



**Bristol Family Hubs and Start for Life:
Test and Learn Grants Scheme
2025/2026**

Application Guidance

**Deadline for applications: 30th
September 2025**

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About the Scheme

[The Bristol Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme](#) has been funded by the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care since 2022. During this time, we've made great progress towards giving families the support they need to care for their children from conception into the start of adulthood. In Bristol, this has involved a 'campus model' of closely connected, highly varied local services that work together to help families thrive. Our emphasis has always been on ensuring parents have the resources they need to give their children the best start in life, especially for the families most affected by inequality.

However, there is still much more to do. The Department for Education have announced that they plan to build on the successes of the Family Hubs and Start for Life programme by creating a new '[Best Start Family Hubs Programme](#)', which local authorities will be funded to deliver from 2026 to 2029.

We are looking to get ready for this exciting new time by exploring innovative ways to have an impact for families. Through the Test and Learn Grants Scheme, we aim to:

- Work with new partners who are already reaching parts of the community we aren't
- Build services based on a solid understanding of what the needs of our communities are
- Make sure our funding process is as transparent and accessible as possible

We are therefore looking to award a limited number of small grants to organisations to carry out 'test and learn' projects over a period of six months, from **November 2025 to April 2026**.

However, we also welcome shorter projects, and want to emphasise that this does not mean we require six months' worth of activities to be delivered. Time can be spent on research, development, analysis and community engagement. We are truly interested in your expertise and ideas, and want to work with communities in ways that make sense for them.

The scope of the grants is broad, but all projects should involve the development or piloting of approaches and leave us with a more detailed understanding of our communities and their needs than we began with. This understanding should lead to more people being connected to a range of high-quality support services that work for them.

Types of Grant

Race and Multilingual Equality Grant

This grant has a specific focus on anti-racism work, projects that look at targeting health inequalities, developing cultural competence, and supporting families from

diverse ethnic communities. The grant is open to projects working with families that have **children under the age of four**. The applicant must be able to demonstrate that their project is aimed at working towards one of the following outcomes:

- 0–4-year-olds from diverse ethnic communities, and/or their parents, benefit from accessible support for their social, emotional or communication development
- Families from diverse ethnic communities have meaningful chances to share their views and help shape services to improve the quality of support received in the start for life period
- Resources are developed that are accessible and meet the cultural and literacy needs of the communities reached

Noting that this is a 'Test and Learn' grant, the six-month project does not need to achieve each outcome in its entirety. However, it does need to demonstrate progress towards the outcome, which can clearly be built upon.

The outcomes are deliberately vague because we are interested in hearing **your** expertise and ideas, particularly those that come from the community you work with. As a guideline, projects might include:

- Co-production and community engagement
- The development of multi-lingual resources and toolkits
- Needs analyses and cultural understanding work
- The development of targeted or culturally specific interventions

We have a total pot of £28,000 for this grant and welcome applications up to £7,000. We will aim to fund a minimum of four organisations.

VCSE Innovation Grant

This is a general grant aimed at voluntary, community, and faith sector organisations who work with families that have **children under the age of four** and are less likely to get the support they need. Projects must work towards one of the following outcomes:

- Expectant and new parents/carers who are least likely to use family hubs services benefit from accessible outreach support
- Parents and carers can find help through the wider community, rather than just in family hub buildings
- Families who are at risk or vulnerable are actively identified, prioritised and offered support

Which parents and families are least likely to use family hubs?

We are aware that many different barriers, circumstances and characteristics may relate to why someone is less likely to get support at a family hub. Rather than

specifying exact groups you should work with, we are interested in hearing from organisations that know their communities about who would benefit from this support.

Noting that this is a 'Test and Learn' grant, the six-month project does not need to achieve each outcome in its entirety. However, it does need to demonstrate progress towards the outcome, which can clearly be built upon.

The outcomes are deliberately vague because we are interested in hearing **your** expertise and ideas, particularly those that come from the community you work with. As a guideline, projects might include:

- Co-production and community engagement
- The development of outreach models
- Peer to peer and community support projects
- Projects around early identification of need
- Training for family hubs staff
- Awareness-raising and promotional projects

We have a total pot of £28,000 for this grant and welcome applications up to £7,000. We will aim to fund a minimum of four organisations.

Each organisation can make up to one application across the scheme.

Eligibility

The Test and Learn Grant Scheme is open to applications from voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations which meet the specified criteria.

Before you start to complete the application, you should use this checklist to ensure that you can answer 'yes' to **all** the questions below.

1. Is your organisation based in Bristol or delivering services in Bristol?
2. Does your project involve working with families that have children under the age of four?
3. Is there a bank account in your organisation's name?
4. If you have answered no to question 3, is there an Accountable Body who has agreed to hold the funds for your organisation?
5. Is your organisation or accountable body one of the following:
 - Unincorporated association
 - Registered charity
 - Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by guarantee
 - Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by share
 - Company limited by guarantee
 - Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

- A community amateur sports club
- Community benefit company registered as an Industrial and Provident Society

If you are unable to answer “Yes” to **all** the above statements, your organisation is unfortunately ineligible for a grant.

Eligibility Criteria Guidance Notes

Bank Account

Your organisation should have a bank account in its name and that payments from this account should be authorised by at least two signatories (who are not related or living at the same address).

Accountable bodies

If your organisation does not have its own bank account you may be able to find an accountable body to hold the funds in their bank account.

An accountable body is an organisation that can meet the criteria above.

What we won't fund

- Proposals that do not align with one of the defined Test and Learn outcomes
- Proposals that are targeted **solely** at children and young people over the age of four
- The cost of equipment, vehicles, land, buildings, building refurbishment, repairs or maintenance or landscaping (capital costs)
- Activities that are **solely and explicitly** political or religious in nature (we welcome applications from faith-based organisations)
- Projects or activities held in inaccessible venues
- Projects or activities that the state or a statutory body has a legal obligation to provide
- Any costs incurred when putting together your grant application
- Activities that happen or start before the start date of the grant and the council's funding agreement
- Endowments (to provide an income)
- Loans or interest payments

Application stages and dates

The application stages are:

- Monday 1 September 2025: Applications open
- Tuesday 30 September 2025: Applications close
- October 2025: Applications assessed by the panel
- November 2025: Outcomes shared, grant agreements produced and signed

- November 2025: Test and Learn period begins
- April 2026: Test and Learn period ends

Support with your application

If you have any questions about the application process, please email family.hubs@bristol.gov.uk and we will aim to respond to you within 48 hours. We will not be providing advice or support via telephone or face to face.

If your organisation needs support with your application, you may be able to get support from Voscur or Black South West Network (BSWN).

Support from BSWN

BSWN can offer targeted support with applications for the Test and Learn Grant Scheme for Black and Minorities-led VCSE organisations.

To access this, please contact nathalie.sherring@bswn.org.uk.

Support from Voscur

Voscur provides [free resources to VCSE organisations around fundraising and grant applications](#).

Voscur can also provide you with support around reviewing and submitting your application. If you are a local VCSE sector organisation or group, you will be able to receive at least 45 minutes of free support and advice. To access this, please contact info@voscur.org or call 0117 909 9949.

How to submit your application

Your completed application should be submitted to family.hubs@bristol.gov.uk before midnight on 30th September 2025.

How to complete your application

Please read each question and this guidance document fully and carefully.

Some questions have word limits, as shown. Please do not exceed the word limit. Text exceeding the stated word limit will not be read or considered as part of your application. Bullet points are acceptable.

You can check your own word count by highlighting the relevant text. In most Word versions your word count will be shown on the bottom left of the screen.

Section A: Information about you and your organisation

A1, A2: These questions ask for details about your organisation name and address and the key contact for your application. If you wish to, you can submit a collaborative application where more than one organisation will be involved in the

project. However, you will still need to select a lead organisation for the purposes of the application and to handle the funds.

A3: This question asks whether your organisation has received funding from Bristol City Council within the last five years. This could include a grant from one of our other grant schemes, e.g. The Bristol Impact Fund, or a contract for services. We ask this so we can try to avoid organisations having to re-submit information and policies to the council that they've already submitted recently for another reason. **This question isn't scored.**

Section B: Eligibility

B1a: Is your organisation based in Bristol or delivering services in Bristol?

We prioritise local organisations (organisations that are registered in Bristol – by which we mean that their main office or headquarters are in Bristol - and have at least 3 trustees who are residents of the Bristol area), but we will consider applications from non-local organisations which meet our eligibility criteria and which bring specialist expertise to the city.

You can search whether your address falls within the local authority area using the [find your local council tool](#). **This is a Pass/Fail question.**

B1b: Does your project focus on working with families that have children under the age of four?

We are only able to fund projects that have an impact for families in which there are children under the age of four. However, the impact of the project may be an indirect one, e.g. by working with parents or siblings. **This is a Pass/Fail question.**

B1c: Is there a bank account in your organisation's name?

We will need this in order to pay you the grant funding. **This is a Pass/Fail question.**

B1d: If you have answered no to question B1c, is there an Accountable Body (see below for what counts as an Accountable body) which has agreed to hold the funds for your organisation?

If you don't have a bank account in your organisation's name, you can approach an organisation which does qualify (if it can answer yes to all the questions in B1 and yes to one of the organisation structure types in question B2).

If you have answered no to question B1c you will need to provide the name of the accountable body that has agreed to hold your funding.

B2. Organisational Structure:

If your organisational structure does not fit within one of those in our Eligibility Criteria Checklist your application will not be taken forward. **This is a Pass/Fail question.**

Section C: Grant Scheme Priorities

C1. Smaller organisations with a regular turnover of under £250,000

Whilst there is no cut off for groups that have a regular turnover of higher than £250,000, we wish to maximise the impact of our small grants by prioritising smaller organisations who may have never had funding. **There is a weighting of 1 point for organisations with under £250,000 regular turnover.**

C2. Are the majority of your trustees, senior management, staff and volunteers 'of' the community you are working with?

This question helps us to decide whether you are an organisation 'of' your community. This refers to organisations who are led by and controlled by a majority of people who have direct relevant experience in the context of the proposal. Tick 'yes' **only** if the majority of your trustees, senior management, staff and volunteers 'of' the community you are working with.

For example, the organisation applying wants to do work that supports Disabled people. The organisation is led by a majority of Disabled people who experience the same issues as the people they are supporting. They are an organisation 'of' their community.

There is a weighting of 2 points for organisations which are 'of' their community.

Section D: Who you'll work with

D1a. Where will you work?

Please tick the wards that your organisation will be working in. If the project spans the entire city, tick 'citywide'. Not sure which ward you are working in? You can find out using your postcode here [Ward boundary review - bristol.gov.uk](http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ward-boundary-review). **This question isn't scored.**

D1b. Who will you work with – equality groups

Please let us know which equalities groups your work will focus upon, as well as the additional defined groups or communities. Please feel free to tick as many as apply. **This question isn't scored.**

Section E: Your Activities and Budget

E1. Give your proposal a short, clear name. This question isn't scored.

E2. Which type of grant are you applying for?

Tell us whether you're applying for a race and multilingual equality grant, or a VCSO innovation grant. **This question isn't scored.**

E3. How much grant are you asking for?

You can apply for any amount up to £7,000. **This question isn't scored.**

E4. Provide a short description of what you will do:

This will give us a summary of the work you are proposing in under 50 words. **This question isn't scored.**

E5. Which Test and Learn Grant Scheme outcome will be the main focus of your work?

You should only select one outcome, choosing from the options available for the type of grant you are applying for (Race and Multilingual Equality *or* VCSE Innovation). Your project may work towards multiple of these outcomes, and you should explain this in your answer to question E6. For this section, though, please just choose the outcome that is your main priority.

Noting that this is a 'Test and Learn' grant, the six-month project does not need to achieve each outcome in its entirety. However, it does need to demonstrate progress towards the outcome, which can clearly be built upon. **This question isn't scored.**

E6a. What work will you do over the six-month test and learn period?

E6b. How will this work contribute towards the achievement of the outcome identified?

This is your chance to tell us what you want to do and why. You should describe the activities you have planned and explain why you think they're important and will help you progress towards the identified outcome. You could use some of the questions below to help guide your response:

- What is it that you want to do with the money?
- What is the main aim that you are trying to achieve with the money?
- Have you worked with any communities to develop this proposal?
- How are you connecting what you're proposing to do with other activities in the area?
- How will this project create impact?

This question is scored.

E7. Budget table

Please break down the cost of your project into individual elements so we have an idea of what will be spent on each element. If you have any funding from other sources that will be supplementing this project, let us know. **This question isn't scored.**

Section F: Your Impact

F1. What will you aim to have learnt or understood at the end of the grant period?

This is a 'test and learn' grant, meaning we are interested in projects that explore and trial approaches that might lead to longer-term innovation. Please use this space to summarise what you aim to learn through the project. You may want to think about:

- What will we know at the end of the project that we didn't know before?
- Where or who will that knowledge come from?
- Why is this knowledge important?

This question is scored.

F2. What will progress look like?

This is your opportunity to tell us what indicators you think will demonstrate your progress towards achieving your outcome. Indicators are the signs that change is happening, and they help you to see if what you are doing is working. Some people call them measures.

Indicator 1 should be the number of people you expect to work with

- Example 1: 15 members of staff will receive cultural competency training (quantity of change)

Indicator 2 should be stories or case studies that tell the story of the impact on people who you work with - the difference that your work makes to people's lives.

- Example 2: Stories and feedback from participants to show a positive impact of your work on their practice (quality of change)

This question is scored.

F3. Do you agree to share quarterly updates throughout your project on how many children or parents/carers you are working with or impacting?

We are required as a condition of our funding to report this information to the DfE and DHSC. If you believe your project is eligible for a grant but it won't be possible to record this data, please explain why. **This question isn't scored.**

Section G: Baseline Standards

G1. Does your organisation have the following policies in place to meet the council's baseline standards for voluntary groups?

Our baseline standards are a set of things we look for a VSCO organisation to have before we award them funding. However, we still encourage newer or less established organisations to apply, and funding may be awarded without all baseline

standards being met. However, you would need to be willing to develop these policies or areas of practice. Please complete the baseline standards table to tell us:

- What policies and governance your organisation has in place already
- Whether you can commit to developing any necessary policies and procedures within 3 months of the grant being in place

Please note: you **must** confirm that you will have a safeguarding policy in place before the start of any project.

G2. We expect if you are successful, that your organisation will only use accessible premises/venues to deliver your activities/services.

Visit www.accessable.co.uk to find more information on accessibility and to get a detailed accessibility assessment on the venue you intend to use.

G3. We expect that you will consider environmental impact in delivering your proposal.

Please confirm that you will consider and act to minimise the environmental impact of how you deliver your proposed project.

G4. If we recommend funding, do you agree to obtain the right insurance before the start of the grant agreement?

Please confirm that you will obtain and provide evidence of the correct insurances at the minimum levels required before the start of your grant agreement. This means:

- Public Liability Insurance £5m
- Employer's Liability Insurance £5m, if your organisation employs staff

G5. Confirmation

Please confirm that you have permission from your organisation's trustees to apply for this grant, that your organisation meets the Eligibility Criteria for a grant, and that you are willing to work with Bristol City council to provide progress updates on your project against the indicators you have outlined. Progress updates will be requested midway through and at the end of the six-month project period.

How we will score your application

Section A: Information about you and your organisation

This section is not scored.

Section B: Eligibility

We will assess your organisation's eligibility to get Test and Learn Small Grant funding by looking at your answers to questions B1 and B2. These are pass/fail pre-selection questions and if you do not pass all of them, we will not take your application any further.

Section C: Grant Scheme Priorities

C1. Smaller organisations with a regular turnover of under £250,000

Whilst there is no cut off for groups that have a regular turnover of higher than £250,000 we wish to maximise the impact of our small grants by prioritising smaller organisations who may have never had funding. There is a weighting of 1 point for organisations with under £250,000 regular turnover.

C2. Are the majority of your trustees, senior management, staff and volunteers 'of' the community you are working with?

This question helps us to decide whether you are an Organisation 'of' your community. This refers to organisations who are led by and controlled by a majority of people who have direct relevant experience in the context of the proposal. Tick 'yes' **only** if the majority of your trustees, senior management, staff and volunteers 'of' the community you are working with. There is a weighting of 2 points for organisations which are 'of' their community.

Section D: Who you'll work with

This section isn't scored.

Section E: Your Activities and Budget

E1. – E5.: These questions aren't scored.

E6a. What work will you do over the six-month test and learn period?

E6b. How will this work contribute towards the achievement of the outcome identified?

How we will score your answer:

Score 1

Poor: Not clearly answered or explained

Score 2

Satisfactory: Answered partially or fully but we have moderate/minor reservations

Score 3

Good: Answered and explained clearly

Score 4

Excellent: our factors have been addressed and exceeded

Additional information

If a proposal scores '1' for any of the appraised factors it will not be considered as fundable.

E7.: This question isn't scored.

Section F: Your Impact

F1. What will you aim to have learnt or understood at the end of the grant period?

How we will score your answer:

Score 1

Poor: Not clearly answered or explained

Score 2

Satisfactory: Answered partially or fully but we have moderate/minor reservations

Score 3

Good: Answered and explained clearly

Score 4

Excellent: our factors have been addressed and exceeded

Additional information

If a proposal scores '1' for any of the appraised factors it will not be considered as fundable.

F2. What will progress look like?

How we will score your answer:

Score 1

Poor: Not clearly described or plausible

Score 2

Satisfactory: clear and plausible but we have moderate/minor reservations

Score 3

Good: clear & plausible

Score 4

Excellent: very clear, plausible and strong measure of impact

Additional information

If a proposal scores '1' for any of the appraised factors it will not be considered as fundable.

F3.: This question isn't scored.

Section G: Baseline Standards

G1: This is a pass/fail question. In order to pass, you MUST:

- Have a safeguarding policy
- EITHER meet all baseline standards OR agree to meet them within 3 months of the grant agreement being in place

G2 – G5: These are pass/fail pre-selection questions and if you do not pass all of them we will not take your application any further.

We look forward to reading your application!