



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Guidance

Better Futures Fund learning and development partner competition: clarification questions

Updated 22 July 2026

1. Is DCMS only looking for one supplier that must contract with other consortia partners to deliver all aspects of the L&D specified outcomes? Will DCMS be looking for consortia that can address specific areas of audience delivery?

DCMS is seeking to appoint a single grant recipient to deliver the Learning and Development Programme. This may be either a single organisation or a consortium, with a lead partner submitting the application on behalf of the consortium. The successful applicant will be responsible for delivering the full scope of the programme and achieving all of the objectives and outcomes, whether directly or through consortium partners.

2. Do all potential consortia delivery partners need to be registered on the Procurement portal, or just the single lead partner?

DCMS are not considering a contract with the delivery partner. Instead we are inviting applications to enter into a grant agreement with DCMS to deliver the programme. As such, applicants and potential consortia delivery partners are not required to be registered on a specific procurement portal such as the Commercial Service L&D DPS framework. For further information on our eligibility criteria, please see the [Better Futures Fund learning and development partner competition guidance](#).

3. Recognising that specific technical and/or thematic expertise may be

needed at various points in the design and delivery of the Learning and Development Programme, will the lead grant recipient be permitted to ring-fence a proportion of the budget for bringing in relevant partners in the delivery of the learning programme?

The grant recipient may propose an approach that includes using their budget for commissioning external expertise, where this supports effective delivery of the programme. Any such approach should be clearly justified within the application and demonstrate how it will be managed, governed and deliver value for money.

4. Could DCMS provide more detail regarding the intended boundary between the Learning and Development Programme and the separately procured technical support service? For example, would activities such as one-to-one clinics or problem-solving sessions which cover SOP design or rate card development be considered within the Learning and Development scope?

The L&D programme is focused on increasing general capability, knowledge, and confidence in the use and delivery of SOPs. The activities undertaken in the delivery of this will be determined by the grant recipient in order to achieve the outcomes and objectives set out in the specification. The technical assistance service is still under design, however, DCMS anticipates that this will primarily focus on more tailored, specific technical support to the preparation of individual project design and bids into the BFF.

5. Can DCMS confirm that being either a lead or sub-grantee partner to the L&D Programme would not conflict an organisation out of providing technical support?

DCMS's current position is that bidding for both the L&D Programme, either as a lead or co-applicant, and the technical assistance service is permissible.

6. Can you provide further detail about the approach to providing technical support, or provide a timeline for when details will be released?

We are currently in the design phase of the technical assistance service. As such, the scope and responsibilities of the technical assistance service partner is currently being considered and shall be defined in relevant documentation in the coming months.

7. Are round 2 applications expected to be rolling or fixed (as this may significantly impact the delivery model for learning & development). Can DCMS clarify the intended application model for subsequent Better Futures Fund rounds? Specifically, is Round 2 expected to operate through a fixed application window, a rolling application process, or any other model?

We are currently in the design process of BFF Round 2, working in close collaboration with a range of stakeholders from across local government, the impact economy and civil society. As such, we are currently unable to clarify the

precise application model for subsequent BFF funding rounds. However, DCMS anticipates that the majority of BFF outcomes funding deployment will occur during the lifetime of this grant agreement. More information will be available on the [BFF website](#) in due course.

Applicants will be assessed on their ability to demonstrate operational capability and resourcing flexibility to effectively manage variable demand over the lifecycle of the programme.

8. Can DCMS elaborate on the process for BFF applicants? For example, will applications be rolling or phased, and will there be a multi-stage application process?

Please see response to question 7.

9. Can DCMS confirm that being either a lead or sub-grantee partner to the L&D Partner competition would not conflict an organisation out of bidding into the fund?

If an applicant intended to apply to be both the L&D delivery partner and a funding applicant, their applications would have to clearly demonstrate how they would implement and maintain a strict counterfraud process fully minimising conflicts of interest.

10. Would participation in both the Round 1 delivery-partner competition and the L&D Partner competition be permitted in principle, including where an organisation participates in the latter as either a lead applicant or a consortium partner?

If an applicant intended to apply for funding as both the L&D delivery partner and Round 1 delivery partner, their applications would have to clearly demonstrate how they would implement and maintain a strict counterfraud process fully minimising conflicts of interest.

11. The competition guidance refers to targeting/working in places experiencing higher levels of child poverty, but it is unclear how these will be defined. Will DCMS identify priority places or communities for targeted Learning and Development support for areas experiencing high levels of child poverty or should applicants propose their own methodology for this?

DCMS does not intend to prescribe a fixed list of priority places or communities for the BFF L&D programme. Applicants should instead set out their own rationale and methodology for identifying and targeting areas experiencing higher levels of child poverty, drawing on relevant national and local evidence.

As part of the assessment process, DCMS will review the proposed approach in each application, including the evidence and rationale used to identify high-need areas. Following appointment, DCMS will make available evidence and insights it has, in order to support the refinement of place identification that the grant

recipient has proposed.

12. Can you provide any additional guidance on the expected relative weighting of each of the 5 sections of the application form, and each of the 5 stated objectives?

The 5 objectives outlined in the guidance will not be assessed individually. The BFF L&D programme objectives will be assessed collectively with an overall application weighting of 25%, alongside SOP & Sector Knowledge (25%); Programme Management & Oversight (20%); Finances (15%) and Service Monitoring & Evaluation (15%). Please view the [scoring criteria](#) for more detailed information.

As noted above, DCMS does not attach a specific weighting or hierarchy to the individual objectives. Whether applying as a single recipient or as a consortium, the onus is on the applicants to demonstrate their overall approach and how they will meet these objectives.

DCMS expects proposals to address all five objectives. If an applicant intends to focus on certain objectives over others, their application should include a justification for doing so. Lastly, as outlined in the [guidance](#), DCMS will favour schemes that:

- offer a service that is accessible and can support a diverse range of organisations and stakeholders interested in SOPs and the BFF
- demonstrate how they can sufficiently flex and adapt their work to target support to organisations and stakeholders working in places and communities experiencing higher levels of child poverty

13. Can DCMS provide further clarity on whether this grant will be VAT exempt?

Grants are not generally subject to VAT. However, the ultimate decision on whether a grant is subject to VAT ultimately lies with HMRC. Please visit HMRC for [guidance](#).

14. Are you able to share any details on target or expected application volume?

Please refer to the 'Further Information about the BFF to support your application development' section in our specification for details of application volumes in predecessor funds, which enable estimates for this programme. You may also want to look at evaluations of the Life Chances Fund, including '[Key Findings from the evaluation of the Life Chances Fund](#)'.

Applicants to the BFF L&D programme will be assessed on their ability to demonstrate operational capability and resourcing flexibility in order to effectively manage variable demand over the lifecycle of the programme.

15. Can DCMS provide further detail about plans for the supporting data

infrastructure for applications, grant management and outcomes tracking?

No further information on this service can be shared at this stage, however DCMS intends to learn from the data capture service provided in the Life Chances Fund.

16. What, if any of this infrastructure is expected to be provided by the L&D partner, and when do you expect any data infrastructure to go live?

The L&D partner will not be expected to provide data infrastructure pertaining to outcomes tracking and payments. Data infrastructure for these purposes will be determined by our discovery phase work and therefore timescales can not currently be shared.

17. Which provider will have primary responsibility for tracking expressions of interest to the BFF?

The BFF Round 1 Delivery Partner with responsibility for tracking overall expressions of interest to the BFF has not yet been formally appointed. Information on this appointment will be made available on the [BFF website](#) in due course.

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