

LEF webinar for potential applications: script

15 July 2025

Introduction and Housekeeping (Rachael Takens-Milne, Director of Grants and Learning)

Good afternoon and welcome to everyone. I'm Rachael and I'm here today with some of our grants team, which includes Ali, Alex, Joy, Hannah and Sheena.

A few housekeeping notes first. In order to be able to reach as many people as were interested, we are using a webinar format which means we will ask you to post any questions in the Q & A rather than unmute to ask the question orally. Feel free to post any questions in the Q&A as we go through.

We are about to start recording the session now. You should already have had access to the slides. These and the presentations will be available on the website.

We had booked British Sign Language interpreters for this webinar but unfortunately they have had to cancel today. However, we will arrange for a BSL interpretation of the recording which will be available on our website.

If you want to turn on transcription, you can do this by clicking the three dots in the top right hand corner of your Teams window and clicking on 'language and speech'. However it does often make mistakes so a script from today's presentation will also be available afterwards.

We know that many organisations are struggling to find funds in the current climate and that it takes time to research funders and funding opportunities, as well as to prepare an application. So we are running this session to help you decide whether or not to go ahead with an application, and to understand what happens if you do.

Your feedback is really helpful for us when planning future sessions. We will send a link for feedback via the chat at the end and we will also email this to participants.

Now we'll start sharing slides.

We are delighted to be sharing our new grant programmes with you today.

Over the next hour we will cover:

- Quick introduction to LEF
- Introducing our new open grants programme
- Our criteria
- Eligibility and exclusions/what we don't fund
- How to apply including upcoming key dates.
- Q and A

Part of the reason for this webinar is to ensure that we are as open and transparent as possible about our funding programmes and decision making – we don't want to waste anyone's time. To this end we need to be upfront that we always receive more applications than we have funds available – and we expect this autumn to be particularly competitive because of the launch of new programmes. The purpose of this webinar is to assist you in making the decision as to whether or not LEF is good fit for your work and whether to invest the time in applying.

We know that probably the key question for many of you will be 'will LEF fund our work?' – and unfortunately we won't have time today to give detailed one-to-one advice or feedback. However we do hope that by the end of this session you will have a clearer idea of our criteria, what we are looking for; and how our application process and decision-making works. And if you still have queries or questions, you can book a pre-application guidance call with one of our team.

About LEF

Firstly, a little about us. LEF was set up in 2012 following the sale of the College of Law. Our legal name is The Legal Education Foundation. However, as our work has evolved, we have found the word 'education' to cause confusion and misunderstanding. So with the launch of our new strategy, we will just call ourselves 'LEF' – which is what many people knew us as anyway.

We are a social justice funder, with a focus on shaping and using the law.

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.

However, we are also aware that the law is often used to oppress too. and equally that funders have a lot of power than can be used carelessly and harmfully. We have been working over the past 3 years to understand and address the power and privilege we hold as an organisation and as individuals. We call this work 'power, culture and inclusion' and this underpins everything in our new strategy. We have made progress but know we still have lots to do.

And in terms of our organisation, to help give a sense of who we are, we are 27 staff, which includes the grants team, as well as learning, policy,

communications and operations. There are 7 of us who work on open grants, not all full time.

LEF's new strategy

We have been developing this strategy over the past two years so it very much builds on the work we've already funded, and our direction of travel towards longer term, more flexible grants and valuing lived experience. As well as learning from our grant and funding partners, we worked alongside an external Advisory Panel which brought a range of different experience and networks to challenge us over that period.

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.

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.

I will now hand over to Ali.

Our new open grants programme

Thanks Rachael. Hi, I'm Ali and I'm the Head of Grants at LEF. I'm going to give you an overview of our new open grants programme.

Overview

Our aim is to create new connections between the law and communities facing injustice. To do this, we are looking to fund organisations that meet two key criteria:

1. They prioritise accountability to their communities (and we'll talk a bit more about this) and
2. They are either already committed to using the law to influence change or would like to explore using the law towards their wider influencing goals.

By influencing wider change, what we mean is that the work has a broader impact than individual outcomes. We will talk more about this criteria in a moment.

We have two funds in the programme: Emerging Justice and Strengthening Justice.

Emerging Justice fund

So first the Emerging Justice fund – this aims to create opportunities for ‘by and for’ organisations to explore ways that the law could help them achieve the change they seek. This fund is for organisations that are:

- By and for – and by this we mean led by the communities you serve, so maybe having lived experience among your trustees or committees and senior staff, or wider ways of building power among the people affected by the issues you work on AND you will be:
- Working to protect and promote rights and equality; AND
- Would like to explore how to add legal tools to your campaigning work

In this funding stream it is likely that you will have some understanding of the law as it relates to the issues you work on, but you may not have used the law as a tool for change. So for example you may already provide advice to individuals, or share legal information. This fund can support you to explore how the law could help you to influence change more broadly.

For organisations that are by and for or community led and who are already using the law for change, the Strengthening Justice fund may be a better option for you.

There are two routes to funding under Emerging Justice, which depends on the work you want to do.

The first route is to apply for short term or urgent work up to £50,000 for up to 12 months. These shorter grants are designed for small, specific pieces of work, for example:

- To identify a possible legal partner
- To work with a partner to develop a legal strategy
- To understand the law relevant to your campaign and identify potential changes and opportunities to influence.

Decisions on these applications will be made within a maximum of 12-14 weeks. Although smaller in size and length, these grants may lead to a longer term flexible grant through a subsequent application to our other funds.

The second funding route under Emerging Justice is to apply for flexible funding to test out a new legal approach or partnership. Recognising that this type of campaign and partnership development can take a lot of time to get right, and to ensure it is rooted in the views and experiences of communities impacted, we can offer longer grants under this funding strand, up to three years, and of 50,000 to 75,000 a year. We would not normally fund more than 50% of your organisation's income.

Again, you can apply at any time but we will have two decision points each year for this fund, and funding could include:

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

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

A full range of what we can fund under Emerging Justice is in the guidance but it does cover a wide range of costs, including overheads.

Under both strands of Emerging Justice, we can also offer support in accessing a legal advisor if you do not already have one in mind.

Strengthening Justice fund

Moving on to our Strengthening Justice fund. This fund aims to connect organisations already 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 those two factors we mentioned before

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How accountable your organisation is to the communities you serve. For example, under this criteria we will consider:

- Do you work closely with the communities you serve, and seek to increase your accountability to them? (For example, at a minimum this would be organisations that regularly consult with communities about their priorities and share their power to help communities. It could also mean being a by and for organisation, or operating as a membership organisation where strategy is developed and delivered with members)
- Do you ensure that those with least power in your communities are heard, and do you adapt your work to reflect their needs and views? (for example

sharing legal knowledge with partner organisations, co-creating strategies or programmes with communities)

- Are you already working effectively in solidarity with your communities?

We know that this work is a long-term process for many, and that you may be at different stages of this journey, as are we, and we very much recognise that and acknowledge that we are not perfect and that we are learning ourselves.

We see learning as an important part of accountability, and what this fund can do is support you as you work towards these goals. So we want to work with organisations who acknowledge where they are and take a reflective approach to building and sharing their power.

It is worth noting that for organisations who are on a journey towards accountability, we are more likely to fund you if we have previously supported you.

The second key factor is how your organisation uses the law to drive wider change. For example:

- 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, and recognise there could be a wide range of approaches within this, for example using evidence from a Freedom of Information request to drive your policy, research or campaigning work, or using the public sector equality duty to challenge discrimination. It could also mean using the law to drive transparency and accountability in public bodies and decision makers, influencing legislation or supporting legal inquiries.

We are particularly interested in organisations which take a long-term strategic approach, working collaboratively to help shape the law in local, regional, devolved or national government.

Funding under Strengthening Justice is via flexible grants of £50k-£100k per year over 3-5 years to support your work related to the law. We will not normally fund more than 35% of your organisation's annual income.

These grants can be used to fund any costs, including overheads.

This next slide just summarises some of the key numbers.

- The Board has committed an additional £15m so we expect to spend around £50m on grants, support for our grant partners and running the Justice First Fellowship over 2025-30.
- Urgent or short-term grants will be up to £50,000 over 12 months.

- Longer term grants will be £50-£100,000 per year for 2-5 years.
- We will update the website with the range and average size and length of grant, once we have completed our first funding round.

So those are the two funding programmes. Now I just want to talk a little bit more about our funding criteria and how we see these working in practice.

Funding criteria

We've talked already about our two key overarching criteria, being

1. Being accountable to communities and
2. Using or shaping the law to drive wider change

We also consider other criteria that will influence our decision:

- We prioritise funding small and medium sized organisations: this means usually under 2m annual income. This is to prioritise our funding where it is most needed, for organisations that may struggle to find funding elsewhere.
- We are only able to fund organisations that are doing charitable work in the UK, but you do not have to be a registered charity. We support organisations that have some structure – for example a constitution that sets out how decisions are made – and have access to a bank account with two signatories, although this can be through a partner organisation. LEF wouldn't normally be your first funder. And while we don't require a minimum reserves level, we are unlikely to fund organisations that are insolvent.
- We will take your wider context into consideration, which will include opportunities for influencing, the number and geographic 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 under represented by current work across the sector will also be prioritised. So this will be about weighing up different needs.
- 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.

Eligibility and exclusions

So just briefly to touch on some exclusions:

We don't fund work on criminal law, but we do fund work which focuses on discrimination in the criminal legal system.

In relation to immigration, while we will fund work to strengthen migrant's rights for example on issues like housing or employment, we won't fund work on improving access to justice for people in the immigration system – our support for this is channelled 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.

We don't fund projects to develop or manage pro bono legal advice. While we recognise there is a real need for legal services, we believe that this isn't a long term or sustainable solution to the lack of legal aid experienced around the country.

We don't fund projects where our funding would replace or subsidise government, the legal profession or university funding including the costs of law clinics.

And like many other funders there are some relatively common exclusions and eligibility criteria, some of which are on the slides here, but it is worth checking the full list on our website before making an application.

I'll now hand back to Rachael to talk through the application process.

Application process

For all funding programmes, if you think this is the right funding opportunity for you, you will need to register on our portal and take our short eligibility quiz.

We've tried to make our grants application process as flexible as possible, but we do need to know how you meet our criteria. You can do this in one of these ways:

- Answer a few questions via our online application form
- Send us information you already have for example an application to another funder or sharing links to information on your website
- Tell us how you meet our criteria by sending us video content which can be pre existing or recorded for us

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 also ask for copies of your accounts and your governing document, in whatever form that takes, if they are not already publicly available.

For all programmes, you can apply at any time.

A reminder that for Emerging Justice short term or urgent grants (grants under 50k) you'll receive a decision within 12-14 weeks, and for the other grants we have two key decision points a year which will be on our website.

For the Emerging Justice short term grants, the grants team will review and then meet to make a collective decision on your application.

For all applications above £50,000, there will be a two-stage decision process. Firstly, the grants team will discuss and agree which applications are the strongest against our criteria within the budget we have available.

We will let you know within 5 weeks of the deadline if we have been able to shortlist your application.

The second stage process will involve an in person or online meeting. If you didn't complete the four application questions at first stage we will discuss these when we meet, as well as any follow up questions we might have.

We will also ask for some more financial information at this stage.

All second stage applications are reviewed and final decisions are made by our Grants Committee. The Committee will comprise three trustees and three external members with lived and learned experience of the issues we fund, which we will be recruiting over the summer.

At both first and second stage you can ask for more detailed feedback. If you have been unsuccessful, we ask that you wait a year before reapplying.

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 request an Access Payment of up to £500.

In terms of key dates for this forthcoming round:

- Today's webinar
- Guidance calls – available until the 11th September
- Application deadline 18th September
- First stage outcome: 20th October
- Second stage assessments (visits) mid October to mid November
- Final outcome: 19th December

Next steps

If you still have questions about whether to apply or have questions about the application process, you can contact us to book a short guidance call with one of our grants team. The booking system for these will be live after this webinar.

Finally – we haven't mentioned the Justice First Fellowship today, another grant programmes some of you may be aware of – which funds training for future social welfare lawyers. We are continuing to run this programme and the round of applications will open in January. There is more information on our website, you can also talk to us about this – and please let us know if you think a dedicated webinar would be useful

Conclusion (Rachael Takens-Milne, Director of Grants and Learning)

That's all we have time for today but thank you to everyone for coming and we hope we've been able to provide some useful guidance as well as answers to the wide range of questions. You should already have the slides and we will share the recording from today's presentation. As mentioned you can find full details of our guidance on our website.

If you are still uncertain about whether or not to apply and would like to arrange a call with one of our grants team, you can book one via our website. This will offer you guidance on preparing your application rather than being part of the assessment.