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| Building Blocks  Grants  2024 Improvement 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. From 2025 to 2036, 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 childcare centres. We’ll build these in areas that have unmet demand, making it easier for families to get childcare. The first 4 centres will be open 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 this once-in-a-generation reform. The *Building Blocks* Improvement Grants stream helps kindergartens refurbish or renovate early childhood buildings and facilities, and purchase information technology to assist the delivery of educational programs and administration.

I encourage all eligible organisations to embrace the life-changing potential of this reform and consider applying for these grants. I look forward to seeing 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 *Building Blocks* grants support the Victorian Government's unprecedented reform and funding of early childhood education.

The grants are funding a massive program of building, modernising, and expanding kindergartens across the state.

This work, backed by new partnerships and record investment, means all Victorian children can now get 2 years of free kinder.

The reforms, and the benefits they bring, will continue to expand over the next few years.

Victorian 3-year-olds can now get at least 5 hours of kindergarten a week. That increases to 15 hours by 2029. Also, from 2025 to 2036, 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.

The government has invested $2.7 billion to work in partnership with local councils and early learning providers to build the kindergartens we need for these important reforms.

*Building Blocks* grants are key to identifying the best projects to realise the government’s vision and achieve best value for this significant public investment.

In particular, the Improvement Grants stream outlined below is helping our kindergartens upgrade, refurbish and renovate their early learning facilities so children can learn in a quality learning environment. Grants are also available to help services purchase new IT equipment or televisions to support administration or learning programs.

See *What Type of Grant Can I Apply For?* below for further details on the funding streams and amounts available.

# Improvement Grant Stream

The *Building Blocks* Improvement stream offers grants to help kindergartens refurbish or renovate early childhood buildings and facilities, and purchase information technology to assist in the delivery of educational programs and service administration.

Funding is designed to:

renovate or refurbish facilities to improve the quality of learning environments for kindergarten children.

deliver small renovations and refurbishments to early learning facilities.

purchase IT equipment or televisions for administration or learning programs

Projects must be for a kindergarten in Victoria that is, or will be, licensed to provide a funded Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program for **4 years** from project completion. The kindergarten **must** offer, or **intend** to offer, both programs. This can be sessional or integrated with long day care.

More information on eligibility, merit criteria and the application process are available on pages 9 – 10.

# Improvement Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist

It is **important** that applicants read these guidelines in conjunction with the *Building Blocks* [Improvement Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-improvement) which can be found on the VSBA website.

Applications cannot be considered for funding where:

* the organisation does not meet the eligibility criteria
* the organisation does not provide all the required documentation at application stage, such as soil and asbestos reports (where required)
* there is no clear evidence of costings

# What type of grant can I apply for?

There are 3 categories of grants under the*Building Blocks* Improvement stream:

* Early Learning Facility Upgrade
* Minor Infrastructure
* Information Technology

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| Grant Type | Early Learning Facility Upgrade |
| **Purpose** | Early Learning Facility Upgrade grants can be used by existing eligible early years facilities offering a funded 3 and 4-year-old program to upgrade or renovate facilities. |
| **Funding Available** | Up to **$750,000** per grant (GST exclusive)  Note applications require 2 quotes from a qualified professional for projects **less** than $200,000 OR 1 Quantity Surveyor (QS) report for projects **over** $200,000 or more\*. |
| **Co-contribution** | Grants over $150,000 **require** a co-contribution. |
| **Project Completion/**  **Acquittal** | Within **12 months** of executing a Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA) with the Department of Education (DE). |
| **Payment of Grants** | Payments are provided in 4 milestone payments. |

*\* QS report* ***not*** *required for projects proposed on DE land. Refer to Page 8 for more information.*

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| Grant Type | Minor Infrastructure |
| **Purpose** | Minor Infrastructure grants can be used by existing eligible early years facilities offering a funded 3 and 4-year-old program to upgrade or renovate facilities. |
| **Funding Available** | Up to **$150,000** per grant (GST exclusive)  Note: applications require 2 quotes from a qualified professional for projects **less** than $200,000 OR 1 QS report for projects **over** $200,000 or more\*. |
| **Co-contribution** | Grants under $150,000 **do not** require a co-contribution. |
| **Project Completion/**  **Acquittal** | Within **12 months** of executing a VCFA with DE. |
| **Payment of Grants** | Payments are provided in 2 milestone payments. |

*\* QS report* ***not*** *required for projects proposed on DE land. Refer to Page 8 for more information.*

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| Grant Type | Information Technology |
| **Purpose** | Information Technology grants support the purchase of desktop, laptop or tablet computers and televisions for use in the delivery of educational programs or service administration. |
| **Funding Available** | **Up to $2000** per grant(GST exclusive)  Note: a provider can apply for up to 20 IT applications for 20 services on 1 form. Noting each service is eligible for 1 IT grant only. |
| **Co-contribution** | Applicants do **not** have to co-contribute. |
| **Project Completion/ Acquittal** | Within 6 **months** of executing a VCFA with DE. |
| **Payment of Grants** | Payment provided in 1 upfront instalment.  Funding agreements must be signed and submitted by an authorised officer of the organisation no later than **4 weeks** after receipt. |

# What can and cannot be funded?

Early Learning Facility Upgrade and Minor Infrastructure

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| What can be funded | What cannot be funded |
| * external project management costs\* * planning and design costs that result in a completed playground or building upgrade * site preparation, including clearing or demolition (if the project will be on land owned by DE, please contact the VSBA before applying to confirm how these costs can be funded) * construction and commissioning * landscaping and car parking * fixed fittings and fixed equipment * a soil contamination assessment, completed before the application is submitted\* * a Division 6 Asbestos Audit Assessment completed before the application is submitted\* * removal of contaminates on project sites\* (e.g., asbestos/ arsenic * routine or cyclical maintenance works * upgrades that do not increase capacity | * site acquisition and lease costs * planning and design costs that do not result in a completed playground or building upgrade * purchase of cars, buses, and other vehicles * ongoing administration or operational costs including volunteer committee costs, staff salaries and training\*\* * toys, portable equipment, and consumables * movable electronic devices such as kitchen and garden appliances * IT equipment such as laptops, tablets and installed interactive screens * removal of contaminates on project sites (e.g. asbestos/ arsenic, lead), following announcement of the grant * additional funding due to project cost overruns * reimbursement for work already started or completed |

*\*Provided it is within scope of the state’s financial contribution for this grant stream and costs are included at application stage*

*\*\*Staff salaries may be eligible where these apply to new roles which engage staff for the exclusive purpose of project management.*

Information Technology

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| What can be funded | What cannot be funded |
| desktop computers  laptop computers  tablet computers  televisions  accessories\* which may include:   * + cables and adaptors   + consumables (e.g. data chargers for tablets)   + headphones   + devices for content streaming (e.g. Apple TV, Chromecast)   + data projectors and projector screens   + digital cameras   + docking stations   + keyboards and mice   + modems, routers or access points for Wi-Fi or cabled networking   + printers, photocopiers, and multi-function devices   + protective cases and laptop bags   + software and apps (including cards for online app stores)   + wall brackets for TVs   + transport, installation and training required for specific new equipment | applications solely for software  applications for software training  mobile phones  bee-bots, blue-bots, or similar programmable robotics  leased equipment (e.g. printers)  cabling or items requiring installation which disturbs building materials |

\**Funding for accessories may be requested so long as most of the proposed purchase is for desktop, laptop, or tablet computers and/or televisions, and the accessory relates to the major purchase and is for use as part of the learning program or for administrative use.*

# Exclusions

The *Building Blocks* Improvement stream **will not fund** projects that:

* are not located at a funded kindergarten service(s) at time of application
* are not at facilities which offer (or are intending to offer) both Three and Four-Year-Old Funded Kindergarten programs
* are 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 or include all the required **costings and** **documentation** (such as soil, asbestos or QS reports) at time of application
* 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 government school
* a Victorian non-government school registered with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority or Victorian Catholic Education Authority.

Victorian kindergarten providers with a funded kindergarten service at the time of application are eligible to receive funding. **For-profit organisations cannot apply** for any grant streams within Building Blocks.

For further information regarding eligibility, please refer to the Improvement Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist on the [VSBA website](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-improvement).

# Projects on DE Land

If you propose an **Early Learning Facility Upgrade** or **Minor Infrastructure** project on land owned by DE, you must contact the VSBA Early Childhood Grants team as early as possible during the development of your proposal to discuss the approach to land and project delivery.

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

Applications for projects on DE land must include:

* a completed [Land Use Proposal Form](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/early-childhood-grants) found on the VSBA website (refer to Projects on DE land)
* a copy of any existing lease or agreement between relevant parties
* a detailed design of your proposal
* 2 quotes from a qualified professional

If the project is located on DE land, the VSBA will procure a QS report and, where necessary, a division 6 asbestos report and soil hygiene report.

Successful grant recipients must also enter into a lease agreement with DE (if not already) in addition to their VCFA.

Attendance of a building professional at your facility is not a guarantee that your project will be funded.

Further information on these requirements can be found on the VSBA website in the [Frequently Asked Questions.](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-frequently-asked-questions)

# Assessment Process

DE will not consider late or incomplete applications.

A *Building Blocks* Improvement Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist can be found on the [VSBA website](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-improvement). Please refer to this factsheet before preparing your application. Applicants **must not** enter into a contract or commence any works proposed in an application until a VCFA has been executed with DE.

# Merit Assessment Criteria

Funding recommendations will be based on the extent to which you can demonstrate that your project addresses the following assessment criteria. These are weighted according to specified percentages, which align with *Building Blocks* Improvement stream objectives:

## Early Learning Facility Upgrades

* demonstrate how the proposed works improves the learning environment and access to high quality early childhood services (40%)
* delivers a quality kindergarten program that responds to projected demand for funded kindergarten places (20%)
* demonstrate access for children of all abilities (15%)
* incorporate environmentally-sustainable design (15%)
* demonstrate project readiness, including provision of all required documentation and overall completeness of the application (10%)

## Minor Infrastructure

* demonstrate how the proposed works improves the learning environment and access to high quality early childhood services (50%)
* the proposed project facilitates access for children of all abilities (20%)
* the proposed project adheres to environmental sustainability principles, and includes environmentally-sustainable features, in design or construction where possible (20%)
* confirmation the project is ready to commence construction (10%)

## Information Technology

* demonstrate how the proposed purchase will be used to provide educational benefits to the service (100%)

# Past Performance

DE will assess the applicant’s past performance to determine whether this is likely to have an impact on the successful delivery of the proposed project. Considerations include:

* timely delivery of former *Building Blocks* grants awarded to the organisation
* active projects funded via the *Building Blocks* program and whether time extensions have been requested and approved
* submission and compliance of mandatory monthly reports to DE
* providing all documentation required to acquit the grant within the contracted time frame, and/or
* taking the appropriate measures to inform DE when an unforeseen circumstance occurs, that could result in a time, cost, or scope change

Poor performance against these factors can result in projects not being recommended for funding.

# Soil and Asbestos Reports

Please read the Improvement Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist which can be found on the [VSBA website](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-improvement) to understand when these reports are required.

# Recommended Projects

Following the assessment process, DE provides a list of recommended projects to the Minister for Children for approval. The Minister makes the final determination with respect to funding. Applicants will be advised of any prolonged delays in notification of grant outcomes.

Projects will be recommended for funding primarily on their rating against the Assessment Criteria; however, the VSBA will consider other factors including:

* the availability of funding, noting that the number and value of eligible, highly-rated projects may exceed the total available funding
* an application increases approved kindergarten places
* the proposed project is deemed critical to the operation of the facility
* whether a service is in an area of demand or an area of projected demand for funded kindergarten places, and
* whether a service has received recent Building Blocks grant funding

The Minister reserves the right to provide strategic investment to projects. The Minister may also, on advice from DE, 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 VCFA with DE;
* where applicable, follow the [*Building Blocks* Acknowledgement and Publicity Guidelines](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-acknowledgement-and-publicity-guidelines), including:
  + liaising with DE and holding events on request, such as sod turns and openings
  + erecting signage for projects valued at over $250,000
  + offering the government’s representative the opportunity to attend and open the completed project, as well as any project-related events, noting that 3 months’ notice must be given for sod turns and official openings, by contacting [building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au).
* submit monthly progress reports through an online reporting system (more on this in ‘Project reporting requirements.
* submit an acquittal form and the required supporting evidence for approval by DE upon completion of the project.
* agree that no additional DE funding will be allocated to the proposed project and, if additional costs arise, they must be met by the applicant.

For more information on reporting and acquittal requirements, please refer to **Project reporting requirements** and **Acquittal requirements and project variations** on page 11.

To remain eligible for funding, **you** **must not** enter 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)

* [VCFA Standard Form Terms and Conditions](https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-common-funding-agreement-forms-and-templates)

# 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.

# Relationship with other funds

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

# Project management requirements

For **Early Learning Facility Upgrades** and **Minor Infrastructure** grants**,** a qualified and experienced project manager must be identified at the time of application and appointed within 4 weeks of the funding announcement.

# Project reporting requirements

As a condition of funding for **Early Learning Facility Upgrades** and **Minor Infrastructure** grants, successful applicants must comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements, including:

* monthly 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
* advising DE in advance of key milestones including architect appointment, design completion, sod turn and construction completion and providing opportunities for public communication of these milestones
* advising DE of scope changes (relating to time, cost, and project scope) by completing and submitting a Request for Variation (RFV) form via an online reporting system
* site inspections, meetings and teleconferences with DE staff or representatives if required
* production of building contracts, receipts and/or invoices when requested
* acquittal through an online reporting system

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

* advising DE of scope changes (relating to time, cost, and project scope) by completing and submitting a RFV form via an online reporting system
* site inspections, meetings and teleconferences with DE staff or representatives if required.
* production of receipts and/or invoices when requested.
* acquittal through an online reporting system.

# Acquittal requirements and project variations

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

Recipient organisations must contact DE 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 RFV (which will be submitted through an online reporting system), 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/building-blocks-frequently-asked-questions)

# How to apply

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

For assistance with the online application system, please email the [Smarty Grants Support Desk](mailto:service@smartygrants.com.au) or call on 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* Improvement 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 by email at [building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:building.blocks@education.vic.gov.au)

# Further information

**Before applying**, please read the Improvement Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist which can be found on the [VSBA website](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-improvement). This factsheet contains important information about your grant application.

Please also read the [Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-frequently-asked-questions).

If you have 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.*