

Grantee Perceptions Survey 2024: JRRT free text answers

Do you have any comments on our priorities?

- **Why do you think we should prioritise in the specific areas you ranked the highest?**
- **Are there any areas that you don't think we should prioritise, and if so, why?**
- **Do you have any other suggestions for where we should prioritise?**

The changing geo-political world order and its impact on racial justice

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Increased Representation of Black (African, Caribbean and Asian) and other minority communities in elected positions in National and Local Government and Civic Leadership.

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I actually found it very difficult to prioritise the areas since many on the list are linked. I would actually group some of the priorities together. For example, in order to have fair elections, it's necessary to consider AI and data and their effect on elections. Or, if you wish to counter populist and extremist views, the key is probably to have informed and engaged citizens. In fact, perhaps that latter is the key to most issues - informed and engaged citizens (maybe something to be learnt from the Swiss model).

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My thoughts are that the areas of work that are easily funded by more mainstream funders shouldn't be prioritised.

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14 is too many

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I think that as well as prioritising the *issues* above, JRRT would benefit from introducing some cross-cutting themes which reflect *ways of working*.

For example, innovation in approach (this could give more weighting to genuinely innovative grassroots organisations using new methods of 'citizen research', meaningful co-production with people who have lived experience, and groups who would benefit from technological support but do not yet have the means or advice to embed this into their projects. This could also include recognition for organisations using 'novel' forms of activism across information rights (such as subject access requests and freedom of information requests), unusual regulatory/legal channels, or new forms of social/digital media disruption.

Another cross-cutting theme for 'ways of working' could ideally weight organisations by the volume or nature of individuals and partner organisations involved in producing and disseminating research, programmes or projects. Often, grassroots

organisations are wiser to emerging trends due to more meaningful on-the-ground networks, but often larger NGOs get funds to address fast-moving threats such as the rise of the far right. For this reason, the charity response can be very disjointed and rarely keeps pace with emerging trends.

A potential third cross-cutting theme linked to ways of working could be accountability. Which organisations can evidence negative feedback about their own practice transparently, and have made meaningful steps towards embedding progress, inclusivity and racial justice in every aspect of their work? Whilst asking every organisation for specific policies on safeguarding, inclusivity or co-production may alienate grassroots or time-poor groups, offering the opportunity to share 'relevant documents' outlining a commitment to these values could be an inclusive way of ensuring grantees are embedding fair practice in what they do. For larger grantees, it would be reasonable to ask for copies of feedback/stats from workshops/projects with people who have lived experience of the issue, so that JRRT's involvement also helps grantees remain accountable to a reasonable degree.

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Education of citizens to their relationship and thus power to influence politicians and legislation is key. The majority of people are unsure of their relationship to law makers and rarely engage with Westminster. Westminster is essentially accessible but does not make that as clear as it should be. The root of human rights, change and the balance of power rests on the general public understanding their own ability to make change.

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Fundamentally, it's essential that JRRT remain focused on *democracy* related issues as per the above, rather than move to related issues like racial justice of place-based democratic reform, both of which already have a significant number of funders. This is the best way to ensure clear value add / impact.

In terms of specific areas, the current approach undervalues the potential of public participation and deliberation (e.g. citizens' assemblies) as a tool for widespread shift in the democratic relationship between the public and politicians.

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Voting reform is at the top of our list because it's always been a core belief, for the Lib Dems, that our voting system could and should be fairer and in turn the lack of a fair system creates disengagement and lack of trust.

Some of the areas seem strongly connected.

Our route for priority was to pick the issues we had the strongest chance of impacting on.

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Other: Increased scrutiny and action to address the less formalised aspects of the democratic process - ie corporate lobbying and corporate capture of institutions and politicians.

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Supporting work that keeps citizens informed and engaged will help strengthen the other selected areas in a domino effect.

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JRRT has an interesting and specific responsibility as one of the very few funders working on protest rights, surveillance and police powers, such as the spy cops scandal and netpol - I think it is vitally important that this work is maintained, due to the paucity of available funding for this work.

Equally, the sector is on the cusp of securing AVR and Votes at 16, through the hard work of the organisations working in this space, with your support - but it's still important to support these organisations and campaigns, such as the Democracy Classroom coalition, on this final stretch to secure the best possible version of AVR and Votes at 16 and that it is at the top of the Govts agenda.

Equally, we are at time when it is increasingly important that far right narratives are countered at scale, a range of organisations from HNH, to Red Flare, to CCDH and Campaign Lab are working on innovative means to counter misinformation, disinformation and far right narratives and online tactics. JRRT is well placed to understand this and support these organisations in their critical work.

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Help us prioritise women

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Very hard to prioritise these worthy priorities! But aside from the topics, priority should go to those things that are a) high quality, b) likely to succeed and c) hard to fund elsewhere.

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I truly believe that combating misinformation and disinformation, while simultaneously working to foster an engaged electorate equipped with the necessary literacy and critical thinking skills required to engage in politics in a meaningful way, is absolutely vital. It is difficult to overstate the importance of these priorities in ensuring a healthy and functioning democracy.

Not sure if that fits neatly into these priorities, but I feel strongly about this issue—I really believe citizens do not have full political agency if they are unable to fully and critically engage in political discourse, whether in media (print and broadcast) or in government-issued literature/information

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Concern about media ownership and plurality, and an understanding about the way people now get news, particularly about elections and politics, which is changing, and still quite poorly understood.

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My priorities are not necessarily reflective of what is most important but where change is also achievable for the greatest outcome. I rated racial justice work highly for example because it is not only important of itself but can lift up a just and equitable approach for everyone — but done badly, can also promote the opposite feeling of division and populist racist push back. The House of Lords is one of the few parts of making laws that works well right now and I am concerned about those who want it scrapped with little idea of what could replace it — democracy in its current form may not be working well, but replacing it with what is popular may not always be wise.

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You cannot change political and democratic processes without having more competent and effective politicians who are open to democratic reform. You have to change the system from the inside out!

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We have many issues to deal with in the UK at the moment. I place considerable weight on getting the processes at the top of the country right which I think will help in resolving, on a long term and effective basis, the other issues. Moreover, fixing some of these processes is reasonably easy and cheap (some of the others are much more complex and expensive). JRRT is superbly placed to be a respected, reasonably central, thoughtful, strategic supporter of moves in this direction.

Trust in politics must be a priority because if people cannot trust their politicians and politics, they won't trust the policy decisions they take, however rational they are. Improving voter participation is also critical because politicians prioritise talking to registered voters who vote.

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If the government is open and accountable everything else will follow, racial justice, strong democracy, responsibly governance etc. Humanising both citizens and also the government, also includes breaking down conspiracies about power - something I can see destroying the electoral fabric of my community.

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I think systemic changes are the most important in the long run, even if they are the hardest to get. Therefore I think it's vital that Rowntree continues to support these. I also think, given resource limitations, that Rowntree steers clear of those areas where there already are big players.

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These are all very important areas but I have prioritised the areas in which I think JRRT can have the most impact

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I suppose lots of people (including me) are going to choose the issues that they work on!

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I believe that addressing the longstanding gaps in civic engagement and representation within underrepresented communities is very important and need to be prioritised.

Prioritising efforts that amplify the voices of these communities and support educational initiatives on democratic participation is essential for fostering greater inclusivity and equity.

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I find the approach to democratic reforms - PR, AVR, votes for 16 yos, votes for residents as well as encouraging participation of those not often involved in politics - voter reg, ethnic minorities in politics a very clear aim for the fund.

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The reason I have placed justice, law and rights as my first priority is because these three areas have been severely challenged, particularly in the last 5 years, which has led to the second priority, where trust in politics and politicians has significantly declined.

My third priority, diversity, is critical for addressing the first two points. We need more politicians from a diverse range of backgrounds who can sit as lawmakers in Parliament with their various perspectives.

Finally, it is in my view critical to examine the role of technology and its influence on our democracies.

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There are many organisations focussing on individual elements of our political system. The great strength of JRRT is look across the piste and identify the gaps but also to look at the system as a whole...

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I believe that democracy functions best when people are well informed and engaged. The ultimate accountability is election day, and if everyone is well informed and engaged then those voted in would likely be of a higher quality and have the interests of the people at heart. Part of helping inform people also involves tackling populism and opening space for the nuance in politics.

AI is also a huge factor that has likely already shaped elections and will continue to have an increasing impact. Proper regulation to tackle disinformation spread by bots, malicious social media algorithms, and deepfake technologies will be hugely important to maintain the reliability of our electoral system.

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I think countering extremism and the far right is a huge challenge, as is voter education given the reach and persistence of the right / far right media (Talk, GB News, online information).

Reform matters - but not all reform; for example I think that PR and devolution are far more important than House of Lords reform, which would change little.

Some of your choices above are not very clearly defined or seem to overlap.

Voter turnout is an issue, as is the loss of support for main parties; even Labour got fewer votes in 2024 than they did in 2019, for example.

Loss of trust in politicians and the media (including the BBC) is a big issue.

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The hard right parties (mainly Reform UK) threaten all the priorities of JRRT, and some thought must be given to tackling them before, and at, the next election.

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For us it'd be less about specific goals and more about specific ways of doing change, which create, strengthen and sustain long term movements and capacity to push for further change. At the moment, our democracy is being under attack, in part because we can't sustain the type of movements and long term engagement of civil society to hold governments accountable and to dream of better ways of having a government.

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We are at risk of the rise of the extreme right - we need to counter misinformation, shore up politics and the rule of law, renew trust in democracy and ensure that those in the most vulnerable circumstances have their needs met plus building connection

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I have put open and accountable government first because I think this is the fundamental principle - everything else follows from that.

Informed and engaged citizens is second because ill-informed or disengaged citizens cannot effectively hold governments to account.

Justice, law and rights are third because these provide checks and balances on government and give people the power they need to be able to demand accountability from government.

Trust in politics/conduct is fourth because if trust is lost, there is a risk that people will turn away from the very institutions and processes that uphold citizens' rights and the rule of law. And that opens the gates to people who would be glad to see constraints on government undermined.

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There is a particular opportunity to embed votes at 16 and high quality political education for young people across the UK within the next few years.

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That really reflects my priorities in term of grassroots, bottom up politics. I don't think government is reformable, so the solution lie beyond it, not within it.

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Politics and reform within politics is in my opinion the reason that JRRT was set up as a trust not a charity. There are other organisations that cover many of these areas very well but none of them have the direct ability to influence politics in the way JRRT does because it is able to fund political parties.

For this reason I believe it is sensible to priorities making systemic changes in politics and related areas, because it is effective, an underfunded space and no one else will do it.

I also believe that although we are probably a long way away from it a change to a more proportional voting system is the best way to make change in this country. That is best done by funding progressive liberal politics.

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Trust in politics is at a low point. You only have to look at the promises Labour made and immediately targeted older people in the Winter Fuel Payments. If you pledge you should be trusted to follow through and better the lives of citizens not make it worse.

From a Northern Ireland perspective, openness and transparency is key when you look back at the carve up and disproportionate way devolution has been managed. It is key that in our politics that any party upholds the rule of law and are unequivocal in this. Regarding elections first past the post does not represent political views correctly and polarises politics further.

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There is an unaddressed need for strengthening UK democratic resilience from autocratic actors from within civil society.

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All of the priorities are very important and it's hard to deprioritise any of them. That said, there are areas that will likely lead to outcomes across multiple priorities e.g. trust in politics/conduct will likely improve voter turnout and participation. Likewise, tackling police powers and AI is a racial justice issue, as much as anything else, and we are at a key juncture in time with this kind of technology, hence their high position on the list.

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Embedding participation ensures that our elected officials continue to be representing the voices of society throughout their term - rather than an abstract fixation on a "mandate" in a manifesto.

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Increasing support for and influence of the far right is one of the biggest threats currently facing the country. As such, tackling this ought to be one of the key

priorities. Supporting media which can counter the narratives and influences of the far right is an important means to do this.

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My 4th ranking was for 'other', which is defending freedom of expression, as funding for this is threadbare in the UK rights and democracy sector (other than protest rights specifically) making it a neglected area despite growing threats and leaving the cause to be appropriated by the right/populist causes. Democrats should always be leading this cause, and from a rights perspective.

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Priority 2 - data and tooling to support progressive advocacy and journalism (but only if run by people who have a track record of previously shipping successful user-focussed products) - e.g. the kind of thing done by mySociety, OpenOwnership, OpenCorporates etc. This stuff is hard to get funding for, and high-impact when it works.

I don't think you should work on the impact of AI/data on democracy as loads of other funders are also interested in that, and it's yet to be shown that there will actually be much impact.

Have you got any additional comments about our impact on your field or organisation?

JRRT are one of the few better informed and enlightened funders who actively seek to learn about what's actually happening in the field of Politics, Democracy and political Representation/Participation. This means we can have a proper discourse and a more meaningful dialogue. Most funders don't understand the issues they are trying to support through their funding.

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JRRT is an important funder in the field of democracy.

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JRRT makes everything we do possible, and I feel so grateful to work with a funder that appreciates the need to meaningfully embed lived experience into our ways of working. Receiving the support to do this has helped us challenge narratives and support so many other organisations, MPs, academics and journalists to access both accurate information, research, and testimonies on exploitation and abuse. JRRT plays a huge role in supporting organisations with non-traditional structures or statuses. JRRT levels the playing field by making funds available for many 'underdog' causes whose loss would be felt across the sector.

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To be completely honest I am not aware of JRRT's impact in my field other than by helping my organisation with funding.

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JRRT has a huge influence on the democracy sector in particular. It's an actor in the space in a way that few funders are, and this needs to be understood thoughtfully in how the organisation interacts with its grantees.

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Relative to the size of our organization we have demonstrated significant impact in our field and are building momentum.

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JRRT has had a key impact on our organisation, however it does not fully understand our work and has made decisions in relation to the work that have made the work more difficult.

JRRT has had a major influence on the field, which I think is undeniable, as the primary funder for the democracy sector and related fields. With this, JRRT has a serious responsibility and a unique vantage point.

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It's disappointing. We know from others in our field that support for women's groups is challenging

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I suspect that more of our peer/partner organisations would be aware of JRRT if it clarified that charities can request funding for campaigning -- and if UK charities were less wary of campaigning, in general.

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The influence is both good and bad. Where funding has been positive it enables us to achieve our aims and be present in policy making even if not seen to 'deliver' measurable outcomes — which we appreciate is a hard ask to a board trying to weigh different bids against the others — but when dropped we have very few other alternatives to approach and yet the work we do has not gone away.

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JRRT is the only consistent funder of our sector so has a significant impact on the activities of the mainly small orgs in the sector and can play (and does play) an important role in helping the sector to avoid overlap and competition.

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In our last application I didn't feel faith in the importance of grassroots involvement was a strong interest to the Trustees. For our organisation, inclusion of the passionate involvement of those on the frontlines is a priority, especially as civic culture in the UK is already degrading and community roles are being replaced by professionalised voices instead.

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JRRT is seen a real leader in our field and has supported many of the most important organisations and projects in the field. It's no exaggeration to say that without JRRT's work the field as it is now would not be the same

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Whilst we appreciate the huge financial support, it seems the fund often offers more direct advocacy support on other campaigns eg through open letters, meetings with key stakeholders, etc. Our campaign doesn't seem as passionately defended by the fund.

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Your support has had a significant impact on our ability to engage with the community through Skate Cabal's 'Rolling for Change' initiative. By focusing on civic engagement and voter registration, we've been able to reach underrepresented groups in innovative ways that resonate with their lived experiences. The resources and guidance provided have empowered us to amplify community voices, fostering greater awareness and participation in the democratic process. This kind of impact has strengthened our role as a community-focused organisation and helped us create lasting change

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Would say that smaller grants to multiple organisations is causing a degree of fragmentation. Our sector needs larger grants to a smaller number of well-governed, proven, impact-led, organisations.

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I think you sometimes run the risk of being too narrowly focused and as a result miss opportunities.

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It doesn't seem that JRRT has much influence in Scotland, and interest/capacity to look at different union like movements.

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We work in the area of patient and public involvement in healthcare. With a state-run National Health Service our work is, ultimately, intensely political.

Openness and accountability in healthcare is routinely undermined - for example by food industries resisting efforts for greater government regulation, while drug companies sell anti-obesity drugs as a policy solution to worklessness.

Some politicians are also increasingly making the case for replacing a health system run by the people for the people with a health system run on the basis of private provision, and insurance for those who can afford it.

I am absolutely certain that the JRRT Directors would understand these points. But I am not certain that the work of JRRT is systematically geared towards promoting public involvement in healthcare as a fundamental democratic safeguard.

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You are one of our smaller funders, but the support has been especially important in increasing our impact

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As a Political Party who grown significantly in the 5 years in particular, the support received from JRRT has played a major role in that growth. We would not have been able to deliver, campaign and grow had we not had the grant funding from JRRT. The first past the post GE disadvantages Parties with less than 2 MPs in terms of funds into the Party which presents significant challenges.

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The grant from JRRT has significantly contributed to changing the face of politics in the UK. The rebuild of the Liberal Democrats has been created through local government, with us winning almost all councils we hold in the latest General Election. This success and change is delivering a liberal voice in parliament and on councils. It will make a huge difference to people across the country and will give a strong voice for electoral reform once again.

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Impact is diluted by confusing branding which impedes message discipline.

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Without the support of JRRT we would not have been able to deploy as many election observers as we have in recent elections. The evidence we have collected at polling stations has led to changes in Election Law (through the Ballot Secrecy Act 2022) as well as influencing the Electoral Commission on its response to the implementation of this law and those around the ongoing challenges with the introduction to show ID in order to vote.

Overall, what do you find helpful and/or frustrating about our application process?

Helpful - officers are well informed, provide good guidance, patient and have an understanding and appreciation of the challenges we have as a not for profit organisation.

Frustrating - There is still a challenge to translate/ communicate the realities of issues we are dealing with to decision makers, who may come from very different backgrounds. Especially as there are very few quick fixes in this area of work and therefore real changes/ results take years of investment. One or two years is never enough.

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Your grant managers give excellent support and feedback during the application process.

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Not in your control, but the surprise timing of the GE meant we had to really quickly pivot our approach and amend our application.

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The application process is incredibly accessible compared to many other funders, but still remains fair and includes avenues for reasonable questions to be asked by staff and the board both before and after the application process.

Receiving feedback from Ben Williams many years ago demystified the application process hugely, and put us in a position to apply successfully at a later date. Our growth has been made possible not only by JRRT funding, but also the time that JRRT invested in us by JRRT putting a meeting in the diary to discuss the basics, despite many other funders ignoring our requests for the same at this time. A willingness to hold informative discussions is such a key benefit for young organisations and those led by people with lived experience, working class backgrounds, or any non-traditional career trajectory. The advice and support given by JRRT staff is a huge part of what makes the organisation an inclusive funder.

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the prescriptive nature of questions often made it hard to show the actual successes that the campaign had already achieved which would have been helpful to be able to show in the application process.

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I have found Ben to be one of the most open and supportive grant managers within the sector - always willing to hop on a call, give honest feedback, and dedicate time to maximising the chances of our applications being successful.

However, I have at times found the logic of the decisions made by the trustees to be contradictory and confusing. For example, there have been grants awarded to others working within our space that seem to have as much - or sometimes less - connection to the stated priorities around democracy than our un-successful applications. There are many reasons why a grant application may fail, but when a failure to sufficiently align with priorities is the reason giving for rejection, and yet other similar applications are successful it feels a little confusing.

I have also felt that the definition of what constitutes "democratic process" seems to be too narrowly defined, and risks steering JRRT's work to more apolitical and uncontroversial work around more abstract ideas for reform of political participation, rather than more direct and immediate threats to our democracy.

Finally, we have also received feedback, informally, that some trustees assessed that repeated, high level, non-transparent, non-minuted contact between corporations and senior government politicians and officials outside of normal systems and processes, related to contracts worth billions of pounds and with consequences for national and global health were "to be expected" and by extension work to increase scrutiny of such dealings unworthy of funding. When similar informal contact between senior EU officials and corporate CEOs has led to high profile public inquiries at an EU level, and widespread political and media debate, it

felt a little alarming that some trustees didn't share a view that this kind of contact poses a severe risk of corruption of UK political decision making and democracy.

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Given the strategic review going on it has not been clear whether or not political funding will go ahead in the same way as normal. This has added a greater than normal degree of uncertainty around possible funding.

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More detailed feedback on why we were unsuccessful would be helpful.

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Being told repeatedly that there is a reluctance to fund charities, and therefore being put off the process at times. The interview with board members and the JRRT grant manager was quite overwhelming, and likely didn't need that many trustees to be involved for such a small pot of money.

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We drafted and submitted a detailed application after discussing the idea with a funding officer, only to then be told it wouldn't be something you funded. It took over 6 months from first submitting an idea to then resubmitting a new proposal and subsequent redrafts in order to secure funding. We were grateful for the funding, but the unexpected time it took to secure the money meant that we couldn't deliver the project in the time we had planned to do so.

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We appreciate how open the relevant programme officer is to having conversations with us as we develop proposals; they even look at our drafts. What's most frustrating, perhaps, is the overall squeeze on funding in the sector that means we (as a small charity) face a great deal of competition whenever we apply for grants such as these, even if we've previously received one.

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Apologies, if I made an unsuccessful application it was years ago and I now don't remember the process.

More recently, I have had some frustrations with your website – some of the instructions could be clearer.

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Overall, I find the application process with JRRT to be very helpful. It is straightforward, which makes it accessible and not overly burdensome. The team is extremely supportive and personable, creating a warm and approachable experience, rather than a clinical one. I also appreciate how helpful they are throughout the process, making it easier to navigate. One thing I find particularly positive is that JRRT is keen to fund organisations in Northern Ireland, an area that is often overlooked by other funding bodies. I don't have any frustrations with the process—it's one of the best I've encountered.

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The support we get is unlike any other funder and extremely helpful in putting together an application that is relevant for both funder and grantee.

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It's not easy to see how core work can be assessed against measurable projects and we worry we sound either airy-fairy or arrogant to justify asking for funding to just 'be there' — eg how can we demonstrate the value of being in a meeting today advising and critiquing new DWP powers with the minister and team to come in new legislation this quarter — there is nothing public, no known benefit, yet we are told there is influence and it is said it matters to be involved. But without funding we cannot pay for our time which means getting a different paying job which cuts our time available for the campaign / policy work we do and affects its quality to be available 'on demand' for department calls and meetings. We are a bad fit for most philanthropic orgs' goals and yet eat, sleep and breathe the JRRT values and aims around democracy, human rights and rule of law.

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It works well and is both sympathetic and professional.

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The lack of certainty around the likelihood of success when applying!

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The application process for JRRT is one of the best! I am extremely grateful for how much we were supported and learned through this process, even when we didn't get funding, the process was good.

The application portal on the other hand, does need improving.

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The grants manager provided excellent advice and support through the application, which was incredibly helpful

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Overall I think the JRRT application process was good.

With regards to "How much pressure did you feel to modify your priorities in order to secure funding for your application?", the answer is yes, though in answer to a question on a previous page I said that JRRT would be described as an expert in the field that we work in. So for us that wasn't necessarily a negative, though I understand if others had different experiences.

I found it very helpful to be able to discuss our application with Ben and to get honest feedback on drafts of the proposal.

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Changing goal posts: were encouraged to apply after an initial call but then were told it wasn't appropriate for the fund.

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There is a disproportionately high focus on academic rationale on parliamentary processes in the application that other funds don't require. I believe this disadvantages those that are campaigning on issues from lived experience and don't have as much formal knowledge of the Parliamentary system and don't benefit from connections to politicians and the media

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I did have to provide extensive information on my experience in community engagement and community research, and explain how we are rooted in the community. While it was detailed, I found it helpful as it allowed me to reflect on the work I've done and how the skills and experience I've gained are transferable to support democratic engagement efforts. It was rewarding to see how our community-focused approach aligns with the goals of this initiative.

The support from Local Champion CIC was also invaluable, and I found the information on your website—particularly the criteria and guidance on tracking metrics for campaigns—extremely helpful.

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It was very helpful to be able to contact Ben Williams to discuss our initial proposal. He gave us extremely helpful feedback whilst being realistic and not raising our hopes. That said, we were successful so we are very happy.

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It is an extremely supportive process and ensures applicants give the best possible account of themselves

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I found the process straightforward and made much more enjoyable thanks to the help of Ben who was a huge help.

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Sometimes it's difficult to understand funding decisions by Directors.

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I find the process helpful, particularly the feedback given by your team.

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The application process was straightforward and the staff very supportive and present throughout.

We have not re-applied however because it seems that our organisation, method of change and goals are not the priority of JRRT.

It has been somewhat frustrating though to see other organisation funded, which are much more off the ground advocacy groups (but on the same subject) instead of grassroots campaigning, but that is the choice and prerogative of the JRRT board. It

would be good to know how the JRRT board learn about different social movements and campaigns across the UK and hear from people directly (not just organisations!).

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The current situation with the Government highlights the wholly self-defeating strategic commitment to engagement with Labour Together and related organisations as the only viable means of achieving change. Evaluating activity on the basis of whether or not it has Labour Together's support is a myopic and bizarre position to adopt by an organisation apparently committed to democracy

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It would be great to have wider access to decision makers. Passing through just one gatekeeper puts a lot of power in their hands. We also find ourselves limiting our ambitions to please them when a more ambitious approach may achieve better outcomes and find favour with others in the organisation. Also the amount of time it takes to fill out a long application - including for a small grant is really debilitating for small organisations. Could there be a two page process rather than requiring almost the same length as for a major grant. It can put off small organisations from even trying. It also feels as if Lib Dem affiliated projects are more likely to get fast approval whilst non-affiliated projects struggle more .

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It is incredibly helpful being able to talk to Ben Williams. With both our funding applications, I have felt that I have had fair and realistic advice. He is always clear that it is not up to him to support the actual focus of our funding request - but he does offer very practical support in steering us through the application process.

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The process was very well supported by the Officer and we were provided with detailed feedback and support. We have always as an organisation felt that the objectives of our own organisation are understood by JRRT.

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Clear and well supported process. Friendly and supportive staff and while we were anxious about meeting Trustees, they were wonderful and had great insights and questions

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JRRT Understanding, collaborative and understanding our limitations helped with the application process.

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To clarify we have been a long standing recipient of JRRT grants so I am unaware whether we have had historic grants rejected.

The process is clear and easy to follow.

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Staff are so helpful and open regarding the process.

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The discrepancy between the requirements listed on the website, the portal, and those which the grant officers explained to us.

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The point of contact was an excellent communicator and kind-hearted person who clearly understood the subject matter and provided clear and consistent feedback. I was impressed by the willingness to engage to help improve the application. However, some of the points of feedback acted upon appeared to later be reasons for the rejection of the application, which was a little frustrating. However, this was beyond the scope of the point of contact, and I understood that there was a limited pool of funding.

Understanding which body to apply to was also a challenge owing to an integration of the links between the different strands of JRRT's work. The point of contact was excellent in making the difference clear, but the overuse of acronyms, sometimes with qualifiers, and confusing setup of the organisational structure (I do not know any other equivalent organisation that uses multiple public-facing names for similar things) generated barriers to the accessibility of the process.

It emerged that a key theme of the work proposed, which sought to mitigate a particular set of risks around the UK election, later turned out to be an important element of the election itself.

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It was really useful having so much input from you as a funder in our application, helping us secure funding. That being said, it is almost essential to have this input from JRRT because it is not as willing to be led by the grantee on where the money is best spent or which approaches are most useful. Our funding from JRRT comes with more strings than most grants, but we coproduced the project to a point where it is meeting both of our needs and has certainly be strengthened in some ways by JRRT's input.

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The feedback we get through the application process (and usually in at least one catch up throughout the grant period) helps us keep on track and aligned to JRRT strategic aims.

--

In the case of the 2024 General Election the grant process was truncated and very swift indeed. The normal process is also very quick, usually in experience within 3 months, and this allows reasonable advanced planning for our work.

--

It was very clear, and I think being able to submit an initial application that you then get feedback on was very helpful.

The grant is now finished, and I don't think we had much engagement at the end of it beyond submitting a final report, so perhaps a bit more follow-up.

Overall, what do you find helpful and/or frustrating about our reporting processes?

Helpful - Officers accessible/ happy to discuss any issues as they arise, especially during reporting times.

--

We appreciated as a small organisation that the reporting processes are not as bureaucratic and cumbersome as those of some funders.

--

The reporting process is accessible and intuitive.

--

I haven't heard back from my report so presume all is well. It was very easy to do though

--

We have not found the level of reporting frustrating, it's an important way to monitor and manage project delivery.

--

Acknowledgement from the grants manager and feedback or a meeting with them to discuss.

--

Nothing, it is straightforward, particularly compared to some other funders.

--

Helpful; they are short, fairly unstructured and simple. We've had both JRRT and JRCT in the past. Currently unfunded. Frustrating: I probably worry too much about any deviations at all as it is not our money, and it is stressful worrying about what we don't know behind the scenes when everything we do fits into the overarching aims and agreed field of work. Possibly a twice a year call on top of formal 'reporting' could have been helpful.

--

It is limited and focussed.

--

The reporting processes are not overburdensome which is welcome

--

The reporting process was straight forward. we didn't get feedback on our report.

--

Overall I think the reporting processes are generally fine.

--

The report itself is fine but the grants are for a short period of time and realistically not much tangible policy change happens in a year so it's difficult to plan ahead and feel safe that we will have funding for the campaign

--

It is light touch but designed to ensure the key impacts are recognised and understood

--

Nothing. Reporting seems to balance need for detail vs. low-time-resource of grantees in this sector.

--

The reporting process is fantastic - light touch and proportionate.

--

The reporting process is straightforward and made easy for organisations like ourselves who have limited capacity and resources. It is targeted and avoids repetition and unnecessary reporting.

--

Very helpful - submitting a two page report is very refreshing and also challenges us to be clear and succinct

--

We always wish to provide full and thorough reports. At times we have been asked, and have created more quantitative reports however many of our outputs are too complicated to effectively report quantitatively so we are sometimes unclear as to how best to present our outputs.

--

No issues

--

I think the reporting requirements are fair and not over burdensome.

--

Organisationally we have gone through this process before, but I personally haven't submitted a report for you. My understanding is that the reporting process for JRRT is fairly helpful and not too prescriptive.

--

As we have received a three (now four) year grant, in some ways the limited reports required by JRRT actually restrict some of the feedback we would like to give.

If you are a member, what do you value about the Democracy Network? And/or what would you like to see the Democracy Network improve or do differently?

Clarify its purpose and governance structure

--

Become better 'owned' by its members, possibly changing the governance so its hosts by numerous organisations, not just Involve.

--

We joined the Democracy Network last year before the big conference. It is one of those things that you don't know you need it, or how badly it was needed, until it exists. The Network is a really positive step and absolutely vital, we have connected with dozens of organisations and begun collaboration with them - because we met them at the conference, coworking and through the bulletin newsletter. The bulletin is properly brilliant every sector should have one! I have met Helen Wishart and James Moulding and Adam (?) they were really helpful and approachable and connected me to Hattie Andrews and others who we've gone on to work with. Their funding database is also REALLY HELPFUL.

I wouldn't want to pick apart their work too harshly as I really value them. We have found some of their political positions difficult in relation to our work as a charity and we have communicated this to the Democracy Network via their survey and feedback. It's not appropriate for us to be connected to the campaigning work in the network which is a risk for us and our relationships.

The whatsapp group is really useful, but there are a lot of people on there that make it difficult to engage with. But we stay on there because of its value. I would also prefer if the network was able to run more events outside of London.

Please keep supporting them - or whoever continues to do this work!

--

As a member of the Democracy Network, I really value the sense of community it provides. The regular newsletter is particularly helpful—it's invaluable to have updates on funding cycles and job opportunities all in one place. I appreciate being part of a network that, while varied, is united by a common goal.

I really like being part of a community that is varied but focused on a common goal. The wide range of organisations and issues being addressed by the network is incredibly useful for members. For example, I work on the issue of women in politics and have received funding from JRRT to expand my training programme, which helps women who want to enter politics. I plan to further develop this programme to include sessions specifically designed for minority and underrepresented groups, such as women of colour, LGBTQAI+ women, or disabled women. Being a member of the Democracy Network means I can find and reach out to organisations that work with, for example, disabled people. We could collaborate or even just share knowledge on the issue of disabled women in politics, allowing me to create a truly thorough and informed training session for that underrepresented group.

I also really enjoyed the Democracy Network conference. Working from home can sometimes feel alienating, and it's easy to lose sight of the impact your work has. The conference provided a much-needed opportunity to reconnect with others and appreciate the vital and impactful work being done by all the organisations in the network. It was especially valuable to meet people in person and hear about what organisations across the UK are doing. For those of us based in Northern Ireland, this is particularly important, as we can sometimes feel geographically and culturally isolated. The network helps us broaden our perspective and approach.

--

Its coordinating ability. I would like it to demonstrate that it can activate its wider membership in support of a small number of national campaigns

--

Connection to other organisations
Opportunities to collaborate on projects
Sense of community / belonging
Good way to keep abreast of what others are doing
Sharing good practice

--

We're new members - the first call we had was great, but we've not had much contact since. The meetings we've tried to attend haven't gone ahead, but once we've attended a meeting I am sure it will be a highly valuable resource. We've also heard there is a group chat but we're still waiting to be added.

--

It has built an impressive network of organisations.

Focus on the networking side, forget about trying to do campaigns. It's too broad to make things work.

--

More communication about the Democracy Network's initiatives and members

--

I value the ability to bring together the sector and to share skills. In general I think the establishment of the Democracy Network has been a positive development.

The network seems to have such a wide scope of membership, covering both administrators to do the vital work of keeping the electoral system running, to campaigners who exclusively focus on changing the system. This breadth has a number of advantages in terms of the breadth of skill sharing that can be done. But it has drawbacks too, as we're working on fundamentally different work to some of our fellow Democracy Network organisations. We're a campaign organisation and we probably have more to gain by working in a small group with other campaigners campaigning on our issue, than we have in common with people or organisations who do great work but of a different type to us.

We're a single-issue organisation, as I believe are a number of other Democracy Network members. So it means that we can benefit from some of the internal benefits and skill-shares, but it's not as suitable for us to get involved in some of the more external campaigns, as they just aren't relevant to our single issue.

--

As a member of the Democracy Network, I value the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and organisations that are deeply invested in strengthening democratic engagement. The platform provides valuable resources, insights, and networking opportunities that allow us to learn from each other and collaborate on shared goals, especially around engaging underrepresented communities.

--

I think they need a much better understanding of disability.

--

Linkages with other organisations and the opportunity for joint campaigning. As a small organisation partners are key to our campaigning and influencing

--

I'm afraid not much. And caused an issue with a different grant-making organisation.

--

Yes - it struggled a bit earlier this year but seems to be back on its feet now. We find it collaborative, supportive and well run but we find it is the members that actually do the action ... so there is an open question as to whether giving funds directly to the member rather than the network would achieve more impact.

--

It is useful to be a part of it though most of the posts are England-centric and more so Westminster-centric. Would be good to see more regional discourse. Also being in Belfast makes it difficult to participate in real-world meetings and events.

--

We have limited involvement, not through the lack of desire, because we simply don't have the human resources to do more. With just two members of staff we are extremely stretched with our core work but would engage more if possible in the future.

--

Contacts, events

If you are not a member, or are not engaging in the activities of the Democracy Network, why is that and how could the Network better accommodate you?

This is a function of our current priority focus which is currently on wider citizens' rights issues but we would be interested in future.

--

We should be! It may be helpful to have more clearly defined strands of work / interest within the Democracy Network to aid the focused participation of organisations which work on only one or a few specific issues.

--

We had been in discussions with the Programme Lead who moved on and need to connect with the team again - the connections during the run up to the elections was very helpful

--

Limited capacity

--

I did not know about the democracy network until the JRRT invitation to event. Maybe it would have been good if the democracy network had got in touch with me once I was awarded the JRRT grant?

--

As far as I know it is London focused - not easy for us to engage

--

We were not made aware of this network and would be delighted to be invited.

--

Happy to be a member - put me in touch please

--

haven't been told about it/ invited to join

--

It seems an extremely broad alliance, and I'm unclear whether it is for people who are interested in the subject matter, or campaigning for particular outcomes. I have a feeling that it is a bit of a difficult balance of both – so membership might imply that you are signed up to certain outcomes which we would not necessarily sign up to. And in practice it is difficult to imagine that a very wide collection of groups could sign up to much (so perhaps I'm misunderstanding?).

--

Don't know about it and don't think we were invited but everything we do is about safeguarding freedoms under a democratic umbrella so it might be very interesting to be involved (even if we're not currently funded by either org.)

--

I'd like to know more about it.

--

We did not engage with them. I would welcome a discussion about how better to interact with them. However, we were only a specific project and the opportunities may be limited.

--

I would be glad to join the Network.

--

It is hard to be in a network when one isn't a grantee, and it doesn't seem that the method of change/theory of change of our organisation is seen as key to strengthening democracy, when we believe it is....

--

I am not particularly aware of the Democracy Network - that might be my own fault!

--

It isn't something I had heard of before completing this survey, but I now find we are on their website which is great. Having looked at the website it seems predominantly theoretical and apolitical so it is probably not likely to be something that cuts across our work as a political organisation.

--

Not sure what this is would need more information

--

To be honest, we have been so preoccupied with our own work, we have not had the opportunity to engage. I have now signed us up to the email list.

--

Unaware of this - will look into joining!

--

I don't know anything about it.

--

This is only a small part of our work and it would not be appropriate for us to join

Please specify any areas not in the list above where your organisation needs to strengthen:

Need operational funding

--

This is not an additional area, but a clarification on leadership and management - We are trying to 'decentralise' our structure, away from 'director' at the top, and others at the bottom. Many of the NGO success case studies are tend to list examples and actions which are just not actionable for a small organisation with limited funds. I

think there is scope for sector guidance on flat governance/staff structures more suited to small groups/campaigns.

--

recruitment

financial management/advice

--

Like many other organisations, we are seeing a real down turn in government transparency. Help to strength organisations in this area or support for challenges would be helpful

--

Building a strong donor network

--

I found that pretty hard to fill in – at risk of complacency, I think we are quite good at all these things!

--

Funding stability beyond a year at a time.

--

As we were only a specific project, this question is less relevant to us.

--

Training and Development

--

Recruiting experienced staff at salaries the organisation can afford.

--

Other - it would be useful to know what others are doing in the field. Given you have a good overview you may be able to help with that.

--

A second vote for income!

We would greatly appreciate overall feedback about how we are perceived – positive or negative – and suggestions as to how we can be more effective.

Very supportive as a rare funder in the democracy space. Id be interested to understand the frame of reference that JRRT are making in their funding. That hasn't felt clear. But that open ness has enabled some interesting work to get funded, so im not sure if that is positive or negative feedback.

--

JRRT is in our perception an organisation that will give smaller organisations and campaigns a chance if they are able to show that they have a clear plan and can make a difference. This is important as there are few funding options for small organisations. JRRT was also prepared to look at issues which are not the most obvious type of advocacy projects or campaigns, and which have innovative features.

--

JRRT has been a supportive and flexible funder. Interest and expertise on the technical detail and political realities of our work is refreshing and meaningful. It has challenged us and helped us to develop our own thinking and your support makes us all the more confident in our cause.

Although we have been funded over several years, for which we are grateful and without which we may well not have made the progress we have, grants which are one year at a time make the work somewhat precarious, key staff difficult to retain and means planning time (not just on the application, which is relatively straightforward and quick, but on various aspects of contingency planning and actions) diverts from substantive work.

--

Overall focus is clear and the level of engagement in the development of proposals have been quite helpful and most welcome. It ensures that submissions stand a better chance as they are co-created, with the initial idea/planned work centred on the submitting organisation's area of expertise.

--

I have a very positive perception of JRRT - I really appreciated the hands off approach once I was awarded the grant but it might have been really helpful to have had some sort of 'hub' or introductions to other people who can help move campaigns/policy etc as money is super helpful but connections even more so. Being endorsed or introduced by JRRT to change makers would be great or being introduced to other JRRT campaigners to share connections and resources/knowledge may mean that campaigners can work faster and more efficiently.

--

Thanks for this opportunity to input.

In relation to the final Q on priorities for JRRT there was no "Other" suggestion. I'd like to suggest multi-year core funding as a priority.

--

In an almost unique fashion, JRRT is both an actor and a funder of the democracy sector / space. It has a huge influence on the sector, and this needs to be carefully understood in any strategic reset / refresh.

That said, some of the advocacy and comms approaches of the sector are simply ineffective, and JRRT should feel comfortable critically challenging / rejecting

applications from parts of the sector how have not sufficiently developed their ability to successfully campaign.

--

We would appreciate the consideration of a second application given the tremendous progress we have made in the field and within our organisation since we last submitted an application and an invitation to the democracy network if applicable. Thank you.

--

Hello, I think that the fund could consider best how to reduce the duplication of its grant giving

--

JRRT feels quite unapproachable for funding, particularly for registered charities.

It was really disappointing not to receive any supportive email or communication from the grants manager in the wake of the racist riots, particularly when we are majority led by racialised people.

We have appreciated JRRT's flexibility to amend our funding timelines, even though it has felt onerous to draft additional documents to get a 3-month extension.

--

Generally good, I think. I have appreciated your events bringing grantees together.

--

The JRRT's support is extremely gratefully received.

The issue for those of us working in the UK and Europe is how massively underfunded democracy work is, particularly versus the US. While the issues the UK faces are not as serious as the US, we do underinvest in democracy, and few other funders are out there for this type of work.

Not sure how JRRT can encourage more groups to get involved, but it often feels as if our organisation exists despite the wider funding environment, rather than because of it.

--

In my view the JRRT and JRCT are the last bastion of truly liberal values in any philanthropic organisation available to UK campaigns. You have wonderful staff who care, and make the effort to understand and support grantees, it isn't just their job. Money is limited so where we cannot have that support perhaps you could consider some opportunities that ex-grantees can take advantage of, such as shared services for accounting, or legal advice, convening periodic meetings on cross-disciplinary topics and legislative changes coming to the UK or even EU that will affect the UK despite Brexit — mentoring services (that do not affect your funding) are needed in the sector.

--

We appreciated the support given during the application process, and the good ongoing communication, as well as the understanding when we needed to push back our completion date. It was also great that in the context of rising inflation, the grant was automatically increased to match inflation. Thank you again!

--

The application was incredible time intensive which is a huge barrier to access if you work or if long written work is difficult. The requirements were huge, for example adding citations.

There was very little support. Overall, this application was one of the most inaccessible I have come across and completely unworkable unless you have an academic background and lots of time.

These exclusions seem to be in direct contract to the aims of the funding.

--

JRRT is perceived positively and more so if JRRT was able to work with other funders to grow the pot available for democracy-related work.

--

First, the staff with whom we had contact did a superb job of supporting and managing the process and projecting the values of the organisation.

Secondly, although we did not need it, other funders described JRRT as a catalyst funder, in that their support generated support from others because of trust in their integrity, due diligence and decision making processes - they were good company to be keeping.

Thirdly, we found your approach to a coherent strategy building links between relevant organisations and opening doors to help build powerful connections very impressive and thoughtful.

Fourthly, the trust that you showed was very empowering.

In terms of improvement, there is not much that I am in a position to say - I have not seen enough. My current impression is that you should be doing more of the same.

--

We really enjoy applying for JRRT. That said, the grants available for us are still small in comparison to how hard we work in the application process (which in the end is such a gamble!)

Keep up the good work and invite us to more things where we can meet with and learn about the expertise of the JRRT staff! You're all sooooo knowledgeable and we only hear about this in little bits. Be involved with your grantees, we want to grow and funders clearly care about the same things we do. Maybe you could mentor people within the teams that you fund or something - because grantees are intimidated by funders and that stops us from accessing your wells of knowledge.

--

JRRT is perceived as a key node in our field. JRRT's support for our work was integral to opening up other funding opportunities and also us to grow. JRRT has also helped connect us with other like minded organisations and provided key funding and support that has allowed us work to develop

--

I think you play a unique role in funding work in our particular field. Without you I think our field would be significant smaller, and I'm very grateful to you for the positive role you've played in growing it. Of course, with great power comes great responsibility and all that!

Personally, I'm an immigrant to Britain, and there isn't really an equivalent to JRRT in my home country. Sometimes I wish there was. So I think that's a testament to the power and positive effect of JRRT!

--

We are really grateful for funding from JRRT which has funded important project work which otherwise wouldn't have happened. Funding applications have been quick and funding management has been flexible to work with what the project needs.

--

Overall, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust / UK Democracy Fund is perceived as a highly credible and impactful organisation that plays a critical role in supporting democratic engagement, especially within underrepresented communities. Your commitment to advancing democratic reform, funding grassroots initiatives, and ensuring that marginalised voices are heard is highly respected and appreciated.

One suggestion for improvement would be to further amplify your communication and visibility within smaller, local organisations that may not yet be aware of your resources and support. Making your work even more accessible to groups who might not have experience with large-scale funding could help diversify the range of initiatives benefiting from your support.

Lastly, increasing opportunities for networking among grantees like the Lessons Learned Event held in October 2024, creating spaces for collaborative learning, and sharing insights would further strengthen the collective impact of everyone involved in advancing democracy.

--

On the negative - There seem to be frequent changes and reviewing of strategy, which can make it hard knowing how to pitch applications and plan for the future. Also, the grant decision making process is a little obscure.

On the positive - JRRT is the only major funder out there to support campaigns for freedom with a community/democracy (non-free market) angle. It has a massive impact in this area. There is also a tangible enthusiasm and principled nature of trustees and staff, which is unusual for funding bodies. People involved in JRRT

really seem to believe in freedom and democracy, and seem like very nice people, which makes a big difference in terms of the relationship with the grants body.

--

Our experience has been a very positive one and JRRT is highly regarded by those that we connect with.

--

The perception is that smaller (well-meaning, but less-effective) organisations are given grants based on values-alignment rather than ability to have impact.

--

I have greatly appreciated your work over recent years. I would encourage you to look beyond a strict democracy focus to consider the impact of the far right; right wing media; the links and shared aims of climate, racial justice and inequality campaigns; the longstanding ineffectiveness of much of our campaign efforts on democracy (let's not keep doing the same things and getting the same results); the loss of trust in politicians and the media; the short termism of much of Government policy; the lack of political education which feeds into conspiracy theories and support for the far right; the evident insecurity felt by many which is one driver of far right support; how to partner with More in Common and others.

--

Apologies if previous comments have felt negative, they are neither good or bad (in our views) but hopefully just a honest reflection!

--

Definitely perceived as positive - less bureaucratic and more involved in the issues than other funders. In tune with the real issues that organisations face and considerate in respect of increasing unanticipated costs and challenges.

--

We are grateful for our relationship and the support we have received. As a relatively new charity, we need to build our organisational capacity so for us it would be helpful to be able to access longer-term funding to help us plan and grow.

--

Throughout the application process, acquiring the grant we felt extremely supported by the team. They understood our limitations and small team meant there were delays from our end but the team were extremely understanding and gave us ideas on how to go about certain aspects of the grant outcomes. They were always available to discuss our concerns, and provided assistance whenever this was needed. They had a good understanding of our priorities and organisational values which meant that the actions were focused on and in line with our core values.

--

JRRT fulfils very well a unique position as a grant funder that can support direct political action through political parties and their organisations. I greatly value this

and it shows extreme sense from the founders to foresee this need and the importance it has for achieving this reform.

When JRRT heads straight to funding political parties it is a vital tool for the delivery of change in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Where it seeks to inhabit more crowded territory I believe it is likely to be less efficient.

We are enormously grateful for the change in our organisation and the country that has been facilitated by the grants we have received from JRRT. I have no negatives, it is a well run and governed trust that fills a huge gap in the market.

--

We have been very fortunate with the JRRT's support over the years and we have had nothing but positive experience both with funding applications and relationship with staff.

--

We believe that the JRRT is perceived as partisan and associated to the Labour Party. Beyond this it is also seen as a tad old fashioned, but its heart is in the right place.

Ultimately, you are one of the only funders in the democracy space and your contributions to the sector are vital. Please continue supporting organisations who work to make our democracy more participative and equal for all.

--

Overall, JRRT is seen positively by us and other grantees I've spoken to. They are flexible and approachable, which is helpful when things go wrong or projects face unexpected challenges/changes. They are aware of issues and understand the sector well, but could improve by listening to grantees more and being less prescriptive about how and what grantees deliver. There is also a sense that JRRT is more willing to work with certain organisations than others, but this might be very justified from a funder's point of view.

--

Integrate the organisations and use consistent branding and messaging. Minimise use of acronyms and adopt message discipline in communications. Amalgamate the application processes into one consolidated process. For anyone outside the organisation, JRRT and JRRST and JRRT-... are indistinguishable; if they are different then they should have entirely separate comms infrastructures, if they are the same then they should be consolidated from a comms perspective.

--

We love our relationship with JRRT through the grant but wider connections too. We have an only positive perception of JRRT.

--

We have had a great experience with JRRT and its staff, always helpful, welcoming and down to earth. There is no 'side' to people in JRRT, they have the capacity to be change-makers and they take every chance to be so.

I enjoy the informality of the organisation. Whilst the grant-making process is rigorous, the application process is supportive, helpful and guided. Perhaps informality isn't the right word, openness would be a better term.

If there is a negative, and this is hardly your fault, the democracy sector is incredibly underfunded in the UK, as we are perceived, by many, to have an advanced democracy which is the ideal (!).

Our work, with your funding, has given us a disproportionate impact on the way elections are perceived by opinion-formers and the wider democracy community. I was recently challenged at an event by a former colleague and friend about why election observation is important in the UK, I answered 'if you think it's fine for us to see the secret ballot broken in 20% of polling stations, for the victims of that to be primarily women and if you think it's fine for those turned away from voting, because they lack ID, to be mainly women and from ethnic minorities, then all is fine with UK elections'. We would not know any of this without the support of JRRT.

Our work, although perhaps not the most eye-catching, colourful and attractive to some, has proven that evidence-based evaluation and data collection of the electoral process, in an impartial manner, can supply the necessary tools to improve our elections.

So, if there is some feedback, as well as making grants to those causes the Trusts do fund, it would be to try to find those modern day philanthropists who can build and augment the funds that originally created the Trust that now supports our work.

We all need more money - but it's hardly your fault we don't have it.

--

I've heard people say that JRRT is perceived as a Lib Dem organisation, although I don't know if that's a problem or not. I don't think it had any impact on our work, including doing cross-party engagement.

As per previous comment - and being v frank - I would avoid funding any work to do with AI impact, because I think it's yet to be shown that this will have any meaningful negative impact on democracy; there are loads of other funders trying to fund this area; and most research in this area is poor-quality anyway.

I think JRRT has most impact when it funds things that are difficult to get funding for elsewhere e.g. existing tools and processes that work well but are hard to get core funding for; small grants to tiny organisations; non-charitable organisations; etc.

Grantee Perceptions Survey 2024: UKDF free text answers

Do you have any comments on our priorities?

- **Why do you think we should prioritise in the specific areas you ranked the highest in Q17?**
- **Are there any areas that you don't think we should prioritise, and if so, why?**
- **Do you have any other suggestions for where we should prioritise?**

Constituent reform needed to combat disillusionment, same with trust.

Voter participation to increase numbers of people registering to vote.

Police powers would be an interesting avenue to explore and would work with the wider mission or understanding the civic importance of government and governance.

--

The fund needs to be focused on democratic issues as the only Democracy funder in the UK.

--

Trust in politics must be a priority because if people cannot trust their politicians and politics, they won't trust the policy decisions they take, however rational they are. Improving voter participation is also critical because politicians prioritise talking to registered voters who vote.

--

I think systemic changes are the most important in the long run, even if they are the hardest to get. Therefore I think it's vital that Rowntree continues to support these. I also think, given resource limitations, that Rowntree steers clear of those areas where there already are big players.

--

I believe that addressing the longstanding gaps in civic engagement and representation within underrepresented communities is very important and need to be prioritised.

Prioritising efforts that amplify the voices of these communities and support educational initiatives on democratic participation is essential for fostering greater inclusivity and equity.

--

I find the approach to democratic reforms - PR, AVR, votes for 16 yos, votes for residents as well as encouraging participation of those not often involved in politics - voter reg, ethnic minorities in politics a very clear aim for the fund.

--

Young people report they do not feel confident engaging in voting, democracy as it is not taught widely in schools.

Added to the curriculum, encourage young people to take action locally to make change in their communities and link to democratic engagement. So they feel they can make a difference in their community first, then develop their knowledge and skills to be able to feel confident to vote and participate.

Social action projects to develop their interest.

--

There is a particular opportunity to embed votes at 16 and high quality political education for young people across the UK within the next few years.

Have you got any additional comments about our impact on your field or organisation?

Our interests and those of the Democracy Fund overlap only a little so it's not a problem that it has limited influence in our primary field.

--

Really useful organisation, you can see the genuine impact the fund has provided to fantastic, innovative organisations wanting to do great work to increase civic engagement.

--

I think the fund has a lot of influence as the only funder and we really need there to be a strategy as actors in this space.

--

JRRT is the only consistent funder of our sector so has a significant impact on the activities of the mainly small orgs in the sector and can play (and does play) an important role in helping the sector to avoid overlap and competition.

--

Whilst we appreciate the huge financial support, it seems the fund often offers more direct advocacy support on other campaigns eg through open letters, meetings with key stakeholders, etc. Our campaign doesn't seem as passionately defended by the fund.

--

Your support has had a significant impact on our ability to engage with the community through Skate Cabal's 'Rolling for Change' initiative. By focusing on civic engagement and voter registration, we've been able to reach underrepresented groups in innovative ways that resonate with their lived experiences. The resources and guidance provided have empowered us to amplify community voices, fostering greater awareness and participation in the democratic process. This kind of impact has strengthened our role as a community-focused organisation and helped us create lasting change

--

I like the way you gather feedback. The event in London was really valuable and make us an organisation feel valued and that our contribution and experience as a youth work service was valued. You understand that Democracy is a part but not all of what we do and that we can use our influence to support young people in this field.

--

You are one of our smaller funders, but the support has been especially important in increasing our impact

Overall, what do you find helpful and/or frustrating about our application process?

I remember spending a lot of time developing and refining the proposal, though this ultimately helped our project. There was a fair bit of back and forth in order to get it approved, but this meant that there was no single definitive proposal and budget to refer to when it came to implementing the project. That is clearly the responsibility of the grant recipient to deal with, but some support on this post-approval would have been appreciated. Maybe even just a kick-off meeting to check everything is in place would help.

--

Not in your control, but the surprise timing of the GE meant we had to really quickly pivot our approach and amend our application.

--

The engagement of your staff in helping to shape a fruitful process is very helpful.

--

Speaking to an individual was exceedingly helpful to discuss how our plans and funder plans could best align

--

Very helpful staff from JRRT in submitting funding application

--

The support and guidance from Ellen and Betsy has been exceptional.

It can be difficult to find the UKDF application on the JRRT website and more generally to clearly distinguish information provided for each (especially for those of us who are ND, the fact there is no visual differentiation in colours, branding etc doesn't help).

It would be helpful to have a shorter application form for grants up to £10k.

--

I want to shout out Betsy in our last application round who was an incredible support and gave some really helpful feedback.

For the last three bids we have submitted to the Democracy Fund we have been asked at the last minute to decrease the funding ask (once on the day of submission) which has led to us having to cover the core costs from the grant from other work. It would be useful for core costs to be considered important to allow organisations in the space to build their financial resilience.

--

The lack of certainty around the likelihood of success when applying!

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Changing goal posts: were encouraged to apply after an initial call but then were told it wasn't appropriate for the fund.

There is a disproportionately high focus on academic rationale on parliamentary processes in the application that other funds don't require. I believe this disadvantages those that are campaigning on issues from lived experience and don't have as much formal knowledge of the Parliamentary system and don't benefit from connections to politicians and the media

--

I did have to provide extensive information on my experience in community engagement and community research, and explain how we are rooted in the community. While it was detailed, I found it helpful as it allowed me to reflect on the work I've done and how the skills and experience I've gained are transferable to support democratic engagement efforts. It was rewarding to see how our community-focused approach aligns with the goals of this initiative.

The support from Local Champion CIC was also invaluable, and I found the information on your website—particularly the criteria and guidance on tracking metrics for campaigns—extremely helpful.

--

Unknown - I am new to our organisation (after the bid was awarded)

--

I found the application process fairly easy compared to big academic funders. The application form felt manageable and appropriate. I particularly valued that JRRT staff took time to talk to me about our application in the process. Feedback came very quickly. The interview process was slightly daunting as we weren't sure what questions would be asked.

--

Clear and well supported process. Friendly and supportive staff and while we were anxious about meeting Trustees, they were wonderful and had great insights and questions

--

I think the process was a pain at times. Having to pass a 'test/interview' in order to get to the next stage doesn't seem fair. Although I understand it's about saving people time not doing a full application etc. I didn't appreciate the rewrites.

--

To have personal support on how to improve the application was fantastic. Not something you receive often during the grant application process.

--

We found the process really simple compared to other funding portals

Overall, what do you find helpful and/or frustrating about our reporting processes?

This is a learning for us as we do more short term projects, but the reporting timescales, particularly on finances, didn't line up with our own internal processes, which meant that an initial figure reported had to be corrected a few weeks later.

I may have missed a substantive discussion that a colleague had with the Fund, but to my knowledge there hasn't been one per se.

--

Not frustrating - but we produced an external evaluation of our project and there was a little confusion about this and our final report

--

We haven't had the resource to work with JRRT and the UK democracy fund. It would be nice to have the support back.

--

Useful to take the time to reflect on the impact and report back.

--

It would be great to be able to write more than 2 pages for larger grants.

--

The reporting processes are not overburdensome which is welcome

--

The report itself is fine but the grants are for a short period of time and realistically not much tangible policy change happens in a year so it's difficult to plan ahead and feel safe that we will have funding for the campaign

--

I found the JRRT team extremely approachable. It was the first time I managed and led on a grant and it gave me a lot of confidence to have people available that I could ask questions. At the time, particularly the UK Democracy Fund manager and Nicky Milsted in the office were super helpful. Huge thanks to them!

--

Very helpful - submitting a two page report is very refreshing and also challenges us to be clear and succinct

--

The edits.

The amount of reports and meetings to labour, excuse the pun, the same findings over and over.

If you are a member, what do you value about the Democracy Network? And/or what would you like to see the Democracy Network improve or do differently?

Would love the Democracy Network to focus more on increasing representation in the room - whether that's making young people or those from underrepresented communities feel more welcome at conferences.

--

The diversity, the open-mindedness, the enthusiasm.

--

Its coordinating ability. I would like it to demonstrate that it can activate its wider membership in support of a small number of national campaigns

--

It has built an impressive network of organisations.

Focus on the networking side, forget about trying to do campaigns. It's too broad to make things work.

--

As a member of the Democracy Network, I value the opportunity to connect with like-minded individuals and organisations that are deeply invested in strengthening democratic engagement. The platform provides valuable resources, insights, and networking opportunities that allow us to learn from each other and collaborate on shared goals, especially around engaging underrepresented communities.

--

Only recent – can't comment yet.

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It is useful to be a part of it though most of the posts are England-centric and more so Westminster-centric. Would be good to see more regional discourse. Also being in Belfast makes it difficult to participate in real-world meetings and events.

If you are not a member, or are not engaging in the activities of the Democracy Network, why is that and how could the Network better accommodate you?

We have been involved in other networks but not the Democracy Network to my knowledge.

--

Our project was to support the realisation of new legislation extending voting rights in Scotland to refugees and migrants in Scotland - we were not necessarily a traditional grantee of the fund. We have sought to maintain engagement but this has been challenging with other priorities and issues

--

Someone to explain how to get involved again.

--

We have attended events before and never really felt seen. We're keen to work with the network though to make it more representative and welcoming to those working with underrepresented groups.

--

More email contact?

--

Happy to be a member, it is just that as an organisation we are more focused on art and creativity.

--

I think at the time our involvement was all too much

--

We will definitely look into joining

--

We find most things are London centric and more needs to be done to engage the wider cities.

Please specify any areas not in the list above where your organisation needs to strengthen:

We need to register with charity and we need support

--

There was a significant interest around the elections for organisations to have training and support on delivering digital campaigns.

--

Research

We would greatly appreciate overall feedback about how we are perceived – positive or negative – and suggestions as to how we can be more effective.

We were really supported by the fund in developing and delivering our grant - conversations were transparent, supportive, realistic and there was a real desire to learn (and to ensure learning was built in).

--

We are a community organisation, Called Bangladeshi Women's Association Wales and received a funding three years ago.

We have a greater need to grow and establish with a charity number and need some funding to do that, so that we could proceed with more constructive work with JRRT and UK democracy fund.

--

The Democracy Fund is one of the most effective funders that we work with. Ellen and Betsy are incredibly supportive to our work and the opportunity to bounce ideas around normally leads us to a better solution or strategy. The quick turnarounds for grants are rare and really helpful.

We have also been able to benefit from longer-term funding which has made a huge difference in what we have been able to achieve, I would encourage the fund to do more of that work to give organisations stability.

At the moment the fund doesn't have a strategy which is difficult for the sector as many organisations are designing their strategies for the new government and parliament. We would also really welcome more engagement between the board and the sector as they currently feel very distant from the work.

If the fund is moving away from voter engagement work that will leave a significant hole in the funding landscape which will lead to a lot of practice being lost (and likely needing to be rebuilt before the next general election). It would be great to have some clarity on that sooner rather than later.

--

JRRT is perceived positively and more so if JRRT was able to work with other funders to grow the pot available for democracy-related work.

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We are grateful for our relationship and the support we have received. As a relatively new charity, we need to build our organisational capacity so for us it would be helpful to be able to access longer-term funding to help us plan and grow.

--

Overall, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust / UK Democracy Fund is perceived as a highly credible and impactful organisation that plays a critical role in supporting democratic engagement, especially within underrepresented communities. Your commitment to advancing democratic reform, funding grassroots initiatives, and ensuring that marginalised voices are heard is highly respected and appreciated.

One suggestion for improvement would be to further amplify your communication and visibility within smaller, local organisations that may not yet be aware of your resources and support. Making your work even more accessible to groups who might not have experience with large-scale funding could help diversify the range of initiatives benefiting from your support.

Lastly, increasing opportunities for networking among grantees like the Lessons Learned Event held in October 2024, creating spaces for collaborative learning, and sharing insights would further strengthen the collective impact of everyone involved in advancing democracy.

--

I feel that we as an organisation are valued and listened to. I like that you take on board flexible approaches to working with young people to engage them in democracy. (Let us do what we feel is helpful)

More communication with us as partners/grantees. Maybe commisioning of orgs. that have been successful.

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Very professional and supportive.

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Our process was amazing but I don't know about other things that are going on, would love to be more involved as the last meeting was really powerful.

Grantee Perceptions Survey 2024: JRSST-CT free text answers

Do you have any comments on our priorities?

- **Why do you think we should prioritise in the specific areas you ranked the highest in Q17?**
- **Are there any areas that you don't think we should prioritise, and if so, why?**
- **Do you have any other suggestions for where we should prioritise?**

This is a big range of priorities for a smallish grant maker to have and it would be useful to know whether there might be scope to hone them into 2-3 areas with more strategic longer term funding for those areas.

--

Addressing widening inequalities of power through supporting alternative ways of organising, more directly democratic forms of community action and collective control of assets

--

I think that the specific groups whose voice and power differential need greater attention in a political context tend to change over time, and so my perspective about what should be prioritised reflects the institutional channels through which I think that can best happen regardless of which group(s) at any point in time are most in need of that attention.

--

Open and accountable government leads to informed and engaged citizens. Countering the use of AI through government and regulatory intervention with the private sector will weaken the misinformation from populist movements which are designed to cause social distress and demonisation.

--

There's been a big focus on voting, but it often feels like that one part of a very big puzzle. Often this seems to have taken the form of large scale digital campaigns, but I worry that this does little to actively address the real reasons why people aren't voting. Many simply feel there is nothing/little to vote for.

I think doing more work on educating people, particularly on the collective power they have to hold government to account needs more of a focus, and is a positive way to restore a sense of agency to people. That education can be at young levels through schools, colleges, youth clubs etc. But I also think it can be through media and work places, unions etc to try and support people's understanding of how they can impact the communities and wider societies they live in.

--

As a charitable funder with a high risk tolerance, JRSST-CT has the very rare potential to support evidence-led policy advocacy in relation to complex systemic challenges in our democratic system, in particular: embedding deliberative

mechanisms; boosting the capacity of independent media to inform and empower citizens; and constitutional and voting reform. These issues are responsive to evidence, unlike, e.g., 'diversity in politics' or 'countering support for populist and extremist parties' which are about campaigning on moral or normative grounds and which, therefore, JRRT is better placed to address.

--

I don't think the focus necessarily matters as much as your ethos, methodology and culture. Whatever you decide, within the parameters of your mission, it would be good to embed an equity led approach in the design and delivery.

Have you got any additional comments about our impact on your field or organisation?

My response here is a reflection of the impact and understanding of the funder on the wider organisation (i.e., the University of York), of which my impact-oriented and stakeholder-focused research comprises only a small part. I think JRSST-CT as a funder understands the latter quite well and has a huge influence on our ability to do our work.

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Our field is taken for granted by the public and civil society. Funders are shy in supporting the non party political strategy we deliver. Your awareness of the issues and benefit of strategic action enable funding to be made which makes a huge difference. Without it we would be operationally weak.

--

Our immediate field - independent media - may not be in the bull's-eye of your concerns in relation to democracy, and therefore you may not be recognised as a major influence in this field; but your support for our work over the last few years has helped us draw the link between independent media and the health of UK democracy, thereby steadily building support for our mission.

--

Thank you for making it clear that you are on a journey and willing to learn. I truly wish we could work with you more without the upper limit restriction on charitable funding, as we evolve.

Overall, what do you find helpful and/or frustrating about our application process?

Only that it would be nice to be able to apply for more than one year, and have more continuity of funding rather than gaps between one grant and another

--

Nothing, it was very responsive and easy to understand.

--

Helpful to have a guidance and support in framing the bid - a critical friend.
Frustrating as timelines on website did not tally with award timeline - no summer diet.
However that proved to be ok as developments we were expecting were delayed.

--

sometimes the goalposts of what an outcome v output is seemed to move? What was sufficient for one application wasn't for later ones. I also think there's quite a strict limit on pages. it is quite difficult to set out in just two pages a whole application, but i can understand why you'd want applications not to be too long either.

--

The website is very straightforward and the process is simple. It's nice that you ask applicants to identify three intended outcomes, but I wonder whether you could do more, after a grant has been awarded, to discuss these intentions with grantees and modify them if necessary, so that we can all review outcomes together with a shared understanding of what we're aiming to achieve.

--

Perhaps too open to interpretation

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The current situation with the Government highlights the wholly self-defeating strategic commitment to engagement with Labour Together and related organisations as the only viable means of achieving change. Evaluating activity on the basis of whether or not it has Labour Together's support is a myopic and bizarre position to adopt by an organisation apparently committed to democracy

Overall, what do you find helpful and/or frustrating about our reporting processes?

We always find it useful to draw up reports and it is quite light touch compared to other funders which we appreciate.

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N/A, no reporting yet

--

Streamlined and not onerous.

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Not much, I think it's quite light touch and doesn't require too much effort on my part. I also like that I'm being held accountable for what we've managed to achieve with the funding.

--

Reporting is nice and simple, but would be good to have some way of discussing shared learning.

--

Main case officer was away or unavailable for a while.

If you are a member, what do you value about the Democracy Network? And/or what would you like to see the Democracy Network improve or do differently?

We are kept up to date through email contact/newsletters so it is passive support/membership. Now that we have funding in place there is an opportunity to engage. We have so many competing demands on our time that it is a luxury to engage strategically with external bodies aligned to our interests.

--

A good sounding board, makes it much easier to know what's going on in the democracy space so you can work out what other work is happening and how your projects might fill a gap, or complement that ongoing work.

Would be nice to do more in person things again! I think those can be really useful. Also more conversations about funding, including ethical funding considerations.

--

Useful to be able to articulate the role of independent news media within the wider democracy landscape.

--

Access to similar charities but we needed a news piece about our search for a merger partner covered and it wasn't. As a result we decided to wind- up the charity.

If you are not a member, or are not engaging in the activities of the Democracy Network, why is that and how could the Network better accommodate you?

Because it feels very much oriented on pre-existing democratic institutions and institutions of power, rather than on supporting alternatives being built by communities and collectives at the grassroots.

--

Our research team is very interested in learning how our work could be better used to support activities of the Democracy Network, but the project is relatively new and so we simply have not yet had the chance to explore such opportunities.

--

There is not a problem with the Network, it is our ability to engage and that comes down to financial resources.

--

I had not heard of the Network before

Please specify any areas not in the list above where your organisation needs to strengthen:

The biggest obstacle to our operation is fundraising, and that could be priorities 1-4 in the above table. Finding and securing funding is pivotal to success. Crafting a narrative and reaching the right funders/organisations/companies/individuals is a huge challenge and not being based in London seems to keep us out of the opportunity loop.

--

Upscaling

We would greatly appreciate overall feedback about how we are perceived – positive or negative – and suggestions as to how we can be more effective.

Overall focus is clear and the level of engagement in the development of proposals have been quite helpful and most welcome. It ensures that submissions stand a better chance as they are co-created, with the initial idea/planned work centred on the submitting organisation's area of expertise.

--

We really appreciate the warm and friendly atmosphere and tone of the Trust. We really enjoyed the meeting where you brought different grantees together and wonder if there could be more scope for that - it was particularly useful to have major political players in the room and more could have been made of that and to perhaps leverage the Trusts' influence to continue that engagement.

Longer term funding to avoid the administrative burden of yearly reporting and applications would be fantastic and help build resilience in this sector.

--

Positively perceived, absolutely.

Use your current staff and Board's expert knowledge, and that of funded organisations, to be pro-active in sharing evidence based knowledge and practice. The impact will help shift/inform the debate, challenge perceptions on what matters to democracy, what works to make our democracy fairer, government responsive and the public better aware of malicious manipulation.

--

I think the fund could probably do more to attract grassroots organisations or individuals from marginalised backgrounds. Often when I tell others in my field about your funding, they've heard of you but not been aware that their work might fit into your scope? My impression was during 2020 after the BLM movement took off that as an organisation there were plans to look at this, four years on it might be good to reflect on whether there's been enough improvement around funding this type of work which does really matter in our democracy.

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I think you are perceived extremely positively as an unusually open, supportive and risk tolerant funder which is 100% committed to the causes you support. The challenge you face is that you are trying to support a large and complex ecosystem of researchers and advocates on extremely limited resources. So, one of the most effective things you could do would be to bring other funders into this space.

--

A great funder! Was a little surprised that the Trustees weren't keen on supporting a % portion of overheads.

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We appreciated the grant which allowed a piece of research - shortlisted for a Democracy Network award.

Sadly we will no longer be around, but there are new charities in the promotion of free speech and debate.

We were trail blazers!

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There's so much we are thankful for. Our experience was quite positive. However, unrestricted, core grants are the most helpful way to support organisations. Additionally, I think that BAMER led grassroots nonprofits would find you a little bit inaccessible and I wonder if we could work together to change that. Otherwise you are doing a fogey

--

You are easily approachable, friendly, and the grant has played a big part in making our work possible. Thank you!

Thank you for being very responsive to emails, having a flexible approach to funding, and always making the grant payments on time. This helps us keep our financial budget up-to-date.