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| BUILDING BLOCKS GRANTS 2024 INCLUSION GRANT 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 Inclusion Grants stream makes it easier for kindergartens to make buildings and playgrounds more accessible and inclusive. It offers funding to upgrade classrooms and purchase play equipment so that kindergartens can support the needs of children of all levels and abilities.

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.





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 kinders we need for these important reforms.

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

In particular, the inclusion grants stream outlined below is making our kindergarten buildings and playgrounds more accessible, safer and better equipped for children of all abilities.

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

# Inclusion Grant Stream

The Building Blocks Inclusion stream provides funding to kindergartens to upgrade early childhood buildings and facilities (including playgrounds), and purchase equipment to provide safe and more inclusive environments for children of all abilities.

Funding is for projects designed to:

* increase engagement, improve learning outcomes and strengthen inclusive early childhood learning environments for children of all abilities
* promote inclusion in early childhood teaching approaches that are tailored to the needs of all learners
* create innovative early childhood learning environments based on inclusive and [universal design best practice.](https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/the-7-principles)

Projects must be for a funded kindergarten in Victoria that is, or will be, licensed to provide a funded Three and Four-Year-Old Kindergarten program for **four 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.**

## INCLUSION ASSESSMENT FACTSHEET AND APPLICATION CHECKLIST

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

Organisations that meet the eligibility criteria and provide required documentation at the application stage, such as soil and asbestos reports (where required) and clear evidence of costings, will be prioritised.

## WHAT TYPE OF GRANT CAN I APPLY FOR?

There are two categories of grants under the *Building Blocks* Inclusion stream:

* Buildings and Playgrounds
* Equipment

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| Grant type | Buildings and Playgrounds |
| **Purpose** | Grants are offered to improve early childhood buildings and facilities to provide safe and more inclusive environments for children of all abilities. Funding is for fixed fittings and equipment. |
| **Funding available** | Up to $200,000 per grant (GST exclusive) (please note that a minimum 10-15% cost contingency **must** be added to quotes and QS reports)* Projects less than $200,000 (ex GST) require 2 quotes from a qualified professional.
* Projects $200,000 and over (ex GST) require a Quantity Surveyor (QS) report.
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| **Co-contribution** | Applicants do not have to co-contribute.  |
| **Project completion/acquittal** | Within 12 months of executing a Victorian Common Funding Agreement (VCFA) with the Department. |
| **Payment of grants** | Payment provided in four milestone instalments throughout 12-month period. |

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| Grant type | Equipment |
| **Purpose** | Equipment grants are offered to fund the purchase of inclusive educational equipment for kindergarten programs. Funding is for non-fixed equipment (i.e., non-fixed to buildings). |
| **Funding available** | Up to $10,000 per grant (ex GST). |
| **Co-contribution** | Applicants do not have to co-contribute.  |
| **Project completion/acquittal** | Within 3 months of executing a VCFA with the Department. |
| **Payment of grants** | Payment provided in one up front instalment. |

## WHAT CAN (and CANNOT) BE FUNDED?

Buildings and Playgrounds

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| **WHAT CAN BE FUNDED** | **WHAT CANNOT BE FUNDED** |
| * project management costs
* planning and design costs that result in a completed playground or building upgrade
* site preparation, including clearing or demolition (if the proposed project is on land owned by the Department, you must contact the VSBA Early Childhood Grants team before applying to confirm how these costs can be funded)
* construction and commissioning
* landscaping and accessible 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 such as asbestos/arsenic/ heavy metals\*

*\*Provided it is within scope of the state’s financial contribution for this grant stream and costs are included at application stage* | * planning and design costs that do not result in a completed playground or building upgrade
* site acquisition and lease costs
* routine or cyclical maintenance works
* purchase of cars, buses and other vehicles
* ongoing administration or operational costs including volunteer committee costs, staff salaries and training
* additional funding due to project cost overruns
* purchase of relocatable buildings (including ‘pods’) which would extend or increase the number of early childhood buildings
* information technology costs
* non-fixed furniture and specialist disability equipment e.g., specialist chairs and toilet frames
* reimbursement for work already started or completed
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Equipment

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| **WHAT CAN BE FUNDED** | **WHAT CANNOT BE FUNDED** |
| * moveable and accessible equipment, such as:
	+ ramps to support transition between play areas and entry/exit to services
	+ safety surfacing (e.g., soft fall mats) and indoor/outdoor gross motor skill equipment such as climbing frames and balancing boards
	+ indoor/outdoor sensory equipment and resources
	+ adjustable furniture, such as inclusion tables, change tables, mobility stools, toilet frames/steps, walking frames
	+ wadding/protective padding for building structures, e.g., around veranda posts
	+ installation costs (only costs for installing equipment funded through the Inclusion stream)
 | * information technology equipment, software or subscriptions e.g., laptops, tablets, bee-bots and robotics etc.
* non-moveable (i.e., permanently fixed to buildings) and non-inclusive equipment such as dryers, mirrors and shelving
* reimbursement for equipment already purchased
* first aid medical, toiletries and other sanitary items e.g., nappies
* gardening equipment and plants, such as leaf blowers, water pumps and generators
* shade sails
* artwork
* clothing and footwear
* ongoing administration or operational costs including staff salaries and training, office furniture and maintenance costs
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## EXCLUSIONS

* The Building Blocks Inclusion 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 Quantity Surveyor 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(s) 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 [Inclusion Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-inclusion) on the VSBA website.

## PROJECTS ON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LAND

If you propose a **Buildings and Playgrounds** project on land owned by the Department of Education (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.

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 Department of Education 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 Quantity Surveyor report.

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

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

The Department will not consider late or incomplete applications.

A Building Blocks [Inclusion Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-inclusion) can be found on the VSBA website. Please refer to this factsheet before preparing your application

Following the assessment process, the Department provides recommendations to the Minister for Children for formal approval. Applicants will be advised of any prolonged delays in notification of grant outcomes.

Applicants **must not** enter into a contract or commence any works proposed in an application until a Funding Agreement has been executed with the department.

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.

## 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 Inclusion stream objectives:

**Buildings and Playgrounds**

* Demonstrate how the proposed works (60%):
	+ upgrade or maintain infrastructure to enable children with all abilities to participate in an inclusive kindergarten learning environment; and
	+ support teaching approaches that promote inclusion
* Demonstrate how the proposed works support the seven universal design principles (20%)
* Demonstrate how the proposed works promote environmental sustainability (10%)
* Demonstrate project readiness, including provision of all required documentation and overall completeness of the application (10%)

**Equipment**

* Demonstrate how the proposed purchases enable children with all abilities to participate in an inclusive kindergarten learning environment (100%)

## PAST PERFORMANCE

The department 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 the department
* providing all documentation required to acquit the grant within the contracted time frame
* and/or taking the appropriate measures to inform the department 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 [Inclusion Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-inclusion) which can be found on the VSBA website to understand when these reports are required.

## 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 (VCFA) with the department;
* 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 the department and holding events on requests, 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.
* submit monthly progress reports through an online reporting system and provide supporting evidence for payment of milestone claims.
* submit an acquittal form and the required supporting evidence for approval by the Department upon completion of the project.
* agree that no additional Department of Education state 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 (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. 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 Inclusion stream applications to other Department agency led grant programs for consideration for funding under those programs where appropriate.

## PROJECT MANGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

For **Buildings and Playgrounds** grants**,** a qualified and experienced project manager must be identified at the time of application and appointed within four weeks of the funding announcement.

## PROJECT REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

As a condition of funding for **Buildings and Playgrounds** 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 the Department 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 the Department 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 Department 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 **Equipment** grants, successful applicants must comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements, including:

* advising the Department 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 Department 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 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 (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 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 OUTCOME

If you are unsuccessful in obtaining funding for a *Building Blocks* Inclusion 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

## FURTHER INFORMATION

**Before applying**, please read the [Inclusion Assessment Factsheet and Application Checklist](https://www.schoolbuildings.vic.gov.au/building-blocks-grants-inclusion) which can be found on the VSBA website. 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

## 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