

Raising Colorado Kids:

A National Model for Integrated Early Childhood Access & Data

CATEGORY

Digital Experience:
Agency/Program Solutions

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Raising Colorado Kids, the Colorado Technology Association's 2025 APEX Project of the Year winner, is a cornerstone of Colorado's nationally recognized unified early childhood governance model. This cross-agency, technology-driven initiative reimagined how families access early childhood services and how the state uses data to govern and improve them. In under one year, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood (CDEC), in partnership with the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT) and key implementation partners, delivered two major outcomes:

1. A unified, user-centered bilingual digital platform for families: RaisingColoradoKids.com.
2. The foundational components of the state's Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS), powered by a modern data lakehouse architecture.

Along with the successful rollout of Universal Preschool (UPK)—a landmark initiative that propelled Colorado from 27th to 3rd nationally for preschool enrollment, now serving nearly 70% of eligible 4-year-olds and a total of 52,617 children—CDEC was tasked with unifying how families understand eligible services. Previously, families encountered a fragmented digital experience navigating early childhood support.

Raising Colorado Kids addressed these challenges through strategic objectives noted below:

- **Launched RaisingColoradoKids.com**, a unified, bilingual family-facing platform, simplifying service access via a modern, SaaS-based solution.
- **Built a centralized data lakehouse** to integrate early childhood program data across systems.
- **Delivered measurable value to families, providers and policymakers** by improving access, enabling real-time analytics and supporting data-driven investment.
- **Completed on time and within budget** despite a compressed timeline tied to expiring federal funds, the project expanded scope to include **a public-facing web experience and a technical proof of concept for Phase Two's Unified Family Application.**

This initiative exemplifies agile, human-centered government, utilizing smart procurement to deliver lasting impact and reinforce Colorado's leadership in early childhood governance.

IDEA

WHAT PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY DOES THE PROJECT ADDRESS?

Raising Colorado Kids was launched to address two long-standing and deeply interconnected problems within Colorado's early childhood system:

- **Fragmented access to services for families:** Families seeking any of the over 20 early childhood programs (e.g., UPK, Colorado Child Care Assistance Program [CCCAP]) navigated multiple,

disjointed legacy systems, each with unique eligibility, applications, and communications, often causing inconsistent access and missed benefits.

- **Disconnected and siloed data systems:** Legacy data platforms lacked integration. Key systems like UPK and CCCAP required weeks of time-intensive manual reconciliation for fundamental questions (e.g., cross-program enrollment), hindering CDEC’s informed policy/funding decisions and program effectiveness assessment.

Raising Colorado Kids directly addressed these challenges through a coordinated, enterprise-scale strategy focused on integration, simplification and access.

- **Improved family experience:** The project launched RaisingColoradoKids.com, a unified, bilingual digital platform that allows families a single entry point to explore and apply for services. Its intuitive interface makes government services easier to access and more equitable for all Coloradans.
- **Modernized data infrastructure:** The project established the foundational components of Colorado’s Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS) by using Snowflake and APIs to ingest, standardize and analyze data across programs, enabling timely, cross-program insights previously out of reach.

Together, these components increase families' access, enhance program administrators' decision-making and support data-driven governance at the state level.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Investments in early childhood yield high returns in public policy, impacting health, education and economic outcomes. Realizing these benefits requires accessible services and robust data infrastructure. The urgency of this initiative was significant:

- Over 40,000 children—representing about 67% of Colorado’s eligible 4-year-olds—enrolled in UPK in its first year, highlighting the large constituent group impacted. While families were accessing UPK, surfacing all early childhood-related programs remained a barrier for many.
- A \$14 million project budget tied to one-time federal funding had a hard deadline of September 30, 2024.
- Coordination was critical across multiple state agencies and local partners serving Colorado’s 64 counties.
- Failure to act within this timeline would have perpetuated fragmentation and left the state without the data and systems necessary to deliver on its long-term goals for children and families.

Completed on time and within budget, the project went beyond the original scope, delivering:

- A new **public-facing web experience** to improve statewide access to early childhood resources.
- A **technical proof of concept for Phase Two**, which included a comprehensive technology assessment for a future Unified Family Application.

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT?

Unlike many large-scale government technology projects, **Raising Colorado Kids** prioritized speed, equity and human-centered design from day one. Differentiators included:

- **Rapid Cross-Agency & Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Over 200 contributors from CDEC, OIT, Colorado Statewide Internet Portal Authority (SIPA) and key vendor partners (BridgeCare, Propeller, Slalom, Salesforce, Gartner) were quickly mobilized to deliver value in just seven months.
- **Agile Procurement & Delivery:** Leveraging enterprise agreements and SIPA's flexible model, the team avoided lengthy RFP processes to begin building within weeks, accelerating impact while maintaining accountability.
- **Human-Centered Design:** Placing families and providers at the center, incorporating feedback through journey mapping, user testing and iterative development.
- **Cloud-Native, API-First Architecture:** The data lakehouse enables interoperability, scalability and sustainability for future policy shifts.

WHAT MAKES IT UNIVERSAL?

The challenges Colorado faced are universal: disconnected social service systems, legacy data infrastructure, and the need for equitable access across race, geography, income, and ability. Colorado's unified governance model, highlighted by the Center for American Progress (CAP) and National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) as a national blueprint for streamlining services and improving access, offers a replicable model. **Raising Colorado Kids**, as a core component, directly addresses multiple NASCIO State CIO Top Ten Priorities:

- **Digital Government/Digital Services:** Unifying how families engage with the government.
- **Data Management and Analytics:** Enabling real-time, cross-program insights.
- **IT Modernization:** Building through cloud infrastructure and scalable architecture.
- **Customer Relationship Management:** Delivering a human-centered, equity-focused experience.

This initiative proves that meaningful transformation is possible not only with the right partnerships and delivery model but also at speed, at scale and with lasting value.

IMPLEMENTATION

WHAT WAS THE ROADMAP?

Implementation followed a structured, rapid roadmap to meet the September 30, 2024 federal funding deadline.

- **Discovery & Procurement (Q1 2024):** Defined user/technical needs; rapidly mobilized resources via existing agreements.

- **Design & Development (Q2-Q3 2024):** Parallel workstreams built human-centered RaisingColoradoKids.com and the Snowflake/API-driven ECIDS data lakehouse (beginning with UPK/CCCAP data). Agile methods enabled iterative delivery.
- **Deployment & Iteration (Q3-Q4 2024):** Launched RaisingColoradoKids.com with foundational UPK/CCCAP functionality; ECIDS ingested production data for analysis.
- **Phased Rollout (Q4 2024) & Promotional Campaign (Q1 2025):** Phased go-live ensured readiness; statewide campaign promoted RaisingColoradoKids.com adoption.

PROJECT ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS

Success was measured across four dimensions:

- Operational APIs functioning between systems.
- Completion of the Snowflake lakehouse with active data pipelines.
- A live, integrated platform (RaisingColoradoKids.com) enabling unified access.
- Positive feedback from pilot users, families, providers, and frontline staff.

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

- Deep collaboration among government agencies, vendors and community stakeholders drove **Raising Colorado Kids'** success.
 - **CDEC:** Strategic direction, program leadership and product ownership.
 - **OIT:** Technical architecture, security and data integration.
 - **SIPA:** Fast-track procurement, flexible contracting, coordinating third-party suppliers and driving technology deployments.
 - **Implementation Partners:** BridgeCare (SaaS platform), Propeller (program management, consulting), Slalom (data engineering), Salesforce, and Gartner.
 - **Community Stakeholders:** Dozens of regional/local partners (early childhood councils, Local Coordinating Organizations [LCOs], community-based providers) engaged via discovery interviews, co-design sessions and user testing, ensuring real-world solutions.
- **Stakeholder Buy-in & Adoption:** Expertly-led organizational change management drove internal weekly cross-functional standups for aligned workstreams combined with external targeted communication strategies that built awareness and gathered feedback statewide, ensuring adoption aligned with human-centered design principles.

HOW DID YOU DO IT?

Raising Colorado Kids was delivered through the strategic use of financial, human and technical resources:

- **Financial:** The \$14 million initiative, funded by one-time federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) dollars, created urgency. No general fund dollars were required.
- **Human:** The initiative mobilized over 200 contributors, emphasizing cross-functional integration, rapid decision-making and working-level empowerment.

- **Technical:** The ECIDS data lakehouse, built on Snowflake, uses APIs to securely connect data (e.g., Child Care Automated Tracking System [CHATS], UPK). [RaisingColoradoKids.com](https://www.raisingcoloradokids.com), a modular SaaS solution, integrates eligibility/provider databases. Architecture prioritized interoperability, scalability and sustainability, favoring cloud-native, configurable tools for speed and future innovation.

IMPACT

WHAT DID THE PROJECT MAKE BETTER?

Raising Colorado Kids has fundamentally improved both how Colorado families access early childhood services and how the state understands and manages its early childhood ecosystem.

Before Raising Colorado Kids:

- Families navigated multiple portals and disconnected workflows to find services (UPK, CCCAP), often missing eligible benefits.
- Program staff spent weeks reconciling data from siloed systems for basic questions.
- Policymakers lacked timely, trustworthy data for equitable resource allocation and program evaluation.

After Raising Colorado Kids:

- Families can explore and apply for services through a single, intuitive platform ([RaisingColoradoKids.com](https://www.raisingcoloradokids.com)), reducing confusion, increasing access and supporting holistic enrollment across programs.
- Program staff experience significant reductions in manual data processing and improved data confidence.
- Policymakers now have a holistic view of the early childhood landscape, enabling data-driven insights and stronger legislative confidence.

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

The impact of the initiative is backed by both quantitative metrics and qualitative feedback.

- **Colorado now ranks #3 nationally for 4-year-old preschool enrollment**, a major leap from 27th place.
- With nearly 70% of eligible 4-year-olds enrolled each year—representing approximately 50,000 three- and four-year-olds—the program **saves families an average of \$6,100 per child annually** in preschool expenses.
- Built on a mixed-delivery provider network of **nearly 2,000 sites statewide**, the program **supports up to \$239 million in annual investments in Colorado’s early childhood workforce.**

- It is also **advancing equity**, with nearly 50% of participating children coming from low-income households, including many who are English-language learners, experiencing homelessness or living with a disability.
- **Platform Engagement:** Early adoption data shows strong uptake of RaisingColoradoKids.com with high satisfaction and enthusiasm from initial user research and feedback interviews. Some verbatim testimonials from our research participants:
 - “An amazing website where you can find almost everything you need.”
 - “It’s a one-stop shop website for families to access Colorado kids resources.”
 - “This is a game changer.”
- **Operational Efficiency:** Internal teams report significant reductions in manual data processing and improved data confidence.
- **Data Availability:** CDEC leadership now has a holistic view of the early childhood landscape, enabling cross-program dashboards and predictive analyses.

Opportunity Realized: These outcomes reflect the increased impact of the program and **Raising Colorado Kids**. By elevating public awareness and enabling real-time application tracking, **Raising Colorado Kids** has contributed to the success of Colorado’s Universal Preschool (UPK) program and will continue to do so in the future.

WHAT NOW?

This project laid the foundation for Colorado’s long-term early childhood strategy.

- **Unified Family Application:** CDEC is in discovery for Phase Two, aiming to consolidate multiple program applications into one.
- **ECIDS Evolution:** ECIDS will continue to evolve, incorporating new data sources (e.g., health, education, Census) and enabling longitudinal tracking of outcomes.
- **Sustainability:** Governance structures and data-sharing agreements are being formalized to sustain this integrated approach, aligning with Colorado’s nationally recognized unified governance model for continued impact.

WHY THIS MATTERS (WORTHY OF INVESTMENT)

As a core component of Colorado’s nationally recognized unified early childhood governance (per [CAP](#) and [NIEER](#)), this project proves the value of modern, agile, outcomes-driven government. It delivers measurable results for Colorado’s children, families and policymakers, establishing a scalable model other states can adopt to improve early childhood systems and integrated digital services.