



**Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning**

BRIGHT FROM THE START

Lifting Infants and Toddlers through Language-rich
Environments (LITTLE) Grant

Operating Guidelines

2024-2025

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the requirements and regulations for operating a Lifting Infants and Toddlers through Language-rich Environments (LITTLE) grant. To ensure program compliance and quality service, all LITTLE grant providers must be familiar with and implement these guidelines. This document is intended to provide clarity and to offer guidance to LITTLE grant providers. Bright from the Start makes all funding decisions for the Lifting Infants and Toddlers through Language-rich Environments grants. Infant Toddler Specialists make site visits throughout the grant period to review compliance and provide support. Providers who do not comply with the LITTLE Guidelines may have the existing grant agreement terminated, be required to repay any or all the funds received and may not be eligible for the grants in the future.

1.0 General Program Information

1.1 Purpose

The Lifting Infants and Toddlers through Language-rich Environments (LITTLE) grant program focuses on boosting the foundational language and literacy skills of infants and toddlers by providing training and coaching to the educators that care for them. Specifically, the grant increases teacher confidence and competence in using responsive caregiving practices as a tool to build literacy skills, develops a peer coach to support and coach infant and toddler teachers, and strengthens program leadership skills in supporting positive, responsive, and high-quality infant and toddler classrooms.

The LITTLE Grant provides programs with:

Professional Development	Directors, peer coaches, and infant and toddler teachers will receive coaching and training from a DECAL Infant Toddler Specialist on responsive caregiving and strategies to promote children’s language and literacy development. See Section 3.0 for more information.
Funding	Programs will receive funding to support participation in the grant. The funding will cover the salary of a peer coach, classroom materials and supplies, a family engagement event, as well as other operating expenses. See section 4.0 for more information.
Data Collection and Coaching Tools	<p>LENA (Language Environment Analysis) Grow is a practice-based professional development program designed to increase interactions between teachers and children in child care centers. The LENA device is used as a “talk pedometer” to gather information about the language environment in the classroom. Coaches and teachers use the objective data to set goals and ensure that children have enriching experiences throughout the day.</p> <p>CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System) is an observation tool developed to assess effective teacher-child interactions in infant and toddler classrooms. Participating grant classrooms will receive a CLASS observation at the beginning and end of the grant period.</p>
Stipends	Educators will receive stipends for participating in professional development sessions that occur outside of work hours. See Section 3.4 for more information.

1.2 Eligibility

To participate in LITTLE, programs must:

- Be a licensed child care learning center in good standing with DECAL;
- Be a 2- or 3- Star Quality Rated Center;
- Commit to participating in all components of the LITTLE Grant;
- Have at least one infant AND one toddler classroom throughout the grant period;
- Have not previously participated in the LITTLE Grant; and
- Be willing to sign a LITTLE Grant agreement confirming commitment to participate.

1.3 Program Responsibilities

Early learning programs receiving a LITTLE Grant will:

- Ensure that teachers, peer coaches, and directors participate in ongoing professional development and coaching by a highly trained DECAL Infant Toddler Specialist;
- Identify a Peer Coach who will receive intensive training and support from a DECAL Infant Toddler Specialist on how to coach and support infant and toddler teachers in their program;
- Support the professional growth of program’s infant and toddler teachers (including the attainment of infant and toddler specific credentials through DECAL Scholars);
- Participate in all evaluation measures, including but not limited to, the use of LENA and CLASS instruments;
- Host a Family Engagement event for families of children in LITTLE Grant classrooms;
- Budget and expend grant funds according to LITTLE guidelines; and
- Maintain or increase their current Quality Rated star rating.

2.0 Personnel

2.1 Grant Roles and Responsibilities

Grant Role	Requirements and Responsibilities
Contact Signatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The legal signatory (CEO, COO, CFO, President, Sole Proprietor) who has actual authority or legal authority for the program/ company applying for the grant • Must sign the grant agreement • Communicates the expectations of the LITTLE Grant, including the guidelines, to the center director and staff to ensure successful grant participation
LITTLE Grant Administrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified director who serves as the primary point of contact for the grant and is located onsite daily at the child care program • Attends all professional learning sessions for directors. Participates in coaching support and technical assistance with the Infant Toddler Specialist • Supports coaching and other activities of the grant by providing release time for the teacher, ensuring that the peer coach is able to complete required grant activities • Oversees the day-to-day work of the grant • Determines the appropriate number of teachers to include in grant activities based on their budget. <i>(Programs may choose up to four infant and toddler classrooms to participate in the grant)</i> • Reviews credentials and certifications of teaching staff and provides encouragement and resources for teachers to increase their credentials • Reports any significant changes in the program to the DECAL Infant Toddler Manager immediately. Significant changes include resignation of the peer coach, change in Quality Rated star rating, temporary or permanent closure of grant classrooms, or temporary reassignment of the peer coach to non-grant-related duties.

Peer Coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full or part time staff person who will serve as a leader within the program. The person should have extensive experience as an infant and toddler teacher. This person can be chosen from current center staff or hired externally. • Must hold a current minimum credential as required under Georgia’s Child Care Learning Center licensing rules for a lead teacher. • Paid at the rate specified in the programs approved grant budget. Please see the LITTLE Grant: Budget Guidance for more details regarding Peer Coach salary and benefits. • Supports and coaches infant toddler teaching staff <i>*Cannot be a member of administrative staff and cannot fulfill job duties in any other capacity including classroom teacher, substitute teacher, bus driver, or floater during the hours they are being paid as a coach. Programs that currently have staff functioning in a technical assistance or coaching role may request a waiver to appoint that staff person as Peer Coach. Written approval must be obtained prior to making the appointment.</i> • Receives intensive training and support in coaching and mentoring within coaching visits and professional development sessions • Handles various administrative duties related to LENA and other data collection activities.
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified infant and toddler teachers who will participate in all grant activities including professional development sessions, coaching sessions, observations, and assessments. • Meets the minimum required ratios and credentials under Georgia’s Child Care Learning Center licensing rules.

3.0 Professional Development

3.1 Required Professional Development Opportunities

All personnel participating in grant activities must attend required professional development opportunities as listed below.

- Literacy Leadership Forums
 - Participants: Directors
 - Frequency: Monthly sessions
 - Location: Hybrid (In-Person and Virtual)
 - Conducted by: DECAL Infant Toddler Program Leadership

- Foundations of Coaching – Peer Coach Forum
 - Participants: Peer Coaches
 - Frequency: 8 sessions across grant period
 - Location: Hybrid (In-Person and Virtual)
 - Conducted by: DECAL Infant Toddler Specialists

- Professional Learning Community sessions
 - Participants: Infant and Toddler Teachers
 - Frequency: 5 sessions across the grant period
 - Location: In-Person at program
 - Co-facilitated by Infant Toddler Specialist and Peer Coach

- Quarterly Early Language and Literacy Institutes
 - Participants: Teachers, Peer Coaches and Directors
 - Frequency: Quarterly
 - Location: In-Person
 - Conducted by Infant Toddler Program

- Weekly coaching sessions
 - Participants: Teachers, Peer Coaches
 - Frequency: Weekly
 - Location: Onsite in program
 - Conducted by Peer Coaches with support from DECAL Infant Toddler Specialists

3.2 Professional Development System

Teachers, Peer Coaches and Directors must be enrolled in the Georgia Professional Development System (PDS or GaPDS). PDS combines education, experience and training and assigns all registrants a Career Level. Supporting documentation must be submitted to confirm educational attainment and training. Supporting documents include official transcripts, training certificates, copies of CDAs and technical college credentials. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) reviews transcripts and credentials for the PDS to verify an individual teacher’s credentials and degrees. Grant Administrators should confirm that teachers have registered in the PDS, submitted required documentation to the PDS, and that the PDS has verified the credential. Failure to have credentials current and verified in the PDS may affect grant payments.

3.3 Registration for Professional Development Opportunities

Registration for Early Language and Literacy Institutes, Literacy Leadership Forums and Professional Learning Community sessions will be done through GaPDS. The Grant Administrator is responsible for distributing professional development and training information to all grant personnel and registering the staff through GaPDS. For help with professional development needs, LITTLE grant administrators should contact their assigned Infant Toddler Specialist or infanttoddler@dec.al.ga.gov.

3.4 Stipends for Attending Professional Development Sessions

Stipends will be paid for all staff participating in professional development that falls outside their regular work schedule. Stipends will be paid directly to teachers by Care Solutions, Inc. Stipends may take up to one to three months to process. The stipend rates are outlined below:

Activity	Eligible for Stipends	Stipend
Early Language and Literacy Institutes	Teachers, Peer Coaches, Directors	\$125 per Institute
Professional Learning Community Sessions	Teachers, Peer Coaches	\$25 per session (when held outside regular work hours)

4.0 Funding Amounts

As part of LITTLE, programs will receive grant funds to support: (a) salary and benefits for a full or part time Peer Coach, and (b) operating expenses for required grant activities, including: travel for LITTLE professional development events, materials and supplies, substitutes, and technology. Programs may request between \$20,965 and \$52,100 depending on the number of classrooms and teachers participating in the grant.

4.1 Use of Funds

Funds must be spent on allowable items that support the implementation of language and literacy practices in your program’s infant and toddler classrooms. Please note, that all funds must be reasonable, allocable, and necessary for the purposes of the LITTLE grant.

The chart below lists allowable expenditures as well as the allowable spending range for each item. Further information about allowable expenditures is included in sections 5.2 and 5.3.

Category	Allowable Items	Allowable Funding Range
Peer Coach Salary & Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salary and benefits for a peer coach 	\$15,965 - \$40,100
Operating Expenditures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel to LITTLE professional development events Materials and Supplies Substitutes Technology to support participation in virtual coaching or institutes 	\$5,000 to \$12,000

4.2 Peer Coach Salary

Funding must be utilized to employ a Peer Coach. Peer Coaches must dedicate a minimum of 10 hours per week per classroom involved in the grant. Salary for the Peer Coach can range from \$15 to \$18 per hour, plus benefits. Programs should ensure the salary is commensurate with the individual’s experience and comparable to those employed in similar roles at the program. Peer coaches are expected to work for the full 45-week duration of the grant (February 3, 2025 – December 12, 2025) except days the program is closed for vacations or holidays. If a program cannot meet the minimum salary requirement due to vacancies or absences, it can submit a request to DECAL for approval to spend the funds for other grant purposes. The Peer Coach will also be eligible for stipends for participating in

professional learning outside of their work schedule and compensation for any travel expenses incurred due to training or job responsibilities. The Peer Coach may not fulfill any other job duties or roles during the hours they are being paid as a coach.

4.3 Operating Expenditures

4.3.a Travel Expenditures

Programs can use grant funds to cover travel expenses to LITTLE professional development, including mileage, meals, and lodging expenses incurred when traveling for professional development activities. Programs must follow the state of Georgia and Federal travel regulations when determining mileage and meal rates. Reimbursement for mileage when using personally owned vehicles (Tier 1) is at the rate per mile of actual miles traveled in the performance of official duties. The state mileage rate may increase or decrease during the grant period. Documentation of travel costs paid must be retained for record keeping. The state of Georgia travel regulations can be found at <https://sao.georgia.gov/state-travel-policy>. Federal travel regulations can be found at [eCFR :: 2 CFR 200.475 -- Travel costs](#). It is the responsibility of the grantee to have knowledge of and apply all state and federal travel regulations.

4.3.b Materials and Supplies

Programs may use funds to purchase materials and supplies that support the grant objectives, including:

Classroom Materials and Supplies that support infant and toddler’s language and literacy development. Infant Toddler Specialists will work with programs to inventory current materials, equipment and supplies and identify appropriate items for purchase. Programs may order from any vendor. Programs must retain invoices and receipts for any items purchased.

Family Engagement Materials and Supplies: Programs may use funds to purchase materials for the family engagement event required by the grant. Examples of allowable items include books, consumable materials, food, event space, etc. Programs must retain invoices and receipts for any items purchased.

Other Materials: Grant funds may be utilized to pay for supplies used by the Peer Coach to support coaching activities. Examples of approved materials include paper, laminating film, printer ink and other consumable materials. Programs may spend no more than 1% of the total grant funds in this category. Programs must retain invoices and receipts for any items purchased.

4.4.c Substitutes

Grant funds may be utilized to pay for additional staff such as a substitute teacher or “floater” teacher to support a lead or assistant teacher’s participation in professional learning including workshops, coaching sessions, or other identified professional learning activities. Grant funds can only be utilized when teachers are participating in professional learning activities approved for the grant. Documentation of substitute salary paid must be retained for record keeping.

4.4.d Technology

Grant funds may be utilized to purchase technology for participation in virtual grant activities. Allowable items include laptops, tablets, wi-fi hotspots, etc. Programs must retain invoices and receipts for any technology purchased.

5.0 Fiscal Procedures

5.1. Post Award Budget and Approval

Programs selected to participate in LITTLE must submit a post award budget including: (a) the amount of funds they are requesting for the grant, and (b) how they intend to utilize the grant funds. DECAL will review and approve each budget prior to finalizing the grant contract. DECAL reserves the right to request budget modifications and disallow items that are not allowable, allocable, reasonable, and necessary to accomplish the grant objectives. Programs must submit their budget using the **LITTLE Budget worksheet**.

5.2 Payment Process

DECAL will provide quarterly payments to participating programs. Funds will be deposited in the provider's bank account via an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) process. Failure to submit documents will result in a delay of receiving the grant funds. Providers must promptly notify DECAL of changes in bank account information or ownership. Providers are also responsible for reviewing their quarterly payments and payment documentation.

5.3 Schedule of Payments

Programs will receive four equal payments based on the amount of the funded grant. **Please note that no payment can be made until the grant agreement is fully executed and the program's vendor management form is approved in the system.**

Payments will be made no later than:

- February 17, 2025
- April 25, 2025
- July 25, 2025
- October 24, 2025

5.4 Budget Reconciliation Report

LITTLE grantees must provide Bright from the Start with a reconciliation report spanning the dates of the grant agreement. The purpose of the reconciliation report is to provide an actual accounting of all the provider's expenditures related to the LITTLE grants. This report shall demonstrate that funds were spent in appropriate categories for their intended uses. Supporting documentation must be maintained and provided upon request from DECAL. The LITTLE Grant Reconciliation Process is due by December 31, 2025. Failure to submit the LITTLE Grant Reconciliation Report by the due date may impact a program's eligibility to apply for future grant opportunities. Any program that fails to submit the LITTLE Grant Reconciliation Report may also be required to repay some or all the funds received.

5.5 Record Keeping

LITTLE grant recipients are required to keep all receipts and other records necessary to support figures reported on the annual reconciliation statement. If a LITTLE grant recipient provider is audited and receipts and other records are not available to support these amounts, funds must be returned to DECAL. Examples of such records include, but are not limited to:

- LITTLE signed grant agreement
- Canceled check copies (front and back)
- Bank statements
- Paid invoices
- Federal and state payroll records
- EFTPS or other evidence of taxes remitted to regulatory agencies
- Timesheets
- Original receipts for equipment, materials, and supplies for LITTLE grant classrooms
- Approved waiver forms

6.0 Audit and Accounting Requirements

6.1 Right to Audit/ Agreed Upon Procedures Review

Bright from the Start reserves the right to require an independent, certified financial audit of the program at the provider's expense. Bright from the Start reserves the right to conduct Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) reviews.

Bright from the Start may conduct audits and AUP reviews as specified in the LITTLE Grant Agreement, Section III, Part H:

Grantee agrees to cooperate fully with Grantor auditors and/or agents providing Audit or Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) review services. Grantee will coordinate with auditors/reviewers to have appropriate staff available during the scheduled audit/review period. Grantee will make advanced preparations for scheduled audits/reviews to make available for auditors or reviewers all identified documents, records, and entity related materials requested by the auditors/reviewers for the current grant year, as well as for prior grant years in which Grantee participated in the LITTLE grants as requested by the Grantor. Grantee's failure to substantially prepare for a scheduled audit engagement or provide requested documentation or information to an auditor/reviewer during the scheduled audit period may result in the withholding of grant payments. The failure of Grantor to review and/or inspect the services provided or to discover a breach of this Grant or any amendment thereto shall not subsequently operate as a waiver of any remedies available to the Grantor.

6.2 Record Keeping Findings and Adverse Findings

Findings noted during the course of the AUP review that do not result in a balance of funds due back to Bright from the Start are considered Record Keeping Findings. Examples include:

- Understatements of reported expenses compared to the LITTLE Grant Reconciliation Report.

- Overstatements of reported expenses compared to the LITTLE Reconciliation Report.
- Variances between the expenditures reported on the LITTLE Reconciliation Report and the allowable LITTLE expenditures supported during field work.

Findings noted during the course of the AUP review that result in a balance of funds due back to Bright from the Start are considered Adverse Findings. Examples include:

- Failing to meet Peer Coach salary requirements.
- Failing to support that payroll taxes were forwarded to the relevant taxing authorities.
- Failing to support that the use of all monies received from Bright from the Start were used in accordance with applicable regulations and guidelines.

6.4 Balances Due to Bright from the Start

If a LITTLE grant recipient is unable to support its expenditures with receipts and other records, as a result of having its financial records reviewed (AUP, audit, investigation), funds may be required to be returned to Bright from the Start. There are three options regarding these outstanding funds:

- Remit the balance in full by the deadline date;
- Submit a payment plan proposal with a 10 percent good faith payment by the deadline date; or
- Submit all source documentation by the deadline, disputing the results of the AUP review findings.

6.5 Reconsideration- Audit, Agreed Upon Procedures Review (AUP), or Investigation

In order for an Audit, AUP review or investigation to be reconsidered, providers must submit a formal request. The request:

- Submitted along with the Repayment Agreement document, provided by Bright from the Start;
- Submitted in writing;
- Must be made within 15 days of the notice of balance due letter from Bright from the Start; and
- Must include a detailed audit trail including all source documents necessary for Bright from the Start to make a final decision in a timely manner.

6.6 Random Reviews

The LITTLE grant recipient is subject to random, unannounced expenditure reviews by Bright from the Start or Bright from the Start contract auditors during the program year. All records (programmatic and financial) must be retained for a minimum of three years as stated in the grant agreement.

6.7 Tracking of LITTLE Grant Funds

The provider must maintain financial records to track LITTLE grant expenditures in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). All records must be retained for a minimum of three years as stated in the grant agreement. The provider is required to keep all receipts and other records necessary to support figures reported on the LITTLE Grant reconciliation statement. If a program is

audited and receipts and other records are not available to support these amounts, funds must be returned to Bright from the Start. Examples of such records include federal and state payroll records to verify payment of Peer Coach salaries, original receipts for equipment, supplies, and materials for grant classrooms, original receipts for expenses for travel to professional development activities and records indicating payment of stipends to eligible participants.

6.7 Lost, Stolen, or Destroyed Records

In the event of natural or man-made disasters, i.e. flooding, fire, hurricane, tornado, theft, etc., the LITTLE provider is responsible for providing third-party verification to substantiate the disaster. Verification includes police reports, insurance company claims, photos, or other proof that support the disaster and must also include detail of the property impacted. Claims related to man-made disasters must be made and files within 30 calendar days of the incident. Claims related to natural disasters must be filed as soon as possible in accordance with insurance company regulations.

Lost, stolen or destroyed records will not exclude an organization selected for an audit, AUP review, or investigation from undergoing the scheduled review. DECAL reserves the right to request other supplementary documentation in lieu of supporting records that have been lost, stolen or destroyed.

6.7 Fraudulent/ Inappropriate Use of Funds

The provider shall ensure that expenses charged to the LITTLE grant funding source are not concurrently charged to another program funding source.

The provider must ensure that no LITTLE grant funds are used to pay penalties associated with adverse actions imposed by licensing or governmental agencies. LITTLE grant expenditures should be identifiable as separate from federal expenditures (e.g, CACFP).

Misuse of funds may result in repayment of funds and denial of current and future participation in other Bright from the Start programs and/or in prosecution.

Providers that participate in any federal programs operated by DECAL and who are terminated from a federal program because of fraudulent or misrepresentative submission of records and/or inappropriate use of funds as determined by the federal program, shall also have their LITTLE grant terminated.