

Strengthening Civil Society Programme

Supporting effective use of the law and human rights-based approaches

Expert legal organisations – stage one application guidelines

March 2024

Introduction to the Strengthening Civil Society programme

The Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) programme supports the use of the law and human rights-based approaches by civil society in the United Kingdom.

We see the law and human rights-based approaches as important tools for civil society. These approaches can provide a means to directly tackle the discrimination and disadvantage faced by marginalised communities.

There are many great examples of organisations who have used these tools effectively. However, use of the law and human rights-based approaches is far from consistent across civil society and many organisations see no link between these tools and their purpose, strategy, and activities, or are wary of using them.

This programme aims to boost engagement and to support organisations within broader civil society to make effective use of the law and human rights-based approaches to tackle discrimination and disadvantage in their social change work.

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.

Definitions of the law and human rights-based approaches vary, but we use these terms in a broad and practical way. A framework for different uses of the law by civil society is available [here](#), and you can learn more about the programme [here](#).

Expert legal organisations

The SCS programme turned five in 2019, and to coincide with this milestone, we commissioned an [independent evaluation](#) to analyse the programme's strengths in order to support us to identify our focus for the following five years. A key finding of this evaluation was that the most successful of our funded projects were those which involved the connection of expert legal 'hub' organisations to civil society organisations (CSOs) focused on tackling discrimination and disadvantage through service provision, advocacy, and campaigning.

These expert legal hub organisations ('hubs' or 'hub organisations' hereafter) are crucial to the programme's aim to support effective use of the law and human rights-based approaches by CSOs to achieve long-term social change.

Most CSOs will not undertake legal action as their core business. However, organisations focused on social change will often benefit from considering whether and how legal action could play a role in their work, be able to recognise a legal problem, and know where to turn for advice. Hub organisations play a vital role in helping them do this.

In the SCS programme, we define hubs as civil society organisations that meet all three of these characteristics:

- have specific and demonstrable legal expertise relevant to their social change goals;
- offer expert legal information, advice and/or representation to civil society organisations;
- and collaborate to:
 - support others to recognise when, where and how legal action can be an effective tool of social change; and/or
 - use legal action to achieve social change.

We describe these forms of collaboration as 'hub activities'.

We know there are numerous CSOs using the law in creative ways to benefit communities around the country. However, with limited funds, this call for applications focuses on our definition of a hub, therefore, we require applicants to strictly meet our definition of a hub organisation.

Purpose of this call

The programme had an open funding call for hub organisations in 2021, awarding ten grants to CSOs around the UK working on a range of issues such as housing, school exclusions, tech accountability, and environmental harm. **The purpose of this funding call is to support smaller hub organisations to scale up their hub activities to reach more CSOs and communities.**

This funding will support hub activities which use [legal action in all its forms](#) – whether that is to empower individuals and groups, persuade public and private bodies, challenge government, or a mix of all three.

By scaling, we mean that our funding will go towards increasing the amount or range of your organisation's hub activities as described above. We hope this funding will help existing collaborations to grow and enable new ones to materialise. Examples of the type of hub activities we might fund include:

- a new project which works with 2-3 community groups to support them to use the law to address social harms of gentrification in their neighbourhoods;
- enabling part-time staff to increase their hours so that they can respond to increased demand from small CSOs for support on using the law to respond to the lack of support for disabled children within education; and
- an endeavour to undertake legal research to collate data and evidence for use in a bigger campaign for change within the criminal legal system.

If you believe your organisation fits in with the Foundation's definition of a hub, and you can demonstrate pre-existing plans to scale up this area of your activity, we invite you to submit a short expression of interest (EOI) outlining your ambitions for your hub activities and how our funding can help you realise these ambitions (see stage one of the application process below).

We are particularly keen to receive EOIs related to issue areas and from geographies which have received less funding from the Foundation in the past. This includes organisations:

- with a focus on housing, education and/or social care;
- working in Wales or the English regions outside of Greater London; and
- which focus on less used areas of law, for example labour law or under-utilised areas of equality laws such as race equality provisions.

We will award 7-10 grants of up to £150,000 over three years. However, we will discuss with shortlisted applicants the most effective size and duration of grants to allow for greater flexibility.

The grant will be flexible, for your hub activities, to be used as you see fit. This means the funding can be used for any costs related to your hub work, such as covering lawyers' fees, towards the salaries of admin staff supporting hub work, or towards management costs to oversee the work.

We expect this fund to be heavily oversubscribed, so please carefully check you satisfy all aspects of the eligibility criteria.

Finally, we are attuned to the many political and policy changes which are likely to take place in the UK in 2024 and beyond, and we know this will impact the work of our grantholders. We hope that additional, flexible resources for hub organisations can play an important role in enabling CSOs to adapt and respond to these changes.

Eligibility

In this open funding call, we will accept applications from UK civil society organisations which:

- fulfil all three criteria in our definition of a hub organisation;
- have hub activities as one of their main areas of activity;
- can demonstrate pre-existing plans for scaling their hub activity;
- are a legally registered not-for-profit entity in the UK, preferably a charity;
- have at least one full year's accounts;
- have an annual income of under £750,000; and
- will undertake activities with this grant which delivers benefit in the UK (applications for international work will not be considered).

Organisations that have previously received a grant from the Foundation for hub activities are not eligible to apply to this fund.

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 which only supports work providing advice to individuals – for example, recruiting or retaining welfare benefits advisers or solicitors.

Application process

This fund has a two-stage application process.

Stage 1 – expression of interest

In the first stage, we ask that you provide a short expression of interest of no more than 500 words outlining how this funding could be impactful for your organisation's hub activities, in addition to confirming your eligibility as outlined above.

You can submit your expression of interest [here](#).

Stage 2 – submission of a detailed written application

If shortlisted for the second stage, you will be asked to submit a detailed application outlining:

- your planned hub activities and your legal expertise;
- an overview of the discrimination and disadvantage you hope to address;
- the key outcomes you hope to achieve;
- how you work with other organisations and at a community-level;
- why your organisation is best placed to do this work; and
- how you plan to learn from your work.

In this second stage, we will also ask you to submit your current organisational strategy, financial accounts, and details of two referees who can provide references on your organisation's work.

During the assessment process, should we have any further questions about your application, we will get in touch to request this additional information, ensuring we provide adequate time for you to get the information to us.

Timeline

Date	Stage
Monday 11 March	Applications open for submission of expressions of interest
Tuesday 30 April	Deadline for submission of expressions of interest
By Friday 17 May	Notice of invitation to submit longer written application
Wednesday 3 July	Deadline for submission of detailed written application
Between Thursday 4 July – Monday 5 September	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.
Tuesday 10 September	Decisions made by the Baring Foundation board
By Friday 20 September	Notice of application outcome

Successful applicants will be required to submit an annual progress report outlining activities, learning and expenditure. The full conditions of any grant will be provided upon award.

Resources

Before starting your application, you may wish to read the following supporting research:

- a paper on the [successful use of strategic litigation by the voluntary sector](#);
- an exploration of [civil society organisations deploying a range of legal tools and tactics](#) to achieve social change;
- an overview of how UK civil society has [used the law in pursuit of racial justice](#);
- a [framework for better use of the law](#) by civil society organisations; and
- a paper on the [value of using legal based approaches](#) (which informed the focus of our Strengthening Civil Society programme).

Contact

If you would like to speak to a member of staff before submitting your expression of interest, please email us at baring.foundation@ing.com by midday on Tuesday 16 April 2024 to arrange a time. Our team is here to support you; please do not hesitate to get in touch with your queries.