Building Blocks

2025 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. That number is increasing to 15 hours by 2029. By 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’re building these in areas that have unmet demand, making it easier for families to get childcare. The first 4 centres are now open with another 14 set to open in early 2026.

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. That’s why the 2025-2026 budget includes $10 million for Building Blocks Improvement Grants. These grants help 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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AI-generated content may be incorrect.

A person with dark hair wearing a green shirt

Description automatically generated

Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP

**Minister for Children**

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# Building Blocks Objectives

*Building Blocks* grants are a key pillar of the Victorian Government's Best Start, Best Life reforms.

The grants support the sector by 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. Meanwhile, Four-Year-Old Kindergarten is transitioning to ‘Pre-Prep’ – doubling play-based learning for every 4-year-old child in Victoria from 15 to 30 hours a week by 2036.

Since 2015, $3.6 billion has been invested in early childhood infrastructure, including $2.7 billion invested since October 2022. This investment funds around 145 kindergartens across the state as well as the delivery of 35 of the 50 new government owned and operated Early Learning Victoria Centres and $15 million for Building Blocks Improvement and Inclusion grants in the 2025-26 State Budget.

*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-Year-Old and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten ([Free Kinder](https://www.vic.gov.au/free-kinder-english)) 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)

### 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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grant type | Early Learning Facility Upgrade |
| Purpose | Early Learning Facility Upgrade grants to fund existing eligible early years facilities offering a funded 3-year-old 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 2 separate qualified professionals 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. |
| Department of Education (DE) owned land | Applicants **must** submit a completed Land Use Proposal Form to support their application for a project on DE owned land.  Applications for projects on DE owned Land that are high value and/or deemed high risk or especially complicated may be delivered by the VSBA |
| Project completion and 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.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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 2 separate qualified professionals 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. |
| Department of Education (DE) owned land | Applicants **must** submit a completed Land Use Proposal Form to support their application for a project on DE owned land.  Applications for projects on DE owned Land that are high value and/or deemed high risk or especially complicated may be delivered by the VSBA |
| Project completion and 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 2 milestone payments |

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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 $2,000** 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 nothave to co-contribute. |
| Project completion and acquittal | Within 3 **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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 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\* (for example asbestos/arsenic) * 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\*\* * routine or cyclical maintenance works * toys, portable equipment, furniture 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 (for example 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 quotes 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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What can be funded | What cannot be funded |
| * desktop computers * laptop computers * tablet computers * televisions * accessories\* which may include: * cables and adaptors * consumables (for example data chargers for tablets) * headphones * devices for content streaming (for example 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 * digital microscopes * digital photo frames * lamps, night lights/planetarium projectors * leased equipment (for example 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-Year-Old **and** Four-Year-Old Funded Kindergarten programs
* do not agree to deliver [Free Kinder](https://www.vic.gov.au/free-kinder-english) for at least 4 years after the completion of the grant project
* 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 Department of Education DE owned Land

If you propose an **Early Learning Facility Upgrade** or **Minor Infrastructure** project on land owned by DE, you **must advise** the Early Childhood Grants team and DE’s relevant regional provision and planning manager as early as possible. This is required to discuss the approach to land and project delivery, should your project be successful.

Applications for projects on DE land must also 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) including:
* a copy of any existing lease or agreement between relevant parties
* a detailed design of your proposal
* 2 quotes from a qualified professional for projects below $75,000 (GST inclusive); **or** 3 quotes for projects exceeding $75,000 (GST inclusive)
* a request for structural assessment reports (if works are proposed to a roof for example solar installations or extensions of roof line or roof upgrades).
* a mark-up of a School Plan (previously Schools Asset Management Plan) or Site Plan indicating clearly where the proposed works will be carried out.

If the project is located on DE land, DE will procure a Quantity Surveyor report and, where necessary, a Division 6 Asbestos Report, Soil Hygiene Report and/ or Geo-Tech Report.

Applications for projects on DE owned land that are high value and/or deemed high risk or especially complicated may be delivered by DE.

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

## 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 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%)
* incorporates 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,
* 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 formal approval. Applicants will be advised of any prolonged delays in notification of grant outcomes.

Eligible projects will be recommended for funding primarily on their rating against the Assessment Criteria. However, the number and value of eligible, highly rated applications may exceed the total available funding, therefore DE will consider other factors including whether:

* a service has received recent Building Blocks grant funding
* the proposed project increases approved kindergarten places
* the proposed project is deemed a priority upgrade for the facility, that increases safety, compliance, and helps keep the kindergarten continue operating into the future
* a service is in an area of demand or an area of projected demand for funded kindergarten places
* 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-Year-Old 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 Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA) with DE
* not enter a contract or commence any work proposed in an application until a VCFA has been executed 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
* 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.
* advise DE of any service closure prior to receipt of outcome
* consent to DE delivering their project if on DE land, as decided by DE

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

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 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 Request for Variation (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 may 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.*