

Innovation Grants to Support the Retention of Early Career Teachers and Educators Program

2024-25 Program Guidelines



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Introduction

The Victorian Government's \$14 billion Best Start, Best Life (BSBL) reforms are the most significant change to Victoria's early childhood sector in a generation.

The BSBL reforms are a clear policy commitment to:

- improve early learning outcomes for Victorian children through quality education programs in the 2 years before school
- provide greater choice, savings, and access for families, including supporting parents and carers to make their own choices about work and study.

The ambitious reforms show the Victorian Government's commitment to the early childhood education sector and the capability of its highly skilled workforce.

The retention and development of the existing workforce will play a critical role in ensuring that every child has access to a kindergarten program led by a qualified early childhood teacher (ECT).

To support the retention of the existing workforce at the beginning stages of their career and in a period of significant reform, new and innovative approaches are required.

Innovation Grants Program scope

The Innovation Grants to Support the Retention of Early Career Teachers and Educators Program, hereafter referred to as the Innovation Grants Program, seeks to strengthen partnerships between the Department of Education (the department) and the early childhood sector in delivering the workforce solutions required to meet the demands of Three -Year-Old Kindergarten and the BSBL reforms.

Through the Innovation Grants Program, approved providers of state-funded early childhood services in Victoria can apply for grants of \$5,000 (excl. GST) up to \$50,000 (excl. GST) to implement innovative projects designed to improve the retention of ECTs and educators in the first 5 years of their careers. Up to \$500,000 (excl. GST) in grant funding will be awarded across the program.

Projects must be implemented within 12 months of the funding being provided to the approved provider. The final report and acquittal process are due to the department within 2 months of the conclusion of the funding period.

Funding available

Grants from \$5,000 (excl. GST) up to \$50,000 (excl. GST) are available to fund 12-month projects conceived and designed by grant recipients to improve the retention of early career ECTs and educators (i.e. those in the first 5 years of their careers).

Use of Funding: What do we mean by ‘innovation’?

For the purposes of the Innovation Grants Program, ‘innovation’ is defined as *‘new ideas, projects and initiatives that advance ECT and educator retention practices in the early childhood sector’*.

Applicants are encouraged to be creative and submit proposals for projects that would trial new and innovative ways to support the retention of early career ECTs and educators.

Visit the [program webpage](#) for case studies highlighting the achievements of some of the 2021 Innovation Grants Program grant recipients.

Examples of possible projects may include:

- Collaboration between early childhood services and/or organisations to make better use of resources and technology that support ECT and educator retention.
- Early childhood services collaborating to implement a shared ‘deep dive’ induction program for early career teachers and educators.
- Set up a trial of ECT and educator rotation across early childhood services in a local area, including between long day care and sessional services.
- Pilot an ECT and educator career pathway program through a partnership with early childhood services providing different career development opportunities.

Proposals to use the grant funding on any of the following will be unsuccessful, as they are not considered innovative:

- ‘Business as usual’ and compliance activities and costs (e.g. payroll support, regular performance management and induction activities).
- Any form of bonus payments to early career ECTs and/or educators.
- Projects that replicate existing programs offered by the department to support workforce retention, such as coaching and mentoring services and the supports for early career ECTs listed [on this webpage](#).
- Hiring additional ECTs or educators to work with children.

Please note that no funding can be used for activities involving contact with children that require the supervision of, or authority over, children, other than one-off activities, or activities which result in incidental or ad hoc contact with children. This means, funding can be used to provide back-fill to ECTs and/or educators participating in the project activities.

Eligibility Criteria

To be eligible to receive an Innovation Grant, an organisation must satisfy each of the following:

- be an approved provider of a state-funded early childhood service in Victoria
- employ at least one early career ECT or educator (i.e. an ECT or educator in the first 5 years of their career)
- meet the obligations of the Education and Care Services National Law and the Education and Care Services National Regulations with no significant compliance issues or incidents outstanding with the department
- not owe any money to the department as a result of previous funding or grants
- has the appropriate type and level of insurance for the activities that are the subject of this grant
- commit to presenting about the implementation of the proposed project at the virtual showcase event to be held at the conclusion of the funding period

- not have received funding by other means (including Victorian Government funding) explicitly for the purpose of implementing the proposed project
- outline in the budget proposal if funding from other sources will be used to supplement the grant funding being requested to implement the project.
- agree that, if selected as a successful applicant, they will be required to enter into a funding agreement with the department.

Previous recipients

Applications submitted by previous recipients of Innovation Grants Program funding are ineligible to receive further funding through this program to continue/expand the same project.

Consortia

Applications from consortia are permitted as they allow organisations to combine their capacity, specialist capability, and expertise. However, an approved provider of a state-funded early childhood service in Victoria must be nominated as the lead organisation in the application form.

Ineligible organisations

Approved providers that do not deliver a state-funded early childhood service in Victoria are considered outside of the scope of the Innovation Grants Program and are not eligible to apply.

Application process

How to apply

Applications must be submitted online via the application form. The link to the application form will be featured on the [program webpage](#) when applications are being accepted.

Late applications will not be accepted.

Applications must include:

- a project proposal, outlining how the proposed innovative project would support the retention of early career ECTs and educators, and
- a budget proposal (in the template provided on the [program webpage](#)), outlining how the funding would be used to implement the proposed innovative project, and
- responses to the 5 selection criteria (see **Attachment A** for explanations about the 5 selection criteria and how each one will be weighted during the application assessment process).

If you would like to request more than \$50,000 (excl. GST) in funding and/or approval to complete a project over a period longer than the standard 12-month funding period, you must contact the department before you submit your application via early.years.workforce.grants@education.vic.gov.au. These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

If applying as part of a consortium, the application must clearly identify a lead organisation. The lead organisation must be an approved provider of an early childhood education and care service in Victoria that meets the eligibility criteria defined in the 'Eligibility' section of this document.

Further information in relation to how to apply for the funding can be found at the above program webpage link.

Free grant application writing assistance

Free writing assistance is available to assist applicants to appropriately address the 5 selection criteria in their applications. Applicants are strongly encouraged to access this free service as early as possible during the application period.

Once an initial draft of an application has been prepared, featuring the project proposal and responses to the 5 selection criteria, a professional writer can review the draft and provide feedback on how the application could be refined.

Information on how to access this free grant application writing assistance will be provided on the [program webpage](#) when applications are open.

Selection process

Selection criteria

The Innovation Grants Program involves a competitive selection process. Submitting an application does not guarantee funding will be awarded.

Innovation Grants Program applications from approved providers that meet the eligibility requirements will be submitted to an Evaluation Panel for review and will primarily be assessed based on the project proposals, budget proposals and responses to the 5 selection criteria.

Attachment A includes the questions applicants must respond to in the application form, the word limit for each of the responses and guiding questions applicants are encouraged to consider while preparing their application. Applicants do not have to answer all the guiding questions – they are provided in **Attachment A** to help applicants prepare detailed, high-quality responses.

Please note that during the assessment and selection process, as well as reviewing the project proposals, budget proposals and responses to the selection criteria, the department may also consider:

- the geographic spread of shortlisted applicants
- the mix of project types and sizes proposed by shortlisted applicants.

Notification of outcome

Applicants will be informed in writing of the outcome of their grant application following the completion of the assessment process. See the 'Key dates' section for more information.

Successful applicants will be required to confirm their acceptance of the offer of funding in writing and will be required to enter into a funding agreement with the department.

The Evaluation Panel will offer debriefs to all Innovation Grants Program applicants, including those who are successful. Instructions on how to request a debrief outlining the Evaluation Panel's assessment of an application will be included in the outcome notification email.

Grant management

Contracting and payment

Grant recipients will receive the funding through existing agreements in the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS). Grant recipients can track this payment through the Funded Agency Channel: <http://fac.dhhs.vic.gov.au/>.

Grant recipients will be required to act in accordance with these guidelines, the terms of the funding agreement and the terms and conditions of their existing service agreements with the department.

In the case of a successful application by a consortium, the funding will be allocated through KIMS to the lead organisation nominated in the application. The lead organisation will be responsible for dispersing funding to the partner organisations, as needed.

Project alterations

As noted in the 'How to apply' section, if an applicant requests an implementation period longer than 12 months, they must contact the department before submitting an application.

Should a grant recipient wish to amend the plan for the innovative project they received funding to implement and/or seek an extension to the initial funding period outlined in the funding agreement, they must seek approval from the department by emailing early.years.workforce.grants@education.vic.gov.au.

Requests for extensions from grant recipients will only be approved by the department if the grant recipient:

- demonstrates progress has been made to date to implement the project or indicates a valid reason why the implementation has been delayed
- provides a revised project plan outlining how the extra time would benefit the project
- commits to providing additional interim reports at each 6-month interval, until the funding period concludes, and the final report is submitted.

Plans to amend a project will only be approved by the department where the proposal continues to align with the program details outlined in the guidelines. For example, the project must still focus on supporting the retention of early career early childhood teachers and educators.

Grant recipient requirements

Project reporting

Grant recipients will be required to submit the following:

Reporting	Due date
Interim report	Must be submitted 6 months after funding has been issued If an extension to the initial 12-month funding period is granted, additional interim reports may be required, as determined by the department
Final report	Must be submitted at the conclusion of the funding period (i.e., 12 months after the funding is issued, unless an extended funding period is approved by the department)
Funding acquittal form	Must be submitted at the conclusion of the funding period (i.e., 12 months after the funding is issued, unless an extended funding period is approved by the department)

Project updates must also be provided to the department on an ad hoc basis, as requested.

The information included in reports may be captured for best practice examples, published, or promoted by the department with the agreement of grant recipients.

Participation in the virtual showcase event

Grant recipients must commit to ensuring at least one employee involved in the delivery of the project funded through the Innovation Grants Program will present at a virtual showcase event at the conclusion of the funding period.

This event will allow grant recipients to share learnings from the implementation of their projects with each other and with the department.

Financial acquittal

As a condition of funding, grant recipients must complete an acquittal at the conclusion of the funding period. To acquit the funding, recipients will be required to outline how the funding was used throughout the project period.

If the grant funding has not been fully expended, further information will be sought from the grant recipient to determine next steps. Refer to the Recoup policy for more information.

Additionally, as and when requested by the department, grant recipients must provide the department with any information, record or report that relates to the use of funding or shows how funding was spent (in a format to be determined by the department).

Grant recipients are advised to keep receipts for purchases made using grant funding.

Recoup policy

Grant recipients are expected to make every effort to spend the funding within the 12-month funding period to implement the project outlined in their application.

The department will recoup all or part of the funding within sixty (60) days using the Kindergarten Information Management System (KIMS) if:

- at any time, the department determines that the funding is not being used in accordance with the project proposal submitted by the grant recipient; or
- the grant recipient records in the acquittal form that more than \$500 of the funding remains unspent following the 12-month funding period, and the implementation of the project is complete.

Other conditions

Promotion by the department

Successful projects may be captured as best practice examples, or be promoted and featured in relevant communications by the department.

As a condition of accepting grants, organisations must agree to provide a reasonable amount of additional information to support ongoing promotions and communications if requested by the department. Grant recipients may also be required to facilitate visits from government representatives and media.

Acknowledgement of the department

All grant recipients are required to acknowledge the Innovation Grants Program funding in speeches and presentations regarding the funded project, and, if applicable, on project materials and the organisation's website.

Grant recipients may be required to host an event with the Minister or government/department representatives to showcase the Innovation Grants Program initiative they have implemented.

Evaluation of the Innovation Grants Program

As a condition of funding, organisations must agree to provide information and/or provide appropriate staff for interview to assist in the evaluation of the Innovation Grants Program.

Information privacy

The department is collecting information for the primary purpose of processing and assessing applications for the Innovation Grants Program. Information collected will be dealt with in accordance with the *Public Records Act 1973* (Vic) and the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* (Vic). Information will be securely stored and only accessible by those department staff involved in the grants process. Applicants can access and amend the information provided upon request. For more information about privacy obligations, please see the department's [Privacy Policy](#).

Intellectual Property

As a condition of funding, grant recipients will provide the department a licence to use, reproduce, adapt, modify, publish, distribute and communicate the intellectual property in the innovative projects to allow the department to enjoy the full benefit of the projects.

Key dates

Activity	Date
Applications open	Monday 7 October 2024 (9:00am)
Applications close	Friday 1 November 2024 (5:00pm)
Notification of outcome	December 2024
Grant payment and project commencement	January 2025 / February 2025

Further information

For further information please contact the Innovation Grants Program team via early.years.workforce.grants@education.vic.gov.au

Attachment A – Selection Criteria

Selection Criteria	Question/s in the Application Form	Weighting	Word Limit	Guiding Questions to Consider when Preparing your Responses (You <i>do not</i> have to answer every question - these are just here to help!)
Innovation	In what ways does the proposal outline an innovative response to support the retention of early childhood teachers and educators in the first 5 years of their career?	30%	800 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What makes your idea unique and original? - Are there already similar supports available to early career ECTs and educators (for e.g. those provided by the department)? How will your project be different?
Focus on Retention	How will the initiative support the retention of early childhood teachers and/or educators in the first 5 years of their careers?	30%	800 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would your project address retention issues? - What outcomes do you expect as a result of implementing this project?
Project Management	<p>Please outline how the organisation will manage the project and deliver it within the 12 month period.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who will be consulted as you develop a plan for the project? • who will be involved in the project? • what will be the key milestones during the 12 month implementation period? 	15%	400 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What steps would you need to take to complete this project? - Are you confident that you would have enough time and money to complete the project you are proposing? - If your application is successful, what planning would you need to do at the beginning of the funding period to help make the project run smoothly? - What issues/risks might prevent you from completing the project? How will you manage or overcome them?
Evaluation	<p>Please outline how you would collect and provide evidence of success back to the department.</p> <p>What data will be collected during the course of the initiative?</p>	15%	400 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How will you determine if your project has been successful? - What information will you collect throughout the project to help you prepare detailed reports for the department? For example, event attendee figures, survey results and/or participant interview responses. - Will participants in your project be able to provide feedback during the year to help guide and improve your project? If so, how?
Scalability and Sustainability	How could the project be sustained beyond the 12 month implementation period?	10%	300 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How might the project continue beyond the initial funding period without further funding from the department? - Who will be involved in the implementation of the project during the initial funding period? Are there other groups that might be interested in participating in the project in the future, if it is successful?