



CITY BRIDGE
FOUNDATION

Standing with Londoners

Funding Guidelines for the
Access to Justice Programme 2025/6:

Supporting social welfare advice,
social action and systems change

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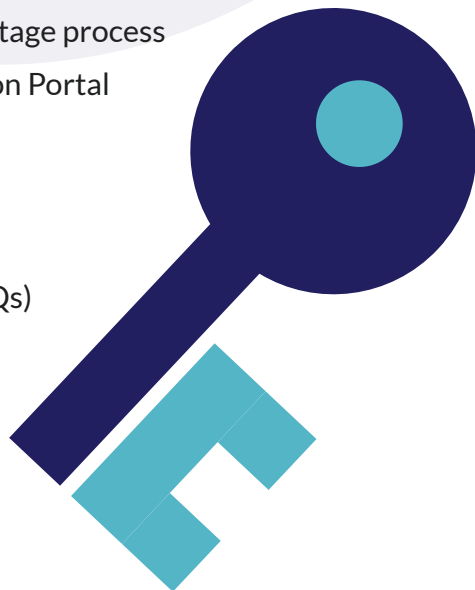
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General Guidance

Summary

Area: Greater London only

Open to: 'Led by and for' organisations only

Funding length: Between 3 and 5 years

Funds available: £6.5 million – distributed via 3-Year Development Grants of £75,000 and 5-Year Transformation Grants of £200,000, £300,000 and £450,000

Number of grants available in 2025/6: Up to 25

Key Dates

Programme opens: 10 November 2025

Webinar date: 11 November 2025 (with slides and a recording available by 13 November)

Applications open: 14 November 2025

Pre-application calls open for booking: 14 November 2025

Pre-application calls available: 19 November to 12 December 2025

Application deadline: 12 noon 7 January 2026

Assessment Stage 1: January to February 2026 (6-8 weeks)

Assessment Stage 2: applicants notified and invited to Stage 2 by 4 March 2026

Stage 2 assessment and visits: 4 March to 17 April 2026 (4-6 weeks)

Final decisions & applicants notified of outcome: by 29 May 2026 (grant set up and first payment released within 2-4 weeks and 12 weeks from the start of Stage 2), but these timeframes may vary.

Standing with Londoners

City Bridge Foundation's ten-year funding policy, '*Standing with Londoners 2025-35*', identifies four visions for a fairer London around which we will shape and develop our funding programmes:

- Access to Justice
- Climate & Environmental Justice
- Economic Justice
- Racial Justice

Within these four areas are some of the most critical issues facing London's most disadvantaged and marginalised communities – they are vital entry points to addressing inequality and achieving social justice. We seek to use our funding and resources to empower directly affected communities to play a central role in shaping the necessary solutions and to support those working to change the systems that cause injustice.

Access to Justice round one is accepting applications from 14 November 2025 to 12 noon 7 January 2026. We're offering grants for '**led by and for**' organisations delivering free social welfare advice and engaging in social action and systems change in one or more of the following areas: housing, welfare benefits, debt, employment, and immigration.

In this programme, we'll only fund organisations offering free social welfare advice, operating and serving within the communities in Greater London.

We also know that 'how' we fund is as important as 'what' we fund. This means that we are continually working to improve our processes, as described below:

- **A more equitable funder:** We are adapting our processes to respond to the diverse needs of our applicants and offering them the time and support necessary to ensure we're accessible to all. We recognise that operating a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't address the needs of those who experience systemic inequality. An equitable approach to funding means allocating more time and resources to those who need them the most, removing barriers to access, valuing the lived experiences of our communities, and ensuring that our processes are fair, transparent, and inclusive. We will also reach out to communities and organisations who have been historically overlooked.
- **High service standards:** We will offer pre-application calls and constructive feedback to groups who are unsuccessful. We are committed to seeking regular feedback from our applicants and funded organisations about their experiences of engaging with us, to continually improve our service.
- **Streamlined processes:** We are making our application and assessment processes faster, more efficient, and more inclusive. We are introducing a two-stage application process that reduces the burden on unsuccessful applicants.

Access to Justice – social action and systems change

Access to Justice is about working collaboratively with London's communities to ensure everyone can access their rights and find solutions to problems – whether through civil, legal, or other processes – without facing barriers such as cost, discrimination, or complexity.

We have consulted with the **social welfare advice sector**, researched and learned from our previous and current funding in this space, and will continue to do so. Through this engagement, we've heard clear messages from the sector about the need for both **core and flexible funding**. Importantly, we have come to understand that organisations want to **do more than just tackle the symptoms of poverty and inequality**.

As such, our Access to Justice programme will fund work that provides good-quality free social welfare advice and supports social action and systems change. At City Bridge Foundation, systems change means addressing the root causes of injustice – not just the symptoms – by transforming the structures, policies, and mindsets that marginalise people. It's about taking action by bringing communities, policymakers, local and national governments, and businesses together to reshape how systems work, making them fairer, more inclusive, and more effective for all Londoners.

Quality advice and frontline services are a lifeline for people navigating everyday injustices. Therefore, we will fund **'led by and for' organisations** who use their frontline experience to drive **social action** – such as advocacy, campaigning, and community organising – and contribute to **systems change** by challenging the structures, processes, and narratives that sustain inequality.

Our programme supports work that:

- Is **hopeful and imaginative**, reimagining what justice can look like and opening up new possibilities for a more equitable London.
- Has the potential to **inform shifts in power, policy, and practice** needed to change the systems that sustain inequality.
- **Bridges immediate needs and long-term transformation**, supporting frontline work that meets urgent needs while laying the groundwork for deeper change.
- **Works in solidarity with communities**, especially those directly affected by injustice, drawing on their insight and leadership to shape change.
- **Builds collective power and coordination**, recognising that no single organisation can change a system alone. We support collaboration across communities, legal services, civil society, public institutions, and the business sector.

Access to Justice Programme 2025/6 Round One: Social welfare advice, social action and systems change

For this first round of the programme in 2025/6, we are focusing on providing **core and flexible funding** to ‘led by and for’ organisations, operating within and serving the communities in Greater London, who are:

- Delivering **free social welfare advice** to Londoners, i.e., they provide free expert guidance and practical support to help the people in the communities they serve resolve issues related to their social and economic circumstances, particularly in areas such as housing, welfare benefits, debt, employment, immigration, **AND**
- Engaging in **social action and systems change** work, or having the ambition to begin this work.

For City Bridge Foundation, **social action** is about people working together to push for change – through activities such as advocacy, campaigning, or community organising. This can lead to more significant, long-term shifts in how systems operate, such as changes in policy or public attitudes. That’s what we call **systems change**.

- **Social action** focuses on who is affected and how to mobilise for change
- **Systems change** focuses on how the system works and how to change it

We will fund both – especially when organisations use their advice and casework to spot patterns and structural problems, speak up and push for change, and support communities to lead the way.

We have £6.5 million available and expect to award 20-25 grants in this first round. However, we anticipate receiving more applications than we can fund, so we won’t be able to support every request.

To submit the best possible application, organisations must ensure they’re eligible and their work meets our funding guidelines. They can do this by watching our [webinar], using our [Eligibility Checker], or booking a 15-minute [pre-application phone call] (booked on a first-come, first-served basis) before proceeding with their application.

Grants available

We are offering **core and flexible funding** to help organisations respond to Londoners’ changing advice needs, strengthen organisational capacity, engage in social action work, and contribute to systems change.

Organisations can use grants over three or five years (depending on the grant type) to support their core costs and strategic aims – including staff salaries, programme delivery, organisational development, collaboration, advocacy, and impact measurement.

As long as an organisation’s work aligns with the programme’s purpose – supporting Londoners to access welfare advice and using that experience to influence social action and drive systems change – it’s trusted to decide how best to use the funding. This approach reflects our commitment to open and trusting grant-making, and to programme funding that is equity-led, long-term, and shaped by those closest to the issues.

We’re offering two streams of funding: **Development Grants** (lasting over 3 years) and **Transformation Grants** (lasting over 5 years). The total available funding across the two streams is up to £6.5 million

3-Year Development Grants

– core, flexible grants of £75,000 over 3 years

For ‘led by and for’ organisations who have:

- A track record of providing free social welfare advice to the most marginalised Londoners, and
- Ambitions to start using frontline experience and insight to engage in social action and drive systems change.

Core, flexible, 3-year grants of **£75,000**

As a *guide*, we expect Development Grants to be suitable for smaller groups or organisations with an **annual income** of **£50,000** to **£250,000**.

Groups or organisations in this category are welcome to apply for the Transformation Grant, provided their work aligns with the grant’s conditions.

5-Year Transformation Grants

– core, flexible grants of either
£200,000, £300,000 or £450,000 over 5 years

For ‘led by and for’ organisations who are:

- Providing free social welfare advice to the most marginalised Londoners, and
- Applying frontline experience and community insights in their social action work and contributing to systems change.

Core, flexible, 5-year grants of either

a. **£200,000**

b. **£300,000**

c. **£450,000**

As a *guide*, we expect Transformation Grants to be suitable for organisations with an **annual income** of **£50,000** to **£1.5 million**.

If we shortlist an organisation for Stage 2, we will discuss which amount (£200,000, £300,000 or £450,000) is most appropriate.

Although we offer fixed amounts, we may vary grant amounts on a case-by-case basis each year to suit an organisation’s needs. We can only accept **one application for funding per organisation**.

Core and flexible funding

We understand that organisations need flexible, longer-term funding that is adaptable and responsive to the realities of their work. This enables them to meet the evolving advice needs of Londoners, strengthen their capacity, engage in social action work and drive systems change.

Our grants can be used flexibly over the grant period (3 years for the Development Grant and 5 years for the Transformation Grant). Organisations will need to demonstrate how they will use flexible funding to support their core costs and long-term strategic objectives, and how they will develop their social action work to bring about systems change.

These costs may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Core costs, such as staff salaries, wellbeing, training, overheads, and infrastructure.
- Programme activity, including direct advice provision and using insights from advice work to catalyse social action and systems change work.
- Organisational development, such as time to reflect, learn, and adapt.
- Collaboration and movement-building, including connecting with other organisations, sharing insight, and building collective power.
- Community organising, advocacy and campaigning, drawing on frontline experience to influence policy and practice.
- Data and storytelling, to capture impact and amplify the voices of those affected.

Trusting organisations to decide how best to use the grant is key to unlocking their potential. As long as their work aligns with the programme's purpose, grants can be used in the ways that make the most sense within the organisation. We expect the work we fund to evolve, particularly within the 3- or 5-year period. We're comfortable with uncertainty, and we'll be flexible. We aim to continually support organisations in meeting the needs of their communities.

There is a list of what we can't fund just before the 'Application stages flow chart' on [page 13](#).

Essential eligibility criteria

In this section, we provide an overview of our eligibility criteria. Please read this in conjunction with the 'What we mean by/glossary'. Each of our programmes has its own eligibility criteria, so please also ensure you check our [general eligibility and exclusions](#) section on our website.

Organisations providing free social welfare advice must:

1. Deliver work that **benefits its Londoners** (in one or more of the 32 London boroughs and/or the City of London) – we cannot fund work delivered outside of London or for the benefit of people living elsewhere.
2. Hold a **recognised advice quality assurance mark** or demonstrate that they've started the process towards accreditation.
3. Pay **at least a London Living Wage** as set by the Living Wage Foundation (£14.80 per hour from April 2026) to all members of staff based in London (or will commit to doing so following receipt of our grant). We do not require organisations to be accredited by the Living Wage Foundation.
4. Provide **at least one year's worth of audited or independently examined accounts** and an **up-to-date safeguarding policy** that is reviewed regularly.
5. Have **at least three directors or trustees** on their board (persons legally responsible for running the company and ensuring it complies with the law).

By 'led by and for', we mean:

- An organisation **led and run by the community/communities it serves** and/or the **people who use its support services**, i.e. 75% of the Board of Trustees or Management Committee **and** at least 50% of senior staff, self-identify as being from the specific marginalised community or protected characteristic that the organisation serves.

There is some flexibility around this requirement, particularly if an organisation can demonstrate a strong commitment to progressing towards this level of representation over time. Or where contextual factors – such as the size, location, or stage of development of the organisation – make meeting the threshold challenging in the short term.

Organisations should try to demonstrate how they remain accountable to the community they serve – for example, through inclusive governance structures, participatory decision-making processes, or other mechanisms that ensure lived experience meaningfully informs leadership and strategy. There is further clarification in 'What we mean by/glossary' at the end of this document.

By **social welfare advice**, we mean advice that:

- Covers one or more of the following areas: housing, welfare benefits, debt advice, employment, and immigration.
- Is free – organisations do not charge beneficiaries or service users for this advice
- Involves some form of casework rather than primarily delivering one-off advice. This means that an organisation helps someone

over a period of time, addressing the problems they are experiencing, finding solutions, and supporting them through the process. This can include filling out forms, making phone calls, or writing letters on their behalf, and following up to help resolve issues. Even if organisations refer people to other services, they stay involved to help guide and support them.

- **Involves advice with casework**, which includes all the above but also requires the provider to take action on behalf of the client to progress the case. This may involve negotiating with third parties (by phone, letter, or in person), conducting follow-up work, and taking responsibility for advancing the case until it is resolved.
- It may include specialist legal advice, but this is not a requirement.

We will not fund organisations where the **main service provided is an information service** rather than advice, for example:

- An **information service**, as defined by AQS, provides clients with the information they need to understand and take action regarding their situation. Responsibility for taking further action rests with the client. It may include providing general information (e.g., leaflets, kiosks, or online resources) without direct guidance from staff, and signposting – giving factual information about the role of another organisation or how to find or contact them.
- Assisting clients to locate information relevant to their enquiry (e.g., leaflets, website addresses, or contact details for agencies such as the Department for Work and Pensions).

We will also not fund services where the primary offer is one-stop signposting or directing people towards other organisations, without

personalised follow-up or casework involvement. Similarly, we will not fund services where the activity is focused predominantly on mentoring, counselling, job searching, or similar support rather than the provision of advice as defined above.

By the **organisation's legal status**, we mean we can fund the following organisation types:

- A charity that is established and registered in the UK
- A registered charitable incorporated organisation
- A charitable company – an organisation that is both a limited company (usually a private company limited by guarantee) and a registered charity
- A registered charitable industrial and provident society (IPS)
- A charitable community benefit society (BenCom) – a co-operative established by a geographical community or people with common interests
- A Community Interest Company (CIC) limited by guarantee with at least three directors
- A constituted voluntary organisation – with a fiscal host as the named applicant

All charities with an annual income over £5,000 are recommended to register with the Charity Commission.

Programme priorities – your eligibility

Alongside our eligibility criteria, we are looking to fund you if:

- Your work aligns with our programme's purpose (and the priorities of *Standing with Londoners 2025-35*) and
- You provide frontline service delivery by offering free advice and addressing the needs of your communities through your social action and systems change work.

Please read the information below to determine if **your organisation's current activities align with our priorities** (alongside our 'Essential eligibility criteria' and 'What we mean by/glossary').

Meeting needs

You support frontline work with an emphasis on advice and holistic support for London's most marginalised communities, prioritising service delivery that applies community insights and evidence to drive meaningful change.

A commitment to community accountability

Inclusion is at the heart of what you do. You are a 'led by and for' organisation, accountable to the communities and people you serve. For example, 75% of your Board of Trustees or Management Committee, **and** at least 50% of your senior staff, self-identify as being from the specific marginalised community or protected characteristic your organisation serves. If your organisation falls just outside our 75% and 50% thresholds, you can still apply, as long as you can demonstrate strong community accountability and representation in your work. In addition to your leadership and staff being members of

your community, you also demonstrate community accountability and lived experience leadership in other ways, for example:

- The work you do clearly responds to the needs and lives of the people you are trying to support, and those with lived experience contribute to decision-making in your organisation.
 - You work to help people who have experienced marginalisation move into leadership positions and participate in your organisation's decision-making.
 - You help to build power within the community/communities you are supporting
-

Catalysing change

You use your frontline experience to drive social action – such as advocacy, campaigning, and community organising – and contribute to systems change by challenging the structures, processes, and narratives that sustain inequality. You have an ambition to contribute to shifts in power, policy, or practice (social action) that can help to create fairer and more equitable systems (systems change).

- **3-Year Development Grant:** If you are applying for the 3-Year Development Grant, you have the ambition to do this.
 - **5-Year Transformation Grant:** If you are applying for the 5-Year Transformation Grant, you are already engaging in social action work and contributing to systems change, using your experience of supporting Londoners to access social welfare advice.
-

Social action & systems change

Social action through advocacy, campaigning and community organising is often the pathway to systems change. Through the power of people actively working together (social action), you strive to influence policies, shift public narratives, and reshape institutional practices – leading to deeper, long-term transformation (systems change). Both aim to address root causes, but systems change focuses on how systems operate, while social action focuses on who is affected and how to mobilise for change.

Through your casework and community insights, you can identify opportunities to shift systems that cause recurring problems – such as unfair assessment criteria or inaccessible processes. You use your frontline leadership, experience, and knowledge as evidence, engage in social action and drive systems change.

Social action refers to the active efforts that create shifts in laws, public attitudes, institutional cultures, and societal conditions to address systemic injustice and inequality. It might include activities such as:

- Advocacy
 - Campaigning
 - Community organising
 - Gathering evidence and analysis from your casework and frontline experience to create briefings, reports, or campaigns.
 - Collaborating with other organisations to influence local, regional, or national governments.
-

Learning

You are curious and honest in your approach to understanding how your work is making a difference. You want to understand the effectiveness of your work and the needs of those you seek to support. You are open to adapting your approach based on your learning and leading with new and creative ways to create change.

Collaboration

You recognise that change requires collaboration. Your approach is to connect with others to share learning or resources or improve access to advice, through formal or informal referral pathways. Alternatively, you want to collaborate with others and know which approach to take when working with them, but you currently lack the resources and/or networks to do so.

High quality of service

You are an organisation providing free social welfare advice and have ways to monitor and continually improve the quality of the advice you provide. You hold a recognised quality assurance mark and/or are regulated where legally required (see ‘What we mean by/glossary’), or you can demonstrate tangible action towards accreditation.

Your governance, financial practices, organisational structures, pay structures, as well as your working conditions, enable you to support care-centred ways of operating, and you use your resources legally and effectively. Your policies and procedures allow you to deliver high levels of service across all your operations and to the communities you work with.

Other considerations

We anticipate receiving many more high-quality and eligible applications than we can fund. In making final decisions, we will consider the overall portfolio of applications and take an ecosystem-based approach to funding. This means we may take into account factors such as geographic spread, potential duplication, and the need to ensure both breadth and depth across the funded organisations' cohort, in line with the programme's priorities.

If you are currently receiving a grant from City Bridge Foundation, you may apply for this round. Still, we may prioritise organisations who are new to us or that we've not recently funded. We can only accept one funding application per organisation.

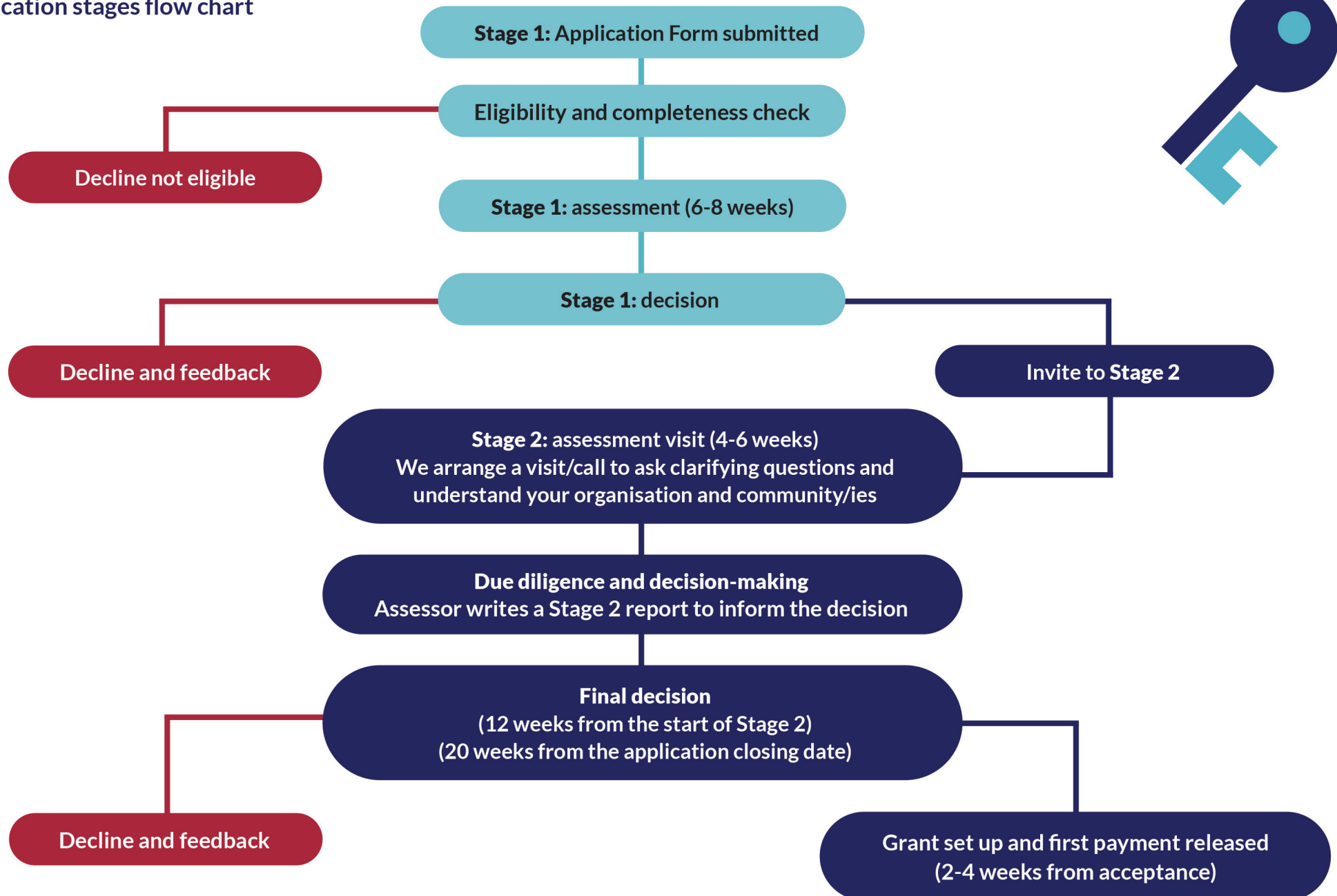
Who cannot apply

- Charities established or registered outside the UK
- Community Interest Companies (CIC) limited by shares
- Hospitals or primary healthcare providers
- Individuals
- Political parties
- Private organisations limited by guarantee
- Profit-making organisations (except social enterprises)
- Schools or PTAs, or work taking place in schools
- Statutory bodies, such as local authorities

What we can't fund

- Capital costs (except for essential small equipment, e.g., laptops)
- Non-charitable activities
- Retrospective costs
- Vehicles
- Work that does not benefit people living in Greater London

Application stages flow chart



Decision-making stages in more detail

We will make decisions using a two-stage process.

Stage 1 – Application review

Our team reviews your application against the programme's criteria, assessing how well your organisation and work align with the funding priorities.

- If shortlisted, our funding team will contact you by email and phone.
- If your application isn't successful, you'll receive an email. You can request written feedback

Stage 2 – Conversation and assessment

If you are shortlisted, we'll contact you to discuss further or arrange a visit with our funding team. We'll explore your organisation's work, communities, and approach in more depth.

- Following our meeting, we'll compile a report to support our decision-making.
- If your application is approved, we'll contact you about the next steps and the process for receiving your grant.
- If you're not successful, you'll receive feedback by email. You can request a follow-up call to discuss your application.

How to apply using our Application Portal

If you'd like to apply, we encourage you to work through these steps before starting your application to ensure you understand our programme priorities and eligibility criteria. You'll also find helpful step-by-step information on creating an account, logging in, and using our Application Portal, including how to save and submit your work, in our [How to apply](#) section on our website.

Step 1

Learn about the programme and the grants available by visiting the [Access to Justice grants section](#) on our website. Here you can:

- Attend or watch our [webinar](#)
- Learn about the programme's priorities, eligibility criteria, and use our Eligibility Checker
- Download a sample application form
- Check our regularly updated [FAQs](#)

If you have further questions about your eligibility, you can apply for a 15-minute pre-application call with a member of our team (offered on a first-come, first-served basis).

Step 2

Sign up for our Application Portal

To make an application, you will need to use our online Application Portal (available from 12pm noon on Friday, 14 November 2025). If you need any help with this, please contact us at funding@citybridgefoundation.org.uk, and a member of our funding team will guide you through the process. If you've previously created an account with us, you can log in directly from the portal homepage.

Step 3

Start your application

Tell us about the work you are doing to apply for Stage 1. You'll be able to attach any relevant documentation (in any file format) as you proceed through the application.

For detailed step-by-step guidance on completing the application form, please refer to our [How to apply](#) page or our [Instructions for Applicants](#).

Accessibility & help

The Application Portal works best in Chrome, Edge, and Firefox. We try our best to ensure our systems work with a range of technologies, but we can't commit to testing every web browser, operating system version or mobile handset type.

If you need to submit your application in a different format, require accessibility adjustments, spot any mistakes, or are otherwise experiencing difficulties accessing our online form, please contact funding@citybridgefoundation.org.uk for assistance.

Other documentation to help you:

- [Instructions for Applicants](#)
- Sample application form in Word – if you would prefer to draft your responses on your desktop before completing your application. However, we do not accept applications in Word. Please upload your application via our Application Portal. Each question has a word limit, and some have multiple-choice answers.

Funder Plus

If you receive a grant from us in this round, you will automatically become part of our Funder Plus programme. We will support all funded organisations together as a group or a cohort. If you hold a development grant, we will invite you to attend specific events, as well as the open events that are available to the entire cohort.

During the Stage 2 visit, we will ask you about the skills development, knowledge, and other support you may need to help you meet the welfare advice needs of Londoners and develop your social action and systems change work. We may ask you about any specific expertise, learning or skills that you are interested in sharing with the rest of the cohort. We would pay you to do this. At the visit, we will aim to create a space where you can speak openly about what you do and don't know, how you want to develop, and what you want to learn. This will help us tailor the series training, events and other support we offer to the needs of everyone in the cohort. We will also bring everyone across both programmes together for learning and networking events.

What we mean by/glossary

In this section, we outline key terms and definitions to expand on some of the descriptions provided in the programme's eligibility criteria and priorities.

Accreditation

Accreditation means that an organisation has been formally assessed against recognised quality standards for its advice services. For example, the **Advice Quality Standard (AQS)** assesses organisations providing social welfare advice across areas including housing, welfare benefits, debt, employment, and immigration. Some areas also have *specialist regulation*, such as the Immigration Advice Authority (IAA formerly OISC), **Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)**, or **Money and Pensions Service frameworks MaPS** for debt advice, and **Lexcel** or **SRA regulation** for legal advice. Accreditation assures that an organisation's advice services are delivered to a consistent, high-quality standard.

'Led by and for' organisations

A 'led by and for' organisation is led and run by the community/communities it serves and/or the people who use its support services. Most likely, a community member set up the organisation to support these communities. These organisations have often been historically underrepresented and deprioritised by the funding sector. 'Led by and for' organisations may also be referred to as user-led, equity-led, or having lived experience leadership.

Our definition of a 'led by and for' organisation requires 75% of the Board of Trustees or Management Committee, and at least 50% of

senior staff, to self-identify as being from the specific marginalised community or protected characteristic that the organisation serves.

Alongside this threshold, we expect organisations to tell us about their accountability to the communities they work alongside and/or represent. Specifically, we want to know how, in practice, their work responds to the needs and lives of the people they aim to support, and how these people contribute to decision-making. We're open to applications from organisations who may fall just outside the 75% and 50% thresholds, as long as they can demonstrate strong community accountability and representation in their work.

Organisations should be able to demonstrate how they meet this definition and reflect the direct lived experience of their community in their leadership, management, and services. This can include details of board or senior management representation, steering or user reference groups, or other ways in which people from the community can shape decision-making.

For example, an organisation is a charity set up by disabled people delivering advice services for disabled people, drawing on its own and its clients' experiences to shape its services.

Or an organisation may be 'led by and for' a different community – for instance, be black-led, or run by and for women and girls, or members of LGBTQ+ communities, or other marginalised groups. We are especially interested in how an organisation is accountable to the community it serves, promotes an inclusive and equitable approach across all sections of its community and encourages participation in shaping its services.

Lived experience

By lived experience, we refer to the definition from Sistren Legal Collective's 'Just Words' [toolkit](#):

"Refers to the knowledge, insights, and perspectives gained through direct personal experience of specific life events, social issues, challenges, or personal conditions. Lived experience teaches and informs an individual's identity and worldview in a way that can be difficult to replicate or to understand through theoretical knowledge or from the perspective of others who have not shared similar experiences."

Lived experience in the context of 'led by and for' organisations is relevant to the community or protected characteristic that the organisation serves.

Most marginalised Londoners

When we use the term 'most marginalised Londoners', we mean communities and individuals who face systemic inequalities. Our grants will prioritise organisations who support, represent, and empower marginalised and underrepresented groups comprising identities such as race, disability, religion, socioeconomic background, gender identity, and sexuality. Intersectional diversity will also be taken into account when a person's identities span multiple underrepresented identities.

When using this term, we:

- Understand the complex social, economic, and political systems at work. There are diverse ways of understanding how power and privilege operate, as well as how certain groups may feel excluded from resources, opportunities, and rights. We do not wish to

oversimplify these dynamics but to provide an entry point for examining the structural inequalities that shape our society.

- Understand that these dynamics are intersectional – that different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, ableism, and classism, intersect and compound to create harmful experiences of exclusion. These forces push certain groups to the margins of society, denying them access to wealth, political power, and social capital.
- Aim to highlight the structural barriers that maintain these inequalities, while also recognising the resilience and agency of those fighting against them.
- Seek to reflect the complex dynamics of power and oppression across various contexts, including systems of exclusion like institutional racism and other forms of systemic injustice.

Social welfare advice

We're defining social welfare advice as*:

*Definitions from London Funders' 2024 '[Mapping Funding for Social Welfare Advice in London](#)' report

- "Housing: access to social housing, advice on housing rights and eviction (including around the management and condition of accommodation), access to assistance when facing or experiencing homelessness."
- "Welfare benefits: eligibility and access to welfare benefits, income maximisation (focusing on promoting the uptake of welfare benefits)."
- "Debt: advice and guidance on how to avoid debt and how to deal with it when it becomes a problem."
- "Employment: rights at work, for example, around unfair dismissal, unfair treatment, and withheld pay."

- “Immigration: the provision of advice on immigration issues, which is subject to its own regulatory framework.”

Definitions of advice standards

These explanations are from the [Advice Services Alliance](#).

Information – general guidance to help people understand their options

Advice – providing free expert guidance tailored to an individual’s circumstances, including some practical support – not one-off advice.

Advice with casework – includes all of the above, but also requires the organisation to take action on behalf of the client to progress the matter, such as negotiating with third parties, following up, and supporting the client until the matter is resolved.

Accreditation (for social welfare advice) – an organisation has been formally assessed against recognised quality standards for its advice services. For example, the **Advice Quality Standard (AQS)** covers organisations who provide advice on housing, welfare benefits, debt, employment, and immigration.

Some areas that also have specialist regulation:

- **Immigration advice** – regulated by the **Immigration Advice Authority (IAA)**, formerly known as the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC).
- **Debt advice** – may require **Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)** authorisation or adherence to **Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) quality frameworks**.
- **Legal advice** (in any area) – may be subject to **Lexcel** (Law Society quality mark) or regulation by the **Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)**.

Accreditation assures that an organisation delivers advice to a consistent, high-quality standard.

Social action

Social action is often the route to systems change. For example, **advocacy, campaigning, and community organising** (social action) can lead to policy reform or narrative shifts (systems change).

Both aim to address root causes, but **systems change focuses on how systems operate**, while **social action focuses on who is affected and how to mobilise for change**.

Social action work may include, but is not limited to, advocacy, campaigning, community organising, evidence gathering, research, and strategic communications.

We have taken the definitions below from Sistren Legal Collective’s ‘*Just Words*’ [toolkit](#).

- “**Advocacy** is the act of representing, supporting or promoting a particular cause, influencing public policy, and/or educating voters and society about issues affecting select communities or society at large.

While there are many different types of advocacy, in the context of charities, NGOs, and activists, advocacy usually means influencing government policies, laws, and public attitudes to create systemic change.

This could include things like campaigning, lobbying or research and policy work. Community organisations should be aware that in England and Wales, there are particular rules around certain types of legal structures, such as charities and CICs, undertaking advocacy work that may be construed as campaigning or political activity.”

- **“Campaigning** is a means for an organisation to further their purpose by organising activities to raise awareness of an issue or to call a community to action over a relevant cause. A campaign typically involves planning and organising a series of activities aimed at achieving a certain change within society. Campaigning activities can take many forms, from online social media campaigns to hosting community yoga and meditation wellbeing workshops to raise awareness of public health matters.

Charities in England and Wales need to be aware of particular guidance by the Charity Commission when campaigning.”

Note on advocacy and campaigning: In this programme, we will not fund one-off campaigns that only advocate for people without supporting them to take action on their own behalf (external advocacy). We will only fund campaigns that build long-term community power, leadership and agency.

This definition is taken from the [Community Organisers’](#) website.

- **Community organising** “When communities work together, the possibilities for positive change are endless. Community organising is the work of bringing people together to take action around their common concerns and overcome social injustice. Community organisers reach out and listen, connect and motivate people to build their collective power. When people are organised, communities get heard and power begins to shift, creating real change for good.”

Systems change

Systems change is about transforming the structures, processes, and mental models that sustain inequality. It goes deeper than addressing symptoms – it aims to shift how systems function at their core. City Bridge Foundation uses the iceberg model to illustrate this:

- **Events** (i.e., someone being denied benefits)
- **Patterns** (i.e., repeated denials for certain conditions)
- **Structures** (i.e., flawed assessment processes)
- **Mental models** (i.e., societal beliefs about disability or poverty)

In practice, systems change can involve redesigning policies, rules, and services; shifting narratives and public mindsets; building collective power and collaboration; and supporting long-term, structural transformation.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Please find a list of frequently asked questions on our [website](#).

Contact information

If you have any questions or would like further advice or guidance, please contact us:

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