



# John Ellerman Foundation

STRATEGY 2022-2025: SUMMARY REPORT



## CHAIR'S FOREWORD

In the Foreword for our strategy for 2022-25, our previous Chair, Peter Kyle CBE, spoke about a backdrop of change and uncertainty and how the next few years were critical for responding to the political, economic, cultural, environmental and societal challenges of our time. Now, in 2025, it is only too clear that the change and uncertainty experienced by people, society and the natural world are firmly in the foreground.

Our strategy for 2022-25 was our first in some time. It focussed on delivering our aim to advance wellbeing for people, society and the natural world with 100% of our assets. It therefore focussed on the ways in which we could enhance our capabilities as a grantmaker, investor and charitable funding organisation, covering four strategic pillars: our funding offer, our investment policy, our work with others, and our commitment to accountability. We wanted to use the three year period to expand and improve our approach in these areas, so that we could become a more transparent, accountable and effective organisation.

This report seeks to summarise what we have achieved and learned from our strategy for 2022-25. We have used this learning to develop our next strategy for 2025-30, alongside our ongoing discussions with those we work with, including in strategy engagement sessions held in December 2024 and January 2025 with grant-holders, fellow funders and investors, and associated organisations. We are determined to be as impactful as we can, despite our limited funds.

Some of the areas where we made most progress relate to the improvements we have made to our pre-application offer – resulting in more organisations receiving pre-application support, as well as improvements in the way that we decline applications. Our efforts have

also been recognised through the feedback we receive in our independently run perception audits with applicants and grant-holders – with the last audit conducted in 2023 – and through external benchmarks and initiatives too, including the Foundation Practice Rating. This initiative assesses grantmakers like us on diversity, accountability and transparency, and we are particularly proud to have received an 'A' rating for the last three years.

We have also become a much more outward facing and collaborative organisation, resulting in a multiplier effect for our work. A good example of this is the progress we have made in our publicly available Investment Policy, which now means we have a vastly improved approach to engagement with our fund managers on responsible investing; a new Social Investment Policy (approved in January 2025); and much greater sharing and collaboration with our peers on both responsible and social investing practices.

We have embraced opportunities for leadership and for learning too. This has included becoming more open about the things we care about, like what it takes to be an effective grantmaker in the current context, as well as working with other funders and philanthropists to increase the levels of environmental funding being directed to the UK Overseas Territories. We have made progress on understanding what wellbeing for people, society and the natural world means to us, and how we can be an organisation that responds to the learning it gathers and evolves its offer accordingly.

We are pleased that there are highlights and positives to share, but we know that there is much for us still left to do in partnership with those we work with.

**Geraldine Blake**

Chair

## INTRODUCTION

Three years ago, we were proud to launch our strategy for 2022-25: Advancing wellbeing with 100% of our assets. It outlined, more clearly than we had previously shared, our purpose and ambitions as an organisation and how we hoped to deliver against those successfully. Over the past three years it has been a guide for our grantmaking, the way we invest our endowment, and the way we organise our operations; reminding us of what we are here to achieve, providing an impetus to action, and a benchmark against which we can be held accountable for our progress.

In the years since our strategy was launched, our overall purpose – and many of our ambitions – remain the same. Now, however, as we move into our next strategic period, we recognise that the context in which we are operating has changed considerably. Since 2020-21, the number of grant applications that we receive each year has more than doubled.

Global average temperatures continue to rise at alarming rates, and our planet's biodiversity is under immense pressure. We are experiencing political and economic uncertainty in the UK and beyond, and this means that the investment landscape remains challenging and volatile. We know, however, that crises and periods of instability can help us to see new ways forward that create opportunities for change.

This report is, then, an opportunity to take stock and inform the direction of our next strategic period. The first section will summarise what we aimed to achieve through our 2022-25 strategy. It then outlines what we did achieve, and provides a summary of our grantmaking across the three year period. It then considers what we learnt in the process, and finally, the conclusion looks ahead to our next strategy and beyond.



# OUR AIM AND VALUES

## Our aim

**Our aim is to advance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world. The main ways in which we achieve this are by:**

- 1

Funding charities for work that has national significance in the fields of the arts, environment and social action (our funding categories). We believe these can make an important contribution to wellbeing.
- 2

Investing and managing our funds in such a way that balances the desire to maintain grantmaking capacity, operating in the long-term, and addressing the risk that our investments are poorly aligned to our aim and values.

## Our values

**Relationships are important to us across every aspect of our grantmaking, and in the ways in which we work with our peers and wider stakeholder networks to deliver our investing activities and our internal operations. Our values guide and reflect how we work.**



Responsive



Discerning



Personal touch



Connected



Flexible

- We are a **responsive** funder, listening and responding to what applicants and our wider stakeholder network judge is important.

We have well-developed and regularly reviewed funding guidelines, enabling us to be **discerning** in our decisions about whom and what to support. This value also extends to the way in which we approach collaborative funding opportunities and make investment decisions relating to our endowment.
- We value all our stakeholder relationships, including with organisations we fund and those applying to us, and seek to have a **personal touch**. Our Trustees are involved at every stage of a grant application, and we always meet an applicant before a grant is made.

We prefer to be **connected** and are in regular contact with relevant colleagues and partners in the charitable and investing worlds. We also like to keep in touch with organisations we fund, convening and connecting them with others from time to time.

We are willing to be **flexible** and may venture outside our funding criteria or our usual ways of working, if we believe a different approach would be more effective.

During the period of this strategy we distributed c.£5.5m annually, on average. As a medium-sized and responsive grantmaker, we had to be discerning about what we could support, as demand for our funding exceeds our grantmaking budget. As a result of this, we prioritised supporting work delivered by UK-registered charities with an annual turnover of between £100,000 and £10,000,000, although we can and did make exceptions where we felt there was a good reason to do so in service of our strategy. We sought to support organisations delivering nationally significant work that has as wide an impact as possible, and organisations that prioritise effectiveness and impact, partnership working and strong governance and management.

- 1

Our funding offer

Offer more ways of receiving pre-application advice

Further refine our core funding offer

Work more collaboratively

Convene and connect organisations we fund

Build in more time for learning and reflection

Design a wider offer of support to those we fund

- 2

Our investment policy

Work with our fund managers to ensure they invest in ways that will meet global targets relating to the climate and biodiversity crises

Determine our approach to engagement or divestment

Research and invest in more social and impact investing opportunities

Review in more detail our decision to operate for 30 years only, thus closing in 2050

**Our main funding categories were:**



You can find more detail on what we funded in the summary of grants below. We planned to deliver our 2022-25 strategy through the following four pillars:

- 3

Our work with others

Work in ways that are more outward facing

Commit to understanding our stakeholders better

Join funder collaborations because there is a mutual benefit and value to doing so
- 4

Our commitment to accountability

Have clear and well understood approaches to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), transparency and accountability

Develop a clear impact framework for our grantmaking

Work in ways that are strategically responsive

Report more fully on the progress we are making

Be clear on why advancing wellbeing matters to us



WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE?

Our funding offer

Our work with others

Our investment policy

Our commitment to accountability

April 2022

Launched our new strategy for 2022-25.

May 2022

Approved and published a new Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy.

May 2022

Our Director, Sufina Ahmad, was the keynote speaker at the Charity Governance Awards 2022.

August 2022

Restructured our team.

October 2022

Staff and Trustee Away Day to discuss the Foundation's time horizon.

November 2022

Conducted a review of our progress under IVAR's Open and Trusting initiative.

November 2022

Published a report on Protea – an international curatorial exchange between the UK and South Africa, which was funded as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations.

December 2022

Third update on our progress under the Funder Commitment on Climate Change.

January 2023

All six new team members now in post.

May 2023

Published John Ellerman Foundation – A Historical Review, researched and written by Drs Michael Taylor, Timothy Twining and Felix Waldmann.

May 2023

Published major updates to our Investment Policy, including more detail and ambition around our shareholder engagement work and our expectations of fund managers in relation to responsible investing.

September 2023

Commissioned an accessibility audit of our website.

April 2023

Implemented the new DEI Data Standard with applicants, and later with grant-holders too.

June 2023

Published interim statement on the Foundation's time horizon.

June/July 2023

Met with each of our fund managers for an in depth meeting on their responsible investing approaches, and compiled an internal report on the findings, which included RAG (red, amber, green) ratings.

July 2023

Nominated for Living Wage Funder Award.

November 2023

Fourth update on our progress under the Funder Commitment on Climate Change.

November 2023

Held Away Day to consider our next strategy and the Foundation's time horizon.

December 2023

Published findings from our second grant-holder and applicant perception audit conducted by nfpResearch, which concluded that we are a “positive, supportive and progressive force in the wider sector.”

January 2024

Published the Protea – One Year On report.

February 2024

Published our first Impact Framework.

February 2024

Launched our inaugural Board Shadowing Scheme.

March 2024

The March issue of the Alliance Magazine titled 'What Leadership Can Philanthropy Provide?' is published, co-edited by our Director, Sufina Ahmad, and Tendisai Chigwedere of Hewlett Foundation.

March 2024

Received an 'A' under the Foundation Practice Rating for the second year running.

March 2024

By the end of the year we had made 58 grants worth a total of £5.2m. We also completed a total of 255 scheduled pre-application meetings, alongside responding to ad hoc email and telephone pre-application enquiries.

March 2024

This year we were a member of the Association of Charitable Foundation's Origins of Wealth Group, the Living Wage funder group, and the Museums COP funder sub-group.

May 2024

Published further significant updates to our Investment Policy, which include excluding any investment into tobacco (including indirect investments), thermal coal, tar sands, and new primary market capital for fossil fuel production and infrastructure.

June/July 2024

We met with each of our fund managers for an in depth meeting on their responsible investing approaches and to discuss compliance with our updated Investment Policy including exclusions. We also produced an internal report on the findings, which included updated RAG (red, amber, green) ratings.

October 2024

Published a 10 Year Anniversary Review of the Museums and Galleries Fund.

October 2024

Improved our implementation of the DEI Data Standard.

September 2024 onwards

Ongoing engagement with fund managers to ensure compliance with our Investment Policy.

September 2024

Transferred our organisational archival material to the UK Philanthropy Archives, based at Kent University.

March 2025

Published our Board Shadowing Scheme learning review.

March 2025

Received an 'A' under the Foundation Practice Rating for the third year running.

March 2025

By the end of the year we had made 52 grants worth a total of £5.1m.

January 2025

Completed ten strategy engagement sessions with grant-holders and wider stakeholders to inform the development of our next strategy.

January 2025

Fifth update on our progress under the Funder Commitment on Climate Change.

January 2025

Approved our first Social Investment Policy as well as our first social investment for some years (to be announced later this year).

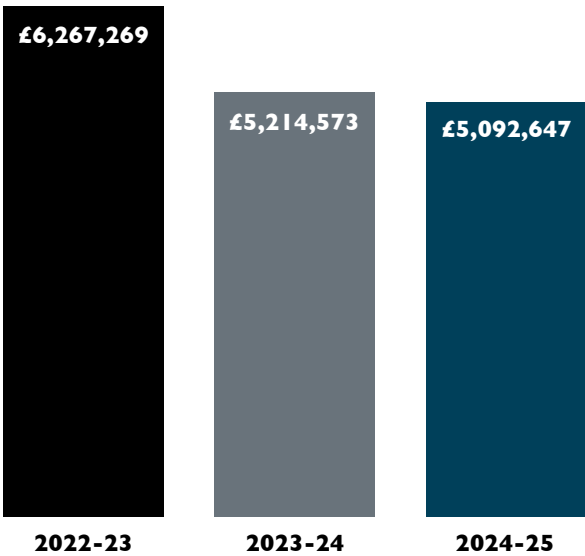
December 2024

Published the UK Overseas Territories Fund – Impact report.

# SUMMARY OF GRANTS

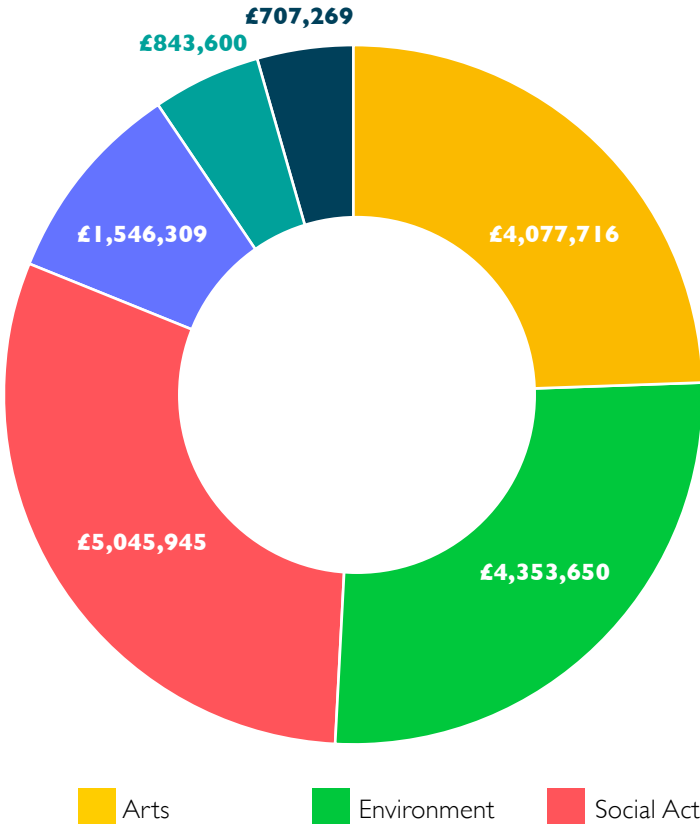
In the three year period of our strategy for 2022-25, we gave out **more than £16.5m** in grants.

Total grants spend

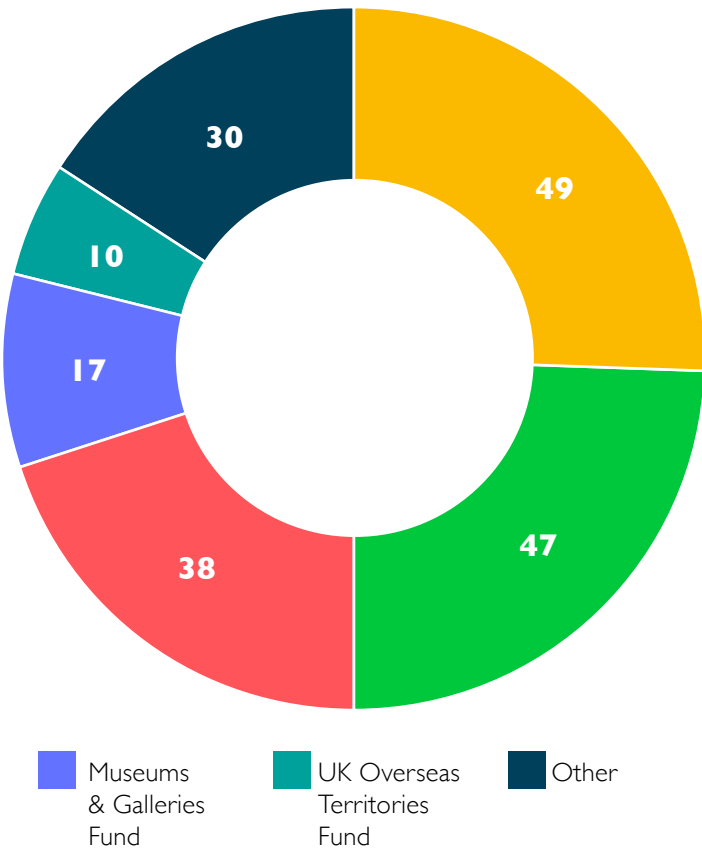


We made grants across six different funding categories. Through our main grants process, we funded organisations under our **Environment**, **Arts** and **Social Action** categories. We also made grants through our **Museums & Galleries Fund** and **UK Overseas Territories Fund**. Reflecting one of our core values, flexibility, we also supported organisations or collaborations that did not strictly fit with our funding criteria, but whose work is very closely aligned with our organisational aim, values and funding priorities (these grants are shown as **'Other'** below). The total number of grants made in this three year period was **191**. [You can find a full list of the grants we have made since 2010 on our website.](#)

Total grants spend 2022-25, per category

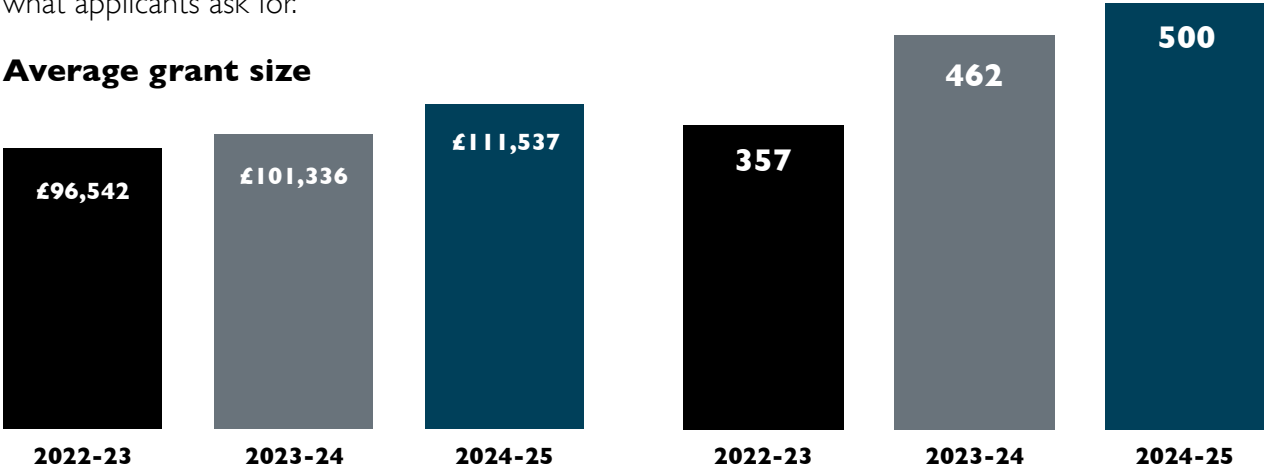


Total number of grants approved, 2022-25



In our main grants programme, the average grant size has increased year on year. The majority of our grants are for core costs, and most are for three years; however, the length and type of grant are flexible and are based on what applicants ask for.

Average grant size

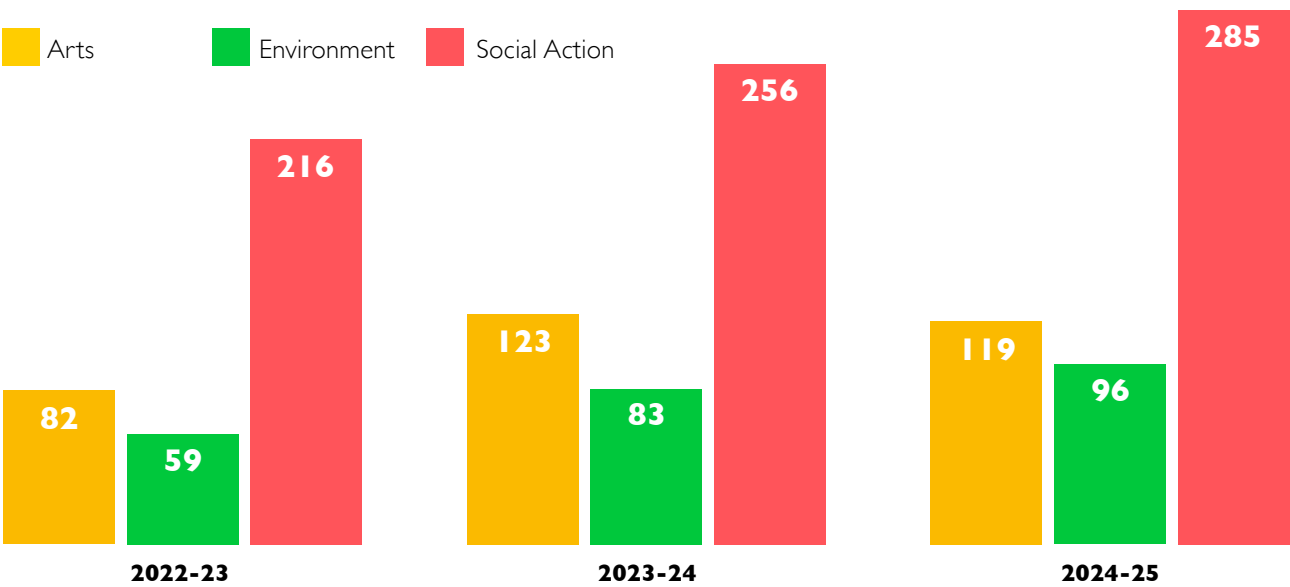


In this period, the number of applications we receive each year to our main grants programme has increased substantially.

Number of applications received

We have received particularly high numbers of applications for our Social Action category.

Application numbers per category per year



This means that, unfortunately, the success rates for organisations applying to us have gone down. The figures below exclude applications that didn't meet our eligibility criteria.

Year	Number of eligible applications	Number invited to second stage	Number of successful applicants	Success rate – eligible applications that received funding
2022-23	263	61	48	18%
2023-24	309	45	43	14%
2024-25	302	42	38	13%



# WHAT DID WE LEARN?

We set out the following measures of success for our strategy for 2022-25, alongside a summary of the activities that we would commit to achieving in relation to each of our strategic pillars:

**In the next few years, we believe that the success of this strategy will be demonstrated in the following ways:**

**Having a team and Board that is small, effective and empowered.**

**Working more collaboratively** with stakeholders and networks to advance wellbeing.

**Taking a values-led approach,** with a meaningful and a widely understood approach to DEI, transparency and accountability.

**Delivering a grantmaking offer that is effective,** regularly reviewed and continuously improved to meet the needs of our applicants and the organisations that we fund.

**Investing in a way that means we can still make grants for the next 30 years,** whilst also figuring out ways in which we can ensure that our investment decisions do not contradict the work that we are supporting through our grantmaking.

**Committing to learning and impact measurement frameworks** that better demonstrate the difference our work and approach are having, and why advancing wellbeing matters to us.

The area in which we feel we have made the most significant improvements is our commitment to accountability. We created and published a new Impact Framework which outlines our understanding of what advancing wellbeing for people, society and the natural world means to us. We have also provided regular communications and updates about the progress (or not) that we have been making across all areas of our work through our monthly blogs, our LinkedIn updates and the publication of different reports and written content – including on the latter for other organisations that we are working with. We have made good progress in relation to our work on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) across our grantmaking, investing and wider operations. Our Historical Review and our DEI and recruitment policies are publicly available, as is the DEI data relating to our staff and Trustee Board. We now have an annually reviewed DEI Accountability Plan that we implement, and have adopted the DEI Data Standard as part of our grantmaking.

We have applied a continuous improvement approach to our grantmaking and investing. This means that through regular review of our grantmaking offer, including our funding guidelines, we can ensure that we are responding to feedback, trends we observe from our grant-holders and applicants and sector insights, and act on these accordingly. This has also included an externally commissioned accessibility audit that has resulted in changes to how our grantmaking material is presented and the introduction of an accessibility statement on our website and in our funding guidelines. We have also shared more fully the progress we are making in our grantmaking – through our Annual Report and Accounts and specific reports relating to different parts of our grantmaking programme, such as our Museums and Galleries Fund and the UK Overseas

Territories Fund. We have also joined a range of funder collaborations including the Earth Funding Lab and the Democracy Fund.

Our public facing Investment Policy underwent extensive changes and improvements in this three year period, with new updates and learning incorporated and built upon annually. Our biggest achievements include the drafting and successful adoption of a new Social Investment Policy, a vastly improved approach to engagement with our fund managers on responsible investing, and greater sharing and collaboration with our peers on both responsible and social investing practices. We have also made a clear commitment to engagement and escalation and are now focussing our efforts on improving the practices of the fund managers we work with, as well as the underlying companies they are invested in, as this is where we feel we can have the most impact and influence.

We have also made firm and clear decisions on matters that were previously less clear for us as an organisation, including the decision taken in March 2025 to return to an ‘in perpetuity’ time horizon. We had previously been operating on a 30 year time horizon that would mean closing in

2050. We have reverted to in perpetuity as we feel that this is the way we can have the most impact as an organisation on the issues we care about.

Whilst we have made much progress, we know that there are areas where we have made less progress than we initially hoped for. This includes convening and connecting organisations we fund more regularly – in this strategy cycle our convening has related to specific funding programmes only, and informing the development of our next strategy. We have been able to expand our offer of support to those we fund, but this is an area that we would like to develop further in the future, including through a deeper understanding of the needs and preferences of our grant-holders.

We also discussed the idea of being strategically responsive in this strategy period, whereby we would take the insights and learning we gathered to develop new ways of working and responding. We have achieved this to an extent, especially in relation to our investing and our environmental grantmaking work in the UK Overseas Territories. However, this is a way of working that we would like to embed further in the future and across more areas of our work.





## CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD

Over the last 50 or so years since the Foundation was set up in 1971, the operating context has changed and we have changed with it. In our commitment to being a positive partner to those we work with, we have sought to challenge our own assumptions. We have tried to ensure that our thinking and decisions reflect best and promising practices. We have worked hard to take decisions that respond meaningfully to life as it is for those we work with. We are ending this strategy period with clarity that we must continue to strive to:

- Apply our values to all that we do.
- Invest sustainably, generating financial returns through responsible and social investing, taking fully into account the Foundation's charitable aim, financial and reputational risks.
- Be a modern and effective grantmaker supporting work in the UK (including environmental work in the UK Overseas Territories) committed to delivering best and promising practices, including our preferred offer of core and multi-year funding.
- Work with others – including our grant-holders, applicants, other funders and grantmakers, investors, policy and decision makers, the media, our staff and our Trustees

– in ways that ensure we are transparent and accountable, and enhance our own experience and knowledge. Our collaborative efforts include our work on diversity, equity and inclusion, our grantmaking, our investing and sharing our impact and learning.

Over the last three years, there is much that we have achieved and can be proud of. However, over this same period we have also seen the ways in which the risks and opportunities we and those we work with face have become more profound, as we navigate the challenges that this age of significant disruption and interconnected global threats pose to people, society and the natural world. We therefore know that we must continue to use our wealth, independence and longer-term perspective and apply it to our grantmaking, investing and wider operations to make the world as it is better, as well as investing in new approaches which seek to reimagine more fundamentally how the world could be.

As we enter our next strategic period, we will continue to centre our organisation's values and build on the foundations we have laid in 2022-25. We know, however, that we must also evolve, develop, and improve our approaches in our ongoing ambition to be a responsive and effective grantmaker.