



JRRT Democracy Priorities

Our Funding Guide

2025

This guide sets out our approach to grant funding

**Please read it carefully and in full before
enquiring about funding possibilities**

Contents

Introduction.....	2
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PART ONE

Who can apply / types of application?.....	3
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1. Who we fund.....	3
2. Eligibility criteria.....	3
3. Important considerations.....	4
4. We do not fund.....	4
5. We are unlikely to fund.....	4

Size of applications.....	5
---------------------------	---

Multiyear and core funding.....	5
---------------------------------	---

Political parties and connected organisations.....	5
--	---

PART TWO

What we fund: strategic priorities.....	6
---	---

1. Money in politics.....	7
2. Voter participation and election systems reform.....	8
3. Political rights – freedom of expression and protest rights.....	9
4. Disinformation.....	10
5. Checks and balances.....	11

Racial justice.....	13
---------------------	----

Bad actors.....	13
-----------------	----

Strategic development.....	13
----------------------------	----

PART THREE

How to apply.....	14
-------------------	----

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Introduction

JRRT's democracy priorities are shaped by the need to rebalance power and strengthen democratic resilience.

At one end of the spectrum, millions of disengaged UK citizens do not register or vote. At the other end, money in politics drives disproportionate influence for wealthy individuals and corporates and a sense that the system is rigged. Political inequality on this scale undermines the legitimacy of democracy.

Falling trust in the system's ability to meet the needs of a discontented public creates the conditions for populist messages to flourish, bad actors using disinformation to exploit social tensions and drive division. The foundations of a healthy democracy – our rights to free expression and protest and the checks and balances that are critical to hold power to account – have been eroded.

We are working for a resilient modern democracy in which:



The rich and powerful cannot buy undue influence



Voting is easy, elections inclusive and turnout high



Freedom of speech and the right to protest are protected



Democracy is protected from the weaponisation of information



Democratic systems are safeguarded against abuse and concentration of power

This strategy is both a positive agenda to revitalise and strengthen democratic resilience and a protective one in the event of a future populist, illiberal, or authoritarian government.

PART ONE

Who can apply / types of application

1 Who we fund

Most of our grants will go to small and medium-sized organisations that are campaigning to improve the resilience of our democracy, in line with the strategic priorities we set out below. This will include interventions to achieve short to medium-term policy or legislative goals, as well as work to lay the foundations for deeper system reform addressing power imbalances.

JRRT focuses on change at the national level and operates UK wide.

We recognise there are many routes to change for the better, including research, advocacy and campaigns. Most of our funding will be for campaigning that seeks change at a national level, presenting a clear analysis of the problem applicants are challenging and offering a credible route to defined and measurable outcomes.

See [What we fund: Strategic priorities](#)

2 Eligibility criteria

We are likely to favour small and medium-sized organisations that struggle to source funding from elsewhere due to the challenging nature of their work.

There is no legal restriction on who we can fund so organisations of any type can apply (eg unincorporated associations, companies, social interest companies etc).

As a non-charitable funder, we prefer to fund organisations that are not charities.

If you are a charity that is considering applying, [please contact JRRT first](#) before working on your application.

3 Important considerations

We are working actively to increase grants at the intersection of our democracy priorities and racial justice.

Directors value sector collaboration and understanding who you work with, how you build on work already occurring, and how you contribute to a mix of approaches (research, insider advocacy, campaign pressure).

While we are willing to consider applications for sector strengthening and collaboration that build sector resilience, funding for such projects is very limited.

4 We do not fund

- Organisations based outside the UK unless the focus of an application is wholly within the UK and satisfactory due diligence can be conducted
- Individual campaigners or researchers without a host organisation
- Local campaign groups without clear national impact
- Work that has already taken place
- Legal fees or costs
- Personal support for individuals in need
- Educational bursaries
- General appeals

5 We are unlikely to fund

- Academic research without clear campaign impact
- Movement building
- Films, podcasts, theatre productions or other arts-based projects

If your proposal is in one of these three categories, [please contact JRRT first](#), before working on your application.

Size of applications

In 2024, the average JRRT application was £54,000.

If your application is likely to significantly exceed this, [please contact JRRT first](#), before working on your application.

Multiyear and core funding

We recognise the evidence of the value of multiyear and core funding for organisations, particularly how it enables them to plan for longer campaigns. We intend to increase the number of multiyear grants we make, some of which will be core funding, but due to our size most of our grants will continue to be project funding.

Applications for multiyear and/or core funding will ordinarily be invited by JRRT, after discussion with potential applicants, in line with our strategic priorities and as resources allow. If you are considering an unsolicited application for core funding or multiyear funding, you should contact JRRT first.

JRRT recognises that not all campaigns can achieve their outcome within a year and that many campaigns with specific short-term objectives are often part of a longer-term campaign for more ambitious system reform. Subject to progress, and discussion with JRRT, you may be able to apply for a further application to achieve your aims. However, you should not predicate your initial application on being able to do so.

Political parties and connected organisations

We will make funds available for political parties, or connected organisations that work inside them, to advance democratic and political reform priorities; and for expansion of Democratic Voices, our programme of direct funding to Parliamentarians designed to support their efforts to champion and advance democratic reforms in Westminster. Grants will be by invitation only and, like all our grants, made openly and transparently.

PART TWO

What we fund: Strategic priorities



1. Money in politics

The rich and powerful cannot buy undue influence



2. Voter participation and election systems reform

Voting is easy, elections inclusive and turnout high



3. Political rights – freedom of expression and protest rights

Freedom of speech and the right to protest are protected



4. Disinformation

Democracy is protected from the weaponisation of information



5. Checks and balances

Democratic systems are safeguarded against abuse and concentration of power

1. Money in politics

The rich and powerful cannot buy undue influence

Political equality is undermined when wealthy individuals and corporations are able to exert disproportionate influence on our politics.



According to the Electoral Commission, in 2024 political parties [spent](#) a record £94.5m at the General Election. Parties received almost £100m in [donations](#) in the same year. Spending by individual candidates increased in 2024 to £23.3m.

At the same time, just 18% of people surveyed by the [Electoral Commission](#) in 2025 thought political spending and funding in the UK is transparent. Work by Survation reveals a high degree of public concern about the ability of [wealthy foreign nationals](#) to influence our politics, as well as majority public support for a [cap on donations](#).

Work by campaigners has shown up weaknesses in the existing regulatory regime, leading to millions in donations from unknown and questionable sources, those with privileged access and even foreign governments and their supporters.

JRRT will fund work that takes advantage of the opportunities presented by forthcoming legislation to achieve reforms. We will also fund work that builds a pathway towards deeper system reform.

Funding areas may include:

- Campaigns seeking to change to the regulatory framework to tighten the rules around political giving (eg donation caps, restrictions on Unincorporated Associations, and UK shell companies, measures to prevent foreign interference) and to improve transparency on how money is given and spent in politics.
- Exposure of abuses and bad practices.
- Effective measures to reduce cash for honours and peerages, scrutinise gifts, hospitality and trips for politicians, tackle second jobs, and challenge improper lobbying interests on ministers and MPs.
- Building the foundations for an alternative system of political finance that rebuilds public trust and influence and overcomes the formidable barriers posed by political party interests in the status quo.

2. Voter participation and elections system reform

Voting is easy, elections inclusive and turnout high

Millions of citizens – predominantly young, from racialised and minoritised ethnicities, born overseas, renting their homes or living on low incomes do not register or vote. For instance, the gap between graduates and non-graduates voting **doubled** in 2024 compared to 2019. Registration and voting gaps contribute to democratic inequality – an unequal ability to contribute and influence – undermining the legitimacy of UK democracy.



An Elections Bill is anticipated in 2025 which will open up short-term prospects for significant system reform. However, turning around long-term trends in low turnout will require sustained efforts to remove barriers and tackle disengagement from democracy.

JRRT funds similar work to that funded by the UK Democracy Fund (hosted by the JRSST Charitable Trust and strictly non-partisan) with a particular focus on proposals that may be politically contentious, or unable to be charitably funded.

Funding areas may include:

- Modernising the election system introducing Automatic Voter Registration and further long-term system reform to make electoral participation easier and more inclusive.
- Introducing Votes at 16 across the UK to enfranchise 1.5 million young people and further franchise extension eg to settled residents.
- Countering efforts to suppress voter participation.
- Increasing registration and turnout of low-voting demographics.

3. Political rights – Freedom of expression and protest rights

Freedom of speech and the right to protest are protected

Freedom of speech and the right to protest are the lifeblood of a healthy democracy.



A healthy society contains a diversity of views, lifestyles, and beliefs. Individuals need to be able to freely discuss political issues, criticise their government, and express dissenting views – including assembling to challenge the government of the day – without censorship or reprisal. Both of these rights are enshrined in the Human Rights Act, which gives statutory force to the European Convention on Human Rights.

UK protest rights have been seriously eroded by a series of draconian pieces of legislation, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, the Public Order Act 2023, and even more measures proposed in the [Crime and Policing Bill](#). These have had a chilling effect on campaigners fearful of reprisal. This is even more the case when the law is coupled with the way the police have interpreted the law and used technology, such as AI-driven facial recognition, to police protest.

In the UK, as in other democracies, freedom of expression is under threat in new and complex ways, caught up in the battleground between different conceptions of offence and harm, debates around cancel culture, no platforming, 'safe space', online harms and academic freedom. Suppressing free speech is a core part of the authoritarian playbook, while at the same time invoked by populists in order to tap into resentment against elites, 'wokeness', and vulnerable communities such as migrants.

Funding areas may include:

- Protecting the rights to freedom of assembly and expression, eg by repealing recent legislation that restricts democratic rights, and/or building knowledge of protest rights and the capacity to defend them.
- Ensuring the policing of protests is limited, proportionate, consistent and accountable, including the way the police and security services use technology to police protest.

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- Rebuilding a democratic and widely-accepted consensus around freedom of speech, including in academia, that robustly defends freedom of expression while protecting people from serious harms, such as incitement to violence, defamation, and fear of genuine intent to harm individuals.
 - Addressing challenges to free speech in the digital age including issues related to online platforms and social media, and online harms (see disinformation below).
 - Ending the use of legal devices (eg Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) that are used to silence and prevent scrutiny and accountability.
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4. Disinformation

Democracy is protected from the weaponisation of information

Ofcom reports that 88% of 16-24 year-olds get their news from [online services](#). Even among those aged 55+, over half (54%) use online resources to source news.



The Internet has also given people an unprecedented ability to express and share their views, while providing largely unaccountable private companies with powerful tools to amplify and distort views and promote or suppress content that serves their commercial and political interests. In a democracy, it is critical that people can have confidence in the information on which they base decisions, including about big issues and who to vote for.

Social media platforms create and curate an information environment where sensationalist content thrives, enabling misinformation and disinformation to spread rapidly. Populist politicians and bad actors exploit this landscape, using disinformation as a tool to manipulate public sentiment and undermine trust in established institutions.

The World Economic Forum described misinformation and disinformation as the [biggest short-term global risk](#), capable of undermining democratic elections, promoting unrest, and increasing restrictions on freedom of speech by prompting counter-disinformation initiatives.

Recognising that misinformation presents its own challenges, JRRT is particularly concerned with disinformation, whether that is through the weaponisation of misinformation or the deliberate presentation of false information as fact – often by political actors.

Funding areas may include:

- Monitoring and regulating the tools of disinformation, including the use of bots, deepfakes, and paid fake commentators, during elections or key political moments, eg disinformation designed to stir up social unrest.
- Strengthening penalties for public officials, candidates and politicians who spread disinformation.
- Regulation of social media platforms with effective penalties, updating the Online Safety Act.
- Strengthening regulator powers including their ability to support the public to discern what is fake news.
- Supporting campaigns or tools that help citizens determine who is trying to influence them and whether or not information is true.
- Longer-term solutions to support information integrity

5. Checks and balances

Democratic systems are safeguarded against abuse and concentration of power

Checks and balances are an essential feature of a healthy democracy because they serve as safeguards against the abuse of power. Checks and balances make it harder for a government to suppress minority rights, undermine the rule of law, and neutralise opposing and independent voices. Checks and balances are even more critical in the event of the election of a government with populist or authoritarian tendencies.



The UK's system of democratic checks and balances is a complex and evolving network of institutions, conventions, and laws designed to prevent the concentration of power and ensure accountability. These include things like the relationship between government and parliament, as well as the tools used by people to ensure government operates accountably, transparently, and to the highest possible standard.

The past decade has been marked by a concentration of power, evasion of scrutiny and accountability, ministerial encroachment on the independence of regulators, and a decline in conduct and standards, all of which have exposed the vulnerability to backsliding of a system reliant on norms, conventions and self-restraint. Our voting system often doesn't properly reflect the wishes of voters, enabling one party to govern unchecked even with minority support.

Funding areas may include:

- Strengthening electoral integrity by ensuring that elections are free and fair and run to the highest standard, the voting system is reformed to provide a check on unfettered political power, and the Electoral Commission's independence is restored, protected and strengthened.
- Strengthening parliament's ability to hold the executive accountable and effectively scrutinise primary and secondary legislation, including the roles of – and relationships between – the House of Commons and the House of Lords.
- Ensuring independent processes for appointing public officials and members of the House of Lords.
- Ensuring tools such as inquiries function effectively to provide accountability for the exercise of government power.
- Protecting a functional freedom of information regime, enabling politicians and public bodies to be held accountable.

Racial justice

JRRT particularly welcomes applications at the intersection between racial justice and democracy.

Bad actors

Joseph Rowntree was directly concerned about bad actors: namely the danger to our national life from the power of selfish and unscrupulous wealth which influences public opinion largely through the press.

Much of the damage to democracy today is the result of particular actors, often wealthy individuals and corporates. Some use undue influence to pursue their direct interests, others to support their long-term objectives. This can undermine democracy, often under the guise of offering populist solutions to the societal tensions they exploit.

We will fund work to monitor, expose and hold accountable bad actors where it is integrated as part of an application for funding one of the democracy priorities above.

Strategic development

JRRT has developed our priorities in the light of long-term trends affecting advanced democracies as well as short-term opportunities and threats. It is a positive agenda to revitalise and strengthen democratic resilience, and a protective one in the event of a future populist, illiberal or authoritarian government.

JRRT recognises that in a volatile climate it is difficult to predict new opportunities and threats that will emerge over time. The priorities outlined above set out where we believe we can currently exert most influence with our funding, expertise and energy.

Our strategy will evolve in an intentional way, with the Board periodically reviewing our objectives and taking decisions to adjust deliberately in response to new circumstances while avoiding mission creep. Applicants and grantees will play an important role, providing feedback on our priorities, intelligence on political challenges and opportunities, as well as the applications which will give substance to our decision making and shape the strategy.

PART THREE

How to apply

JRRT offers two routes to funding:

1. Applications for more than £10,000 made on a quarterly basis (larger grants).
2. Applications throughout the year for £10,000 and below (small grants).

Applications for both types of grant look identical. The difference is in the speed with which JRRT can make a decision and the processes by which decisions are made.

Applications for more than £10,000

Larger grant applications are considered by the Board at quarterly meetings. The [dates for applications for larger grants](#) are on our website. These set out when outlines and final applications must be received. Applicants are encouraged to submit outlines much sooner than the deadline, after initial enquiries, to allow for feedback on draft applications.

Applicants may be asked to attend an online meeting with some Directors prior to consideration of the application by the full Board. This is not a decision-making meeting but is intended to help the Board understand you and your proposal.

Applications for £10,000 and below

Small grant applications may be submitted at any time and are processed according to the capacity of the Programme Manager and Directors. Please be aware that our capacity to process these applications is less between the [outline deadline and decision dates for larger applications](#).

With urgent requests for funding, JRRT will respond at pace and will make time.

Application process

- 1 You should email an outline of your proposal to info@jrtr.org.uk for discussion with the Programme Manager, prior to submitting a full application.
- 2 If your application proceeds, you will be asked to submit a draft application to the Programme Manager for comment and feedback. The Programme Manager will not tell you what you should be doing but they will ask questions that explore the application and that they think the Board might ask.
- 3 Directors may request to meet applicants to explore their application or them as an organisation. NB This does not apply to applications for £10,000 and below.
- 4 Decisions on applications for more than £10,000 are made by the full Board at quarterly meetings. Decisions on small grants are made by three Directors according to a fixed rota.

More detailed information about our [application process](#) can be found on our website.

Budget preparation

Your application should be accompanied by a budget that is completed on the [template you can find on our website](#). It must account for the following elements:

- Staffing costs including employer costs applicable (eg NI and pension contributions)
- Day rate posts/consultants
- Direct support costs for the proposal (eg printing, venue hire, travel)
- A proportion of overheads/indirect costs (eg rent, insurance, IT support etc)

Reporting requirements

Reporting requirements are light touch and will be set out in your grant offer letter. There is a standard requirement for large grants and small grants, though in some instances there may be some additional requirements specific to your grant. If this is the case, they will be set out in your grant offer letter.

Our standard reporting requirement is for two sides of A4 that reflect honestly and openly against the outcomes on whether they were achieved, what worked, what didn't work, and what lessons have been learned during the lifetime of the grant.

If yours is a multiyear grant, you will be asked to provide interim reports at intervals set out in your grant offer letter.

Accessibility

Support with preparing your application is available for blind, deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people. For instance, this might be some time from a Personal Assistant, or a Sign Language Interpreter if you are asked to attend a meeting with Directors. Other appropriate assistance will be considered. You can request an Access Payment of up to £500. Please contact JRRT to discuss any special requirements.

Racial justice monitoring

We use questions developed by the Funders for Race Equality Alliance to monitor the number and value of racial justice grants awarded. When you apply you will be asked the following question:

- Can your organisation be described as Black and Minoritised-led? 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 your leadership (at 75% of the senior team and board level) from the community(ies) that your organisation serves.
- We will also discuss with you what proportion of the grant's work will be designed to directly benefit minoritised and racialised communities.

While many applications will not fit with the above, we would expect all applicants to apply a racial justice lens as they develop their application.

Transparency and 360Giving

JRRT transparency policy requires us to publish a list of grants on our website and in our Annual Report and Audited Accounts. You will be asked to agree this on our online application form. If you have any concerns relating to the disclosure of your grant, eg if it may expose you or those working on the project to increased personal risk, or potentially jeopardise the work, you will be encouraged to discuss this with us.

We also publish details of our grants with [360Giving](#).

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We understand that some people will use AI to help prepare their applications. We will not take this into account when assessing your application. We do not use AI at JRRT at any stage to assist in the assessment process.

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