

# LEF Funding guide 2026

We want to create a society where everyone receives the help they need; where our rights are respected and grown; and where we can all actively shape the systems that affect our lives. We believe that the law is an essential tool to help realise these social justice goals.

Our funding aims to create new connections between the law and communities facing injustice.

These guidelines cover our open grant programme. If you are interested in a grant to train a new lawyer through our Justice First Fellowship, please visit our website.

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# 1. Introduction

## Who we fund

We fund small and medium-sized organisations, closely connected to their communities, who are using – or would like to use – the law to drive wider change and greater equity. See page 6 for our full funding criteria.

## What we fund

We want to advance human rights and equalities across the UK, and support work which has impact on a regional, national or UK-wide level. We believe that human rights and equalities face significant risk and so welcome applications that seek to address these by working collaboratively in complex landscapes.

We want to build on work we have already funded including on overarching human rights frameworks, disability justice, employment rights, housing rights, racial justice and violence against women and girls. However, we would welcome applications that centre other underfunded issues, such as LGBTQ+ rights and women's rights, especially as the external context is shifting so rapidly.

While we cannot support applications focused exclusively on criminal law, we do fund work which focuses on discrimination in the criminal legal system.

We fund migrants' rights work on issues such as employment and housing. However, we channel our support for improving access to justice for people in the immigration system through our contribution to Justice Together, a funder collaboration which we host. Since its creation in 2020, we have significantly increased our funding in this area.

## Our offer

Our funding aims to build the long-term resilience and impact of organisations who are using, or would like to use, the law to drive a wider movement for justice. We want to work in solidarity with a community of organisations who are committed to joining us on this journey. However, we recognise that you may be at different stages of this process and so our grants aim to meet you where you are:

- **Emerging Justice fund:** Support for 'by and for' organisations to explore adding the law to their campaigns

**Who you are:** If you centre those with lived experience in every aspect of your work; are looking at ways to use the law as a lever for wider, community-led change; and are actively looking to learn and work together with legal partners, then this may be the right fund for you.

**What we offer:** Project funding for up to three years to develop ways to use the law and/or legal partnerships to deliver this.

- **Strengthening Justice fund:** Support for organisations already using and shaping the law with communities

**Who you are:** If you're using the law to drive equity and justice, and are working collaboratively with the communities you serve and partners across the sector, then this may be the right fund for you.

**What we offer:** Flexible funding for three to five years that allows your organisation to use the law as needed to address the issues that harm your communities.

## Which fund is best for me?

Two central ideas guide our decision making:

1. **Accountability:** The extent to which your organisation is led, shaped and informed by the communities you serve
2. **Use of the law:** The extent to which your organisation is using and shaping the law to drive wider change in society.

For the Emerging Justice Fund, we would expect you to be accountable to your communities but with less or no experience of using the law.

For the Strengthening Justice Fund, we would expect you to be clearly committed to both ideas, with some evidence of your work in both areas.

## How to apply

We have a two-stage process, and we have tried to make the first stage as short and flexible as possible. Please see page 8 for more details.

## 2. Emerging Justice Fund

Our Emerging Justice fund aims to create opportunities for effective by and for organisations to explore ways that the law could help them to achieve the change they seek.

Are you a community organisation that:

- Is 'by and for', that is, led by the communities you serve?
- Is working to protect and promote rights and equality?
- Is campaigning for wider change and would like to explore how to add legal tools to this work?

You will have some understanding of the law as it relates to the issues you are working on but may not have previously used the law as a tool for change.

If you're a 'by and for' organisation which already uses the law in campaigning for wider change, then the Strengthening Justice fund may be a better option for you.

Please be advised that we are unlikely to fund specific legal cases

## Our offer

### 1. Short-term scoping grants

If you are a 'by and for' organisation that is already campaigning for wider change, and would like to explore how using the law or legal tools could help with this work, you can apply at any time for a grant of **up to £50,000** for **up to 12 months**. These grants are intended for small, specific pieces of work that may then lead to a longer-term flexible grant. This might be, for example, to:

- Identify a possible legal partner
- Work with a partner to develop a legal strategy
- Understand the law relevant to your campaign and identify potential changes and opportunities to influence.

**You'll receive a decision from us on these applications within 14 weeks.**

### 2. Testing out a new legal approach or partnership

If you would like funding to test out a new legal approach or partnership, we make decisions twice a year. This might involve, for example:

- Using the law, including complaints to ombudsmen and public sector equality duty challenges, to hold institutions to account.
- Influencing the legislative process on your campaign issue to improve the law.
- Contributing to strategic litigation.

We are also open to your other ideas of how you could use the law for change.

We recognise that this type of campaign and partnership development can take a lot of time to get right and to ensure that it is rooted in the views and experiences of the communities impacted. You can apply for up to **three years'** flexible funding of **£50,000-£75,000 per year**. We will not normally fund more than 50% of your organisation's annual income.

These grants can be used to fund any costs including, but not limited to:

- Staff time (new or existing)
- Volunteer expenses
- Legal fees or consultancy
- Event costs including participation expenses, venue hire and catering
- Overheads.

We will also offer free access to a legal advisor if you do not already have one in mind.

You can speak to us about this funding and apply at any time, but we will make decisions on applications twice a year.

### 3. Strengthening Justice Fund

This fund aims to connect organisations using and shaping the law more closely with communities facing injustice and to create the space for these organisations to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Our funding decisions will be guided by two factors:

1. How accountable your organisation is to the communities you serve
  - Do you work closely with the communities you serve and seek to increase your accountability to them?
  - Do you ensure that those with least power in your communities are heard and adapt your work to reflect their needs?
  - Are you already effectively working in solidarity with your communities?

We recognise that you may be at different stages of this journey, and are happy to support you, as well as learn from, you, as you work towards this goal.

2. How your organisation uses the law to drive wider change
  - Are you actively using the law to build power in communities?
  - Are you challenging and reshaping the law and policy to promote social justice?
  - Are you collaborating with sector partners in your influencing and campaigning work?

We want to partner with organisations that are using the law creatively and collaboratively as part of a wider movement for justice. This could include a wide range of approaches, for example, using evidence from a Freedom of Information request to drive your policy, research or campaigning or using the public sector equality duty to challenge discrimination.

#### Our offer

Flexible grants of **£50k-£100k per year over 3-5 years** to support your work related to the law. As this is not project funding, we will not ask you to request a specific amount or length of grant in your first stage application. If your application is shortlisted, we will discuss this with you as part of our assessment. We will not normally fund more than 35% of your organisation's annual income.

These grants can be used to fund any costs, including (but not limited to)

- Staff time (new or existing)
- Volunteer expenses
- Legal fees or consultancy
- Court expenses
- Event costs including participation expenses, venue hire and catering
- Governance costs

- Overheads.

As we start to make grants under the new strategy, we will share case studies of organisations supported through this fund.

You can speak to us about this funding and apply at any time, but we will make decisions on applications twice a year.

## 4. Funding criteria

We want to create new connections between the law and communities facing injustice. To do this effectively, we want to fund organisations that are **accountable** to their communities and committed to **using the law** to influence wider change.

We are only able to fund organisations that are doing charitable work in the UK, but you do not have to be a charity.

Please see our full list of exclusions on page 7.

### Accountability

The extent to which your organisation is led, shaped and informed by the communities it serves.

- **Emerging Justice fund**  
This fund is for organisations that are ‘by and for’ the communities they serve. This means lived experience among your trustees or committees and senior staff as well as wider ways of building power among the people affected by the issue(s) you work on.
- **Strengthening Justice fund**  
This fund is for organisations that prioritise accountability to their communities. At minimum, these are organisations that regularly consult with their communities about their priorities and share their power to help communities. This could mean being a ‘by-and-for’ organisation, having some lived and learned experience among trustees and staff, or operating as a membership organisation where strategy is developed and delivered with members.

Learning is also an important part of accountability, so we want to work with organisations who are building power across their communities by identifying those who are not usually heard and adapting their work to address this. We are also keen to work with those who share their legal knowledge with sector partners.

For organisations who are on a journey towards accountability, we are more likely to fund you if we have previously supported you.

## Use of the law

The extent to which your organisation is using and shaping the law to drive wider change in society.

We are focused on using the law to promote human rights and tackle inequality in the UK.

- **Emerging Justice fund**  
This fund supports organisations that are campaigning for change on human rights or equality issues but are **not yet** using or shaping the law to do this. You may already provide advice to individuals and/or share legal information. This fund can support you to explore how the law could help you to influence change.
- **Strengthening Justice fund**  
We are looking for organisations that use the law to address systemic injustice and drive transparency and accountability in public bodies and decision makers. This could include, but is not limited to, judicial review, influencing legislation, strategic litigation, and supporting legal inquiries.

We are particularly interested in organisations which take a longer-term strategic approach, working with communities, networks and policymakers to help to shape the law in local, regional, devolved or national government.

## Other criteria that will influence our decision

- **We prioritise funding small and medium-sized organisations** (usually under £2m annual income) which may struggle to find funding elsewhere, as we believe this is where our grants are most needed. We support organisations that have some structure – such as a constitution that sets out how decisions are made – and have access to a bank account with two signatories (this may be through a partner organisation). LEF would not normally be your first funder. We do not require a minimum level of reserves but we are unlikely to fund organisations that are insolvent.
- **We will take your wider context into consideration**, which will include opportunities for influencing, number and/or geographical spread of people impacted by the issue you want to address, and who else may be already working or leading on an issue. Issues that are clearly under-addressed by current work across the sector will also be prioritised.
- **We will favour approaches that promote solidarity between different groups of people facing injustice, rather than division.** We do not want to advance the rights of one group of people at the expense of another, or fund work which may deepen existing divides or harm.

## Exclusions

We are unlikely to fund organisations that:

- Are based outside the UK
- Have fewer than three trustees, company directors or partners
- Have more general reserves than set out in their reserves policy
- Are in serious financial deficit.

If any of these apply to you but you believe you meet our other criteria, please contact us here: [lef.org.uk/contact](http://lef.org.uk/contact)

## What we won't fund

- Projects to develop or manage pro bono legal advice.
- Individuals or groups of individuals.
- Organisations without access to a bank account with two signatories.
- Projects related to commercial law.
- Work on criminal or environmental law except where this is alongside other areas of civil law, such as work which focuses on discrimination in the criminal legal system.
- Work purely on immigration law. We channel our support for improving immigration advice and policy through our contribution to Justice Together. Please visit [justice-together.org.uk](http://justice-together.org.uk) for more details.
- Awards, prizes or one-off events that are not part of a broader programme of support.
- Projects where our grant would directly replace or subsidise government, legal profession or university funding, including the costs of law clinics.
- Statutory organisations.
- Capital expenditure on buildings and vehicles.
- Work that does not have a direct benefit in the UK.
- Work that has already taken place.
- Work that falls outside the Charity Commission guidance on campaigning and political activity. Please visit [gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities](http://gov.uk/government/publications/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities-cc9/speaking-out-guidance-on-campaigning-and-political-activity-by-charities) for more details.
- Organisations or approaches which are not aligned with our values.
- Promotion of religion

## 5. How to apply

### 1) Find out if you're eligible

If you're interested in applying for funding from us, please make sure you've first read all the information about our grants programme and funding criteria. Then we encourage you to take the short eligibility quiz on our [application portal](#).

### 2) Register

If you think this is the right funding opportunity for you, then you will need to register on our [application portal](#) with your name, organisation and contact details. You can ask us to create an account for you if you are having difficulty.

### Speak to us

If you would like guidance on whether to apply or have questions about the application process, you can book a call with one of our grants team via our application portal, once you have taken the short eligibility quiz on the portal. This call is not required and is not part of our assessment process.

If you have a current or recent grant, please contact your grant manager about a further application. Please note that we do not expect to make grants through our new programmes to organisations with live grants from Stronger Sector and Fairer Systems, except as continuation funding.

### 3) Choose how you would like to apply.

We want to know how you meet our criteria. You can choose to tell us this in one of the following ways:

- If you already have documents, such as an application for another funder, or information on your website which tell us what we need to know, you can make an application just by uploading those or sharing links.
- If you don't have existing material to send us, you can complete our short online application form. This will ask you about the four areas above as well as some basic information about your group or organisation.  
You can download Word and PDF versions of the application form [here](#).
- You can also tell us how you meet our criteria by sending us video content, either pre-existing or recorded for this application.

For all applicants, we ask for a copy of your most recent accounts and your governing document (e.g. Constitution or Memorandum of Association) if these are not publicly available.

You can apply at any time, but we make decisions on grants under £50k four times a year and larger grants twice a year.

A copy of the application form questions is included at the end of these guidelines.

If you need any help with your application, find out about the support we can offer applicants on page 12.

#### **4) Submit your application**

[Use our online portal to submit your application](#)

### **What happens after I apply?**

#### **a) Staff shortlisting**

Our grants team will read all the applications and information submitted. We will also look at publicly available information about your organisation such as your website, the Charity Commission, Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator or Companies House.

If you have applied for a short-term or urgent grant from our Emerging Justice Fund, the grants team will then meet to make a final decision about your application.

For all other applications, the next steps are:

#### **b) First stage decision**

The grants team discuss and agree which applicants are strongest within our available budget. You will hear by email if we have been able to shortlist your application within five weeks of the deadline. If your application has been turned down at first stage, we will give you the main reason and you may request further feedback.

#### **c) Second stage meeting**

A member of the grants team will arrange to meet key people in the organisation, either online or in-person. We will want to find out more about:

- How you use (or want to use) the law to create change that builds social justice
- How you are accountable to the communities you serve
- How you meet our other criteria and align with our values
- The size and length of LEF funding that would offer the right support for your organisation.

#### **d) Second stage application**

If you did not complete the four application questions at first stage, we will ask you to answer them at second stage. Our grants team can help you to complete them through the assessment meeting.

At this stage, we will also ask for some more financial information about your current financial year, for example how much you expect to spend this year – and how much you have raised so far.

#### **e) Staff review**

The grants team will meet to consider all the second stage applications and ensure

that the information is clear and consistent. We may ask you for additional information after this meeting.

**f) Grants and Learning Committee**

All second stage applications are considered by our Grants Committee who make the final decision. We will share with them your answers to the four application questions so that they see how you describe your own work, as well as the staff assessment.

Our Grants Committee is made up of three LEF trustees and three external members with lived and learned experience of the issues we work on.

**g) Second-stage notifications**

We will let you know the committee's decision by email. If your application is unsuccessful, we will include specific feedback on their reasons.

**Use of artificial intelligence (AI)**

We know that some people may use AI in their applications and we will not take this into account when assessing applications. We do not use AI at LEF at any stage of the assessment process.

## 6. 2026 timetable

### Emerging Justice fund (applications under £50,000)

Short-term or urgent applications for under £50k can be submitted at any time and will normally be considered four times a year. You'll receive a decision from us on these applications within 14 weeks.

### Emerging Justice fund (applications over £50,000) and Strengthening Justice fund:

Applications can be submitted at any time. However, there are two decision making windows each year:

- Applications submitted by **3 February 2026**: decisions in early June (shortlisted applicants notified by mid-March)
- Applications submitted by **17 September 2026**: decisions at end of December (shortlisted applicants notified by the end of October)

## 7. Help with your application

- Join our webinar for potential grant applicants on 15 July or watch the recording which will be published on our website.
- If you have any questions after the webinar, we can offer a guidance call or answer questions via email.
- Access support is available for Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people to help with applying – for example, some time from a Personal Assistant to help you complete the form or a Sign Language Interpreter to join the application call. You can you can request an Access Payment of up to £500. Visit our website at [lef.org.uk/contact](https://lef.org.uk/contact) to tell us what support you need.
- These guidelines are being translated into Easy Read and will be available on our website.

## 8. Managing your grant

If your grant application is approved, we will draw up a grant agreement for you to sign which will include the planned start and end date for our funding. After you sign this, we'll assign you a grant manager who'll be your main contact at LEF. They'll contact you to set up an introductory call.

### Keeping in touch with LEF

We have two touchpoints with you during the year after your introductory call.

**Interim calls:** These aim to find out how your grant is going, any additional help we might offer, and any learning, particularly around our priority learning areas:

- How is the law contributing to movements for social justice?
- How are legal organisations working with communities to build social justice?

You can find more information about these priority learning topics on the learning page of our website.

These calls will often be online but we aim to visit you in person once or twice too, depending on the length of your grant.

**Annual report:** A light touch report with questions about how your work is going and the context you are working in, as well as any major changes to the budget or scope of the agreed work. We also give you the option to attach an existing report that includes relevant information, or to discuss your work in a phone call. We may follow up with a phone call to discuss the learning from your grant in more detail

Outside these reporting points, we ask that you let your grant manager know about any major changes to the work or the organisation – for example, changes to key staff members, financial difficulties and/or any serious incidents reported to the Charity Commission.

### Grant payments

We normally pay your grants annually in advance of the work starting. The first payment is usually made once the Grant Agreement has been signed. After that, the payment is released each year once we have received your annual report and/or had an update meeting.

### Development support

In addition to our grant funding, we are committed to providing development support (sometimes called wraparound support or funder plus). We recognise that the work we fund – and the context you work in – is challenging and we want to make sure you have access to the support you need to do this well.

We have some support in place, for example for wellbeing and legal strategy. We will also work with our new grant partners to develop a range of tailored provision which may include helping you with organisational development, navigating transitions or with specific learning or influencing activities.

# Appendix – Application questions

**This is for information only: all applications need to be made through our online portal**

## Emerging Justice Fund

Application contact name\*:

Phone:

Mobile phone:

Email\*:

Applicant organisation\*:

Alternative names used:

Names of partner organisations:

Organisation address:

Organisation email:

Organisation phone:

Organisation website:

Organisation legal status\*:

Charity Number (if applicable):

Company Number (if applicable):

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If you would like to apply through written answers, these are the questions. The character limits are generous (5000 characters per answer) to minimise your time editing but we do not expect more than a few hundred words for each answer.

---

Question number: 1

A brief introduction to your organisation

[Please give us a short summary of the purpose and activity of your organisation]

---

Question number: 2

How would you like to explore using or shaping the law?

[Tell us how you think the law could help strengthen your campaigning work.]

---

Question number: 3

How are you accountable to the communities you serve?

[Tell us about how your organisation is led and shaped by the communities it serves. This fund is for 'by and for' organisations.]

---

Question number: 4

Tell us what you think we need to know about the context you work in.

[For example, opportunities to influence on your issue(s), other activity on your issue(s) and/or particular need among your community or in your local area.]

---

If you would like to answer these questions through video content instead of text, please choose option 2 in the online form and paste link(s) into the fields using valid URLs. These could be links to YouTube or other video sharing sites, to your website, or to documents in other services such as Dropbox. **If you have one video that answers all of the questions please enter its URL in the first box and leave the others blank.**

---

If you would like to apply by sharing existing documents - such as an application to another funder - please choose option 3 and upload them.

---

For all applications, please upload your governing document and most recent annual accounts. You do not need to do this if these are publicly available, for example if they are on your website, the Charity Commission or Companies House.

Files uploaded:

Please upload any supporting documents in docx, xls, xlsx, csv or PDF.

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Grant length requested:

Total grant requested:

Requested amounts by year:

Year 1:

Year 2:

Year 3:

- End of Emerging Justice fund application form -

## Strengthening Justice Fund

Application contact name\*:

Phone:

Mobile phone:

Email\*:

Applicant organisation\*:

Alternative names used:

Names of partner organisations:

Organisation address\*:

Organisation email:

Organisation phone:

Organisation website:

Organisation legal status\*:

Charity Number (if applicable):

Company number (if applicable):

---

If you would like to apply through written answers, these are the questions. The character limits are generous (5000 characters per answer) to minimise your time spent editing but we do not expect more than a few hundred words for each answer.

---

Question number: 1

A brief introduction to your organisation

[Please give us a short summary of the purpose and activity of your organisation]

---

Question number: 2

How does your organisation use and/or shape the law to build social justice?

[Tell us about the key legal tools you are using and/or legislation you are working to influence.]

---

Question number: 3

How are you accountable to the communities you serve?

[Tell us about how your work is led and shaped by the people it is set up to help.

This might be through governance, staffing, consultation, organising or other methods.]

---

Question number: 4

Tell us what you think we need to know about the context you work in.

[For example, opportunities to influence on your issue(s), other activity on your issue(s) and/or particular need among your community or in your local area.]

---

If you would like to answer these questions through video content instead of text, please choose option 2 in the online form and paste link(s) into the fields using valid URLs. These could be links to YouTube or other video sharing sites, to your website, or to documents in other services such as Dropbox. **If you have one video that answers all of the questions please enter its URL in the first box and leave the others blank.**

---

If you would like to apply by sharing existing documents - such as an application to another funder - please choose option 3 and upload them.

---

For all applications, please upload your governing document and most recent annual accounts. You do not need to do this if these are publicly available, for example if they are on your website, the Charity Commission or Companies House.

Files uploaded:

Please upload any supporting documents in docx, xls, xlsx, csv or PDF.

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As this is not project funding, we will not ask you to request a specific amount or length of grant in your first stage application. If your application is shortlisted, we will discuss this with you as part of our assessment.

- End of Strengthening Justice fund application form -