

# Expressions of Interest: Innovations to improve outcomes for disadvantaged pupils

The New Schools Network (NSN) is a national education charity dedicated to improving educational opportunities in England by promoting innovation to raise standards within the state education system, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Building on its track record of supporting free schools, NSN is well positioned to foster innovation across the sector. We invite proposals that test ideas and produce insights that can be shared and scaled to improve outcomes for students and communities nationwide.

## NSN's Innovation Pilots

NSN's Innovation Pilot programme will fund a small number of projects in free schools and academies to test new, evidence-informed approaches to raising standards and tackling persistent barriers faced by pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

We are seeking innovative, practical solutions that deliver measurable improvements in attainment. All projects must demonstrate a clear and direct impact on educational outcomes and contribute to widening educational opportunity for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. To focus this work, we are inviting proposals targeting the two specific impact areas:

- **Strand A: Barriers to attendance and engagement**
- **Strand B: Parental engagement and home environment.**

The funding available per pilot ranges from £75,000 to £100,000, excluding VAT.

NSN will fund at least one pilot project, investing in the design and initial delivery of each pilot from September 2026 to September 2027, with funding for successful selection(s) limiting to that one-year period.

Following the successful Expression of Interest, projects will be invited to submit a full proposal. This two-stage process is designed to make funding accessible to a wider range of applicants. The full Request for Proposals will need to be submitted by 25 April 2026.

## Eligibility

To be eligible for this fund, applicants must:

- **Type of organisation:** Applications are welcome from free schools, academy trusts or charities or other not-for-profit organisations working with free schools or

academies. Consortia applications are welcome if partner roles are clearly outlined. Only England-based proposals are eligible.

- **Innovation requirement:** The fund supports innovations that might not otherwise receive funding. Applicants must demonstrate that the pilot is new or represents a new approach and disclose any other funding sources supporting the project, including grants, matched funding, or in-kind contributions.
- **Capacity to deliver:** Applicants must demonstrate the operational, staffing, and financial capacity to deliver the pilot over a one-year period, including governance arrangements and project management.

We are seeking proposals that outline a credible, developable idea with the potential to reduce barriers to education for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. While proposals may vary in maturity, we expect them to be:

- **Promising** - supported by some evidence that they can reduce barriers to education.
- **Feasible** - deliverable in practice with no participation barriers to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Ready** - capable of being implemented within the proposed timeframes, with potential to scale.

## Timeline

STAGE	DEADLINE
EOI deadline	2nd April 2026
Full RfP issued to successful parties	7th April 2026
Deadline for clarifying questions	17th April 2026
Submission deadline	25th April 2026
Selection notification	11th May 2026
Pilot launch	September 2026
Interim process report	March 2027
Final process report	September 2027

To find out more and express interest in participating in the Pilot Programme visit [NSN's Website](#).

All expressions of interest must be received by **12:00 on 2 April 2026**.

For any questions, please contact [meg.powell-chandler@newschoolsnetwork.org](mailto:meg.powell-chandler@newschoolsnetwork.org).