



Reducing Parental Conflict - Challenge Fund 2

Application Guidance

Digital Support Strand

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Contents

- Section 1: Overview of Reducing Parental Conflict Programme
- Section 2: Introduction to Challenge Fund 2
- Section 3: Digital Support Strand
- Section 4: Learning and evidence
- Section 5: Planning and management/assessing questions
- Section 6: Applying to the Challenge Fund
- Section 7: How we make decisions
- Section 8: Annexes Annex A: Digital Support – Supplementary guidance

Section 1: Overview of Reducing Parental Conflict Programme

1.1 This guidance is intended for organisations considering whether to apply to the Universal Digital Support for Families (Digital Support) strand of the Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund 2. The Challenge Fund 2 is an important component of the overall Reducing Parental Conflict Programme.

1.2 The Challenge Fund application process is open and accessible to everyone. If there are barriers to applying for a grant or accessing our information about this fund, please contact us at challengefund2@ecorys.com. For example, if you need this information in another format.

1.3 The Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) Programme was announced as part of ‘*Improving Lives: Helping Workless Families*’ (April 2017)¹. This works to equip organisations which

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-lives-helping-workless-families>.

deliver family services with the tools they need to reduce conflict between parents or carers, (whether they are together or separated) to improve outcomes for children.

1.4 The key objectives were to:

- Ensure evidence-based interventions are more widely available to improve children's outcomes
- Support local areas and related public, private and voluntary organisations who are best placed to identify families experiencing parental conflict; to embed parental conflict support in their wider services for children

1.5 The RPC Programme has developed over the course of its lifetime, and this development can be split into two phases:

Phase 1 - 2017-2021: Building evidence and capability

1. **Building evidence:** Testing specialist interventions and innovative approaches to providing parental conflict support.

In its first phase, the RPC Programme delivered seven RPC specialist interventions in 31 LA areas to test for efficacy. Alongside this, the DWP ran a Challenge Fund for organisations to test innovative approaches to support for specific groups of disadvantaged families and to test digital support. The DWP also worked with the Department for Health and Social Care and Public Health England (now Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) to integrate RPC support in whole family, whole system approaches to addressing alcohol misuse.

The evidence gathered from this first phase is helping to support services that work with families and to influence the DWP's approach to the development of the RPC Programme.

2. **Building capability:** Provided training for LAs and senior leaders.

The DWP provided a flexible RPC training offer for Local Authority staff, ranging from awareness level to train the trainer. Alongside this, the DWP provided small grants for local senior leaders to use to increase RPC awareness.

Previous grants for the purposes of evidence gathering and dissemination were awarded up to £500,000 per year where the activities carried out with those grants gathered and disseminated evidence to support the RPC Programme.

Phase 2 – 2022-2025: Building sustainability

1.6 The DWP is now building on the Phase 1 achievements to embed RPC activity in the work of LAs and their partners. To do this, the DWP has provided funding to 151 Local Authorities in England to spend on improving their local RPC offer through an RPC Local Grant. The DWP is also launching a new Broadening RPC Support Challenge Fund, to understand the specific needs of diverse families and to develop digital RPC support for parents to access independently.

1.7 See the [RPC Gov.UK](#) pages and the [Reducing Parental Conflict Hub](#) to learn more about the RPC Programme and the families it seeks to support.

1.8 The evidence review ‘What works to enhance inter-parental relationships and improve outcomes for children’ (March 2016)² demonstrated that children who are exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved parental conflict are at significant risk of experiencing poorer long term outcomes.

1.9 In 2019-20, 12% (almost 1 in 8) children whose parents were living together, were exposed to potentially damaging levels of parental conflict, a figure that has remained constant since 2017-18. In the same period around half of children in separated families did not see their non-resident parent frequently, which is indicative of a poor-quality relationship between their parents and a higher likelihood of experiencing problems sustaining effective child maintenance arrangements. Evidence shows that children tend to have better health, emotional wellbeing and higher academic attainment if they grow up with parents (whether together or separated) who have a good relationship and are able to manage conflict well.

1.10 Poor outcomes for children are damaging and costly, not only for individuals (children and parents) but also for the state, as extra support is needed through health care, education, social and employment services to mitigate these problems. Therefore, early intervention to improve the quality of the inter-parental relationship (whether parents are together or separated) has the potential to reduce cumulative costs across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

1.11 Reducing Parental Conflict is being embedded across Local Authorities, and within government programmes. It is an outcome for the DLUHC Supporting Families Programme, and a service expectation for the DfE Family Hubs.

Section 2: Introduction to Challenge Fund 2

2.1 Aims and objectives

2.1.1 The first Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund (CF1) ran from 2018 to 2021, which funded activities to:

- Build the evidence base to inform future policy and practice
- Support greater numbers of disadvantaged families at risk of parental conflict
- Increase the awareness of and engagement with Reducing Parental Conflict work

2.1.2 The Challenge Fund 1 (CF1) funded 10 projects to test what works to reduce parental conflict through two strands: one which grant-funded initiatives that targeted disadvantaged families, and one that investigated how digital interventions could support parents in conflict. Some of the key findings included:

- A broader understanding of ‘what works’, and that different approaches or products are needed to engage more diverse groups;
- Trusted local community organisations can break down barriers to engagement
- Clear evidence that parents do seek support in the digital space, and digital interventions are most effective when they are hosted in a place that parents

² <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/what-works-to-enhance-inter-parental-relationships-and-improve-outcomes-for-children-3/outcomes-for-children-3/>

already visit (known as 'Digital Comfort Zones') and are easy to understand and use;

- Online delivery of initiatives increased reach and engagement, with parents preferring this approach in some cases. This was demonstrated when initiatives pivoted to online delivery due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, this risked digital exclusion of the more disadvantaged;
- Digital interventions were effective in creating behavioural change;
- Local Authorities reported that existing RPC support offers are not successful in supporting all kinds of families;
- Expanding the evidence base of programmes which are effective in reducing parental conflict and the advantage of tailoring to reach targeted groups;
- Evidence that proper support for separating couples can reduce court proceedings (and produce better outcomes for families);
- With more practitioners skilled and knowledgeable about couple conflict, confidence increased to speak to families about this 'private' area and intervene early.

2.1.3 The overall aim of the next phase of the RPC Programme is to support local areas to embed support in their services and to tailor this to meet the needs of the full range of families in their areas.

2.1.4 The key objective of the Challenge Fund 2 will be to build upon the evidence and learnings from Phase 1 of the Reducing Parental Conflict Programme (including CF1³) and to help fill evidence gaps. To produce products or resources which can be utilised by local areas to support a greater number of disadvantaged families at risk of parental conflict, including through universal digital support offers. The Challenge Fund 2 aims to:

- Grant fund delivery organisations to develop and deliver innovative projects and products that support families experiencing parental conflict.
- Grant fund digital interventions that can be accessed independently of Local Authority to support parents experiencing conflict. This means there should be no practitioner involvement.
- Test the effectiveness of the projects/products developed and create an evidence base about what works most effectively to reduce parental conflict.
- Increase options for self-guided products that could in the future work with central government services.
- Create products that are sustainable post-Challenge Fund, and could be adopted as part of Central Government Services or by Local Authorities. This means initiatives that offer extremely poor value for money are unlikely to be funded, as are those that would only succeed in very limited circumstances. Applications must demonstrate how the proposal, if successful in reducing parental conflict, could be packaged as a product to be deployed elsewhere and embedded into centralised or localised family support.

2.1.5 In response to feedback from Local Authorities that some of the generic content in current interventions does not suit local needs, the DWP are interested in universal digital

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-parental-conflict-challenge-fund-learning-from-the-first-phase>

approaches and approaches tailored to diverse groups, to complement the work of Local Authorities to develop support through trained practitioners.

2.1.6 In 2018, DWP ran their first RPC Challenge Fund, which funded ten projects over 12-months to test what works to reduce parental conflict. Due to Covid-19, six projects were then funded for an additional nine months. The Challenge Fund 1 had two streams; one which grant-funded initiatives that targeted disadvantaged families, and one that investigated how digital interventions could support parents in conflict.

2.1.7 For example, 'Me, You and Baby Too' was a product from the Challenge Fund and is now used by over 50% Local Authorities to support new and expecting parents.

2.2 Funding available

2.2.1 Under CF2, up to £3.6 million is available in total over 2023/24 and 2024/25 for initiatives that will generate evidence in the following two strands:

- Universal Digital Support for Families (Digital Support) – see Section 3
- Support for a diverse range of families with additional stressors for conflict

2.2.2 Funding will be available for organisations to deliver their initiatives from June 2023 until November 2024. Initiatives must be able to meet these timescales.

2.2.3 The minimum spend per initiative is £150k.

2.2.4 The Challenge Fund 2 aims to fund a small number of larger digital initiatives and is looking to also fund a higher number of smaller initiatives focused on parents with additional pressures.

2.2.5 In contrast to Challenge Fund 1 the fund is not differentiated, and the DWP will review the highest scoring initiatives from across both strands that best fit the desired aims.

2.2.6 Organisations can apply to each of the two Challenge Fund 2 strands. Initiatives must be distinct and applicants should complete a separate application to each strand of the Fund. Applications to the Diverse Families strand can have digital components.

2.2.7 Organisations may be involved in more than one initiative as a partner but can only lead on one application per strand.

2.2.8 Any awards of funding will only be made if the DWP is satisfied that such award will not constitute a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

Section 3: Digital Support Strand

3.1 Key considerations

3.1.1 The DWP have identified some key factors which it is believed are important elements to delivering effective and engaging Digital Support to the target user group. We will look for evidence that these factors have been considered by applicants.

- **Readability:** It is important that target users can understand the support and advice provided, whether it is spoken or in writing. The Government Digital Service standard

minimum is that content should be suitable for people with a reading age of 9 years old). Heavy text-based content is not favoured by our target audience.

- **Accessibility:** Initiatives must meet the legal requirements for digital public services. Initiatives must meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 (Level AA) <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/helping-people-to-use-your-service/understanding-wcag> .
- **Safeguarding:** We expect bids to show how they will ensure appropriate safeguarding, proportionate to the intensiveness of the intervention. For example, passive resources that target parents with a low levels of conflict may have no internal safeguarding. Comparatively, digital initiatives that provide support should demonstrate how safeguarding with verification will ensure that no victims of domestic abuse wrongly access the product. Safeguarding considerations will need to be appropriate to the level of the intervention (e.g. if working directly with families experiencing domestic abuse, appropriate screening will need to be built into the planning and delivery, or if it is a standalone intervention, it may require a wraparound service to direct users to the intervention).

3.1.2 Additionally, for Digital Support initiatives, applicants should consider:

- **Devices:** Our target parents predominantly use Smartphones to go online. Digital support should be accessible on a smartphone as well as other commonly used devices.
- **Mediums:** with reference to mediums, we would consider funding range of digital interventions:
 - Apps
 - Forums
 - Bots that can be imbedded on existing website
 - Websites
 - Video content

3.1.3 This list is not exhaustive but supposed to demonstrate that we will consider a range of digital interventions. However, we expect applications to consider evidence on how parents access the internet. While we understand that not every parent can access every kind of digital intervention, accessibility and an evidence-based approach should be considered. This is particularly important if the digital intervention aims to target a specific subgroup of parents experiencing conflict. Evidence should be used to target where these sub-groups already access the internet.

3.1.4 Content should be placed where our target users go online. This is typically social media, particularly Facebook and YouTube, and forums via Google searches. We should not expect users to have to look hard for content. Locating material in online places linked to child related issues (because this is what parents search for first) is advised. We would consider products that are outside of 'Digital Comfort Zones' if there is sufficient evidence to overcome these recognised behaviours and barriers.

- **An Agile Approach:** Grant participants should consider how they will deliver their initiatives in a way that allows multiple iterations. Initiatives should meet 'user needs' according to Government Digital Service principles and demonstrate an ongoing impact. Initiatives should be flexible to the target audience's online searching strategies (e.g. analytics, on-going user need feedback).

3.2 The Challenge Fund 2 will not fund:

- Digital initiatives with pre-existing activities. As the Challenge Fund 2 is aimed at encouraging innovation, we will not fund activity that is already taking place without a strong rationale, although we are open to applications which have been developed but are yet to be tested or have had limited testing.
- Digital interventions should also be realistic in terms of budget, scalability and user behaviours. The Challenge Fund will be unlikely to fund a project that does not take these into account. In particular, it is unlikely to fund projects which would need extensive investment after the Challenge Fund completes to deliver at scale.

3.3 Target groups

3.3.1 To encourage innovation, the DWP are not specifying a target group for the digital initiatives, they should be accessed universally. For instance, universal support could be aimed at improving parental awareness of parental conflict and its effects, and help them find the appropriate assistance, e.g. accessing locally based support in their area. However, there are some groups that the DWP are particularly interested in supporting:

- Parents that experience additional stressors that are known to increase the likelihood of conflict (e.g. low income, separating parents, children with SEND, parents with SEND, families with mental health issues and new parents).
- Separating parents. The DWP are interested in how digital interventions could be used to reduce pressure on central government funded systems, such as the family court system or the child maintenance system. For example, consider targeting separating parents, and whether a self-guided digital intervention would reduce the need for state involvement in Child Maintenance Service.

Section 4: Learning and evidence

4.1 Evidence

4.1.1 The Challenge Fund 2 seeks learning on what works to support a diverse range of families by funding innovation where there is little current evidence.

4.1.2 The initiatives should be evidenced-based so applicants will have to provide evidence on the demand for support with their proposed target group and should include learning on how to improve support to better meet the needs of parents with additional pressures.

4.1.3 Applicants will need to demonstrate that their approach to learning and evidence gathering is well considered and appropriate for their initiative. We are not prescribing what form this evidence will take; it could be qualitative and/or quantitative. Evidence must be of a good quality; we are looking for evidence that can inform future policy and practice and help us determine where future investment should be made. We are also interested in the identification and sharing of learning from what doesn't work, as well as what does.

Some examples (not exhaustive) of the type of learning and evidence we expect initiatives to gather over the course of the initiative:

- What digital support works to effectively engage and re-engage disadvantaged parents and how to measure this (what metrics are effective).

- How barriers already identified for the target user groups can be overcome.
- Other barriers to providing effective digital support identified by the grant participants during delivery.
- Evidence on whether and how they have met the needs of specific target groups and how well digital support can address the needs of any specific target group's user needs (e.g. men, ethnic minorities).
- Evidence of the resources needed to effectively reach the target groups.
- Any other relevant learning and evidence that initiatives might consider appropriate.

4.1.4 As a key aim of this fund is to encourage innovation, we will not fund activity which is already taking place or that you have alternative sources of funding for, unless there is a strong case for doing so. Although we are open to applications which have been developed but are yet to be tested or have only had limited testing.

4.1.5 Digital applicants will demonstrate how they will monitor who is using their product. For example, consider if all participants come from an intended income group, or if everyone accessing your digital service identify as select groups, such as female.

4.1.6 Digital support applicants will have to provide either evidence on the efficacy of their approach to providing therapeutic support without the intervention of a practitioner; or how they will generate robust evidence on the efficacy of the support through testing.

4.1.7 Potential applicants should set out evidence demonstrating the need for their proposals, showing how they will address these needs and broaden the evidence on what works to reduce parental conflict. This should include learning from the previous RPC Challenge Fund 1, especially from the digital trials.

4.1.8 Potential applicants will need to clearly set out how their initiative will gather evidence. This means being clear how your initiative will measure the extent to which digital support is meeting your target user's needs, how well it engages and re-engages them, and how the provision may impact their behaviour. The Government Digital Service has published guidance on this which you may find helpful: <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/agile-delivery>

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Grant participants will be encouraged to use parental conflict measures. These can be found here: [Measuring parental conflict and its impact on child outcomes | Early Intervention Foundation \(eif.org.uk\)](#)

4.2.2 Where appropriate to the initiative, grant participants will be encouraged to use the existing Department for Education measures on children's outcomes:

- school attendance
- academic progress
- behaviour, wellbeing or mental health measure
- social care involvement – duration, change in status of case, re-referral.

4.3 Sustainability

4.3.1 We are looking to fund initiatives that have the potential to be sustained if they are successful. This means we are unlikely to fund an initiative that offers extremely poor value

for money or would only succeed in very limited circumstances. Applications must demonstrate how the proposal, if successful in reducing parental conflict, could be packaged as a product to be deployed elsewhere and embedded into central or local family support.

4.3.2 We are interested in projects from a diverse set of geographical regions, and therefore would strongly encourage interested organisations to consult with their local stakeholders before they apply for funding.

4.4 Evaluation

4.4.1 The initiatives that receive funding will undertake a period of testing for 18 months and record the learning and evidence they gather. We expect this will be done through monitoring processes capturing outputs and outcomes, as well as a formalised evaluation process. Applicants are encouraged to allocate 10 to 15% of their budget to evaluation of their projects. This can be spent on appointing an external evaluator (following appropriate procurement processes) or on a structured, internal evaluation. Where evaluations are to be conducted internally, applicants will need to demonstrate that staff with relevant expertise are available to conduct the research.

4.4.2 Initiatives will not be required to share personal or sensitive data with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or Ecorys UK.

Section 5: Application Considerations and Timescale

5.1 Application process

5.1.1 The application process consists of three stages:

1. **Self-assessment:** Please read this guidance carefully and complete the online checklist before deciding if you wish to submit your initiative idea for an eligibility check. This will enable you to identify quickly whether your application is likely to meet the Challenge Fund criteria.
2. **Eligibility check:** We will provide an online eligibility checklist for you to provide some basic information about your initiative. The checklist is available on the RPC website rpcchallengefund2.co.uk/information-for-applicants with screenshots for guidance on how to complete the form. You will need to confirm your organisation type, experience and availability fit the needs of the Challenge Fund.

Once an applicant has determined they are eligible and wish to apply for funding they will provide a brief summary of their initiative, learning and track record. The information will be reviewed by the RPC team against the criteria in section 2.1.4, section 3 and section 4.1. The RPC team will then contact the applicant to arrange an eligibility telephone call to discuss the proposal with the applicant. This call will be a short 15 minute assessment to identify if an application appears eligible to apply to the Challenge Fund based on its brief summary and the eligibility telephone call. Applicants will receive an email explaining the eligibility decision. If they appear eligible to apply to the Challenge Fund, a link will be sent to the application portal, to continue with the application process. If they are ineligible, reasons will be provided as to why

their application doesn't meet the criteria by email. Initiative ideas that clearly do not meet the Challenge Fund criteria will not be allowed to proceed past this stage. However, organisations will have the option to review their application, based on the feedback provided, and resubmit another eligibility check within the timescales. If we need further information, we may contact you about your initiative. If following this process you are dissatisfied, you may appeal this decision, in which case Ecorys will have a discussion with the DWP who will make a final decision as to whether to allow the application to continue with the application process.

3. **Complete your application:** Organisations that have completed an eligibility check and have been invited to apply to the Fund will be able to access the online application portal between 16 January and 24 February. Applications submitted after 24 February will not be considered. Eligibility will be assessed further based on the full application submitted via the online portal; passing the eligibility check does not guarantee that the application will be considered eligible or that it will receive funding.

5.1.2 We will share separately the questions that applicants will need to answer when completing their application and include guidance on what we are looking for.

5.2 Eligibility

5.2.1 Who can apply?

5.2.1.1 Applicants to the Digital Support for Families (Digital Support) strand must be based within the United Kingdom. Initiatives will be required to focus on an English audience although this support will be available to families living elsewhere within the United Kingdom.

5.2.1.2 Applicants will need to demonstrate:

- expertise and/or a strong track record of reducing parental conflict work with disadvantaged families and
- relevant digital expertise

5.2.1.3 Applicants are strongly encouraged to work in partnership to bring together relationship expertise and digital expertise to meet this requirement. Partnerships need to be secured in advance of the funding application. Applications from partnerships must have a clearly identified constituted lead organisation with whom we will sign a grant agreement and be accountable for delivery of the initiative.

5.2.1.4 Applicants can be from the private, and third sector, including organisations such as voluntary organisations, charities and social enterprises.

5.2.1.5 Organisations already in receipt of RPC grant funding must avoid double-funding the same activity.

5.2.1.6 Applicants cannot make a profit from their involvement in a Challenge Fund initiative. However, to be eligible for this fund, we must be satisfied (at our discretion) that applicants are not an "enterprise" for the purposes of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (see sections 7 and 8 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022), with regard to the initiative proposed to be funded. In summary, an "enterprise" means either:

- (a) an organisation which is engaged in an economic activity that entails offering goods or services on a market, to the extent that the organisation is engaged in such an activity; or

(b) a group of organisations under common ownership or common control which is engaged in an economic activity that entails offering goods or services on a market, to the extent that the group is engaged in such an activity.

5.2.1.7 We will require evidence to demonstrate that each applicant will not constitute an “enterprise” for these purposes. For further information on assessing whether or not you constitute an “enterprise” for these purposes please see pp 164 to 172 of [Statutory Guidance for the United Kingdom Subsidy Control Regime \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk).

5.2.1.8 Smaller organisations have an important role to play in reducing parental conflict; however, organisations will need to have a certain level of capacity to deliver effectively to the Challenge Fund budgets and timescales. If you want to apply for funding equivalent to a large proportion of your annual income it may be better to partner with a larger organisation, and for them to act as the lead applicant.

5.2.2 Who cannot apply?

- Individual applicants
- Legal Partnerships
- Organisations already receiving funding through the RPC local grant cannot apply for funding through the Challenge Fund for the same activity.
- Applicants who are an “enterprise” for the purposes of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (see sections 7 and 8 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022), with regard to the initiative proposed to be funded.

5.3 Programme timescales

Stage	Date
Guidance and criteria is published on the Challenge Fund website rpcchallengefund2.co.uk/information-for-applicants	5 January 2023
Applicants can register interest and book eligibility telephone call	13 January to 8 February 2023
Eligible organisations can complete their application online	16 January to 24 February 2023
We aim to notify applicants of the outcome of their application	by 19 April 2023
Pre-delivery Activity Commences	01 May 2023
Successful applicants begin delivering initiatives	05 June 2023
Ongoing delivery and learning reports submitted quarterly	From September 2023
Delivery of Initiatives finish	by 29 November 2024
Evaluation and final reporting due	by 3 January 2025

5.4 Budget information

5.4.1 Timeframe

5.4.1.1 Please consider your budget carefully and only apply for what you need to deliver your initiative, bearing in mind that all activity must be completed and costs incurred by 29 November 2024. Value for money will be considered as part of the assessment process.

5.4.1.2 All initiatives must begin activity on 05 June 2023 and submit evaluation and final reporting by 03 January 2025, and all funds must be spent within this timeframe.

5.4.2 Funding from other sources

5.4.2.1 There is no requirement for your budget to include funding from other sources. If your budget includes match or additional funding from another source this must be secured. We are very unlikely to fund any initiative where funding from other sources is included in the budget but is not secured.

5.4.2.2 You must be clear where any funding from other sources will come from, and the level of funding must be reasonable and proportionate to the value of the fund. As a guideline we would not expect this to exceed 20% of the total initiative cost. Each initiative will be assessed individually on its merits.

5.4.3 Overhead costs

5.4.3.1 You may include reasonable overhead costs in your budget. As a guideline we would not expect these to exceed 10% of the cost of your initiative.

5.4.3.2 Overheads are the costs incurred by your organisation to run its operations and not the direct cost of initiative activities. Overhead costs might typically include a proportion of office rent, telephone expenses, accounting fees, salaries of your management or administration staff, etc.

5.4.4 VAT

5.4.4.1 You may only include VAT in your budget if you cannot recover it from HM Revenue and Customs.

5.4.5 Ineligible costs

5.4.5.1 Applicants are strongly encouraged to review this list carefully before submitting their application.

1. Paid for lobbying, which means using grant funds to fund lobbying (via an external firm or in-house staff) in order to undertake activities intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, Government or political activity; or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action.
2. Using the grant to directly enable one part of government to challenge another on topics unrelated to the agreed purpose of the grant.
3. Using the grant to petition for additional funding.
4. Expenses such as for entertaining, specifically aimed at exerting undue influence to change government policy.
5. Input VAT reclaimable by the grant recipient from HM Revenue and Customs.

6. Payments for activities of a political or exclusively religious nature.
7. Contributions in kind (i.e. a contribution in goods or services, as opposed to money).
8. Interest payments (including service charge payments for finance leases).
9. Statutory fines, criminal fines or penalties.
10. Payments for work or activities which the grant recipient, or any member of their Partnership has a statutory duty to undertake, or that they are fully funded by other resources.
11. Bad debts to related parties.
12. Payments for unfair dismissal or other compensation.
13. Depreciation, amortisation or impairment of fixed assets owned by the grant recipient.
14. The acquisition or improvement of fixed assets by the grant recipient.
15. Liabilities incurred before the issue of this funding agreement unless agreed in writing by the funder.

5.5 Accessibility

5.5.1 Our target users will have accessibility needs, both physical (e.g., visual) or cognitive (learning disabilities such as dyslexia, mental health etc.)

5.5.2 There are legal requirements for digital public services:

- For Readability, the Government Digital Service standard minimum is reading age of 9 years old. On average, 1 in 6 adults in the UK lack basic literacy skills. The average reading age of the UK population is 9 years – the ability expected of a 9 year old.
- For Accessibility, the Government Digital Service minimum standard is AA of [the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.1).

5.5.3 Please include the costs to ensure the initiative is accessible to those delivering and participating in the activity.

5.6 Contact us

5.6.1 We encourage you to check the frequently asked questions and to read this guidance before contacting us. The frequently asked questions will be regularly updated.

5.6.2 You can contact us through the 'contact us' portal on the Challenge Fund website: rpcchallengefund2.co.uk

Section 6: The Application form questions

6.1 Accessing the form

6.1.1 Applicants who pass the eligibility check – demonstrating their initiative meets the requirements (organisation type, expected outputs and existing planning) - will be granted access to the full application form for the Challenge Fund. The form itself includes five main sections, with supporting text for each question, and is available to download in pdf format for applicants that wish to plan ahead, before being granted access to the application portal.

6.1.2 Further detail on the questions to complete will be published closer to the application window on the website, alongside example screenshots and a recording on how to complete the form. Consideration points detailed in 6.2 outline examples of what we are looking for should you wish to start planning your application form early.

6.2 Scoring framework and weighting

6.2.1 There are five judgement points, as set out at paragraph 6.2.3 below, which closely correspond to sections of the application form. Judgement point five covers delivery and budget together.

6.2.2 Each judgement point can be marked out of 4, ranging from 1 (weak) to 4 (excellent). These can be summarised as:

- 4 – Answer entirely meets all consideration points without concerns.
- 3 – Answer meets all consideration points with minimal concerns.
- 2 – Answer meets most consideration points with minor concerns.
- 1 – Answer does not meet the majority of consideration points.

6.2.3 The scores awarded for each section will be weighted to give an overall score for the application, with examples of consideration points an application will address to achieve an 'excellent' score for each of the scoring criteria, below.

Criteria	Example of 'excellent' score
Judgement point one: Rationale and strategic outline (25%)	<p>The delivery model and target group are appropriate for the Challenge Fund, there is a clear rationale, and the initiative will meet the Challenge Fund aim of reducing parental conflict.</p> <p>Consideration points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative is truly innovative and is clearly aimed at reducing parental conflict. • There is a clear rationale for the initiative activities. Activities are appropriate for the intended beneficiaries, be they practitioners or families. It is clear they will reach and be engaging for the intended beneficiaries. • The applicant shows a clear understanding of the typical online behaviours of the target user group. • Specific needs are clearly articulated throughout. Where the initiative is targeted at families with specific or particular disadvantages there is a clear rationale for why the initiative will target the identified families, and their needs are clearly articulated. • Where practitioners are involved, they will have a genuine role in shaping the initiative. • Applicant has considered strategy, action and expected impact to support development of a clear Theory of Change. • Impacts are precisely articulated and substantive and there is good reason to believe the initiative will lead to reducing parental conflict, and can be scaled to new target groups. • Appropriate safeguarding is clearly defined for the target group.

<p>Judgement point two: Learning and evidence (35%)</p>	<p>The initiative will generate evidence, outputs and learning in line with the Challenge Fund aims.</p> <p>Consideration points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal outlines a very clear learning strategy within every iteration of their initiative. The methods and tools have been fully outlined and show creativity of approach. • There is a genuine commitment to a test and learn approach which is clearly outlined. • The applicant is clear about what learning they are seeking to gain and all the forms it will take. • Outputs are clearly defined and innovative. • There is a sound theoretical basis for their evaluation. They have a clear understanding of evaluative approaches and evidence of how they will implement their evaluation. • Ethical issues have been fully described and there is a full understanding of how to manage them. • The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has been considered in full, and the applicant is fully and clearly complying with the legal and procedural requirements. • The applicant has clearly provided either evidence on the efficacy of their approach to providing therapeutic support without the intervention of a practitioner; or how they will generate robust evidence on the efficacy of the support through testing • The applicant has clearly articulated the potential contribution of their learning to the evidence base and it is clear that this will be of interest to policymakers and practitioners. They have fully considered how sustainable and/or easy to replicate the initiative is.
<p>Judgement point three: Experience and capability (15%)</p>	<p>The applicant (lead organisation or within partnership) has the experience and capability required to deliver the initiative.</p> <p>Consideration points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lead organisation and/or its partners have extensive experience of delivering effective services for the families and target groups identified in the proposal. • Where included, all partners clearly add weight to the proposal and their involvement is very well thought through. • The lead organisation and/or its partners have extensive experience of providing effective digital support to people with low literacy and digital skills, and clearly outline their ability to do this effectively.
<p>Judgement point four: Planning and management (10%)</p>	<p>The initiative will be well managed and ready to go. There are clear plans in place for staffing and the applicant has clearly set out appropriate management arrangements.</p> <p>Consideration points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management plans are of a very high standard - appropriate to the scale and scope of the initiative and include excellent project methodologies. • Clear staffing arrangements are in place, are appropriate and proportionate, and it is clear where day to day responsibility and accountability sits. Excellent governance arrangements are in place.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the initiative is being delivered by a partnership, the role of the partners is clear and appropriate and the partnership management arrangements are excellent. • Substantive preplanning has taken place and the initiative is ready to go. • Feedback systems are fully built into the working methods.
Judgement point five: Delivery and budget (15%)	<p>The initiative will be well delivered. Milestones include all the activity required to deliver the initiative and the budget includes the necessary costs to deliver the activities and represents value for money. Risks to the project have been well considered and appropriate mitigation is included.</p> <p>Consideration points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The milestones are clearly articulated and are appropriate for the proposed initiative. • The risks identified are realistic, considered and the mitigation is very clear and appropriate. • The budget includes all of the costs required to deliver the initiative. It offers excellent value for money. • Other funding sources are clearly identified and follow Subsidy Control Act principles. • All costs are eligible and there are no calculation errors.

Section 7: How we make decisions

7.1 Grant Approval Panel

7.1 Applications will be assessed against the criteria set out in 6.2 and shortlisted according to these scores. Applications must score at least '2' in every judgement point in order to be considered for funding.

7.1.2 DWP will form a Grant Approval Panel (GAP) chaired by the Programme Director and a minimum of 3 independent programme and subject matter experts. This will be the decision-making forum.

7.1.3 The delivery partner will present the shortlisted applicant's proposals to the panel (together with their assigned scores). This will ensure that scoring and assessment is validated by the GAP. Should any scores change because of this process, these will be recorded.

7.1.4 The GAP will make all funding decisions. Applicants will be ranked in order – highest to lowest – in order of scores awarded. DWP's intention is to ensure that the fund is fully utilised. The table below set out a theoretical example of awards. In this example, the GAP have decided to fund Applications 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 to ensure the entire £3.6m is utilised, after confirming this meets the Fund objectives (see #2.1.4).

Application	Value (£m)	Score (out of 10)
1	1.5	8
2	0.75	7
3	0.75	6
4	0.4	5
5	0.3	4
6	0.3	4

7.1.5 Additionally, GAP will look across the applications to identify whether any of the following situations would arise and will seek to minimise them in reaching its decision as to which applications will be funded (in the following order of priority, where the highest listed situation is most important factor in making the decision):

- Applications overlap with activity funded elsewhere in the RPC Programme or in other government departments
- Two or more applications propose similar activity occurring in the same geographical area
- Two or more applications propose to deliver the same or overlapping activity
- Any applications could present a potential conflict of interest

7.1.6 The GAP may decide on a reserve list of suitable applications should any of the chosen grant applicants withdraw from the process before grant agreements have been signed. The reserve list of suitable applications will be determined by applying the decision-making principles set out at paragraphs 7.1.4 and 7.1.5 above.

7.2 If your application is successful

7.2.1 Grant agreement

7.2.1.1 You will be asked to sign a grant agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions if you are awarded funding. A draft version of this grant agreement will be made available before the deadline for submitting applications. The grant agreement terms and conditions are not negotiable.

7.2.2 Support

7.2.2.1 If you are awarded funding you will be allocated a named grants manager who will act as a single point of contact for all queries and will provide support and guidance.

7.2.2.2 Your grants manager will also clearly explain the monitoring, payment, learning, evidence, reporting, evaluation and audit requirements of the Fund to you. This will be supplemented by comprehensive written guidance.

7.2.3 Performance and learning reports

7.2.3.1 Initiatives will be required to submit a monitoring and learning report at the end of each quarter of initiative delivery and then one final report when Challenge Fund delivery has finished. We will broadly expect these reports to include:

- Update on activities and milestones completed against agreed deliverables and financial profile as in your grant agreement
- Key issues and challenges, and how these have been addressed
- Effectiveness of the funded activities
- Proposed adjustments or modifications to project activities
- Key learning in line with the learning and monitoring framework agreed with Ecorys UK at the start of your initiative

7.2.3.2 We will provide a template for you to use if you are awarded funding.

7.2.4 Payment terms

7.2.4.1 Your grant agreement will include initiative milestones which we will pay against. We will use the information provided in your application to agree these milestones with you.

7.2.4.2 We will ask you to provide evidence that a milestone has been met with each payment claim.

7.2.4.3 Payments will be made in arrears, subject to acceptable reporting and evidence being provided. We are unable to provide start-up funding.

7.2.4.4 You must have a UK bank account in the name of your organisation and the bank account must have at least two unrelated signatories.

7.2.5 Audit requirements

7.2.5.1 You should keep a record of what you have spent your grant on and evidence of expenditure (such as receipts) for seven years. We may audit a number of initiatives and may select your initiative for an audit.

7.2.5.2 If you do not provide this information when asked for it then you may have to pay back your grant.

7.3 If your application is not successful

7.3.1 We will inform all applicants of the funding decision within the agreed timescales, and an overview of why your initiative was not chosen.

7.3.2. Details of the successful initiatives (including organisation name and a summary) will be published on the Challenge Fund website along with DWP's rationale for the selected initiatives.

7.4 Role of Ecorys UK

7.4.1 Ecorys UK has been contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions to administer the Challenge Fund on its behalf. Ecorys UK will not handle any personal data.

7.4.2 If you have any questions about the programme, please see the website rpcchallengefund2.co.uk or email us on challengefund2@ecorys.com.

Section 8: Annexes

Annex A: Digital Support – Supplementary guidance

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 This document is supplementary to the main Digital Support guidance document and is intended to provide applicants with an overview of findings of research undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) when developing the Challenge Fund.

8.1.2 We will expect to see that applicants have considered this research and that its findings are reflected in their initiative where appropriate.

8.2 Target user group

8.2.1 In the United Kingdom, 11.3 million adults (21%) have limited basic digital skills. This has implications for online behaviours and means those with low digital skills have difficulty with managing information, communicating, transacting, problem solving and creating.

8.2.2 [The Good Things Foundation](#) have done research into the digital divide where millions of people in the UK don't have the basic digital skills they need to thrive in today's world.

8.3 How the target user group accesses the internet

8.3.1 Our target users are more likely to only use a smartphone to go online, compared to adults overall. They use social media; YouTube and Facebook being the most popular. They use long tail keywords for searches which produce higher volumes of search results. They frequently demonstrated high interest in peer group support / advice (if moderated) and expert advice (professionals) and social media with interactive on-the-go / 'gamification' elements.

8.3.2 Our target users are online, accessing digital information predominantly through social media – particularly Facebook and YouTube. They use forums when signposted to them via Google searches (if relevant), but do not sign up to forums and do not post questions or responses.

8.3.3 While our target users use a limited number of apps (YouTube and social media apps such as Facebook) they don't tend to use them beyond those brands or join/sign up for information digitally.

8.3.4 In addition, our analysis tells us that apps tend to be deleted quite quickly after download. Therefore, any impact an app may have is limited, and creates a barrier to meeting our users' needs.

8.4 Target group - perception of conflict

8.4.1 Conflict can be exhibited in a range of ways from the higher end of the scale such as involved loud arguing, to the lower-level conflict such as silences, constant bickering or showing annoyance. These were not considered to be conflict and be seen by many as acceptable methods of communication within a relationship.

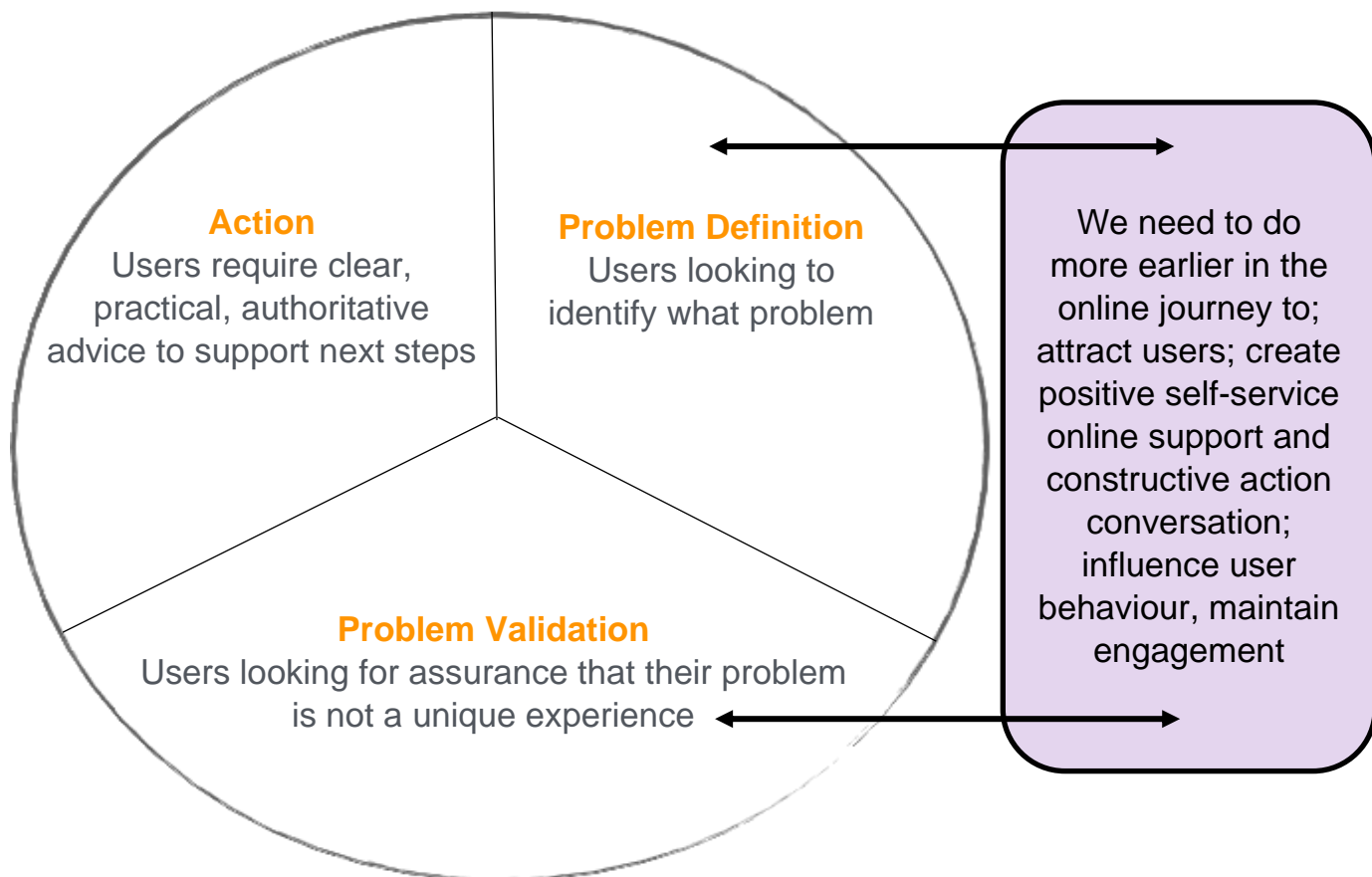
8.4.2 In certain situations, particularly where the relationship was considered to have broken down such as separation and /or divorce, high levels of conflict was even expected and so normalised, especially if an individual had experienced similar behaviours in a previous relationships and/or when growing up.

8.4.3 Most expressed the opinion that if children were not present during the arguments – such as in their bedrooms – the impact of the parental conflict on a child was minimised especially if they were younger.

8.4.4 Some users expressed a lack of awareness/acknowledgment that conflict within the home can affect their children’s life chances and family wellbeing.

8.5 How and when the target user group seeks digital support

8.5.1 Online support needs may be influenced by whether the person searching for support is looking to define what the problem is, is looking for validation or wants to take action. See the chart below.



8.5.2 Our target users want on the go access, steps to take, practical simple advice and positive messaging. Users need to feel good and rewarded when engaging with support material.

8.5.3 Users preference for forums to validate their feelings / experiences and provide peer support and You Tube for videos from perceived experts or people who users recognise as dealing with similar situations.

8.5.4 Initiatives should consider posting material in online places linked to child-related issues (because this is what parents search for first). For example, a parent searching for solutions to bedwetting may also find it helpful to understand the potential causes of the bed wetting, i.e. anxiety as a result of parental conflict.

8.6 Role models and trusted online ‘brands’

8.6.1 Target users said that recognising a brand (expert) or a role model engages and re-engages them in content. Initiatives should review the importance of role models and consider building a recognised brand (e.g., following on Instagram / Facebook) and recognised / trusted images (e.g. children's charity websites use faces of children) as a means to engage, attract and retain the target audience for Reducing Parental Conflict programme material.

8.7 Peer support / expert advice ‘on-the-go’ and ‘gamification’ principles

8.7.1 Initiatives should consider promoting online user engagement / interactions with Reducing Parental Conflict programme material as the target audience frequently demonstrated high interest in peer group support / advice (if moderated) and expert advice (professionals).

8.7.2 Social media provides a platform where our target users are comfortable sharing digital material they find useful and where it's easy for them to comment. This type of provision should be interactive on the go /and include ‘gamification’ elements.

8.7.3 Gamification does not need to be complicated – essentially the users must feel positive about the experience of engaging with the digital support, and that they have clear action they can take away to act on.

8.8 Further information

8.8.1 [Reducing Parental Conflict programme and resources](#), published by the Department for Work and Pensions

8.8.2 [Reducing Parental Conflict Challenge Fund: learning from the first phase](#), published by the Department for Work and Pensions