

Strengthening Civil Society Programme

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

Using legal action to address racial injustice in the criminal legal system

Application guidelines – March 2025

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. 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 vulnerable 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 support organisations within the sector to make better use of the law and human rights in their 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](#). You can learn more about the programme [here](#).

Purpose of this call

In 2021, the SCS programme began supporting work which uses legal action to address racial injustice in the criminal legal system and bring about wider social change. We started this work after a period of consultation with activists, social change lawyers, and academics who either use legal action in their work, are involved in anti-racist work, or work on the peripheries of both.

You can see a list of grants we have awarded to date [here](#).

In this funding call, we have narrowed our focus within the criminal legal system (CLS) to support work which uses the law to:

- clarify or challenge legislation which disproportionately criminalises racialised people;
- address any racial injustice/s caused by police in schools; and

- address the clampdown on activism in relation to issues of racial injustice (addressing the criminalisation of free speech and protest).

We will fund organisations based anywhere in the UK. However, if an 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 a city like Manchester), they will need to evidence how they are working with organisations in those places. Organisations able to demonstrate pre-existing plans for taking legal action in this space are also eligible to apply.

We believe that carefully planned legal action, as part of a wider campaign, could play a critical role in addressing racial injustice in the criminal legal system and contribute to long-term social change. It is important you ensure the legal action you are taking is in line with those outlined in our [framework for the effective use of the law](#). We will not fund service delivery work such as providing advice or support to people on an individual basis.

Examples of the type of work we anticipate funding under this call include (but are not limited to):

- Undertaking legal research to better understand the impact of police presence in schools;
- Challenging public body policy and practice in relation to the right to protest through Judicial Review; and
- Implementation activities for wins already achieved through legal action.

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.

Amount and duration

The budget for this fund is £750,000. We will largely award grants of up to £50,000 for up to 18 months. However, we will consider applications for grants of up to £90,000 over three years for projects which require a longer development phase. Please be ready to discuss your budgetary needs in your eligibility call so that we can confirm the size of the grant you can apply for.

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 campaigning activities. 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:

- Be an anti-racist organisation or have a demonstrable history of working on anti-racism;
- Already be undertaking legal action activities to address racial injustice in the CLS or be able to demonstrate pre-existing plans for doing so;

- Be planning to undertake activities under the grant which delivers 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 £1m a year.

To ensure eligibility, the application process includes a phone call prior to the submission of a written application. Organisations that have received a grant from the Foundation in the last five years are eligible to apply if they meet the above criteria – we will discuss any necessary considerations with you in your eligibility call.

Application process

There is a two-stage application process for this fund.

In stage one, you need to speak to us about the eligibility and suitability of your work under this call. If you are not already undertaking legal action activities in line with our priority areas as outlined above, but have pre-existing plans for doing so, this call will be your opportunity to tell us more about these plans including when they were devised, who has been involved, and the barriers you have faced in getting these plans off the ground.

You need to arrange your eligibility call by Friday 30 May. Please email us to do this: baring.foundation@ing.com.

After confirming your eligibility for this fund, you will need to:

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

Write an expression of interest, of up to 2000 words, outlining the legal action you are taking or planning to take to:

- clarify or challenge legislation which disproportionately criminalises racialised people;
- address the harms caused by police in schools; or
- address the clampdown on activism in relation to issues of racial injustice (addressing the criminalisation of free speech and protest).

Your expression of interest should be factual; written in plain English, avoiding jargon and rhetoric; and should be presented under the following headings:

- **Summary** – in no more than 100 words, tell us your project's objective and approach.
- **Ongoing or planned legal activities** – explain how you are and/or will use legal action in relation to one of the three areas outlined above. This should include:
 - A short overview of the racial injustice in the CLS you hope to address;

- The legal action/s you are or will be taking;
- what you hope it might help you achieve; 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 expression of interest.

- **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 racial injustice.
- **Learning** – tell us how you plan to learn from your activities and how this learning might support your work going forward; and
- **What else** – if there is anything else you would like us to know, include it in this section.

Your expression of interest should not include any hyperlinks, images, or appendices.

2. Referees. Please include the name 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 be taking references via email during the assessment process, so please make sure your referees know that we will be in touch. This can be included in the same document as your expression of interest and is not included in the word limit.

- 3. 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 can be uploaded as separate documents and are not included in the word count.

- 4. Include your organisation’s safeguarding policy.** If you do not have a safeguarding policy, please upload an explanation entitled "No safeguarding policy".

Your expression of interest (in a Word document), financial accounts, budget, and safeguarding policy should all be separate documents. You will be directed to upload these documents in the grant application form. If you encounter any issues with the online form, please email us at baring.foundation@ing.com and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

During the assessment period, if we have any further questions about your application, we will contact you to request this additional information, ensuring you have adequate time to respond.

We expect successful applicants to submit a monitoring report at the end of the grant period sharing their activities, learning, and expenditure. Together with our learning partners, we will

seek to learn from this work and develop a better understanding of how legal action can be used to address racial injustice in the criminal legal system.

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

Timetable

Date	Stage
Monday 10 March	Funding call launched
Monday 10 March – Friday 6 June	Eligibility phone calls (stage one)
Friday 30 May	Deadline to arrange eligibility phone call (stage one)
Wednesday 11 June	Deadline for written applications (stage two)
Wednesday 11 June – Friday 29 August	Assessment period, including requests for further information from applicants.
Thursday 11 September	Decisions made by the Baring Foundation board
By Friday 19 September	Notification of application outcome

Resources

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

- 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 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).