Riverbank Trust
YOUTH LITERACY · NORTH EAST ENGLAND

GRANT PROPOSAL

Reading Rooms: family literacy in three coastal wards

Turning underused community buildings into weekly reading rooms that reach the families least likely to attend a library.

AMOUNT REQUESTED	TOTAL PROJECT COST	DURATION	PEOPLE REACHED
£148,600	**£212,400**	**24 months**	**1,450 children**

Submitted to **The Vaughan Foundation** — Early Years & Literacy Programme
Funding round **Autumn 2026** · closing 30 September 2026
Reference **RBT-2026-RR** · submitted 4 August 2026

The Riverbank Trust (CIO) · Registered charity no. 1178342
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1. Summary of the Request

The Riverbank Trust requests £148,600 over 24 months to establish Reading Rooms in three coastal wards where child literacy at age eleven sits more than fifteen percentage points below the regional average. The programme places a trained facilitator and a rotating book collection into buildings families already use — a leisure centre, a food pantry and a community church hall — for two hours every week, at times set by the families themselves.

The model is not new to us. We have run a single Reading Room in Hebburn since 2023, and the children who attend regularly have closed roughly half the reading gap with their year group within four terms. What we have not been able to do is scale it: the Hebburn room is funded from unrestricted reserves and staffed by one part-time facilitator whose hours we cannot extend.

This proposal funds three new rooms, a shared collection of 2,400 books, a part-time programme coordinator, and an independent evaluation carried out by the education faculty at a regional university. The Trust and two local partners have already secured £63,800 of the total project cost in cash and in-kind contributions, set out in section 5.

2. Statement of Need

The three wards named in this proposal — Marine, Harbourside and Fell View — share a pattern familiar across the coastal North East. Each sits in the most deprived fifth of English neighbourhoods. Each lost its branch library between 2011 and 2016. In each, the proportion of children reaching the expected standard in reading at Key Stage 2 has fallen further behind the regional figure in every year since.

The barrier is not appetite. In a survey of 214 parents and carers we conducted across the three wards in March 2026, 78% said they would like to read more with their children, and 61% said they had not visited a library in the previous twelve months. The two most frequently cited obstacles were travel time and a feeling that libraries were "not for people like us". Only 9% cited a lack of interest.

Nor is the barrier a shortage of provision in the abstract. Two of the three wards are within four miles of a well-stocked central library. But four miles is two bus changes with a pushchair, and the central library closes at the hour the school run ends.

42%
of children in the three wards reach the expected reading standard at age 11, against 59% regionally

3
branch libraries closed across the three wards between 2011 and 2016; none has been replaced

61%
of surveyed parents had not visited a library in the previous twelve months

1 in 6
households in the wards report having fewer than ten books in the home

The Reading Rooms model answers the barrier that families actually described: it puts books, and someone to read them with, inside buildings those families already walk into every week. It does not ask them to travel, to join anything, or to be the kind of household that visits a library.

> *"I never took him to the library because I knew he'd be loud and I'd be the one getting looked at. At the pantry nobody minds. He picks two books every Thursday now and he reads one to me in the queue."*
>
> Parent, Hebburn Reading Room, interviewed February 2026

3. Our Organisation

The Riverbank Trust has worked on youth literacy in the North East since 2009. We employ eleven staff, nine of them part time, and work with a volunteer base of 74 people. Our annual income for the year ending March 2026 was £684,000, of which 71% was restricted grant funding and 22% earned income from our training programme.

We are not a delivery arm of any local authority and hold no statutory contracts. This independence matters to the model: our facilitators are trusted in settings — food pantries in particular — where families are guarded about anything that looks like it reports back to a statutory service.

3.1 Relevant track record

PROGRAMME	WHAT WE DELIVERED	FUNDER	VALUE
Hebburn Reading Room 2023 – present	Weekly sessions for 96 registered children; 62% of regular attenders moved up at least one reading band within four terms	Unrestricted	£38,200
Books at the Gate 2021 – 2024	Distributed 11,400 books through school gates at seven primaries; independently evaluated as improving home reading frequency	Tyne Community Fund	£96,500
Story Startters (early years) 2019 – 2022	Trained 140 nursery staff across 31 settings in dialogic reading technique	Vaughan Foundation	£124,000
Summer Shelf 2020 – present	Holiday reading programme reaching 400 children a year, retained 68% year on year	Mixed	£52,700

4. Objectives and Activities

Four objectives carry the programme. Each has a single named lead, one indicator, and a target that can be verified from records we already keep or from the independent evaluation described in section 6.

#	OBJECTIVE	PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES	INDICATOR	TARGET
O1	**Open and sustain three Reading Rooms** Programme Coordinator	Secure host agreements, fit out reading corners, recruit and train three facilitators, run weekly two-hour sessions in each ward	Sessions delivered	288 of 300
O2	**Reach children not currently using library provision** Programme Coordinator	Recruit through host settings, school gates and the food pantry network; deliberately avoid library mailing lists	Registered children	1,450
O3	**Improve reading confidence and frequency at home** Literacy Lead	Facilitator-led shared reading, take-home book loans, termly parent sessions on reading aloud	Children reading 3+ times a week at home	+28 pts
O4	**Build a model other organisations can run** Chief Executive	Document the operating model, publish the evaluation, run two open days for peer organisations	Organisations adopting the model	4

4.1 Delivery schedule

PERIOD	MILESTONE	OBJECTIVE	REPORTING
Months 1–3	Host agreements signed, facilitators recruited and trained, collection procured and catalogued	O1	Inception report
Months 4–6	All three rooms open and running weekly; baseline data collected from first 300 registrations	O1, O2	Quarter 2
Months 7–12	First full year of delivery; midpoint parent survey; termly parent sessions begin	O2, O3	Interim report
Months 13–18	Second-year delivery; peer open days; operating model documented and reviewed	O3, O4	Quarter 6
Months 19–24	Endline evaluation, publication, transition of two rooms to host-led delivery	O4	Final report

5. Budget and Justification

The budget below covers the full 24-month programme. Every line carries a justification tied to a specific objective or to the evaluation requirement. Salary costs include employer national insurance and a 4% pension contribution.

LINE ITEM	BASIS	AMOUNT (£)	JUSTIFICATION
STAFF			
Programme Coordinator	0.6 FTE × 24 months	48,600	Single point of accountability for host relationships, facilitator supervision and data collection across all three wards. Without a coordinator, the Hebburn room absorbed senior staff time we cannot repeat at three sites.
Reading Room facilitators (×3)	0.3 FTE each × 22 months	58,300	Each room requires a trained facilitator for the two-hour session plus preparation, book rotation and follow-up with families. Costed at the actual grade used in Hebburn.
Literacy Lead (existing staff)	0.1 FTE × 24 months	9,800	Provides technique training and quality assurance. Charged at cost; the balance of this post is met from unrestricted funds.

LINE ITEM	BASIS	AMOUNT (£)	JUSTIFICATION
Facilitator training and supervision	6 days + monthly supervision	4,700	Dialogic reading training and safeguarding refreshers. Delivered internally at cost, which is materially below the external market rate.
	Staff subtotal	**121,400**	
BOOKS AND MATERIALS			
Core collection	2,400 titles at £9.20 avg	22,080	800 titles per room across the 0–11 range, including dual-language and accessible-format titles. Priced from our existing supplier agreement.
Take-home lending stock	1,100 titles at £6.40 avg	7,040	Loss rates on take-home stock run at roughly 18% in Hebburn. We treat this as a programme cost rather than chasing families for replacements.
Reading corner fit-out	3 rooms at £1,600	4,800	Shelving, floor seating and storage that can be packed away between sessions, since all three hosts share their space with other users.
Printed parent materials	24 months	980	Termly take-home guidance on reading aloud, produced in three community languages.
	Books and materials subtotal	**34,900**	
EVALUATION			
Independent evaluation	University contract	19,500	Baseline, midpoint and endline measurement by an education faculty with no delivery interest in the programme. Required for objective 4 to be credible to adopting organisations.
Data collection and participant incentives	24 months	5,000	Vouchers for parents completing survey waves, at the rate our ethics review requires. Response rates in the survey stage of this work were 71% with incentives and 34% without.
	Evaluation subtotal	**24,500**	

LINE ITEM	BASIS	AMOUNT (£)	JUSTIFICATION
OVERHEADS AND DELIVERY			
Host contributions	3 sites × 24 months	10,800	A modest payment to each host towards heat, light and caretaking. Two hosts waived this; it is retained for the third, a leisure centre that must staff the building.
Travel	24 months	4,300	Facilitator and coordinator travel between three coastal sites with limited public transport links.
Support costs	9% of direct costs	16,500	Finance, HR, safeguarding and IT, apportioned on our published cost-allocation policy. Below the 12% our auditors calculate as full recovery.
	Overheads and delivery subtotal	**31,600**	
	Total project cost	**212,400**	

5.1 Matched and in-kind contributions

SOURCE	STATUS	TYPE	AMOUNT (£)
The Riverbank Trust (reserves)	Committed	Cash	24,000
Tyne Community Fund	Awarded 12 June 2026	Cash	18,500
Harbourside Food Pantry	Confirmed in writing	In-kind (space)	8,400
Fell View Community Church	Confirmed in writing	In-kind (space)	7,200
Northern Books Ltd	Confirmed in writing	In-kind (stock)	5,700
		Secured from other sources	**63,800**
		Requested from The Vaughan Foundation	**148,600**

6. Outcomes and Evaluation

The logic model below connects what the grant buys to the change we expect to see. We claim outputs and outcomes; impact is stated as a contribution, not an attribution, and the evaluation is designed accordingly.

INPUTS

- £148,600 grant
- £63,800 matched
- 3 host settings
- 3 trained facilitators
- 2,400-title collection

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OUTPUTS

- 288 weekly sessions
- 1,450 children registered
- 9,000 book loans
- 12 parent sessions
- 2 peer open days

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OUTCOMES

- More frequent shared reading at home
- Higher reading confidence among attenders
- Sustained attendance across four terms
- Model adopted by 4 peer organisations

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IMPACT

- Narrowed reading attainment gap in three coastal wards
- Reading provision that survives the grant period

6.1 How we will measure it

OUTCOME	BASELINE	TARGET	METHOD	WHEN
Shared reading 3+ times weekly at home	31%	59%	Parent survey	M4, M12, M24
Child reading-confidence score	2.4 / 5	3.6 / 5	Validated scale	M4, M12, M24
Regular attendance (8+ of 12 sessions)	n/a	55%	Attendance record	Termly
Reading band movement	n/a	+1 band, 60%	School data sharing	M12, M24
Organisations adopting the model	0	4	Follow-up survey	M24

The evaluation is contracted to a university education faculty with no role in delivery. Baseline collection happens in month four, once each room has a stable registration list, with midpoint and endline waves at months twelve and twenty-four. Attendance and loan data come from records we already maintain, so the survey burden on families is limited to three short waves.

We will publish the full evaluation, including any negative findings, within three months of the endline wave. The Hebburn evaluation was published on the same terms in 2025.

7. Sustainability and Risk

Two of the three rooms are designed to transfer to host-led delivery at the end of the grant. Both hosts have agreed in principle to absorb the facilitator hours into existing staffing if the evaluation supports it, and the book collection transfers with the room at no cost. The third site, the leisure centre, is more likely to require continued external funding; we have begun conversations with two regional funders about a follow-on award covering that room alone.

The collection itself is a durable asset. On our Hebburn experience, roughly 70% of stock remains serviceable after four years, so the cost of running a room in years three and four falls to facilitator time and a modest replenishment budget.

RISK	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	MITIGATION
A host setting withdraws or closes	Medium	High	Written host agreements with a six-month notice period; two reserve settings identified in each ward; the model is portable by design and all fit-out is demountable.
Facilitator recruitment is slow in coastal wards	Medium	Medium	Recruit from the existing volunteer base, where seven people already hold the relevant training; stagger room openings by up to eight weeks if required.
Families register but do not attend regularly	Medium	High	Session times set by the families themselves at each site; take-home loans give value even to irregular attenders; attendance reviewed monthly with host partners.
School data sharing is not agreed	Low	Medium	Reading band movement is a secondary measure; the primary outcomes rest on parent survey and attendance data we collect directly.
Cost inflation on book stock	Low	Low	Supplier agreement fixes pricing for eighteen months; in-kind stock from Northern Books provides further buffer.

DECLARATION

We confirm that the information given in this application is accurate and complete, that The Riverbank Trust (CIO) has the legal power to carry out the activities described, and that our most recent audited accounts and safeguarding policy have been supplied with this application. We agree to report against the schedule in section 4 and to notify The Vaughan Foundation promptly of any material change to the programme, its budget or its leadership.

Helen Marsh
Chief Executive
The Riverbank Trust (CIO)
Date: _______________

David Aluko
Chair of Trustees
The Riverbank Trust (CIO)
Date: _______________