

Supporting Families: Investing in Practice - Mockingbird Frequently Asked Questions

LA Eligibility

Q: Are there any eligibility requirements?

A: Any Local Authorities that are not currently delivering the Mockingbird Family Model are eligible to apply.

Q: Would you be accepting an EOI from Local Authorities who have received an Inadequate Ofsted rating?

A: The applications are open to all local authorities regardless of their Ofsted rating. We would encourage you to ensure that your application clearly demonstrates the local authority's ability to support the delivery of the project despite their Ofsted rating, and that the LA's leaders are similarly committed.

Q: Please can you advise whether you are anticipating receiving bids from single local authorities or whether you would be open to receiving joint bids from neighbouring local authorities.

A: We anticipate mostly receiving bids from single local authorities, however we are open to receiving joint bids particularly if you anticipate sharing foster carers between neighbouring local authorities. If you are submitting a joint bid, it would be helpful if you could describe how the LAs involved will work together successfully, so as not to cause delays to implementation or contracting further down the line.

Q: Are small local authorities with few looked-after children eligible to apply?

A: Yes, you can still apply regardless of the local authority's size.

Q: Are LAs who have applied to the other projects within the Supporting Families Investing in Practice programme (i.e. Family Group Conferencing or Family Drug and Alcohol Courts) still eligible to apply to Mockingbird? Will they be less likely to receive funding if they've already been successful for one?

A: LAs who have already applied to either (or both) of the other two projects are still able to apply for Mockingbird. LA's applications will be considered separately for each model.

Timeline of project

Q: Is there any further information regarding the timeline for decision-making on the EOIs and when the programme is looking to commence the work with successful local authorities?

A: The timeline for the development of the programme is still being clarified, so the following should be considered indicative only:

The deadline to submit an EOI is **Midnight, August 2nd**. Following this deadline, the WWC, the Department for Education, and The Fostering Network will review applications, and request any clarifying information from LAs in Mid-August. We hope to be able to inform successful applications of a decision in early September.

We expect LAs to begin working towards implementation of a first constellation in late September/early October, with the aim to launch their initial constellation by March 2020. The Fostering Network outline six stages to implementation:

- Stage 1: Self-assessment questionnaire
- Stage 2: Early project planning and communication strategy
- Stage 3: Implementation working group formation
- Stage 4: Define, recruit and train key Mockingbird roles
- Stage 5: Constellation planning and development
- Stage 6: Constellation launch and community building

We may also ask local authorities to attend a set-up meeting with The Fostering Network, the independent evaluator, and the What Works Centre shortly after successful LAs are notified.

Sustainability

Q: Would you clarify what period the allocated funding would cover, and whether you require information about sustainability from the project start date or from March 2020?

A: If successful, LAs will be asked to provide a more detailed budget breakdown to the Department. The funds agreed upon will be paid out to the LA before the end of this financial year (by the end of March 2020). However, we expect this project to run and be evaluated for up to two years (from the point of implementation).

Sustainability is a key feature of the application process and local authorities will be expected to demonstrate their commitment and ability to sustaining the model once government funding has ended. We are therefore asking LAs to describe how they anticipate to ensure sustainability of Mockingbird over the evaluation period and beyond.

Budget and funding conditions

Q: Is this funding stream only to support Mockingbird, or would you be open to using it to support other innovative ideas around fostering?

A: No. This stream of funding is only available for the implementation and evaluation of the Mockingbird Family Model.

Q: In the budget question, what are the differences between the 'implementation' vs. 'yearly' costs?

A: We define implementation costs to be any costs incurred in setting up the first constellation. Yearly costs are all the on-going costs to successfully run and support the Mockingbird model for

12 months *after* this first constellation is established. This may require you to estimate the number of constellations you are likely to/ would like to set-up in the year following implementation of the first constellation. Please note that costs for support from The Fostering Network will be covered by the DfE, so you do not need to include these in your budget.

Q: Regarding the budget, what are the upper/lower limits that a LA can apply for?

A: The amount of funding needed by LAs will vary, so we are unable to place a firm upper- or lower-limit on funding requested.

According to information from previous bids shared by The Fostering Network, as well as guidance from Loughborough University's initial [evaluation report](#) (2016), we would estimate that the costs of running a constellation are between £25-35,000 per year. These costs cover Hub home carer costs, activity costs, recruitment costs, travel and venue hire.

However, staff costs within the LAs are not included in the above estimate, as these were typically funded internally. Please note that minimally one full-time Supervising Social Worker would be required throughout implementation and beyond.

Q: Is there a proportion of costs that are expected to be met or matched by the LA?

A: The DfE have not specified what proportion of the costs need to be covered by LAs. However, whether or not the LA does cover some of the costs will factor into the way we understand the LA's capacity to sustain the model, beyond the funding period of this programme.

On-going support

Q: What kind of support will be available? Is this something we have to budget for, or will it be provided by the delivery partner?

A: The Fostering Network will provide implementation support throughout the programme. The costs of the Fostering Network's fees (for support, delivery, and quality assurance) will be covered by the Department for Education throughout the funded period so LAs do not have to include this in their budget. However, maintaining Mockingbird beyond the funding period will require the LA to contract with The Fostering Network so should be factored into the longer term sustainability plan

The Fostering Network will:

- Appoint implementation coaches to support this work.
- Provide support and guidance throughout all phases of implementation and set-up of the programme, including help tailoring the model to local needs, whilst meeting the model's fidelity criteria.
- Help LAs launch sustainable constellations, and provide guidance on recruitment of hub and satellite carers.
- Offer on-going support and shared learning opportunities thereafter.
- Advocate for and promote the greater use of Mockingbird.

LAs will need to ensure sufficient project management support to ensure the smooth implementation and delivery of Mockingbird, and to liaise and work with TFN and the appointed evaluators.

Ethics and evaluation

Q: What ethical approval will be sought for these projects?

A: We are only able to seek ethical approval once the LAs and the evaluator have been appointed. At this point the What Works Centre, the delivery partner and the evaluator will work together to develop an evaluation protocol, outlining our plans for the research. Evaluators will be required to submit this protocol for approval by a recognised ethics committee (either one run by the evaluator, or the What Works Centre's ethics committee, which is currently being established).

Q: Why are you using randomised controlled trials to evaluate this programme? Is this ethical?

A: It is important for us to conduct the best possible evaluations of programmes so we can be confident whether they really work - and to allow services to choose models which are going to deliver the greatest impact on children and family outcomes. While Mockingbird has previously been evaluated, a randomised controlled trial (RCT) - which is generally considered to provide the highest standard of evidence - has never been conducted for this model. This is why we are proposing an RCT evaluation which would involve randomly allocating foster carers (who have expressed an interest in and have been assessed as being appropriate for the model) to either form constellations - or not. We are not proposing to change the way that children and young people are placed with foster carers for the evaluation. We appreciate that there are ethical considerations when applying this method, particularly in children's social care, and this is something that What Works for Children's Social Care and the Department have carefully considered. Appropriate ethical approval will be sought by the independent evaluator once the evaluation design has been agreed with The Fostering Network and What Works for Children's Social Care.

Further information

Q: Would you be able to signpost to further information about Mockingbird for local authorities?

A: To find out more about how Mockingbird is currently being used, please visit [The Fostering Network's website](#).

The Mockingbird model first received funding under the Department of Education's Innovation Programme, to adapt and evaluate Mockingbird in a UK setting. This preliminary evaluation summary, which includes some key findings, recommendations and initial economic analysis can be found [here](#).