

MEETING: 11/09/23

REF: 20349

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Anchor Programme

HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network	Adv: Shegufta Slawther
Amount requested: £998,500	Base: Islington
Amount recommended: £999,200	Benefit: London-wide

Purpose of grant request: HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network (HEAR) is requesting funding to support its core work as a membership organisation to provide a collective and inclusive voice for equality, social justice and human rights across London to affect systemic change.

The Applicant

Operating since 2004, HEAR registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in August 2016 (Charity Number: 1168591) with voting members other than its charity trustees, and now operates a diverse membership network of over 1,000 community groups, community activists, and front-line organisations across London. It seeks to bring about systemic change in addressing marginalisation and discrimination experiences by those with intersecting identities, and across all protected characteristics. A second-tier equity-led network and organisation (whereby it is led by and for the communities it serves) HEAR brings together and amplifies the collective voices of hundreds of organisations, themselves representing tens of thousands of marginalised individuals, to address structural inequalities and promote equality and justice at local and London-wide levels.

Background and detail of proposal

HEAR has previously received funding from CBT to support and expand its core work of growing and supporting its membership, as well as Cornerstone funding. It has also been one of the Equity Partners for the Propel funder collaboration. The organisation was formed in a voluntary capacity, with organisations and members coming together to volunteer their time and resources to work across all protected characteristics with an intersectional focus. It promotes collaboration, partnerships, and solidarity across different communities, to break down barriers between different specialisms. As such, being 'led by and for' is for HEAR to be led, directed and steered by as diverse a range of Londoners as possible, to ensure that lived experience is at the heart of its direction. Its uniqueness is in the range, size and scope of its membership, all united by one common aim of working for equality in London. This enables a broad range of knowledge, expertise and experience that can be shared across different geographies and specialisms, breaking down barriers and helping to avoid 'silo' working. HEAR's board of trustees and staff represent a range of Londoners in terms of protected characteristics, lived experience of the issues being addressed, and intersectional identities. Its diverse steering group brings both lived and professional experience of the barriers and oppressions faced by HEAR members and those they work with and for.

HEAR has a demonstrable track record of achieving systems change. Examples include achieving improved concessions for disabled Londoners in relation to the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) by connecting a key member that was a central campaigner on this issue to relevant colleagues in the Greater London Authority's (GLA) health team. Another example was working with member Age UK London, it's engagement with the London Digital Exclusion Task Force enabled network members to speak directly with decision makers. Working with broadband providers Community Fibre, Vodafone and BT, HEAR's very small user-led women's groups spoke directly about the experiences of the African heritage women they support around digital poverty. Feedback from the private broadband providers was that hearing directly from those groups was critical to their understanding of the need to change policies and resulted in widely increased access to social tariffs for broadband and phones, benefiting thousands of Londoners. HEAR has gone on to facilitate the London Digital Inclusion Network, bringing together members from large and small organisations, and individual experts by experience, to support campaigning on diverse aspects of digital poverty and inclusion.

The funding requested would provide HEAR with long-term stability, which in turn, would enable it to continue to build on its network of 1,000+ members to support grassroots organisations and individuals with lived experience to have their voices heard. Working on intersectionality, and the impact of this on structural inequality, the charity has already delivered years of core work to establish a strong foundation. Funding will allow it to move forward from a base of strength and experience in working with London's diverse communities and enable the continuation and development of HEAR's work and expansion of its membership and engagement with Londoners across all protected characteristics. Support would reach those facing specific barriers such as homelessness, refugee and asylum-seeking status, those experiencing domestic and sexual violence, the gypsy/traveller community, more marginalised disabled Londoners (for e.g., people with learning disabilities, deaf/blind people, neuro-diverse people, disabled people from different faith backgrounds), and older Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ+) Londoners, to name but a few. More user-led groups and people with lived experience will help HEAR's aim to achieve strategic change through transforming existing engagement practices, so that London's diverse communities can be the decision makers.

Funding will also enable opportunities for HEAR to be more creative and have the space to address challenging and often difficult tensions in the equalities sector. The stability of long-term core funding will also support HEAR's ability to diversify its income sources by developing meaningful projects with members and seeking appropriate funding for these.

The funding required in Year One of the grant will equate to over 50% of the organisation's annual income however the assessor has undertaken an assessment of the organisation's ongoing financial sustainability and is satisfied that there is a strong fundraising plan in place for future years.

London's Equality Sector

HEAR is the only pan-London membership organisation that unites and amplifies the voices of intersectional identities facing specific barriers and structural inequalities to move towards achieving equality, social justice and human rights for all marginalised Londoners. Current challenges facing this sector include legislation, the environment around equity and human rights, lack of capacity, resources and funding, power imbalances that impact grassroots influence and services, a lack of trust and opportunity for all sectors to have open and honest discussions, lack of awareness, information and knowledge, growing demand for services, and a lack of collective and individual voice, with embedded structural inequality across all these issues.

Challenging systemic power imbalances and barriers to shared decision-making whilst building trust and confidence is key. As a pan-equity network, the systemic issues faced by HEAR's network and the communities it serves are multiple, intersectional and complex. These barriers mean that at times of crisis, these communities are impacted the most, as was seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, and currently through the cost-of-living crisis and increasing inflation. This further increases the inequality in service provision which then impacts basic human needs and rights such as housing, health, food, employment, and income. When small grassroots organisations are firefighting to survive and help those that most need it, it can be isolating and depressing. Not having a voice at the table where decisions, policies and strategies are being devised by decision-makers with little or no knowledge of the issues impacting them is real concern. As a result, these further increases inequality, mistrust, and societal problems, within a growing negative political and social environment around equality and human rights, particularly around the issues of immigration, racism and trans equality. HEAR's long-term strategic aim is to bridge the gap between members being asked to provide information on the needs of their communities without seeing any real change. HEAR will be able to explore, with partners and members, sustainable approaches and models for inequality and systems change that can be replicated across sectors and influence London-wide policy and strategy. Without knowing how the negative social and political environment around equity and human rights will develop in the coming years, HEAR will continue to work with partners to counter negative rhetoric and discriminatory practices, update members on external issues, to further innovate and be bold to increase the effectiveness of being a collective and inclusive voice, as an anchor for systemic change, equality and human rights groups across London.

The charity proactively seeks and reaches out to user-led, intersectional equalities groups, to become members, and encourage their active inclusion in the charity's activities to build on lived experience and increase peer learning. Examples of intersectional members include the Asian People with Disabilities Alliance, Black Disabled People's Organisation, Latin American Women's Rights, Tonic Living, Opening Doors London, Micro Rainbow, Sisters of Frida, and Mosaic. The charity's work and services promote an understanding and awareness of intersectionality, and what it means for good practice, service delivery and meaningful inclusion.

HEAR facilitates difficult conversations; exploring and working with the tensions between some of the groups with protected characteristics to treat everyone with respect and with the understanding that consensus will never be reached. HEAR is mindful of the need for safe, supportive relationships that respect people's lived experiences and the potential for re-traumatisation and hold connection and trust at the core. The charity's models move away from exploitative and extractive interactions with people with lived experience; offering a way of getting involved, paying them for their time and expertise and empowering them to speak out. Having done so, they are then supported to become ambassadors for their communities.

Financial Information

HEAR has limited capacity to fundraise and takes a strategic and selective approach whereby applications for funding are only submitted to programmes that closely align with their strategic objectives. In error, its reserves policy was omitted from the 2022 accounts. The reserves policy is to hold three months core expenditure, as presented below, with a view to changing this to six months in the coming years. Some income from London-specific funders, such as Trust for London, are for services rendered. This income is classified as restricted grants, but once responsibilities have been discharged, the income is transferred to unrestricted and thus meeting its reserves policy. 50% of income is confirmed for 2024.

Year end as at 31st March	2022 Signed Accounts £	2023 Management Accounts £	2024 Budget £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	74,217	158,454	143,725
Expenditure	(124,799)	(100,054)	(133,330)
Surplus/(deficit)	(50,582)	58,400	10,395
Reserves:			
Total restricted	65,062	102,811	106,331
Total unrestricted	15,258	35,909	42,784
Total reserves	80,320	138,720	149,115
Of which: free unrestricted	15,258	35,909	42,784
Reserves policy target	15,000	15,000	15,000
Free reserves over/(under) target	258	20,909	27,784

Funding History

ID	Type	Meeting Date	Decision
20030	Propel	12/06/2023	The funding requested would result in CBT being the majority funder for the organisation. Having discussed with the organisation, it is agreed that Propel funding would not be awarded and that the organisation may wish to consider submitting an application for Anchor funding.
20047	Anchor Programme – Resourcing grant	06/03/2023	£3,600 to resource HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network to participate in the advisory panel for City Bridge Trust's Anchor funding programme. This funding is to resource HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network's involvement in the advisory panel until the end of February 2023. Any funds which have not been spent by that point can be used towards HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network's core running costs over the next twelve months.
IPP9	Inflationary Pressures Payment	06/03/2023	£3,103 to support increased costs.

19388	Anchor Programme – Resourcing grant	20/06/2022	£3,600 to resource HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network to participate in a design group co-creating programme design for City Bridge Trust’s Anchor funding programme. This funding is to resource HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network’s involvement in the design group until the end of July 2022. Any funds which have not been spent by that point can be used towards HEAR Equality and Human Rights Network’s core running costs over the next twelve months.
16191	COVID19 Small Charity Emergency Support Funding	13/05/2020	A one-off, unrestricted grant of £12,500, equivalent to one regular quarterly payment for the organisation’s current grant.
14895	Bridging Divides	31/01/2019	£194,000 over five years (£50,000; £42,000; £34,000; £34,000; £34,000) towards the salary of a f/t HEAR Network Co-ordinator and running costs of work to develop and support the membership.
14839	Anniversary infrastructure support programme	07/09/2018	£20,000 over two years towards the salary costs of HEAR and four of the collaborating organisations, together with the associated running costs of a project to test the use of innovative, accessible digital means to enable equality-focussed grassroots organisations to make connections across the voluntary, public and private sectors.
14369	Anniversary infrastructure support programme	14/03/2018	£25,000 over six months towards the salary of a Network Co-ordinator to enable HEAR’s continued active involvement with The Way Ahead.
13925	Anniversary infrastructure support programme	11/05/2017	£50,000 over one year for the co-ordinator’s salary, on-costs and operational cost.

The Recommendation

£999,200 over 10-years (£103,000; £98,600; £98,600; £98,600; £103,000; £98,600; £98,600; £98,600; £98,600; £103,000) of core funding towards the roles of Director and Coordinator (2 FTE) to support further development and support for members to bring about systemic change in addressing marginalisation and discrimination experiences by those with intersecting identities, and across all protected characteristics.