



Department
for Education

Trust Capacity Fund 2023-2025

Information for applicants

Window 4

March 2024

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). It has been produced to help schools and trusts apply for window 4 of the [Trust Capacity Fund \(TCaF\) 2023-2025](#).

Expiry date

This guidance will expire on 31 March 2025, when TCaF 2023-2025 closes.

Who is this publication for?

This guidance is for:

- academy trusts
- local authority-maintained schools forming a multi-academy trust (MAT)

Main points

This guidance relates to application window 4. This guidance explains:

- what TCaF is and what it will fund
- who can apply
- how and when to apply
- how we will assess applications

You should read the guidance in full before applying for funding. If you have any questions, please contact the grant team at TCAF.GRANT@education.gov.uk

Please note that to better manage anticipated demand, we have removed window 5 and extended the window 4 application dates. Please see [Table 2](#) for more details.

What is the Trust Capacity Fund and what will it fund?

TCaF 2023-2025 is a competitive grant fund available to help form and grow trusts. It has a particular focus on supporting high quality trusts, and high quality schools forming trusts, to take on underperforming schools in [education investment areas \(EIAs\)](#).

TCaF and the Trust Establishment and Growth (TEG) Fund form part of an enhanced package of support to the trust sector to support growth, particularly in EIAs and areas of priority as determined by regional directors. Both TEG and TCAF are designed to enable trusts to grow sustainably and well, TEG through providing start-up funding for projects in their initial stages and TCaF is for trusts once growth projects are approved.

Applications linked to growth projects which involve multiple schools are more likely to be successful. TCaF 2023-2025 is organised into four strands, each with its own minimum and maximum grant values as detailed in [Table 1](#) below. For windows 3 and 4, grants are available over one financial year only. It is for you to determine which strand to apply for, based on the details of your [linked growth project](#).

Table 1: TCaF 2023-2025 funding strands

Strand	Minimum grant value	Maximum grant value
A1: For projects in which your trust will take on or form from at least 5 schools, one of which must be an inadequate or requires improvement school in an EIA (listed in Annex A)	£50,000	£750,000
A2: For projects in which your trust will take on at least one inadequate or requires improvement school in an EIA (listed in Annex A)	£50,000	£500,000
B: For projects in which a trust takes on either at least one inadequate or requires improvement school outside an EIA or any school within an EIA (listed in Annex A)	£50,000	£250,000
C: For projects taking on good or outstanding schools outside of an EIA	£50,000	£100,000

Bids in excess of the strand maximum cannot be submitted.

Please note applicants should apply based upon the Ofsted judgement on the date of the Regional Director approval of the growth project.

Applications for projects in an EIA (strands A1, A2 and applicable strand B projects) will be expected to demonstrate how their plans for trust growth and development, for which they are seeking funding, will deliver some of the objectives detailed in the [trust development statement](#) (TDS) for the given area. These statements have been published for each of the 55 EIAs to demonstrate the priorities for trust growth of the [regional director](#) (RD).

Key differences between TCaF 2023-2025 and TCaF 2022-2023

The following key changes from TCaF 2022-2023 have been made:

- there are now [four strands](#) to which you can apply.
- tariffs have been increased for strands A1, A2 and B.
- we will continue to prioritise applications involving trusts taking on underperforming schools and or schools in EIAs but within this, applications involving multiple schools are more likely to be successful
- the grant is now designed so that planned activities only commence post notification of the grant award.
- TDS will now be used in the assessment of applications for projects in EIAs.
- the application process will remain open until 25 June 2024.

This guidance relates only to window 4.

Eligibility

If you are an academy trust or local authority-maintained school in England, to apply to TCaF 2023-2025 window 4 you must:

- be considered by the Education and Skills Funding Agency to be of sound financial health. As a minimum requirement, academy trusts must not have an open [financial notice to improve](#).
- have an [eligible growth project](#) that has been approved by an RD between 1 January 2024 and 20 July 2024.

Please remember that TCaF is a competitive grant: meeting these eligibility criteria is not a guarantee of funding.

Phonics and English Baccalaureate

If your application is successful and you do not already meet the standards of 90% of all pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check in year 1 and 50% English Baccalaureate entries¹ (as relevant to your phase(s) of education), you will need to commit to improving your performance. In general, this will mean aiming to reach that level of performance after three years.

Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

Trusts receiving funding will be expected, where capacity and context allow, to engage with ITT initiatives promoted by the department. Many trusts will be an accredited provider of ITT or a delivery partner to an accredited provider. We would expect all trusts receiving funding to host placements for trainees if you do not already do so or increase the number of placements already offered if you have the available capacity. From September 2024, this may include hosting trainees undertaking the new intensive training and practice element. Trusts receiving funding should provide the department with information on the number of placements offered across your trust during the previous academic year when requested.

¹ Either 75% of your converter academies or 50% of your sponsored and converter academies will need to meet the standards. Schools that have been with the trust for less than three years, Special Educational Needs schools and Alternative Provision will not be included.

Eligible growth projects

Your TCaF application must be linked to a clearly defined growth project that has been approved by an RD between 1 January 2024 and 20 July 2024. This must commit you to either:

- taking at least one new school into your trust by 31 March 2026²
- or converting to academy status and taking on at least two new schools (with all schools to be taken into your trust by 31 March 2025)

The following types of growth project are eligible for TCaF:

- a MAT taking on a school or group of schools
- applications from schools to convert to academy status and form a MAT
- sponsor matches for schools with directive Academy Orders (dAOs)
- trust mergers, including a single academy trust (SAT) joining a larger MAT and SATs joining together to create new trusts
- academy transfers from one trust to another
- approved free school bid proposals³

One application may be made for each growth project approved by an RD on a particular date. You may not submit applications which combine growth projects approved on different dates.

Growth projects that are not eligible for TCaF include, but are not limited to, [significant change](#) applications (for example, changes to age ranges, published admission numbers or the addition of a SEN resource base); physically expanding an existing school within your trust; and a school joining your trust as part of a trust partnership.

If you are considering trust growth but are at an early stage of engagement with potential schools, you should consider applying to the [Trust Establishment and Growth fund](#) (TEG).

You should contact the [RD office](#) for the area in which you are proposing to work to confirm the deadline for submitting your project to your RD, as schedules vary.

² If the new school is a free school, in certain circumstances we may be able to extend this deadline. You should contact the TCaF delivery team to discuss this.

³ Approval for the free school must be received between 1 January 2024 and 25 June 2025 to be eligible.

Eligible activities

All activities funded by TCaF must be completed by 31 March 2025. The grant is now designed so that planned activities follow notification of grant award at each window as shown in [Table 3](#) below. This is a change from previous rounds of TCaF.

Activities must be focused on strengthening your trust's central capacity for the benefit of all the schools in the trust.

Examples of activities for which you can seek TCaF funding include:

- establishing new central processes such as IT, finance and HR
- training and continuing professional development for staff
- new staffing posts within the central trust team*
- new staffing posts, including increases in contracted hours, salary uplift or backfill costs relating to trust wide school improvement*
- reasonable relocation costs for moving staff to new regions
- specialist advice – such as IT, finance or HR advice – to build permanent capacity for growth
- audit fees in advance for the assurance of this grant funding

*See [Writing your application](#) below.

Examples of activities for which you cannot seek TCaF funding include:

- due diligence activities relating to the schools being taken on
- expenditure on tangible items, such as the purchase of assets (for example, buildings, furniture, fittings, IT equipment) up to and including individual items such as stationery
- costs for refurbishment
- activities that are already funded from other sources, such as legal fees that are covered by the sponsorship/conversion grant
- time for pre-existing staff to undertake work that is already in progress as part of their current responsibilities
- time for senior trust personnel (such as CEOs, headteachers) to conduct further school improvement activities or trust audits as a part or an extension of their current role/duties
- consultancy costs for delivering and managing the whole TCaF project

Neither of these lists is exhaustive. If you are uncertain whether any of your proposed activities are suitable for TCaF, please seek guidance from the grant team at TCAF.GRANT@education.gov.uk.

When and how can I apply?

Application deadlines

Applications may be made between 1 March 2024 and 25 June 2024, subject to RD approval dates of growth projects. Applications will be assessed, and awards made in the month following the application window. The application window is shown in [Table 2](#) below.

RD approval for a growth project must have been given before an application can be considered for assessment. For window 4, RD approval must have been received from 1 January 2024 to 20 July 2024.

Table 2: TCaF 2023-2025 key dates

Application window	Window 4
Window opens	1 Mar 24
Submission deadline	25 Jun 24*

*Applications may be submitted for projects being decided in July advisory boards.

Writing your application

To apply for TCaF 2023-2025, you must complete the online [application form](#). You will need to fill out several sections, which ask for the following information (further guidance can be found in the form):

- project outline – the strand to which you are applying, the details of the school(s) that you are proposing will form or join your trust, when your growth project was or will be discussed at advisory board (AB) or approved by the RD.
- project details – an overview and action plan for the project, including how you will ensure it is delivered, represents value for money, and is sustainable, and your compliance, governance and resource management arrangements.
- Planned activities – a breakdown of the planned expenditure for the project, including a description of each activity, the dates between which each activity will take place and the individual cost of each activity. Activities must be [eligible](#) and must not start before 1 August 2024.
- TDS narrative (for strands A1, A2 and applicable strand B projects only) – a narrative to be provided by those trusts taking on or forming from schools in EIAs

(listed in annex A). This narrative should set out how the project delivers against the priorities in the published TDS for the relevant EIA.

The grant is now designed so that planned activities follow notification of grant award as shown in [Table 3](#) below.

Table 3: TCaF 2023-2025 grant activity start dates

Activity	Window 4
Planned grant activity start dates	1 Aug 24

- For all strands in window 4, TCaF 2023-2025 is a single financial year scheme and all activities must be completed by 31 March 2025.
- Please note that the information you submit in your planned activities will form the basis of any grant offer letter issued if you are awarded funding. You will be expected to commit to deliver against the activities submitted in your application so you must be confident of its delivery.
- Where there are DfE budget constraints, it is likely that individual award amounts will be capped below the original amount in your application.

Please remember that TCaF is a competitive grant: your application is not an agreement of funding. You should submit your strongest project relative to the [assessment criteria](#), against which all applications will be scored and prioritised.

Before submitting your completed application form, you must ensure that your accounting officer has ratified the application. This will normally be the chief executive if your organisation is a trust, or the headteacher if it is a school. This individual will be accountable for delivery, ensuring funding is used correctly, and in compliance with the department's [grant funding agreement: terms and conditions](#).

You are not entitled to claim from the department any costs or expenses that you may incur in preparing your bid, regardless of whether it is successful.

Questions and clarifications

You may query and seek clarification on any aspect of TCaF or this guidance prior to submitting your application. Questions must be submitted to the grant team at TCAF.GRANT@education.gov.uk. However, we will not review or give specific advice on any part of your application before submission.

Submitting your application

Please complete and submit the online application form and record your reference number.

The grant team may contact you to clarify elements of your application: this is not an opportunity to provide additional detail beyond that already within the application.

There will be a [national moderation](#) exercise following each application window. Decisions will be communicated to trusts as quickly as possible after each exercise.

As explained in [eligible growth projects](#), your application must be linked to a clearly defined growth project that has been approved by an RD from 1 January 2024. to 20 July 2024. You can submit your TCaF application ahead of RD approval, but it will not be assessed until and unless the RD makes a positive decision on the growth project.

You can only submit one TCaF application per growth project. You may withdraw and resubmit your application if it has not yet been to [national moderation](#), but we will not provide feedback on the initial submission. You cannot submit a revised application for the same project after a decision has been made.

How will my bid be assessed?

Assessment process

Eligible applications must be linked to a growth project approved by a RD at which point the quality of a trust will be considered. Provided their linked growth project has been approved, all applications received will then be subject to a two-stage assessment process: regional assessment and national moderation.

1. Regional assessment: the relevant regional team will assess the merit of the application against the [assessment criteria](#) and apply any [relevant penalties](#), treating all applications fairly. They will use the information contained within the application, as well as information generated from DfE-held sources, to make a relative judgment about whether it should be approved.
2. National moderation: to ensure applications are assessed consistently, and to maximise value for money against the aims of TCaF, all regional assessments will be subject to a national moderation exercise involving senior officials from across the regions. Where the number and value of strong bids exceeds the available funding, this exercise will prioritise applications according to the extent to which they meet the [assessment criteria](#). Any bids that are above the maximum grant value will be reviewed by the Director General and receive wider financial scrutiny to assess value for money and consider the impact on other applicants.

Assessment criteria

The following sections set out how we will judge applications against specific assessment criteria. You should ensure your application shows clearly how you meet these criteria, but please remember that TCaF is a competitive grant: even applications that meet all the criteria and support priority projects are not guaranteed funding.

Applications that support the scheme's specific geographical and contextual priorities will receive higher scores and be prioritised accordingly during moderation. Applications that do not involve taking on underperforming schools and/or schools in EIAs are still eligible but will be prioritised according to the strand criteria. Applications which involve taking on multiple schools are more likely to be successful within each strand.

Geographical need

If you are applying to strand A1, your trust must be taking on or be created from at least 5 schools, one of which must be an inadequate or requires improvement school in an EIA listed in [Annex A](#). If you are applying to strand A2, your trust must be taking on at least one inadequate or requires improvement school from one of the areas in [Annex A](#). If you are applying for strand B, your project must involve your trust taking on either at least one inadequate or requires improvement school in an area not listed in [Annex A](#) or any good

or outstanding school in one of the areas listed in [Annex A](#). If you are applying under strand C, your project does not have to include a school from one of these areas and are less likely to be prioritised and less likely to receive funding.

Within these parameters, geographical need will be assessed by comparing the number of at-risk schools in a local authority district with the supply of effective trusts in the same area. RDs will also refer to local intelligence (for example, to ensure that boundary issues and anomalous cases do not unduly influence decisions) and consider their key strategic priorities for their areas to inform decision-making.

Contextual need

Contextual need will be assessed by considering the relative level of priority of the schools attached to the project.

Applicants should apply based upon the Ofsted judgement on the date of the Regional Director approval of the growth project.

Projects involving Special Educational Needs provision or Alternative Provision will be considered higher priority and, across all strands, applications in which the trust will take on underperforming schools (as measured by Ofsted ratings) will receive the greatest priority. For example, a project involving an inadequate school will be prioritised over a project involving a school with multiple requires improvement ratings.

Trust development statements

This is **only** applicable to applications where trusts are taking on or being formed by schools in an EIA (strand A1, A2 and applicable strand B applications).

Applications will be assessed to evaluate how well the plans for trust growth and development match the requirements set out in the relevant EIA [TDS](#).

A strong application will provide clear evidence of the following:

- meets the requirements set out in the relevant TDS and addresses the regional director's priorities.

Deliverability

Deliverability will be assessed by considering the extent to which plans are realistic and provide suitable assurance that all funded activity will be completed by required deadlines.

A strong application will provide clear evidence of the following:

- a well-conceived, realistic plan and detailed understanding of the impact of the additional capacity.

- a thorough risk assessment and effective procedures to mitigate risks at both school and trust level, including a scheme of delegation that makes clear at what level risks are managed.

Value for money

Value for money will be assessed based on whether the funding requested seems proportionate to the size and risk of the project. This will include considering the number of schools proposed to join the trust.

The grant maxima are reflective of the maximum period in which funding can be spent.

A strong application will provide clear evidence of the following:

- a comprehensive list of planned activities with itemised costings that are appropriate for funding. This will include a clear understanding and demonstration of why the money is required, how it will be spent and how costs have been minimised.
- specialist financial expertise within the organisation to scrutinise expenditure, maximise efficiency, and ensure propriety with public money. For example, an accredited school business manager and/or financial expertise at trustee level.

Applications will also be deemed stronger under this criterion if there is clear evidence the activity could not take place without TCaF funding (for example, if it cannot be funded through other sources).

Sustainability

Sustainability will be assessed by considering the extent to which there is evidence that activities will be sustainable beyond the applicable deadline for completion of activities. This is 31 March 2025.

A strong application will provide clear evidence of the following:

- how the organisation will pay for any new capabilities that are likely to be required after the completion of their TCaF activities. For example, we would expect trusts to have made sufficient provision for new staffing posts beyond the grant funding period.
- that the organisation will be financially sustainable without additional revenue support from DfE.

Penalties and deductions

Where applicants are not adhering to departmental guidance or best practice, applications will be subject to point deductions from their overall application. This may

lead to extra conditions being attached to the award of funding, should the application still be successful.

Where deductions have been applied, these will be made clear in the feedback to applicants.

Failure to provide information about key individuals in the trust

As part of the application form, applicants must provide details of the trust's (or the proposed trust's) chair of trustees, accounting officer, chief financial officer, trustees and members, including their individual email address and the date they were appointed. This information must also be updated on the [Get Information About Schools](#) register. Failure to do so will result in a point deduction.

Failure to comply with previous grant assurance procedures

If the applicant received a previous grant award from DfE but did not comply effectively with the financial reporting requirements outlined in the grant funding agreement (especially if they did not submit a satisfactory Annex G certificate of expenditure within required deadlines), 3 points will be deducted from their application.

What happens next?

Whether it is successful or not, we will inform you via email about the outcome of your application as soon as possible after the national [moderation panel](#) following the assessment point for which you applied.

As explained in [submitting your application](#), your application to TCaF confirms that you have read, understood and will comply with the [DfE grant funding agreement: terms and conditions](#).

If your application is successful, you will be required to sign a grant funding agreement, based on the planned activities you submitted in your application. This will set out our expectations of you, including the specific grant conditions, monitoring arrangements and payment details, and you will be required to accept it in full.

Grant funding will be paid in arrears throughout the funding period once your agreed activity has been completed and evidenced.

Annex A: Education investment areas by local authority district

To apply for strand A of TCaF, your proposal must involve you taking on an underperforming school from one of the following local authority districts in EIAs. If you are applying for strand B, your project does not have to include a school from one of these areas but will be considered higher priority if it does.

- Amber Valley
- Ashfield
- Babergh
- Bassetlaw
- Bedford
- Blackpool
- Bolsover
- Bolton
- Boston
- Bradford
- Breckland
- Broadland
- Broxtowe
- Bury
- Cambridge
- Central Bedfordshire
- Chesterfield
- Cornwall
- County Durham
- Coventry
- Darlington
- Derby
- Derbyshire Dales
- Doncaster
- Dorset
- Dudley
- East Cambridgeshire
- East Lindsey
- East Suffolk
- Eastbourne
- Erewash
- Fenland
- Gedling
- Great Yarmouth

- Halton
- Hartlepool
- Hastings
- High Peak
- Huntingdonshire
- Ipswich
- Isle of Wight
- King's Lynn and West
- Norfolk
- Kirklees
- Knowsley
- Leeds
- Lewes
- Lincoln
- Liverpool
- Luton
- Manchester
- Mansfield
- Mid Suffolk
- Middlesbrough
- Newark and Sherwood
- North East Derbyshire
- North Kesteven
- North Norfolk
- North Northamptonshire
- North Somerset
- North Yorkshire*
- Norwich
- Nottingham
- Oldham
- Peterborough
- Plymouth
- Portsmouth
- Rochdale
- Rother
- Rotherham
- Rushcliffe
- Salford
- Sandwell
- Sefton
- Somerset**
- South Cambridgeshire

- South Derbyshire
- South Gloucestershire
- South Holland
- South Kesteven
- South Norfolk
- South Tyneside
- St. Helens
- Stoke-on-Trent
- Sunderland
- Swindon
- Tameside
- Wakefield
- Walsall
- Wealden
- West Lindsey
- West Suffolk
- Wirral

* North Yorkshire local authority district comprises the former districts of Craven, Hambleton, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Ryedale, Scarborough, and Selby.

** Somerset local authority district comprises the former districts of Mendip, Sedgemoor, Somerset West and Taunton, and South Somerset.



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