

Edge Fund

GRANTMAKING PRIORITY-SETTING AND STRATEGY

What are your grantmaking and/or strategic priorities (in terms of geographic focus, issue, etc.)?

Edge Fund is a small grantmaker that supports grassroots efforts to bring about radical change. Edge gives grants to groups that are based in the UK and Ireland that would be considered too radical for funding from traditional sources. Edge Fund aims to support work that creates long-term change in society by addressing the root causes of injustice and inequality. We fund in areas such as gender justice, climate justice and racial justice.

Who decides the grantmaking priorities? The overall strategy for the fund?

Edge Fund is a membership-based organization, run through a non-hierarchical structure. We don't have a board or a committee who make decisions about how Edge Fund is run, or who receives funding; all our members are our decision-makers. Members are made up of people who shared Edge Fund's values. Anyone can apply to become a member, but Edge aims to build a membership that is representative of the groups and communities the funding affects. Edge Fund has around 100 active members from the communities it intends to serve. Members and previous grantees collectively decide how funds should be distributed, as well as deciding on the management of the fund, including grantmaking priorities and strategy.

What's the process by which these decisions are made?

Edge Fund has a review after each grant round where members' and grantees' views are sought. We also have an annual general meeting where members can get involved in the strategic planning. Day-to-day decisions are made by a small group of members, the facilitation group, but any major decision will be put to the entire membership. We have two part-time staff, drawn from our network of lived-experience leaders, who support these processes.

How are these practices socialized within your organization?

Non-hierarchical organizing is built into the foundations of the Edge Fund. We have no director, no board, nobody holds a senior role to anyone else. Every Edge member has equal voice: There are no members with authority over others, and decision-making power is never based on financial (or other) contribution. The only time a member does have more of a say is when the issue in question concerns their own community (e.g., proposals on racial justice will be reviewed by people experiencing racism).

TYPES OF GRANTS

What kinds of grants do you provide (e.g., general, rapid response, capacity building, field-building, etc.)?

All our grants are entirely unrestricted general funding.

What is the range in amount of the grants you award?

Up to £3,000. In the past we gave grants of £5,000 but we reduced them in order to support more groups. Most applications receive around £1,500.

Is the participatory decision-making process the same for all grant types and sizes? If not, why?

Yes, although applications for less than £1000 that are scored highly by the members do not need to attend the funding day, where applicants vote for each others' proposals. They simply get the money (though they are encouraged to attend the funding day for community-building and sharing purposes).

Do you earmark funding for a specific purpose in order to ensure diversity in who/what you're funding?

Not really, but we do aim to find ways of funding across the range of areas we support, which are roughly categorized as:

1. Disability and health (including mental health);
2. Low income/working class;
3. Race/ethnicity;
4. Women;
5. LGBTQI;
6. Migrants/refugees;
7. Gypsy, Traveler, and Roma;
8. Environment;
9. Economic and political systems.

Who determines the type and size of grants, and how?

The type of grant (unrestricted) never changes; the size of the grant is determined in part by the applicant (they ask for up to £3000) but also by the scoring process. Decisions about funding are made by members and previous grantees, who score proposals. Those with the highest scores are invited to a funding day where they can learn about each others' work and, along with members, previous grantees and others, vote on how to distribute the budget amongst them (all organizations that are invited to the funding day get a minimum grant of £1,500 or a maximum of £3,000).

APPLICATION PROCESS

Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

Any grassroots group working on social justice issues in the UK and Ireland is eligible to apply. Although charities can apply, we rarely fund them for a few reasons. Firstly they tend to not have radical aims, being constrained as they are by the charities legislation on politics and campaigning activity. Also, they tend to be able to access a greater range of funding opportunities than the majority of groups we fund, which are un-constituted informal groups with a low average income. Our members also tend to prefer organizations that devote all their time to campaigning and political activity, and so score them more highly than the charities that apply.

What kind of outreach happens to make potential grant applicants aware of your grantmaking?

We have two regional organizers who undertake outreach in communities. This is very hands-on, as many of the groups we support have never received any outside funding before, and often were unaware that funds such as Edge Fund exist. As such, we undertake a lot of physical outreach such as leaving flyers in community centers or attending meetings, events and protests, and raising awareness on social media.

How often do you accept applications/grant proposals?

We aim to run two grants rounds each year, but it usually ends up being about every eight months.

Can applicants get assistance in applying? If so, what kind?

Yes. Any kind, but for example we aim to help people who are non-native speakers, or semi-literate, or who don't have access to computers. Potential applicants ring us up, and either the regional organizers or a volunteer member will help.

What type of information is collected from applicants, and who has access to this information?

We ask for two pages maximum. The basics are gathered: group information, purpose, background, as well as some information on their politics and values, such as asking them who is involved in their group and how they make decisions. This information is shared with all members who read, review and score their applications, as well as any former grantees or potential grantees who are helping with the scoring process.

INITIAL VETTING/SCREENING/ DUE DILIGENCE

Are applications initially screened or vetted to ensure eligibility? How and by whom is this done? If more than one person is involved, how do you ensure that the same criteria has been considered in all cases?

Three people—usually one regional organizer and two members—will vet for eligibility. It is rare that we remove proposals, but occasionally there are applications that are entirely outside of our remit. For example, social enterprises with large turnovers may apply. Our criteria are quite basic, and as such it's relatively easy for the people involved to ensure that they are using the same criteria.

GRANTMAKING DECISION PROCESS AND PANEL

Who comprises your grantmaking selection panel(s)?

We don't have a selection panel as such, because all proposals are read by members. Everybody reads a batch of proposals, and scores them. Proposals will be read by at least three members. Then those with the highest scores will be funded. However, before general members read and score the proposals, they are reviewed by 'community committees' or 'advisory groups' (depending on the proposal), whose comments are then shared with the membership to help build understanding of the issues within the broader community. They are the first to see and score the applications relating to their own backgrounds and identities and give advice to the membership from their perspective and experience of working in the field. They keep an eye on the process to help ensure it is as fair as possible and may also be asked for their help to reach out to communities and networks.

Community committees are made up of a diverse group of members from communities facing discrimination and

injustice, e.g., proposals concerning disabilities will be read by people with disabilities first. The advisory groups have a similar function to community committees but they are based on issues rather than on identities. So, for example, we have an environmental advisory group.

How are they selected (e.g., by nomination, application, etc.)?

Any member can join the community committee as long as they self-identify as belonging to one of these communities. Any member can join an advisory group if they feel they have a good understanding of the issues and perhaps also the groups working in the field, which would be useful to guide other members.

How do you think about representation of specific population groups or geographies?

Edge Fund aims for its membership to be representative of the communities it intends to serve. As such, we try to ensure we don't end up with (for example) a large number of white middle-class people. However, the reality is that although our membership may be representative, those members who can devote time and energy to the process are often white and middle-class. As such the community committees (which are made up of members who have lived experience of discrimination and marginalization) play an important role: applications concerning race issues are reviewed first by people experiencing racism, for example.

What, if any, is the term limit for members of the selection panel? Why?

There is no term limit, but the facilitation group (volunteer members engaging in behind the scenes administration) is intended to renew every two years or so, to give others the opportunity to be part of this side of things.

What is the process by which the selection panel determines grant decisions?

Members score proposals on the basis of our values, which include our intention of supporting under-funded groups led by people affected by the issues.

What considerations are taken into account to ensure inclusive and streamlined decision making processes?

It's not very stream-lined, because it's so inclusive! Our process takes around four months: First, proposals need to be checked for basic eligibility (by regional organizers and members); then they are reviewed by people who understand the issue best (members in community

committees or advisory groups); then by all members; then finally, if scored highly, by other applicants at a face-to-face meeting (the funding day). One consideration we take into account to ensure inclusivity is that we support members (such as those with language barriers) who need help reviewing and scoring proposals.

Can decision-makers on grantmaking selection panels be applicants? If so, are there any special processes or a conflict of interest policy tied to this occurrence?

Yes. We just ask people to declare whether they have a relationship to any of the applicants. This is not a fail-safe conflict of interest policy, but we trust that people will be honest and share in the spirit of things. It's not really enough money for us to be concerned about any kind of major fraud, and we place a high value on trust and community accountability.

What happens if there is disagreement among the decision-making committee? How is this resolved? (e.g., consensus, voting, etc.)

The scoring and voting system means that any disagreement about proposals is relatively easily dealt with. What is more complicated is decision-making about strategy. We aim to be consensus-based, but this is not always possible. In the past we have had one-to-one discussions that feed into specific meetings and even several surveys to see how to deal with contentious issues, such as our funding of sex work.

How are selection panel members trained and supported?

We don't have training for members, but they do receive a welcome pack and another member will buddy them to understand the processes.

What recourse do grants applicants have to challenge the decisions?

They can email us, and some do, but because it's a collective community decision—and one that they are able to be part of, because they are encouraged join as a member and take part in the scoring—challenges are rare.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

What percentage of staff members are “peers”, i.e. of the population the foundation seeks to benefit?

100%. We have two very part-time staff members, both of whom were recruited in part due to their activism, and both of whom continue to be active members of the communities Edge Fund supports.

What percentage of board members are peers?

100%. We don't have any board members, but those in the facilitation group, community committees and advisory groups are all members with lived experience or a background of activism in relevant areas (e.g. environmental activists).

What percentage of the grantmaking decision-making committee(s) are peers?

100%. As above.

Are there other committees or operational processes that involve peers?

There is nothing that doesn't involve peers! Even our Tweets are sent out by members.

How does the role of paid staff differ from that of peers?

The two regional organizers are responsible for outreach, communications and fundraising, as well as grants administration (e.g. organizing our funding days). However in practice they do this by mobilizing members, because the regional organizers only work three days per week maximum. So, paid staff may be the ones processing payments to grantees, but in busy periods they will ask members to support them even with this.

Do you pay members of your panel/committee?

We pay members if they need financial support to engage. So, for example, we ask members to facilitate meetings, and if they are on low incomes then we pay them for doing this work, and also provide childcare, etc. We trust people to be honest about their needs.

REPORTING, LEARNING, AND PROCESS ITERATION

What, if any, are your reporting requirements for grantees?

Who develops them?

We do not have any reporting requirements for grantees. Previously we have held 'Radical Sharing Forums', which is a day when grantees come together with members to share what they've done and encourage solidarity with their campaigns. However these were expensive and time-consuming to organize, so we haven't done these for a while.

Do you do any kind of formal evaluation? If so, what is asked of grantees and who conducts the evaluations?

No, we don't though we would love to! We simply don't have the financial resources to invest in any formal evaluations. All our money goes to small grants.

How do you evaluate impact?

We don't formally evaluate impact, but we do consider indicators such as the number of groups we have supported that have never received funds before; or the number of groups in rural communities, for example.

How do you learn about participants' experiences, both as selection panelists and applicants?

We build our community through formal processes, such as post-funding-round reviews (meetings, surveys, one-to-one conversations); but we also have informal processes, which act to build our community. So, for example, we raise awareness for our grantees' campaigns and so others grantees can join in solidarity, or we share events and activities that members (panelists and applicants) can take part in.

With whom do you share the results of what you learn?

We take part in as many networks as possible. So, for example, we are members of **EDGE Funders Alliance** and the **Human Rights Funders Network**, and we go to as many conferences and events as we can. Although we have no budget for these types of events and as such have had to rely on donor allies to support our participation, we've had quite a lot of success. For example, **FundAction** (the new participatory fund in Europe) was borne out of conversations that Edge Fund members had with EDGE Funders Alliance friends, and much of the learning from Edge Fund was incorporated into the design of FundAction.

Have you made changes to your programs based on feedback? If so, what is an example?

We review our grants after every grant round, and every time we make changes, ranging from small tweaks to our scoring system to major updates of the process. So, for example, we previously used a scoring system whereby members had a number of points they could distribute across the proposals (ranking), but this was changed due to feedback to a basic score-out-of-ten system. At the more significant level, we had to substantially change the way we dealt with applications from sex worker groups after the first few rounds.

Initially, applications from sex worker groups went to the Women and Oppressed Genders community committee. However we realized that some of the members of this committee were rejecting sex worker applications on the basis of their abolitionist politics. Because the community committees have the most weight in the process (due to their lived experience of the issues), this meant that sex worker applications would not make it through. The

sex workers in our community offered feedback that the Nordic Model that the abolitionists championed is damaging to sex workers; as such, we had to have some frank conversations between facilitation group members (who had gathered the feedback from the sex workers) and the abolitionist committee members (who were rejecting the sex worker applications). The facilitation group noted that ‘self-determination’ is a core value of the Edge Fund, and as such those who do not have direct lived experience of sex work shouldn’t remove proposals on the basis of abolitionist beliefs that the sex workers in our network tell us are problematic. This led to some committee members agreeing not to score sex work proposals, and some committee members politely stepping back from Edge Fund completely. We then put together an [FAQ](#) that explained our stance to clarify that—due to feedback from those with lived experience—Edge Fund would take a pro-sex work stance, and would therefore be unlikely to fund Nordic Model work unless led by sex workers / ex-sex workers themselves.

For more information about Edge Fund, email info@edgefund.org.

This resource was developed as a companion piece to the GrantCraft guide on participatory grantmaking. This resource is part of a suite of resources that showcase the rich and varied practices of participatory grantmaking across various organizations, reducing the burden on each funder to repeatedly outline their model. The guide and companion resources give insight to the philanthropy landscape about the what, how, and why of participatory grantmaking.

Visit grantcraft.org/participatorygrantmaking to explore further.