

Strengthening Civil Society Programme

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

Expert legal organisations – application guidelines

June 2021

Purpose of the Strengthening Civil Society programme

The Strengthening Civil Society (SCS) programme supports effective 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. They can provide a means to directly tackle the discrimination and disadvantage faced by marginalised individuals and 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](#).

This programme is a collaboration with the Legal Education Foundation and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. You can learn more about the programme [here](#).

Expert legal organisations

In late 2019, the SCS programme was [independently evaluated](#), as it reached five years of grantmaking. A key finding of the evaluation was that a great many of our successful projects were so because they 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 large numbers of civil society organisations using the law in creative ways to benefit communities around the country. However, with limited funds available, this call for applications focuses on a narrow definition of a hub. We know that this will not be the right fit for many organisations using the law and hope to be able to support emerging hubs and other approaches to collaborative legal action in the future. In this call, we require applicants to strictly meet our definition of a hub organisation.

Purpose of this call

In 2021 and beyond, we will focus on supporting hub organisations to scale their activities to enable them to work with more civil society organisations to challenge discrimination and disadvantage and create long term social change.

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.

If you believe your organisation fits in with the Foundation's definition of a hub, and you are able to demonstrate pre-existing plans to scale up this area of your activity, we would be delighted to receive a short expression of interest from you (see stage one of the application process).

We particularly encourage applications from areas that have received less funding from the Foundation in the past. This includes organisations:

- With a focus on housing 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:
 - projects that focus on labour law or housing law; and
 - under-utilised areas of equality and human rights law such as race equality provisions.

We will award 7-8 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. In other words, the funding can be used for any costs related to your hub work, for example, to cover lawyers' fees, towards the salaries of administrative staff supporting hub activities, or towards management costs to oversee the work.

Finally, wide-ranging reform proposals from the government could have profound consequences on hub organisations. Substantive legislative and policy reforms are currently under consideration for the immigration and asylum system, as well as for key aspects of public and administrative law, human rights and criminal justice. We believe additional, flexible resources for hub organisations could be crucial to enable organisations to adapt and respond to these changes.

Eligibility

In this open fund, applications will be considered from civil society organisations in the UK who:

- 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 income of under £1.5m per year; and
- Will undertake activities with this grant which delivers benefit in the UK (applications for international work will not be considered).

Organisations which currently hold a grant from the Foundation are eligible to apply. However, please contact us before submitting an expression of interest to discuss your proposal.

This fund is intended to support legal action which might achieve broad social change, we would normally expect any social change goals to have an impact on a community or large number of people. Unfortunately, this means we are unable to support applications from organisations seeking funding to support their work to provide advice to individuals – for example, recruiting or retaining welfare benefits advisers or solicitors.

Application process

This fund has a three-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 300 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 share details of two referees who will be able to provide references on your organisation's work.

Stage 3 – a semi-formal interview

If your application is shortlisted for the final stage, you will be invited to a semi-formal interview with our team and funding partners to learn more about your hub activities, the plans and ideas you have for scaling these activities, and your approach to collaboration.

Timetable

Date	Stage
Wednesday 30 June	Applications open for submission of expressions of interest
Wednesday 28 July	Deadline for submission of expressions of interest
By Friday 6 August	Notice of invitation to submit longer written application
Wednesday 6 October	Deadline for submission of detailed written application
By Friday 22 October	Notice of invitation to semi-formal interview
Between Monday 1 November – Wednesday 24 November	Semi-formal interviews
Monday 13 December	Decisions made by the Baring Foundation board
By Friday 17 December	Notice of outcome of application

Successful applicants will be required to submit a report at the end of the grant period sharing their activities, learnings and expenditure.

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;
- 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).

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 to arrange a time. Our team is here to support you, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your queries.