

Applying for EEF funding

Guidance notes to support you in completing the application form for our Autumn 2025 funding round

Round open: Wednesday 24th September 2025

Closing date: 11:00am, Wednesday 5th November 2025

Interventions to support early years self-regulation and executive function outcomes – innovation applications

The EEF's grant-funding rounds test the impact of high-potential programmes and approaches aiming to raise the attainment of 2–19-year-olds from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Funding rounds focus on projects within selected themes. This ensures that we are funding projects that can answer the most important questions as suggested by the existing evidence base and settings' priorities, while also giving precedence to the areas that are likely to be most beneficial for socio-economically disadvantaged children. This guidance document is for organisations considering applying for the **Early Years theme** (with a focus on programmes that prioritise self-regulation and executive function) of the EEF's Autumn 2025 funding round.

The first few years of a child's life are hugely important to their future. How they spend this critical period shapes their outcomes—both in the shorter term and later in life—laying the foundations for their development and future academic achievement, which in turn, have a significant influence on their life chances. Giving every child access to great learning and development opportunities in the early years is also crucial to combatting education inequality: gaps in development between children from disadvantaged homes and their more affluent peers require early identification and intervention.

Key for development in the early years and the foundation for future learning and attainment are self-regulation and executive function.^{1,2} **Self-regulation** refers to skills and abilities that help children to monitor their emotions, thoughts, and behaviour, while **executive function** refers to skills and abilities that help children to resist impulses, direct their attention and hold information in mind.² The objective of this funding round is to **provide small, targeted grants, alongside dedicated EEF support**, to support organisations to develop a codified programme based on one of the priority areas listed below.

¹ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2011). [Building the Brain's "Air Traffic Control" System: How Early Experiences Shape the Development of Executive Function: Working Paper No. 11.](#)

² The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2023). [The Early Years Evidence Store: Self-Regulation and Executive Function.](#)

Early Years priority areas and sub-themes

The primary focus of this funding round is self-regulation and executive function. We are interested in programmes that support 2–5-year-old children. This includes professional development programmes provided to educators working in maintained nurseries; Private, Voluntary and Independent settings (PVIs); primary school reception phases; and childminders.

For each of the priority areas, we have identified that there is a gap in high-quality programmes to support practice change and children's outcomes already available to settings, but great need from the sector, which is why the EEF is calling for organisations to develop programmes of support in these areas.

- For 2–3-year-olds we are interested in professional development that enables educators to sensitively and effectively support children through co-regulation.
- For 3–5-year-olds we are interested in approaches that focus on creating and navigating challenge, creating a community of collaborative learners, and promoting talk about learning.

A range of examples are included in the table below to give an indication of what applications with a direct and indirect focus on the priority areas could look like.

Applications may cover multiple priority areas and sub-themes but must address at least one.

The sub-themes have been identified following a review of the existing evidence and practice in settings, stakeholder engagement and a review of the existing programmes the EEF has funded within this theme. Please indicate which of these your application is addressing, referring to the number and letter from the tables below.

Priority areas for 2–3-year-olds

Priority Area One: Co-regulation

Educators working alongside children to co-regulate and co-solve problems. Adults helping children to shift their attention and inhibit their initial impulses, in favour of alternative emotional and behavioural responses. Educators supporting children to develop the skills that help them to regulate.

Sub-theme 1a. Developing educators' skills which enable them to respond in a consistent and supportive manner as they help children to regulate, such as through consistent responses or identifying learning opportunities when co-regulating.

Sub-theme 1b. Professional development to support educators' use of talk and gesture to shift/co-manage children's attention or emotions in order to help them inhibit their initial impulses.

Sub-theme 1c. Professional development to support educators in modelling appropriate self-regulation strategies and reactions to challenges in order to support the development of co-regulation in children.

Examples of programmes that could fall under this priority area include:

- Professional development that supports educator awareness of how children's states affect them and how they support children, before engaging in co-regulation activities.
- Professional development for educators to support children to move from co-regulation to self-regulation.

Priority areas for 3–5-year-olds

Priority Area Two: Creating and navigating challenge

Creating developmentally appropriate challenges for children to develop and practise their skills in different contexts

Sub-theme 2a. Developing educators' skills to design appropriate challenges for children and/or adjust them appropriately (scaffolding).

Sub-theme 2b. Developing educators' skills to support children 'in the moment' as they navigate through challenges and tasks (including during play). This includes approaches to support educators to monitor and observe children before supporting them, as well as approaches to support persistence and adaptability.

Examples of programmes that could fall under this priority area include:

- Professional development for educators to support children through challenges including the use of hints/prompts and scaffolding.
- Professional development to support educators to introduce challenges or dilemmas during play and ways to help children think about and approach these challenges.

Priority Area Three: Creating a community of collaborative learners

Facilitating collaborative groups of learners where adults and children cooperate and work towards shared goals

Sub-theme 3a. Professional development to help educators to plan for and create collaborative learning/play, including involving children's voices in planning activities.

Sub-theme 3b. Professional development that supports educators to create and facilitate (scaffolded) collaborative learning experiences for children. This can include approaches to support child-led play.

Examples of programmes that could fall under this priority area include:

- Professional development to help educators co-create play activities where children are challenged, co-operate, work together, make rules and take turns.

Priority Area Four: Promoting talk about learning

Encouraging talk that enables children to plan, monitor, and reflect on their thinking and learning, including how they plan to approach or adapt an activity and evaluating this afterwards

Sub-theme 4a. Developing educators' skills to think aloud to children to share thought processes or to draw attention to/affirm interest in relevant characteristics of problems or thinking.

Examples of programmes that could fall under this priority area include:

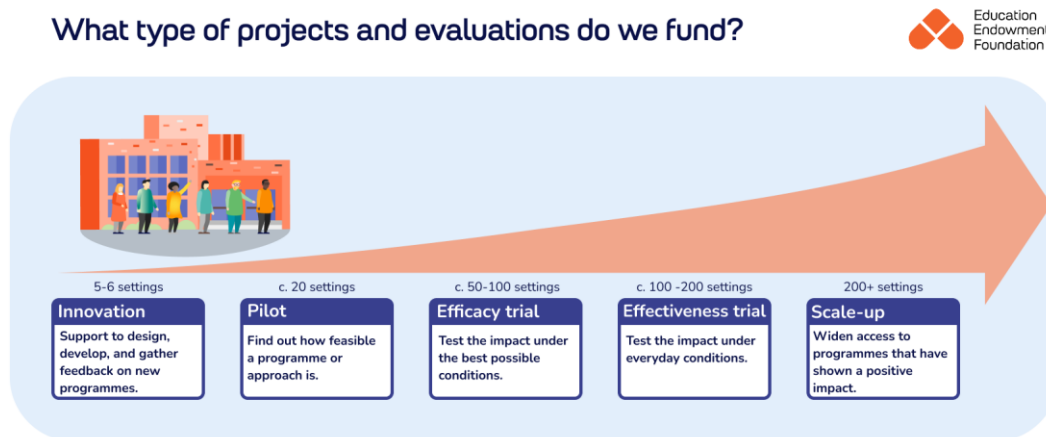
- Professional development for educators to share their thought processes to approaching challenges to children in age-appropriate ways.
- Professional development for educators to identify and highlight relevant issues or actions to overcome challenges when they are supporting children to plan learning or activities.

What is innovation funding?

This funding round is open to developers of programmes that seek to improve outcomes for young children and align with one or more of our priority areas and sub-themes identified above. For this early years funding round, we are open to applications in the **innovation phase** of our evidence pipeline.

Innovation is a stage of EEF funding that supports the development of new programmes: programmes in the earliest stages of development go through a structured process to aid programme design and the collection of feedback before the programme is delivered in a small number of settings. We also call this phase ‘early stage programme development’. You can read more about our approach to early stage programme development here and see previous projects that we have funded: [early stage programme development](#).

The below diagram shows the different project stages we fund, referred to as our ‘[evidence pipeline](#)’.



Innovation Projects

Applications that are suitable for the Innovation route are those from organisations that are interested in following a structured process to use evidence to design and develop a programme from their initial idea. This route is suitable for new ideas for structured programmes drawing on developer expertise or experiences, which could include where some existing training/approaches need to be codified and fully developed, or where the aim is to create a programme that is suitable for a wider range of settings from something that has delivered in one school or trust. Applications that are selected for the Innovation route will follow a structured process to design, develop and package programmes and then deliver them in 5–6 participating settings. Developers are supported to collect their own feedback through this process — an independent evaluator is **not** engaged at this stage.

There is a **fixed grant of £30,000** available to contribute towards the costs of engaging in the development process, delivering the programme to settings, and collecting formative feedback. Participating settings also receive funding to support their engagement and provision of feedback.

The stages of the Innovation process

Stage	Objectives
1 – Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing a theory of change for your programme• Developing a plan to gather feedback on whether the programme can be delivered as intended
2 – Build	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Developing and refining your programme materials and resources• Developing tools to gather formative feedback about feasibility and acceptability• Recruiting 5–6 settings to deliver your programme in
3 – Deliver and observe	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delivering and gathering feedback on your programme in 5–6 settings
4 – Analyse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Analysing feedback from settings• Writing a concise reflection on findings for the EEF
5 – Reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having a reflective discussion with the EEF to explore the feedback on your programme and potential next steps

What makes a successful proposal?

Successful proposals will:

- **Be grounded in evidence.** Successful applications will demonstrate a good understanding of the existing evidence in the area the programme is being developed in, and how their programme will improve outcomes.
- **Be aligned with the EEF's mission.** Successful applications will present a convincing argument about how their programme will benefit disadvantaged children.
- **Have an experienced project team.** Successful applications will be driven by teams that have experience in delivering similar projects (for example, developing new programmes, delivering professional development to practitioners, or creating programme materials in similar contexts), expertise in the early years sector, and have the capacity to work on the project.

We broadly expect applicants to be ambitious about their programme idea, with the impetus to develop a programme that is practical, cost effective and scalable. The EEF's aim is to identify programmes that, if shown to be successful, could be taken on by educational settings across England and move onto rigorous independent evaluation. The EEF's [Scaling Framework](#) may be useful to support your thinking: it gives an indication of what good scalability looks like at each stage of the EEF's evaluation pipeline.

How to apply

To submit an application, please complete the online [Early Years Application Form](#).

- Guidance on each of the questions can be found below.
- You might also find it useful to have a look at our [Funding FAQs](#). Moreover, for examples of the types of programmes we fund for innovation, please check the past [early stage programme development projects](#). We aim to fund a mix of different types of programmes, so if your idea is very similar to something we have already supported, do contact us before applying, and/or ensure you address this clearly in your application.
- Please consider attending the Early Years Applicant Webinar we are hosting on **2nd October, 3:00–4:00pm**, to support prospective teams in applying for funding. You can sign up [here](#).
- **The deadline for applications is Wednesday 5th November at 11:00am.**
- Shortlisted programmes will go through a due diligence process before a decision is made on final approval.

Timeline for Innovation Projects

Activity	Date
Funding round opens	w/c 22 nd September 2025
Early Years Applicant Webinar	2 nd October 2025 at 3:00pm
Deadline for applications	5 th November 2025 at 11:00am
Due diligence process	December 2025–mid-January 2026
Final decision confirmed	Late January 2026
Design stage: workshops to support programmes design and theory of change	Late January–June 2026
Build stage: develop programme materials and tools for gathering feedback; recruit participating schools (project dependent)	Early June–late December 2026
Deliver stage: programme starts in schools/settings (project dependent)	From early January, with all delivery to be completed by December 2027 at the latest

Innovation application form guidance notes

To submit an application, please complete the online [Early Years Application Form](#).

Wherever the guidance refers to ‘schools/settings’, this can be read as referring to a range of settings, including early years settings and childminders. Where the guidance refers to ‘teachers’, this can be read as referring to a range of practitioners, such as teachers, early years educators and teaching assistants. Where the guidance refers to ‘parents’, this can be read as including other carers. Where the guidance refers to ‘pupils’, this can be read as including young children, pupils, and young adults engaged in 16–19 education.

Applications can be saved on the system while drafting. You may find it easier to draft first in another program, like Microsoft Word, paying attention to the maximum word count for each question. If copying into the form, please format using the form's tools.

Please note that confirmation that your application form has been submitted, and the outcome of your application, will be sent to the 'applicant contact email' address given in the application form below.

The following notes explain each question from the application form. Each section relates to a section on the form. If you have any questions, please contact the EEF at applications@eefoundation.org.uk.

Eligibility Screening

1.1 Where will your proposed programme take place?

Please note that the EEF can only fund programmes that will work for the benefit of children and settings in England.

1.2 Is your application from a legally constituted organisation?

We accept applications from legally constituted organisations, and not from individuals. The organisation does not have to be based in England, although if you are not based in England, we would expect you to demonstrate reasonable partnerships and knowledge to support you to work with English schools/settings.

1.3 Would this grant be used to pay for any costs already incurred?

Our grant funding is restricted to cover activities supporting your proposed programme and cannot be used to cover costs that have already been incurred. For Innovation projects the grant will typically start once the due diligence processes have been completed and the grant agreement has been signed.

1.4 What types of costs or activities would the grant be used for?

We are not a source of funding for ongoing delivery of existing commitments. If successful, you will be required to work with new settings that you have not previously worked with. For Innovation projects, funding is available as a fixed grant and should support the direct costs of engaging in the structured process and delivering the programme in 5–6 settings. Funding is not available to cover: property or capital items; pupil fees, scholarships or bursaries; loan or debt repayment. We do not fund indirect university costs (e.g., estate costs of permanent university staff). Website development and seminar attendance are also out of scope, except for where they are part of a wider proposal with the broad aim stated above.

About your organisation

2.1 Organisation name

2.2 Organisation type

Please select from:

- Early years setting
- Primary school
- Secondary school
- Special school

- Further education college
- Sixth form college
- Sixth form attached to a school
- Independent training provider
- University
- Local education authority
- Charity
- For-profit company
- Multi-academy trust/Teaching School Alliance
- Community Enterprise Company/Social Enterprise
- Other (please state)

2.3 Number of employees

2.4 Briefly outline your experience of working with pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (100 words).

Please include here an indication of the demographic of children your organisation works with—this could include, for example, indicating the percentage of children who are eligible for free school meals or the Early Years Pupil Premium. We are interested in your experience working with children in Early Years settings specifically, experience of working with children from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, and/ or delivering your programme to these cohorts?

2.5 Applicant title

2.6 Applicant first name

2.7 Applicant last name

2.8 Applicant contact email

Please note that confirmation that your application form has been submitted, and the outcome of your application, will be sent to this email address.

2.9 Applicant contact phone

2.10 Applicant job title

2.11 Please give the name and a brief description of any partner organisations that will contribute to this programme (100 words).

Please indicate what role the partner organisation(s) will play in the proposed programme.

Programme questions

3.1 Please tick the main priority area the proposed programme is related to.

Further information on each priority area is included above.

Please choose from:

1. Co-regulation (2–3-year-olds)
2. Creating and navigating challenge (3–5-year-olds)

3. Creating a community of collaborative learners (3–5-year-olds)
4. Promoting talk about learning (3–5-year-olds)

3.2 Which sub-theme(s) does your programme fit within?

Refer to the section above on priority areas and sub-themes. If more than one sub-theme applies, please select the most relevant.

- 1a. Developing educators' skills which enable them to respond in a consistent and supportive manner as they help children to regulate, such as through consistent responses or identifying learning opportunities when co-regulating.
- 1b. Professional development to use talk and gesture to shift/co-manage children's attention or emotions in order to help them inhibit their initial impulses.
- 1c. Professional development to support adults in modelling appropriate strategies and reactions to challenges.
- 2a. Developing educators' skills to design appropriate challenges for children and/or adjust them appropriately (scaffolding)
- 2b. Developing educators' skills to support children 'in the moment' as they navigate through challenges and tasks (including during play). This includes approaches to support educators to monitor and observe children before supporting them, as well as approaches to support persistence and adaptability.
- 3a. Professional development to help educators to plan for and create collaborative learning/play, including involving children's voices in planning activities.
- 3b. Professional development that supports educators to create and facilitate (scaffolded) collaborative learning experiences for children.
- 4a. Developing educators' skills to think aloud to children to share thought processes or to draw attention to/affirm interest in relevant characteristics of problems or thinking.

3.3 How does your programme link to the priority area and sub-theme(s) (150 words)?

If it links to any further priority areas and sub-themes, please mention it here.

3.4 Programme title (15 words)

Please give your programme a rough title. Simple, descriptive titles (e.g., "Peer-tutoring in the North-East" or "Mentoring programme for Year 7s") are welcome. If you are applying with a named programme, please include the name in the title.

3.5 Please describe the experience and expertise of the proposed team (100 words)

The development team is central to ensuring EEF funds are well spent and that the programme has potential impact. We would like to know about them and their track record in this area. (e.g., engaging with evidence, designing professional development, understanding teaching practice well, recruiting schools/settings to programmes, managing complex programmes, working with partners, previous experience of working with disadvantaged children in year groups or Key Stages that your proposal targets, as well as expertise in the area your programme covers).

Please provide a comprehensive list of members of the team that you expect to involve in developing this programme. Describe what their responsibilities will be.

3.6 Which Key Stage(s) are you targeting?

Please select the main Key Stage focus you have in mind for your programme:

- Early Years, Reception

3.7 Is your programme likely to be: whole setting/whole class/targeted programme?

Please give an indication of whether you are expecting the programme to aim at **whole setting change** (e.g. training all teaching staff); **whole class** (e.g. training practitioners to improve their classroom practice); or a **targeted programme** (e.g. additional small group support for struggling pupils).

3.8 Please briefly outline the rationale for the programme idea and why it is needed (100 words)

Please outline what challenge you are hoping your programme will address and why you think the programme can help address it.

3.9 Please select who you think is most likely to be directly responsible for improving outcomes.

For, example if a teacher receives training to support children to undertake a specific activity, this would be the teacher rather than external trainer.

- Please select from: subject leaders/setting leaders/teachers or educators/teaching assistants/external trainers/other
- If 'other' please let us know who

3.10 Please provide a brief description of your initial ideas for the programme you would like to develop (300 words)

In describing your ideas, it is helpful to consider:

- who will benefit from the programme (recipients e.g., all children and teachers, or targeted groups) and why you think that they will
- the likely support for implementation (likely training, resources, coaching etc.)
- how long you think the programme might be (in this context we are looking for programmes where children, having undertaken the programme, demonstrate a measurable improvement in attainment so the length/intensity of the approach should reflect this).
- If there are likely to be restrictions or limitations of the schools who might be able to use and access the programme from your initial ideas (e.g., would need good internet access and laptops for all students).

Write your description in clear, straightforward language, avoiding jargon or technical terms. If you need to use specific terms, provide brief explanations so that someone unfamiliar with your field can easily understand. Use short sentences and bullet points where appropriate to make your description more readable.

3.11 Please describe how your programme ideas align with the EEF's mission to break the link between family income and educational achievement (300 words)

When assessing how your application fits the EEF's portfolio, a key consideration will be alignment with our mission. You can assume that we have some understanding of the broad issues facing socio-economically disadvantaged children. Here, we are interested in how your specific programme aligns with EEF's mission. Details specific to your programme ideas, e.g. specific language deficits or gender sub-groups, should be briefly explained.

In particular, please outline why the programme is expected to have a greater impact on the learning outcomes of disadvantaged children. Please indicate what evidence supports your claims.

3.12 Please describe how your proposed programme fills a gap in support for Early Years settings in England (200 words)

Please describe how your proposed programme relates to the existing programmes and professional development available to schools/settings. Please include wider context such as how the programme addresses sector interests such as those of schools/settings or policy makers. If the proposal is similar to anything that the EEF has funded in the past, please highlight this and expand on what this research will add to the evidence base. If the programme draws on ideas from other countries and programmes, please include this here too.

3.13 Please describe how your proposed programme is likely to be different from ‘business as usual’ in settings (100 words)

Please detail here precisely how the approach differs from typical practice, and how you know.

3.14 If the proposed programme was to be funded by the EEF, and positive indicative results were found, would your organisation be willing to further progress delivery of the programme, including for an independent evaluation (for example, at pilot or efficacy level)? (200 words)

We are interested in how your programme might be scaled up so that it could be delivered in larger numbers of schools and settings in England and subjected to a robust impact evaluation. For example, does the lead organisation have the capacity and skills to grow the model? Or would it need to be partnered with a larger organisation/network for further scaled delivery? Please discuss here if you already have current thinking regarding delivery at scale in the future. Note, we understand this thinking may not yet be in place, we are keen to understand any initial ideas and intentions you have.

We suggest reviewing the EEF’s [Scaling Framework](#) to see the indicators of good scalability at all stages of our evidence generation pipeline and to support thinking about the areas that you may need to consider as an organisation.

3.15 Please provide an explanation of the research evidence that supports your ideas for your programme design. You may provide references. (200 words)

Good applications will draw on high quality evidence. This might include systematic reviews and meta-analyses that collate multiple previously published research studies, or high-quality synthesis of evidence for example through EEF Teaching and Learning Toolkits or Guidance Reports.

EEF’s resource ‘[Using Research Evidence: A Concise Guide](#)’ gives an overview of different types of education evidence, what they can be used for, and what their limitations might be.

4.1 Additional documentation upload (optional)

The maximum file size that can be accepted by the form is 30 MB. Larger files that are crucial for your application can be emailed to applications@eefoundation.org.uk.