphasized that the movement toward greater day-to-day construction project management especially intensified in response to what program interest holders described as the most significant implementation challenge: a mid-program pause and revision of program processes.

Given that the source of the public funding supporting the projects was federal ARPA dollars, compliance was a key concern for all interest holders, including the City of Atlanta, which would ultimately be held responsible. In the Fall of 2024, after the Repair and

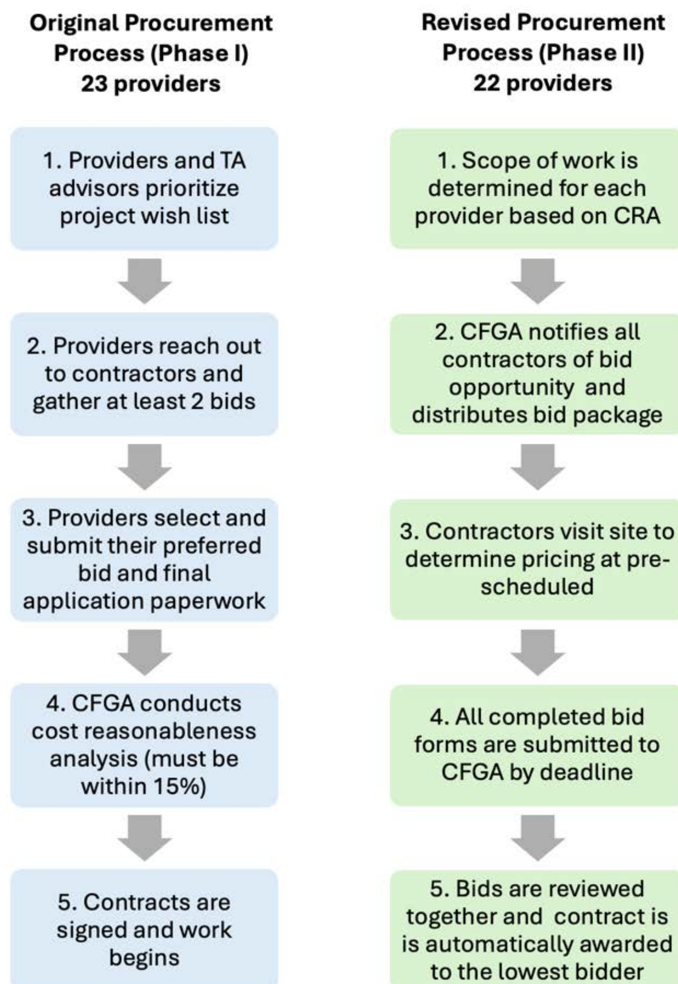
Renovation Grant had been operating for a year, the compliance consulting firm engaged by the City raised concerns about the process in place. The original bidding process involved grantees contacting contractors, who would then scope out the projects and submit a bid to them. Grantees were required to secure at least two bids. They then selected the contractor and bid that they preferred. This bid was submitted to the CFGA, and a cost reasonableness analysis was conducted utilizing specialized software for this purpose. If the costs of the selected bid were deemed reasonable, the contractor was hired, and projects were allowed to proceed.

In May 2024, compliance auditors engaged by the City of Atlanta issued a report raising concerns with the procurement process. While this process was articulated and agreed upon during initial planning and documented in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between PAACT partners and the City of Atlanta, differing understandings of some of the key process elements existed between compliance consultants and PAACT partners, particularly related to contractor procurement and communication and the scope of work development. They stated that, to comply with federal funding requirements, standardized scopes of work should be developed for each grantee and a cost reasonableness analysis (CRA) conducted before requesting sealed bids from contractors in the prequalified pool. Specifically, they requested a new process in which contractors bid on identical scopes of work, proposals are submitted in a prescribed format detailing work tasks, proposal dates align within a 30-day window, and CRA is conducted on the scopes of work prior to bids being received and selected.

Consequently, a program pause on issuing any new construction contracts was initiated from Summer 2024 through the remainder of the year. During this period, the PAACT partners gathered information about facilities improvement initiatives across the country and other expert opinions, hoping to preserve the existing process, which they felt was in line with both federal and local standards and the existing agreement. Upon review, the City of Atlanta and compliance contractors determined they would move forward with a revised process, but would accept the preexisting process for previously contracted projects. Figure 24 outlines the original Phase I procurement process and the Phase II revised process. The new process changed how contractors were hired. Rather than having grantees contact contractors to secure bids, the project team established a set scope of work for each project in concert with CFGA. Project interest holders emphasized that these scopes were made possible only because providers had already secured bids before the procurement process changed. The information contained in those earlier bids was critical for developing accurate scopes in Phase II. They also noted that creating scopes without this prior bid information would have required costly upfront assessments, which had previously been identified as financially prohibitive during program design and could pose a barrier to replicating this model.

The developed project scope was presented in a standardized bid form and emailed to the pool of contractors. Contractors were invited to walk the site on specific days and times to assess the project and develop their pricing proposals. They then completed the bid form and emailed it to the CFGA contact by a specific date and time. Once the bids had all been received, they would be compared, and the lowest-priced bid would be automatically awarded the contract, removing the choice from the grantees about which contractor would be selected.

Figure 24. Initial and Revised Repair and Renovation Procurement and Bidding



As this new process rolled out, it was agreed that grantees who had already executed contracts in place would proceed and would be considered "Phase 1." Any grantees that did not have an executed contract (22 grantees) would be regarded as "Phase 2" and would be subject to the new procurement process.

Some viewed the new process as a positive change resulting from a difficult situation, as it created a more uniform bidding procedure. Because scopes were set before contractors considered the work, it created an opportunity for "apples to apples" comparison. With the original process, especially for some of the more complicated jobs, bids varied, making it more difficult for grantees to compare them. Even so, bid variation can sometimes reflect important differences in contractors' approaches, which can be useful information for grantees when selecting the vendor that best fits their needs. Interest holders noted that it would have been ideal for scopes to be identified upfront as part of the application phase of the process. However, the costs of engaging expertise upfront to evaluate and scope out every project would have been prohibitive for the program. Scopes were developed and distributed by the CFGG for Phase 2 grantees because they could draw on previously received bids for information about the work to be completed.

While the new process refined and standardized the bidding process, it also created confusion among grantees who were already frustrated by lagging timelines and difficulties in communicating with contractors. All grantees began their grant award at similar times, receiving the second part of the application form in early September 2023. Phase I grantees had an average project duration of one year and two months, while Phase II grantees experienced an average duration of approximately one year and nine months. As of August 6, 2025, 82% (47) of projects were complete. Seven (7) out of the ten (10) projects that were incomplete were Phase II projects, while only one was a Phase I, and two were projects supported by private funding. Several factors contributed to project delays, including waiting for inspection dates and contractor responsiveness. However, the compliance pause was identified as a primary contributing factor. One interest holder noted that although work resumed in January, it did not immediately lead to significant project progress. Some contractors had dropped out of the project or were no longer able to take on the work they had previously considered. This meant that grantees had to restart the bidding process, which was especially frustrating for those who were days away from signing a contract with their selected contractor when the pause was initiated. One interviewee reflected on the grantee perspective:

> "It was already hard enough to do this work before, but now you've started them over. They're frustrated. They're tired. Some of them have been engaged in this process for two years at this point." – project interest holder

Interest holders also reported that technical assistance advisors faced the difficult task of explaining what was happening and why to the grantees. Interviewees reported that grantees struggled to understand why they were no longer allowed to select the contractor that would be performing the work in their program. Under the revised procurement process, the contractor was selected based on the lowest bid. Interviewees report that already tenuous grantee-contractor communication was exacerbated by this loss of choice and often necessitated greater involvement and facilitation by technical assistance grantees to move projects forward. Sometimes, when conflicts arose between grantees and contractors, the grantees expressed additional frustration because they had not chosen this contractor and now were unhappy with the quality of the work or the project experience. One interviewee summarized the differences between the Phase I and Phase II experiences:

> "The Phase II folks really had no agency. Phase I folks were calling the contractors themselves. They were walking through the scopes of work themselves...There were places where that led to less clarity, but there was still that sense of agency, and they got to choose from the three bids which one they felt was the right bid." – project interest holder

Complicated contractor-grantee interactions were identified as a program challenge that often required technical assistance providers to step in and keep projects on track.

Throughout data collection, grantees and project interest holders described mixed experiences engaging and working with contractors. While most grantees were satisfied with the quality of work and professional service they experienced, others described scenarios where projects required extensive follow-up, close monitoring, and occasionally remediation of unsatisfactory work, or even removal from the project. Survey results reflected this mixed experience: while 87% of respondents (n = 31) were satisfied with their contractor and 83% rated the quality as "Good" or better, only 52% said their project was completed on time (Figures 25-27).

Figure 25. Grantee Satisfaction with Contractors

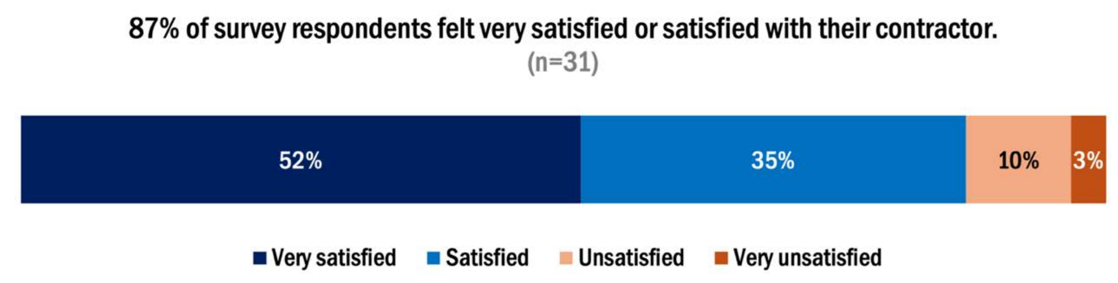


Figure 26. Project Completion Rate

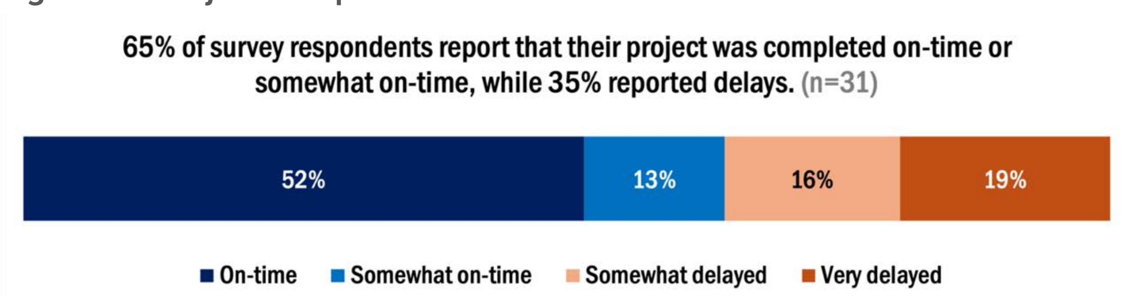
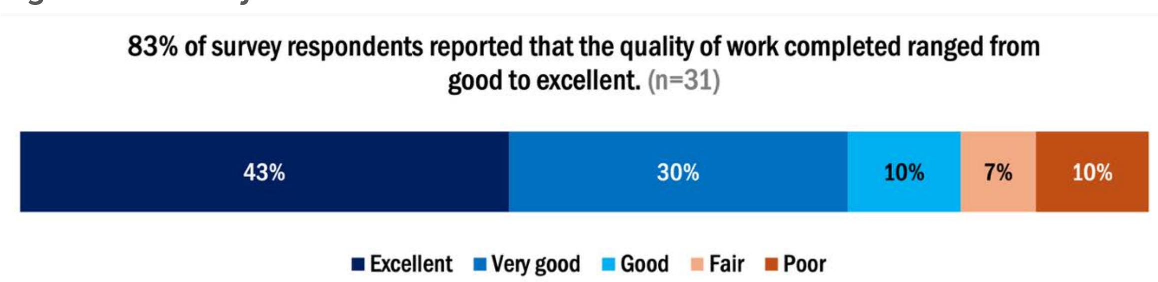


Figure 27. Quality of Work



Conversations with grantees and interest holders revealed the characteristics and best practices of more positively received contractors, and also offered context and deeper perspectives on the challenges. Many observed that successful contractors demonstrated a greater willingness to adapt their work to accommodate their presence in an active, operational child care facility. Contractors with previous experience with child care programs entered projects with a clearer understanding that these environments differ from typical construction sites, where safety, noise, and continuity of care must be carefully balanced. As one contractor put it, "You just have to be more cautious when working around children." During interviews, grantees and project interest holders described the practices, behaviors, or characteristics demonstrated by contractors who had a good command of the intricacies of working in child care environments. These conversations provided valuable insights into what leads to success in facilities programs. Table 7 summarizes these practices and offers direct supporting quotes as evidence.

Table 7. Effective Practices and Behaviors Demonstrated by Contractors

Practice/Behavior/ Characteristic	Supporting Quote
Awareness of Child Care Regulations.	"I was really proud of our team because we jumped in their to learn the safety requirements according to Bright from the Start: DECAL, things like the requirements of fencing height." -contractor
Keeping grantees informed of daily impacts on their operations.	"He [the contractor] came in, talked to me, and told me what they were going to do. He told me how long it would be before they would finish and before you could go back out onto the playground again. He was very informative when doing different stuff. He came back and rechecked and let me know what they were doing." -grantee
Bringing a mission-driven focus to the work.	"We've had several projects that made all the difference in the world. I mean, they had new playgrounds, turf things that provided a safe environment and kind of leveled the playing field for the kids." -contractor
Recognition that there would be children and teachers present in active learning environments.	"We tried to work very closely with the teachers and directors so that we weren't just showing up and tried to build a personal relationship with them and to try to keep that going. There are rules about what to wear, to be polite, and not leaving tools or creating safety hazards." -contractor
Creativity with the construction schedule and working around teaching and learning times.	"We felt like the contractors that ELPM used were really good about working with us around our schedule. They were able to accommodate it [the construction] during our school breaks, and weekend, and evenings." -grantee

Interviewees also described less positive contractor interactions and what can occur when best practices are not observed. Some grantees shared examples of receiving citations for unfinished projects or discovering safety hazards caused by the construction. One grantee reflected:

> "I would say my contractors were not versed in the safety of working in a child care center. They do a lot of yelling. I left one day and came in the next day, and there's a wooden. plank with nails sticking out of it. I was like, 'You know I have small children here, right?" – child care provider

Grantees who identified difficulties with their contractors often pointed to long delays with project work with few updates and overcommitting and underperforming on the scopes of work. Contractors or interest holders who observed contractor-grantee relationships identified challenges stemming from grantees eager to stretch their grant funding, expecting work that was beyond project scope, also known as "scope creep." There were also examples of grantees who were unresponsive when project direction was needed.

The convergence of these challenges likely caused grantees and contractors to struggle with maintaining consistent and productive communication. They relied more heavily on their technical assistance provider and PAACT staff to facilitate communication and move projects forward. Technical assistance advisors often found themselves navigating difficult terrain with grantee-contractor relationships. They had to work to ensure they were aware of each piece of communication and understood the frequently complicated chain of events that led to specific points of conflict. This was not always easy, as the technical assistance provider had to communicate with the contractor through the grantee, creating a three-way indirect pathway. An interviewee described the challenge in her own words:

> "There was truly a disconnect between the contractors and the TA partners. I think the TA partners sometimes were put in really difficult situations to help mitigate really hard dynamics between the provider and the contractor, and they weren't prepared for that." – project interest holder

The challenging contractor-grantee dynamics were compounded by the limited number of contractors who agreed to participate in the Repair and Renovation Grant. Interest holders consistently highlighted the difficulty of building and maintaining a contractor pool as an implementation barrier. As of April 2024, there were sixteen approved builders in the Repair and Renovation Grant contractor pool. As of the data collection for the summative evaluation (July 2025), the contractor pool had been reduced to two to three reliable contractors. There were two primary factors that interest holders believed contributed to the disengagement of contractors and the difficulty in attracting new ones:

1. Administrative and compliance burdens. Interest holders observed that often, quality contractors busy with other projects had little interest in taking on the additional administrative burden of the grant. This extra work included building and submitting more detailed bids than they typically create, invoicing in multiple stages, submitting lien waivers and change orders, obtaining approval for work before payment, and coordinating with various oversight entities, such as technical assistance providers, the project fiscal agent, and PAACT staff. This limited the already small pool of contractors who were willing to consider participation. One interest holder described the perspective of contractors and the impact that the additional bidding requirements had on their willingness to take on Repair and Renovation Grant projects:

> "We were already having trouble getting people to even bid because so many of them found the process already quite arduous. So that was a real challenge." – project interest holder

Another interest holder shared this sentiment and commented:

> "I think one of the problematic things is we had a small pool to start with, and then, I'd say two-thirds of them kind of dropped out or just weren't interested in doing any more work once they heard about the requirements. So, you know, I think we ended up with two or three contractors who were reliable." – project interest holder

2. Difficulty finding and vetting 'right-sized' contractors. Many contractors, especially those with medium to large-sized firms, consider a $75,000 project to be relatively small. Interest holders reported that these smaller projects sometimes attracted contractors who were less established and seeking work. These small contractors would sometimes commit to multiple projects but lacked the staff and capacity to complete them simultaneously. This contributed to the lagging project timelines and affected grantee-contractor relationships. One grantee interviewed reflected on this experience.

> "I think another thing that made everything so slow they were explaining to me that their particular contractors were working on so many daycares. It's like they needed more or people were picking the cheaper ones. And so one or two people were doing all of the daycares, which pushed it all back." – child care provider

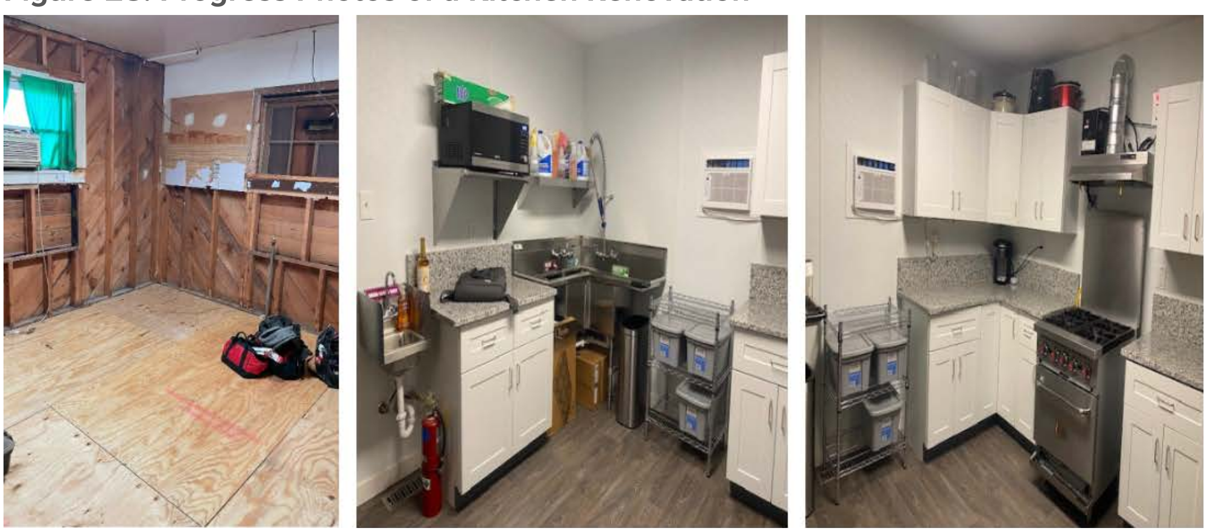
Comments such as this confirmed observations of contractor capacity challenges, especially during Phase II when the lowest bids were automatically selected. One interviewee described a scenario in which contractors realized they would win the job if their bids were low enough and, as a result, ended up taking on too many projects at once.

> "Contractors are like, well, I'm winning all the bids because I'm putting in the lowest bids. So what's happening is by default, some of our contractors have multiple jobs. We have one contractor where I really think he's out of capacity because he has four jobs at the same time and that's why he's taking so long to close out the projects. He's trying to do a little bit of work at each of the facilities at one time instead of just doing one facility and finishing it and moving on to the next one." – project interest holder

The experience of working with very small contractors alongside the difficulty of engaging larger firms suggested that the ideal contractor for the Repair and Renovation Grant is one with the capacity to take on multiple jobs, a strong subcontractor network, and a dedicated administrative staff to manage paperwork and compliance requirements.

The project team also learned that building a solid and reliable contractor pool is an ongoing process. Interest holders felt that the compressed grant launch window, spanning the Summer of 2023, was insufficient time to recruit quality contractors who adequately fit the project parameters. Recruitment activities included hosting a contractor recruitment webinar (May 21, 2023) and inviting contractors to participate through partner networks and outreach led by the Community Foundation. Despite these efforts, the initial response rate was low within the narrow window (June-August 2023). Grantees were provisionally awarded in September 2023. Another timing challenge was that contractors initially vetted and onboarded to the program in summer 2023 sometimes had availability at that time, but then moved on to other jobs by the time grantees were ready to move forward with projects. Additionally, many grantees sought more specialized work, such as playground upgrades. Interest holders reported that it was difficult to identify and attract companies with specific playground expertise within such a short timeframe.

Figure 28. Progress Photos of a Kitchen Renovation



Given the increasing demands that technical assistance providers experienced as their role evolved into one of construction project management as opposed to project guidance and advice, key lessons were learned.

Construction Background

While technical assistance providers brought national perspectives and experience with other successful facilities improvement projects, not all staff had a direct construction background, which proved to be a necessary skill set for grant implementation. During almost every conversation, interviewees emphasized that a thorough understanding of construction is crucial, from the initial scoping to the final walkthrough. One interviewee reflected on an experience where they felt there was a missing piece in the initial prioritization of work, because the untrained eye may see superficial damage and want it remediated, but lacks the experience to know the extent to which other issues may be causing the visible problems.

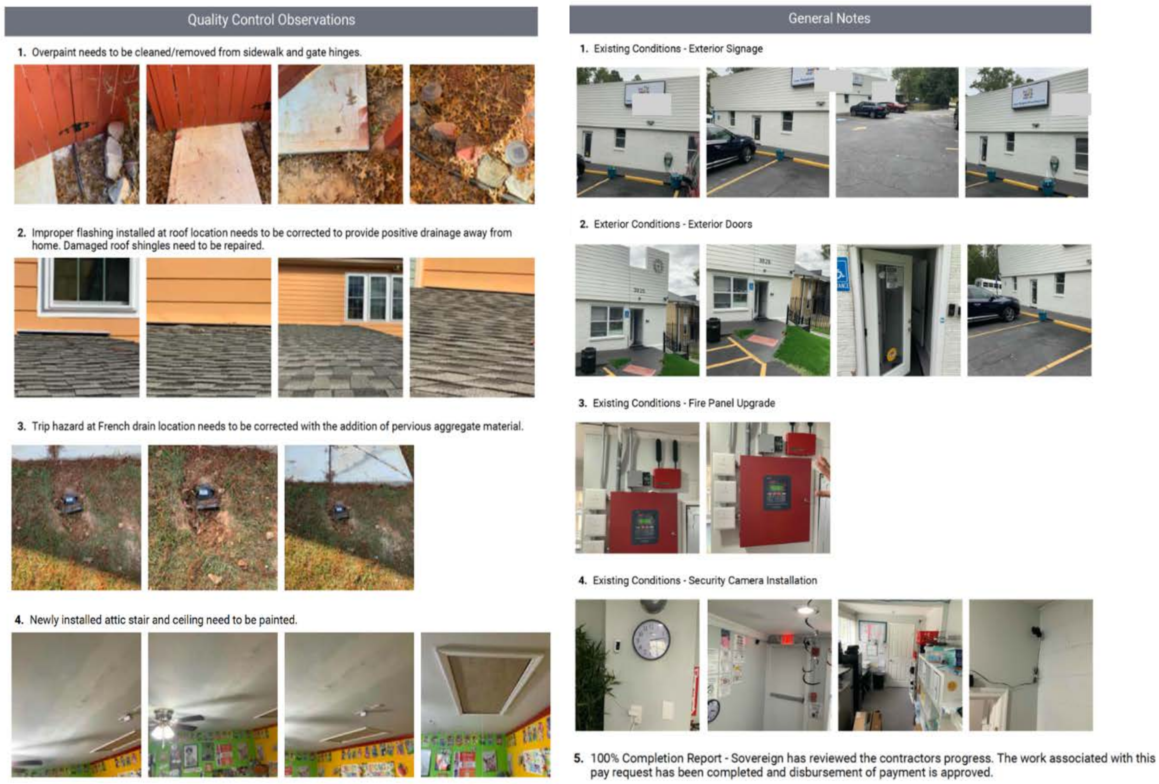
> "You know, the struggle from our standpoint is you have people who are doing the scopes who are walking the jobs who are deciding how the money would be spent, and they had absolutely no experience in contracting or building or what it would take. It was, 'Hey, I want this wall, or I want this without knowing all the unforeseen [issues] that could come into play. They were really heavily focused on their wish list."
> – project interest holder

Most technical assistance advisors did not have a direct construction background and faced a steep learning curve. One of the project strengths was the engagement of a construction monitor, who visited sites and assessed the quality and completeness of work both at the mid-point and during the final inspection. The construction monitor issued thorough reports with images, describing the current conditions as they observed them at the site, and identified when work was sufficient to warrant payment. The reports also offered recommendations for remediation if unsatisfactory work was found. One interest holder interviewed reflected on the value of the construction monitor for the publicly-funded projects.

> "One thing I do like in our process is that we had a third-party general contractor on all the jobs who comes out when the job is done and does an evaluation and reviews like, 'Does this work pass?' I'm thankful for that because we had some things that did not pass and we had to ask the contractor to go back and remediate, and in some bad situations, we had to go and get another contractor to fix it." – project interest holder

Figure 29 presents excerpts from two construction monitoring reports: one indicates sufficient project completion, while the other identifies issues requiring remediation. These monitoring reports were collected and reviewed for all publicly supported projects.

Figure 29. Example Construction Monitoring Reports (Quality Control Issues and General Notes)



Familiarity with Local Regulations and Ordinances

At the program outset, technical assistance partners had experience working in diverse geographies nationally, but were relatively new to the Atlanta-specific ordinances and regulations relevant to child care repair and renovation projects.

ELPM's approach further highlights the importance of bringing a construction background and intimate familiarity with local building regulations and ordinances to the project. ELPM's structure placed experienced staff with a construction background in the project manager role, overseeing scoping, contractor selection, permitting, inspections, and weekly site meetings. The model demonstrates how integrating technical assistance with deep construction knowledge can bridge the gap between child care provider aspirations and the realities of construction implementation. Interest holders also described how ELPM's local expertise was an important asset that benefited both public and privately supported projects. One interviewee recounted an example of receiving guidance on the involvement of the fire marshal, which helped move a project forward:

> "[The ELPM Executive Director] has been an asset because she is on the ground, a local partner. She was able to be an advisor...She was able to say, 'From my experience, you need to get that run by the fire marshal...Have you checked that?' So it's been the beauty of having a local partner who's been doing the work, can help and be an advisor and support our public dollar TA partners." – project interest holder

Geographical Limitations and Consistency

Another key lesson learned from this implementation was the challenges associated with providing remote technical assistance. Virtual check-ins helped maintain connection, but onsite visits were crucial for monitoring construction progress and resolving issues. Interviewees reported that onsite visits allowed technical assistance staff to observe project details firsthand, identify safety issues that grantees may not have noticed, and have more direct interactions with grantees and contractors to help manage the dynamic.

In addition to in-person visits, grantees also valued having a consistent technical assistance advisor throughout the project. This consistency reportedly builds stronger relationships, clearer communication channels, and a sense of accountability and reliability. Some grantees and interest holders described instances of staff turnover and shifting contacts, which impacted grantee and trust in the support. One interest holder shared their perspective on how turnover can affect the work.

> "Providers are like, 'Who am I working with?" and they start losing trust in the program because they're like, you're sending this person from this organization, but then you've got this person, and that person quits. Now you send this person. So that did create some administrative chaos for the child care providers that we couldn't prevent in the middle of implementation." – project interest holder

The overall learning from these experiences is that practical technical assistance requires both regular onsite visits and consistent staffing. Attention to these elements was identified as a way to enhance grantee trust building and ensure the successful completion of projects.

Grantee capacity building and learning about how to engage in and manage repair and renovation projects were observed, but this growth likely did not equip grantees to manage projects from start to finish independently.

In addition to improving child care facilities throughout Atlanta, empowering child care providers with the skills and knowledge necessary to undertake repairs and renovations of their facilities was a primary goal of the grant. Initially, the implementation team envisioned an experience where grantees supported with public funding would be the drivers of their projects, taking on the management of contractor interactions and owning the process. Technical assistance providers would be available to offer information and support, as well as guide decision-making, but would not act as project managers. In theory, the knowledge gained during this supported process would equip grantees to pursue repair and renovation projects in the future as they draw upon their grant experience. (Grantees supported by ELPM would experience a different model, where ELPM would assume the role and responsibilities of project manager.) While evidence of capacity building was observed among grantees served by both models, it was generally limited to observational knowledge and participation, rather than the full project management capacity envisioned. Grantees gained exposure to working with contractors, understanding bid processes, and navigating compliance requirements. However, the complexity and scale of repair and renovation projects still required ongoing project management by technical assistance advisors to ensure completion.

While this was generally true for most grantees who participated in the evaluation, some would have preferred a model that offered them more autonomy and self-management of their construction projects. These grantees tended to be those from large centers with more robust internal management and organizational structures, or grantees who had previous experience, either personally or professionally, with renovation and construction. For example, one owner of a smaller center reflected that, she had extensive experience selling real estate and rehabbing properties. She had a contractor that she had worked with previously and was eager to work with him again on this project. While this contractor did not become part of the approved contractor pool, he was able to be hired as a subcontractor by the general contractor who was eventually awarded the job.

This desire for greater autonomy in managing construction projects was not the predominant opinion among grantees. Almost half (45%) of surveyed grantees reported that they had never completed a major renovation on their home or business before the grant (n = 29). Many interest holders and grantees may have wanted to take a more active role in project management, but did not have the time to do so, given the demands of operating a child care business. This was especially true for FCCs who have limited availability during the day. One interviewee pointed out:

> "Family providers aren't always available all day long in the ways that some center directors might be. So it's really hard to get in touch with them."
> – project interest holder

Another interest holder described scenarios where center directors, who were initially engaged in project management, lost teachers mid-project and had to spend more time in the classrooms to mitigate the staffing shortage. This compromised the grantees' ability to focus on their project and required heavier involvement from the technical assistance provider to ensure the projects continued to progress and were eventually completed.

> "I had several projects where they lost staff as we were going through the process, and so they were even more short-staffed. I don't want to try to build capacity at the cost of not getting the project done, right? So once I kind of got to that line where I'm like, this is not going to get done if I don't step in and try to assist." – project interest holder

Several grantees expressed appreciation for not having to manage all aspects of their projects, but still had the opportunity to make significant decisions about design and color choices. While most grantees did not consider themselves project managers, they appreciated being informed about the project's progress, next steps, and what to expect. One grantee reflected:

> "My time is so stretched thin that it was nice to only have to make the major decision about what things would look like." – child care provider

In addition to examples of grantee appreciation for overall project management support, examples were also shared that described the ways grantees contributed to the forward progress of projects. Table 8 presents these examples, which were collected through interviews, surveys, and focus groups. They demonstrate emergent project management skills likely developed through the support of the Repair and Renovation Grant.

Table 8. Emergent Project Management Skills Observed Among Grantees

Skill or Practice	Evidence from Grantees
Self-advocacy	"I had a consultant and she was amazing in making sure the communication came across clearer because I started to get upset from having to have the same conversation over and over again with the contractor that I was going to just tell him he could stop the project. But she let me know that my rights as a recipient in the program should be heard and to not just give up. So that was a great interceding on her part to make sure quality was met and they assured me that I am able to get what I'm asking for."
Researching and selecting a contractor	"I do own the building and it's been so old and it's been needing things, and so we've tinkered with things since the beginning. We have been burnt by a contractor before early on, and so, I really appreciate the support and helping to vet the contractors. It's a reminder that those extra layers of due diligence are so important. I would say, that would probably be the biggest takeaway to make sure that you don't get taken."
Tracking project progress	"I kept track of the budget very well. I followed each project to make sure that I knew what money was still left to render the things that were left on the list. So think that was a big help that they did a budget and it was a verified budget. It was easy to follow and track and it was easy to make sure that noting was unaccounted for."

Survey analysis also revealed evidence of grantee capacity building, as all respondents (100%) reported that they are likely to undertake repair and renovation projects again in the future (Figures 30-31).

Figure 30. Likelihood to pursue repair projects

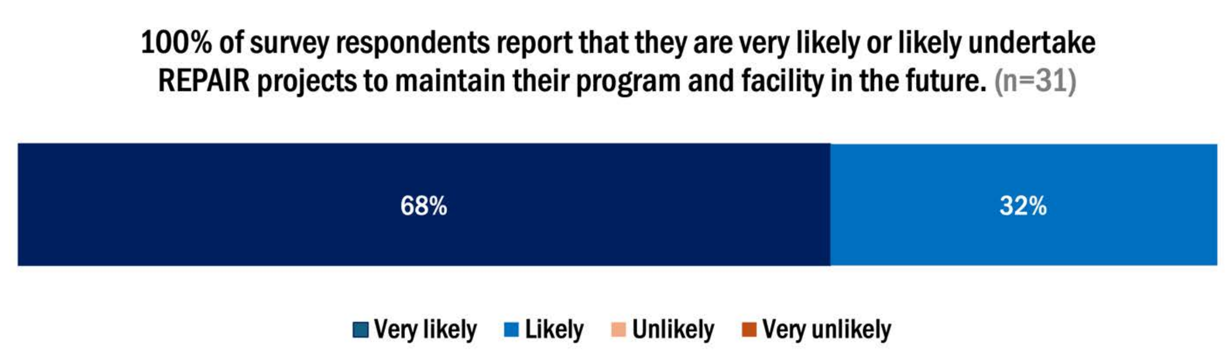
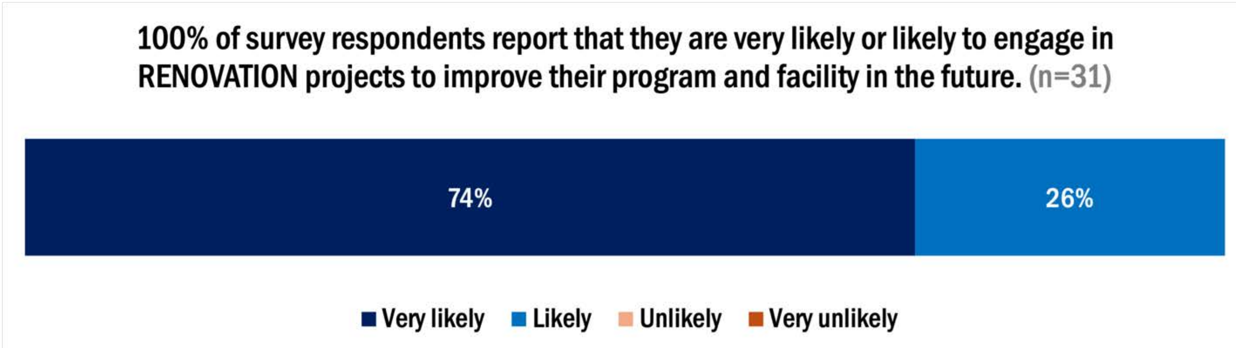


Figure 31. Likelihood to pursue renovation projects



The grant also sought to build grantees' capacity as networked, confident business owners and operators. One strategy to accomplish this goal was to connect grantees with QCC for a business assessment. This assessment involved a comprehensive review of a program's fiscal and operational data by a QCC Business Support Specialist. Evaluation data indicate that the QCC business assessment was perceived as providing valuable information about a child care program's business operations and sustainability. Interest holders describe the complementary nature of business coaching and facilities improvement projects. From an operational perspective, the QCC business assessment provided critical information to the implementation team, as it raised "red flags" signaling potential risks that a grantee may not remain open due to financial constraints. In at least one instance, this helped the project team determine the viability of moving forward with a project. One interest holder felt that this type of business assessment should be mandatory at the time of program entry.

> "The providers need to go through a financial baseline to get an idea of where they're at in terms of their books…It was optional, and some people did it and some didn't. That would be something I would say you absolutely have to go through before you can even get the grant…. Because what I will say is not having that in place, and then we later on found out that some projects had some issues in terms of licensing that popped up when we were trying to do projects." – project interest holder

Many grantees also found the QCC business assessment support helpful. Sixty-three percent (63%) of survey respondents reported that they had participated in the business assessment (n=30). Of those respondents, 80% indicated that the assessment was "extremely" or "very helpful" and 20% described it as "somewhat helpful" (n=20). Interviewed grantees also confirmed this helpfulness. Many who had experienced the assessment process described its primary benefit as helping them to identify additional revenue opportunities that they either weren't aware of or had overlooked. One grantee shared the recommendations they received from QCC and expressed their satisfaction with the process.

> "I think it was a really good exercise. Honestly, as child care owners, we're always very self-conscious of how we are in line with the industry and what we're paying the teachers. Because that data is not necessarily readily available on what the next competitor might or might not be paying. But the QCC representative was very knowledgeable and gave a lot of good insight without naming any particular center. She said, "Here's the average, here's where you are, here's where there are some opportunities for improvement. It was definitely eye-opening." – child care provider

This example, describing the benefits of the business assessment, along with others shared throughout the evaluation, indicates that grantee capacity building also occurred beyond the facilities improvement work. Grantees who worked with QCC gained valuable insights into the financial management of their businesses, and some even enrolled in the full QCC Business Support program.

Another benefit that many grantees experienced from participating in the grant is the connection to other programs and supports. This connection evidences the grantee's capacity to network and access additional funding and support. In addition to learning about QCC, survey respondents reported learning about programs as a result of their participation in the grant (Table 9). Information about these programs often came in the form of information shared by technical assistance advisors, as well as emails or notifications directly from PAACT.

Table 9. Programs Learned About from Repair and Renovation Grant (n=34)

Program	Grantees
QCC Business Support Program	14
PAACT child care scholarships	11
Early Childhood Champions	10
Literacy and Justice for All (LJFA)	7
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	6
Georgia Pre-K	3
Resilient Georgia	2

In addition to learning about the new programs listed above, administrative data indicate that 95% of grantees were also engaged in at least one other program disseminated by PAACT either before or during their grant participation (Figure 32).

Table 10 presents the individual programs as well as the number of grantees that participated in each. This high level of participation and connection further supports the capacity-building impacts of the grant. Grantees leveraged multiple supports to improve their resilience and sustainability.

Figure 32. 95% of grantees participated in at least one other PAACT related program. (n=57)

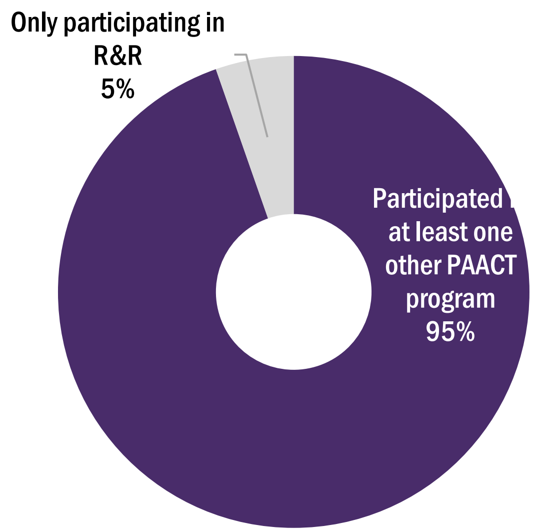


Table 10. Other program participation (by program)

Program	Program Description	Grantees
Rotary Early Literacy & Retention Award	Award program supported by Atlanta Rotary that funds child care programs to strengthen early literacy supports and promote staff retention through supplemental resources.	35
BOOST Scholarships powered by QCC	Tuition scholarships that increase access to early childhood education for children from low-income families, supporting enrollment stability for participating providers.	32
Stabilization Grants	Public funding provided during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to stabilize child care programs by offsetting operating costs and preventing closures.	22
APS Employee Scholarships	Scholarships designated for children of Atlanta Public Schools employees, expanding access to care and supporting the workforce.	22
CFB $5,000 Stipend (CFPF and United Way)	One-time stipends of $5,000 distributed to child care providers with support from the College Football Playoff Foundation and United Way, aimed at provider recovery and stability.	12

P-3 Fellowship	Professional development fellowship supporting early learning leaders to strengthen Pre-K through 3rd grade alignment, leadership, and instructional quality.	9
Literacy and Justice for All (23-24 or 24-25)	Alliance site participation during the 2023–24 year, connecting providers with regional improvement collaboratives and data-driven supports.	16
AETNA SEL	Small pilot program supported by AETNA focused on building social-emotional learning (SEL) supports for children and staff in early learning settings.	1
Repair and Renovation Grant (2021-22)	PAACT-led facilities improvement grant program (up to $75,000) supporting 57 child care sites with critical repairs and renovations to improve quality and business sustainability.	1

In addition to participation records, survey results indicating that grantees feel more connected to resources and are more confident in their business due to the grant also demonstrate the program's ability to build grantee capacity. Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents report feeling more connected to resources and supports than they did before the grant, and 87% feel more confident in their business's future (n=31) (Figures 33-34).

Figure 33. Connection to Resources

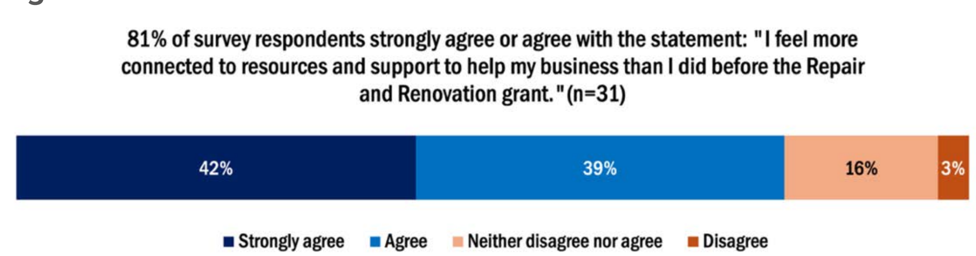
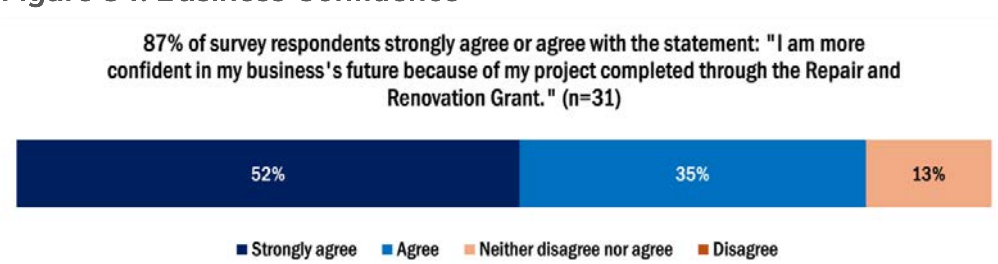


Figure 34. Business Confidence



Taken together, the findings in this section highlight that the grant not only generated program facility improvements but also likely strengthened many grantees' ability to position themselves as connected and informed small business owners. Grantees who availed themselves of QCC's business assessment and connected with additional sources of funding reportedly experienced reinforced financial awareness and observed that they strengthened their connection to Atlanta's early childhood ecosystem.

Key Evaluation Question
What was the efficacy and impact of collaborative public/private partnerships? What best practices and lessons learned can be shared with the field?

The public/private partnership structure of the Repair and Renovation Grant demonstrated how multiple funding sources can be leveraged to strengthen impact, and surfaced important lessons learned for future investments.

The Repair and Renovation Grant represents a new way of bringing together public and private entities to support child care facilities on a city-wide scale. During interviews, many interest holders emphasized that this was the first time that the local project team had attempted a project of this scope and nature in Atlanta. While there were difficult moments, projects were ultimately completed, and valuable strategies and lessons were forged that could only have been discovered by navigating implementation successes and challenges. One interest holder reflected on the emergent learning that occurred over the course of the grant period:

> "I think the caveat in all of this is that it was the first time that the City of Atlanta had ever done anything like this. So there were a lot of unknowns, a lot of things that we would find out after the fact and say, 'Oh yeah, it makes sense. We should have totally done that differently.' We had never done anything like this, so there were going to be some things that we were just unaware of." – project interest holder

Others discussed the benefits and challenges of the program's collaborative nature. Each partner brought unique strengths to the team. GEEARS and PAACT contributed their strong connections and trusted relationships with local child care providers across Atlanta. This supported strong recruitment efforts and networking with local partners and resources for grantees. Mayor Andre Dickens' office publicly elevated child care facilities improvements as a matter of civic infrastructure. A public pledge, accompanied by publicized ribbon cuttings and consistent visibility, reinforced the message that safe, high-quality child care environments are a priority. Technical assistance partners (RF, LIIF, and ELPM) brought national experience with child care facilities projects and a perspective on their implementation. The CFGA provided fiscal oversight and compliance management, supporting project accountability and transparency.

While multiple partners created opportunities for collaboration and creative thinking, enabling progress and addressing challenges, some felt that having so many perspectives led to confusion and convoluted decision-making. For example, one interest holder noted that due to the decentralized, collaborative nature of the partnerships, it was sometimes unclear who would ultimately make decisions, resulting in a groupthink that was not always efficient or viewed as necessary for all decisions. They described a situation where there were just "too many cooks in the kitchen at once." Ultimately, interest holders report that PAACT assumed the role of decision-maker out of necessity; however, the original intent was for a more shared decision-making process. Interest holders believe that establishing clearly defined and documented roles and responsibilities from the outset for all partnering entities would have streamlined decision-making.

Project partners also discovered the benefits and challenges of public versus private funding sources. Public dollars offer scale and accountability. Distributing public dollars made it possible to support dozens of child care facility projects at once. The City of Atlanta's public investment formed the core of the grant pool, enabling the program to reach 45 child care providers across the city, complemented by 12 privately funded projects. This level of impact would likely not have been possible with philanthropy alone.

While private funding may not have the same potential to reach the scale of the public funding, it was viewed by project interest holders as more flexible. This was especially evident when projects did not go according to plan or took longer than anticipated. While 90% of providers surveyed reported that their businesses were able to operate normally as they completed their projects, 10% reported that they were not (n = 31). Instances of operational disruptions were also described during interviews. For the most extreme disruptions, the PAACT was able to access private dollars to provide bridge funding for some grantees, compensating them for the loss of revenue. PAACT and GEEARS helped to raise these private dollars, which contributed to the $20 million investment invitation issued by the City of Atlanta. For example, one grantee experienced an extended kitchen closure due to construction project delays that required her to cater all meals for her center. Another interest holder reflected on the experience of a grantee who had to close her infant room for more than a year because of project delays.

> "The contractor literally disappeared. We contracted the contractor, signed the agreement, paid them their 30% and they literally abandoned the job. Unfortunately, that provider had to go through the whole rebidding process, which takes time. It put that provider a whole year without an infant classroom...and literally lost families who were disenrolling or could not enroll because the classroom never opened back up as promised. They received a business operations grant from private dollars. We have

> appreciation for those private dollars because you cannot do that with public dollars." – project interest holder

Again, the need to offer these business operations grants was not widespread, and only two instances were discussed during the data collection. However, the example shared above highlights the importance of flexible funding and the role it plays in fully supporting the expected and unexpected needs that emerge during construction projects. This flexibility would not have been possible with public funding sources; therefore, having both public and private sources was seen as a project necessity.

While public dollars brought scale and accountability, they also introduced challenges that impacted the experiences of grantees and partners, as discussed previously in this report. Strict compliance requirements often slowed down project timelines and added complexity to the planning process. Requirements were needed to ensure transparency and fairness, but were sometimes misaligned with the realities of small child care businesses that lacked experience navigating construction projects or formal procurement processes. Grantees and partners often felt burdened by the administrative demands and frustrated by the lack of flexibility to adapt funding to on-the-ground circumstances.

Despite the challenges and tensions between public and private funding sources, project interest holders ultimately view the grant as an important demonstration of the power that combining public and private efforts can have in addressing the difficult challenge of improving local child care facilities. One interest holder summarized the sentiment that many shared:

> "We accomplished something really big by doing a public and private dollar model. That's the one thing I will have to tell, regardless of the challenges that we faced. We ran two separate models together at the same time, and that's a win because that's the essence of collective impact. We have public dollar streams that are running to support the outcomes of improving child care facilities. So I always think that grounds me in the fact that we are rooted in public-private investments and leveraging partnerships."
> – project interest holder

Recommendations

Key Evaluation Question
What opportunities exist to refine grant program design and implementation?

The PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant is a unique effort to leverage public and private funds to support improvements to child care facilities at scale across Atlanta. While there are examples of facilities improvement programs nationally, this grant model is unique due to its scale and public-private approach. There is much to learn from this iteration of the Repair and Renovation Grant and opportunities to refine the model in the future. The following section presents recommendations and considerations derived from the data collected and analyzed during this evaluation.

Program Planning & Structure

- **Consider a longer program launch period.** Interest holders consistently emphasized that a shorter initial launch timeline limited contractor recruitment and role planning. Consider building a longer planning and launch phase (6-9 months) for partner recruitment, clarifying partner roles, ensuring compliance alignment, and building a robust contractor pool.

- **Define partner roles and decision-making responsibilities upfront.** Several interest holders noted that while they valued the collaborative teamwork approach of the model, there was a need to limit the bounds of shared decision-making. Creating an organizational chart and a decision-tree map at the outset, and refining the map as needed, could prevent confusion later.

Contractor Engagement & Retention

- **Build and maintain a larger list of approved contractors.** Construction is a fast-paced, ever-changing industry driven by customer demand. Quality contractors with availability during one month may lose that availability quickly, as they often have multiple projects out for bid. Given the compliance requirements of the grant, it is essential to have a deep pool of contractors to accommodate the program's pacing and the needs of grantees. Interest holders recommended that contractor recruitment should be an ongoing process and that the list should be maintained beyond the grant period, making it a valuable resource for grantees and other providers seeking repair and renovation services.

- **Recruit specialty contractors.** Playground resurfacing and specialized equipment projects were often delayed due to a lack of specific expertise in that type of project. Recruiting contractors with child care-specific or specialty experience would likely enhance the quality and efficiency of work completed. However, interest holders noted that compliance requirements limited the contractor pool, as only firms holding a General Contractor (GC) license could be selected. The constraint would likely exclude many playground-specific companies from participation under current compliance rules, which may want to be revisited with future program replication.

- **Address the contractor administrative burden.** Interest holders consistently noted that contractors were often deterred from engaging in grant-funded projects because of the logistical complexity of bidding, invoicing, and communicating with multiple parties. Consider streamlining bidding paperwork, invoicing, and communication processes with contractors to enhance efficiency. These considerations may vary depending on the compliance requirements associated with the funding source, which can influence the degree of administrative burden placed on contractors.

- **Consider "bundling" projects together to attract contractors with greater capacity.** Many contractors consider a single $75,000 construction project to be small and difficult to generate a profit margin. The implementation team may want to consider grouping projects together so that the scope of work is more attractive to firms that can handle multiple projects simultaneously. While only a few interest holders raised this idea, they suggested it could be a viable option to address contractor engagement challenges.

Technical Assistance

- **Clarify the level of project management expected of technical assistance providers**. Interest holders reported that the level of day-to-day management of construction projects by technical assistance advisors was unanticipated. It was suggested that issuing a request for proposal (RFP) for technical assistance would help PAACT define and set the expectations for technical assistance capacity. This would also provide an opportunity for PAACT to articulate if there is a specific approach to technical assistance that is required or if organizations are expected to bring their own approach. Finally, an RFP process offers PAACT the opportunity to formalize the requirement for project support capacity with direct construction knowledge and experience, which proved necessary for grant implementation.

- **Offer onboarding training for technical assistance providers.** Interest holders suggested that holding onboarding training for technical assistance providers would help set expectations and surface initial questions and needs for further support early in the project. This onboarding session could be devoted to orienting technical assistance providers to program goals, clarifying roles and decision-making structures, reviewing compliance requirements, and discussing any perceived challenges or barriers to implementation.

- **Require more onsite technical assistance visits and consistent communication.** Interest holders reported that while remote check-ins with grantees and contractors were efficient, they also had limitations. They placed a high value on visits where project staff could assess progress being made and work with contractors and grantees to resolve differences and chart the next steps. In-person visits were also reported to improve trust from grantees. Similarly, care should be taken to minimize the turnover of technical assistance advisors to maintain trust and continuity of communication.

Grantee Capacity Building

- **Differentiate supports by grantee readiness**. Most grantees, especially smaller centers and FCCs, appreciated the more intensive project management offered by their technical assistance advisors. However, some grantees (often larger centers with management capacity or those with a real estate or construction background) sought greater autonomy for their projects. A tiered-capacity building approach that responds to grantees' experience level and desired level of involvement could better meet grantees where they are.

- **Formalize grantee training sessions.** Develop structured training sessions for grantees at the outset of the program to ensure they know what to expect when participating in a repair and renovation project. Topics could include information about the overall grant process, preparation for potential operational disruptions (such as classroom closures, family communication, and staffing impacts), and strategies to mitigate them. Additionally, topics could cover other programs and business supports, as well as practical guidance on working with contractors.

- **Standardize a financial/business baseline requirement**. The optional QCC business assessment was recognized as an important system for both building grantee capacity and serving as an early warning of grantee sustainability challenges. Consider making this assessment process mandatory at program entry to prevent later-stage surprises that could jeopardize program completion or continued business operation.

Compliance & Procurement

- **Balance compliance with flexibility.** Grantees and program interest holders described how strict federal procurement requirements (e.g., lowest-bid contractor selection) undermined grantee trust and caused extended project delays. Consider exploring compliance models that maintain required accountability while preserving grantee agency and choice.

- **Pilot alternative procurement pathways.** The mid-project shift in procurement processes may have been avoided if a pilot period had been undertaken to test, revise, and refine procurement processes. This additional work phase may have been difficult with this iteration of the project model, given the pressure of the ARPA federal funding spenddown deadline. However, future model iterations may benefit from a procurement pilot period to maximize downstream efficiency and enhance interest holder experiences.

- **Formalize a structured scoping phase prior to project launch.** Interest holders reported that while the mid-project pause and bidding process shift created delays, it also resulted in a more structured bidding process where all contractors were bidding on the same scope of work. This made their submitted bids more comparable because they all referenced the same tasks and activities. At the same time, interest holders noted that developing standardized scopes upfront requires technical expertise and financial resources that may not always be feasible at scale. Consider strategies to build upon this approach in a way that balances the benefits of developing standardized scopes upfront with the cost of pursuing this work program-wide.

The PAACT Repair and Renovation Grant illustrates both the opportunities and complexities of investing in child care infrastructure at scale. Its partnership model demonstrates that combining public dollars with philanthropic contributions can achieve reach and flexibility not possible with either source alone. At the same time, the grant implementation surfaced lessons about procurement, contractor engagement, technical assistance, and grantee capacity-building. Communities considering similar initiatives may benefit from adopting a longer launch period, tailoring supports to grantee readiness, and balancing compliance with flexibility to meet on-the-ground realities of small businesses. More broadly, this work reinforces the importance of positioning child care facilities as essential community infrastructure, not optional amenities.

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