

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.

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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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Nothing, it was very responsive and easy to understand.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.

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

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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.

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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.

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

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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.

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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.

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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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.