

# EJF Granting Framework

## Purpose of this Granting Framework

The Environmental Justice Fund (EJF) has developed this Granting Framework for two reasons.

1. It is intended to guide the Grants Committee when it decides which organisations should get support from EJF.
2. It is available as a public resource as part of EJF's commitment to transparency, and with the aim of demystifying the process that EJF uses to process proposals, and how the Grants Committee selects grantees.

## EJF's commitment to participatory grant-making

EJF is a fund 'by activists, for activists'. We live out this principle by implementing a form of participatory grant-making in which decisions on who gets support are made by activists from the environmental justice sector. This is because we believe that EJF should be guided by people on the ground with a good understanding of the context in which applicants are operating, and the challenges that they face. It is also part of EJF's commitment to putting real decision-making power into the hands of community-based activists.

## The appointment and operation of the Grants Committee

EJF has therefore established a Grants Committee (GC) which is tasked with processing proposals and selecting which organisations should get support from EJF. The initial GC was appointed in July 2022 by the EJF Board through an open recruitment process. There have been a few changes to the composition of the GC since then. Transparency is really important to EJF so every time a vacancy on the GC arises, we issue an open advertisement and run a competitive recruitment process. According to the Terms of Reference which govern the GC, the GC can consist of between 4 and 7 people.

Some of the key considerations which are taken into account when constituting the GC include:

- The need to ensure that all members of the GC are activists with experience working on environmental justice issues and with communities;
- A commitment to ensuring that the majority of GC members are community-based;
- A commitment to prioritising the voices of women and youth;
- The value of a GC with experience in a range of different areas of environmental justice (e.g. mining, water, food security etc);
- The value of a GC comprised of people from across South Africa and not concentrated in a particular province; and
- The need for EJF's Executive Director to sit on the GC as the connection between the staff, GC and Board.

Members of the GC serve a two-year term, with the possibility of limited extension.

EJF is committed to good governance and the Grants Committee operates in the context of authority delegated to it by the EJF Board.

The current GC is comprised as follows:

1. Bulelwa Klaasen (Chairperson)
2. Taryn Pereira (Deputy Chairperson)
3. Lizeka Ntsikeni
4. Samson Mokoena
5. Amanda Rinquest
6. Lisa Chamberlain

More information on the background of GC members can be found at <https://ejfunds.org.za/the-team/>.

### Eligibility criteria for EJF grants

To be eligible for support from EJF, applicants must be:

1. An organisation or network<sup>1</sup> based in, and part of, the community it serves;
2. Working on environmental justice; and
3. In South Africa.

### What EJF funds

#### **Understanding of environmental justice**

EJF supports environmental justice activism. We adopt an expansive and generous interpretation to the term 'environmental justice'. This approach is informed by a recognition of the interconnectedness of different struggles, and forms part of EJF's commitment to inclusivity. We are also adopting an inclusive approach as part of a diagnostic exercise in order to allow ourselves to be led by the needs expressed by activists on the ground.

EJF may support work on, amongst other things: Climate justice and the Just Transition; Air pollution; Mining; Food sovereignty; Water; Defence of Ocean and Coastal commons; Waste; Ecofeminism (projects that are about the relationship between gender equality and the environment); Eco socialism (projects merging aspects of socialism with green politics, ecology and anti-globalisation); Land rights; Promotion of indigenous knowledge; Alternative sustainable livelihoods; Environmental health; Access to environmental information; and Community participation in decision-making around natural resources. This is not a closed list, and we will consider applications outside of these areas if they still fall within the ambit of environmental justice.

#### **Activities which could be supported**

The activities which EJF might support include:

- A specific event (like a protest, meeting or workshop)
- Organising, campaigns and advocacy work;
- Community-led research;
- Litigation by Community-Based Organisations;
- Community environmental education; and
- Organisational strengthening initiatives.

#### **Rapid-response grants**

We understand that sometimes it is not possible to predict things in advance and can therefore provide rapid-response grants to support responses to urgent and unforeseen crisis. EJF is particularly mindful of the risks that activists face which sometimes mean the need for urgent action to keep someone safe. Applications for

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<sup>1</sup> EJF does not typically fund individuals – we make an exception in rapid-response grants.

rapid-response grants are decided on by EJF staff, who aim to provide a response to an application within 48 hours. Rapid-response grants are governed by a separate Rapid-response Granting Framework.

### Size and length of grants

EJF makes 1-year grants of R50 000 – R100 000. Grant funds are usually released in tranches. Rapid-response grants are between 3-6 months and range between R5000 and about R25 000.

### Application process for support from EJF

The application process is as follows:

#### **STEP ONE: EJF ISSUES A CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

EJF issues an open call for proposals. Calls for proposals are widely circulated and are available at least on EJF's website and social media.

#### **STEP TWO: APPLICANTS PREPARE AND SUBMIT PROPOSALS**

Once applicants have read through a call for proposals and are satisfied that they are eligible to apply, they can start working on their proposals. If anyone has any questions at this stage, or needs assistance of any kind regarding the application process, EJF's Activist Support Coordinators are available to assist (contact [info@ejfunds.org.za](mailto:info@ejfunds.org.za) with queries about the process). Proposals can be completed online on our website, or filled out offline and emailed / Whatsapped to us.

#### **STEP THREE: EJF STAFF CONDUCT SCREENING**

Once the deadline for submission of proposals has closed, the EJF staff screen all proposals. They check that everyone that has applied is eligible for support (using the eligibility criteria set out above). They also verify details about the organisation by looking them up online, searching their social media, phoning their references and other people that the organisation has worked with in the past. The EJF staff then prepare a report on the findings of the screening process and pass the proposals on to the GC for deliberation.

#### **STEP FOUR: GRANTS COMMITTEE ASSESSES PROPOSALS AND SELECTS GRANTEES**

The GC then considers all the proposals and selects which organisations will receive support from EJF.

#### **STEP FIVE: EJF STAFF COMMUNICATE THE OUTCOME TO ALL APPLICANTS**

The outcome is communicated to all applicants by the EJF staff. Where possible we will provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants, but it might not always be possible to do this (depending on how many proposals are received).

#### **STEP SIX: EJF STAFF AND GRANTEES DISCUSS SUPPORT NEEDS AND SIGN AGREEMENT**

The EJF staff then sit down with the selected organisations to discuss how EJF can best support their work, how the grant will work and what is expected. An agreement is drawn up and signed by EJF and the grantee. The grantee can then continue their activism, supported by EJF.

## Decision-making criteria

Proposals are assessed both on their own merit but also in relation to each other. This is because EJF has particular objectives which relate to our overall family of grantees.

Each proposal is assessed using the following criteria (please note that proposals that do not meet one or another of these criteria are not disqualified from consideration as we take a wholistic approach):

1. How do the organisation's proposed activities advance environmental justice and what impact will the activities have on the community?
2. To what extent is the proposed project/campaign/event well thought through? Are there enough specific details in the proposal to get a sense of what is planned? Is there a clear, logical link between the proposed activities, the objectives sought to be achieved, and the budget breakdown?
3. Does the substance of the proposal address a particularly pressing or novel environmental justice issue, or is the organisation planning to take a new and creative approach to an old problem?
4. What degree of organisation and democratic accountability is present in the organisation? (How is the organisation structured, how does it take decisions, how does it report back to the community?)
5. Do women hold leadership positions in the organisation? Is the proposed project/event/campaign intended to benefit women specifically? If so, how?
6. Do young people (<35 years) hold leadership positions in the organisation? Is the proposed project/event/campaign intended to benefit young people specifically? If so, how?
7. How is the organisation linked in to other parts of the environmental justice sector ecosystem (if at all)? What do partner organisations or previous funders have to say about the organisation?

In addition, the GC will take the following considerations into account in its decision-making when it looks at the proposals as a collective:

8. EJF seeks to support a combination of established and new CBOs. This is because we believe that building the environmental justice movement involves both strengthening what already exists, and supporting new organisations to enter into this field of activism. We aim to spend the bulk of our grant-making budget on organisations that already have some organisation/structure and which have at least some track record. The rationale for this is that such organisations have the best chance of successfully implementing their ideas and thereby moving the needle of environmental justice. This approach also enables EJF to use a reference mechanism by asking existing players in the environmental justice sector to confirm a potential grantee's credibility. At the same time, EJF is conscious that existing networks can be elitist and sometimes operate to exclude valuable contributions from new organisations, or from existing organisations that are not well networked. We therefore aim to spend a portion of our grant-making budget on new and/or isolated organisations. This is EJF's way of supporting the expansion of the environmental justice movement.
9. EJF would like to support organisations working on a range of different environmental justice issues, rather than concentrating on just one area e.g. mining.
10. We try to ensure that our grants are not concentrated in any one geographic area in South Africa. This is because we have committed to making sure that we try to support a spread of organisations across the country, including in remote areas that often get overlooked. Sometimes we might be guided by the fact that environmental problems are particularly bad in certain parts of the country, but we are trying hard to make sure that our grantees reflect the geographic diversity of South Africa. This might mean that we have to say no to a good proposal if there were lots of good proposals from the same province to give a chance to an organisation from another province, so that we ensure provincial representivity.

11. We can only make a limited number of grants. This is because our own financial resources are limited. Also, because we believe in providing accompaniment beyond money, our model of grant-making is resource-intensive for EJF as an organisation. When we commit to supporting an organisation, we want to make sure that we are able to properly fulfil that commitment. This means that we cannot stretch our small team of staff too thin, and we need to be mindful of the total number of grants that we make.

### Managing conflict of interest

It is critical that EJF operates with integrity. We are committed to avoiding any conflicts of interest where we can, and to working hard to mitigate and responsibly manage any potential conflict where it can't be avoided. One of the circumstances in which a conflict of interest might arise is if an organisation that submits a proposal to EJF has a close relationship with a member of the GC or a member of EJF staff.

Before the GC was established, we debated whether we would need to prevent any organisation to which a GC member belonged from being able to submit a proposal. However, we acknowledged that this would be such a big disincentive, that very few community-based activists would ever want to sit on the GC if it came at that price for their own community or organisation. We didn't want to compromise on having activists in positions of real decision-making power at EJF. Being an activist-driven organisation is at the heart of who we are, and it is why we have adopted this model of participatory grant-making.

For this reason, any organisation is free to apply for a grant, notwithstanding the participation of one of their members on the GC. However, that member of the GC must recuse themselves from all GC deliberations on that particular application. We recognise that this approach does not entirely eliminate the potential conflict of interest, as the applicant organisation concerned could still have an insight into decision-making by the GC in general, and therefore an advantage over other applicants. To combat this, we have committed to running accessible and transparent application processes. This is part of why we are open about the decision-making criteria used by the GC, and why this Granting Framework is publicly available.

The situation we are trying to avoid is where someone who has the power to influence our decision-making process (like a GC or staff member) uses that power inappropriately by trying to influence a decision either in favour of, or against, a particular applicant, because of a pre-existing relationship they have with that person/organisation, that has nothing to do with the proposal that has been submitted to EJF. It's also not only the reality of situations like this ACTUALLY happening that we want to avoid. We also want to avoid any applicant even worrying that it is a POSSIBILITY. It is very important to us at EJF that our process are not only fair, but that they are perceived to be fair.

EJF has therefore put very robust measures in place to manage conflict of interest. These include:

1. Integrity is one of the considerations in the **recruitment** of GC and staff members.
2. The GC is a **collective**, meaning that decisions are taken by a group and influence can't be concentrated in 1 or 2 individuals. Likewise the screening process is done by a team of EJF staff members rather than just 1 individual.
3. The conduct of the GC is governed by both a Terms of Reference and this Granting Framework, and the GC is **accountable** to the Board. The conduct of staff members is governed by their employment contracts as well as EJF's comprehensive policy framework.
4. We are **transparent** about our approach to conflict of interest – like outlining it in public documents like this one.

5. There is a three-tier **conflict declaration system** in place:
  - 5.1 All applicants are required to declare any potential conflict of interest with GC or staff members in their proposals.
  - 5.2 All GC and staff members are required to declare any potential conflicts of interest with applicants in writing ahead of screening and deliberations.
  - 5.3 In addition, where an organisation is a repeat applicant, the EJF staff check whether any potential conflicts were declared the previous year and adds this to the conflict declaration document used by the GC when deliberating on conflict of interest matters.
6. Where a potential conflict has been declared by, or with respect to, a staff member, the Executive Director makes a determination as to whether the nature of the relationship giving rise to the declaration is sufficiently serious to require the staff member concerned to recuse themselves from the relevant portions of the screening process.
7. Where a potential conflict has been declared by, or with respect to the GC, the GC (excluding the potentially conflicted member) deliberates on each potential conflict of interest and makes a nuanced decision on a case-by-case basis as to whether the GC member concerned should recuse themselves in that instance. All GC members felt to be conflicted by the rest of the GC are required to recuse themselves from deliberations on the proposal/s with respect to which they are conflicted.
8. Recusal is automatic where the conflicted GC member is an employee, member, or board member of an applicant organisation i.e. there is no discretion in these cases and no need for the rest of the GC to make a determination as to whether the conflicted GC member should recuse themselves – the conflict is clear and they must automatically recuse themselves.
9. GC members are also given an opportunity to voluntarily recuse themselves – thus implementing an ‘err on the side of caution’ approach and removing the need for the rest of the GC to make a decision as to whether recusal is required in that instance.
10. Records are kept of all conflict declarations and the resulting decision as to whether recusal was required in each instance (and can be provided on request).

We appreciate that in activist circles different organisations work with each other in different capacities all the time. This is not a problem. In fact, this kind of frequent collaboration and solidarity should be encouraged and celebrated! We just need to make sure that our decision-making processes are fair. So we require GC members to declare a potential conflict in the following scenarios:

- They work for, or are a member of the applicant organisation;
- They sit on the board of the applicant organisation;
- They belong to an organisation which is in the same network or coalition as the applicant organisation, especially if they regularly mobilise together or co-host events and workshops; or
- They otherwise have a close personal or professional relationship with the applicant organisation.

Mere knowledge of an organisation, attending a meeting with them, or co-hosting a once off event with them does not warrant declaration of conflict.

It is also important to note that the mere existence of a relationship does not necessarily translate into an actual conflict of interest. In other words, declaration of a potential conflict is only necessary if the relationship between an applicant and a GC member is so intertwined that the GC member would not be able to act independently, or where there might be a reasonable perception of bias.

## Review of Granting Framework

EJF is committed to constant reflection on our activities and ways of working. This Granting Framework is a living document which will be regularly reviewed by the Board, at least every two years, and in conjunction with EJF's Strategy, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan.

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