

# Invitation to Tender: Evaluation of RSA's Preventing School Exclusions project

## Summary

- We are seeking an evaluation partner to undertake an evaluation of our **three-year** Preventing School Exclusions project.
- The evaluation will provide the RSA with insight into the contribution we have made in facilitating multiagency working collaboratives to foster more inclusive local education systems,
- We hope to use results of the evaluation to inform refinements to and reiteration of the project model.
- We anticipate bids of up to a maximum of **£18,000 (inclusive of VAT and expenses)**.
- The deadline for expressions of interest is **12 noon on Wednesday, 1 September 2021**.

## About the RSA

The [RSA](#) (Royal Society for the encouragement of arts, manufactures and commerce) has been at the forefront of social change for over 260 years. We are a global community of proactive problem solvers, uniting people and ideas to resolve the challenges of our time. We do this by:

- Convening reasoned, rational debate;
- Enabling the public, practitioners and policymakers to realise change;
- Influencing key institutions and organisations;
- Demonstrating practical, scalable solutions.

## Project background

Every year, around 8,000 pupils are permanently excluded, averaging to 40 per school day, and many others are informally excluded. Amongst those affected, children with special educational needs and disabilities, children from poorer backgrounds, from certain ethnic minority groups, and those who have been in care are disproportionately represented.

In 2018, the RSA launched the *Pinball Kids* project. We investigated the rise in school exclusions across the English school system, and explored the experiences of the 'pinball kids', the children who constantly bounce up against school behaviour policies, and experience exclusion (temporary or permanent; formal or informal). We asked: how might we keep these vulnerable pupils in education, and ensure that they thrive?

Through our research we concluded that reducing preventable exclusions depends on building strong, collaborative relationships, specifically between:

- **School staff and pupils** so that every child has trusted adult in school who they can talk to about issues that trigger changes in behaviour.
- **Schools and families** so that the two can work in partnership to improve attendance and behaviour.
- **Schools and public services** so that every child's underlying needs are met, whether related to special educational need, experience of trauma or another factor.

## Project overview

The Preventing School Exclusions project will build on the third area of recommendations in *Pinball Kids*. It will involve the RSA working in three localities across England over the course of three years to develop and facilitate multiagency collaboratives of professionals working together to reduce preventable exclusions ("Collaboratives").

Depending on local needs and assets, and the local characteristics of exclusion, the Collaboratives might include representatives from: schools, children's social care, youth services, mental health and criminal justice, voluntary sector, and other organisations. We will anchor this work by partnering with local authorities/school

improvement partnerships that recognise the potential of collaborative approaches to reducing preventable exclusions. We will support these localities to establish the Collaboratives, align stakeholders' understanding of local needs and co-design processes for working together.

The four phases of the project include:

1. **Mobilising for change (Ongoing):** Identify the localities where RSA support can lead to impact and build a cohort of three localities wanting to learn from each other.
2. **Prototyping (Sep 2021- Aug 2022):** The RSA works closely with the Collaboratives to research and co-design collaborative approaches to reducing preventable exclusions.
3. **Piloting and learning (Sep 2022 – Aug 2024):** Local collaborative approaches are initiated, with the RSA working alongside; bringing partners together regularly as a peer-learning cohort to support continuous improvement.
4. **Influencing (throughout the project):** The RSA remains an active, important and supportive voice in national and local conversations around school exclusions. Learning from the project is captured and disseminated by the RSA, with a view to influencing wider policy and practice.

## Evaluation scope

Throughout the project, the RSA will be conducting formative evaluation of the impact of closer collaboration between members of the Collaboratives on reducing preventable exclusions. We will identify the barriers and enablers of effective collaboration between partners, as well as the benefits and challenges that emerge for local partners as they implement initiatives and interventions determined by the Collaboratives.

We will also be collecting and tracking data on exclusion figures, as well as attendance, behaviour and attainment of children identified at risk of exclusion within each of the three localities, to better understand the contexts within which we will be working, and to determine progress made.

We are seeking an independent evaluator to help us answer the following **research question**:

### **What is the impact of the RSA on the functioning and sustainability of the Collaboratives?**

In answering this question, we anticipate that the evaluator will include the following sub-questions:

- Are there increased levels of trust between local partners?
- To what extent has the RSA's process supported individual agencies/organisations to embed the Collaborative's collective vision and goals into their everyday operation?
- What improvements have there been to collaborative mechanisms for supporting children at risk of exclusion to thrive in mainstream schools?
  - Have mechanisms for information exchange between local partners regarding vulnerable pupils improved?
  - Have these resulted in increased information flows between local partners?
  - Are collaborative approaches more focused and efficient?
- To what extent do members of the Collaboratives attribute the success of initiatives to reduce preventable exclusions to improved collaboration?

We are looking to appoint (an) evaluation partner/s to work with us and the Collaboratives to: 1) build a process evaluation framework, and 2) collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data in order to answer the above research question.

## Requirements for evaluation approach

The successful evaluation partner/s will need to take a mixed-methods approach to the delivery of this evaluation, including engaging with perspectives of multiple stakeholders involved in each locality. There will also need to be a balance between rigorous and uniform evaluation procedures across the three localities and an approach that adapts to the individual contexts of each of the localities.

Data collection and analysis should be structured around our working logic model (see appendix I for the current draft), which represents the project theory and assumptions; and illustrates expected causal pathways,

as well as moderating and mediating factors. We expect the evaluation partner to refine the logic model as the evaluation progresses.

These findings should be presented back to the RSA, the Collaboratives, and the anchor organisation in each of the three localities, and the project funders through an interim report at the end of Year 1 and a final report at the end of Year 3 (the final year of the project).

## Selection process

We are asking teams to submit their expressions of interest by **12 noon on Wednesday, 1 September 2021**.

Evaluation partner/s will be selected based on their expertise in process evaluation as well as their experience in evaluating projects of similar scope.

Thus, we ask that the expression of interest includes the following information:

- The proposed project team;
- The project team's relevant experience;
- A proposal of how you might approach the research question.

## Key dates

For the selection process:

Milestone/activity	Date(s)
Release of Invitation to Tender	26 July 2021
Deadline for expressions of interest	12 noon, 1 September 2021
Phone interviews	3 September 2021
Final decision	6 September 2021

For the project:

Milestone/activity	Date(s)
First meeting	September 2021
Project launch	Mid-September 2021
Agree evaluation protocol	Mid-October 2022
Year 1 interim report w/ refined logic model and baseline data	April 2022
Data collection point	September 2023 (end of Year 2)
Year 3 final report	September 2024 (end of Year 3)

The reports will be read by the RSA and the funders; however, we will seek to incorporate elements of these reports in our public-facing communications on the delivery and impact of our work.

If you have any queries about the application process which are not addressed in this document, please email Mehak Tejani ([mehak.tejani@rsa.org.uk](mailto:mehak.tejani@rsa.org.uk)).

## Appendix 1: Project Working Logic Model (Draft)

