

An update on the origins of our endowment: 2025

July 2025

This statement updates JRRT's previous [statement in 2021](#).

In 2021, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust issued a statement reflecting on the origins of its endowments, recognising the Rowntree Company connections to systems of enslavement and forced labour. The Board apology said that: "We are deeply sorry that the origins of our endowments have roots in practices that have caused deep suffering and enduring impact. These practices are abhorrent to us all."

The statement committed the Board to building a positive new legacy, "recognising the systemic nature of racism in the UK and how inequalities of power faced by black and minority ethnic people reinforces racial inequality" and "addressing the underlying causes of political inequality".

The statement also committed the Board to:

- improving the diversity of the Board, staff and networks
- audit, publish and increase funding for grant making and programmes that tackle racial injustice and political inequality
- undertake a review of the investment policy

There was a recognition that the Trust would need to listen to the voices of racialised and minoritised ethnicities and be open to challenge, transparent and accountable for the progress that is made.

2025 update on progress

This further statement provides an account of progress made and summarises reflections and further commitments made as part of the strategy process.

Board and staff diversity

In 2021, the Board did not include any people from minoritised ethnicities. In 2024, two new Directors were appointed to the Board from Asian/Asian British backgrounds. There are no Black Directors or representatives from other racialised backgrounds.

The five-person staff team does not currently include people from minoritised ethnicities.

Investment policy

The policy has been updated to include modern slavery, and diversity, equality and inclusion criteria.

Transparency

We now publish on our website and in our annual report data on:

- grants awarded to Black or minoritised-led organisations
- grants designed to reach minoritised communities^[1]
- Board and staff diversity

Grant funding

The 2021 statement committed to increase funding for grant making and programmes that tackle racial justice and political inequality. JRRT's funding has increased both in real terms and as a percentage of funding.

Total grants to minoritised-led organisations increased from an average of £107k pa 2019-21, to an average of £364k pa 2022-24.

In 2024, 7% of JRRT grants (9% by value) and 47% of UKDF grants (54% by value) were to black or minoritised-led organisations. 15% of JRRT grants (13% by value) and 53% of UKDF grants (29% by value) were designed to benefit minoritised communities.

[1] Due to the small team size, JRRT collects data on the above two questions but not the full range of data required by the Funders for Race Equality Alliance.

Reflections, learning and forward strategy

JRRT remains deeply committed to building a democracy in which everyone can participate, rectifying the severe levels of underrepresentation of racialised communities across UK democracy – as voters, in positions of power, or leading efforts to advocate and influence. While some progress has been made, the Board agrees that the increase in funding and number of grants is only a start. Greater effort is required.

There is collective recognition that our previous failure to focus on this area is partly attributed to the lack of diversity in the Trust, and a lack of understanding and expertise in how systemic racial injustice interacts with the democratic and political system. To make progress, the Trust must build trust and enter into meaningful dialogue about our strategic priorities with ourselves and our partners with humility and grace.

During the strategy process, the Board explored the ways in which Trusts and Foundations and other institutions have responded to their colonial history, including reparatory and restorative justice approaches. The Board acknowledged the many powerful examples of reparatory approaches, their moral force and value in healing and repair but was not convinced that approach was appropriate for JRRT.

The Board recognises that reflecting on the Trust's colonial history and the origins of its endowment is a powerful reminder of the enduring impact of injustices rooted in the past and the need for decisive action today. JRRT's grant making is our most effective lever to address how the harms of the past endure in the present. Our forward strategy includes the following commitments:

1. Our endowment strategy

As the largest (though still small) funder in an under-resourced democracy space, we have committed to sustain close to current levels of grant making, by drawing down from our endowment at a rate well above the level which will sustain the endowment (in 2025 7.3%). It is a slow spend-down trajectory that would deplete our resources in c.27 years.

2. Equipping ourselves for the journey

As a majority white organisation, we have a limited understanding of the needs of racialised and minoritised communities, and how these needs interplay with our core democracy aims. We also do not want to presume to burden our racialised colleagues to bring their lived experience to bear on this important collective work. The Board will begin long overdue anti-racism training this year.

3. A programme of funding at the intersection of democracy and racial justice

We believe work in this area requires JRRT to:

- listen to affected communities' experiences and needs;
- understand best practices by other foundations and democratic institutions; and
- equip ourselves by undertaking a commitment to a continuous journey of learning.

In 2025, JRRT plans to commission support for a process (up to one-year) to shape and design JRRT's future work at the intersection of racial justice and democracy. The process will involve direct dialogue, listening and design with minoritised-led organisations and will inform whether JRRT should set a target level of funding for this work and how JRRT holds itself accountable in its grant making.

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