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Foreword
This document provides program information for prospective kindergarten cluster managers including an overview of the Victorian policy context and kindergarten cluster management policy.

Organisations seeking to apply to become a kindergarten cluster manager must also consider the document *Kindergarten Cluster Management: Application to become a kindergarten cluster management organisation* which includes information about the application process for kindergarten cluster management funding.

1. Introduction
Kindergarten cluster management provides a key platform on which to build an integrated early years and community service system, to develop partnerships with families and implement reform of the early childhood education and care system including providing support for the workforce.

Kindergarten cluster management was introduced in 2003 to:

- reduce the administrative and management burden on kindergarten parent volunteer committees
- strengthen the management and delivery of community based kindergarten programs and
- provide kindergarten staff with professional employment arrangements.

As an alternative to a kindergarten being managed by a volunteer committee of management, kindergarten cluster management provides professional, stable and ongoing management to a network of local kindergarten services. In most cases the kindergarten cluster management organisation takes on the functions previously performed by the committee of management.

Kindergarten cluster management encourages parents to continue to be involved in their child’s kindergarten experience without having to commit to becoming a committee member and take on the responsibility of running a kindergarten service. The kindergarten cluster manager is responsible for the overall management of the kindergartens in the cluster. Arrangements between kindergarten cluster managers and kindergarten services can be tailored to meet the needs of local communities. These arrangements are agreed and documented to record the roles and responsibilities of each party.

A new policy framework for kindergarten cluster management was launched in March 2010. The framework supports the development of a strong and effective kindergarten cluster management system that:

- underpins the delivery of high quality kindergarten programs across Victoria
- is available to every community based kindergarten in Victoria
- provides a platform for leadership in implementing reform in early childhood education and care
- is committed to the ongoing improvement of kindergarten service provision.


The *Kindergarten Cluster Management Policy Framework* outlines the five key components of an exemplary kindergarten cluster management arrangement, these are:

- geographically based clusters
- demonstration of robust governance and support infrastructure
- participation in local partnerships
- provision of professional development opportunities and career pathways for kindergarten staff
- fostering a culture of continuous improvement.
2. Kindergarten Cluster Management in Practice

The role of a kindergarten cluster management organisation

A kindergarten cluster management arrangement consists of a network of kindergarten locations - a minimum of three kindergarten locations in rural regions, and five locations in metropolitan regions. Each of these locations must deliver a funded kindergarten program.

The primary functions of a kindergarten cluster management organisation are:

- **Management and employment of staff** and all related activities such as recruitment and selection, salaries, tax, staff appraisals and professional development, management of staff and provision of pedagogical leadership

- **Compliance with licensing and funding requirements** and all related responsibilities. This includes becoming the licensee of the kindergarten locations, ensuring regulatory and funding requirements are met and liaising with DEECD officers

- **Good governance arrangements** that provide efficient and professional leadership and management systems

- **Financial management** of individual kindergarten funds including the development of annual budgets and financial reporting

- **Strategic planning and implementation of key government initiatives** such as those under the national reform agenda, for example Universal Access to 15 hours per week of Early Childhood Education by 2013. Kindergarten cluster managers are also responsible for linking kindergartens into Municipal Early Years Plans and other local early childhood networks and planning processes.

Any existing not-for-profit community service organisation or local council can take on the role as a kindergarten cluster manager.

Funding

Kindergarten cluster management organisations receive an annual grant for each approved location, to support the management and coordination of the kindergarten service. The kindergarten cluster management rate is subject to annual indexation at the non-government organisation rate. Effective 1 July 2010 the annual kindergarten cluster management grant is $7,662.

Kindergarten cluster management funding is additional to the per capita grant that all funded kindergarten services receive.

When adding new kindergarten locations, cluster managers also receive a one-off additional payment of 15% of the annual cluster management grant.

Since July 2008, all newly approved kindergarten cluster management organisations also receive a one-off $5,000 grant to support the development of good governance practices.

Funding quoted is exclusive of GST.

License application fees for locations joining a cluster are waived when the cluster manager is approved for that location, and subsequently becomes the new licensee of the children’s service operating that location. The licence fee will not be waived if the kindergarten cluster manager becomes the licensee prior to receiving approval for the annual kindergarten cluster grant for that location.

To promote stability across a cluster arrangement, kindergarten cluster managers retain ongoing funding of the cluster management grant for all approved kindergarten locations. This enables the kindergarten cluster to remain stable if locations are closed either permanently or temporarily. Funding will be maintained providing that no other organisation becomes the licensee of that licensed children’s service and that maintaining the funding is in the best interest of the local community. Where appropriate, cluster managers will be required to develop a business implementation plan to support the consolidation of one or more locations or to re-establish a kindergarten program that has ceased, within the next three years. The location grant may be withdrawn if the kindergarten program does not become operational within three years.

Non local government kindergarten cluster managers are eligible to use the kindergarten payroll service, free of charge. The payroll service will cover early childhood staff and/or ancillary staff employed by the eligible organisation who are engaged to work at the funded kindergarten location or provide administrative, management or professional support to funded kindergartens from a central office/location. Information is available in the Victorian Kindergarten Policy, Procedures and Funding criteria, a copy of which can be found at [http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/careankinder/funding/default.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/careankinder/funding/default.htm)
Monitoring

Kindergarten cluster managers are required to enter into a standard DEECD Service Agreement for Early Childhood Services. Kindergarten cluster managers will be monitored by the Department in a proactive and ongoing way to review continuing compliance with service delivery requirements and performance against kindergarten cluster management specifications. Service providers may be required to participate in program evaluation activities.

Kindergarten cluster managers will also be required to complete an Annual Service Improvement Plan.

To assist cluster managers in the delivery of the service, DEECD will:

- Provide funding and advice in a timely manner
- Provide regular updates on relevant policy directions and initiatives
- Undertake to address issues or problems at the earliest opportunity to reach resolution and
- Offer advice and assistance where appropriate.

An officer from the relevant DEECD regional office acts as the contact for each kindergarten cluster management organisation and provide support, advice and assistance in implementing the initiative.

Where performance is unsatisfactory the service provider and officers from the relevant DEECD region(s) will work in collaboration with the cluster management organisation to assist them to rectify any issues.

3. Application Process

An organisation seeking to become an approved kindergarten cluster manager must apply to the DEECD. The Deputy Secretary, Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination, DEECD, is the delegated authority to approve new kindergarten cluster management organisations and funding for new locations. Information about the application process is contained in the document Kindergarten Cluster Management: Application to become a kindergarten cluster management organisation which is available on the Department’s website at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/ecsmanagement/careankinder/clusters.htm

4. Regional Contact Details

Organisations interested in becoming a kindergarten cluster manager should contact the Regional Office of DEECD to discuss the application process. Regional staff will also be able to provide information about the interest expressed by local kindergartens in joining a cluster arrangement.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Contact Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Metropolitan Region</td>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>9265 2400</td>
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<td>Waverley</td>
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<td>Northern Metropolitan Region</td>
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