

Strengthening Civil Society Programme

Supporting effective use of the law and human rights-based approaches by UK civil society

Using legal tools to hold corporations to account for the harms created, perpetuated or exacerbated by their activities

Application guidelines – June 2026

Purpose of the Strengthening Civil Society programme

The Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) programme supports the effective use of the law and human rights-based approaches by civil society in the UK. The programme aims to demonstrate when, how and where the law or human rights based approaches can be effective tools to hold corporations to account for harms they cause.

There are many examples of CSOs who have used legal tools effectively to further their social change goals. However, the use of the law and human rights-based approaches is far from consistent across civil society, with many organisations seeing no link between these tools and their purpose, strategy, and activities, or are wary of using them.

We will seek to support CSOs to:

- build sustainable partnerships between legal and non-legal CSOs;
- develop additional capacity to use the law and human rights based approaches within movements for social change;
- translate frontline activity into effective advocacy and policy change; and
- contribute to the evidence base to support increased funding for this activity.

To achieve this, we will award grants, commission research, convene stakeholders, and use our influence. We aim to take an enabling approach, responding to the needs of our grantholders with creativity, flexibility, and pragmatism.

In its first year, the programme will focus on migration. We will also explore grants of strategic importance in the broader corporate accountability sphere.

Social change

Our primary focus is on social change activities that tackle discrimination and disadvantage.

By social change we mean:

- changes in policy, regulation and law;

- changes in behaviour, attitudes, and norms; and
- new ways of designing and delivering services or support for individuals.

Purpose of this call

The purpose of this open funding call is to identify civil society organisations using legal tools or human rights based approaches to hold corporations to account for the harms created or perpetuated by their activities.

The focus of this call is on migration. We know that corporate activity can have harmful impacts on migrant communities - this fund will enable civil society organisations to challenge activities which cause such harms and contribute to bringing about wider social change and a more just society. We will only fund work which seeks to address harm which has occurred in the UK. Examples of the type of work we anticipate funding under this call include (but are not limited to):

- undertaking legal research to gather evidence on how companies are using tech to surveil migrant communities;
- bringing legal challenges against companies acting unlawfully in delivering public services to migrants or in relation to migration;
- supporting non-legal CSOs to understand how they can utilise regulators to further their campaign goals; or
- monitoring the implementation of wins already achieved through legal action.

In addition to the above, in exceptional cases, we will consider funding challenges to public bodies' approach to procuring services from private companies to deliver services on behalf of the taxpayer. If your work falls into this category, please get in touch with us for a discussion ahead of making an application.

This fund is intended to support legal action which could achieve broader social change; we would expect any social change goals to have an impact on a community or large number of people. This means we cannot support applications from civil society organisations seeking funding for service delivery work such as providing advice or support to individuals.

Amount and duration

In this first open funding call under this new focus area, we anticipate awarding 6-7 grants of £150,000 over three years. However, we will consider applications for grants of £50,000 over 18 months for projects which are in an exploratory phase and require significantly more development time.

Grants can be used for all activities related to legal action, including staff time, supervision, and overheads. It can also cover external costs (such as legal advice) or advocacy costs. We know the approach you set out in your application may need to change and we will be as flexible as possible to support you to take the best approach towards your objectives.

Eligibility

To be eligible to apply to this fund, applicants need to:

- have a demonstrable history of using legal tools to address discrimination and further social change;
- either be a civil society organisation with a focus on corporate accountability, or be a migrants' rights organisation able to evidence an interest in holding corporations to account for the harms caused by their activities;
- undertake activities under the grant which deliver benefit in the UK (applications for international work will not be considered);
- be a legally registered not-for-profit entity in the UK, preferably a charity;
- have at least one full year's accounts; and
- have an income of under £2m a year (we have some flexibility with this, if your income is slightly over £2m, please get in touch to discuss your eligibility).

We encourage collaborative working when using the law to achieve social change and [have found](#) this to be crucial to success. If you are working with other organisations, we expect you to clearly outline the approach to this collaboration and the roles each organisation will have in the work.

We will fund organisations based anywhere in the UK. However, if your organisation is registered and largely based in one part of the country but is seeking to make change in another part (for example a London-based civil society organisation working in Manchester), you will need to evidence how you are working with organisations rooted in those places.

Organisations that have previously received a grant from the Foundation are eligible to apply if they meet the above criteria, but we ask that you get in touch with your grant manager for a discussion before submitting an application.

Application process

This fund has a one-stage application process. You need to download the application form [here](#). Once you have completed the form and collated the documents listed below, you will need to submit your application via our [portal](#), by 11am on Monday 7 September 2026.

1. Download and complete a grant application form, which can be found [here](#).

This grant application form requires you to produce a proposal, of up to 2,000 words, outlining the legal action you are taking or planning to take to. You are required to write this proposal using the following sub-headings:

- **Summary** – in no more than 100 words, tell us the objectives of your project and what you hope to achieve.

- **Ongoing or planned legal activities** – explain how you are and/or will use legal tools to hold corporations to account for harms caused to migrant communities as a result of their business activities. This should include:
 - a short overview of the evidence related to the discrimination you seek to address;
 - the legal action you plan to take, why you chose this route, and what you hope to achieve;
 - how you hope your legal action might contribute towards creating long-term social change;
 - further detail about your organisation’s legal expertise related to your area of focus. If you do not have this expertise internally, please tell us how you will obtain the necessary legal expertise;
 - your approach to risk management, including a clear outline of the key risks for this work, how you will approach these challenges and how the Foundation can support you in risk mitigation; and
 - whether you will collaborate with others and the approach you will take to ensure effective working.

This section should form the bulk of your proposal.

- **Organisation** – tell us your organisation’s purpose, your current priorities and why you are the best placed to do this work.
- **People-centred** – tell us how you work with and for individuals and communities experiencing discrimination.
- **Learning** – tell us how you plan to learn from your activities and how this learning might support your work going forward;
- **What else** – if there is anything else you would like us to know, include it here; and
- **Referees** – please include the names and contact details of two referees who can provide a reference on your organisation’s work and approach. Neither referee should be an existing or past funder. We will request references via email during the assessment process, so please ensure your referees know that we will be in touch.

Your proposal should be factual; written in plain English, avoiding jargon and rhetoric; and should not include any hyperlinks, images, or appendices.

2. Accounts and budget – include your:

- accounts for the last full financial year;
- management accounts for the current financial year; and
- budget for your activities under this grant.

These should be uploaded as separate files and are not included in the word count.

3. **Your safeguarding policy.** If you do not have a safeguarding policy, please upload an explanation entitled "No safeguarding policy".
4. **Submit your application** – your application, budget, financial accounts, and safeguarding policy should all be separate documents. You will be directed to upload these documents in the [online grant application portal](#). If you encounter any issues with the portal, please email us at baring.foundation@ing.com and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Next steps

After the deadline for applications has passed, we will begin our assessment process. During this time, should we have any questions or require additional information, we will get in touch either to request this information via email or to arrange a short online meeting. We will ensure we give you enough time to respond.

Our Board will make final decisions on which applications to award grants to in December 2026. All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application by Wednesday 16 December.

Successful applicants will be required to submit monitoring reports at the end of each year of the grant period sharing their activities, learning, and expenditure. We will seek to learn from this work to help us capture crucial insights on the use of the law to hold corporations to account and understand the challenges and opportunities facing civil society in this area. This is likely to involve some interaction with our learning partners, for which we will give adequate notice and cover expenses.

Full details of the conditions of any grant will be provided following its award.

Timetable

Date	Stage
Monday 22 June	Funding call launched
Wednesday 19 August	Deadline for applicant enquiries
Monday 7 September	Deadline for written applications
Tuesday 8 September – Tuesday 1 December	Assessment period, including any follow-up requests to applicants. In some cases, we may request an informal meeting to discuss the contents of an application
Thursday 10 December	Decisions made by the Baring Foundation board
By Wednesday 16 December	Notification of application outcome

Resources

As corporate accountability is a new area for the programme, we are yet to commission related research in this area, other than the [scoping paper](#) which helped inform the direction of the programme. We do have a plethora of research and resources from the previous iteration of the programme should you wish to understand more about the work we have previously supported. This includes:

- a [framework for better use of the law](#) by civil society organisations;
- an exploration of [civil society organisations deploying a range of legal tools and tactics](#) to achieve social change;
- a paper on the [successful use of strategic litigation by the voluntary sector](#);
- a paper looking at the [how the law has been used to challenge racial injustice in the criminal legal system](#);
- an overview of how UK civil society has [used the law in pursuit of racial justice](#);
- a paper exploring the [challenges experienced by civil society organisations in recruiting and retaining mid-career lawyers](#) in areas of social welfare law and criminal justice;
- a [report capturing learning](#) from the programme's support for legal action related to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- a paper on the [value of using legal based approaches](#) (which informed the initial focus of the Strengthening Civil Society programme).

Contact

If you have any questions which have not been answered in these guidelines, or if you wish to speak to a member of our team before submitting an application please email us at baring.foundation@ing.com by midday on Wednesday 19 August with your questions or with some dates and times which you are available for a short phone call.

The Baring Foundation
June 2026