

This version of the google doc has been edited to remove identifying details and contact data

# Funding a Democracy Network

10:00am – 11:15am GMT, Tuesday 1 December 2020

**Useful links** [Democracy Map](#)  
[Democracy Map Taxonomy](#)  
[Networking for Democracy](#)  
[Democracy Action](#)

Join JRRT to discuss ways forward for a Democracy Network to strengthen the work of the democracy sector.

JRRT is funding a number of initiatives to strengthen the democracy sector. Earlier this year, we commissioned Joe Mitchell (ex Democracy Club) to produce *Networking for Democracy*, an analysis of sector needs and perspectives. It concludes that building better connections within and outside the sector is a priority capacity building need; and that there is a good case and support for building a “network”.

The JRRT Board has made a commitment in principle to fund a network and will host a Zoom call on Tuesday 1 December at 10am to discuss a draft Call for Proposals and to hear views from across the sector.

## Speaker bios

**Fiona Weir** is Chief Executive of [JRRT](#) and previously worked for a number of national campaigning organisations environment, human rights, development, children, family and poverty sectors.

**Jessica Kennedy** is Head of the UK Democracy Fund. She previously advised the Greater London Authority on democratic participation and worked as a community organiser in the migrant justice and social justice sectors.

**Joe Mitchell** is a freelance consultant. He's the author of the recent '[Networking for Democracy](#) report', an analysis of the needs of the sector and proposals for new networking efforts. He previously helped set up and run Democracy Club to build digital infrastructure to get election information to voters. He also has experience in government, politics and campaign organisations.

**Jonny Chambers** is a consultant at [Koreo](#) - a learning consultancy helping people, organisations and networks explore more about themselves, each other and the world around us. Having previously worked in politics and the campaigning and charity sectors, Jonny has more recently been part of several initiatives convening within the democracy sector, including leading the 'Mapping the Democracy Movement' project and the development of the [UK Democracy Map](#) funded by Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust.

**Hannah Swirsky** is the Campaigns Coordinator for [Centenary Action Group](#), a coalition of organisations and activists working to remove the barriers to women's political representation. Hannah previously worked in Parliament as a Researcher for an MP and providing the Secretariat to the APPG on Miscarriages of Justice. She then worked at René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, campaigning on issues including immigration detention, modern slavery and discrimination against Traveller and Roma communities

## Agenda

### Introduction

#### Facilitation and purpose (10 mins)

*Jessica Kennedy and Fiona Weir from JRRT*

JRRT has been developing a democracy strategy.

Democracy problems not new or confined to UK but Brexit and COVID have exposed shortcomings  
Cambridge research earlier this year shows a sharp fall in faith in democracy in UK population

Is the democracy sector too atomised?

JRRT stepping up “Strengthening the sector” activity - convening, Research, Newsletter, UK Democracy Fund  
We are encouraged by seeing more collaborations.

We would like to commit to funding a network if people want it.  
But we don't want to bring to the table a template for what it should look like, but base this on your needs. The network needs to be shaped and trusted by the sector and responsive to it.  
We're sharing our Call for Proposals (emailed with event details), please give feedback, criticism, suggestions.  
We're deciding next steps at JRRT Board on 11 December and will be looking at google.doc addition comments until Thursday 3 Dec

# Reflections

## Why do we need a network now? (10 mins)

### *Jonny Chambers*

I work at Koreo, we are working on "Mapping the democracy movement" funded by JRRT to understand people working on democracy issues.  
We have developed a taxonomy of democracy activities  
Launched UK Democracy Map - open database of orgs and projects about democracy in the UK, please sign up (link) [Democracy Map](#)  
We recognise a vibrant democracy sector with big and varied ambitions.  
But small, informal, lacking capacity, connection  
Connected and interrelated issues, but also contested, and bleeds into other issues.  
Organisations and individuals are lacking in capacity, esp to sustain coordination activity (esp due to project funding)  
We think a network could really help! Both for orgs and individuals, and the sector as a whole.  
Reduce repetition, increase impact.  
Why now?  
    Good quick deep impact because of the sector's size and shape  
    Doesn't need lots of bureaucracy or effort.  
Please sign up to [Democracy Map](#)

People may also be interested in the taxonomy we developed as part of the mapping project to help start the conversation about shape, definition and constituent parts of the sector -  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iIRuvEqoeAvZc6s7qfoUC\\_DXK3e1mibpfpQ7yAindy0/](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iIRuvEqoeAvZc6s7qfoUC_DXK3e1mibpfpQ7yAindy0/)

### *Joe Mitchell*

Link to ['Networking for democracy' report](#)

Jonny and I didn't know each other 6 months ago, we produced two independent reports (quant, external view / qual internal).

I interviewed to 50 people this summer, and confirmed my suspicions:

- There is a democracy sector
- It's weaker than it should be.
- Working together is hard.
- It's fragmented, and underfunded.
- We need a shared vision, and to communicate it to the public.
- We want better connections inside and outside the sector
- Better at communicating
- Sector wide Operational assistance
- Sector wide Organising
- Sector wide Evaluation

Looking at this with a 5-10 year perspective  
Perhaps growing public understanding of democratic deficit, which we could exploit.  
The best time to plant an olive tree is 25 years ago, the second best time is today.

## Working as part of a network (5 mins)

### *Hannah Swirsky*

Centenary Action group - organisations and activists removing barriers to womens' political representation. <https://www.centenaryaction.org.uk/>

Positives

- Wide range of skills and talents
- Can react quickly to advocacy opportunities
- Can pool political/policy knowledge
- Range of voices / intersectional barriers (particularly from smaller orgs / BAME)
- It's helped to break silos.
- Led to new projects.
- Members have shared goals, but don't agree on strategy.
- Quotas/all women shortlists is
- Central coordination is important to keep members informed and engaged.
- Core organisations who are most engaged, which sometimes means others are marginalised.
- Monthly meetings.
- Activists in residence - budget for activists with big networks to engage in the campaigns and

campaign themselves

<https://thetriplecripples.uk/we-are-centenary-action-groups-activists-in-residence>

- More engagement in campaigns

Challenges

- Be clear on remit

Many orgs don't have women's political representation as main focus  
We get requests to do things /share things outside of scope  
Some things can take longer because you need to get agreement

# Breakout Discussions

## Zoom Groups (20 mins)

*Facilitators: Ben, Fiona, Hannah, Joe, Jonny, Katharine (TBC) or Jessica*

1. Is a democracy network what the sector needs now? Is JRRT's approach (to be open, and not prescriptive) the right one?
2. What are the most pressing needs a network should address? What is it for?
3. What advice would you give to JRRT in seeking to fund an effective network? What risks and challenges do you see to a democracy network?

## Top lines from discussion (Ben)

<http://movementschool.us/> <- empowering new activists and leaders, something maybe replicate in the uk

1. Is a democracy network what the sector needs now? Is JRRT's approach (to be open, and not prescriptive) the right one?

Yes, what we need; have networks, lots of overlap – if something happening, why do again;

What's different about this – can have some resources; lots of informal networks, need to demonstrate that collaboration works; if can't prove extreme collaboration works sector has problems

because democracy sector – cash strapped, head above water, collaboration is difficult – how to incentivise across sector

Digital action - digital harms to democracy; model of network to convene and coordinate, highlighted problems within sector – mainly funding structures – incentive to collaborate is not there when having as an organisation to demonstrate impact by owning success – existential future depends on showing achievements; hard to believe authentic when collaboration is stated intention of funders

Push and pull of how authentically capturing energies within sector? Thousand flowers bloom or set it up as have strong ideas on what needs to happen to improve democracy: essentially, is this shaping the sector or creating a megaphone for work going on?

If can create a visible platform – reformation/unfreezing allows for new actors – timing really good from that point of view.

2. What are the most pressing needs a network should address? What is it for?

Network – extreme collaboration – also radical inclusion – go out of way to include as many as possible; many in society don't get involved; what support to expand the reach of the network?

More of this conversation and discussion – great; movement school – training people aspiring to be activists to give them basic tools – great model.

Radical inclusion – agree – amplification and connection – understanding interconnectedness of problems – same problematics/inequalities of power across structures and a network can interface with other movements – democracy often seen on the fringes

3. What advice would you give to JRRT in seeking to fund an effective network? What risks and challenges do you see to a democracy network?

Need to consider function: from the particular, like school strikes, to a bigger paradigm shift – are we entering new 21st century form of participation driven by equality, sustainability etc – where on spectrum should we be? Where do resources go? What isn't being funded that seems to be critical? What are the gaps in funding? Are we about incremental changes or radical change – a reform like PR or a bigger shift?

Movement generosity – excess capacity – how to build in so can come together quickly to defend/advocate?

Civic tech space waiting for things to do; we want to fill the gaps; tell us what to do and fund us.

## Top lines from discussion (Fiona)

1. Is it needed right now?

- Experience of other networks (e.g. in law has been very helpful - working together on responses / papers / cover whole field of activity) — can be formal or informal — but concern can be seen as left-wing activist lawyers
- JRRT one of few organisations that could take this on
- Practical support - e.g. suitable Ts&Cs, bullying policy
- Currently orgs with similar missions don't always coordinate for maximum impact in campaigning - good example given
- A funders' network is a good idea
  - Questions – practical support, capacity building. NCVO & NPC doing something similar, etc, Name Democracy Network uncomfortable – do we have the right to define Democracy? CF Gov appropriation of Living Wage. This should belong to everybody, who it's for and how it's named
- Must be non-partisan and not ideological
- Risk of centralising power
- It is useful to be open at this stage - but it will only take you so far - will need to define functions and parameters

2. What are the most pressing needs a network should address? What is it for?

3. What advice would you give to JRRT in seeking to fund an effective network? What risks and challenges do you see to a democracy network?

- Liberty sees a clear set of challenges right now - the proposals on p48 of the Conservative manifesto sets the agenda - to collaborate on
- Broadening the amount of organisations raising concerns about reforms
- Set up projects within the network
- Public engagement - how to frame issues - bit of work at Involve but wider job for sector on how we communicate
- Building funding - are there more collaborative approaches that could be taken?
- Smaller networks can be better for practical help; focus should be campaigning

### Top lines from discussion (Hannah)

- We absolutely need the network and the approach is great
- Top things for the network to do - enable collaboration and resource sharing, to take a more campaigning approach and join together for lobbying purposes
- A risk is that the network isn't given enough attention / encouragement / management - typically networks don't self-manage - hopefully this will be largely self-managing with plenty of support
- Networks of networks – signposting to others and representing a wider range of views. Currently all having to work out who else is working in this space on own
- Entering anti-democratic force. Need to work together to hold ground – existential situation e.g. in USA
- Seen as non-partisan but problematic when issues are cast as partisan issues e.g. climate change or having a functioning democracy. Backlash from Charity Commission - network should help orgs navigate this. Democracy needs to be listed as issue charities can campaign on

### Top lines from discussion (Joe)

- **Big yes** — focus on community voice from GLA world (did a strategic partnership) — need to involve **the groups that are supposed to benefit in the design of things**
- Would recommend not having just one network — try to get across the groups
- Pressing needs:
- **Hard to find out what else is going on at the moment**
- Democracy Club Slack
- Identify common themes
- Observer! (CAAT does anti-corruption work — it is related)
- Local stuff — all about personal relationships, small network benefits, adhoc basis means we come to help one another when necessary
- **Collate local democracy activity to find national issues, and educate national level about local level.**
- Very supportive
- Dave on local notwestminster — but at a **national level; create space for magic to happen;**
  - i.e. support existing actors to flourish
  - Would like to see a national survey maybe (could link to Democratic Audit?)
  - Support the idea of 'coordinating the coordinators'
- Pressing needs:
  - find common themes to concentrate on
  - Finding overlapping projects
- **Network of networks**
- Networks exist whether you can see them or not, how can you see what's there?
- There are things, and some catalogues, but **relationships are not mapped**
  - I tend to find the way to do this is to map the forums and (internal) publications
    - Can also be surveyed
    - Important to know what kinds of relationships you want to map e.g. 'I know...'. 'I work with...'. 'I give money to...'. 'I join in campaigns with...'. All of those questions yield different relationship maps and the full network map is a composite of them all.
- In the long-term **want to see more specialisation** happening in the sector; new orgs and roles that serve the sector itself (democracy club is a good example) - this will look like "infrastructure"
- And improvement in new career paths... junior roles and senior pathways — more like a 5 year thing
- **Democracy sector in some way a foundation for every other campaign...**
  - So hopefully we can increase money for this sector significantly.
- Covid-19 has showed that funders can be more flexible...
- Major democratic crises approach next year — 2021 — **we don't have so much time** (e.g. voter ID)
- Innovation sandpits: hack weekends
- Is democracy too broad — could we agree on a couple of tangible goals
- Open Source, open license everything
- Central / decentralised debate
- If it's not resourced, then the largest organisations in the space tend to dominate it
- But if it is resourced, then it tends towards centralisation
  - though there are ways to mitigate this! Open source,
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### Top lines from discussion (Jonny)

Participants: Harriet Andrew, James Weinberg, Jane Thomas, Frances Foley, Jessica Metheringham, Greg Sanderson, Jonny Chambers, James Moulding, Harry Pearse

- **Is a democracy network what the sector needs right now? Is this the correct approach?**
- Covid and Brexit have re-emphasised issues/ a crisis of governance
- Having a wider view of the sector is valuable, democracy sector often separated, fragmented into various bubbles
- Democracy sector includes a range of organisations with differing goals and practices, its perhaps a more diverse sector - it straddles more, hence the greater fragmentation
- Many organisations are half in the democracy sector and half in another sector -- campaigners, educational organisations, political parties (both local government and national)

- In the last 5 years or so the sector has grown somewhat, but often a limited understanding of other organisations often doing very similar work.
- The sector has lots of organisations that are half in, or only engage at election time. Do we need a two tier network to support the different types of actors?
- Organisations often limit collaboration and working together to maximise funding for their own projects
- There is a demand for a hub where those -- evaluation?
- **What are the most pressing needs a network should address? What is it for?**
- Democracy sector is woefully underfunded, how can the network leverage more cash for the sector?
- Does the proposed network include the wider UK constitutional arrangements, Wales, Scotland, NI
- We should ensure we don't lose useful existing networks -- Jane mentioned the Brexit Civil Society Alliance.

## Top lines from discussion (Katharine)

1. Is a democracy network what the sector needs now? Is JRRT's approach (to be open, and not prescriptive) the right one?

- Generally people support the idea
- Organisations spend a lot of time building spreadsheets and doing mapping - and know that others are doing exactly the same thing, but there's no channel to coordinate or collaborate.
- This shouldn't just be about the big moments of the elections. Look at Migrant Rights Network, which had huge momentum and salience around it early on: recognise when the network is supporting business as usual (evaluation, networking) and when there are peaks (big moments, collective action)
- We're all talking to the same people who are already interested, but not talking to people who
- We over-complicate things by getting into what kind of PR we need, so bust the myths and simplify the asks so we're not making the FPTP asks for them. So we need to do that education work
- Lack of funding and capacity in the sector – people don't have the capacity to look around and figure out to collaborate
- Another key feature of this sector is the way activity surges around election cycles –projects live and die around elections so there isn't that sustained engagement.
- So there's duplication and sector isn't building and learning. A lot of reinventing the wheel.

2. What are the most pressing needs a network should address? What is it for?

- Recognise that there are some networks existing at the moment, so this one can be broader, more inclusive
- Political education
- Evidence and evaluation
- Shifting norms: a democracy that's more of an everyday practice
- Match-making of skills and needs and interests - demonstrating practical value to the network
- Democracy sector isn't engaging with 'online harms' debate enough? Is this a potential 'quick win'?
- Building civil society power: need shared assets (e.g. polling, segmentation, research, evidence, case studies from across sectors/campaigns/movements) and shared vision
- **Long-term** norms and vision, and develop and mature the sector
- **Short-term**, transactional things are important and don't necessarily need that shared vision and shifting norms. Things to enable the sector to reduce duplication, identify and fill gaps, and improve their work
  - Convening and connecting people – the matchmaking of skills and needs Nick mentioned - and hopefully facilitating collaboration. Enabling people to share information and knowledge more effectively
    - Focus also on the intersections of campaigns and movements, connect allies and share tactics and learnings across campaigns and sectors
  - Building a shared sector knowledge and learning

3. What advice would you give to JRRT in seeking to fund an effective network? What risks and challenges do you see to a democracy network?

- Argue the case for why Democracy is not a partisan issue. A fair voting system is not a partisan issue. Tackle the reasons why issues are incorrectly cast as partisan.
- Must argue the case for the Charity Commission recognising that Democracy is a valid theme for charities to campaign for and defend
- Who's not in the room? Which organisations and individuals do we need to be sure are included and supported
- Move quickly! The sector urgently needs this. There is more to be gained from getting something off the ground than waiting to perfect an idea.
- Think about how you can bring other funders into this space.

# Plenary Discussion

## Feedback from Zoom Groups

1. Is there any important point that hasn't yet been mentioned?
2. Is there anything that you want to draw particular attention to?
3. How do we reconcile these differences of opinion?

How do we recognise that the network will not be able to be all things to all people?

Challenges - what do we mean by 'democracy' and what do we mean by 'network'? Open approach is good at this stage, but only takes you so far - will need to become decisive on what it's for and about. There are then questions about how that decision is taken.

One thing a network can do early on is identify common problems that several of us think we have to solve and then can set up projects and innovation sandpits directed at problems identified. So part of network's work could be definitional analysis of challenges?

Build credibility through action.

Finding the right people with the right skillset will be a big challenge - need for it to be iterative and organic

Constantly having to respond to latest calls for evidence, select committee etc, make sure represented, at the expense of leading the way on thinking - question for network: do we want to be thought leaders or responding to desperate attacks on aspects of democracy?

Capacity question - hard to take a lead if constantly responding

Fair Vote convening - great learning - just information sharing alone has been invaluable to organisations involved

Objectives of network - ultimately action and campaigning - what in common as opposed to constant differentiation as competitive space, small donor pool etc. Identify themes and make it work - change dynamic. Is a real driver in space to be competitive so an obvious but real challenge to focus on what's held in common.

Very tempting to think of networks as about information and messages. Networks really shine when you think about career paths, new organisations - not just about campaigners - if can change way funders and government networks work can have dramatic impact.

Previous unsuccessful experience of networks - why did they fail? Need to understand to avoid making mistakes.

## Wrap Up

Appetite for initiative - caution over challenges

Thinking about what it is not and not duplicating what is going on, but assist in reducing duplication

Resource challenges are a key issue to think about

Information sharing - thoughts on campaigning, the dispersed nature of the network, the work needed to underpin any initiative.

## Informal Networking

JRRT representatives will leave and the session will close after a further thirty minutes.

# Questions, Comments & Feedback

Please feel free to add further questions & comments for JRRT to consider below:

"Re Hannah's talk - need for public consultation and engagement with legislative process. Court of Appeal recently ruled against the Secretary of State in making some coronavirus regulations which removed some legal protections for children. Court ruled it unlawful because the Secretary of State did not consult with the Children's Commissioner and various children's charities before making the Regulations.

The case is here [https://www.bailii.org/cgi-](https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2020/1577.html&query=(title:(+Article+))+AND+(title:(+39+)))

[bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2020/1577.html&query=\(title:\(+Article+\)\)+AND+\(title:\(+39+\)\)](https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2020/1577.html&query=(title:(+Article+))+AND+(title:(+39+)))

And is called Article 39 v Secretary of State [2020] EWCA Civ 1577

The parts on public participation is found at paragraphs 29 onwards"

"Could this group work together to get the charity commission to add 'democracy' to the list of appropriate objectives for charities?"

"I think a Democracy Network is a brilliant idea, which could add so much value - and is a role that JRRT is almost uniquely well placed to crystallise. Thanks for organising this meeting, which I thought was very encouraging."

"Agree with the comment above, JRRT is in a unique position to act on this, which is why it is so important and urgent to act."

"Focus on the practical as much as the theoretical. We aren't going to find the perfect solution that meets everyone's needs but we can help with many urgent challenges faced by the sector right now."

"The network should be led by the community. So by its nature, it should be organic and it should evolve. It shouldn't be overly influenced by the perspectives of the conveners, and certainly not the funders. Good for JRRT to be aware of the risks there."

"Can we look closely at the intended audience for the network? Is it aimed at changing minds of the general public, or influencing politicians?"

"Look at NEON -- is there a role for a similar media-based initiative, and could this be a (small) part of this?"

"There was a conversation about matchmaking between organisations. Yes please!"

"In the spirit of building networks and collaboration, **I'd like to invite all of you to join the Alliance to Make Votes Matter**: <https://www.makevotesmatter.org.uk/the-pr-alliance>. We are a very diverse group united in the single goal of achieving Proportional Representation for the House of Commons - we see that as the keystone to bringing in all the other much-needed improvements to our democracy. Being a member simply means supporting the objective that seats equal votes - there are no obligations, just occasional invitations - we meet quarterly."

"Suggest starting small and targeted in areas where a network can add specific value to specific people/organisations, and then expanding overtime from there. Rather than starting too broad in form or function."

"As per the original brief from JRRT, given the range of views about the different areas in which the network should operate, the first task of the network coordinator will need to be to agree a Terms of Reference for their work with the

likely participants in the network. The TOR would set out the Network's objectives, audience, scope etc. The network coordinator, to pick up on concerns expressed in our group, will need to seek out organisations not already in the loop to ask whether they would want to be involved and what they believe the objectives of the network should be."