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Grantee & Applicant Perceptions Survey 2024

Fiona Weir, Chief Executive, JRRT & JRSST-CT

Response rate

The survey was sent to 198 grantees and applicants who made grant applications to the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRRT) and/or JRSST Charitable Trust (JRSST-CT) and/or the UK Democracy Fund (UKDF) since 2020. It was received by 187 (with 11 emails bouncing back. The response rate was 59% which is very good – 33% for applicants and 64% for grantees (1 unknown).

	Response rate	Number of respondents
2024	59%	110
2020	49%	53
2017	61%	43

nfpResearch typically finds that the response rates for grant holders is about 40% and for unsuccessful applicants is 15%.

Methodology

The survey was sent to applicants to JRRT, JRSST-CT and UKDF enabling analysis across all three entities or by entity. The data analysis focusses on “all respondents” data, adding separate data for JRRT, JRSST-CT and UKDF where there are differences it is useful to highlight. The separate reports are available on request.

An important caveat is that sample sizes are low and fall even lower for questions which respondents skip, which are not relevant, or for subsets such as racial-justice-focussed organisations. While the numbers are low, JRSST-CT’s 16 respondents represent about half of its grantees and UKDF’s 24 responses constitute two thirds of its grantees.

The number of respondents with grants from more than one organisation was small. These are not analysed separately and the results appear in each entity’s data.

- JRRT: 78 responses – 6 are also UKDF, 3 JRSST-CT
- UKDF: 24 responses – 6 are also JRRT
- JRSST-CT: 16 responses – 3 are also JRRT
- There is no overlap between JRSST-CT and UKDF
- One respondent was unidentified

The numbers are best considered alongside the qualitative responses to open questions which can be downloaded from our website; the links are provided at the end of this report. Extracts are included in places within this summary analysis to provide flavour.

1. About our grantees

Who did we survey?

One grant received	41.28%	45
Multiple grants received	47.71%	52
Made one or more unsuccessful applications	21.1%	23
	<i>Answered</i>	109

97 (89%) respondents had received a grant – 41% one grant, 48% multiple grants.

23 respondents (21%) had made an unsuccessful application. Of these, 12 respondents (11% of total respondents) were applicants only; 11 respondents (10% of total respondents) had both received at least one grant and made at least one unsuccessful application.

Organisation type

	All entities		JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
Non-charitable campaign group	40	36%	46%	13%	21%
Registered charity	35	32%	23%	69%	38%
Political party of political association	5	5%	6%	0%	0%
Unincorporated / CIC	11	10%	8%	6%	17%
Academic or think tank	10	9%	9%	25%	4%
Other	19	17%	19%	0%	21%
<i>Answered</i>	110				

Demographic focus

These questions were not asked in previous years.

Is your organisation's primary purpose focussed on a particular demographic?

39% of the 108 responses reported a demographic focus – JRRT 34%. This was much higher for UKDF at 71% and lower for JRSST-CT at 12.5% (two responses). The breakdown is set out below:

	Number of respondents*			
	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
One or more Black or minoritised ethnic community	8	2	1	4
Young people	9	3	1	6
A specific gender	7	6	0	1
People with disabilities	2	0	0	2
Migrants	3	3	0	1
Other	21	16	2	5
Answered	50	30	4	19

* The number of respondents across the separate entity columns does not always add up exactly to the number in the 'All' column. This is due to some respondents showing up in more than one of the entity columns where they have received grants from more than one entity.

Is your organisation's primary focus racial justice?

10% – 11 of 108 responding organisations said yes – JRRT 8 (10.5%), JRSST-CT 0% and UKDF 2 (8%).

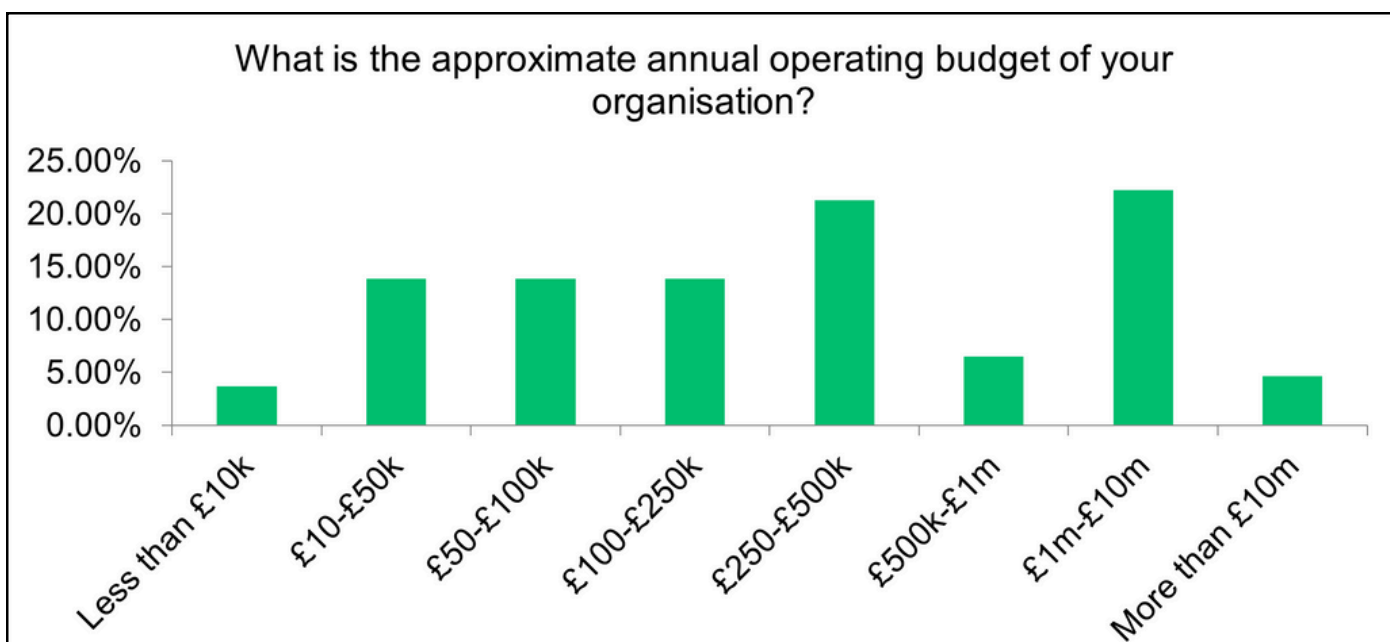
Can your organisation be described as Black or minoritised led?^[1]

Nearly a fifth (18.5%), 20 of 108 respondents said yes – JRRT 11 (14.5%), JRSST-CT 2 (13%) and UKDF 8 (33%).

[1] Question includes the statement that this is defined by the Funders for Race Equality Alliance as having a mission to benefit Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and a majority of leadership (at 75% of the senior team and board level) from the community(ies) that the organisation serves.

Income profile

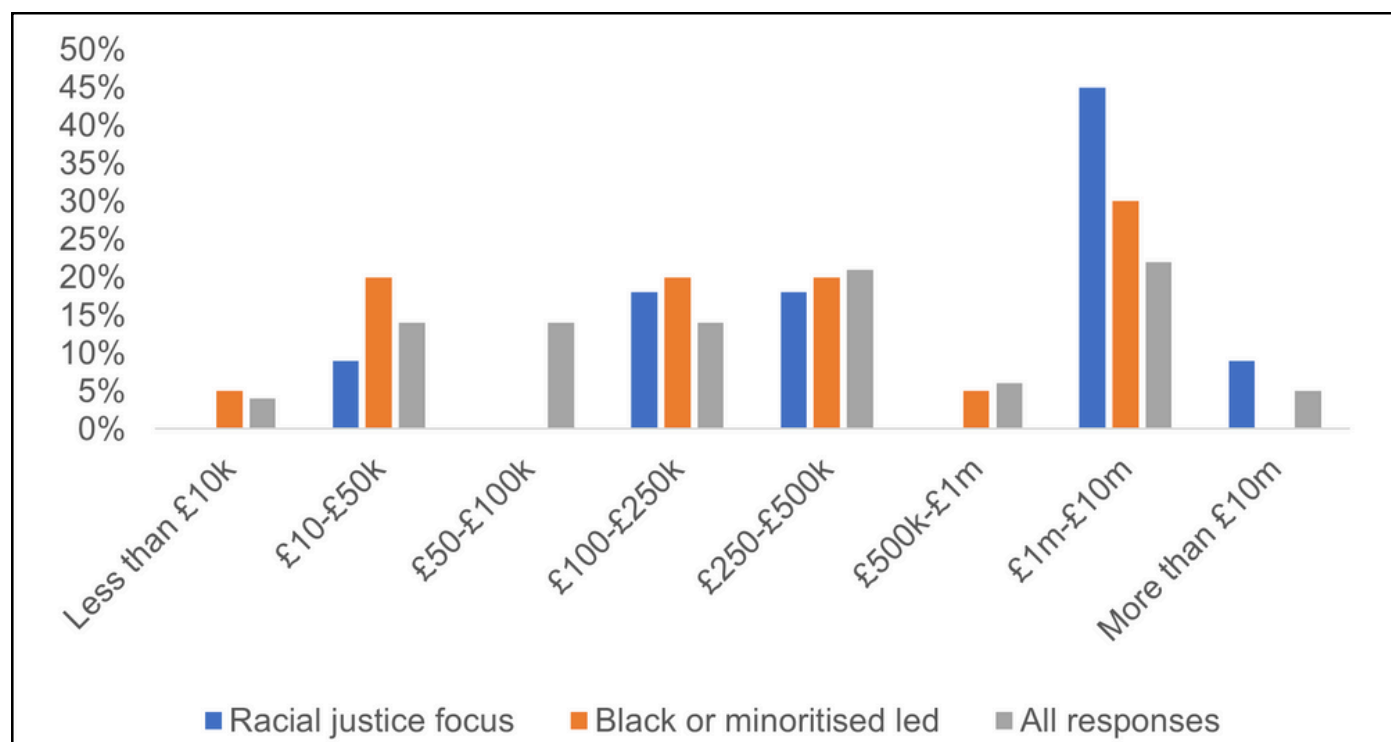
Income profile is similar across the entities, although JRSST-CT has a higher proportion of grantees at both the low and high end but few between £50-250k.



The table below shows the different income profile across each entity. Organisations with income between £250-500k and £1-10m predominate.

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF	Racial justice focus	Black led
Less than £10k	4%	3%	13%	0%	0%	5%
£10-£50k	14%	14%	13%	14%	9%	20%
£50-£100k	14%	17%	0%	9%	0%	0%
£100-£250k	14%	17%	6%	5%	18%	20%
£250-£500k	21%	21%	19%	32%	18%	20%
£500k-£1m	6%	5%	13%	9%	0%	5%
£1m-£10m	22%	22%	25%	23%	45%	30%
More than £10m	5%	3%	13%	9%	9%	0%
<i>Answered</i>	108					

The 11 responses from organisations with a racial justice focus and the 20 responses from Black- or minoritised-led organisations show a similar distribution, but with a higher number with income between £1-10m:



Previous data (table below) suggests a decline in the number of organisations with less than £100k (albeit still 1 in 3) and organisations with less than £250k.

	2024 All	2020 JRRT & UKDF	2017 JRRT
< £100k	32%	44%	63%
£100k-£250k	14%	37%	12%
£250k-£1m	28%	15%	
> £1m	27%	4%	24%

Dependency

JRRT & UKDF average grant size in 2023 was £61k, £54k in 2024. In that context, (even accounting for smaller organisations generally applying for smaller grants) for a high number of grantees, a grant is likely to represent a high proportion of annual income for many grantees, but rarely sole income.

How much, if at all, has a JRRT grant improved your ability to sustain the work it funded in the future?

Just over half (56%) of grantees are positive about the extent to which their grant has helped them sustain their work and draw in additional resources.

Positive scores (5-7) are JRRT 60%, JRSST-CT 38% and UKDF 53%. Responses are higher for groups with a racial justice focus (66%) and black led (72%).

It is fair to conclude that for just over 1 in 2 grantees, our grants fund the work and help to sustain and grow the organisation's capacity to draw in added resource.

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF	Racial justice focus	Black led
1 No improvement; remain reliant	5%	5%	8%	5%	0%	6%
2	9%	13%	0%	5%	11%	12%
3	10%	10%	15%	10%	0%	0%
4	20%	12%	38%	29%	22%	12%
5	15%	15%	0%	24%	11%	24%
6	14%	12%	23%	10%	22%	30%
7 Substantial improvement; helped draw in added resource	27%	33%	15%	19%	33%	18%
Answered	88				9	17

Overall positive scores (5-7) were 56% in 2024, 65% in 2020 and 56% in 2017. The lower figure in 2024 is not surprising given the effects of Covid-19, the cost-of-living crisis and inflation on the funding environment.

Funding difficulties

Although the impact of our grants is positive, nearly half of grantees are not seeing improved ability to sustain work. Funding pressure was reflected in the questions (see later) on capacity-building needs. "Support with growing and diversifying income" was again the top ranked response, by a significant amount, 53% across all three entities.



"JRRT is perceived positively, and [maybe] even more so if JRRT was able to work with other funders to grow the pot available for democracy-related work"



"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."

Board handling of inflation was noted positively:



"It was also great that in the context of rising inflation, the grant was automatically increased to match inflation. Thank you again!"

Multiyear funding

In the open responses some applicants raised multiyear funding:



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



"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."



"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."

Size of entity

JRRT may need to look at questions of sustainability and effectiveness of different sized organisations. Open comments noted both positive reasons to fund small organisations but also the structural difficulties where one or two staff are also responsible for HR, finances, governance and other functions or lack critical mass.



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



"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."



"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".



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



"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."

2. About us

How did you first hear about us?

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
Search engine	8%	8%	14%	0%
Word of mouth	65%	71%	71%	33%
Media mention	0%	0%	0%	0%
Social media mention	0%	0%	0%	0%
Referral by another funder	6%	5%	7%	4%
Contacted directly	10%	7%	0%	33%
Other	11%	9%	7%	29%
<i>Answered</i>	106			

The figures have not varied much compared to previous surveys with word of mouth remaining highest across all entities, and the UK Democracy Fund particularly high on direct approaches as a funder that carries out direct outreach to source potential applicants who could contribute to the Fund's goals.

Black and minoritised-led organisations were more likely to have heard of us by search engine (25%) or word of mouth (25%), racial-justice-focussed organisations, word of mouth (40%) and search engine (30%).

How we are seen

All three entities come across as highly **supportive**. JRRT and JRSST-CT are seen first and foremost as **democracy** organisations.

Differentiating strong words would seem to be:

JRRT: Justice, Reform, Liberal and Strategic

UKDF: Ambitious, Engagement, Passionate and Empowering

JRSST-CT: Supportive, Helpful and Efficient



What three words come to mind when you think about UKDF? 24 responses



What three words come to mind when you think about JRSST-CT? 12 responses



Strategy

Unsurprisingly, understanding of UK Democracy Fund strategy was highest with 70% positive (5-7) scores. JRRT had 55% positive scores, 2020 figure 62%. JRSST-CT 46%.

How well do you understand JRRT's strategy?

55% of the 65 respondents understand the strategy well (5-7). In 2020, this was 62%.

40% of Black- or minoritised-led organisations and 50% of groups with a racial justice focus understood the strategy well.

	2024	2020	2017
1 Not at all well	0%	0%	8%
2	5%	5%	8%
3	20%	8%	18%
4	22%	24%	21%
5	28%	19%	36%
6	25%	35%	8%
7 Extremely well	2%	8%	3%
Answered	65		

How well do you understand the UK Democracy Fund's strategy?

70% of the 23 respondents understand the strategy well. 57% of the seven Black- or minoritised-led respondents understood the strategy well, and the single racial-justice-focussed respondent scored this 5.

1 Not at all well	4%
2	0%
3	4%
4	22%
5	48%
6	13%
7 Extremely well	9%
<i>Answered</i>	23

How well do you understand JRSST-CT's strategy?

46% of the 13 JRSST-CT respondents understand the strategy well, most clustering around the middle, and 39% not well. The two Black- or minoritised-led respondents scored this 5. There were no responses from organisations with a racial justice focus.

1 Not at all well	8%
2	0%
3	31%
4	15%
5	38%
6	8%
7 Extremely well	0%
<i>Answered</i>	13

Overall, how would you rate the Trust's impact on your organisation?

All three entities have high ratings for positive impact on the organisations – overall 79% positive impact (5-7), JRRT 81%, JRSST-CT 68% and UKDF 81%. This is slightly lower for Black- or minoritised-led (73%) and racial-justice-focussed (77%) organisations.

In 2020, JRRT and UKDF together recorded 78% for positive impact on organisations (5-7).

	All	JRRT	UKDF	JRSST-CT
1 No impact	9%	13%	0%	8%
2	4%	3%	5%	8%
3	3%	1%	5%	8%
4	4%	1%	9%	8%
5	25%	20%	45%	15%
6	13%	10%	18%	15%
7 Significant positive impact	41%	51%	18%	38%
Answered	97			



"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."

How well does the Trust understand the issues on which you work?

JRRT expertise is clearly recognised by grantees, scoring 72% across the top three scores, UKDF 87% and JRSST-CT 69%. Around a quarter regard us as expert.

69% of the 19 responses from Black and minoritised-led organisations were similarly positive, as were 89% of the nine racial justice respondents.

In 2020, this was 81% across JRRT and UKDF.

	All	JRRT	UKDF	JRSST-CT
1 Limited understanding	2%	3%	0%	0%
2	6%	7%	0%	15%
3	6%	6%	0%	15%
4	12%	13%	14%	0%
5	16%	12%	32%	15%
6	33%	35%	23%	31%
7 Regarded as expert	24%	25%	32%	23%
Answered	97			



"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."

Overall, how would you rate our influence in your field?

JRRT influence in the field is clearly recognised by grantees, scoring 80% across the top three scores, UKDF 77% and JRSST-CT 52%. 89% of the nine racial-justice-focussed respondents were positive, as were 74% of the 19 Black- or minoritised-led organisations.

	All	JRRT	UKDF	JRSST-CT
1 No influence	4%	4%	0%	15%
2	5%	6%	0%	8%
3	10%	12%	9%	8%
4	9%	9%	14%	8%
5	20%	25%	23%	21%
6	23%	21%	27%	23%
7 Major influence	28%	34%	27%	8%
Answered	96			



"I think you play a unique role in funding work in our particular field. Without you, I think our field would be significantly 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!"



"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"



"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"



"UKDF: 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."



3. The application process

Overall, the survey responses, including the large number of open responses, were very positive about the application process – and went out their way to say how positive they were about the team – with many individual shout outs. The following give a flavour:



“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”.



“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.”



“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”



“I enjoy the informality of the organisation. Whilst the grant-making process is rigorous, the application process is supportive, helpful and guided.”

How useful was the Trust's website when making your application?

The website is a JRRT website with dedicated pages for JRSST-CT and UKDF.

78% of respondents are positive about the website. JRRT responses 78% positive, UKDF 81% and JRSST-CT 69%. 79% of Black- or minoritised-led organisations and 100% of racial-justice-focussed respondents are positive about the website.

In 2020, the figure was similar at 69% finding the website useful across JRRT and UKDF.

Positive comments:



“The website is very straightforward, and the process is simple” and “I found the information on your website—particularly the criteria and guidance on tracking metrics for campaigns—extremely helpful.”

Issues raised:



"I have had some frustrations with your website – some of the instructions could be clearer"



"It can be difficult to find the UKDF application [form] on the JRRT website"^[2]



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



"Distinguish information (especially for those of us who are ND [neurodiverse], the fact there is no visual differentiation in colours, branding etc doesn't help)."

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
1 Not at all useful	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	7%	7%	15%	5%
3	3%	4%	10%	0%
4	12%	10%	15%	14%
5	33%	21%	46%	57%
6	26%	31%	15%	14%
7 Extremely useful	19%	26%	8%	10%
Answered	95			

How involved was the Trust in the development of your grant proposal?

87% of responses show a high level of involvement in development of grant proposals – JRRT 87%, JRSST-CT 93% and UKDF 95%, black-led organisations 89% and racial justice focussed 87.5%.

[2] The UK Democracy Fund grant application form is not accessible via the JRRT website; the link to the online form is provided to applicants directly ahead of formal submission. This is now more clearly stated on the website in response to the feedback from respondents to the survey.

UKDF would be expected to have a higher level of involvement due to the need to ensure measurement of voter registrations, to assess electoral and charity law risk and ensure applications address learning.

It is not clear why JRSST-CT applicants record higher levels of involvement.

In 2020, the figure was 82%.

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
1 No involvement	0%	0%	0%	0%
2	2%	3%	0%	0%
3	1%	0%	8%	0%
4	10%	10%	0%	5%
5	18%	22%	8%	10%
6	30%	21%	62%	50%
7 Substantial involvement	39%	44%	23%	35%
<i>Answered</i>	94			

How much pressure did you feel to modify your priorities in order to secure funding for your grant application?

Overall, 29% of applicants record high (5-7) scores for pressure: JRRT 27%, JRSST-CT 8% and UKDF 48%.

The equivalent figure in 2020 for JRRT & UKDF was 9%.

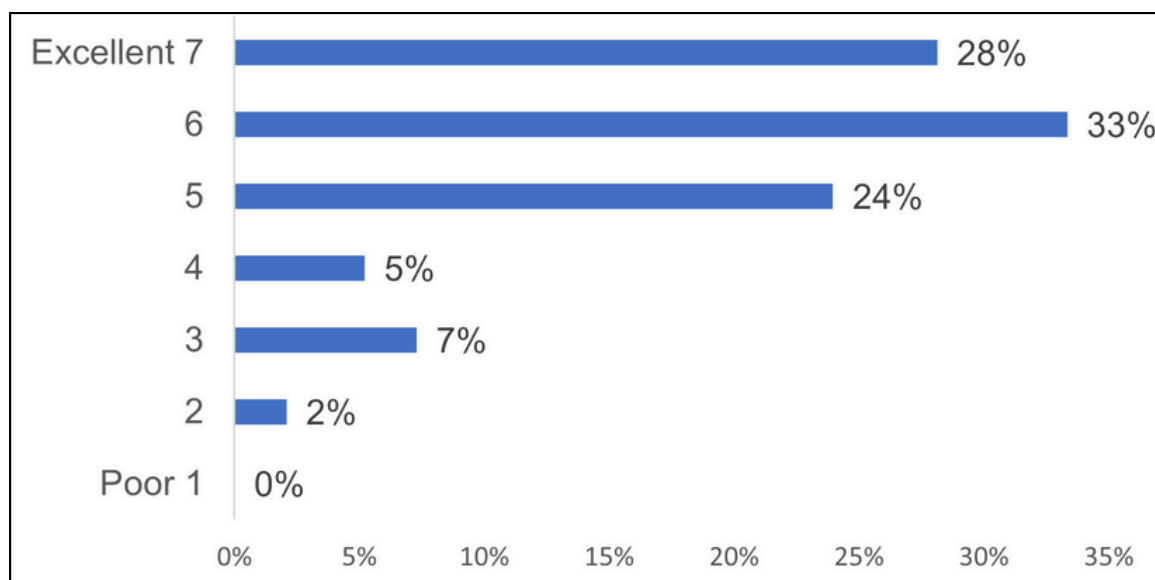
The equivalent figures were 33% of racial-justice-focussed organisations and 47% of black-led organisations – with zero recording 7, significant pressure.

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
1 No pressure	17%	19%	23%	5%
2	21%	20%	31%	14%
3	17%	16%	23%	19%
4	17%	17%	15%	14%
5	19%	19%	0%	33%
6	6%	4%	0%	10%
7 Significant pressure	4%	4%	8%	5%
<i>Answered</i>	96			

Looking across the previous two questions to see how “involvement” interacts with “pressure” there would seem to be different things going on depending on which entity the applicant is applying to.

- JRRT applicants may be experiencing high involvement (87%) with just over one in four (27%) feeling some pressure.
- JRSST-CT applicants may be experiencing high involvement (93%) but low pressure overall (note the 8% significant pressure figure represents one response).
- UKDF applicants may be experiencing high involvement (95%) with nearly a half (48%) feeling pressure.

How do you rate the speed of our application process?



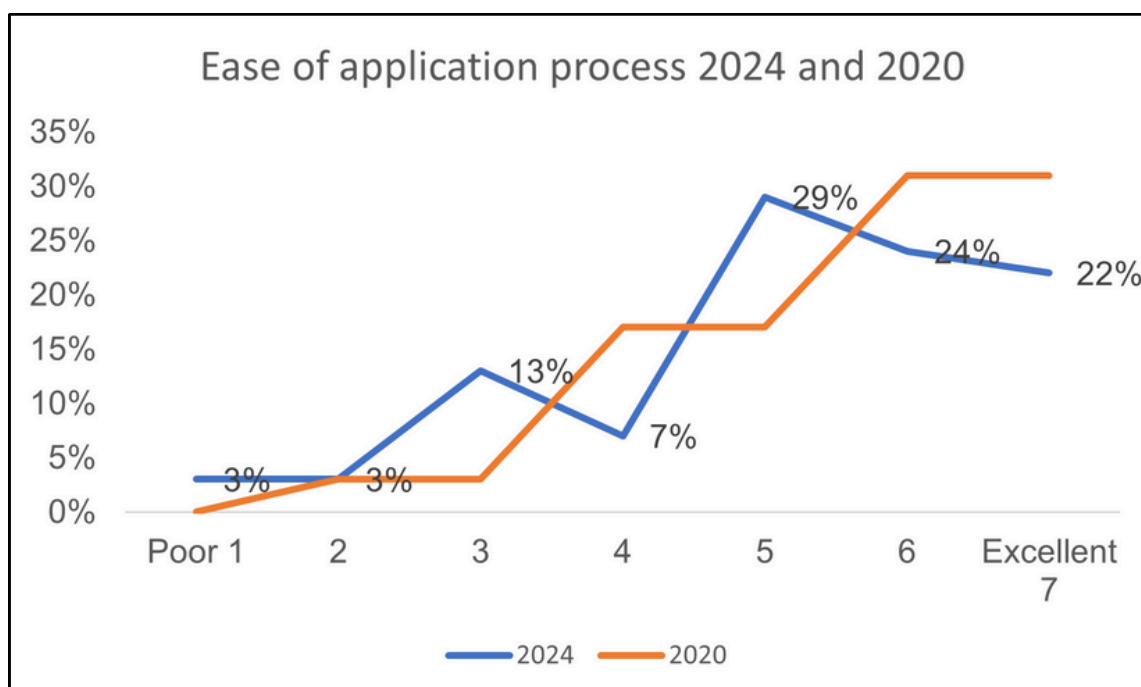
85% of the 96 responding applicants are positive about the speed of the application processes. This compares very favourably with other funders.

85% of JRRT applicants were positive, 77% JRSST-CT and 95% of UKDF. The JRSST-CT result may have been influenced by the six-month gap between main application rounds.

How do you rate the ease of our application process?

75% of the 96 responding applicants are positive about the ease of the application process. 75% of JRRT applicants are positive, 61% of JRSST-CT and 81% of UKDF.

89% of racial justice (zero negative) and 63% of Black- or minoritised-led organisations were positive (21% negative).



Feedback

Have you ever had an application turned down by the Trust?

96 applicants responded.

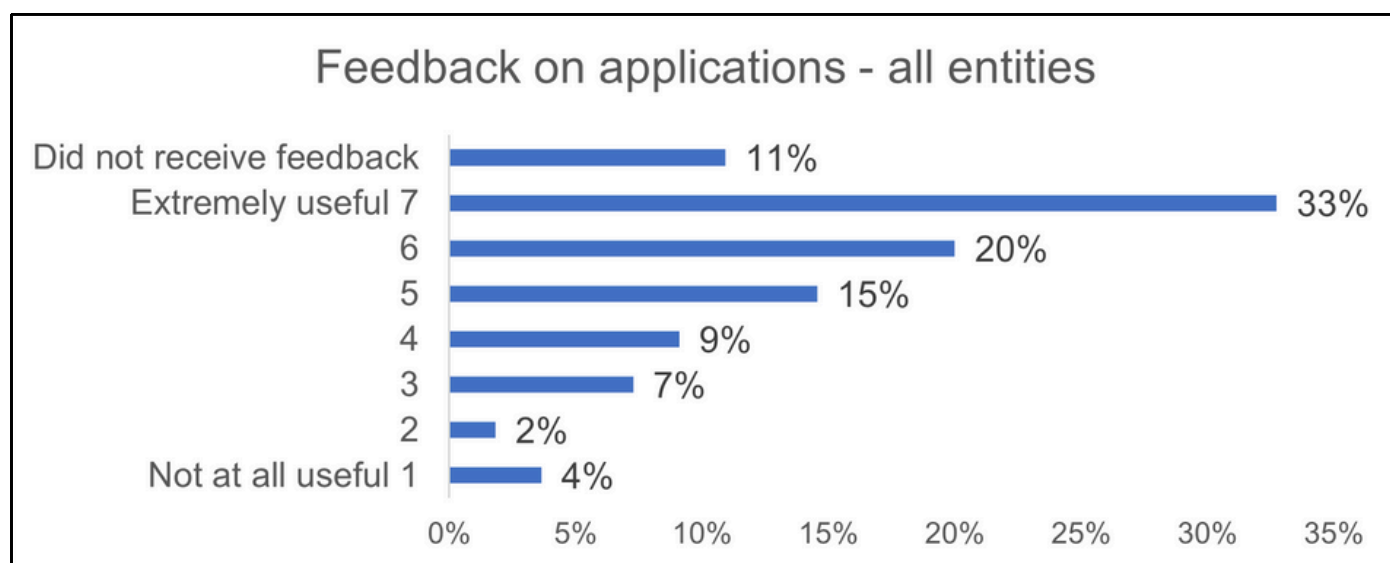
45% of respondents have had an application turned down and were able to respond to the next question. 13% didn't know.

If yes^[3] how would you rate the feedback you were given?

55 applicants responded

[3] Only 42 respondents said they had had an application turned down, whereas 55 answered this question on how useful the feedback is. We therefore assume some of those who were successful with their application also wanted to comment on feedback provided. It is important also to note that respondents dropped to 55 in total for this question, only 5 JRSST-CT and 10 UKDF.

Feedback appears to be a real strength across each of the entities.



No feedback

11% of applicants said they did not receive any feedback – 10% for UKDF applicants, 0% for JRSST-CT.

nfp research benchmark average is 46% not receiving feedback.

Quality of feedback

67% of applicants were positive about the feedback, 60% JRSST-CT, 65% JRRT and 80% UK Democracy Fund.

All racial justice and Black- or minoritised-led respondents were positive about feedback provided.

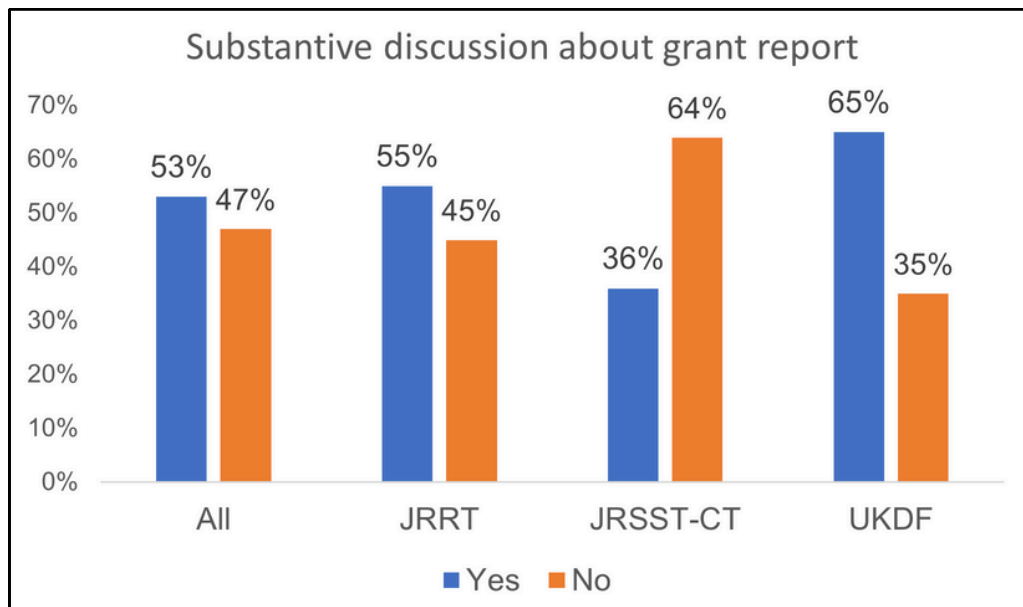
nfp research benchmark average for unsuccessful applicants finding the feedback helpful is 22%.

When you submitted a grant report, have you had a substantive discussion with the Trust about its contents?

This data excludes the fifth of respondents who have not yet submitted a report.

Overall, 53% of grantees reported having had a substantive discussion about their grant report – 55% of JRRT, 36% of JRSST-CT and 65% of UK Democracy Fund grantees.

The figure in 2020 was 60%.



The open question was very encouraging – a selection of comments below:



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



"Streamlined and not onerous."



"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."



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



"Reporting seems to balance need for detail vs. low-time-resource of grantees in this sector."



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

How comfortable do you feel approaching the Trust if a problem arises?

Building trust in approaching a funder is not easy. Overall, 87% of grantees felt comfortable doing so – 49% the highest score “very comfortable”. In 2020, the figure was 91%.

83% of Black- or minoritised-led and 100% of racial-justice-focussed organisations felt comfortable approaching the Trust if a problem arises (5-7).

JRRT positive score (5-7) was 85%, JRSST-CT 84% and UKDF 91%.

	All	JRRT	JRSST-CT	UKDF
1 Very uncomfortable	1%	0%	0%	5%
2	2%	3%	0%	0%
3	2%	3%	0%	0%
4	8%	9%	15%	5%
5	17%	14%	15%	24%
6	20%	22%	15%	10%
7 Very comfortable	49%	49%	54%	57%
Answered	92			

Overall, what do you find helpful and frustrating about our application and grant management processes?

Specific issues and negative feedback are also noted – all are listed in the open responses – and the team will work on these and bring back recommendations.



“The application was incredibly 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.”



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



“I remember spending a lot of time developing and refining the proposal, though this ultimately helped our project.”



"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."



"It took over 6 months from first submitting an idea to then resubmitting a new proposal and subsequent redrafts in order to secure funding"



"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 been strengthened in some ways by JRRT's input."

The following comments give a sense of grantee feedback on the process:



"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."



"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."



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



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

4. Strategy and priorities

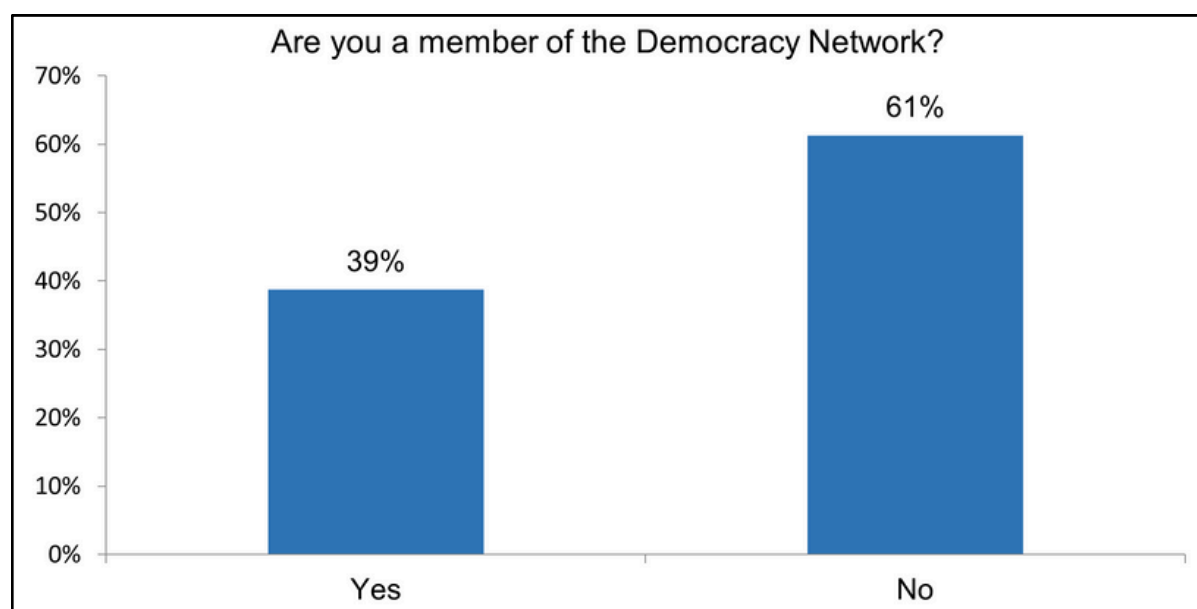
Strengthening the sector and capacity building grantees

Democracy Network

This is the first time we have asked about membership of the Democracy Network, which was set up in 2021. 93 respondents answered the question, showing nearly 4 in 10 are members, but most are not.

The data is similar across entities. 33% of Black- or minoritised-led and none of the racial-justice-focussed organisations are members.

We have shared this data with the Democracy Network.



If you are a member, what do you value about the Democracy Network? And what would you like to see the Democracy Network improve/do differently? 27 responses

Asked about what they value about the network, respondents mentioned common goals; the sense of community and belonging; the funding database; the WhatsApp group; the bulletin (numerous mentions); and the conference as an opportunity to meet people especially those who feel isolated because they work from home or are based in Northern Ireland.



"The bulletin is properly brilliant every sector should have one!"



"It has built an impressive network of organisations".



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



"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."

Asked about what they would do differently, respondents mentioned clarity of purpose; governance structure; being better 'owned' by its members, possibly hosted by numerous organisations; increasing representation of young people or those from underrepresented communities; more events outside London; and better understanding of disability.

The main areas of concern were around campaigning and politics. There were comments both that:

- DN needs to demonstrate that it can activate its wider membership in support of a small number of national campaigns; and that
- DN should focus on the networking side, forget about trying to do campaigns. It's too broad to make things work.

One respondent noted finding some of their political positions difficult in relation to their work as a charity, another that the merging of campaigns and coordination work was leading to organisations stepping away.

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? 39 responses

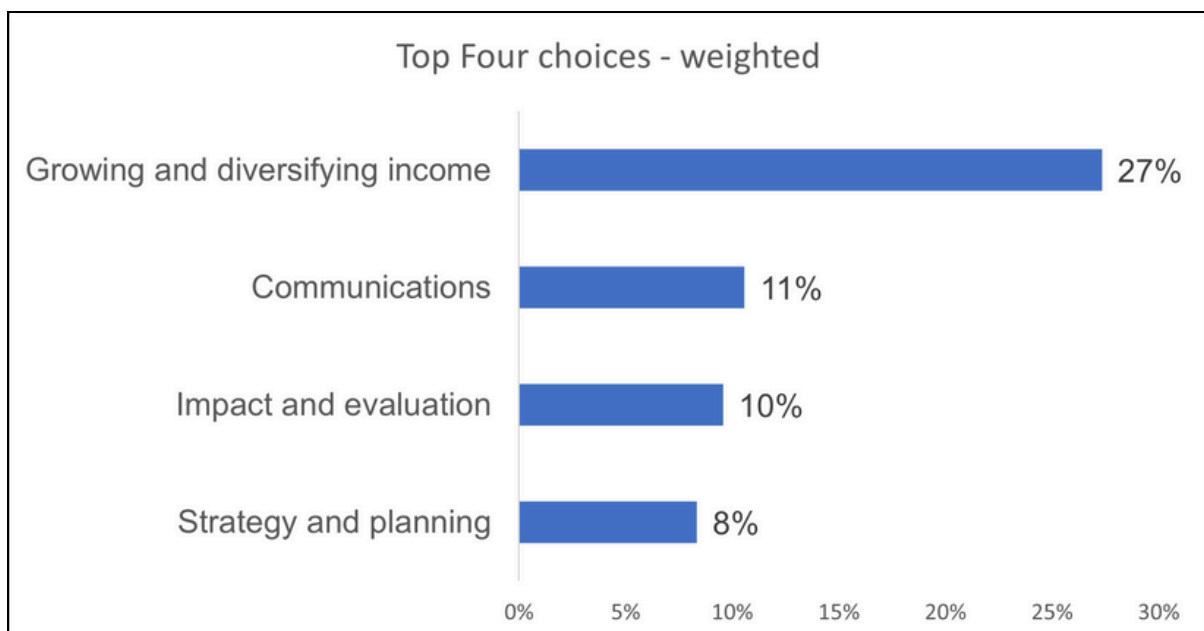
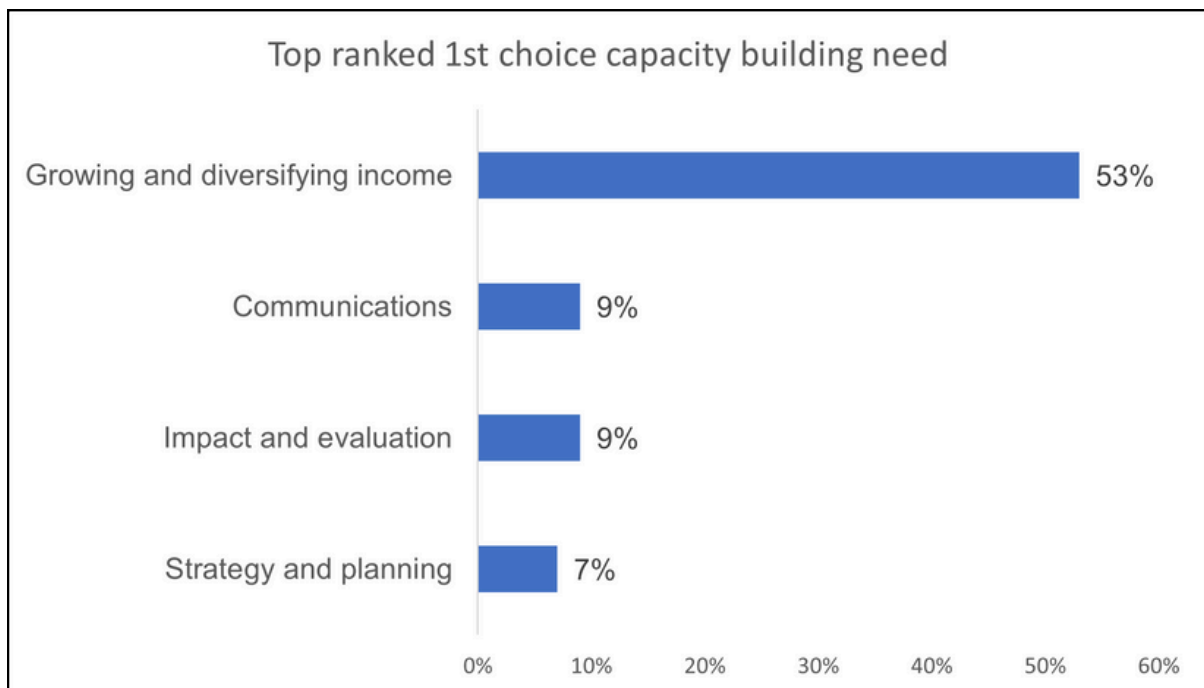
Asked why they were not a member, responses included not knowing about the network, limited capacity, London focus, or many said that they would be interested and would like to be invited. One respondent felt there wasn't a focus on supporting alternatives being built by communities and collectives at the grassroots, and one felt more work was needed to welcome underrepresented groups.

Capacity building needs

Which are the areas where your organisation needs to strengthen?

No prizes for guessing that growing and diversifying income would be the top ranked response by a significant amount, 53% across all three entities. There were 86 responses. Second choice for JRRT respondents was communications, for JRSST-CT and UKDF grantees, impact and evaluation.

Both the top ranked choice and the top four weighted give very similar results (weighting equally produces the same top 4 in the same order but narrows the gap).



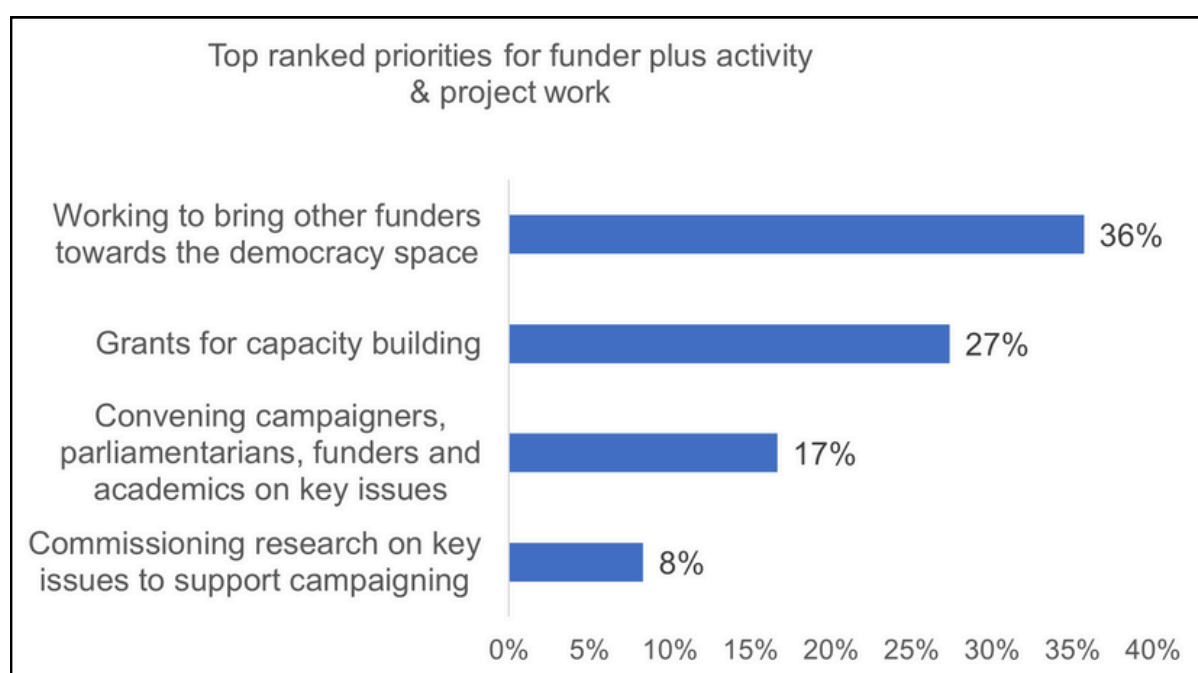
JRRT, the UK Democracy Fund and JRSST-CT are committed to strengthening the democracy sector as a whole, both through our own project work and grant making. Which of the 10 activities listed do you think we should focus on?

The 84 responses again reflected funding as the main preoccupation of grantees with bringing other funders towards the democracy space the top ranked priority, followed by direct grants for capacity building.

Convening and commissioning research is also highly valued.

Evaluating impact and case studies comes in lower; followed by market research with key demographic groups; building connections with climate, social justice and racial justice campaigns; supporting APPGs or other cross-party activity on democracy; and polling on democracy and democratic reform measures.

Responses were very similar for minoritised-led and racial-justice-focussed organisations – slightly higher on grants and evaluating impact.



Working to bring funders into the space: grantees' comments



"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."



"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."



"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."



"Finding and securing funding is pivotal to success. Crafting a narrative and reaching the right funders/organisations/companies/individuals is a huge challenge"

Convening and events



"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."



"I like the way you gather feedback. The event in London was really valuable and make us as 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."



"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."



"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".



"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."

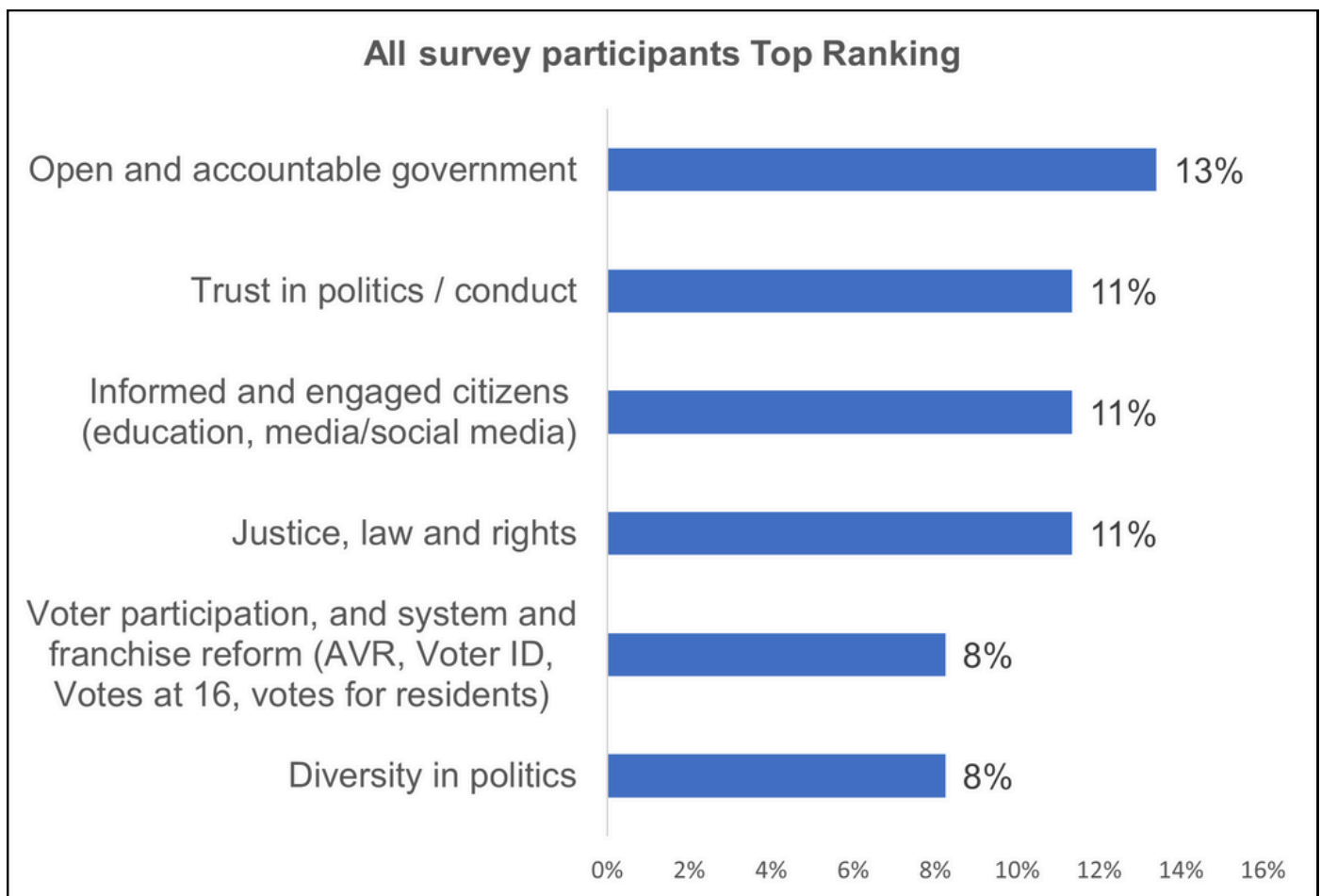
Our priorities

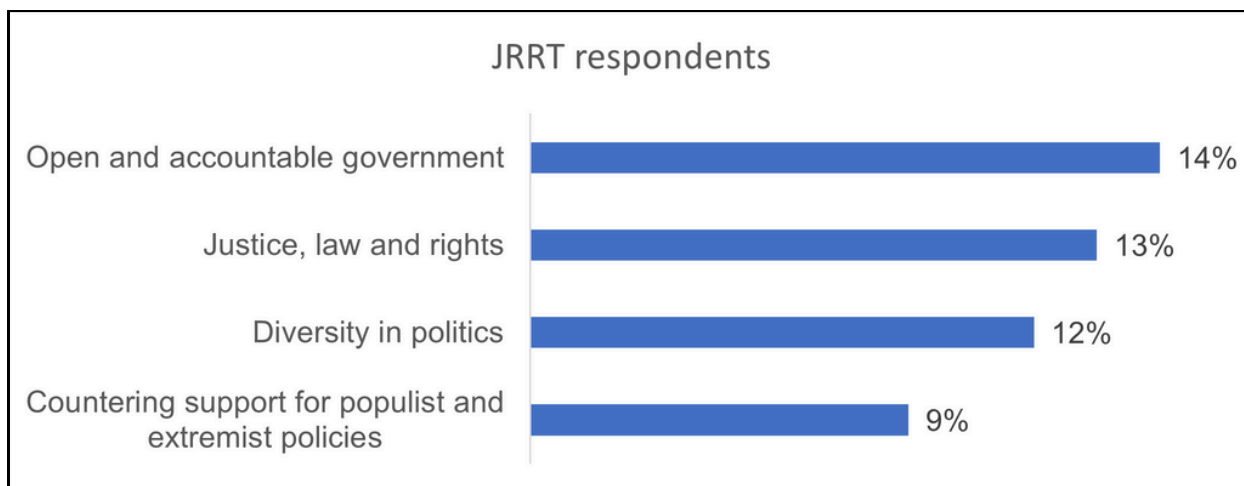
Can you tell us what you think our priorities should be, and why?

There were 97 responses.

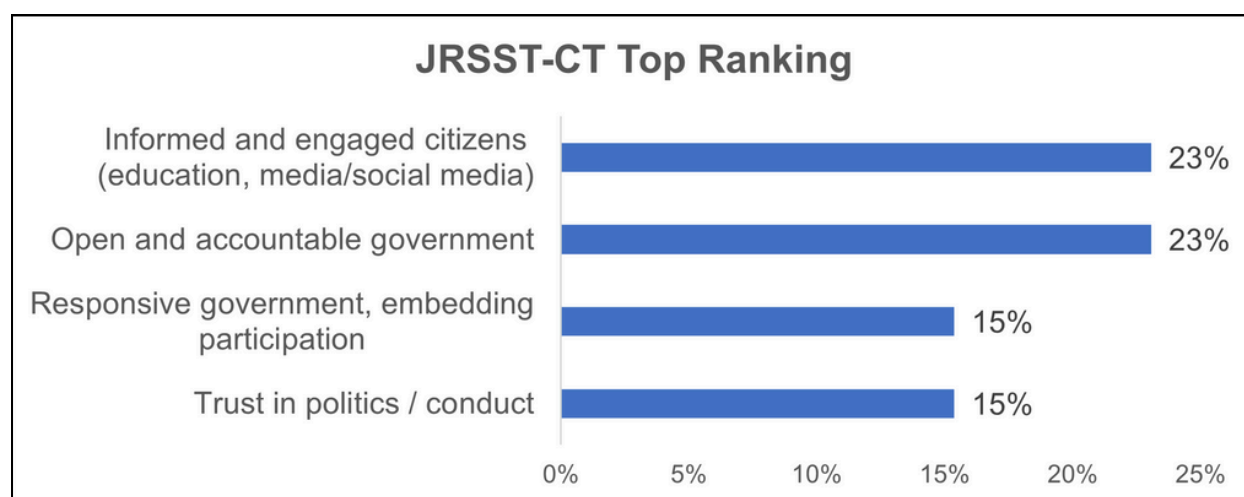
Issues ranked first choice

Below are the issues ranked top by different categories of respondents:

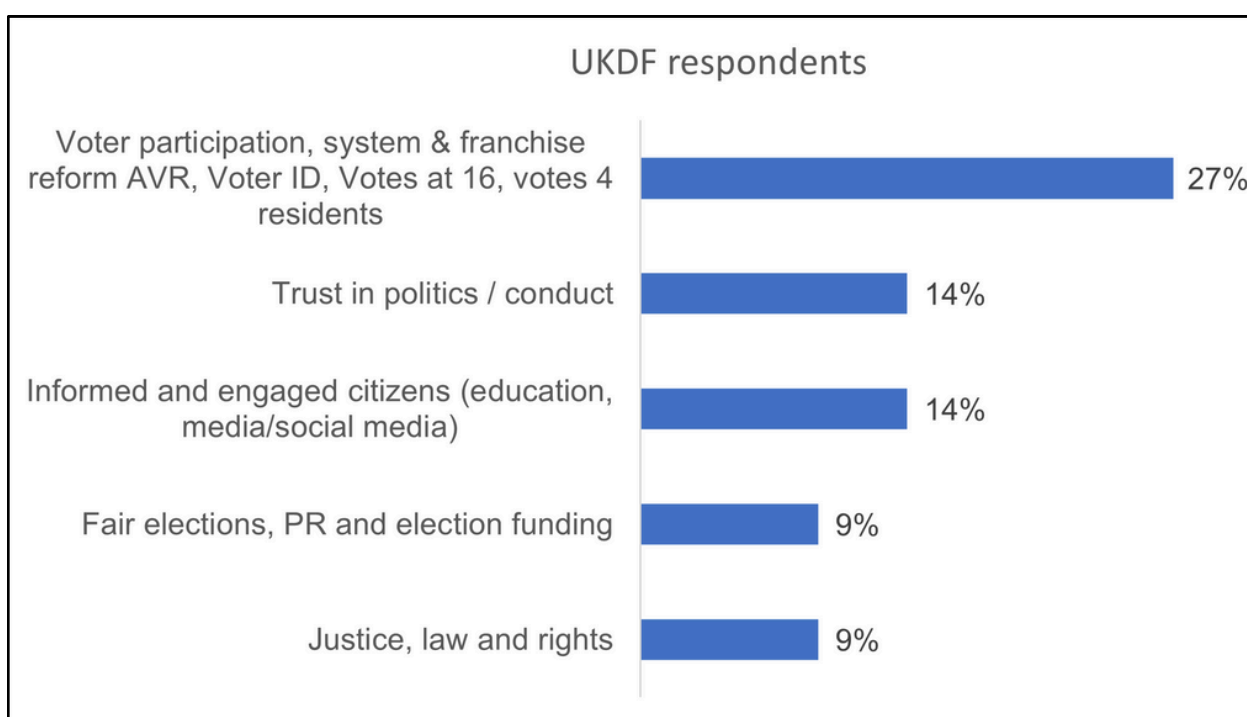


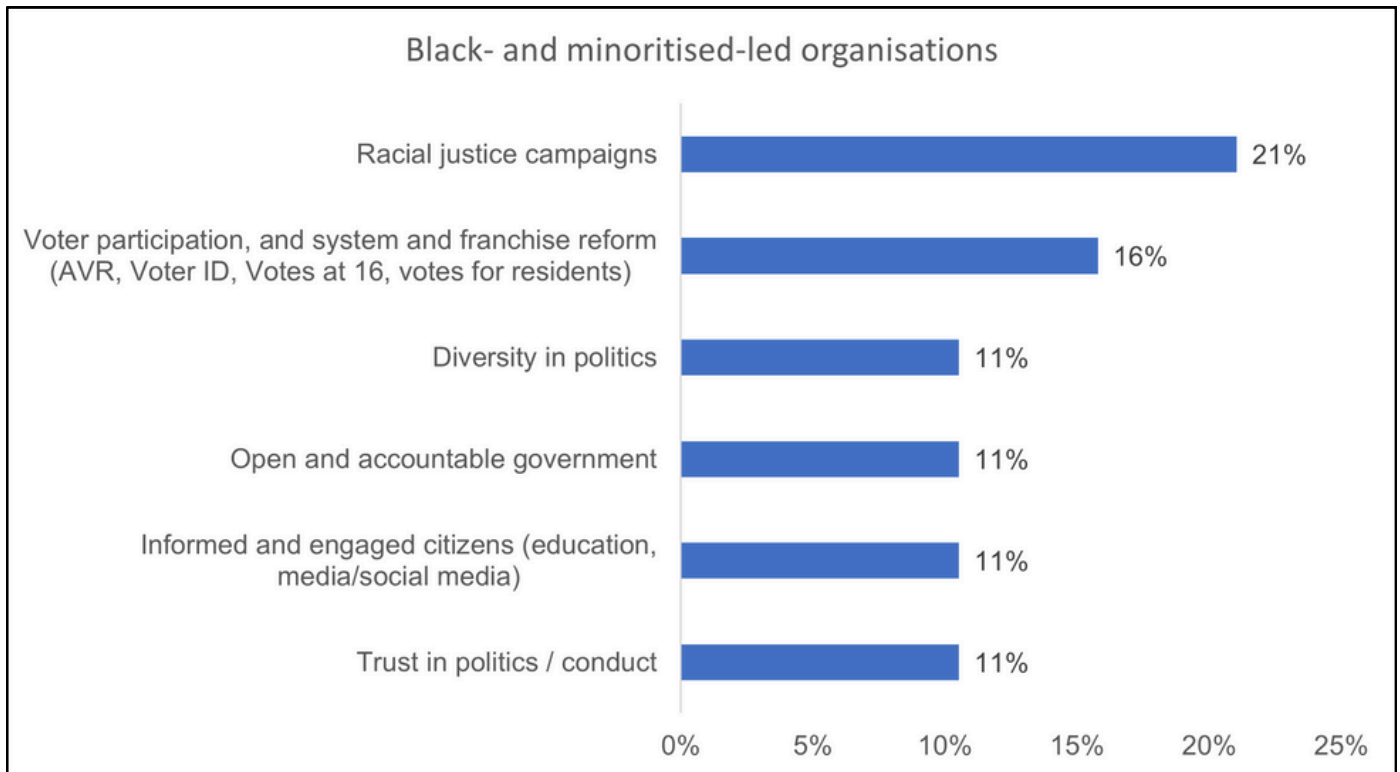


Informed and engaged citizens is currently one strand of JRSST-CT strategy and comes high in the rankings for JRSST-CT respondents:



UK Democracy Fund grantees have similarly strongly ranked the issues UKDF works on:





Weighted top four rankings

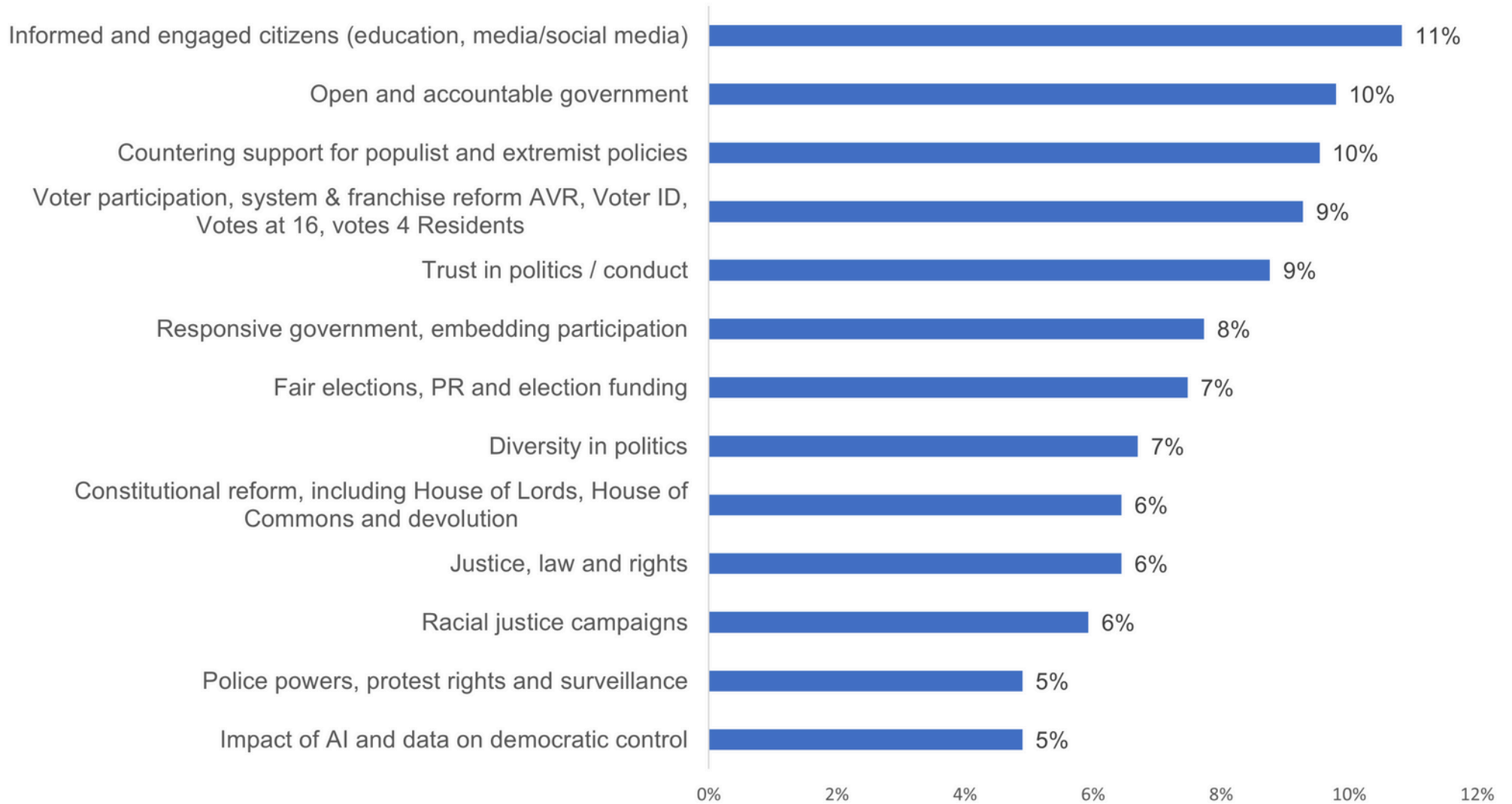
This is probably the most important chart on priorities.

It includes 97 respondents, across the three entities and incorporates their top four rankings (weighted equally) thereby diluting the effect of grantees voting for their own area of work as is likely with the top rankings.

Data was analysed with the top 4 weighted (4 for 1st, 1 for 4th) but this is not included because it made hardly any difference.

The chart can be found on the next page.

Priorities for top four issues - all respondents



Selected open comments



"The staff with whom we had contact did a superb job of supporting and managing the process and projecting the values of the organisation"



"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."



"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."



"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"

Specific issues

The selected examples below are ones where respondents draw out reasons such as: interconnections between issues; an issue being well funded; or a view that government is unreformable requiring a focus on grassroots.



*"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."*



"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."



"Whatever you decide, within the parameters of your mission, it would be good to embed an equity led approach in the design and delivery."



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



"First past the post does not represent political views correctly and polarises politics further. There are areas that will likely lead to outcomes across multiple priorities eg trust in politics/conduct will likely improve voter turnout and participation"



"It is sensible to prioritise making systemic changes in politics and related areas, because it is effective, an underfunded space and no one else will do it. JRRT fulfils very well a unique position as a grant funder that can support direct political action through political parties and their organisations"



"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... This success and change is delivering a liberal voice in parliament and on councils."



"Really useful organisation [UKDF], 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."



"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 Government's agenda"



"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"



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



"open and accountable government ... 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."



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



"I find the approach to democratic reforms – PR, AVR, votes for 16-year-olds, 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."



"Addressing the longstanding gaps in civic engagement and representation within underrepresented communities is very important and need to be prioritised."



"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."



"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."



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



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



"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 rated racial justice work highly [...] 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 if 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."



"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!"



"I place considerable weight on getting the processes at the top of the country right [...] JRRT is superbly placed to be a respected, reasonably central, thoughtful, strategic supporter of moves in this direction"



"If the government is open and accountable everything else will follow, racial justice, strong democracy, responsible governance etc."



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



"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."

On strategy



"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."



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



"Systemic changes are the most important in the long run, even if they are the hardest to get... 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."



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



"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!"

For the full text of all open comments, use the following links:

- [JRRT](#)
- [JRSST-CI](#)
- [UK Democracy Fund](#)

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