



Early Years Special Initiative Phase 2: 2023-2028 Information and Guidelines

Background:

The attainment gap emerges in early childhood and develops and expands throughout a person's lifetime.

For children facing socio-economic disadvantage, the impact on their cognitive and socio-emotional skills plus the difficulty for them to catch up if they fall behind, is stark. This has worsened given the impact of the Covid pandemic.

During the school years, these educational inequalities continue to grow affecting future learning and work prospects.

The Mercers' Company has been supporting work in the Early Years since 2019 when Phase 1 of the Special Initiative was launched and over three cohorts, funded 10 organisations. Phase 2, covering the five year period 2023 to 2028, was launched in early 2023 and a further 6 organisations were funded as the first cohort of grantees. All organisations are supported to deliver effective programmes which improve 'school readiness' and/or an increase in children's numeracy, literacy and language skills. A list of all 16 organisations is provided in appendix 1.

Due to the success of the funding initiative so far and the continuing high need to address inequalities in early years, we are pleased to announce that the Mercers' Early Years Special Initiative Phase 2 plans to fund a further cohort of grantees over the four year period from March 2024.

Outcomes we are trying to address:

- An increase in children's numeracy, literacy and language skills.
- An improvement in school readiness (personal, social and emotional development).

What we will fund:

- ✓ Constituted not for profit organisations, charitable incorporated organisations (CIO), charitable companies (limited by guarantee), social enterprises and partnerships.
- ✓ Work which supports children aged 2-5 years.
- ✓ Work supporting children in London including organisations that do, or could have a national reach.
- ✓ Project or core costs.

- ✓ If applying for core costs, the total funding request is not more than 50% of your organisations total annual income at the time of application.
- ✓ We are open minded about the form of financial support provided and are willing to consider social investment and repayable grants.

We don't fund:

- Applications from individuals;
- Initiatives that support under 2s and over 5s;
- Work outside of London;
- Capital Projects (bricks and mortar); and
- General appeals or financial support for project costs that have already been incurred.

What we are looking to support:

We are looking for programmes that support the overall aims of our Philanthropy Framework namely;

- Improving people's lives,
- Strengthening organisations, and
- Contributing to societal change.

More specifically we are looking for programmes that can clearly demonstrate:

- Evidence of previous early years related work and the needs of the young people you are aiming to impact;
- A deep understanding of, and strong partnerships in, the London communities in which you want to work and how you plan to involve beneficiaries and local people;
- A project that considers accessibility, different learning styles, and intersecting protected characteristics in its design;
- A commitment to robust and thorough evaluation of the proposed project;
- How you will work in ways that might be scalable or replicable;
- How the project will be sustained after the lifetime of the grant and any potential for longer term impact; and
- A clear link between outcomes and activities.

Over the course of the Early Years Special Initiative, two strong themes have been identified through the work of our grantees to improve school readiness and/or improve children's numeracy, literacy and language skills. These are:

- Practitioner training
- Parental engagement and home learning.

We would welcome applications for work which builds on these themes or focuses on other themes that impact on the wider Early Years sector.

What we are offering:

- A grant of £300,000 in total per organisation paid across four years.
- We anticipate making grants to between five and eight organisations in 2024/25. Those organisations would form cohort 2.
- A learning/research partner with expertise in this area of work has been appointed and grantees will be required to work with them as part of a programme wide evaluation.
- Access to (optional) capacity building support through trusted partners.
- A cohort approach creating opportunity for collaboration with organisations funded in both cohorts of Phase 2 of the Special Initiative.

Application process:

The first stage is the submission of an Expression of Interest (EOI). This is a light touch form in which we ask applicants to provide basic information about the Early Years work you require funding support for. The EOI enables us to shortlist applicants who will be invited to submit a fuller stage 2 application.

Application Timeline:

- 1) The programme launches on Tuesday, 9 January 2024 via a webinar, where you will have a chance to hear more about the programme and to ask questions. After the webinar FAQs will be uploaded to the website for anyone that was not able to attend.
- 2) An Expression of Interest (EOI) will then be open for four weeks until Noon on Monday 5 February 2024. As part of this you will be required to fill in an eligibility checker which will advise if you can proceed with an EOI.
- 3) During February 2024, the EOIs will be reviewed and a shortlist will be drawn up by our grant panel.
- 4) In early March 2024 you will be notified if you will be invited to make a full application or not. We are not able to provide detailed feedback on the EOIs.

| Grant application timeline | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Launch of the programme via webinar and access to EOI form | Tuesday, 9 January 2024 |
| Deadline for receipt of EOIs | Noon Monday, 5 February 2024 |
| Decisions made and organisations contacted about outcome of the EOI | Early March 2024 |
| Stage 2 application window (if invited to apply) | March – April 2024 |
| Assessment and due diligence | May – June 2024 |
| Organisations informed about outcome of application | Early July 2024 |
| First payment of funding to be granted to successful organisations | July 2024 onwards |

If you have any questions at this stage please contact grants@merciers.co.uk

Appendix 1

List of Early Years Special Initiative Phase 1 grantees 2019 – 2023

Cohort 1 2019/22

[National Literacy Trust](#)

[Scouts](#)

[Chickenshed](#)

Cohort 2 2020/23

[ARK Start](#)

[Catch Up](#)

[Centre for Literacy in Primary Education](#)

Cohort 3 2021/24

[National Children's Bureau](#)

[Speech and Language UK](#)

[Peeples](#)

[Tales Toolkit Ltd](#)

List of Early Years Special Initiative Phase 2 grantees (to date) 2023 – 2028

Cohort 1 2023/2027

[Early Education](#) (British Association for Early Childhood Education)

[Coram Family and Childcare](#)

[Fatherhood Institute](#)

[National Day Nurseries Association](#)

[NCFE/Campaign for Learning](#)

[Youth Sport Trust](#)