

# UK Democracy Fund – How the Fund Operates

## Purpose

The UK Democracy Fund (the Fund) is a pooled Fund set up by the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRRT) in the Spring of 2019 and supported by a group of committed funders. The Fund is independent and non-partisan and works to build a healthy democracy in which everyone can participate in elections and where political power is shared fairly. The Fund has three broad goals:

1. Enabling everyone to vote: building support reforms to ensure a simple, seamless and accessible voting system fit for the 21st Century.
2. Extending the franchise: advocating in support of expanding the franchise to 16 and 17 year-olds and settled UK residents from overseas.
3. Increasing participation of everyone in our elections: efforts to raise the registration and turnout of low propensity voters to improve fairness in our democracy.

The Fund will not seek to influence the outcome of an election. It is committed to maintaining the transparency and integrity of our democracy and the electoral process and takes active steps to obviate the risk of any of its activities unintentionally threatening this principle.

## Structure

The Fund is operated and managed by JRRT. Final decisions are taken by JRRT Board of Directors. JRRT takes responsibility for ensuring compliance with electoral and charity law.

All decisions are carefully documented. All donations and grants are recorded, noting whether they are from charitable or non-charitable entities and for charitable or non-charitable purposes. Due diligence with grantees includes discussion of how they will ensure compliance with electoral law, and charity law where relevant, and they are required to address this in their applications. Grant offer letters set out the terms and conditions for grantees, including the requirement for activities to be non-partisan, and ensure that funds can be clawed back in case of a breach.

## Contributors to the Fund

Contributors to the Fund include both charitable and non-charitable entities and are listed on the [JRRT website](#).

## **Transparency**

The Fund is committed to transparency, listing contributors to the Fund and grants made by the Fund on the [JRRT website](#). Grants made are also reported as part of JRRT's involvement in 360Giving.

## **Programme and outcomes**

The Fund supports a variety of approaches to achieving its goals including:

- data collection, research and evaluation;
- events and convening;
- civil and political campaigns for electoral reform;
- new and innovative forms of organising, including via technology;
- targeted approaches to register and turnout people from low propensity voting groups.

The Fund works with a range of civil society, charitable and other organisations, including helping establish new groups or campaigns where gaps are identified. We aim to help build a learning community of donors, activists and others keen to engage everyone in the voting system and to share knowledge, intelligence and best practice to address problems at their root.

## **Grant making**

There are four application rounds a year.

The Fund is open to applications from a range of organisations, including incorporated entities, charities, and individuals. The Fund will not support activities that promote a particular party or parties or seek to influence the outcome of the election. The priority will be for work that is unlikely to be funded from other sources.

Applications are initially assessed by the Head of the Democracy Fund; decisions on grants and project expenditure are made by JRRT Directors at quarterly JRRT Board meetings. Directors will use the following criteria:

- contribution to the Fund's strategic objectives;
- relevance and likelihood of success in the prevailing political climate;
- the skills, capability and funding of the organisation;
- the clarity and likely effectiveness of the proposed approach to achieving change;
- contribution to evidence gathering and learning about what works.

Small grants of up to £7,500 can be processed between meetings. In the case of an election or referendum, the Fund can use the Rapid Response process to disburse grants quickly.

### **How the Fund operates**

The Fund has a simple operating model within JRRT.

The JRRT Board make decisions on overall strategic direction and on which applications contribute most effectively to the Fund's desired outcomes.

The Head of the UK Democracy Fund reports to JRRT's CEO and is responsible for developing strategy, building a pipeline of applicants and advising on effectiveness, developing new funding partnerships and updating key stakeholders. The Head of the Fund also develops a programme of activities to add value to the grant making.

JRRT provides financial management and grant administration as in-kind contributions to the Fund. Annual support costs for the Fund are kept within 10-20% of income received each year.

The Head of the Fund reports quarterly to contributing funders, summarising grants made, activities, and progress towards outcomes. Contributors will also have access to evaluations and the reports of independent evaluators.

An informal advisory group comprising Fund contributors and other experts has been set up to invite insights, information and ideas that support the work of the Fund.

At least annually, contributors to the Fund meet to assess progress. This meeting also invites specific insights from donors and provides Fund contributors with an opportunity to network.