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Description automatically generated **Expand Grants: Guidance for applicants**

1. Purpose of this guidance

To provide information to organisations with an Explore grant about your option to progress to an Expand grant, what you can apply for, and how to apply.

2. Background

Explore grants are to provide organisations with the capacity to explore the systemic issues they want to tackle, understand what change might be possible and who needs to be involved in making the change happen.

In Spring 2023, 28 equity led organisations were [awarded Explore grants](https://londonpropel.org.uk/news/first-grants-made-through-propel/), with the average grant totalling **£48,164**.

Since then, we’ve spoken to, and learned from funded organisations and funders respectively to understand what systemic change looks like, and consider how collaboratively, we can change funding practice, too.

Feedback has reinforced the knowledge that grants exploring systemic change differ from project grants. Funded organisations are keen to see a more light touch, flexible approach from funders, acknowledging that progress looks different for everyone. There’s also a call for more face time with funders, and a suggestion that funders could be more involved in discussions around organisational development and progression.

Expand grants have been developed in consultation with Explore funded orgs and Propel Partners, and are designed to help organisations expand on your existing work at a pace that works for you, with a view to preparing for a longer term grant.

3. What is an Expand grant?

Propel is offering Explore funded organisations the option to apply for two years of funding to continue your exploration (if needed) and to begin putting your plans into practice. This could include piloting and testing new approaches, and reflecting on progress.

4. Who can apply?

Only organisations with a current Explore grant can apply for an Expand grant.

5. How much you can apply for

There is not a fixed amount to apply for; funders are keen to understand what you need to continue your work, and will consider this on a case by case basis. The amount you apply for will be decided in consultation with your grant manager to ascertain what is sensible for your organisation (more on this in “how to apply”).

You may find it useful to consider that, in Round 1, the average grant for exploring was £48k over one year, and the average grant for delivering and developing was £196k per year.

Some funders won’t grant more than half an organisations’ annual turnover, in order to avoid reliance on one funder, however this can be discussed on a case by case basis.

If this is the case with your funder, then organisations can apply for an annual amount that does not exceed 50% of their annual income. Normally, this would be based on your most recent recorded income from your latest annual accounts, but projected and historic income can be taken into consideration where there is justification for doing so. This can be discussed further with your grant manager.

For example, if your income for the Year Ending March 2023 was £200,000, the maximum annual amount you could apply for would be £100,000 per year (or £200,000 over 2 years).

If you are proposing partnership work, through which a partner organisation would be delivering a substantial proportion of the funded activity, the partner organisation(s)’ income can also be taken into consideration. This can also be discussed with your grant manager.

6. What you can spend the money on

Funding can support you to continue covering the costs of exploringthe systemic issue you’re aiming to understand with your team, partners and members of civil society. Over the course of your grant, you may also begin to start piloting some of your findings and trial delivery.

Some of these costs may include:

- Research and data dives (including the staffing and planning costs to do so).

- Engaging with the people that your work benefits​ through consultation, focus groups etc.

- Ensuring that the activities you offer are accessible to all. This can include vouchers to service users or people with lived experience who participate in the design and evaluation of your work.

- Trialling new and different methods of delivery (through pilots or otherwise).

- Building or expanding relationships, partnerships and collaborations and convening to develop ideas.

- Organisational capacity building to prepare for the next stage of work, including recruitment and onboarding, or training and upskilling staff.

- Sharing best practice with other organisations through training, workshops or meetings.

- Investment in evidencing impact​ and understanding and evaluating your findings.

You should also include:

- Time to engage in learning with funders and other stakeholders through the Propel Learning Network. We suggest allowing up to five days per year for one or more staff members.

- A contribution to the overhead costs of running your organisation. Percentages may differ from funder to funder and can be discussed with your grant manager. Propel funders are committed to full cost recovery, but some may have limits on the percentage of core costs they can cover.

7. Checking in with your Grant Manager

Grant managers will contact funded organisations at around the halfway point of your current Explore grant to arrange a call or visit. Questions will be sent in advance, but please note that this is a conversation rather than a monitoring report, or a test!

You can expect funders to steer the conversation based on the following questions, but there’ll be space for you to ask questions too.

* How are you getting on? What’s working well and what challenges are you experiencing?
* Are you closer to understanding the issue that you’re exploring and have you got a sense of what needs to be done next?
* What does progression look like for your project? If you think that an Expand grant would suit you, when might you want to start the process of applying, and how much will you need?
* Do you need any support from your funder, or the Propel partnership more widely?

This is also an opportunity for you to raise any issues on your grant – for example, if you think you will underspend on your budget, this is a good time to discuss with your grant manager how you might spend it differently.

The notes of the conversation will be recorded by your grant manager and sent to you for sign off , then you’ll upload it onto the Propel Portal. You can do this by logging into your account, and editing the “Planning and Communications” section of your account – see below.

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From here you’ll figure out the best course of action for your organisation, whether you want to apply for an Expand grant, and how much you may want to apply for.

If you want to apply for an Expand grant, you can agree a bespoke timetable with your grant manager.

You might decide that continuing with Propel via an Expand grant is not the right route for you. Perhaps your exploration is indicating that change is not possible. Or perhaps there is another funding route that would suit your work better.

8. When you can apply and how long it will take

You can apply for an Expand grant whenever you’re ready to. However, if it’s important for you to have a decision before your current grant ends you will need to take this into account.

Funders will aim to assess your request as quickly as possible. Note that this will depend on the amount you are requesting, as larger amounts may take longer to be assessed.

If you feel ready, you can start this process immediately after your six month check in, which would mean that you could have a decision on an Expand Grant at around the 9-10 month point in your current grant.

You can start this process when the time is right for you. You might choose to delay applying until after your current grant ends, in which case there would be a gap between the end of one grant and the start of another.

9. How to apply

There will be no application form for an Expand Grant.

Instead, you will need to do three things following your check in with your Grant Manager:

A. Submit a **work plan** setting out what you intend to do over the next two years. You can submit this in any format. See Appendix A for additional guidance on how to develop a workplan.

B. Submit a **budget** for the grant request. You can submit this in any format. Please provide an appropriate amount of detail – if you provide only one item and cost, with no breakdown, your application is less likely to be funded, or further information may be requested of you which may cause a delay in your grant decision. The higher the total cost, the more detail you should provide.

C. Update **your organisational information** on the Propel portal. If you have a new set of signed accounts since your Explore application, you will need to upload this, unless it is readily publicly available (e.g. on the Charity Commission website). Depending on the size of your funding request, you may need to upload additional financial information for up to two years following your latest accounts, such as draft accounts, management accounts for your current year, financial forecasts or your organisational budget. Your Grant Manager will let you know what documents they will need to see once they understand the likely size of your request. If you have updated your safeguarding policy or changed your governing document, you will also need to upload the new versions. Note that progressing to an Expand grant is not guaranteed, and funders will make each decision based on the information you have provided to them.

If you have questions or queries as you develop your workplan, please do check in with your grant manager for support. Once you’ve uploaded the above documents to the portal, send your grant manager an email to let them know.

10. Criteria

Funders recognise that progress looks different to everyone, especially when exploring systemic change. In collaboration with funders and funded organisations, we have outlined the following criteria to establish if you’re ready to expand:

* You’ll be able to demonstrate some momentum in your work. For example, you’ll be able to clearly articulate the systemic issue you’re exploring and begin to imagine what alternatives look like. You’ll be able to show your thinking on how you could take steps towards these alternatives.
* You’ll have examples of how users have shaped the development of your work, and how you will embed this approach during your Expand grant.. For instance, consultation, codesign or research undertaken with your communities.
* You’ll have a sense of any risks or problems that could arise over the course of your grant. These aren’t dealbreakers, just show evidence to funders that you’re mindful of things that might not go to plan, and how they could be managed or mitigated.
* You’ll have an understanding of who you need around you in order to expand. By this we mean partner organisations, potential staff to be recruited, or any training and development needs in your team.

11. Reporting on your Explore grant

There’ll be a full report to complete at the end of your current grant, where you’ll be asked to respond to the following questions:

* Did you do what you proposed you would do?
* Did you spend what you thought you would spend?
* Have there been,  or are there about to be any changes, in your organisation?
* Did you reach the communities that you intended to? If no - please outline how that changed as your exploration developed. Tell us about your consultation and collaboration with your target communities throughout the course of the grant – how did this shape the work that you did?
* What did you learn about the issue you were exploring and what change might be possible?
* What support from funders or from the Propel Partners has been useful in your exploration?
* Any other reflections or comments you would like to share?

You will need to submit an annual report on your Expand grant. We’ll continue to develop our approach to reporting, but the core questions are likely to remain the same.

12. What happens next?

Following this two year expansion, there will be an opportunity to apply for up to a further seven years of funding to continue your work on systemic and structural change.

The Propel Partners will be working with funded organisations over the coming year to co-design the long term grants.

Appendix A

Developing a workplan for a systems change project

**The context**

First of all, we know that ‘systems change’ is not always useful language. You told us at the first Learning Network day that words that are more helpful are: *growth, development, movement, transformation, disruption, emergence, influence, and connection.* Regardless of the system or structural issue you are exploring, you are likely to be working in a very complex environment. It will not be straightforward to understand how that system works, or how you might start to change it. Also, change can happen in many ways – it might be about investment, services and projects, or policy or structures, but it might also be about understanding and behaviours.

**The content**

So your workplan for an Expand grant isn’t going to be a straightforward document where you can predict linear progress, or plan for outputs that you might deliver. Changing systems is not about writing reports, it’s about getting things done with people, and people need unpredictable amounts of time. Genuinely listening to people also means your work might take an unpredictable direction and that’s okay. You might find it more helpful to think about where you could be by the end of an Expand Grant, what the journey is that will get you there, and what milestones along the way could look like.

There are some things that funders are likely to want to understand that you will want to include in a workplan:

* How you’ll expand upon your existing work.
* What activities you’re planning to deliver, including how you will be involving your beneficiaries in setting the direction of your work.
* Any partners you’ll work with or partnerships you’ll aim to develop.
* Key milestones that you hope to reach throughout.
* How you will know if you’re making progress, and what you hope to learn.

**The considerations**

Here are some things you might want to consider when developing your workplan. They won’t all be relevant to your work, but we hope these are some useful prompts.

* **Understanding the system**

You’ll have spent some time exploring the system - seeing who’s in it, how it fits together, how it behaves, and where you may be able to apply pressure. This job won’t stop at the end of your first year, because the system will keep changing and adapting. You could use your workplan to share what you know so far, what the gaps are and how you’ll fill them in, and how you’ll keep thinking about this. If it’s easier to explain this visually, you could use a diagram or [system map](https://medium.com/disruptive-design/tools-for-systems-thinkers-systems-mapping-2db5cf30ab3a).

* **Developing a shared purpose or a collective vision for change**

We don’t underestimate how long this will take. It took Propel partners 14 months from our first workshop to launching the first grant programme, and the first four months was all about developing our collective vision for change. It’s not just that sectors think differently but also organisations of different sizes. Are you ready to share what your vision of an alternative system looks like? You could use a workplan to set out where you are in this journey, and what you need to do next. How will you know when the purpose, vision or ambitions are aligned with potential partners?

* **Developing trust and relationships across different parts of the system**

We know that to understand any system you need multiple perspectives, and you’ll have already been engaging widely. To change a system, you will want to grow strong relationships with multiple partners, including those who fund the system, those who deliver it, and those on the receiving end of it. You could use your workplan to tell us about the work that goes into this and how you’ll continue that work. For example, you may have learned about the resources you’ll need to underpin ongoing engagement, or you may be thinking about more formal partnership structures that you will need to build.

* **Experimenting and learning – capacity to be flexible and adapt**

Match your big ambitions with some small changes to keep people engaged - small change leads to big change in the end! You might be ready to try for some small shifts in how the system works, or how people behave in the system. What are these shifts? We know that none of us (funders, partners or funded organisations) are going to get this right first time, so how might you test different approaches? Your workplan could set out how you’ll go about piloting, how long you think this might need, and how you’ll evaluate what’s working.

* **Growing leadership and embedding voice**

The work of changing systems is collaborative. This means that you will need to work in different ways – making time to work across organisational boundaries, and giving your teams permission to do the same. You’ll need a good understanding of power dynamics between organisations, and between your organisations and the communities you’re seeking to work with. Involving your beneficiaries in co-design and decision-making requires skills at all levels of your organisation. External change often requires some internal change, too. In undertaking this work, you might begin to notice areas for growth and development in your team, or some gaps in your knowledge. How will you develop your capacity and what support might you need to do that?