

An Early Years Innovation Partnership with Nesta

Application pack

nesta



[nesta.org.uk](https://www.nesta.org.uk)

[@nesta_uk](https://twitter.com/nesta_uk)

What's in this slide deck?

We're looking for local area partners to join us on a journey to help trial, adapt and improve services to support children in their early years (aged 0-5).

If you haven't already read the [project overview on our website](#), we suggest starting there.

This slide deck contains information for potential partners about the open call, covering:

[About Nesta and Our Mission](#)

[What's an innovation partnership?](#)

[How does an innovation partnership work?](#)

[Some examples of the methods we can apply in partnership](#)

[Benefits and expectations of taking part](#)

[Values](#)

[The application process and timeline](#)

[Eligibility criteria](#)

[Questions you may have](#)

[The 'Expression of Interest' form](#)

[Contact us](#)

About Nesta and our vision

Our vision

Since 1998 Nesta has existed to support innovation that benefits society.

Our vision is that by 2030, Nesta will have **improved the lives of millions of people** by designing, testing and scaling new solutions to society's biggest challenges.

Combining our innovation expertise, convening power and risk-tolerant capital, we will be a **world leader in driving innovation for social good.**

Why Nesta is working in the early years

Supporting children from disadvantaged backgrounds and giving them the fairest chance in life will be one of Nesta's three major innovation missions for the next five years.

The circumstances of our childhood set us on a path that affects the rest of our lives. Children born into disadvantage are far more likely to experience poorer health, lower earnings, and lower levels of happiness than their peers.

Nesta's vision is for every child to have the fairest possible start in life, so they can thrive and realise their potential.

By improving the quality of a person's childhood we can radically improve their future. We believe that we need innovation to do this.

Through this open call, we're looking for local area partners to join us on a journey to help trial, adapt, and improve services to support children in their earliest years.

Partnership in the time of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a huge strain on local authorities and their partners. Periods of lockdown and their impact on local services are expected to have a disproportionate impact on already disadvantaged children ([EPI, 2020](#); [Hendry et al., 2020](#); [Sutton Trust, 2020](#)).

We understand that the challenges posed by COVID-19 mean that local authorities have limited capacity for partnership working at the moment. At Nesta we will do everything we can to ensure that our ways of working are flexible, to enable local authorities to participate during this challenging time.

Through this partnership, Nesta will support local areas to further adapt and enhance their services in the context of COVID-19.

Our mission

Our vision

For every child to have the fairest possible start in life, so they can thrive and realise their potential.

Our target cohort and objectives through this programme

Early years

Working with children (aged 0-5) and their families to increase 'school readiness' and improve outcomes for children from low-income backgrounds.

Drivers of unequal outcomes we face

Income disadvantage

Traumatic childhood experiences

Racial discrimination and unconscious bias

What's an 'innovation
partnership'?

What's an innovation partnership?

An innovation partnership is **a long-term (3-5 years) close collaboration between Nesta and a local area**. It is an equal partnership and a shared commitment to pursuing a measurable improvement in outcomes for children.

This means bringing together a local area's deep knowledge and ideas - about their services, families, children and delivery contexts - with Nesta's capabilities and experience of service innovation and improvement. Its long-term nature provides the time, space and capacity to embark upon a radical change to the way support is provided to children and families in the early years.

Through this open call, we hope to find a small number of local areas in England, Scotland and Wales who would benefit from this offer.

What's an innovation partnership?

This means place-based working to support children and families in the early years.

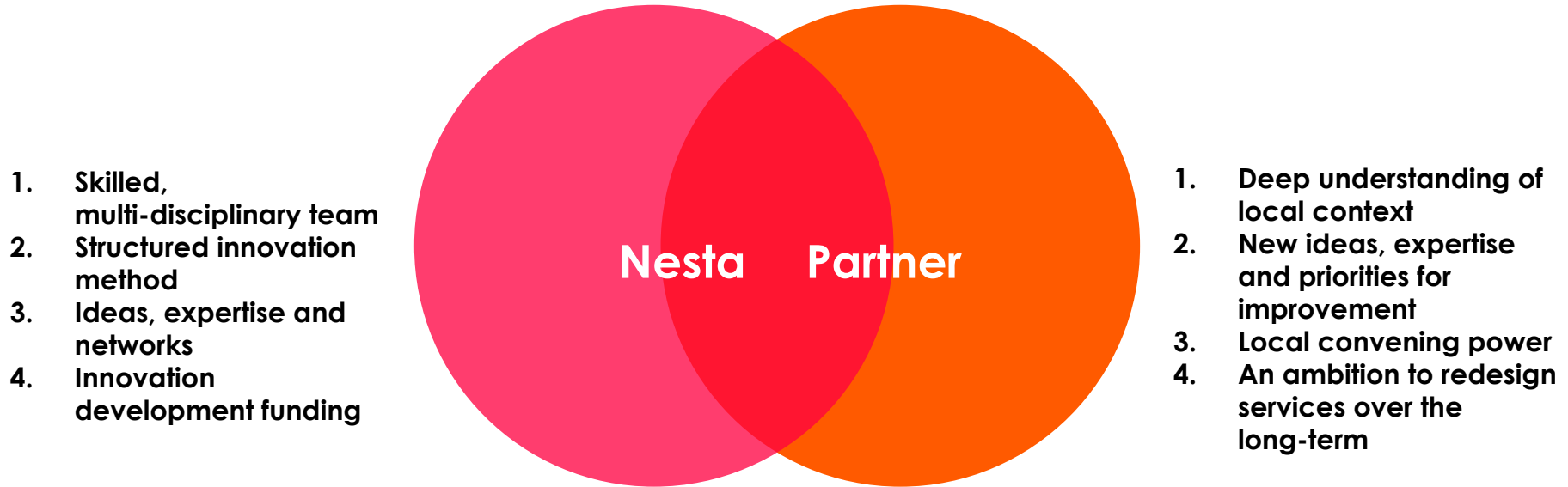
We seek partners that share:

- **Aims:** Improving outcomes, such as 'school readiness', for children from low-income backgrounds.
- **Outcomes:** Driven by wanting to demonstrate a measurable impact on children's outcomes, such as their cognitive, social and emotional development.
- **Long-term ambitions:** A 3-5 year partnership and commitment to redesign early years support for families.
- **Evaluation and scale-up:** Designing with scale in mind. Willingness to learn from successes and failures. Supporting other local areas to implement successful innovations.
- **Values:** Sharing Nesta's values, such as a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion.

How does an 'innovation
partnership' work?

How does the innovation partnership work?

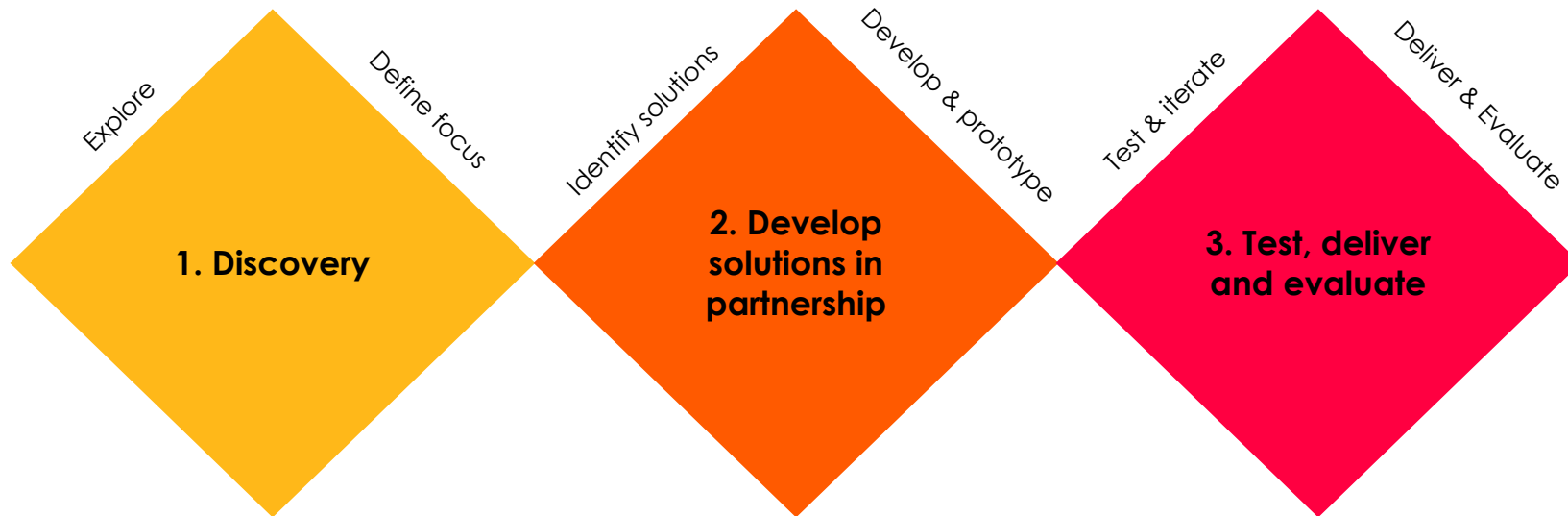
Each partner brings its own unique value and contribution to an innovation partnership.



The partnership centres on a shared commitment to reimagining early years support to deliver tangible improvements to the lives of disadvantaged children

A structured process for working together

This structured process* is designed to combine the skills, capabilities and resources that Nesta brings to the partnership, with the expertise and assets within a local area.



Participatory research

Co-design & participation

Implementation science

Data analysis

Behavioural science

Process evaluation

System and user-journey
mapping

Evidence-informed practice

Impact evaluation

**Sample
activities in
each stage**

nesta

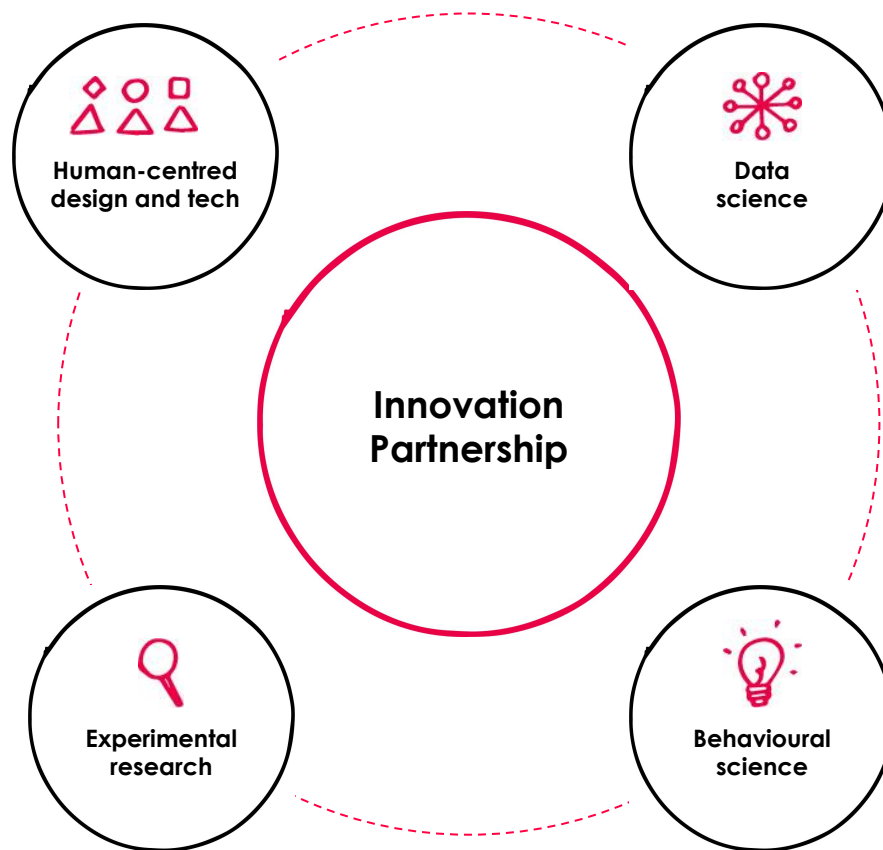
**Process based on blending Design Council 'Double Diamond' with other established innovation approaches*

Our multi-disciplinary team has expertise in a range of innovation methods.

Applying these methods **in combination and at critical moments** presents exciting opportunities to identify and implement new ideas.

At each stage within the structured process, the Nesta team will work with partners to apply different methods as appropriate.

Innovation methods within our multi-disciplinary team



Some examples of the methods
we can apply in partnership

‘Behavioural science’ is the study of human behaviour to develop and test theories that explain why individuals behave the way that they do.

An example

Parental engagement in a child's education can have strong positive effects - but not all parents are as engaged as others. Projects [in the UK](#) and [US](#) have found sending text messages to parents can increase children's school attendance by up to 17% and their attainment by up to 40%.

How might we apply this in the early years?

Use behavioural science to help us understand the contextual and motivational factors that affect whether parents take up free early education for their children. Once motivations and barriers are understood, we can then trial different communications and/ or support to test which are most successful in achieving greater take-up.



Data science involves analysing large amounts of data to derive insights you may not be able to spot in other ways.

An example

Social Finance and What Works for Children's Social Care, incubated by Nesta, worked with four councils (West Berkshire, Bracknell Forest, Southampton and Surrey) to analyse their 'Front Door' data ([Social Finance, 2020](#)). This analysis identified opportunities to improve partners' interface with children's services, including reducing unnecessary contacts, using data to inform service planning and providing more feedback.

How might we apply this in the early years?

Link and analyse data held about children in a local area to identify hidden need e.g. families who could benefit from support who are not currently accessing services. For example, we might combine census data, local authority birth registrations, and other administrative data to see who is not taking up services they are eligible for.



Applying innovation methods in the early years... Design

Good design means ensuring that services are easy to access and give service users a positive experience as well as improving their outcomes

An example

[A team from IDEO](#) set out to improve the experience of patients in hospitals. They wore a body camera and pretended to be a patient in the hospital. Most of the footage faced upwards at a boring ceiling. Hospital staff were able to respond quickly to improve patients' experiences by repositioning signs, painting ceilings and fitting stretchers with wing-mirrors.

How might we apply this in the early years?

Train local parents as citizen researchers. Record their observations and experiences of accessing local early years services, such as libraries, children's centres and health visitor clinics. Use their observations to redesign families' entry routes into early years services, as well as the services themselves, to make them more responsive to user need.



'Experimentation' is a type of research to test approach A in comparison with approach B. Which gets better results?

An example

Robot babies - programmed to cry, sleep, scream or die - were used in sex and relationships education in Australia to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. However, an experimental study ([Lancet, 2016](#)) found that teenagers who participated in the programme were more likely to become pregnant.

How might we apply this in the early years?

Design experimental research methods to test our assumptions about which practices and support are most effective to improve families' outcomes in the early years. For example, how do the outcomes from a parenting support programme delivered via video conference compare to face to face support? Can we reach more parents using these methods? Does digital delivery lead to higher attrition?



Ideas, experience and networks

Partners in local areas bring the deep expertise and knowledge about their provision, the context in which they are working, and the children and families they support.

This local expertise is the essential ingredient in the partnership. However, Nesta complements this with ideas, experience and networks drawn from practice in the UK and around the world. For example, through:

- An expert advisory group of leading academics and practitioners
- A peer-learning network of other local authorities
- Networks - including government, national service providers, and UK-based and international experts
- Ideas inspired by evidence, research and work in analogous contexts

How does it get paid for?

Nesta is an innovation foundation and registered charity. Our mission is to bring bold ideas to life to change the world for good.

Nesta is self-funding its contribution to this work from its own charitable endowment.

In addition, to support the partnership's work, Nesta is providing an 'innovation fund' which will be a contribution towards associated costs of developing and implementing ideas developed through the partnership, such as licenses to practice evidence-based interventions and evaluation.

In the first year of the partnership, up to £200k is available for project expenditure, shared across a small number (1-3) of local area partners. Further funding will be made available in subsequent years.

Benefits and expectations of taking part

Benefits and expectations of taking part

We know that our work together will be most effective through genuine collaboration and equal partnership, with each side bringing their own expertise, skills, and resources.

The next table (across two slides) describes the different contributions that we envisage Nesta and our local area partners might bring to this work.

Nesta's contribution to a partnership	Local area's contribution
A structured process for bringing partners together to co-design, trial and implement improvements, alongside project management capacity.	Buy-in and willingness to take part. From the outset, local areas should only engage in this process if participation feels like a useful exercise for your area and for achieving the aspirations you have for improving early years services. A natural side effect of this is that we expect partners to have buy-in from senior leadership, and the ability to free up some capacity for ongoing project management.
...continues next slide...	

Nesta's contribution to a partnership

Multidisciplinary team providing:

- Additional capacity to facilitate a structured process;
- Skills in a range of innovation methods, from data science and behavioural science to service design and experimental evaluation.

An innovation fund. In Year One, up to £200k is available for project expenditure, shared across a small number of local area partners. We envisage this funding being used towards associated costs of implementing ideas developed through the partnership, such as training, technology procurement or licenses. Further funding may be available in subsequent years.

Aligned goals and outcomes. Mutually supportive and committed to partnership over several years. Working for the public good, including agreement to the future scale-up of successful innovations developed through this partnership to new geographical areas.

Local area's contribution

Convening a cross-sector collaboration. Local area partners should be able to convene a network (formal or informal) of partner agencies (including health, education, early years settings, VCS) who bring:

- Knowledge of current service delivery - both strengths and challenges;
- Practice expertise;
- Relationships with local families;
- Knowledge of your local context, and what is likely or unlikely to work.

Leveraging some resources. We recognise that budgets are under unprecedented pressure, particularly in the shadow of COVID-19. To mitigate this, we aim to align the partnership's aims and activities with a local area's existing priorities and strategy. However, once the formal partnership is in place, we expect areas to have a dedicated project manager for the work to ensure the partnership has every chance to succeed.

Values

Values

1. A commitment to proactively promote equity, diversity and inclusion.
2. Working in the open - wherever possible all work will be publicly available using creative commons licenses.
3. Working in collaboration towards the public good.

The application process and timeline

Expressions of interest

(Eoi): Eligible local areas (see 'Eligibility Criteria') are invited to submit a short expression of interest using the dedicated application form.

'Trial Discovery Projects': A small number (3-5) of shortlisted local area partners work with Nesta to design a 'discovery' project. This serves two purposes:

- The output of the discovery project (the focus of which is decided in collaboration with both parties) will be useful to the local area in its own right for developing early years strategy or services.
- This is an opportunity for both sides to test out the partnership before a longer term commitment is made. More information about 'Trial Discovery Projects', including expected outputs, is included in the 'FAQs'.

Partnership formation: Nesta and up to 3 long-term local area partners work together to: align objectives; agree partnership terms of reference; put staffing and governance arrangements in place; develop our shared programme plan.

3 Nov -
23 Dec 2020

Jan 2021

Feb - Apr 2021

May 2021

June 2021

Informal interview via video call with long-listed applicants: Nesta will contact all long-listed applicants to arrange an informal interview. This gives an opportunity for applicants to expand on information in the expression of interest form, and to ask Nesta any further questions about the potential partnership.

Decision on longer-term partnership: Nesta and shortlisted partners work together to outline a high-level programme of work for the next 3 years. A small number (1-3) of local areas are selected to become long-term partners.

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria

We invite applications from local areas in England, Scotland or Wales. The eligibility criteria aim to:

- **Identify areas where our work can make a big impact.**
- **Identify areas where there is commitment to collaborate from key local partners.** We recognise that for early years services to work well, they require good collaboration at a local level between a variety of partner agencies (e.g. the local authority, health, nurseries, schools and the community and voluntary sector).
- **Ensure that our local partners will have the capacity to collaborate with us on this work.**
- **Ensure that our partners are committed to promoting equity, diversity and inclusion through our work together.**

The next slides contain information on:

- Shared eligibility criteria across **England, Scotland and Wales.**
- Additional eligibility criteria in **England:** Evidence of the opportunity to make a positive impact.
- Additional eligibility criteria in **Scotland and Wales:** Evidence of the opportunity to make a positive impact.

Shared eligibility criteria across England, Scotland and Wales

Partnership criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The lead partner must be a local authority in England, Scotland or Wales (although other forms of organisation may be involved within the partnership's activities). There is commitment at a senior level with the authority to provide strategic oversight and champion the work.2. Once operational, the partnership will also include representation from local partners such as health, early education/childcare settings, and the voluntary and community sector.
Governance	Once operational, each partnership will have a project board with Nesta, which will meet on a quarterly basis. The local authority will be represented on the board at Director level.
Project management	At the end of phase 3, once the formal partnership is in place, the local partnership must commit a dedicated project manager to this work. They will take part in weekly (virtual) project meetings with Nesta. They will have at least 0.5 FTE capacity to contribute to this work.
Type of local authority	All local authorities are eligible as long as they have responsibility for early years services (e.g. it may be a county council, unitary authority, London borough or metropolitan borough).
Commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion	Applicants are committed to work with Nesta to share and develop our mutual practice in relation to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and implement EDI practices through the partnership. Applicants already have a formal EDI policy, or are willing to develop and implement one within the next year.

Additional eligibility criteria in England: Evidence of the opportunity to make a positive impact

Local authorities in England must meet EITHER criteria 1 OR criteria 2 (or both). These criteria are designed to ensure that we are working with the areas where there is the greatest need and potential for impact.

Criteria 1:

The local authority as a whole, or one of its districts, currently has an attainment gap of at least 20 percentage points between children eligible for free school meals (FSM) who achieve 'a good level of development' in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and those who are not eligible for FSM. [In 2018-19, the average attainment gap for local authority districts was 19.87 percentage points].

Criteria 2:

In the local authority as a whole, or in one of its districts, 54% or fewer of children eligible for free school meals reached 'a good level of development' in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile.

Additional eligibility criteria in Scotland and Wales

In Scotland and Wales, local authorities will need to demonstrate that there is the potential for a partnership with Nesta to make a substantial positive impact on the outcomes of disadvantaged children (aged 0-5) in their area.

In the expression of interest form, applicants will be asked to provide evidence to demonstrate the scale of the problems faced in their local area that could be addressed through the partnership. Part of this will include quantifying outcomes (eg. cognitive, social or emotional) of disadvantaged children currently:

- In Scotland, please provide evidence of the percentage of children achieving the Early Level in P1 according to the most deprived/ least deprived quintiles on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- In Wales, please provide data from the Foundation Phase Profile (baseline assessment during reception year), comparing the performance of children eligible for free school meals with those who are not eligible.

We recognise that there may be other measures which are more useful to demonstrate the scale of issues in an area and the potential for impact; please do include this information. In addition to providing evidence for children in the local authority as a whole, applicants may choose to highlight challenges faced by children from a particular demographic group or geographical area.

Questions you may have

Questions you may have

This is a list of other questions you may have to which answers have been [published on our website](#). If you have any additional questions, please do get in touch via earlyyears@nesta.org.uk.

About the application process

- What type of organisation do I need to be to take part? And how do I find out if my local area meets the eligibility criteria?
- Who in my organisation should be writing this Expression of Interest form?
- How much time will it take to go through the application process? And what are the chances of my Expression of Interest leading to a partnership with Nesta?
- What's a 'trial discovery project'?
- How will Expressions of Interest be shortlisted?

About Nesta

- What is Nesta? And how can you offer this for free?
- What is Nesta's experience of working with local authorities and the early years?

About the innovation partnership

- What's the expected resource and time commitment of taking part?
- What funding is available? And what can I use it for?
- What does COVID-19 mean for all of this?

The 'Expression of Interest' form

If your local area meets the [eligibility criteria](#) and you're keen to take part, all you need to do is submit a response via a short '[Expression of Interest](#)' [form on Survey Gizmo](#).

The initial Expression of Interest form takes about 1-2 hours to complete, assuming all the information is to hand.

You can view the form on Survey Gizmo to see the questions asked and the kinds of information required from the outset.

Contact us

If you have any other queries about the programme or submitting an Expression of Interest, please get in touch at earlyyears@nesta.org.uk

nesta



nesta.org.uk

 @nesta_uk