

Housing and Homelessness Programme

**Supporting  
organisations  
to end homelessness  
and create housing  
opportunities**





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## Our vision

Oak's Housing and Homelessness Programme believes in a society where more people live in decent homes and fewer people experience homelessness and housing insecurity.

This means challenging systems that cause homelessness and enabling strategies that create more housing opportunities for everyone. We believe in building greater power within communities and organisations that work most closely with people, strengthening their collective capacity to achieve change. Our grant-making seeks out organisations that are developing ambitious strategies, shaped by people with lived experience and rooted in robust evidence.

### Our challenge

Our grant-making strategy sits within the wider context of the structural causes of homelessness and housing insecurity, which include poverty, inequality, and discrimination. Housing strategies could increase housing opportunity for everyone, yet homelessness persists and the organisations addressing these issues, with people experiencing the problem, need more resources to achieve long lasting change.



## Principles underpinning the strategy

Underpinning our strategy is a deep commitment to strengthening the voices of people with lived experience and supporting solutions that are grounded in social justice, racial equity, and anti-discrimination. Given that the gap between income and homes that are affordable is growing, our focus is primarily on people with the least access to essential resources and who are most excluded from housing opportunity.

We want to target our support where homelessness and housing problems unfairly and disproportionately affect sections of our community. This includes Black and Minoritised ethnic communities, disabled people, LGBTQI communities, and older and younger people.

Housing issues intersect with a range of social issues, including criminal justice, mental health, violence against women and girls, racism, discrimination and hate crime, migration and immigration, unemployment, and low wages. To reflect this, we are interested in funding organisations where housing issues form a part of their strategies, as well as organisations with a sole focus on housing and homelessness.

We are committed to efforts that contribute towards change at a systemic level. Our approach to systems change prioritises work that ensures long-lasting outcomes that directly benefit people furthest from housing opportunity, meeting the immediate needs of people in ways that prevent further homelessness and reduce housing insecurity, whilst also focusing on longer term solutions and change. By working in this way, we aim to address the root causes and identify strategies for change to reflect the experiences and aspirations of people with the greatest housing need. We encourage collaboration and coalitions; this includes working with people who have lived experience of homelessness and housing problems.

## Priority themes and outcomes

Theme	We support organisations that:	Outcome
<b>Renter rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• help renters on low incomes to access decent homes at genuinely affordable rent levels;</li><li>• promote fairer tenancy agreements and end unfair evictions; and</li><li>• uncover and challenge discrimination which excludes people from accessing affordable and safe homes.</li></ul>	All renters have strong housing rights that are protected. This includes social and public housing tenants, as well as tenants in the private rented sector.
<b>Supply and access to genuinely affordable and decent homes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• campaign to improve supply of homes that are affordable for people with the lowest income and/or facing the most discrimination;</li><li>• support different models of community ownership that benefit people with the greatest housing need; and</li><li>• empower communities to advocate for more homes that meet housing need.</li></ul>	Increased supply of new and existing genuinely affordable and decent homes available to people most discriminated against by housing policy.
<b>Reduction and prevention of homelessness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• empower and support people with complex needs through services that break the cycle of homelessness;</li><li>• develop stronger advocacy and campaigning to prevent all forms of homelessness; and</li><li>• improve equitable access to supported housing and suitable longer-term housing options.</li></ul>	Homelessness dramatically reduced and more suitable housing available for people with the greatest need.

# Funding approaches

Approaches	What does this mean	Why is it important
<b>Building a strong civil society</b> that includes organisations and groups led by people with experience of homelessness and housing insecurity, and advocate for substantial changes in policy and practice.	<p>We fund organisations of all sizes, but we have a particular interest in smaller organisations. We do not have a fixed definition of a small organisation, but we are guided by the UK context in which small is often referred to as an organisation with an operating cost of under GBP 1 million.</p> <p>Our interest in the grassroots is in supporting actions that originate and operate at community level and build on lived experiences. We want to encourage grassroots organisations to engage in coalition work and movement building.</p> <p>We often work with larger organisations and other funders to help us direct our funding to grassroots action effectively.</p>	<p>We believe that a stronger civil society, which includes organisations of all sizes working together, committed to connecting grassroots experience and evidence to policy and practice, is key to reducing homelessness and creating more homes.</p> <p>This means building up the capacity of organisations who currently have the least resources, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- small and grassroots organisations;</li><li>- organisations led by people with lived experience; and</li><li>- organisations led by people from Minoritised backgrounds.</li></ul>
<b>Tackling racism and other forms of discrimination</b> in housing to ensure equity and justice are achieved for those most disadvantaged.	<p>We fund organisations that address the relationships between housing and racism and other forms of discrimination.</p> <p>We fund a range of organisations but have a particular interest in those steeped in lived experience and led by leaders from Black and Minoritised communities.</p>	<p>People from communities that experience discrimination are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. Supporting organisations that challenge housing injustice alongside other social injustices will strengthen the voices and experiences of those that most need to be heard.</p>

## Approaches

## What does this mean

## Why is it important

### **Ensuring access to information, knowledge, data, and legal systems**

for stronger advocacy, campaigning, and grassroots action

We fund not-for-profit organisations that support campaigning, activism, and policy change by equipping communities and activists with knowledge and expertise. We define this widely, but it can include:

- expertise on legal challenges;
- training for activism;
- training to better understand formal decision-making processes related to housing;
- support with narrative change, through multi-media and story telling;
- strategies to connect tenants to broader movements; and
- access to and analysis of statistics and data that are not readily available to the sector.

Lack of access to knowledge, data, and information can exclude and disempower grassroots organisations and communities.

By funding initiatives to make knowledge and data more accessible and usable for grassroots activists, organisations and communities will be better equipped to use their power more effectively.

Given the multiple layers and complex factors that have led to a housing crisis, our grant-making strategy is broad so we can respond to the solutions identified by organisations and the people they support. This can include: empowering people to break cycles of homelessness through direct support and casework; securing access to homes long-term; campaigning and advocating for policy change to address immediate problems; testing innovations and new approaches; building the capacity and power of people experiencing the problem; and creating narratives that influence public debate and interest.

As we build our portfolio of grants, we remain focused on long-term systemic change, which means funding a range of strategies to ensure positive outcomes for people who are disadvantaged and discriminated against. We are open to hearing new ideas from the sector and being challenged on our assumptions about achieving change. We use multiple approaches to help us identify projects and organisations to fund. We regularly attend events, seminars, and keep ourselves informed through social media and by reading reports.

## Priority geographies

We fund in the US and the UK. Most of our geographic grants in the US are made to organisations in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. In the UK, we fund organisations in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Bristol, Birmingham, London, and the Midlands. In addition, we fund organisations that work nationally in the US and the UK.



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## How we work with our grantee partners

Our grants are usually multi-year and long-term. When we formally invite an organisation to apply for a grant, we discuss the size of the grant and whether it is project or core. We also work in partnership with organisations to develop the application.

We want to maintain a relationship with our partners throughout the lifetime of the grant so we can share learning and impact. We ask for formal reports on an annual basis and offer the option of six-month meetings online and by telephone. We encourage our partners to take an approach to monitoring and evaluation that inspires learning and ongoing adaptation. We want to engage in what has been achieved as well as what has been challenging, and only expect to receive data and evidence that is of value to our partners and the communities that they work with.

We are committed to supporting our partners with capacity building and will actively encourage partners to discuss their organisational development priorities with us. We can offer support with issues such as governance, fundraising strategies, succession planning, evaluation, safeguarding, and communication. As much as possible, we will encourage organisations to cost their capacity building needs into the grant application.

Where practical, we attend events organised by partners, and explore opportunities to convene and organise seminars for our partners.

# Learning Questions

We have identified learning questions that will guide us as we implement and continue to adapt our strategy. We share these questions with our grantee partners to explore ways in which we can work with our partners to collate evidence as we engage with these learning questions. There is no expectation, but we hope that some of our learning questions will resonate with our partners. We expect our learning questions to evolve as we go deeper into our strategy:

- What does it take for strong organisations, empowered communities, and leaders with lived experience to bring about change?
- How are housing and homelessness narratives and strategies changing when organisations led by people from Black and Minoritised backgrounds and/or with lived experiences become more visible and influential?
- When are we helping and when is our funding model getting in the way of smaller, grassroots, and community-led organisations?
- When has knowledge, data, and technical assistance been most helpful in supporting the sector and communities to achieve a tangible change?
- Does looking at homelessness through the lens of race equity lead to better outcomes for everyone experiencing housing disadvantage?
- How is our learning approach helping us to develop a pipeline of organisations to fund?



## Requests for support

Organisations that fit our current strategy can also submit an enquiry through our website: <https://oakfnd.org/submit-enquiry/>.

We know it can be challenging for organisations with limited resources to connect with funders, and we do value and consider all submissions, but an enquiry does not guarantee a formal invitation to apply for funding. Please only submit an enquiry once you have considered our strategy.

## Our team

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## Contact us

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