



# Ethical Fundraising Toolkit

Produced through a series of  
conversations between members of  
**Geese Theatre Company, Fierce,  
MAIA, Open Theatre,  
Ort Gallery and Talking Birds**

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**The choices we make about where to invest or spend our money have enormous power. We may have a limited budget to spend on a project, but we know that the choices we make – about who to employ, the materials we purchase, and where we buy them – can do good (or harm). These choices speak to the kind of organisation we are, and the values that we hold.**

This Toolkit aims to look in the other direction: at where the money that funds our work comes from – how it was generated, and what else the funder chooses to invest in. It has been created by a group of small arts organisations in the Midlands through frank, and sometimes uncomfortable, conversations over a number of months.

We don't believe Ethical Fundraising has to be oppositional or judgemental. We hope that this Toolkit will help start (or add to) conversations around the issue - to enable organisations to more confidently apply their values to their fundraising, but also to encourage organisations to talk with funders about where their money comes from – in the hope that this might lead to greater transparency and more ethical investment across the funding landscape.

This Toolkit, of course, reflects the priorities and types of funding typically available to the organisations that wrote it, and is not all-encompassing. As a group we've all had experiences of making decisions about whether to accept funding from sources that were questionable, or just unknown to us. In those moments, many of us reached out to find expertise or guidance from others who'd been in this situation before – but couldn't find anything relevant. This toolkit is our attempt to make those decisions easier for ourselves and others in the future.

Produced through a series of conversations between members of **Geese Theatre Company, Fierce, MAIA, Open Theatre, Ort Gallery and Talking Birds**

Designed by Andrew Moore, Pixeltrix

# Using This Toolkit

**This is a toolkit, not a template. It is designed to capture and share some of the questions we asked ourselves, and enable organisations to have their own conversations about where their funding comes from. We hope it will help you make decisions about whether to apply for, or accept, funding or commissions in the future; equip you to have these conversations with your stakeholder communities; help you to shape your own Ethical Fundraising Policy; and perhaps even prompt you to open a dialogue with your funders.**

Please note that the toolkit is designed to help organisations make decisions about funding from trusts and foundations, commissioners and public funders and does not include guidance on ethically procuring individual or legacy giving, for example.

This work is huge and complex, this document doesn't offer any answers, but if you want to start the conversation these are some of the things you might want to talk about as you begin to shape your organisation's approach to Ethical Fundraising, or write your own Ethical Fundraising Policy.



Through our conversations, we found that some organisations will want to produce a clear written policy to guide all their fundraising whilst, for others, each case will be so different that a toolkit or ethi-score approach might work better.

To think about which is right for your organisation, you might want to consider:

## **WHEN:**

When will you want to use your toolkit/policy? It may not be appropriate for every funding scenario – perhaps you will have a minimum figure that triggers the use of the policy (eg for anything over £1,000).

## **WHO:**

Is there one person in your organisation who is ultimately responsible for making these decisions or is it a process that needs to be done collaboratively by staff, or in conversation with your Board?

## **WHAT:**

What are the absolute non-negotiables for your organisation? What is most important to you or, if you want to use an ethi-scoring matrix (see page 12), what will your cut off point be? You may want to do this in consultation with your stakeholders and communities (see page 8 for more guidance on this).

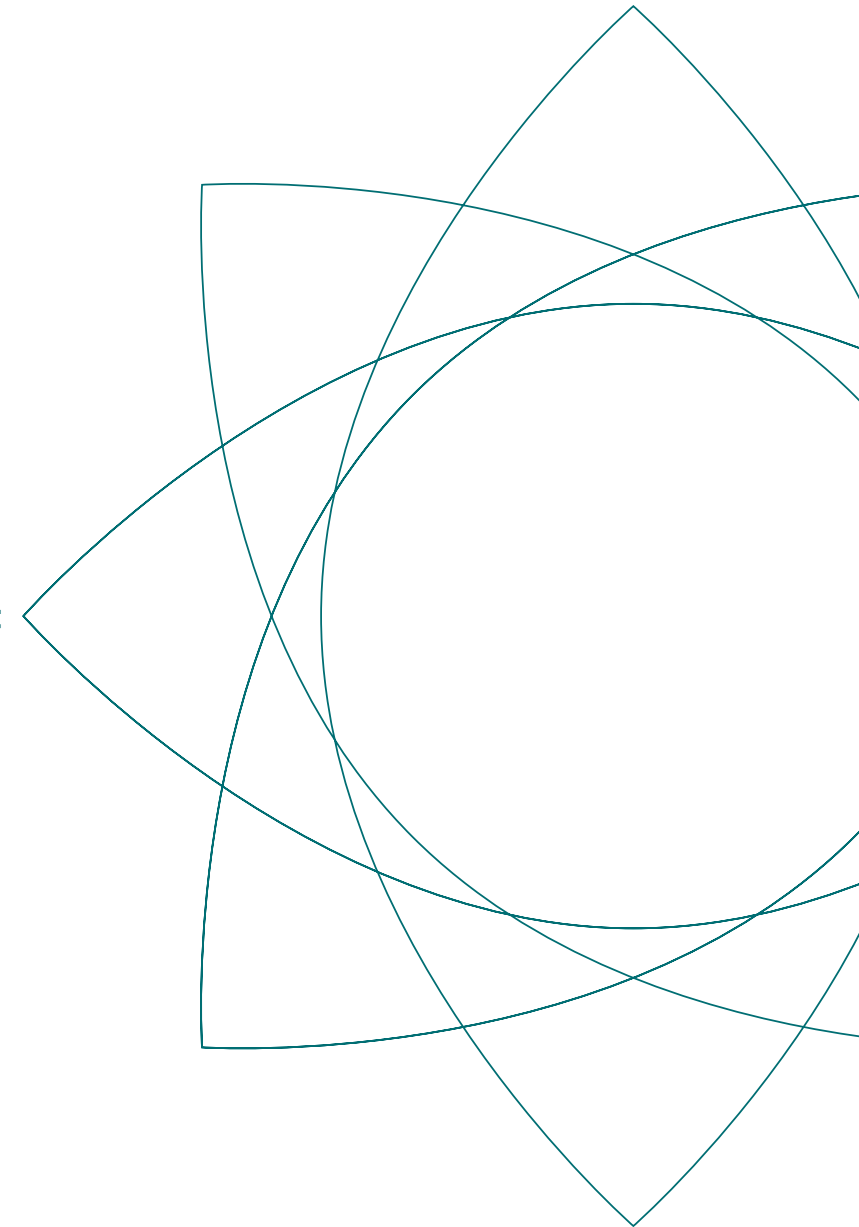
# Getting Started

**Most organisations have values, and a strong instinct determining what does (or doesn't) sit comfortably within the organisational ethos. Our discussions recognised that sometimes you might decide that the good you can do with certain resources might outweigh the funder's lack of obvious alignment with your values – and that, if you can be open about this and share your thinking around how you reached your decision, your stakeholders and communities will generally respect this.**

**The initial scoping questions offer a way of making an informed decision on whether or not to apply for, or accept, money, by considering the impact of any decision you make. This is not a tiered list and some questions may be more relevant to some organisations or projects than others.**

Firstly, we think it is important to consider what you know about the source of this money, and if you don't know enough, is it possible to ask the funder or commissioner directly or do you need to seek out expertise from elsewhere? It might be that the internet can offer the information you need, or you may need to find the right people to ask, who will have more information rather than more questions.

If this investigation doesn't provide a clear answer for you, the question framework on page 5 has been designed to help provide clarity and enable you to make an informed decision. It is not an exhaustive list, there may be questions you want to add to it that are relevant to your organisation, and you certainly don't have to use all of these, but they were useful in our conversations.



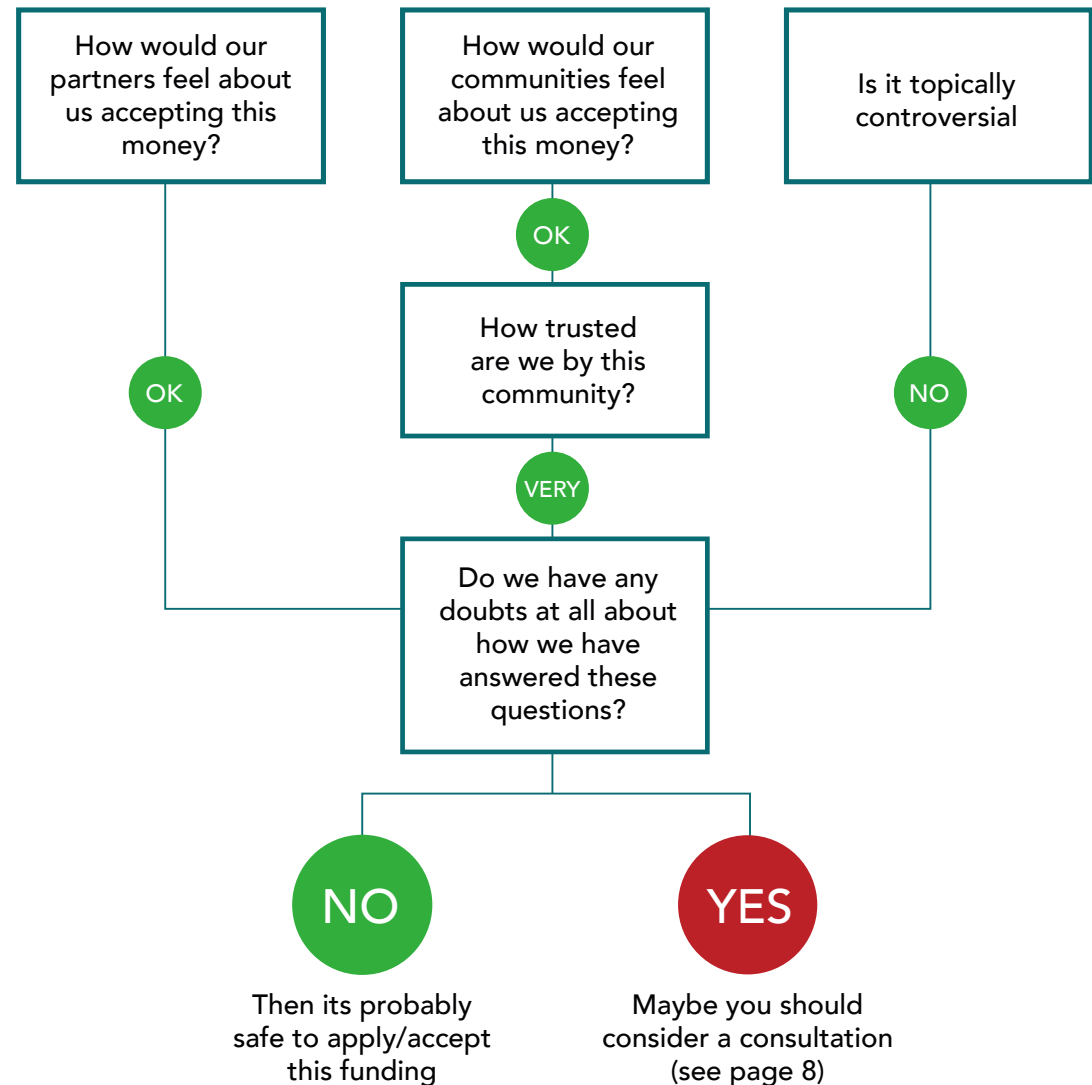
# Initial Scoping

Some initial scoping questions could help you make a quick decision or understand the kinds of follow-up questions you need to ask.



# Avoiding Harm

These questions are designed to help consider whether applying for, or accepting, the funding in question might cause harm to your organisation (for example, reputational damage), or to your stakeholders and/or the communities you work with. It is important to recognise that decisions causing, for example, reputational damage are also likely to cause harm to communities – who might feel let down, confused or misled by you – and it is important to mitigate this harm, as well as the reputational damage itself.

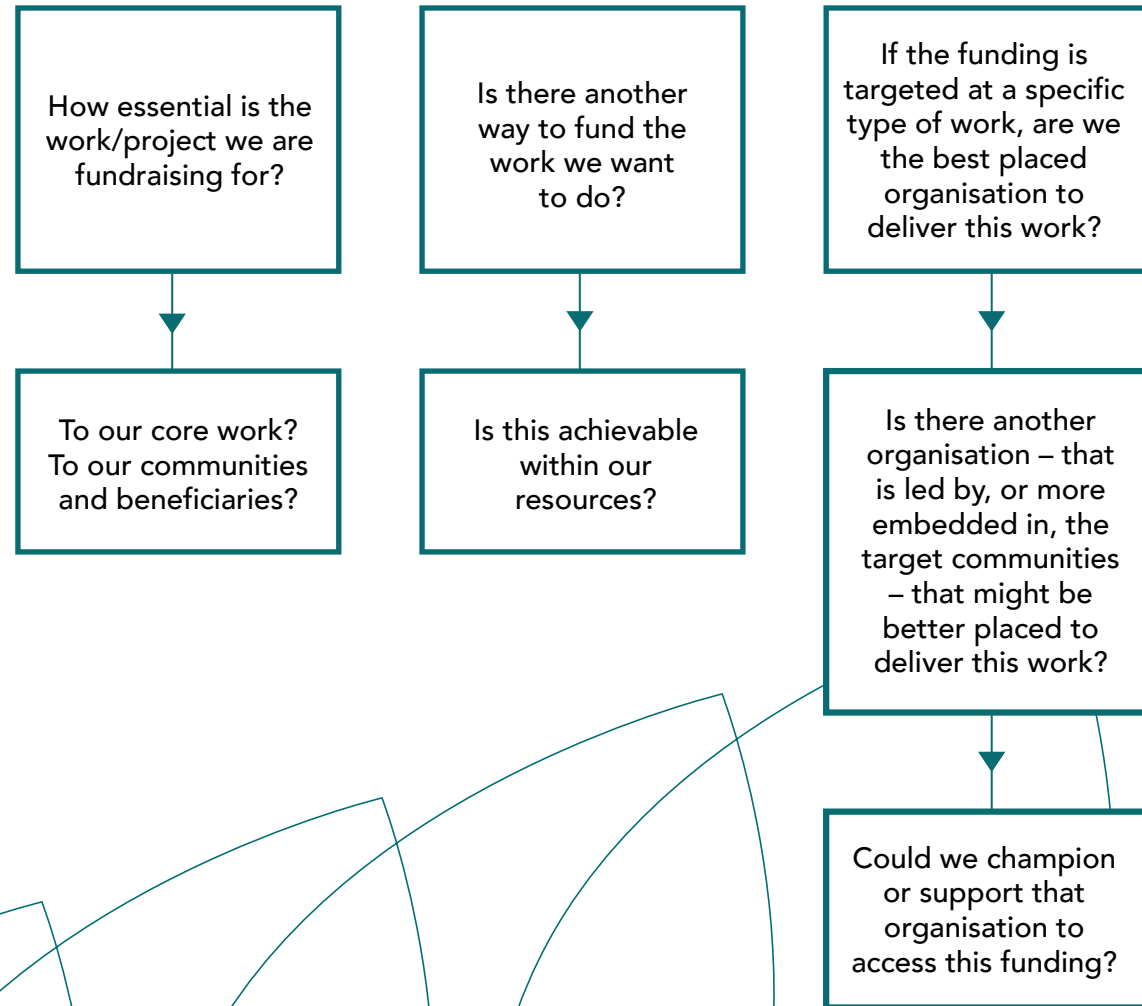


# Considering Alternatives

We know that sometimes projects are led by, or devised in response to, funders' priorities. Whilst this might provoke us to usefully interrogate our own ethical standpoint and motivation in deciding whether to apply or not, we should also perhaps ask ourselves if we are the best placed organisation to deliver work that will achieve this priority.

If we don't know, then perhaps our organisation would benefit from consulting more closely with peers/partners/communities to establish a better understanding of how our organisation's role and value is perceived.

These questions are designed to help consider whether there are alternatives to a particular fund. There are no clear outcomes from these questions, they should be discussed and appropriate actions and decisions made by the necessary stakeholders.



# Consultation

**Using the questions in this Toolkit in an internal review context might help you decide how to proceed, but consultation with key stakeholders can be a useful way of coming to a more informed decision, particularly if your answers to the questions about how your stakeholders would feel about the decision are unclear. It might not be suitable for all situations, and it will be up to individual organisations to decide when it might be useful for them.**

Consultation can be a useful way to decide your absolutes or set your scoring matrix criteria, or it might be necessary for a specific project or funding decision. Consultation is also time-intensive and funding is often advertised with very short turn-around times so it may not be feasible, unless you have existing groups you can consult.

If all your work involves specific communities or interest groups, you might already have invested time and resources in consulting them and may already have established a strong set of shared values and an ethical 'mandate', enabling you to be confident how they would feel about an issue. If you haven't, perhaps it is worth considering, as – if you can be confident when assessing new potential funding sources – it is likely to save you time consulting in future.

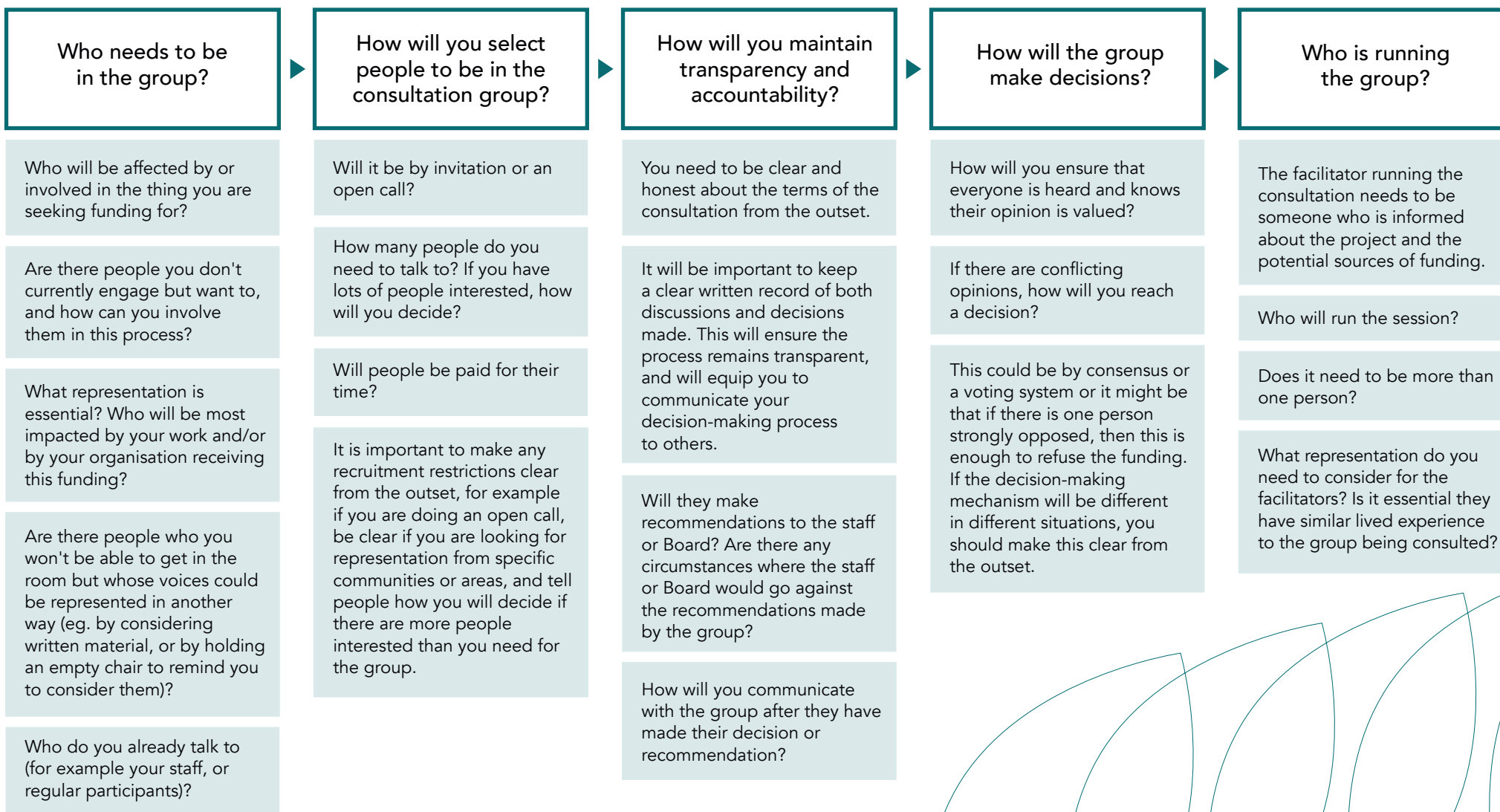
## Example questions for your consultation group:

It is always important to be clear with any consultation group what the group is for and therefore what is (or is not) in your power to respond to in any specific situation.

- **How aligned are the values of your organisation with the values of the community?**
- **How important to the group is the project / thing you are fundraising for?**
- **Does the group know who the potential funders are? How do they feel about them?**
- **Does the group have any concerns? If so, how will you take those on board?**
- **How will you make clear to the group your process for listening to, and acting upon, their concerns?**
- **How does the group want you to communicate your decisions and reasoning back to them?**
- **How will you respond to anyone who is unhappy with your decision?**



Below are some key considerations when using consultations as a means of decision making, they are based on a consultation for a specific project.

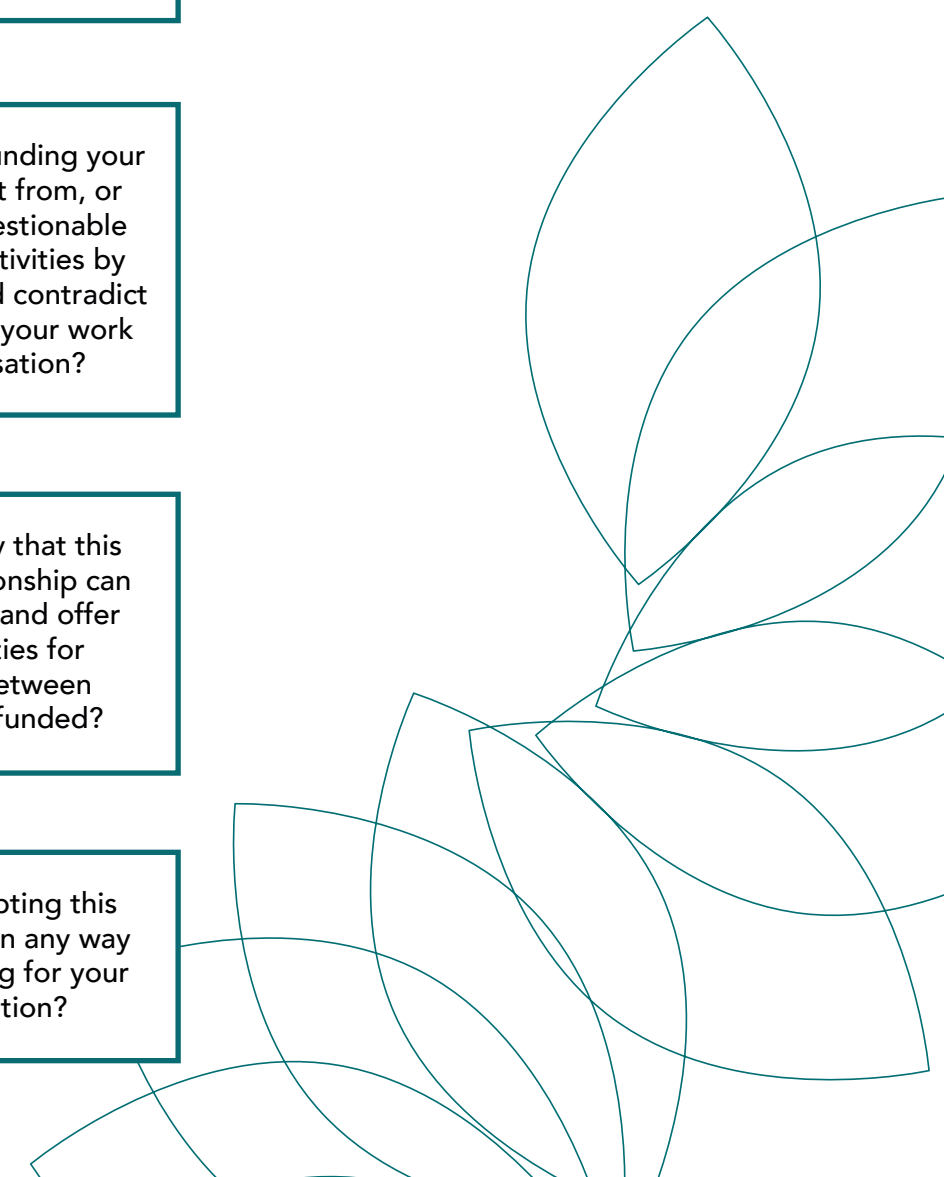
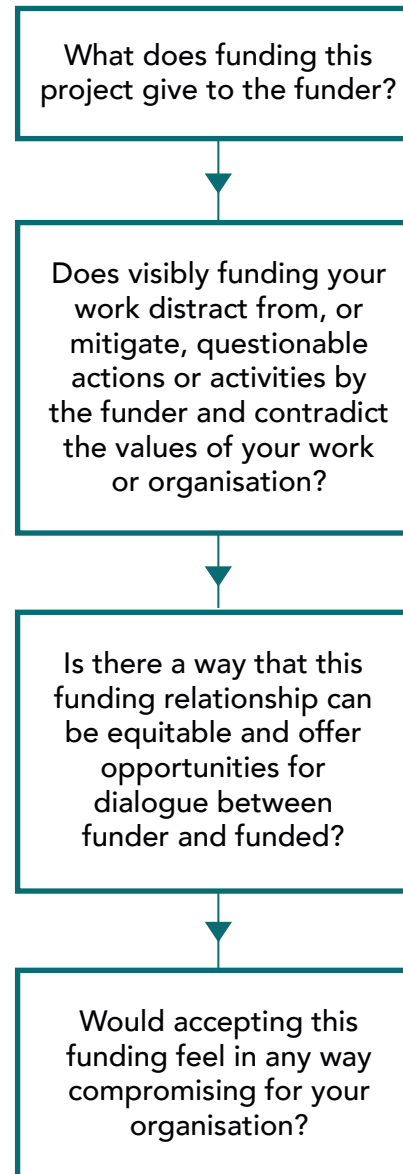


# Working with the Funder

**This Toolkit is intended, not just to enable individual organisations to make more informed decisions based on their own values, but to encourage transparency across the funding landscape.**

Ethical Fundraising does not have to be oppositional or judgemental. Where possible, we want to encourage organisations to talk with funders about where their money comes from (and where they choose to invest it) and for funders to feel able to be open about their own position, or journey, around any sensitivities this may involve.

Nevertheless, whether or not reputational risk is an issue simply by association with a funder, there may be lines you are not willing to cross – particularly if the funder is getting more from the relationship than you are comfortable with. Again, there are no clear outcomes given, but these questions might help you think about the issues, or suggest how you might navigate a way forward that works for you.



# International Working

We recognised, in our discussions, that applying an agreed ethical fundraising policy when working with partners internationally can raise even more questions, particularly where both parties are navigating different beliefs or traditions, as well as availability of resources. As UK-based organisations we may have to navigate the privilege of our position in relation to international partners' values, or access to funds. We are likely to have to sit with the discomfort of, or navigate sensitivities around, the complex ways that the UK's colonial history is entangled in both international relationships, and in decisions we might have to make when accepting, or refusing, funding.

How would our international partners feel about us taking this funding?

Do our international partners accept money from this funder?

Would it be OK for them to accept this funding but not us, or for us to accept the funding when working with them?

Can we make a decision without imposing our cultural values, whilst still ensuring no harm is being done?

In our conversations, we talked about how to respond when actions (by potential funders) that we would class as unacceptable, are not necessarily considered harmful by our partners, or more generally in that local setting. When asking questions like – “Does this fund(er) cause harm?”, we recognised the need to be wary of deferring to partners' opinions to such a degree that we unintentionally endorse harm that is unacceptable to us, irrespective of cultural differences. Perhaps comparing funders' actions against more 'objective' or recognised frameworks (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or Sustainable Development Goals) as well as considering our own and our partners' values offers a useful way to look at this?

# Scoring Matrix

A scoring matrix might help you weigh up how your organisation's answers to previous questions point to a decision. There might be some questions that are deal-breakers – that are more relevant or important to you – where even a slightly negative answer will prompt you to reject the funding; or it might be that you decide on a cut-off point, and a score below a certain number means that it's OK for you to apply for the funding. Too many 'don't knows' could highlight that you need to do more research or some consultation (see page 8).

## Example scoring matrix:

	Not at all (0)	A little (1)	A lot (2)	Don't Know
<b>Do we believe that this funder causes harm to our communities?</b>				
<b>Do we believe that this fund(er) has values that contradict our own?</b>				
<b>Do we believe that this fund(er) causes harm to the environment?</b>				
<b>Do our partners advise against applying for / accepting this funding?</b>				
<b>Do our communities advise against applying for / accepting this funding?</b>				
<b>Is the fund(er) or commission topically controversial?</b>				
<b>Might someone else be better placed to do this work / commission?</b>				
<b>TOTAL SCORE</b>				

# Accountability and Communication

**Once you've made your decision, it's time to let people know about that decision and why you made it in the way you did. The way you do this will depend on the decision, and you as an organisation.**

Sharing your decisions openly could help you to be accountable for your decisions, and foster trust with the communities you serve by showing how you prioritise their needs. It also allows others who might be in the same situation as you to read your reasoning and might help them to make a decision; or to think more deeply about what their funding sources say about them and their values; or to publicly challenge funders on their transparency, working practices or decision-making.

## **Communication as part of your Policy**

You may want to include Communication as a section in your Policy, setting expectations about if, when and how you would communicate decisions made by using this policy, for example if the funding is over a certain amount when you announce the project. How – and if – you communicate the decisions you make may depend on the funding or opportunity you are accepting; you wouldn't expect to put out a formal statement about every piece of funding you accept. It may be that if you are doing press or publicity around a specific project, or making an announcement on your website or socials, you choose to include a line that states how decisions were made about that specific funding. Or if you have a funders page on your website, perhaps include a more generic statement signposting the policy and stating how you have used it.

## **Who you are communicating to**

Whilst you might or might not want to make the policy itself accessible for anyone who wants to read it, there may be circumstances where you want to communicate certain decisions with specific stakeholders, communities or funders.

For example if the answers to some of the questions in the toolkit have shown that the source of the funding does cause harm or that some of your partners or communities would think you shouldn't take it, but you have decided that the benefits outweigh these costs, you might want to communicate with these people directly, explaining your decisions. You should communicate with anyone you have consulted on the decision.

Not all communication needs to be public, if there are specific communities or partners affected by your decision who you have an existing relationship with, you can of course communicate with them directly.

## Communicating with Funders

This work is intended, not just to enable individual organisations to make more informed decisions based on their own values, but to encourage transparency across the funding landscape. We want to encourage funders to talk about where their money comes from and be open about it.

There is little that can be done if an endowment has come from someone who made their money 'unethically' but if the funders acknowledge that, and show how they are using the money to make reparations, there is still value in the fund existing.

There will always be people who will take the money, particularly in the current competitive funding environment, however a principled refusal can encourage a conversation and normalise asking these questions.

## Inviting feedback and two-way communication

Accountability is reliant on two-way communication; it is not enough for you to say that you have used your Ethical Fundraising Policy to make a decision, if people are to trust you they must be able to interrogate and potentially challenge those decisions. This process will also help you to test and strengthen your Ethical Fundraising Policy, highlighting areas where it may not be strong enough so that you can adapt it when making future decisions.

**To encourage feedback and challenge, you could include a contact as part of your policy, or in your communications about particular funds. This will mean that you can:**

- Provide more information to anyone who requests it about a specific decision, for example who was consulted, what questions were asked or what research was done. With more information, even if someone disagrees with a decision you have made, they can understand why you have made it.
- Invite challenge allowing people to disagree with you and open up a conversation; if you show that you are happy to have discussions with people and be accountable for your decisions, you foster trust with your communities and can avoid public call-outs.
- Learn new information about a funder or source of funding that may not have come up through your research, conversations or consultations.



# Receiving New Information

Learning new information may mean that you need to refer back to your Ethical Fundraising Policy and start your processes again; ask the questions you originally asked, use your scoring matrix, or speak to the same people, presenting them with the new information.

If the outcome of this process is different, particularly if it means you would not accept the funding, the next steps will depend on how far along you are in your project timelines and may be a decision that you need to refer to your Board.

The impact of withdrawing an application, going back on a decision to accept funding or returning some or all of the funding you have already received may be significant and will depend on the individual circumstances of each organisation and project. Delays to timelines and changes to projects may or may not be possible, there may or may

not be alternative sources of funding for the project, you may or may not be too far along to cancel the project without losing the trust and support of communities and partners – all these things need to be considered in this decision-making process.

You are accountable for this decision just as you were for your original one, even if that decision is to not change anything, and you must communicate accordingly.

Whatever the decision, it is vital to ask why things changed, and how you could have had the relevant information from the start. You may need to change how you research funds, the minimum number of people you consult, or question your absolutes – this will help to strengthen your policy for the future and ensure this is less likely to happen again.

## REMEMBER: IT IS OK TO GET THINGS WRONG!

The ethical status of funding sources are not always obvious. Using your Ethical Fundraising Policy will mean you do everything in your power to research and ensure funding is right for you, but you will not always have all the information you need – and sometimes you will make decisions you later question, even with all the information. So long as you are prepared to be open about what happened, and can learn and adapt your process for the next time, it's OK!

We're interested to know what you made of this Toolkit, and whether it has affected the way you, or your organisation think, or talk, about fundraising. You can send feedback to the group via [talkingbirds.co.uk/EFT/](https://talkingbirds.co.uk/EFT/)