JRSST Charitable Trust

Our Funding Guide

2026

This guide sets out our approach to grant funding

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

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About the JRSST Charitable Trust

The JRSST Charitable Trust (JRSST-CT) is a charitable trust independent of, but connected to, the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust (JRRT).

In 2025, JRSST-CT agreed a new strategy to address political inequality, the uneven distribution of power and influence in the UK, and how it fuels low trust in democracy, disengagement with politics, and the sense that most people have too little say within our democratic system.

The Trust has decided to spend out its small endowment within ten years, releasing additional funds for grant making on voter engagement and system reform, democracy education, participation in democracy between elections, and diversity of representation.

Central to addressing this is the work of the UK Democracy Fund, which JRSST-CT hosts, to engage the millions of citizens who do not register or vote – predominantly young, from communities experiencing racial inequity, born overseas, renting their homes or living on low incomes – and advocates for system reform that makes voting easier. You can find the UK Democracy Funding Guide here.

What we want to fund

Thematic priorities

JRSST-CT's four thematic priorities are:

1. Voter participation and election system reform
2. Democratic education

The above priorities are supported by the UK Democracy Fund. For more information see the UK Democracy Funding Guide here.

3. Diversity of representation in politics
4. Participation in democracy between elections

This funding guide focuses on priorities 3 and 4. It also includes some further information on priority 2 (democratic education), in particular the aspects of this work that fall outside the work of the UK Democracy Fund but are relevant to JRSST-CT's strategy.

Demographic priorities

JRSST-CT has two demographic priorities which cut across our thematic priorities.

1. Young people
2. People from communities that experience racial inequity

We have chosen these priorities because young people and people from communities that experience racial inequity are less likely to engage with democratic processes. Low participation and underrepresentation may further compound the wider social and economic inequalities they experience. We want to understand the barriers people from these groups face and how to reform the system to take account of their needs.

Our aim is that most of our grants will support work that seeks to mobilise people from these groups. We hope prioritising will enable us to focus our limited resources, generate learning and build up our expertise.

JRSST-CT recognises that people have multiple identities. We are interested in funding work that focuses on people from our demographic priorities who experience interconnected and overlapping forms of discrimination (e.g. young people on low incomes; women from communities that experience racial inequity).

We may also fund work that focuses on other groups (or has no demographic focus) where there is significant potential for either testing what works or driving system reform.

Diversity of representation in politics

Improving diversity of representation in politics helps to ensure that parliaments and other elected bodies look more like the publics they serve.

There are many barriers that can prevent people from standing for elected office, including lack of time, financial costs, or party selection procedures. Long hours or poor work culture, including harassment and intimidation, may also put people off from entering politics.

More understanding is needed about whether and how diversity of representation in politics can lead to better policy outcomes for people who share certain characteristics, particularly those who experience injustice, inequity or discrimination. This includes interventions that can support all elected representatives to pursue meaningful reforms in the interests of people from these groups, and what the barriers to this might be.

Our priorities

Our focus is on improving diversity of representation in politics through system reform. We want to fund research, advocacy and campaigns that either:

- Improves diversity of elected representatives, by tackling the barriers that prevent people from standing for election or working in politics.
- Improves understanding and uptake of interventions that support all elected representatives to pursue meaningful policy outcomes for people or groups who share certain characteristics, particularly those that experience injustice, inequity or discrimination because of these characteristics.

This might include research, advocacy or campaigns on or for:

- Transparency requirements to collect and publish data on diversity of candidates and representatives
- Requirements for political parties to improve selection processes
- Changes to culture and/or working conditions in Parliament
- Measures to improve safety of candidates and representatives
- Measures to identify and/or address other barriers to representation

What we don't fund

- Direct interventions to support candidates or groups of candidates that share characteristics to get elected

Participation in democracy between elections

Participation in democracy between elections can have many benefits. When done well, it can lead to people feeling more positive about democracy, help to counter fragmentation, polarisation and disinformation, and enable better policy making.

However, participatory processes that are extractive, tokenistic or poorly implemented can reinforce feelings of exclusion or lead to backlash and resentment.

There are many kinds of participatory processes. Citizens' assemblies have been well tested globally and are most effective when supported by decision makers and when well designed and run. Other processes include deliberative polling, citizens' juries, people's assemblies, networked conversations, participatory budgeting, digital crowd sourcing, legislative theatre, and citizen involvement in campaigns.

Participatory processes are not always well designed for everyone. There is a need to understand the barriers to participation, including by people from communities experiencing racial inequity, and how participatory processes can be improved.

Our priorities

Our focus is on interventions aimed at building support of decision makers for participatory tools and embedding in policy and legislation the use of such processes by public authorities. Our priorities are:

- Campaigns for system reform to embed use of deliberative and other participatory processes at national level.
- Building decision-maker support and champions across the political spectrum for specific measures.
- Research and learning to understand the barriers to participation including by people from communities experiencing racial inequity and how participatory processes can be improved to engage them.
- Supporting national campaigns to embed participatory requirements into local and regional policy and decision-making processes.

What we don't fund

- Direct funding to run deliberative or other participatory processes.
- Initiatives that do not take account of the need for well-designed, inclusive processes.

Democratic education

Most of our funding on democratic education will go through the UK Democracy Fund. JRSST-CT will fund some work that fits with our strategy but falls outside the focus of the Fund, e.g. research, advocacy or campaigns focused on system reforms that either:

- Lead to broader understanding of and engagement in democracy among young people; or
- Support youth practitioners to deliver democratic education outside schools e.g. in youth work settings

We will not fund the delivery of democratic education.

Across all our thematic priorities, we will prioritise applications that focus on our priority demographics: young people and people from communities that experience racial inequity.

Who is eligible for funding

What we fund

We accept applications from organisations and individuals who are hosted by an organisation (e.g. an academic or researcher working for a university).

As a charitable organisation, there are important legal duties we must follow. Your organisation does not need to be a registered charity, but all the activities you are seeking funding for need to fit within charitable purposes. Please contact the Fund if you have any questions about this.

JRSST-CT is a Living Wage Employer. We expect our grantees to ensure that all posts which are wholly or partially funded by us are paid the real Living Wage.

JRSST-CT particularly welcomes applications from organisations working at the intersection of our democracy priorities and racial justice.

We cannot fund

- Partisan activities
- Work outside the UK
- Individual campaigners or researchers without a host organisation
- Work that has already taken place
- Legal fees or costs
- Personal support for individuals in need
- Educational bursaries
- General appeals

We are unlikely to fund

- Academic research without clear learning or campaign impact
- Movement building
- By-election and local election activity
- Small-scale campaigns or outreach work

How to apply

Routes to funding

The JRSST Charitable Trust 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 the Trust can make a decision and the processes by which decisions are made.

Application process

There are five steps to applying for funding from us, whether you are applying for a small grant or larger grant:

1. Read our guidelines to check your eligibility and fit with our funding criteria
2. Share a brief description of your idea in an email to info@jrsst-ct.org.uk
3. We may request to meet with you to have an initial conversation about your idea
4. If we think it's a good fit, we will ask you to submit a short outline proposal
5. We will then advise you whether to move forward to a full written application

Applications for £10,000 and below (Small grants)

Small grant applications may be submitted at any time and are processed according to the capacity of the Grants Manager and Trustees. Please be aware that our capacity to process these applications is less between the outline deadline and decision dates for larger applications.

Applications for more than £10,000 (Larger grants)

Larger grant applications are considered by the Board. JRSST-CT has four funding rounds a year. If you wish your application to be considered at a particular funding round, please contact us at the earliest opportunity to enable staff to provide you with feedback on your application and any other support you may require.

Advice on structuring and writing your JRSST-CT grant application is available here.

After submitting your full written application, some applicants may be invited to meet up to three Trustees online. The purpose of these meetings is to help Trustees to learn more about your organisation and your application. It is not a decision-making meeting. Whether or not you are invited to a meeting should not be seen an indication of the eventual outcome of your grant application.

Final decisions on all applications are made by JRSST Charitable Trust's Board of Trustees. Upcoming deadlines for applications for larger grants can be found online.

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 (e.g. NI and pension contributions)
- Day rate posts/consultants, if applicable
- Direct support costs for the proposal (e.g. printing, venue hire, travel)
- A proportion of overheads/indirect costs (e.g. 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.

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 Trustees. Other appropriate assistance will be considered. You can request an Access Payment of up to £500. Please contact us to discuss any special requirements.

Data on diversity, equity and inclusion

JRSST-CT wants to understand more about the organisations and campaigns that apply for funding. All organisations who submit a full application to JRSST-CT will be asked a series of yes/no questions about the leadership of their organisation and who the work is designed to benefit. The questions we use are based on those developed by the DEI Data Standard and focus only on our demographic priorities.

When submitting your application, you will be asked if:

- The application is intended to benefit people from communities experiencing racial inequity
- The majority of the leadership of your organisation identify as people from communities experiencing racial inequity
- The application intends to benefit young people

This information will help us to understand our applicants, and it will inform our processes and strategy, but will not be used for individual funding decisions.

Transparency and 360Giving

JRSST Charitable Trust's 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, e.g. 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 any stage to assist in the assessment process.

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JRSST Charitable Trust

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