



Department
for Education

Family Hubs –

**Behavioural Insights Project:
testing what works to increase
the reach and uptake of family
hub services by disadvantaged
and vulnerable families**

Expression of Interest Guide

March 2022

1. Summary

The Department for Education (DfE) is seeking to build evidence of what works in terms of improving reach and uptake of services provided by family hubs amongst families most in need. To achieve this the department is investing in a behavioural insights research programme. Round 1 of the research is currently underway. The department is now looking for local authorities or voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisation with initiatives aimed at increasing family hub uptake from disadvantaged groups to participate in round 2 of the research which is expected to commence in Autumn 2022. The research will provide participating organisations with evidence on how effective their approaches are. Learning from the research will be shared amongst local authorities to support practice, as part of the department's role in championing family hubs.

What can participant LAs/VCS organisations expect?

- The department to commission Behavioural Insights research from an expert external supplier to test the effectiveness of their initiative.
- The supplier to work with the local authority or VCS organisation to design and deliver the behavioural insights research.
- The supplier to analyse the data and produce findings.
- The department to disseminate learning from the research, with support from our partners.

What will participant LAs/VCS organisations need to do?

- Have some experience of already delivering or have existing capacity and funding to deliver their initiative.
- Start the initiative before April 2023.
- Work with a DfE appointed supplier to design the methodology and enable the supplier to deliver the research.
- Be willing for results to be published so others can learn from their approach.

Timeline

Expressions of Interest (EOI) stage opens	10 th March 2022
Deadline for EOIs from local authorities/VCS organisations	8 th April 2022
Moderation discussions	W/c 25 th April 2022
DfE to shortlist LA/VCS initiatives and prepare research brief	May 2022
DfE to commission specialist behavioural insights supplier	June/July 2022
Project start	September 2022
Research completed	September 2023

How can I find out more about round 1 of the research?

The department has published a technical report: *Behavioural Insights: increasing uptake of family hub services* on Gov.uk detailing the preparatory work underpinning 4 behavioural science research projects to be conducted in collaboration with 4 local authorities as part of round 1 of the research.

The Anna Freud Centre as the National Centre for Family Hubs also hosted a seminar titled *Using Behavioural Insights to Increase the Reach and Uptake of Family Hub Services* where the round 1 supplier and participant local authorities spoke about their work as part of the department's family hubs behavioural insights research programme. Information from the seminar can be accessed via the [National Centre for Family Hubs website](#).

2. Background

Family hubs are a way of joining up locally to improve access to services, the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and to put relationships at the heart of family help. They bring together services for children of all ages, with a great Start for Life offer at their core.

At Budget, the government announced £82m to create a network of family hubs. This is part of a wider £300m package to transform services for parents, carers, babies and children in half of council areas across England¹. This builds on the £39.5 million the government had already committed to Family Hubs to champion the model.

The success of family hubs in improving outcomes for families and children hinges on their ability to successfully engage and reach families in need of support. We are aware that a range of constraints mean that in many cases it is difficult to engage these families and that professionals are working to improve reach and uptake of their family hub services.

In Autumn 2021 the department set up a behavioural insights research programme to work with local areas undertaking initiatives to engage families with their services to test what works to drive uptake of specific family hub services, to get families most in need engaged. The research will help the department to build an evidence-base to support local practice, as part of our role in championing family hubs.

Round 1 of the research is currently underway with 4 behavioural science research projects being conducted in collaboration with 4 local authorities. The preparatory work underpinning these projects including the theory of change, logic models and research protocols developed are published on Gov.uk in the technical report; *Behavioural Insights: increasing uptake of family hub services*

¹ [Budget and Spending Review – October 2021 \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

3. Research specification

Aim

The aim of the research is to enable the Department for Education and the local areas participating in the research to evidence what works to drive uptake of family hub services, particularly by families most in need, with the purpose of sharing this learning with local areas to support them to successfully engage and reach families in their area.

Objectives

The department will contract an expert behavioural insights organisation to deliver on the following objectives.

1. To work with local authorities or VCS organisations to develop a method for how their initiative could be tested using behavioural insights research.
2. To work with local authorities or VCS organisations to conduct behavioural insights research in 5-6 local areas to test the effectiveness of different approaches in different local contexts aimed at enhancing uptake and use of services by disadvantaged families.
3. To analyse and report on findings for dissemination of learning to local authorities, working with the National Centre for Family Hubs and DfE policy officials.

Methodology

Following the shortlisting of projects the department will draft an invitation to tender, the final methodology will be devised by the appointed supplier. The department is likely to invite specialist Behavioural Insight suppliers to tender for the three-stage project outlined below which replicates the approach to round 1 of the research.

Phase 1: Discovery phase and research design

This phase will address objective 1 and is expected to consist of: a review of previous research and evaluation, interviews with the DfE short list of local authority or VCS initiatives and outlining the potential methodology for each project.

Research design will need to be tailored to localised problems and challenges relating to reach and uptake, and may involve testing communication materials, small-scale evaluations of communications or incentives, collection of monitoring data on how an outreach campaign influences uptake and service usage, or other methods.

At the end of this phase the department will ask the supplier to submit a report with a set of recommendations on research design, methods and timings

developed in collaboration with 5-6 local authority areas, which could be delivered in phase 2.

Phase 2: Behavioural Insights Research:

This phase will primarily address objective 2.

This phase will involve small-scale behavioural insights research in 5-6 local areas to empirically establish what works to enhance reach and uptake of family hub services. The detailed methodology will need to be devised with participating local authorities or VCS organisations and will depend upon the initiative they intend to deliver and their commitment and time. The research will likely test practice and activity that local authorities or VCS organisations have some experience of already delivering or have existing capacity to deliver, rather than establishing new services, interventions, or campaigns.

The initiatives local authorities or VCS organisations are running are likely to be varied as they target families in their area who are most in need. **DfE and DHSC would particularly welcome EOIs relating to SEND provision, services for adolescents (e.g. youth services, emotional and mental health support) or the Best Start for Life offer² delivered via family hubs.** However, we are also keen to encourage innovative projects that target families most in need in local areas to build the evidence base and share learning on how to engage and reach all disadvantaged families.

The following are initiatives being tested in round 1 of the research which provide an indication of the type of projects this research may be working with:

Project 1	This project focuses on how to design communications informed by behavioural science to engaging new fathers to take up a father’s/male carer peer support group. The group aims to support fathers/male carers to adapt to the transition to parenthood during the postnatal period. Social media campaign.
Project 2	This project assesses the use of a new communications strategy in schools to promote engagement of families with school aged children (5-16) in services to support children’s emotional well-being/mental health.
Project 3	This project tests the use of Family Hub staff and Parent Champion outreach in community settings to promote engagement of BAME families with young (pre-school) children and English as a second language in universal Stay and Play sessions.
Project 4	This project focuses on evaluating the communications component of a new father inclusive strategy to promote male carer engagement in family support (parenting programmes for parents of 11-16 year-olds).

Additional information on these projects and the methodology designed in collaboration with the DfE appointed supplier can be found in the technical report:

² <https://www.nationalcentreforfamilyhubs.org.uk/toolkits/best-start-for-life/>

Behavioural Insights: increasing uptake of family hub services published on Gov.uk

As well as the findings, the methodology will be an important tool for local areas to illustrate how they can test their approaches and develop evidence-based practice locally. The department will therefore require from the contractor an outline of the research design for each local authority/VCS organisation initiative, how this will be tested and any local characteristics which have influenced the design.

Phase 3: Analysis and dissemination of learning to local authorities:

This will involve full analysis of data and reporting of findings to a publishable standard and working with the [National Centre for Family Hubs](#) and DfE policy leads to disseminate learning to local authorities.

4. Role of the local authority or VCS organisation

We are looking for a partnership approach. We are looking for local authorities or VCS organisations with a willingness to engage with the DfE and their appointed supplier to develop empirical evidence on what works to increase reach and uptake up of family hubs, in their local area. The exact role of the LA/VCS organisation will evolve as the project does, but we are asking for a commitment to;

- Leading on designing an initiative to increase uptake of or engagement with family hub services by disadvantaged group(s) and have some experience of already delivering or have existing capacity and funding to deliver their initiative.
- The initiative would need to start before April 2023 to meet the timescales for this research.
- Working with the DfE appointed supplier to design the research methodology and enable the supplier to deliver the research. This will involve some time commitment and may involve providing insight and advice on how potential methodological designs would sit within the wider local context and providing feedback on potential design options.
- Being willing for the results to be published so other areas can learn from their approach.

5. Funding and eligibility

Funding

There is no direct funding for local authorities or VCS organisations. The department will fund an expert behavioural insights contractor to design and deliver behavioural insight research on the effectiveness of the initiative local authorities or VCS organisations are setting up/delivering. Local authorities/VCS

organisation will therefore receive behavioural insights research funded by the department to test how effective their initiative is. The local authority/VCS organisation will need to fund the initiative itself.

Who can submit an expression of interest?

- The 151 top tier local authorities
- VCS organisations delivering family hubs or services which are part of family hub networks.

A local authority or VCS organisation may submit multiple applications if they have multiple unrelated initiatives which they would like to put forward to participate in the research. Joint expressions of interest involving more than one local authority will be accepted providing all local authorities named complete a declaration.

Local authorities/VCS organisations should also be planning an initiative to increase reach/uptake or engagement with family hub service(s). The initiative can be delivered in house or commissioned out. How uptake or engagement in services should be defined is for local areas to identify.

The target population for the initiative should be disadvantaged families, it is for local areas to identify and define who disadvantaged families are in their local area, based on the needs of the local population.

What do you class as a family hub services?

Family hubs are a way of joining up locally to improve access to services, the connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and to put relationships at the heart of family help. They bring together services for children of all ages, with a great Start for Life offer at their core.

We appreciate that many local authorities are on a transformation journey and still developing their family hub model. For round 2 of this research we will accept expressions of interest from VCS organisation or local authorities who are delivering services through a family hub or children's centre model.

Should my local authority or VCS organisation submit an expression of interest?

If the answers to the following questions are 'yes', then you are a likely good candidate:

- ✓ Are you planning initiatives to increase the uptake family hub services of by disadvantaged groups?
- ✓ Do you have an initiative planned to increase uptake by disadvantaged groups that is either in the early stages or due to begin before 31st March 2023?

- ✓ Are you willing to work with a specialist behavioural insight supplier appointed by the DfE?
- ✓ Are you willing to allow the learning from your initiative to be shared with other local authorities?

7. Submitting an expression of interest

How to apply

The application period will open from Thursday 10th March and will close at 23:59pm on Friday 8th April. Key dates and deadlines for the application process are set out in the table below.

Expressions of interest issued	10 th March
Deadline for Expressions of interest from local authorities	8 th April
Moderation discussions	w/c 25 th April
DfE to shortlist LA/VCS initiatives and scope research brief	May 2022
DfE to commission supplier who specialises in behavioural insights research	June/July 2022
Project start	September 2022
Research completed	September 2023 ³

How is the expression of interest form structured?

The expression of interest form is structured so the department can start to understand the theory of change behind your intervention by asking about the rationale, intervention and outcomes. Establishing a theory of change is the first step in undertaking an evaluation, it captures crucial details about why your intervention or service is necessary and what it aims to achieve⁴. The technical report: *Behavioural Insights: increasing uptake of family hub services* published on Gov.uk provides illustrative examples of theories of change developed in round 1 of the research. These have been developed collaboratively by the local authorities and the DfE contractor. The department anticipates working with organisations participating in round 2 of the research to identify the theory of change which can then be included in the invitation to tender. The EOI form and stage 2 moderation discussions are designed to work towards identifying this theory of change. However, if you would like more information on developing a theory of change it is available from the [Early Intervention Foundation Evaluation Hub](https://evaluationhub.eif.org.uk/theory-of-change/).

³ We expect some LAs to complete before this date but would like to provide some flexibility to accommodate interesting initiatives which may not be starting immediately.

⁴ <https://evaluationhub.eif.org.uk/theory-of-change/>

Completing your expression of interest (EOI)

Please complete the accompanying EOI application form to the best of your ability. Information on what is expected in each section of the form can be found below and has prompts under each question in the form to support you in completing your EOI. Please make sure you refer to these prompts throughout to ensure you address the question.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 are aimed at developing a theory of change for your project and are structured around understanding the key components of:

Need	Why	Why is the intervention needed?
Intervention	Who	Who are you targeting with your initiative to increase the uptake of family hub services?
	Which	Which service(s) offered through the family hub are you seeking to increase uptake of by the target group through your initiative?
	How	How are you planning to increase uptake of the family hub service from your target group? What is your initiative designed to increase uptake?
Outcome	What	What is the intended outcome(s) related to uptake or engagement?

We encourage expressions of interest to be as precise as possible and emphasise that the projects in round 1 of the research outlined in the technical report have a very specific focus which lend themselves well to research testing behavioural change. Section 2 of the EOI form 'project summary' asks for a simple breakdown of the theory of change in less than 30 words for each section. This is designed to help applicants to be as reductionist as possible by focusing precisely on the core components of the theory of change.

Section 6 of the form asks for information on timeframes, scale and design to assess how feasible it is to test the initiative using a behavioural insights approach within the scope and budget of this project. For ease of completion these questions ask for a yes/no response, a number or date. Please complete these questions to the best of your ability, there is a 'don't know' option if required. Research readiness will be explored further during the moderation stage where a researcher will be available to work with you to scope this.

A limit on the number of words is stated for each section where a text box is provided, any text that exceeds the stated limit will not be assessed. Please include the total number of words for each section at the bottom of each text box. Sections marked with * are mandatory and must be completed in order for your EOI to be accepted. You should submit multiple expressions of interest if your local authority/VCS organisation has multiple unrelated initiatives which you would like to be considered for the research. There is space in the form to include how many applications your local authority/VCS organisation has submitted. VCS

organisations only need to count applications as multiple applications if they are within the same local authority area. Joint local authority bids will be considered providing all local authorities included have signed a declaration.

Submitting your expression of interest

Please email a single Word version of your completed application to FamilyHubs.RESEARCHANDANALYSIS@education.gov.uk

Your 'local authority name' or 'VCS Organisation name' followed by 'Family Hubs – BI project EOI' should be included in the email 'subject' field when submitting your application.

Deadline

The Department for Education must receive all completed applications by email by 23:59 on 8th April 2022. The department will not be able to consider applications that miss this deadline as to do so would be to unfairly discriminate against those applicants who submitted their application within the allowed timescale.

8. Assessing the application

We are seeking to recruit local authorities/VCS organisations through a two-stage process in April and May 2022

Stage 1

The department will sift expressions of interest based on:

- A theory of change is evident throughout the responses to section 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the EOI form- the summary, rationale, intervention, and outcomes, which demonstrates how the initiative targets the engagement of a disadvantaged group with a family hub service.
- The timeline for the initiative is compatible with the project delivery.
- The LA/VCS organisation have the resources to deliver their initiative.
- How feasible it is to assess the initiative using a behavioural insights approach within the scope and budget of this project.

Stage 2

Stage 2 will be a moderation stage to clarify any queries related to identifying the theory of change for the initiative and assess research readiness. The list below provides an example to the type of queries we may raise at this stage.

- Understanding how the initiative has been designed.

- How feasible it is to assess the initiative using a behavioural insights approach within the scope and budget of this project.
- How increased uptake would be defined and operationalised in the research.
- Capacity within the local authority to support the research including any data collection infrastructure and any scope to probe existing or routinely collected quantitative data and how any research participant might be recruited.

The department may also use contextual factors such as geographical and demographical information, rural/urban classification etc. to rationalise the list.

Next Steps

Following the identification of projects to participate in the research the department will scope a detailed research brief and draft an invitation to tender to commission an external supplier in summer with a view to the research starting in autumn.

In the invitation to tender we would like to detail the initiatives selected to participate in the research and provide a theory of change for each to assist potential bidders to scope potential methodological approaches to and cost of delivery. We will work with the selected local authority/VCS organisation to develop the theory of change and description of their initiative.

Disclaimer

By issuing this invitation the Department for Education is not bound in any way and does not have to accept any expressions of interest, the department reserves the right to decide when, or if, any research is commissioned.