EQUIPMENT BOOST FOR SCHOOLS: 2019 APPLICATION ROUND

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Funding

Is there a minimum or maximum funding amount that our school can apply for?

No. There is no minimum or maximum amount that your school can apply for. Requested equipment/technology should be identified based on the needs of the relevant student(s) and/or the school, not the cost.

Will our school be receiving Equipment Boost for Schools funding via the Student Resource Package again in 2019?

No. In July 2018, the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative provided $5,000 to every Victorian government school to purchase new equipment and assistive technology to support students with disabilities or additional learning needs. This was a one-off funding stream and will not be repeated in 2019.

The Equipment Boost for Schools: 2019 Application Round is the only opportunity for schools to receive funding through the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative in 2019.

Eligibility – Eligible applications

Can Catholic schools apply for funding?

No. The Equipment Boost for Schools initiative provides funding to Victorian government schools only.

Our school has already received $5,000 through the Equipment Boost for Schools via the Student Resource Package (SRP) in 2018. Can we apply?

Yes. All Victorian government schools are eligible to apply.

In July 2018, the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative provided $5,000 to every Victorian government school to purchase new equipment and assistive technology to support students with disabilities or additional learning needs. This does not impact on your school's eligibility for the 2019 Application Round.

Our school received funding through the 2018 Application Round. Can we apply again in 2019?

Yes. All Victorian government schools are eligible to apply, regardless of whether they received funding through the 2018 Application Round. However, if the Department receives more applications than it has the capacity to fund in this round, schools that did not receive funding through the 2018 Application Round may be prioritised.

The Department will not disadvantage individual students with disabilities or additional learning needs on the basis that their school received funding through the 2018 Application Round. This method of prioritising applications will only be used for applications that are intended to support inclusive education practices more broadly.

Can our school apply for equipment for a student who has enrolled, but is not currently attending the school (e.g. students starting school, transitioning from primary school to high school, or moving schools in 2020)?

Yes. In general, at this time of year schools will have confirmed enrolments for next year, and can complete an application for equipment/technology that will support the needs of incoming students in 2020.

If a student is expected to enrol at your school in 2020, but has not yet enrolled, please include this in your application. The Department can contact you prior to finalising the outcome of your application to confirm that the student has enrolled.

Our school is a new school opening next year. Can we apply?

Yes. Your school can apply for equipment/technology that will support the needs of incoming students in 2020. In general, at this time of year schools will have confirmed enrolments for next year, and can complete an application for equipment/technology that will support the needs of incoming students in 2020. If a student is expected to enrol at your school in 2020, but has not yet enrolled, please include this in your application. The Department can contact you prior to finalising the outcome of your application to confirm that the student has enrolled.

If the equipment/technology is not intended for a specific student, it is recommended that you emphasise in your application how the requested items will support inclusive education practices in your school.

Can Visiting Teachers apply for equipment to demonstrate at schools and professional learning sessions?

No. The current application round is open to Victorian government schools only.

I have heard that there is funding available to provide Visiting Teachers with equipment and technology to support their student caseloads and build capacity in schools. What does this refer to?

The initiative to provide Visiting Teachers with equipment and technology to support their caseloads and build capacity in schools refers to a separate funding stream within the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative. This funding stream includes the upcoming Visiting Teacher conference in December 2019 and the equipment/technology that will be provided to Visiting Teachers at that conference.

Eligibility - Eligible items

What is meant by the terms 'portable' or 'moveable' equipment/technology?

The terms 'portable' and 'moveable' refer to items that are not fixed to the school building or grounds. This is an important distinction as any adjustment that requires permanent modifications to the school building/grounds is out of the scope of this initiative and is more likely to be eligible for consideration through one of the Victorian School Building Authority's (VSBA) funding programs.

To determine whether an item is portable, it may be useful to consider whether an item can be easily moved from one room to another within the school. Some wall-mounted equipment is considered portable, provided that the mechanism for mounting the equipment to the wall is temporary (e.g. adhesive Velcro strips or hooks).

Can our school apply to replace old equipment/technology?

Yes. Your school can apply to replace old equipment/technology that is no longer fit for purpose. It is recommended that your application should focus on how the replacement equipment will support inclusion within your school, and the benefits for students with disabilities or additional learning needs.

The application form includes a question about how your school will address the identified need(s) if your application is not approved. It is recommended that you use this section, as well as the section relating to the identified need(s) at your school, to highlight why the existing equipment is no longer fit for purpose.

Can the same equipment be bought for multiple classrooms?

Yes. There is no limit to the number of items your school can apply for.

Can our school apply for funding to purchase literacy resources?

Yes. For literacy resources, eligibility will generally depend on how the requested items are intended to be used, rather than the items themselves being in or out of scope.

The Equipment Boost for Schools initiative is primarily intended to support inclusive education practices, and applications will be prioritised based on how they demonstrate that the requested items will support inclusive education practices within the school. Literacy resources could achieve this, for example:

- by enabling individual students with disabilities or additional learning needs to access the same materials as their peers
- by enabling a targeted cohort of students to participate in a whole-of-school literacy program
- by providing alternative materials to students with disabilities or additional learning needs, so that they can achieve the same learning outcomes as their peers.

Applications for whole-of-school literacy resources have generally not been funded, unless they have clearly demonstrated the benefits for students with disabilities or additional learning needs.

Can our school apply for funding for staff training?

Yes. Your school can apply for funding to pay for staff training that will directly support the implementation of the requested equipment/technology within your school. This may include:

- attendance at external training sessions
- professional development provided by external organisations (e.g. at a staff meeting).

The Equipment Boost for Schools initiative does not fund costs associated with internal on-training (e.g. CRT costs associated with taking a teacher out of their classroom to train other teachers).

Can our school apply for funding for Casual Relief Teacher (CRT) coverage?

No. The Equipment Boost for Schools initiative does not fund CRT coverage, even if the CRT coverage is associated with staff training to directly support the implementation of the requested equipment/technology within your school.

Submitting an application

Is there a word limit to the application?

No. There is no word limit for the application, apart from one question which asks you to summarise your proposal in 100 words or less.

The equipment our school wishes to apply for does not fit within any of the 'Equipment Categories' on page 3 of the application form. Can I apply for this equipment?

Yes. The question relating to Equipment Categories allows the Department to assign your application to the relevant team for review or comment. If the requested equipment/technology does not fit within any of these categories, just leave this question blank – it is not a mandatory question.

Our school wishes to apply for multiple pieces of equipment or multiple projects; should we submit a single application or separate applications?

If your school wishes to submit applications for multiple pieces of equipment, or multiple projects, you can apply through separate applications, or apply for everything in a single application (noting that applications may be partially approved).

The Application Guidelines state that for certain types or categories of equipment, our school needs to provide evidence that the equipment has been recommended or prescribed by 'an appropriately qualified professional'. Who is this referring to?

There are four types of equipment that require a supporting recommendation from an appropriately qualified professional:

- Highly specialised equipment for students with complex needs
- Portable hearing/amplification equipment
- Sensory equipment and resources

- Specialised communication equipment.

The Application Guidelines provide examples of relevant professionals who may be able to support requests for each of these equipment types (p. 10). However, this is not a definitive or exhaustive list as in some instances it may be appropriate for other professionals to recommend or prescribe a particular item (e.g. a general practitioner, paediatrician or another medical professional). If you are unsure about who to seek this supporting recommendation from, please contact the Inclusive Education Grants team to discuss your application in more detail.

Our school has consulted with a Visiting Teacher to identify the most suitable equipment for our needs and prepare our application. Do we need to include a written support letter from the Visiting Teacher?

No. If your school states in your application that you have consulted with a Visiting Teacher to identify the most suitable equipment/technology for your needs, we will accept this as evidence of consultation with a Visiting Teacher. If any further information is required to assess the application, our team may contact the consulting Visiting Teacher.

Where a Visiting Teacher chooses to provide a letter of support, the purpose of this letter should primarily be to support your school to demonstrate the following assessment criteria:

- The requested equipment/technology is a **suitable solution** for addressing the identified need(s)
- The application demonstrates the **expected impact** of the requested equipment/ technology.

Exception: Applications for portable amplification equipment (where the primary intent of the equipment/technology is to support an individual student's needs) must be accompanied by a written statement from a Visiting Teacher (Hearing), confirming that:

- the requested equipment/technology is compatible with the student's personal assistive hearing equipment
- the requested equipment/technology is compatible with any existing amplification equipment within the school
- the school has considered the acoustic environment, as well as any additional treatments (e.g. reducing noise or reverberation levels) that may further support the implementation of the requested equipment/technology.

Can our school engage an external specialist to write our application?

Yes. While all applications must be endorsed by your school's principal, there is no requirement for your application to be completed by a specific staff member within your school.

The Equipment Boost for Schools initiative does not provide funding for any costs associated with engaging external specialists, suppliers or contractors to complete schools' applications.

If an allied health professional (e.g. an occupational therapist, speech pathologist or physiotherapist) is writing the application for our school, does the application still need to include a separate supporting document?

Applications for certain types of equipment/technology must include evidence that the requested items have been directly prescribed or recommended by an appropriately qualified professional based on an assessment of the relevant student(s)' needs (see page 10 of the Application Guidelines).

Generally, schools have provided this evidence in the form of a supporting letter from the relevant professional; however, if your school has engages this person to write the application for your school, they can include this information within the application itself.

Can our school provide a general recommendation to support a request for equipment/technology? For example, if an occupational therapist has provided a report stating that a student would benefit from additional sensory stimulation, would this be sufficient evidence to support our funding request?

No. The purpose of requiring this evidence is to ensure that the requested equipment/technology has been specifically recommended or prescribed by an appropriately qualified professional, based on an assessment of the relevant student(s)' needs.

Our school is not able to book an appointment with a specialist before the application closing date. How can we get this evidence to support our application?

In most cases, but particularly for the types of equipment that require a supporting recommendation, schools are encouraged to apply for equipment/technology that has already been identified as the most appropriate solution to address an identified need within the school (for example, based on an existing recommendation from an appropriately qualified professional). Strong applications will be those that clearly

demonstrate how the requested items have been identified as the most appropriate solution for the identified need.

Is there a time limit for how long a specialist's recommendation would be considered valid for?

No, there is no set time limit or expiry period for a specialist's recommendation. The nature of specialist recommendations varies depending on the needs of students and the type of equipment/technology being requested; the currency of a specialist's recommendation will be considered alongside these other factors. For example, a recommendation for specialised communication software that is five years old would not provide strong supporting evidence for that software, as the specialist would not have considered all of the software currently available when making this recommendation.

Is there a template for allied health professionals to write a supporting letter?

No. Because the needs of students and the types of equipment requested are so diverse, it was felt that any template provided would not be able to cover all scenarios.

Quotes

Why do I need to provide a written quote?

The purpose of requiring a written quote for each requested item is to ensure that for approved applications, the approved funding amount accurately reflects the cost of purchasing the requested items.

Will our school receive the amount of funding listed in the quote(s) if our application is approved?

In most cases, if your school's application is approved, your school will be able to claim reimbursement based on the amount of funding listed in your application.

For commonly-requested items, the Department may purchase these items in bulk and arrange for the requested items to be delivered directly to your school. The primary benefit of this approach is that it enables the Department to achieve greater value for money and fund a higher number of applications. This approach also reduces the administrative burden associated with claiming reimbursement for approved items.

Where the Department has an existing contractual arrangement in place that allows schools to purchase requested items for a lesser cost than what is requested in an application, the Department may provide funding based on the cost of purchasing the requested item(s) through the existing contractual arrangement. In this scenario, the Department will provide written guidance to schools about how they can purchase the requested item(s) through the Department's existing contractual arrangements.

Do I only need to provide one quote?

Yes. As long as each requested item is supported by a written quote, only one quote is required per item. The amount requested should reflect the GST-exclusive amount in the quote.

Can I provide a screenshot from an online store as a quote?

Yes. In many cases, suppliers will have an online store that provides the cost of a requested item, particularly for software and mobile apps. A screenshot of the online store, clearly showing the requested item(s) and the cost, will suffice for the purpose of providing a written quote.

Please note that the prices listed on websites tend to be GST-inclusive, however the costings listed in your application are to be GST-exclusive.

Can I submit a quote in a currency other than Australian dollars?

If schools are purchasing from international suppliers, it is preferable to provide a quote in Australian dollars.

Quotes in other currencies will may be acceptable, provided that the currency is clearly indicated in the quote(s). If the application is approved, the amount of funding approved will be based on the exchange rate at the time of approval.

Assessment process

Will certain types of equipment/technology be prioritised because they require supporting recommendations, making them stronger applications than those that don't require recommendations (e.g. inclusive kitchen equipment)?

No. Provided that the requested items are within scope of the initiative, your school's application will be assessed based on how the requested equipment/technology addresses the need identified in your application.

While supporting recommendations and academic research may be used to support an application, other forms of evidence may include:

- case studies from the applying school or other schools
- results of 'trial periods' from using the requested equipment/technology
- documented observations by teachers and other school staff
- supplier recommendations
- results of pilot programs or trials of the requested equipment/technology in similar contexts.

Will cheaper quotes be more likely to be approved even if the items are not as 'good'?

Applications will be prioritised based on the strength of each application, not the cost. Strong applications will demonstrate that the requested equipment/technology has been selected based on the needs of the school/students and will have a positive impact for the identified student(s). The Department would not favour one brand over another as a general rule.

This application round is expected to be more competitive than the previous round, and each application will be assessed and prioritised using the assessment matrix (included in Appendix D of the Application Guidelines). If a number of applications receiving an identical assessment score cannot all be funded, the value for money demonstrated by each application may also be considered. In this scenario, 'value for money' would take into account the number of students who will benefit and the extent of this benefit, not just the cost of the requested equipment/technology.

How important is it for our school to contribute towards the cost of the requested equipment/technology? Will this be considered as part of the assessment process?

Schools' willingness to contribute to the cost of the requested items will not be considered as part of the assessment process, but may be considered as part of a 'value for money' assessment if the application round is significantly over-subscribed. The main purpose of asking this question is to ensure that this funding has the broadest possible impact, even if the application round is over-subscribed, by providing schools with an opportunity to contribute to the cost of the requested items if they are able.

Information privacy

How much information should our school provide in relation to students, their disability or learning needs without breaching privacy obligations?

There is **no requirement** for your school's application to include personal or identifying information about a student(s), however we understand that in many cases this information may form part of a school's supporting evidence.

Information provided by schools will be used for the purpose of assessing applications for equipment and assistive technology through the Equipment Boost for Schools: 2019 Application Round. In some cases this may involve referring applications to other government agencies and/or third parties with relevant expertise for advice or comment. Schools are encouraged to only provide students' health information where it is necessary for the purpose of assessing the application.

The Department may also provide de-identified information to government agencies or external experts for research and/or evaluation purposes.

Full details in relation to information privacy can be found on page 14 of the Application Guidelines.

The Application Guidelines state that our school's application may be referred to other government agencies and/or third parties with relevant expertise; who are these other parties and why would our application be referred in this way?

The Department makes every effort to ensure that requested equipment/technology is safe, fit for purpose and is likely to have a positive impact for students. The Department may therefore refer applications to third parties with relevant expertise (both within and outside the Department) for advice or comment. Depending on the type of equipment requested, this may include:

- the Department's Restraints and Seclusion Unit
- the Department's NDIS Implementation Branch
- speech pathologists employed by the Department
- the Victorian Deaf Education Institute
- the Statewide Vision Resource Centre
- the Victorian School Building Authority
- the Department's Complex Matter Management Unit

- the Department's Complaints Unit
- the Department's Financial Services Division

The Department has also engaged Ballarat Health Services to provide advice or comment on applications for equipment/technology that is considered to be specialised and/or customised supports for student(s) with complex physical needs (e.g. specialised seating, standing frames, hoists, toileting equipment or adjustable furniture intended for the use of an individual student).

Specific equipment types – Communication equipment

In relation to Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) equipment/technology, what types of equipment/technology are eligible for funding?

Schools can apply for a range of AAC equipment and resources through the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative, including hardware, software and non-digital resources such as PODD resources. The examples of eligible equipment and assistive technology provided in the Application Guidelines and Professional Practice Guides are intended as examples only and are not intended to be an exhaustive list of eligible equipment/technology.

Specialised communication equipment, such as AAC devices and software (where the primary intent of the equipment/technology is to support an individual student's communication needs), must be supported by evidence that the requested items have been directly prescribed or recommended by an appropriately qualified professional (such as a speech pathologist) based on an assessment of the relevant student(s)' needs.

Specific equipment types – Software

The Equipment Boost for Schools website refers to an "online catalogue of evidence-based inclusive education software. Where can I access this?

The Department is currently developing an online catalogue of evidence-based software options to support students with disabilities or additional learning needs (including applications for mobile devices). It is expected that this will be available via the Department's FUSE website in Term 4 2019, and will be communicated to schools and teachers via the Department's School Update and In Our Classrooms newsletters respectively.

Specific equipment types - Hearing

Should our school apply for portable amplification equipment through the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative, or the Victorian School Building Authority's (VSBA) Accessible Buildings Program (ABP)?

In general, equipment/technology that is eligible for funding through the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative is not eligible for funding through the ABP, and vice-versa.

In relation to portable hearing/amplification equipment:

- at present, the ABP provides schools with hearing technology in individual students' primary classrooms to ensure schools are supported to meet their legal obligations (for example, under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*)
- where the equipment is ***intended to meet the needs of an individual student***, schools are advised to contact the VSBA in the first instance, to confirm eligibility through the ABP. If the proposal is not eligible for ABP funding, schools can then contact the Equipment Boost for Schools team to discuss eligibility.
- where the equipment is ***intended to support inclusive learning environments across the school***, it is unlikely to be eligible for funding through the ABP, and schools are advised to contact the Equipment Boost for Schools team to discuss eligibility.

Are mobile acoustic treatments eligible under this funding initiative?

Yes, provided that the requested equipment/technology does not require any permanent infrastructural improvements or modifications to the school building.

There is a wide variety of acoustic treatments that can be applied to classroom environments such as rugs, wall hangings, soft furnishings and acoustic panels.

Acoustic panels that are fixed to walls are eligible if they are not permanent fixtures and can be removed.

Can our school apply for a replacement transmitter for existing portable amplification equipment?

Yes. Applications are to provide evidence that the requested item is compatible with your school's existing equipment – for example, by consulting with a Visiting Teacher (Hearing).

Can any Visiting Teacher (Hearing) write a letter for any school that is applying for portable amplification equipment?

Yes, provided that the VT (Hearing) can confirm that:

- where the requested equipment/technology is intended to support the needs of an individual student who is deaf or hard of hearing, the requested equipment/technology is compatible with the student's personal assistive hearing equipment
- the requested equipment/technology is compatible with any existing amplification equipment within the school
- the school has considered the acoustic environment, as well as any additional treatments (e.g. reducing noise/reverberation) that may further support the implementation of the requested equipment/technology.

What is the purpose of a letter or report from an audiologist?

The purpose of an audiologist's letter or report is to demonstrate that the student's individual needs and condition have been considered when identifying the most appropriate equipment/technology to meet their needs.

Why is Hearing Australia providing advice to schools when they are not in the education sector?

Based on the large number of applications for portable amplification equipment in the 2018 Application Round, the Department has engaged Hearing Australia to provide additional support to schools and Visiting Teachers by providing general advice in relation to this equipment.

Engaging with Hearing Australia does not replace the need for schools to consult with a Visiting Teacher (Hearing) in relation to requests for portable amplification equipment.

In relation to portable hearing/amplification equipment, do schools need to provide academic research with each application?

No. The Department has access to academic research about this type of equipment and schools are not required to include academic research with their applications.

As with all types of equipment/technology, the strongest applications will be those that demonstrate that the requested items will meet the needs identified in the application, and will provide a positive impact on, or benefit for, students.

For applications for portable amplification equipment (where the primary intent of the equipment/technology is to support an individual student's needs), this will include a written statement from a VT (Hearing), confirming that:

- the requested equipment/technology is compatible with the student's personal assistive hearing equipment
- the requested equipment/technology is compatible with any existing amplification equipment within the school
- the school has considered the acoustic environment, as well as any additional treatments (e.g. reducing noise or reverberation levels) that may further support the implementation of the requested equipment/technology.

Portable amplification equipment can be used to support students with auditory processing disorder or ASD, but these students are not eligible for support from a VT (Hearing). What evidence can these schools provide to support their applications?

As students with auditory processing disorder or ASD are not eligible for support from a VT (Hearing), schools may consider other types of evidence that will support their application. This evidence may include:

- case studies from the applying school or other schools
- results of 'trial periods' from using the requested equipment/technology
- documented observations by teachers and other school staff
- supplier recommendations
- supporting advice from professionals with relevant expertise (e.g. Visiting Teachers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech pathologists, psychologists, social workers)
- results of pilot programs or trials of the requested equipment/technology in similar contexts
- academic research outlining the benefits of the requested equipment/technology for others with the same condition.

As is the case for all equipment types, applications will be prioritised based on the demonstrated impact on, or benefit for, students.

Does our school need to provide details about the impact of the requested equipment/technology on classroom reverberation times?

It is not a requirement for schools to provide specific details about reverberation times in classrooms or other school spaces. Your school may wish to include this information if you believe it will strengthen your application, however it is not expected that schools will be able to determine the exact impact of the requested equipment/technology on reverberation time. Applications will be prioritised based on the expected impact on, or benefits for, students. The following example provides an acceptable level of detail in relation to reverberation times:

> *"By using a tablet app to measure reverberation times in the affected classroom, we determined that the reverberation time (1.2 seconds) exceeded the recommended maximum of 0.4 seconds for a classroom of this size... through consultation with a Visiting Teacher (Hearing), we have selected the identified equipment in order to reduce this reverberation time"*

Specific equipment types – Vision

In 2018 our school applied for vision-specific equipment through the Statewide Vision Resource Centre (SVRC) Technology Library? Should we do this again in 2019?

In 2018, the Department provided all Victorian government schools to apply for equipment/technology for students who are blind or have low vision through the Equipment Boost for Schools: Blind/Low Vision Stream. The purpose of this funding stream was to determine how the Department could best support the existing SVRC Vision Technology Library through the Equipment Boost for Schools initiative.

In 2019, schools are advised to apply for specialised blind and low vision equipment through the SVRC Vision Technology Library via https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/collaboration/SVRC (Department of Education and Training user ID and password required).

Schools can apply for more general equipment/technology (such as tactile rulers, 'talking' kitchen equipment or mobile apps) via the Equipment Boost for Schools: 2019 Application Round.

If you are unsure, please contact the SVRC in the first instance, to confirm eligibility through the SVRC Vision Technology Library. If your school's proposal is not available through the SVRC Vision Technology Library, please contact the Equipment Boost for Schools team to discuss eligibility.

Are tactile markers eligible under this funding initiative?

Schools may apply for tactile markers, provided that:

- installation of the tactile markers does not involve any permanent modifications to the school building or grounds (for example, self-adhesive tactile markers would be considered within scope)
- the application includes evidence that the tactile markers will be installed in accordance with Australian Standards. This evidence may include:
    - consultation with an appropriately qualified supplier or consultant
    - a plan of the tactile marker placement design, developed by an appropriately qualified professional.

Fixtures and fittings remain the responsibility of the school and must be completed in compliance with all relevant school policies and legal requirements to ensure safety and durability.

Vision-impaired students often use equipment/technology that Visiting Teachers have not used previously. How can Visiting Teachers access this equipment/technology and receive appropriate training?

The following advice is taken from the Department's *Blind and Low Vision Technology Library: Guidance for Schools* document (page 8):

> ***Equipment for staff training***
>
> Equipment and technology is available for short-term loan to Victorian government school staff and Visiting Teachers working directly with eligible students, for the purpose of training and professional learning.
>
> To apply, teachers or allied professionals should submit an online application at https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/collaboration/SVRC (Department of Education and Training user ID and password required). If you cannot view the page, please contact SVRC to request access.
>
> Applications must be endorsed by the staff member's Principal or manager. It must also include a detailed description of how this equipment loan will help the staff member to enable or improve student access and participation at school.
>
> Loans for the purpose of staff training will be provided for no more than one-term, after which time they must be returned to SVRC.

Equipment such as embossers or printers that are used to support a student over a longer period of time should be applied for via the student's application.