



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY

Evaluation of the 'National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum'

May 2025

What is the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum (NLCBF)?

The NLCBF was established in 2003, following the Leaving Care Act, as a **forum for local authorities to share good practice around supporting young people leaving care**, who continue to face multiple challenges including housing, mental health and cost of living pressures.

Today, the forum is comprised of **over 130 local authority leaving care teams** and aims to **improve services and support for care experienced young people**. At the heart of our work is our Young People's Benchmarking Forum (YPBMF) – ensuring that the voices and priorities of care experienced young people shape our work. The NLCBF is part of the charity Catch22.

NLCBF's main activities include:

- Running 9 hybrid events each year for leaving care professionals and care experienced young people. Our next event will be held in November.
- Facilitating online events and workshops throughout the year, including four networks/communities of practice.
- Amplifying the voices of care experienced young people through the YPBMF, through forum activities and national events.
- Hosting a members website for more than 2500 leaving care professionals.
- Offering support and guidance to LA leaving care teams with practice and policy queries.
- Influencing policy & practice at a LA, regional and national level, including through working closely with the Department for Education (DfE), Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), Ofsted etc.
- Playing an active role in the Children in Care and Care Leavers Alliance, including the co-chairing the Care Leavers Month & Mental health subgroups.

Why an evaluation now?

The NLCBF has been through a period of ongoing growth since it was established in 2003 – including the addition of 50 local authority members since 2018. The move into hybrid and online events during covid has led to an improved membership offer for local authorities. Alongside this, the profile and reach of the forum's messages have never been stronger, particularly supported with the launch of NLCBF's public website.

At the end of March 2026, we will reach the end of the Forum's current strategy. As we look to the future, we want to better understand how to develop the work of NLCBF further through understanding:



- 1) Which elements of our work have the most impact for care experienced young people & local authorities – through both our local and national work.
- 2) The unique contribution & opportunity for NLCBF amongst the partner leaving care organisations we work with.
- 3) Which activities we should prioritise and which areas we should consider developing work in, for future impact.
- 4) Recommendations on how to evidence the impact of NLCBF in the future.

In 2021, another evaluation looked specifically at the work of the YPBMF and provided recommendations for the future, many of which have been put into practice. As the YPBMF is an integral part of the NLCBF, we expect that this research will reference the previous evaluation report and progress made against the recommendations that came out of it, **but without replicating the existing work that has already been done.**

Eligibility

Individual researchers, organisations or consortia are invited to submit proposals for this evaluation. Applicants **must be based in the United Kingdom.**

Budget

A fee of up to **GBP 22,000** has been made available for this evaluation. **This does not include VAT**, so please indicate how much you would be required to pay as **NLCBF/Catch22 will be covering that cost separately.** Budgets will be reviewed with respect to the strength of the proposal in meeting the project objectives in a cost-effective manner - we do not simply prioritise the lowest budget.

As part of the proposal, please prepare a brief budget with the following breakdown:

- Personnel cost
- Other direct costs (e.g. training workshops, refreshments, reimbursements of participant costs and advisory group compensation, software licences, devices or tools for data collection).
- Overheads
- How much you will be paying in VAT.

Please do **include budget for reimbursing YPBMF members** for any participation in either data collection or through Advisory Group membership, considering at least £10/hour. The NLCBF team can manage the arrangements for distributing vouchers for YPBMF members involved in the consultation process.

Note that there is **no need to include design costs for the report**, which we will arrange to be designed by our internal design team.

Proposal deadline



Proposals and enquiries should be submitted via email to Matilde Chora, at Matilde.Chora@catch-22.org.uk, **no later than Wednesday 18th of June, 5pm UK time**. Proposals should be no more than 6 pages, plus CVs and annexes.

Evaluation objectives and main research questions

The scope of this evaluation is to examine the impact and influence of the NLCBF, including assessing the impact of our approach and its sustainability, uncovering distinctive advantages and obstacles, and identifying potential areas for improvement. The evaluation will aim to yield key insights to inform the future strategy of the NLCBF so that it can better serve its mission of improving leaving care practices and policies across England.

To do this, the selected evaluation team will focus on the key thematic areas highlighted below, which will serve to guide specific research questions.

- **Thematic area 1:** What are the **main outcomes** for the YPBMF and NLCBF members, and how would members describe their **experience**? How would local authorities describe the **membership offer**?
 - **Thematic area 2:** To what extent has the NLCBF contributed towards **more collaboration** between local authorities and the **development of initiatives** directed at care experienced young people?
 - **Thematic area 3:** Are there any **knowledge gaps and practical challenges** related to care leaving policies and practices that are not being addressed by the Forum?
 - **Thematic area 4:** What has been the impact of the NLCBF in **influencing leaving care policies and practices at different levels**, and ensuring that **young people's voices are represented** in such changes?
 - **Thematic area 5:** What progress has been made against the recommendations stated in the **YPBMF evaluation report**? What still needs to be done?
 - **Thematic area 6:** what should the focus be in terms of **future investments**? How should the NLCBF **monitor its impact** going forward?
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Research methodology

Advisory Group: The evaluation should ideally include the involvement of an Advisory Group, comprised of care experienced young people, to guide the research, helping to refine the objectives, review and give ethical approval of the research methods and tools, and give feedback on findings. The NLCBF can help to offer this opportunity and facilitate their participation. The evaluation team should recommend a suitable composition and way of working (including compensation for time allocations) for this committee.



Mixed methods approach: The NLCBF/Catch22 invites applicants to propose a suitable methodology for achieving the objectives of the evaluation. We seek to obtain **both quantitative and qualitative findings** from the evaluation, therefore, applications that describe a comprehensive mixed method approach would be given preference. Kindly include the data collection methods and sources of information. Preference will be given to candidates who are willing to suggest more **innovative and interactive data collection approaches with young people**.

Stakeholder participation: Please outline which stakeholders you will engage with and justify your proposed sample and its size. Consideration should be given to how these individuals can be accessed and engaged with in a manner which encourages honest responses. The NLCBF will be support with connections with local authority members and key stakeholders. .

Data quality and analysis: Describe the procedures that will be in place to ensure a high level of data quality. Describe the methods and tools used for data analysis at different levels. Describe the data analysis plan, including any data analysis software and rationale for its use, proposed analysis methods and a rough timeline. The work plan should allow for sufficient time for inputs from the NLCBF/Catch22 before finalisation.

Operational, safeguarding and ethical considerations: Highlight any logistical, ethical and/or safeguarding issues with the proposed methodology, such as encouraging candid responses, handling of potentially sensitive information, confidentiality of respondents, sensitivity and respect to stakeholders, Do No Harm etc. Please indicate how you will monitor responses provided and mitigate response bias that may influence the research.

Main deliverables and high-level timeline

Main deliverables	Proposed timeline
Kick off meeting with NLCBF/Catch22 team	July 2025
Complete desk review of NLCBF documents and discussions with the NLCBF/Catch22 team	July 2025
Finalise suitable evaluation/research methodology to answer the evaluation objectives outlined above, presented as a research protocol, which includes a realistic sampling strategy, an initial draft of all relevant data collection tools, work plan and ethical considerations. NLCBF/Catch22 team needs at least 2 weeks to review.	August 2025
Plan for Advisory Group engagement finalised and initial meetings conducted	August 2025
Data collection phase	September 2025 - October 2025
Complete data cleaning and analysis	November 2025
Presentation of emerging themes to NLCBF/Catch22 and NLCBF Steering Group	3 rd December 2025
Draft report	January 2026
Final report	February 2026



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Presentation final findings: NLCBF Steering Group (March 26, Milton Keynes)

11th March 2026

Proposal format

Interested parties should prepare a proposal of no more than 6 pages plus CVs and annexes. Proposals should contain the following sections:

1. **Short biography of project lead(s) and key team members**, outlining relevant subject matter expertise and prior experience leading similar research projects. CV(s) of the project lead(s) should be included in the annex. Past report(s) from similar projects could be included as a link or in a separate annex.
2. **Methodology**, addressing the topics listed in the 'Research methodology' section of this document. This may include an estimation of sample sizes for each stakeholder group, data collection methods that will be used, and types of tools that might be applied.
3. **Team structure**, defining the role and time commitment of key project team members.
4. **High-level work plan** with timing of key project deliverables and proposed format of final report.
5. **Proposed budget** in GBP.

The proposal must be written in English and sent electronically in Microsoft Office or PDF format.

Criteria and scoring for assessing proposals

In reviewing proposals, the NLCBF/Catch22 will use the following criteria:

Technical criteria	Weighting
a. Technical capacity of the evaluation team, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Experience of conducting evaluations, with an advanced understanding of relevant quantitative and/or qualitative research techniques (dependent on the proposed method).- Demonstrated experience of conducting research and evaluation on sensitive topics and/or with vulnerable groups (such as experience of working with care experienced individuals).- Experience of using creative/innovative methods for data collection with young people or other types of research audiences.- Fluency in English.	50%
b. Contextual knowledge of the research team, including on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Familiarity with human rights issues and/or types of issues faced by care leavers.- Familiarity with working with NGOs.	10%

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c. Team structure, including:

- Adequate staffing levels to deliver quality project outputs within the desired timeframe.
- Ability to conduct data collection in England.
- Diversity among its team members.

30%

Financial criteria

d. Costs are proportionate to the scale of work being proposed, and consideration of all potential expenses.

10%

Total

100%

Commissioning timeline

28th May 2025

Release of this Request for Proposals.

**18th June 2025
5pm UK time**

Proposals due.

Please submit all documents to Matilde Chora at Matilde.Chora@catch-22.org.uk with "Proposal for NLCBF Evaluation" as the email subject line.

2nd July 2025

All shortlisted research teams will be notified, and interviews will be scheduled.

11th July 2025

Notification and feedback from Catch 22

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