

CALL FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Systematic review of interventions and services for fathers and male carers in families with multiple and complex needs

Expression of interest deadline: Midday, Friday 19 June

Application deadline: Midday, Friday 26 June



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Foundations – What Works Centre for Children and Families is seeking proposals from research organisations to deliver a systematic review aimed at identifying interventions for fathers and male carers in families with multiple and complex needs. The review must be conducted between September 2026 to October 2028 inform the development of Practice Guides that will cover evidence-based interventions or services for supporting fathers and male carers and their children or children in their care.

Introduction to Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families

At Foundations we research, generate, and translate evidence into practical solutions that shape better policy and practice and lead to more effective family support services, so more vulnerable children have the foundational relationships they need to thrive in life.

Foundations was founded in December 2022, following a merger of What Works for Children’s Social Care (WWCSC) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF). Both organisations were proud members of the What Works Network, and the new organisation maintains this status. As a What Works Centre, Foundations will continue to improve child and family outcomes by conducting research and promoting the use of evidence-based interventions and approaches.

Aim of this review

Foundations – What Works Centre for Children and Families, has been tasked with producing a Practice Guide which will focus on interventions aimed at supporting fathers and male carers in families with multiple and complex needs.

It is intended that the practice guides will emphasise interventions and practices that are supported by causal evidence – meaning that there is robust evaluation evidence linking the activity to improved child and/or family outcomes when delivered to a high standard. Ideally, there will be sufficient evidence for this review to identify effective practices and interventions that are relevant and implementable within the United Kingdom.

The aim of this review is to use robust systematic methods to:

1. Identify the effectiveness of different types of interventions or services for improving the outcomes of fathers and male carers, their children and the children and young people in their care. **We are still determining our exact population (see PICOTs later in the document) and would welcome recommendations from those applying.**



2. Identify how such interventions can be effectively targeted and delivered towards the needs and risks faced by different fathers and male carers of children and young persons aged between 0 and 18 years old.
3. Ideally, identify practice elements and intervention components within programmes targeted at fathers and male carers and provide guidance to practitioners on 'best practice'.
4. Identify the enablers and barriers to successful implementation of interventions for fathers and male carers.
5. Identify practitioners' and beneficiaries' views on programmes and delivery to support successful implementation of interventions for fathers and male carers.

Background and context to the requirement

What do we know about this topic?

Fathers play a critical role in shaping their children's development and life outcomes. Research shows that positive father involvement is associated with enhanced cognitive development, educational achievement, emotional regulation, reduced behavioural problems, and social competence in children.^{1 2}

However, studies across multiple service contexts—including early years programmes, parenting interventions, and family support services—consistently report that fathers are underrepresented in services, with participation rates often below 10%.^{3 4} Under-engagement occurs despite evidence that fathers express willingness to be involved when services are accessible and welcoming.⁵ From voluntary family support services to child protection work, there is a "father deficit" in family support services, with male carers often remaining invisible or marginalised.⁶

Within the context of children's social care and early help services, the importance of father involvement is heightened due to the complex interplay of support needs and safeguarding concerns. Families referred to these services often experience intersecting forms of disadvantage, including poverty, mental health difficulties, substance misuse, domestic abuse, and social isolation, which can impact both parenting capacity and child safety.⁷ When services fail to engage

¹ Sarkadi, A., Kristiansson, R., Oberklaid, F., & Bremberg, S. (2008). Fathers' involvement and children's developmental outcomes: A systematic review of longitudinal studies. *Acta Paediatrica*, 97(2), 153–158.

² Lamb, M. E. (2010). *The role of the father in child development* (5th ed.). Wiley.

³ Panter-Brick, C., Burgess, A., Eggerman, M., McAllister, F., Pruett, K., & Leckman, J. F. (2014). Practitioner review: Engaging fathers—recommendations for a game change in parenting interventions based on a systematic review of the global evidence. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 55(11), 1187–1212.

⁴ Lee, S. J., Pace, G. T., Lee, J. Y., & Altschul, I. (2018). What works in father involvement interventions with children? A state-of-the-science review of paternal engagement. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(2), 139–161.

⁵ Bayley, J., Wallace, L. M., & Choudhry, K. (2009). Fathers and parenting programmes: Barriers and best practice. *Community Practitioner*, 82(4), 28–31.

⁶ Featherstone, B., Rivett, M., & Scourfield, J. (2007). *Working with men in health and social care*. Sage.

⁷ Bywaters, P., Bunting, L., Davidson, G., Hanratty, J., Mason, W., McCartan, C., & Steils, N. (2016). *The relationship between poverty, child abuse and neglect: An evidence review*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



fathers, they miss opportunities to leverage an important source of support and potentially overlook risks that fathers may pose.⁸

Furthermore, serious case reviews have repeatedly highlighted the absence or inadequate assessment of fathers and male carers in child protection work.⁹ These reviews reveal patterns of "invisible fathers," where male carers are not engaged by professionals, not assessed adequately, or where risks are underestimated or overlooked.¹⁰ The challenge for practitioners is to balance the promotion of positive father involvement with robust risk assessment and management.¹¹ Early help services, positioned at the preventative end of the continuum, offer opportunities to engage fathers before problems escalate.¹² However, research suggests that even these services struggle to meaningfully involve fathers, with assessments and interventions continuing to focus predominantly on mothers.¹³

Multiple complex barriers contribute to this low engagement including structural factors and institutional practices¹⁴, practitioner attitudes and assumptions, organisational cultures¹⁵, and fathers' own perceptions of services and beliefs about parenting.¹⁶

Given the importance of father involvement for child outcomes, the challenges in engaging fathers in services, and the specific complexities within children's social care and early help contexts, there is a need to better understand the evidence base regarding interventions and services for fathers and male carers in families with complex needs. Understanding what approaches have been attempted, what evidence exists for their effectiveness, and what evidence gaps remain, will inform the development of more inclusive and effective practice with fathers and male carers.

What do we know about the effectiveness of interventions and services for fathers and male carers in families experiencing multiple and complex needs?

There is a significant body of literature on evaluations of interventions for fathers using randomised controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental designs (QEDs).

⁸ Brandon, M., Belderson, P., Warren, C., Howe, D., Gardner, R., Dodsworth, J., & Black, J. (2008). Analysing child deaths and serious injury through abuse and neglect: What can we learn? A biennial analysis of serious case reviews 2003-2005. Department for Children, Schools and Families.

⁹ Ofsted (2011). Ages of concern: Learning lessons from serious case reviews. Ofsted.

¹⁰ Ashley, C., Featherstone, B., Roskill, C., Ryan, M., & White, S. (2011). *Fathers matter: Research findings on fathers and their involvement with social care services*. Family Rights Group.

¹¹ Clapton, G. (2013). Fathers in the child welfare and protection system. In N. Latzko, K. Wilkins, & C. Harrison (Eds.), *Engaging with fathers in social work: Perspective and practice* (pp. 97–112). Whiting & Birch.

¹² Brown, L., Callam, R., Turney, D., & Ward, H. (2009). The assessment of family support needs: The assessment of families with young children. Thomas Coram Research Unit.

¹³ Featherstone, B., Gupta, A., Morris, K., & White, S. (2018). *Protecting children: A social model*. Policy Press.

¹⁴ Scourfield, J. (2006). The challenge of engaging fathers in the child protection process. *Critical Social Policy*, 26(2), 440–449.

¹⁵ Ferguson, H., & Hogan, F. (2004). Strengthening families through fathers: Developing policy and practice in relation to vulnerable fathers and their families. Waterford Institute of Technology Centre for Social and Family Research.

¹⁶ Bayley, J., Wallace, L. M., & Choudhry, K. (2009). Fathers and parenting programmes: Barriers and best practice. *Community Practitioner*, 82(4), 28–31.



The literature is primarily focussed on parenting programmes – both those designed specifically for fathers and those which have been evaluated for the impact of fathers’ involvement alongside or instead of the mother. RCTs have shown that interventions delivered to fathers alone or alongside mothers can lead to significant improvements in interparental conflict, fathers’ satisfaction and efficacy, and child social and emotional outcomes.¹⁷

The wider evidence base around parenting interventions for fathers also includes father-specific interventions, such as Fathering Through Change¹⁸ and Caring Dads.¹⁹ A review of 44 studies of parenting interventions found improvements in father involvement and child cognitive and socioemotional development.²⁰ The integrative review found that almost half of included parenting interventions for fathers employed social/cognitive learning theory. This included activities such as role play and modelling behaviours to increase parenting knowledge and skills. Interventions which employed Behavioural Parent Training approaches were also well represented in the literature.²¹

Other intervention types represented in the literature include therapeutic interventions and home-visiting interventions. Father participation in *Parent Child Interaction Therapy* was linked to reduced child externalising behaviour problems and increased child compliance in a non-randomised experimental study.²² An RCT of the Dads Matter home visiting programme showed a small significant effect on father engagement when delivered postnatally.²³ This was associated with improved parental support for one another and reduced bidirectional partner abuse, lowering maternal and paternal physical child abuse risk. However, initiating the service prenatally was associated with reduced father engagement.²⁴

The majority of studies evaluating interventions using rigorous experimental methods have been conducted in the USA. The UK evidence base appears to be predominantly focussed on pre-post

¹⁷ Frank, T. J., Keown, L. J., & Sanders, M. R. (2015). Enhancing father engagement and interparental teamwork in an evidence-based parenting intervention: A randomized-controlled trial of outcomes and processes. *Behavior Therapy*, 46(6), 749–763. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2015.05.008>

¹⁸ DeGarmo, D. S., & Jones, J. A. (2019). Fathering Through Change (FTC) intervention for single fathers: Preventing coercive parenting and child problem behaviors. *Development and Psychopathology*, 31(5), 1801–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579419001019>

¹⁹ St Michael's Fellowship. (2015). *The Caring Dads programme with young fathers in Lambeth*. <https://stmichaelsfellowship.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Caring-Dads-programme-with-young-fathers-in-Lambeth.pdf>

²⁰ Henry, J. B., Julion, W. A., Bounds, D. T., & Sumo, J. (2020). Fatherhood matters: An integrative review of fatherhood intervention research. *Journal of School Nursing*, 36(1), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059840519873380>

²¹ Self-Brown, S., Osborne, M. C., Rostad, W., & Feil, E. (2017). Initial findings from a feasibility trial examining the SafeCare Dad to Kids program with marginalized fathers. *Journal of Family Violence*, 32(8), 751–766.

²² Bagner, D. M. (2013). Father's role in parent training for children with developmental delay. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 27(4), 650–657. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033465>

²³ Guterman, N. B., Bellamy, J. L., Banman, A., Liao, X., Liao, X., & Stanis, M. (2023). Engaging fathers to strengthen the impact of early home visitation on physical child abuse risk: Findings from the Dads Matter-HV randomized controlled trial. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 143, 106315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106315>

²⁴ Bellamy, J. L., Gopalan, G., Traube, D. E., Schiff, J., Mullin, B., & Eisenstadt, M. (2023). The effect of Dads Matter-HV on father engagement in home visiting services. *Prevention Science*, 24(1), 137–149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-022-01451-8>



study designs and implementation and process evaluations. Furthermore, there is a larger evidence base for evaluation of interventions targeted at Early/Family Help, or universal services, compared to interventions for fathers whose families are involved with child protection or children's social care. Initial scoping did not uncover any evidence on effective interventions for male carers who are not biological fathers (for example, grandfathers, step-fathers, or foster carers), however we would be keen for bidders to include evidence on these populations if it is available, including both specific studies and sub-group analysis.

What do we know about implementation and acceptability of available support?

There is a large non-experimental evidence base, including implementation and process evaluations and qualitative research, considering features of implementation which may improve fathers' engagement in services as well as families' experiences of interventions and services.

Evidence on barriers and enablers is predominantly provided by service providers and practitioners, with additional perspectives from fathers and male carers themselves. Primary data is typically collected via focus groups or interviews, while secondary data has been synthesised through qualitative or scoping reviews.²⁵ The UK government have also published large scale implementation evaluations.²⁶

Many enablers of effective implementation, including training, the use of supportive practitioners, culturally sensitive programmes, and flexible approaches to intervention delivery, can be found in broader family support and parenting interventions.²⁷ However, there appear to be barriers and enablers specific to working with fathers and male carers.²⁸

Social attitudes and practices appear to affect implementation at the family, service, and national level. Differences in views about fathers' roles and responsibilities within families, are felt across families, services, and cultures, affecting the behaviours of practitioners as well as beneficiaries.²⁹

³⁰ These broader context of gendered expectations and experiences underlie many of the identified barriers and enablers to father engagement – from fathers' practical availability to engage in

²⁵ Baran, M. B., & Sawrikar, V. (2023). Service-level barriers and facilitators to father engagement in child and family services: A systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative studies. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 155, 107295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107295>

²⁶ Department for Work & Pensions. (2023). *Reducing Parental Conflict programme 2018 to 2022: Final evaluation report*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-parental-conflict-programme-2018-to-2022-final-evaluation-report>

²⁷ Baran, M. B., & Sawrikar, V. (2023). Service-level barriers and facilitators to father engagement in child and family services: A systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative studies. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 155, 107295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2023.107295>

²⁸ Gordon, D. M., Oliveros, A., Hawes, S. W., Iwamoto, D. K., & Rayford, B. S. (2012). Engaging fathers in child protection services: A review of factors and strategies across ecological systems. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(8), 1399–1417. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.03.021>

²⁹ Ewart-Boyle, S., Manktelow, R., & McColgan, M. (2015). Social work and the shadow father: Lessons for engaging fathers in Northern Ireland. *Child & Family Social Work*, 20(4), 470–479. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12096>

³⁰ Campbell, C., Howard, K., Rayford, B. S., & Gordon, D. M. (2015). Fathers matter: Involving and engaging fathers in the child welfare system process. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 53, 84–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2015.03.020>



parenting programmes around work commitments, to practitioners prioritising relationships and engagement with mothers.³¹

The evidence base encompasses research on specific structured interventions as well as research on social work or family help practice broadly. The latter studies tend to be more conceptually complex than those looking at the acceptability of specific interventions, testing theories of practitioner behaviour and identifying patterns or biases in practice. Furthermore, as in the wider literature on children's services, there is a notable difference between beneficiaries' positive experiences of specific interventions and negative experiences of general service delivery.

Aims, objectives and research questions

Research aims

The aims of this systematic review are to:

1. Identify and summarise evidence on the effectiveness of different types of interventions and services for fathers and male carers of children and young people aged 0-18 in improving outcomes for families with multiple and complex needs associated with involvement in children's early help or children's social care. This would focus on such children and families experiencing evidenced risk factors for interacting with the care system (so with high end needs making families more likely to require support from the early help and children's social care system). This includes ascertaining how programmes are effectively targeted and delivered to address different needs and risks among parents, carers and children and young people.
2. Identify what effective practice looks like within interventions for fathers and male carers and identify barriers and enablers to successful implementation of effective interventions.

Research questions

1. **What works:** What interventions for fathers and male carers have been found to be effective in promoting good outcomes for children, parents and families?
2. **For whom:** Which types of interventions for fathers and male carers are effective for different populations of children, parents and families?
3. **How and why:** What practice elements and intervention components are associated with successful interventions for fathers and male carers?
4. **Implementation:** What are the barriers to and enablers of successful implementation of effective interventions for fathers and male carers?

³¹ Klein, C. C., Girard, E., Neudecker, C., Jordan, T., Weaver, C. M., & Kolko, D. J. (2022). Father participation in parent-child interaction therapy: Predictors and therapist perspectives. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31(7), 1868–1880. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23794925.2022.2051213>



- 5. User perspectives and needs:** What are the views of children, young people, parents/carers, and practitioners about the acceptability and usefulness of different interventions for fathers and male carers?

Suggested approach and analysis

We invite applicants to suggest the most robust and cost-effective methodologies to meet the aims of the review within time and budget, providing costed options where appropriate. We encourage applicants to build upon the findings and methodologies used in meta-analyses when feasible.

Foundations encourage responsible and transparent use of AI innovation in our in-house and commissioned evidence synthesis work. Suppliers are welcome to suggest AI-based methodological innovations, though should ensure adherence with latest methodological guidelines on use of AI such as the [RAISE](#) framework jointly published by Cochrane, the Campbell Collaboration, JBI, and the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence.

PICOT

Our draft PICOTs are as follows, though we welcome further refinement of these by bidders and at protocol development stage.

Population

Fathers and male carers of children (aged 0-18 years) or who care for children in families considered to have multiple complex needs and either there is a risk of maltreatment occurring within the family, the family is eligible for early help, or the family is otherwise involved with Children's Social Care. The children (aged 0-18 years) of and/or in the care of these fathers and male carers. Families will be identified to have multiple and complex needs or adversities based on the following established risk factors for child maltreatment: parental substance abuse, parental mental health, teenage parenthood, parental intellectual disability, parental incarceration, the presence of intimate partner or domestic violence and abuse, parental experience of adverse childhood experiences, traveller/refugee/asylum seeker or undocumented migrant status, socioeconomic disadvantage, and the presence of serious child conduct problems and/or disabilities. For transferability purposes, families must be residing in the UK or countries with comparable child welfare system to the UK, including the United States of America, Australia, Canada, Ireland, and other European countries. While we have not to-date found interventions and services which have been specifically delivered to and evaluated for male carers who are not biological fathers, including step-fathers and male kinship or foster carers, these populations are of interest to practice in the UK.

Intervention

Programmes, interventions, and services (including business-as-usual children's services) which conduct direct work with fathers or male carers specifically. This may include interventions with



over 50% of male participants, or where male participants make up less than 50%, but sub-group analysis of male participants has been undertaken and reported, or sub-group analysis of the impact of male participation on child outcomes has been undertaken. This may include interventions which work with both parents, where the impact of the fathers' involvement has been measured.

Comparison

No intervention (business as usual), or a comparable intervention.

Outcomes

Outcome measures of interest include those that are based on systematic direct observational techniques, self-report measures and, if available, administrative data including official reports of maltreatment. This may include but is not limited to:

- Child maltreatment (incl. harsh parenting)
- Negative parenting
- Positive parenting skills
- Parental mental health
- Parenting stress
- Quality of parent-child relationship
- Child and Young Person externalising/behavioural problems
- Child and Young Person internalising problems
- Child and Young Person wellbeing
- Number of out of home placements
- Placement permanency (for looked-after-children)
- Reunification rates
- Educational attendance
- Care entry and duration of time in care
- Educational attainment and attendance

Follow-up period

≤ 12 months; > 12 months

We encourage applicants to suggest robust methods that can identify commonalities shared by intervention models, populations, and outcomes, as well as interventions/populations/outcomes where these commonalities do not apply, or where specific activities are contraindicated.

We also encourage applicants to make use of robust critical appraisal tools (for example, Cochrane RoB2) to inform decisions about the interventions included in the review. Given that a primary aim of this review is to identify interventions with strong causal evidence, it is important that the extraction criteria utilise a high threshold for reducing study bias. Other critical appraisal tools



(e.g. Robbins, CASP) may be relevant where non-randomised studies and qualitative research could be synthesised to answer particular research questions. To ensure inclusiveness, we also recommend that the search strategy encompass evaluation studies from 2000 onwards.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (EDIE)

At Foundations, we are committed to promoting Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (EDIE) both in terms of the people who work in Foundations and the suppliers who lead, design and deliver our work. To achieve this, we are keen to work more closely with organisations which actively promote diversity and inclusion. Within our evidence synthesis work, we expect suppliers to search for, synthesise and report on variations in intervention effectiveness across populations and subgroups, as well as consider EDIE in project design and implementation. Within applications for this grant, we expect applicants to explain how the project will cover considerations around equality, diversity, inclusion, and equity (e.g. in review design, analyses, reporting, involvement of experts by lived experience, etc.). We also encourage applicants to make use of the PRISMA-Equity checklist and other relevant tools to guide the conduct and reporting of the systematic review.

Research outputs

The appointed grantee will supply the following outputs:

1. Regular slide packs to be presented to the advisory group at regular time points.
2. A final report consistent with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) of Equity-focused systematic reviews summarising the rationale of the project, the methodology, results, and discussion.
3. A list of interventions and effective practices detailing: The intervention/practice's model; target population; eligibility requirements, format, duration, and delivery requirements.

Delivery timeline

Date	Milestone
Week commencing 25 May 2026	Grant call published
Midday Friday, 26 June 2026	Deadline for responses submitted to Foundations
By Friday, 24 July 2026	Notify successful bidder



27 July – 25 September 2026	<p>Set-up period: This would include the signing of a grant agreement, development of a protocol, and the carrying out of due diligence processes.</p> <p>Please find details of what we will need from you in order to perform due diligence checks in the “Detailed requirements” section below and ensure that you are able to provide the required documents within a week of being appointed.</p>
28 September 2026	Official start of work
1 December 2026	Drafted protocol near completion for publication
January 2028	Early findings shared with advisory group
March 2028	1 st draft of systematic review report out for peer review
May 2028	Systematic review draft finalised
October 2028	Systematic review published

Detailed requirements

1. Due diligence

All grantees are required to undergo Due Diligence checks as part of their onboarding. **If you are successful**, we will require you to send the following within a week of being awarded:

- The name and contact details of your organisations Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Confirmation that DSL will report safeguarding concerns to Foundations' DSL
- A copy of your organisations Safeguarding Policy – has this been reviewed in the last 12 months?
- A copy of your organisations internal reporting procedure – has this been reviewed in the last 12 months?
- A copy of your organisation's whistleblowing policy – has this been reviewed in the last 12 months?



- A copy of your organisation's EDIE policy – has this been reviewed in the last 12 months?
- Confirmation you have Vetting procedures such as DBS - If this is needed (don't need to see it)
- Confirmation your organisation has a Staff Code of Conduct (don't need to see it)
- Confirmation that your organisation has the following insurance - public liability, professional indemnity, Employers liability (plus any others specific relevant to this project)
- Bank statement (in name of the organisation and dated within the past 3 months with Bank account details)

Please also answer the following questions on data protection:

- Please provide details of your Data Protection Officer (DPO) - Please include - Full name of DPO - Email - contact number
- Please provide your ICO Registration Number
- Please provide a copy of your organisational privacy policy (link or attach, multiple files can be uploaded if required)
- Does your organisation hold any IT certification such as ISO or Cyber Essentials? Please include the reference number(s) and attach a copy
- Have you had any data breaches in the last year that were reported to the ICO? If yes, how many?
- Do you review your security measures or perform audits? If yes, how often?
- Are your employees required to complete data protection training annually? Yes/No
- Do you have security measures that are applied to your devices such as use of password, access control and antiviruses? Yes/No
- Do you ensure your own data processors are compliant? Yes/No
- Do you have processes that would enable the performance of individuals' data protection rights? Yes/No
- Please confirm your organisation has Cyber Security insurance. Yes/No

2. Reporting

The output is expected to be a full systematic review and/or meta-analysis if applicable, with an Executive Summary and Plain English Summary.

3. Project management

Concerns the regularity of team meetings, ways of working, allocation of tasks and time to project team members, and project responsibilities for each team member.

4. Data collection, sharing and management

Brief outline of data collection methods and how data will be stored and shared between teams. Please outline approaches necessary to comply with GDPR and data protection.



5. Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity (EDIE)

The outputs (including the review protocol and final report) are expected to include a section on EDIE outlining the approaches that have been taken to cover considerations around equality, diversity, inclusion, and equity (e.g. in review design, analyses, reporting, involvement of experts by lived experience, etc.). The successful applicant would be expected to search for, synthesise and report on variations in intervention effectiveness across populations and subgroups, as well as consider EDIE in project design and implementation. Please include in proposals how this would be covered.

6. Budget

Foundations will assess and score bids on value for money and can make up to **£125,000** available for this project.

7. Risk management

Please include in proposals a risk plan with any mitigations.

8. Conflicts of interest

Please confirm if you are aware of any potential or actual conflicts of interest.

Once appointed, the successful research team will be expected to:

- Work with Foundations to refine the appropriate research questions, methodology and approaches.
- Submit Due Diligence documents (as listed above)
- Produce a research protocol that will be published on the Foundations website and registered on the Open Science Framework (OSF).
- Seek appropriate ethical approval, if required.
- Conduct the systematic review process and analysis as set out in the protocol.
- Produce monthly progress reports.
- Attend monthly KIT meetings with the Foundations team.
- Produce a full systematic review report with an Executive Summary and Plain English Summary
- Engage with an Advisory Group, to be set up by Foundations, through sharing of the review protocol with the group for feedback, presentation of initial findings from the review, and attending meetings as may be required.
- Conduct all activities in line with relevant Data Protection Laws including and without limitation the UK General Data Protection Regulation, the UK Data Protection Act 2018 and all other relevant country specific legislation.
- When requested and if required, assist with writing the project's Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA).



- Delete all data captured for the project in line with a Data Sharing Agreement we have with you or at least 5 years after the project has completed, whichever is the least amount of time, and confirm the deletion in writing to Foundations shortly after deletion.

Applicant responses

How to apply

The format of the application is at the discretion of the applicant. All the section headers included in the [detailed requirements](#) section of this document should be easily located within the supplier's response. Our grant terms and conditions can be found [here](#).

Please submit your Expression of Interest online [here](#) by midday, Friday 19 June 2026

Please submit your completed application via our application portal [here](#) by midday, Friday 26 June 2026.

Further information on how we process your personal data in relation to your application can be found in our Privacy Policy [here](#).

If you have any questions that have not been answered in this document, please email practice_guides@foundations.org.uk. We will aim to reply to your queries in 2 working days.

Assessment criteria

We will score all bids initially on criteria 1 (strength of the proposed methodology) and criteria 4 (relevant expertise and experience of the project team). We reserve the right to exclude any bid not scoring at least 4 or more out of 5 for each of these sift criteria (see later evaluation criteria for a description of the scoring system from 0-5 on each scoring criteria).

The six elements of the bid that will be assessed for those passing the initial sift stage include:

1. Strength of the proposed methodology [criteria weighting 30%]

Proposals will be assessed in terms of the following methodological characteristics:

- A. Systematic search strategy, critical appraisal tools, inclusion and exclusion criteria and population selection.
 - Please include a rationale for the population(s) that reviewers propose to focus on
 - Please also include an explanation and rationale for the search strategy to be undertaken for the different review research questions, and the critical appraisal tools relevant to each search and synthesis strategy.



- B. Analysis strategy (e.g. core components work, thematic synthesis, and/or where relevant statistical analyses).

We anticipate the systematic review consisting of a mixed-methods review, where RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 are answered quantitatively (e.g. through means of a meta-analysis where viable, or through other approaches such as narrative synthesis if more appropriate) and RQ 4 & 5 have a qualitative component, reflecting 'lived-experience' and implementation enablers where possible. However, we welcome recommendations from bidders on the review methodology and options within the available budget and timescales.

2. Considerations around Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity principles [criteria weighting 10%]

It is expected that applicants will provide explicit statements on their approach to EDIE, in terms of ensuring diversity of the research team, and a diverse panel of experts by lived experience, PPI/user involvements, as well as the approaches that have been or would be taken to cover considerations around EDIE in the systematic review design, development of search strategies, data collection, synthesis, and reporting.

3. Methods for gaining sufficient information for inclusion in a practice guide [criteria weighting 20%].

A primary aim of this review is to gain sufficient information about effective practice elements so that they can be adequately described in a guide that will be used by commissioners and practitioners. We are therefore interested in understanding how the researchers will gather this information so that it can be communicated in a way that is consistent with the intervention model. This also includes suppliers suggested approaches to PPI/user involvement in the systematic review.

4. Relevant expertise and experience of the project team [criteria weighting 20%]

It is expected that the research team will have previous experience of conducting systematic reviews and meta-analyses of interventions of interest to child welfare services. Knowledge of interventions or programmes for foster carers and/or adoptive parents is also desirable. Please describe the roles, expertise and experience of each team member, including the principal investigator and other team members.

5. Approaches to project governance, project management and quality assurance [criteria weighting 10%]

It is expected that the research team will have previous experience of managing and conducting research projects. Knowledge of systematic review standards to ensure quality assurance is essential. Please outline in the proposal how the project will be managed, staff roles and



responsibilities of all team members, include an indicative timeline with key milestones, and how project risks and issues will be escalated. Please summarise approaches to be used for quality assurance of all deliverables, tasks and outputs from the project.

6. Value for money [criteria weighting 10%]

It is expected that the outputs will demonstrate value for money. This reflects the need for the costings of the deliverable to be reflective of the output quality, the number of outputs and the breadth and depth of topic matter to which each output covers. Bids will also be scrutinised for how staff time is allocated and costed for various project tasks and outputs (see price/costs table later).

Evaluation scoring criteria

Each response will be evaluated using the following scoring system against each of the five criteria:

Assessment	Score	Summary	Interpretation
Excellent	5	Very strong evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills or experience.	As well as addressing all, or the vast majority of, bullet points under each criteria heading, it will demonstrate a deep understanding of the project. All solutions offered are linked directly to project requirements and show how they will be delivered and the impact that they will have.
Good	4	Sufficient evidence provided of appropriate knowledge, skills or experience. Have confidence in their ability to deliver the required service	Will reflect that bidders will have addressed, in some detail, all or the majority of the bullet points listed under each criteria heading. Evidence will have been provided to show not only what will be provided but will give some detail of how this will be achieved. Bidders should make clear how their proposals relate directly to the aims of the project and be specific, rather than general, in the way proposed



Assessment	Score	Summary	Interpretation
			solutions will deliver the desired outcomes
Acceptable	3	Reasonable evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills or experience. Meets requirements in many areas but not all.	Will again address the majority of the bullet points under each criteria heading but will lack some clarity or detail in how the proposed solutions will be achieved. Evidence provided, while giving generic or general statements, is not specifically directed toward the aims/objectives of this project. Any significant omission of key information as identified under each criteria heading will point towards a score of 3.
Minor Reservation	2	Some evidence of appropriate knowledge, skills or experience. Meets requirements in some areas but with important omissions	Will reflect that the bidder has not provided evidence to suggest how they will address a number of bullet points under the evaluation criteria heading. Applications will in parts be sketchy with little or no detail given of how they will meet project requirements. Evidence provided is considered weak or inappropriate and is unclear on how this relates to desired outcomes.
Serious Reservations	1	Very little evidence of appropriate knowledge skills or experience	Will reflect that there are major weaknesses or gaps in the information provided. The bidder displays poor understanding and there are major doubts about fitness for purpose.



Assessment	Score	Summary	Interpretation
Unacceptable	0	No evidence/response	Will result if no response is given and/or if the response is not acceptable and/or does not cover the required criteria.

Proposal timetable

Activity	Date
Grant call issued	w/c 25 th May 2026
Deadline for submission of Expression of Interest Form (voluntary, not needed to apply)	Friday 19 th June 2026
Deadline for proposal submissions	Friday 26 th June 2026
Evaluate proposals	29 th June – 4 th July 2026
Rebuttal period for clarification questions	6 th July – 17 th July 2026
Notify successful applicant	By Friday 24 th July 2026

Budget

Please include a detailed breakdown of staff costs (stating the number of days allocated to each staff member, and the associated day rate). As a minimum, please also indicate what proportion of



the budget is allocated to each of the research activities, analysis, and reporting. Please also produce a summary budget table as per the below format.

Activity	Costs
Total cost	

Questions or clarifications

Any queries ahead of the proposal submission deadline should be directed to practice_guides@foundations.org.uk. Foundations will endeavour to respond to queries within two working days.