**Building Blocks**

**Grants**

**2025**  
**PLANNING BUILDING STREAM**   
**GUIDELINES**

## 

## **Minister’s Foreword**

The Victorian Government continues to work closely with kindergarten services across the state to reform early learning − making it bigger, better, and fairer.

Because of new partnerships and record investment, all Victorian children can now get 2 years of Free Kinder.

We can all be enormously proud of that achievement, but that’s just the start of our Best Start, Best Life reforms.

Victorian 3-year-olds are now benefitting from at least 5 hours of kinder a week. We will increase that to 15 hours by 2029. Over the next decade, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will transition to ‘Pre-Prep’ – doubling play-based learning for every 4-year-old child in Victoria to 30 hours a week.

We’re also building 50 Victorian government-owned and affordable Early Learning and Childcare Centres. We’ll build these in areas that have unmet demand, making it easier for families to get childcare. The first 4 centres are opening in 2025.

As we reform early learning, we are transforming communities. Children will get a better start to their education, families will save money, and parents will have greater flexibility to return to work if they choose.

Change of this scale does not happen overnight. It requires a lot of hard work, serious commitment and sensible planning. That’s where the Building Blocks grants come in.

Since launching in 2020, Building Blocks has funded new kindergarten buildings, expansions and improvements, supporting the sector to create additional kindergarten places across the state. It’s allowed us to expand early learning and work more closely with local government and not-for-profit providers to deliver more and better integrated, family and community services.

The results speak for themselves, but there’s still work to do to deliver these once in a generation reforms. That’s why in 2023, the Capacity Building grants offered further increases to State funding. These increases are substantial. In some cases, we’ve more than doubled the government support available for projects that add more kindergarten places in the communities that need them most.

The 2024–25 State Budget has ensured these increased Building Blocks Capacity grants rates have continued. It has also demonstrated our commitment to supporting local government and the early childhood sector to meet the needs of the community, well into the future.

I encourage all eligible organisations to embrace the life-changing potential of these reforms and consider applying for these grants. I look forward to seeing more of the exciting proposals and new partnerships they generate.

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Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP **Minister for Children**

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### **BUILDING BLOCKS OBJECTIVES**

The Victorian Government is delivering an unprecedented early childhood reform agenda.

In June 2022, the Best Start, Best Life reform was announced.

The Best Start, Best Life reform builds on the Victorian Government’s commitment of $1.68 billion, announced in 2018, to support the delivery of increased hours and the roll-out of infrastructure expansion required for the Three-Year-Old Kindergarten reform.

A key component of this reform has been Three-Year-Old Kindergarten rolling out across the state, expanding universal access to 15 hours of government-funded kinder every week. Three-Year-Old Kindergarten programs are gradually increasing, reaching 15 hours per week across Victoria by 2029. Four-Year-Old Kindergarten will [transition to Pre-Prep in stages](https://www.vic.gov.au/pre-prep) from 2025. From 2036 all children across Victoria will be eligible for 30 hours of Pre-Prep each week.

To support these major reforms the Victorian Government is expanding kindergarten infrastructure. It has committed to co-invest with the early childhood sector to build and expand kindergartens across the state. The Building Blocks grant program is an integral part of that commitment and is critical to the success of universal access to increased hours of Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten across Victoria over the life of the reform.

### **BUILDING BLOCKS PROGRAM - PLANNING GRANT STREAM**

The **Building Blocks Grants - Planning Stream** helpsfund planning and pre-construction work for kindergarten Capacity building projects that will support the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and Pre-Prep. For the purposes of this grant stream, the ‘planning process’ includes the scope development, design and costing required for a project before it is tendered for construction.

A Planning Grant means you can:

* plan a project, or pipeline of projects, to help provide the kindergarten places needed to meet demand for the roll-out of Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten
* better prepare applications for Building Blocks Capacity grants that will help deliver capacity building projects.

Planning Grants are not a pre-requisite to apply for other Building Blocks grants.

**Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plans**

Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plans (KISPs) were agreed with all local governments to support the infrastructure expansion required for Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and are now being updated to support Pre-Prep. KISPs set out agreed estimates of kindergarten supply and demand, and unmet demand over the implementation of the reforms. Collectively, they provide a consistent, state-wide planning framework designed to support sector planning and help ensure investment is targeted where it is needed to support the reforms.

While a KISP is not a funding document and does not commit any party to funding specific projects, future investment requests through Building Blocks and decisions about local government or not-for-profit projects must address unmet demand identified in the relevant KISP. We will consider the entire KISP to fully understand the data regarding the demand for kindergarten and the local context of service delivery, demographics and geography. This information is included in the ‘Local Context’ section of the KISP and may be referenced by the applicant when addressing criteria as part of a Building Blocks grant application.

KISPs are being updated to incorporate the additional demand generated by Pre-Prep and other up to date data as required. Whilst this process is underway, your application should demonstrate that the project will address unmet demand in the early years of the [rollout of Pre-Prep](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.premier.vic.gov.au%2Fpre-prep-begin-rolling-out-regional-victoria&data=05%7C02%7CMarina.Thomson%40education.vic.gov.au%7Caced733962124f95ba7908dd6b5bf3c2%7Cd96cb3371a8744cfb69b3cec334a4c1f%7C0%7C0%7C638784764873060737%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJFbXB0eU1hcGkiOnRydWUsIlYiOiIwLjAuMDAwMCIsIlAiOiJXaW4zMiIsIkFOIjoiTWFpbCIsIldUIjoyfQ%3D%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=lcx1hGRDPQVtwGt%2FgUXdWV%2F6nadFbuyEcbAH3%2B0wo5M%3D&reserved=0). Preliminary estimates of unmet demand have been shared with all local governments and may be used as evidence to demonstrate unmet demand. Please contact the local government where your project is located to request these estimates.

For the local government area (LGA) where a project is located, applicants to the Planning stream must provide evidence to demonstrate that the project is in an area with infrastructure need. Preliminary estimates of unmet demand may be used as evidence to demonstrate unmet demand.

Additionally, where enrolments are drawn from outside an applicant’s immediate LGA, **applicants must** **demonstrate where forecast enrolments are drawn** **from** to illustrate alignment to KISP demand.

**Project requirements**

Planning grants must:

* be completed within **12 months** of Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA) execution. This means that successful planning grant applicants have 12 months to complete their infrastructure planning processes, including identifying projects to apply for a Building Blocks Capacity Building grant.
* be used to plan for a Capacity Building stream project located in Victoria that is, or will be, licensed to provide a funded Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program, and must offer, or intend to offer, both programs. This can be sessional or integrated with long day care.
* demonstrate how the proposed project(s) will create additional kindergarten capacity, or maintain service continuity of existing capacity, in line with the demand of Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten, at a community and local government level.
* all applications must address unmet demand as identified in the relevant Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP). KISPs will be updated as part of the Best Start, Best Life program and, while this process is underway, respond to criteria based on the information currently available to you.

**Funding available**

Eligible organisations can apply for up to **$150,000** (GST exclusive).

Co-contributions are **not required** but are allowed**.**

**Project completion**

The planning work funded by a planning grant must be completed and acquitted within **12 months** of the VCFA execution date.

### **WHAT CAN (AND CANNOT) BE FUNDED?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What can be funded** | **What cannot be funded** |
| * project management costs * planning and design costs, such as:   + quantity surveyor fees and reports   + architect and design   + geo technical services   + feasibility studies   + town planning consultants   + planning permits   + soil contamination reports   + asbestos reports   + environmental sustainability assessments for energy and or water efficiency, e.g. NABERS and NatHERS * planning and design project costs relating to capacity building projects, or projects required to maintain existing capacity * planning for multi-staged projects * staff salaries and training for staff involved in working on the proposed kindergarten infrastructure planning project (note: funding is one-off and does not cover on-going appointment) * local design feasibility study (assessing multiple sites to determine opportunities and cost to meeting unmet demand) | * costs already incurred * site preparation, including clearing or demolition (these may be funded by a subsequent Building Block Grant) * construction and commissioning (these may be funded by a subsequent Building Blocks Grant) * landscaping and car parking (these may be funded by a subsequent Building Blocks Grant) * site acquisition and lease costs * ongoing administration or operational costs * Planning for Projects on a Victorian Government school site |

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### **EXCLUSIONS**

The Building Blocks Planning Grant program **will not fund** planning for projects that:

* do not address unmet demand as identified in the relevant KISP
* do not intend to create additional capacity or maintain existing kindergarten capacity required for the roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten and/or Pre-Prep through a subsequent Building Blocks Capacity Building application
* are not for facilities that offer, or intend to offer, both Three and Four-Year-Old funded Kindergarten programs
* are intended to be located outside Victoria
* do not align with the program objectives
* do not meet the requirements outlined in these guidelines
* do not meet the assessment criteria
* have already started or been completed (i.e. retrospective funding)

### **WHO CAN APPLY?**

Your organisation can apply if it is:

* a Victorian local government (council)
* a not-for-profit community organisation that is a legal entity (for example an incorporated association, incorporated cooperative or Indigenous corporation)
* a Victorian non-government school registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority or Catholic Education Commission of Victoria.

**For-profit organisations cannot apply** for any grant streams within Building Blocks. For further information regarding grant eligibility, please refer to the [**Building Blocks Planning Assessment Factsheet**](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/240916_Building-Blocks-Grants%E2%80%93Planning-Assessment-Factsheet.docx).

### **VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS and projects on DE land**

Kindergartens on Victorian Government schools are being assessed by the VSBA for suitability for a kindergarten aligned to demand data estimates. Schools are being prioritised based on agreed demand in the relevant Kindergarten Infrastructure Services Plan (KISP). Should a kindergarten be required in your area, the Kindergarten on School Sites (KOSS) team will lead this engagement with schools and other stakeholders.

Therefore, applications for new or expanded early childhood infrastructure on department owned land, including schools, are no longer accepted via grant applications. Should you wish to discuss a potential new kinder on a school site, or an expansion of an existing kinder on a school site, contact the KOSS team at [KOSS@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:KOSS@education.vic.gov.au).

### **ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

A [**Building Blocks Planning Assessment Factsheet**](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/240916_Building-Blocks-Grants%E2%80%93Planning-Assessment-Factsheet.docx) is available on the VSBA website to help you understand the planning assessment process.

This factsheet explains the type of information you need to include in your application. Please make sure that you refer to this factsheet when preparing your application.

Following the assessment process, the Department will provide its recommendation to the Minister for Children for final approval.

*The Minister reserves the right to provide strategic investment to projects. The Minister may also, on advice from the Department, provide funding to partners, in exceptional circumstances to support the provision of funded Three- and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten services across the state.*

### **FUNDING CONDITIONS**

Organisations that receive a grant must:

* agree to the requirements outlined in these guidelines (failure to do so may result in funding being withheld)
* enter into a formal Victorian Common Funding Agreement with the Department
* where applicable, follow the Building Blocks Acknowledgement and Publicity Guidelines.
* submit an acquittal form and the required supporting evidence for approval by the Department upon completion of the project
* agree that no additional Department funding will be allocated to the proposed project and if additional costs arise, they must be met by the applicant.

To remain eligible for funding, you **must not** enter into a contract or commence any works proposed in your application before we inform you of the application outcome.

Before submitting your application, we encourage you to review the following documents which further clarify your obligations for receiving *Building Blocks* funding.

* [Acknowledgement and Publicity Guidelines](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-acknowledgement-and-publicity-guidelines)
* Victorian Common Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions

### **NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS**

The Betrayal of Trust Report found that survivors of institutional child abuse were sometimes unable to identify an appropriate legal entity to sue.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse also recommended that governments consider requiring organisations they fund to be insured against child abuse.

**From 1 July 2019**, non-government organisations funded by the Victorian Government to deliver services to children will be required, as a condition of funding to be:

* **incorporated separate** legal entities that can be sued in their own right in child abuse proceedings
* **appropriately insured** against child abuse.

The new requirements will improve the ability of child abuse survivors to bring a legal claim for compensation and ensure that successful claims can be paid.

### **RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER FUNDS**

There are other grant programs that provide funding for the development of early childhood facilities and services. The Department must be advised of other funding applications for your project. We reserve the right to consider grant applications made for other programs, offered by the Department or other government departments and to submit Planning grant applications to other department agency led grant programs for consideration for funding under those programs where appropriate

### **PROJECT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

As a condition of funding for Planning grants, successful applicants must comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements, including:

* quarterly status reports through an online reporting system to provide an update on progress, updating proposed, forecast, and actual dates for project milestones, flagging risks and issues, and providing the required evidence when payment milestones have been met
* requesting approval from The Department for scope changes (relating to time, cost, and project scope) by completing and submitting a Request for Variation (RFV) form via the online reporting system
* meetings and teleconferences with Department staff or representatives if required, this may include more frequent updates as your project nears completion;
* supplying contracts, reports, receipts and/or invoices when requested; and
* acquittal through an online reporting system

Information about Project Extensions can be found in the [Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants).

### **ACQUITTAL REQUIREMENTS AND PROJECT VARIATIONS**

All successful applicants are required to upload information into the Department’s reporting system to complete their acquittal.

Recipient organisations must contact the Department immediately if they:

* Require a project extension
* Propose a change in project scope
* Propose a change in project costs which results in either an overspend or underspend.

Applicants will be required to complete a Request for Variation form (submitted through the online reporting system) for approval, together with detailed evidence that explains the reason for the variation.  The applicant will be asked to allocate any underspend towards additional eligible items in line with the guidelines before an acquittal is accepted. Overspends remain the responsibility of the organisation.

Further information on acquittal requirements and variation requests can be found in the [Frequently Asked Questions.](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants)

### **HOW TO APPLY**

Applications for Building Blocks Planning Grants are open all year round, and an outcome is anticipated approximately three months from submission.

Application forms can be accessed online through [SmartyGrants](https://vsba.smartygrants.com.au/). Applicants must complete a free registration to use the Smarty Grants application system.

For assistance with the online application system, please email the [Smarty Grants Support Desk](mailto:service@smartygrants.com.au) or call 03 9320 6888 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday. You can also consult the [help guide](http://applicanthelp.smartygrants.com.au/).

### **REVIEW OF APPLICATION OUTCOME**

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining funding for a Building Blocks Planning grant you may:

* contact the Early Childhood grants team for feedback on your application and outcome
* seek a review into the assessment of your application.

The VSBA Early Childhood Grants team can be contacted at: [building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au).

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

Before applying, please refer to the [**Building Blocks Planning Assessment Factsheet**](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-09/240916_Building-Blocks-Grants%E2%80%93Planning-Assessment-Factsheet.docx)**.** This factsheet contains important information about your grant application.

Please also read the[Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants).

For any queries, contact the VSBA Early Childhood Grants team at: [building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au).

### **INFORMATION PRIVACY**

The information you provide will be dealt with in accordance with the Public Records Act 1973 and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014.