

Red Umbrella Fund

GRANTMAKING PRIORITY-SETTING AND STRATEGY

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

Our focus is global (any country in the world). The grantmaking criteria and priorities are set /tweaked each year by the **International Steering committee (ISC)** of the Red Umbrella Fund. We only fund sex worker-led groups, organizations, and networks.

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

Both are determined by the ISC, of which a large majority always are sex workers (community representatives).

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

The ISC determines this by consensus through in-person meetings, using input from their own background and expertise, input from the staff's expertise and experience, and information from relevant resources and evaluations that may be available (e.g., evaluation from the **Programme Advisory Committee**, our internal grants peer review panel, etc.).

How are these practices socialized within your organization?

The entire fund is led by sex workers, which is a core part of our organizational principles. Our history of the organization and why it is the way it is has been documented in a **publication** and shared widely within the organization and publicly.

TYPES OF GRANTS

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

We only provide flexible, general support grants. These can be used for any of the costs described above, as well as for operation costs, salary, activities, research, publications, board meetings, etc. The grants are either one- or two-year grants.

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

Our grants are between 4,000–40,000 Euro per year (double for two-year grants).

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

Yes. There is a separate process for selecting regional networks, but it does follow the exact same process (it's just that they don't have to 'compete' with local/national groups).

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

We earmark funding to specific regions to ensure that the final selection includes grants in all regions. There is also a separate earmark that has been set by the ISC for regional networks to ensure that these are also supported through our grants.

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

The Programme Advisory Panel (PAC), which is the grants peer review panel, determines the size of the grant but follows guidance (lower and upper limits) that have been determined by the ISC.

The ISC determines the types of grants (core funds, one and two-year grants), as well as the guidance on grant sizes. For example, newer groups and groups working locally, have a lower "ceiling" for the grant size than older and national or regional (as in international/ multi-country) working groups.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

Sex worker-led organizations that support the principles of the Red Umbrella Fund and are committed to contribute to the sex workers' rights movement(s).

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

- ◆ Our own social media and website.
- ◆ Direct sharing with key contacts including sex worker

groups that we know, allied funders that we know are in touch with sex worker groups, allied NGOs, etc.

- ◆ Distribution through sex worker networks and organizations who share it on their member list serves and social media.

How often do you accept applications/grant proposals?

So far, once a year.

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

Yes, we provide a brief written guide with tips, a Q&A on our website, and a short video online with tips.

We also offer (as explained in the brief application guide) direct personal feedback to any group that asks for it before a certain date (roughly one week before the actual final deadline for sending in applications). This feedback is provided in at least four languages, as needed.

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

We only ask for information that is needed to assess the eligibility of the group and for the PAC to be able to prioritize groups for grants. Additional information (whether they have a bank account, etc.) is only asked for from groups that are selected for a grant. The information is accessible to Red Umbrella Fund staff, and the information on the application form is shared with the PAC, although contact details are left out for safety/security reasons.

Requested information includes:

- ◆ Information about the organization and contact details
- ◆ References that we can contact
- ◆ Mission, strategies and key partners
- ◆ Focus of the group (what is the situation they are trying to change, what are they doing, two key successes to date, etc.)
- ◆ Income from the past two years
- ◆ What they want to do if they get the grant and a rough budget to accompany that.

INITIAL VETTING/SCREENING/ DUE DILIGENCE

Are applications initially screened or vetted to ensure eligibility? How and by whom is this done?

Yes, this is done by staff who critically assess the application, conduct database and online research, and do reference checks.

If more than one person is involved, how do you ensure that the same criteria has been considered in all cases?

The criteria are clearly defined and set by the ISC. These are in our database system so that staff who are reading the application can check whether the organization meets those criteria. All declined applications on the basis of eligibility are checked by the Coordinator to ensure they indeed are clear about why they are declined on that basis.

GRANTMAKING DECISION PROCESS AND PANEL

Who comprises your grantmaking selection panel(s)?

Sex worker rights activists from different regions in the world make up our panel. In exceptional cases, there are up to two people in the PAC (out of 11 total) that can be an ally and not a self-identified sex worker.

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

We put out a public call for self-nominations. Applicants submit a short form and a letter of motivation, and also provide a letter of support from a sex worker-led organization. The membership committee of the ISC reads and selects the new PAC members.

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

The membership committee determines the diversity and other criteria used to select the PAC members. At this moment, key criteria are regional diversity and gender diversity. But additional factors—such as experience and/or knowledge—may be included each year as decided on by the membership committee.

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

Three years to ensure that members have opportunities to contribute to this process and share what they have learned with other activists in the movements.

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

PAC members participate in the first round of scoring from home. The next steps involve group discussions of highest scoring organizations and a new (blind) scoring of those applications by all PAC members. This is followed by a final consensus decision about which groups should be awarded grants, and the size of those grants, based on the full portfolio selected.

Depending on restrictions/ earmarks of funding placed on us by our funders, there may sometimes be some limits in the freedom of the PAC to decide on the grants and grant sizes.

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

We consider diversity in membership of the PAC, as well as facilitation of the process. Our processes have clear agendas (but also flexibility where needed), timelines, and guidelines to ensure that everyone speaks, contributes, and is heard. We provide one-on-one orientations to each PAC member each year to ensure everyone understands the process and what is expected of them.

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, and there is a conflict of interest policy in place. It is an important part of the orientation and is enforced throughout the PAC scoring, discussion, and decision making process.

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

The final selection is by consensus. The resolution is usually found by taking a break to reexamine all the criteria, priorities, arguments and data and then coming back to the conversation, which helps to see whether a consensus can be reached.

How are selection panel members trained and supported?

One-on-one orientation sessions over Skype (of 1.5–2 hours each), as well as support throughout the process as needed.

What recourse do grants applicants have to challenge the decisions?

They are offered the opportunity to request clarity / arguments for the decision. They can also send in a complaint should they wish, which would be formally responded to and documented.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

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

Currently 60%.

What percentage of board members are peers?

72% at least, if all the seats are filled.

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

At least 80%, but often it is 100%.

Are there other committees or operational processes that involve peers?

We make effort to recruit sex workers also as consultants, whenever possible. We have also worked with community designers, editors, researchers and interpreters who are also peers.

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

Staff implement the work and decisions by the ISC. Staff also take care of the day-to-day administration, accompaniment, communications, fundraising, finance, etc. Whereas the peers in the ISC make the higher-level decisions and the peers in the PAC decide on which grants to make.

Do you pay members of your panel/committee?

No, but all costs are covered (travel, hotel, meals, etc.).

REPORTING, LEARNING, AND PROCESS ITERATION

What, if any, are your reporting requirements for grantees? Who develops them?

Our reporting requirements are developed by staff, and there is a reporting requirement roughly every six months.

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

We require a final report (narrative and financial), and usually have an additional closing Skype or phone conversation to contribute to our understanding and evaluate the grant. We also do an internal evaluation of each grant ourselves, based on all the information available.

How do you evaluate impact?

We have a monitoring and evaluation plan that outlines our key objectives/ expected outcomes, processes and tools—for both our grantmaking, as well as our donor education/ philanthropic influencing work. We have also done some external evaluations (an anonymous survey of our current and former grantees), as well as various internal evaluations (an annual assessment of our work). We have now reached the end of our strategic plan and will hire a consultant to provide us with additional feedback by interviewing key stakeholders.

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

We usually conduct an evaluation with the PAC at the end of their process, either in-person or anonymously through an online survey (and sometimes both). We request feedback on all our reports of applicants; in 2015, we conducted an anonymous grantee survey process to get this kind of additional feedback.

In 2017, an external researcher interviewed our ISC members and staff and observed an ISC meeting to assess the level of participatory decision making that we practice and provide recommendations for improvements.

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

We share our learnings with the ISC, and as much as possible, the sex worker rights movement, relevant philanthropic spaces, and directly with our funders. Many of our evaluations and learnings have been shared publicly through blog posts.

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

Each year we have made changes based on feedback. Sometimes it has been adjusting wording or specific questions on our application form; other times it has been adding more guidance in the form of a Q&A and video to provide tips & recommendations to applicants. We also went from one-year to mostly two-year grants.

For more information about Red Umbrella Fund, contact Nadia van der Linde at nadia@redumbrellafund.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.