2026 SSCPS - Application for Funding (June 2026 Update)
Form Preview

Start Strong for Community Preschools Program

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Application overview

The Start Strong for Community Preschools program objectives are to improve the affordability, quality, and accessibility of preschool education for children in the years before school. The program funds providers of community and mobile preschools to reduce fees, support quality uplift, incentivise increased enrolment and attendance, and drive improved outcomes for children.

The program operates on a calendar year, from 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026.

June 2026 Update: Eligibility criteria for new applications to the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program have been reviewed and updated in response to a significant increase in applications from existing Long Day Care services under this program.

Providers of new services can apply for funding at any stage throughout 2026. Interested organisations who would like to apply should review the eligibility criteria before completing this application form. The current program guidelines can be found here.

The department will not consider applications from long day care services. Providers of other existing service types wishing to extend or change service types to include Community Preschool should first review the eligibility criteria and write to the department at ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au prior to making any changes to their service model.

Organisations will need to demonstrate their eligibility for funding during the application process (Seesection 3.1 service eligibility criteria), as well as at least one of the following:

- **demonstrated local need and demand for community preschool**: providers must be able to demonstrate that there is a local need for a community preschool service to deliver early childhood education in the area. This may be demonstrated through a lack of existing provision, changes or closures to existing preschool services in the community, or through demonstrating unviability of other models of preschool delivery.
- **existing approved Department grant to deliver community preschool:** providers must provide evidence of an existing approved grant to deliver community preschool, such as an approved Start Strong Capital Works or Flexible Initiatives Trial grant.

In addition to the above, organisations will also need to demonstrate all of the below points during the application process:

- **proposed number of preschool places to be created:** providers are to outline the maximum number of places and how many children the service is expected to enrol.
- **capability to provide affordable early education for families:** providers must include a fee structure for children enrolled at the preschool service that is compliant with the Section 5 Fee guidelines and provide documentation to demonstrate the service's financial viability (e.g. through financial statements, forecast budgets or similar). Whilst the department recognises that fee decisions are at the discretion of services, the department considers affordability for families when reviewing applications for funding. New services are encouraged to set fee structures that do not impact negatively on preschool participation in their community.

- **value for money:** providers are to demonstrate that funds will be used in the most efficient and innovative means that improve the affordability, quality, and accessibility of preschool education for children in the years before school and in accordance with program guidelines.

Providers will be asked to upload evidence to support their application. Individual child information is not collected at this point of the application.

A preview of the application form is available via the side menu. The form can be saved while in progress and returned to at a later stage by logging into SmartyGrants. For help with completing application forms in SmartyGrants, including information on uploading files, please click here.

The NSW Department of Education (the **department**) will assess all information provided in this application form and will conduct internal analysis to determine eligibility as per the program guidelines. The approval of funding applications and provision of ongoing funding is at the discretion of the department's Early Childhood Outcomes division.

For support with this application, please contact the department by emailing ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au or calling 1800 619 113.

Please select the option that best represents the intended operating model of the service *

○ Preschool places only
○ Preschool places and additional services
○ Long day care adding preschool places

Disclaimer

The Applicant acknowledges and agrees that:

- submission of this application does not guarantee that funding will be granted and the department expressly reserves its right to accept or reject this application at its discretion and in accordance with the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program guidelines;
- they must bear any costs of preparing and submitting this application and the department does not accept any liability for such costs, whether or not this application is ultimately accepted or rejected;
- they have fully informed themselves of the relevant program requirements by reading the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools guidelines.

Privacy notice

The NSW Department of Education (**department**) is collecting the personal information you provide via this form, including names, position title, phone number and email. You don’t have to provide this information, however if you do not, the department may be unable to process your application under the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program.

The department uses the personal information to process the application, administer the Start Strong program, assist future policy and program development and exercise the department’s statutory and government functions (including reporting). If personal information is shared with third party contractors, they can only use it for those purposes.

Your personal information will not be shared with any others unless authorised by law or with your consent.

You can withdraw consent to the department's use or disclosure of your personal information at any time by contacting the department, however the department may be no longer able to provide the funding.

Your personal information will be held and managed by the department in accordance with the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (NSW), and subject to the department's Privacy Policy. For further information, please see the department's Privacy Management Plan.

You have the right to access or amend your personal information by emailing ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au or legal.privacy@det.nsw.edu.au. Alternatively, you can write to Legal Services – Privacy, Department of Education GPO Box 33, Sydney NSW 2001.

Service eligibility criteria for community preschools

To be eligible for current funding as a community or mobile preschool, providers must ensure each service meets **all** the following criteria:

- be a not-for-profit community preschool or mobile preschool service;
- be an approved early childhood education and care service under the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 (National Law) and Education and Care Services National Regulations;
- deliver a quality early childhood education program by a qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the requirements under the National Quality FrameworkExternal link, including using the Early Years Learning FrameworkExternal link;
- accept and comply with the *Early Childhood Outcomes Programs – Funding Agreement – Terms and Conditions – 1 January 2026 to 31 December 2026* (Terms and Conditions); and
- take reasonable steps to deliver 600 hours of quality preschool to all children enrolled at the service.

The department will not provide funding for enrolled hours in a service that are Child Care Subsidy approved.

The program is an open non-competitive grants program. The department will complete checks to confirm a provider's eligibility for the program.

Ineligible: Long day care adding preschool places

June 2026 Update: Eligibility criteria for new applications to the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program have been reviewed and updated in response to a significant increase in applications from existing Long Day Care services under this program.

The department will not consider applications from long day care services. Providers of other existing service types wishing to extend or change service types to include Community Preschool should first review the eligibility criteria and write to the department at ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au prior to making any changes to their service model.

By checking the below box, you acknowledge that your application will not be progressed as your service will not be eligible for funding. If you have any questions, please contact the department by emailing ecec.funding@det.nsw.edu.au or calling 1800 619 113.

Acknowledgement *

○ I understand that my service does not meet the eligibility criteria of the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program, and that my application will not be progressed.

Applicant confirmation

By proceeding with this application, I confirm that:

- I have read, understood and agree to the above Disclaimer and Privacy Notice, and I acknowledge the above Privacy Notice;
- I have read the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program guidelines; and
- The service meets the service eligibility criteria as outlined above.

I agree with the above statements *
○ Yes, and I wish to proceed with the application
○ No, and I do not wish to proceed with the application

Applicant information

* indicates a required field

Approved Provider and service details

Please complete this section based on your Approved Provider information recorded in the National Quality Agenda IT System (NQA ITS). This should also match your entity details in the Australian Business Register (ABR).

Name of primary contact *
First Name Last Name

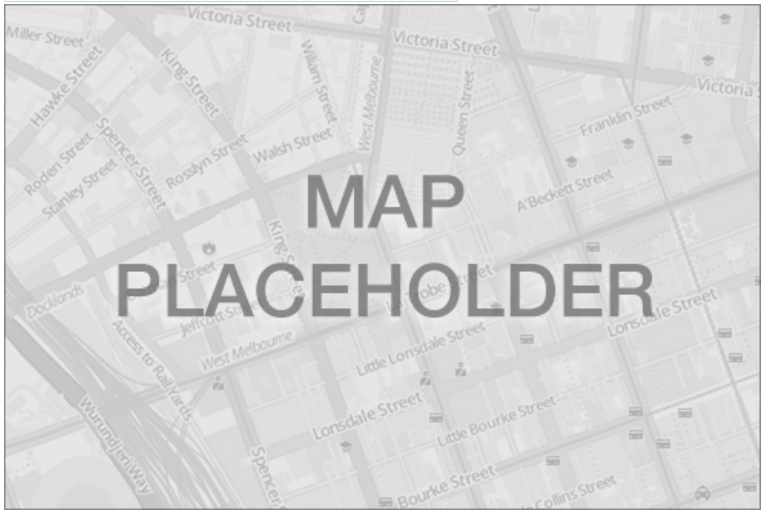
Email *
Must be an email address.

Phone Number *
Must be an Australian phone number

Approved Provider Name *
Please provide exact name as per NQA ITS

Approved Provider ID (PR-12345678) *
PR-
Please enter 8 digit number as per NQA ITS

Approved Provider address *
Address



Address Line 1, Suburb/Town, State/Province, and Postcode are required.

Approved Provider ABN *

The ABN provided will be used to look up the following information. Click Lookup above to check that you have entered the ABN correctly.

Information from the Australian Business Register	
ABN	
Entity Name	
ABN Status	
Entity Type	
Goods & Services Tax (GST)	
DGR Endorsed	
ATO Charity Type	More information
ACNC Registration	
Tax Concessions	
Main Business Location	

Must be an ABN.

Service name: *

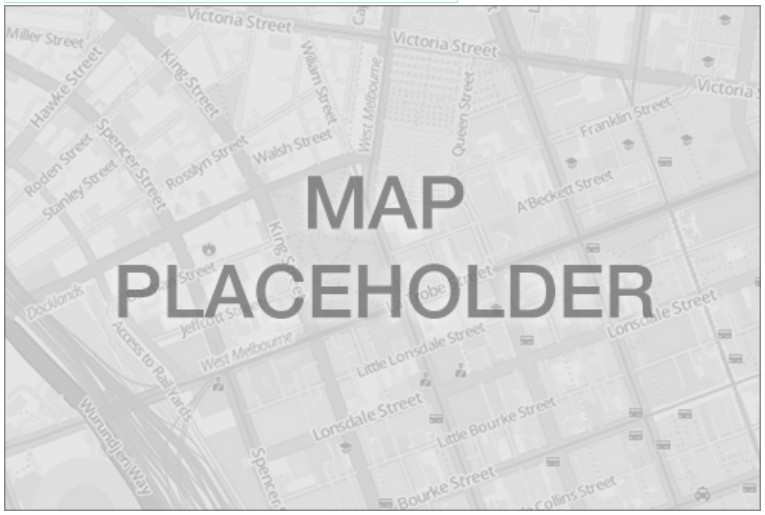
Please provide exact name as per NQA ITS. If this information is yet to be finalised in NQA ITS, please provide the proposed name.

Service Approval ID (SE-12345678)

SE-

Please enter 8 digit number as per NQA ITS. If this information is yet to be finalised in NQA ITS, please leave blank.

Service address *
Address



Address Line 1, Suburb/Town, State/Province, and Postcode are required.

Service type and funding

* indicates a required field

Additional service information

In this section you will provide further information about your service type, delivery and proposed fees.

To be eligible for funding under the Start Strong for Community Preschools program, the Approved Provider must be a community based, not-for-profit provider of early childhood education services.

Services must take reasonable steps to deliver 600 hours of quality preschool to all children enrolled at the service.

The department will not provide Start Strong for Community Preschools funding for enrolled hours in a service that are Child Care Subsidy approved.

If you are not registered with the ACNC, please provide evidence of not-for-profit status. For example, a copy of the constitution supporting not-for-profit status
Attach a file:

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) is the national regulator of charities.

Please provide information about the intended hours of operation, including operating weeks per year *

Providers must take reasonable steps to deliver 600 hours of quality preschool to enrolled children.

Please enter the anticipated number of preschool places the service will offer *

How many children are currently on the waitlist for a preschool place at your service? *

Enter zero if no current waitlist

Do you use a childcare management system (CCMS) or other ECEC-specific system to manage your enrolments and attendance? *

○ Yes
○ No

A CCMS is a digital platform that helps ECEC services track enrolment, attendance and other data. Please select No, if you don't use a CCMS, e.g., you track details via a paper-based solution.

Which childcare management system (CCMS) are you using? *

Other:

The above list is a sample only and does not represent all CCMS providers. If your CCMS is not listed, please enter the name in the 'Other' field.

Please select all additional services offered at this centre *

☐ Vacation Care
☐ Before and After School Care
☐ Other:

This question appears as you selected 'preschool and additional services' on page 1.

Priority of access

As per Section 3.4 of the program guidelines, services are required to give equal priority of access to:

- children who are at least 4 years old on or before 31 July in that preschool year and not enrolled or registered at a school
- children who are at least 3 years old on or before 31 July in that preschool year and are eligible for equity loading (see Appendix 1.1 for definitions):
    - children from low-income families
    - children with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background
    - children with disability and/or additional needs
- children with English language needs
- children who are at risk of significant harm (from a child protection perspective).

There is no order of priority assigned to the list of above, however each service is responsible for managing their enrolments in line with priority of access requirements, own service enrolment policy and community needs.

I have read and agree to adhere to the Start Strong for Community Preschools priority of access guidelines. *

○ Yes

For further information about priority of access please refer to Section 3.4 of the program guidelines. For further information about equity cohorts please see Appendix 1.1. Guidelines available at: https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/grants-and-funded-programs/start-strong-funding/start-strong-for-community-preschools/2026-start-strong-for-community-preschools-program-guidelines

Proposed fee structure

Start Strong for Community Preschools is designed to reduce preschool fees, making at least 600 hours per year of early childhood education more affordable for families.

Please ensure you have reviewed the fee guidelines available in the current program guidelines before completing this section of the application form. Amounts entered are the proposed fees for each cohort *before* applying any fee relief available through Start Strong.

Fee cohorts (enter in first column):

- 3-year-old non-equity children
- 4-5-year-old non-equity children
- Children eligible for equity loading

Children eligible for equity loading under Start Strong for Community Preschools include children with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, children from low-income backgrounds, children with disability or additional needs. Refer to Appendix 1.1 for more information, including evidence requirements.

Fee cohort	Daily fee for up to 600 hours (before fee relief)	Daily fee for over 600 hours (before fee relief)
Include the three cohorts from the description	Enter the daily fee for children enrolled for up to 600 hours	Enter the daily fee for children enrolled for over 600 hours
3-year-old non-equity children		
4-5-year-old non-equity children		
Children eligible for equity loading		

Provider financial reporting information

* indicates a required field

Financial Reporting Period

In accordance with the Terms and Conditions (also referred to as the Funding Agreement), providers must submit a financial accountability statement for each funded individual service. Submitting financial accountability statements helps to provide assurance that public funds have been expended for their intended purpose.

Financial accountability statements are completed through ECCMS. The department will advise providers of due dates and the submission process through ECCMS prior to release. Further information is available in the Financial Accountability Return Guide and on the Financial Accountability - Information for Services page on the NSW Department of Education's website.

Providers complete their financial accountability statements either on a calendar or financial year basis. This is usually determined by the provider's operating and reporting period.

The NSW Department of Education also requires providers to identify whether they are a Tier 1 or Tier 2 association for the purposes of accurate financial reporting. Please refer to this website for more information on Tiers.

Please advise which financial reporting period you *
- ○ Financial reporting period (e.g., 1 July 2025 - 30 June 2026)
- ○ Calendar reporting period (e.g, 1 January 2026 - 31 December 2026)

Please advise whether your provider is a Tier 1 or Tier 2 association. *
- ○ Tier 1
- ○ Tier 2
- ○ Unsure

Please refer to this website for more information on Tiers: https://www.nsw.gov.au/business-and-economy/incorporated-associations/running-an-incorporated-association/financial-reporting-requirements

Preschool program

* indicates a required field

Alignment with the Early Years Learning Framework

In this section you will provide further information about how your preschool program aligns with the Early Years Learning Framework.

To be eligible for funding under the Start Strong for Community Preschools program, the Approved Provider must deliver a quality early childhood education program by a qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the requirements under the National Quality Framework, including using the Early Years Learning FrameworkExternal link

Is the service delivering an early childhood education program designed by a degree qualified early childhood teacher in accordance with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) *
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Information on the Early Years Learning Framework can be found here: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-law-regulations/approved-learning-frameworks

Please attach documentation demonstrating the provision of a quality preschool program based on the EYLF. For example, governance documentation, preschool programming or similar *
Attach a file:

You may upload multiple documents. The maximum file size is 25 megabytes, however it is recommended to keep files to 5 megabytes.

Short description of evidence supplied for the provision of a quality preschool program *

Is the preschool program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher (ECT) and offers at least 600 hours per child per year *

○ Yes
○ No

Further information on ECT regulations is available via the ACECQA website: https://www.acecqa.gov.au/qualifications/requirements/children-preschool-age-or-under

Please provide additional information on the delivery of your preschool program *

This section appears if you selected 'No' to the questions regarding your service delivering a program designed and delivered by a qualified ECT and offering at least 600 hours per child per year.

Community needs analysis and service viability

* indicates a required field

Supporting evidence for community preschool demand

In this section you will provide information on how your service meets the needs of your local community and is financially viable.

To be eligible for funding under the Start Strong for Community Preschools program, organisations must demonstrate their eligibility for funding during the application process (See **Section 3.1 service eligibility criteria**), as well as at least one of the following two points:

- **demonstrated local need and demand for community preschool**: providers must be able to demonstrate that there is a local need for a community preschool service to deliver early childhood education in the area. This may be demonstrated through a lack of existing provision, changes or closures to existing preschool services in the community, or through demonstrating unviability of other models of preschool delivery.
- **existing approved Department grant to deliver community preschool**: providers must provide evidence of an existing approved grant to deliver community preschool, such as an approved Start Strong Capital Works or Flexible Initiatives Trial grant.

The department will complete internal analysis to determine eligibility as per the program guidelines, including assessment of local need and demand for community preschool places.

Do you have any existing approved NSW Department of Education grants to deliver community preschool? Please select all that apply: *

☐ Building Early Learning Places
☐ Flexible Initiatives Trial
☐ Start Strong Capital Works

☐ N/A
☐ Other:

Please provide evidence of any existing approved grants to deliver community preschool (if applicable)
Attach a file:

Examples may include signed agreements issued under the Start Strong Capital Works, Flexible Initiative Trial grants or Building Early Learning Places Program. This information will be validated with the relevant funding teams as part of application assessment.

Please describe how the preschool will fill a current identified local need based on recent analysis of the supply of preschool places in the area *

For example, current evidence for supply and demand of services in the local area, recent community feedback demonstrating need for preschool places

Please attach documentation to support the service's ability to fill a current identified community need for preschool places. For example, data on comparable preschool services in the area, waitlist or preliminary enrolment information, or an increase in 600 hour enrolments *
Attach a file:

You may upload multiple documents. The maximum file size is 25 megabytes, however it is recommended to keep files to 5 megabytes.

Short description of evidence to demonstrate local need for preschool places *

Please attach documentation to demonstrate the service's financial viability. A forecast budget showing expected income and expenditure is required. Please provide copies of the organisation's previous two annual financial statements if available. If the service is part of an established provider, please upload two full years of audited annual financial reports along with auditors' recommendations – similar to the reports supplied to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission *
Attach a file:

You may upload multiple documents. The maximum file size is 25 megabytes, however it is recommended to keep files to 5 megabytes.

Short description of evidence to support financial viability *

Please describe how funding would be used to improve the affordability, quality and accessibility of preschool education *

Providers are to demonstrate that funds will be used in the most efficient and innovative means that improve the affordability, quality, and accessibility of preschool education for children in the years before school and in accordance with Section 3.2 of the program guidelines.

Applicant declaration

* indicates a required field

By submitting this application form I hereby declare that:

- I have read and understood each section of this application form;
- I am authorised to submit this application on behalf of, and have the authority to represent the Approved Provider;
- all information provided is true and correct to the best of my knowledge;
- I understand the approved service/s will, in using any funding, need to comply with the funding agreement, including the Early Childhood Outcomes Programs Terms and Conditions and the 2026 Start Strong for Community Preschools program guidelines, as well as the department's discretions;
- I agree to comply with the research, evaluation and data requirements and directions of the department, such as the Annual Preschool Census;
- I understand that approval of funding applications and provision of ongoing funding is at the discretion of the department's Early Childhood Outcomes division, and in accordance with the program guidelines;
- I confirm the approved service/s will keep evidence of expenditure for any funding received, as part of the department’s acquittal and audit processes and requirements;
- I understand that any false declarations may render this application ineligible/invalid; and
- all conflicts of interest have been declared.

I agree with the above statements *

○ Yes

Name *

First Name Last Name

Position *

Position held in applicant organisation (e.g. CEO, Treasurer, Director)

Date *

Must be a date.