



**Funder
Safeguarding
Collaborative**

Safeguarding when funding Lived Experience-Led Organisations

An Essential Guide for Funders

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The views and opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the individuals or organisations we spoke to in developing the guide. Any mistakes or errors remaining are those of the author alone.

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1 Introduction

Funding organisations led by people with lived experience of the issues they are working on has huge potential benefits.

Fuelled by personal experience, their insights, and collective knowledge can provide a credible voice to drive meaningful systemic and grassroots change. Supporting these organisations to thrive can help shift power imbalances, and ensure those closest to the issues are able to determine the most effective solutions on their own terms.

An increasing number of funders are seeking to support and partner with more lived experience-led organisations. Many are seeking guidance on how to do this safely, recognising that particular factors may need to be considered due to the lived experience of those involved.

This guide aims to support funders to develop a considered and proportionate approach to safeguarding when funding lived experience-led organisations. It draws on insights from existing literature and guidance, as well as interviews with people from lived experience-led organisations and funders who support such organisations. It encourages you to think beyond compliance and to centre your approach in care, safety, and wellbeing.

What do we mean by lived experience-led organisations?

We use the term 'lived experience-led organisation' (LEO) to refer to a group or organisation where people with first-hand lived experience of the issues they are working on hold influence over the strategic and operational direction of the organisation. We use this term because it is more commonly understood globally and avoids sometimes contested terms where individuals are described as a "user" or a "victim".



Figure 1: Examples of ways lived experience-led organisation describe themselves

There is huge diversity among LEOs, in terms of how they describe themselves, the issues they work on, and the language they use to talk about care, safety, and wellbeing. While the term lived experience-led is used throughout this guide, it is important to respect the specific language organisations use to describe themselves as defined by their people. Terminology often varies by geography, by community, and identity.

Furthermore, although we use the term 'organisation', we recognise that there can be large differences in how LEOs are constituted. Some may be small grassroots organisations who are formally registered. Others may be informal groups or movements who are deliberately unregistered or yet to be registered. Some are larger, more well-established organisations, and there is a growing number of lived experience-led funders,¹ and lived experience-led organisations who distribute grants. The information in this guide can be adapted to these different types of structures.

¹ For example, [Resourcing Refugee Leadership Initiative](#) is a global collation of six refugee-led organisations; [Black Feminist Fund](#) is a global institution led by Black women and gender expansive people; and [International Trans Fund](#) is a fund made up of trans activists and donors.

About this guide

This guide has been developed to support funders partnering with LEOs. It aims to ensure that those involved in such organisations, those benefiting from their work, and those within the funders themselves, are kept safe from harm.

Funders, like LEOs, vary in terms of size, structure and available resources. This guide provides different options for funders to consider so you can identify an approach that is realistic and manageable within your organisation.

This guide is intended for use by:

- Staff or trustees in funders supporting lived experience-led organisations.
- Designated safeguarding leads in funder organisations.
- Individuals involved in lived experience-led organisations who want to learn more about what they can reasonably expect from funders.

The guide is best used by individuals with experience in managing safeguarding and/or working with lived experience-led organisations. You may need further reading and/or training if you are new to either. This guide signposts to a diverse range of resources where you can find out more about the topics covered.

Reflecting on the funding landscape as the context for safety

As funders consider how to apply this guidance, we encourage you to reflect on how the wider funding environment affects LEOs ability to embed care, safety and wellbeing in their work.

Lived experience-led organisations are more likely than non-LEOs to be representative of marginalised people who already experience multiple forms of disadvantage. This disadvantage is more often due to their intersecting identities, socioeconomic status, and inequitable policies, systems and structures. This inequity can be replicated and exacerbated by the practices and approaches taken by funders.

“

We face substantial challenges in securing necessary resources. The current funding landscape is structurally inequitable, inaccessible and fails to recognise the unique contributions and needs of Disabled People’s Organisations.”

– [Funding Justice Collective, Position Statement \(2024\)](#)

There is evidence to suggest that LEOs are less likely to receive core, unrestricted, and long-term funding which is crucial for strengthening their systems, structures, and future sustainability. Research by the Civic Power Fund from 2022/2023 found that “grants directed to social justice work account for c. 4.5% of the funding from the UK’s largest grantmakers, with just 0.2% being directed to community organising work”². A reliance on shorter-term and project-based funding can leave LEOs in a continuous search for funding, often competing against larger mainstream organisations which are better resourced, networked, and equipped to secure funds.

These resourcing constraints can have a direct impact on safeguarding. For example, when there are national emergencies or targeted hostilities to marginalised groups, LEOs which are insufficiently resourced struggle to meaningfully respond to safety and security concerns and other risks. This can have a huge impact on people’s mental health, and on organisational wellbeing, and may even lead to programme and organisational closures.

In considering how to approach safeguarding when funding LEOs, it is important to reflect on how inequity in funding can affect a LEO’s ability to build and strengthen internal structures and systems, and properly resource safety, care and wellbeing. Funders can play a key role in tackling this inequity. We encourage all funders to consider how they can contribute to this change.

² Statistic from the executive summary of [Funding Justice 3](#) report by [Civic Power Fund](#).

2 Key terms

Co-Production:

An approach to working together in equal partnership and for equal benefit underpinned by the core values of being human, inclusive, transparent, and challenging.³ A genuine commitment to these values is essential to avoid practices that inadvertently perpetuate structural inequalities by extracting knowledge from marginalised communities without giving over real power or delivering benefit⁴.

Funder:

An umbrella term for organisations that include grant-making as a core component of their organisational mission. This includes private, family, corporate and community trusts and foundations as well as intermediary funders⁵.

Learned Experience:

The knowledge, understanding, and practice you get by learning from others, including the people affected by an issue(s), and through working or volunteering at an organisation.

Lived Experience:

The experiences(s) of people on whom a social issue, or combination of issues, has had a direct personal impact⁶.

Safeguarding:

This guide adopts the definition used by the Funder Safeguarding Collaborative which refers to the actions taken to prevent harm, abuse or exploitation and promote the welfare and wellbeing of anyone who come in to contact with the organisation. This includes:

- **Promotion:** adopting policies and practices which promote a culture of dignity, respect, safety, and wellbeing.
- **Prevention:** taking proactive steps to prevent all forms of harm, abuse or exploitation connected to the organisation and its operations.
- **Protection:** taking timely action to address any actual or suspected harm, abuse or exploitation.

The term 'safeguarding' is not universally understood or even translatable in some languages. In as much as possible, local and contextualised terms should be used to talk about safeguarding. Where the term 'safeguarding' is used, care should be taken to ensure a shared understanding so that a lack of familiarity with terminology does not exclude lived experience-led organisations from accessing funding.

Survivor-Led:

Survivors lead and are meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the functioning [of the organisation] from design to implementation to monitoring and evaluation, with the ultimate aim of enabling full survivor leadership⁷.

³ Adapted from [What co-production means to us](#) by the [Co-Production Collective](#) at University College London.

⁴ From [Understanding Anti-Racism in Co-Production Spaces: Centring the Voices of Racialised Individuals](#) (2025) by Isaac Samuels for [Co-Production Collective](#).

⁵ Adapted from Walker-Simpson, K. (2021) [Funder Approaches to Safeguarding Challenges, positive practices, and opportunities for collaboration](#) by the Funder Safeguarding Collaborative.

⁶ Definition from Sandhu, B. (2017) [The value of lived experience in social change: The need for leadership and organisational development in the Social Sector](#).

⁷ Definition from [A Global Survivor Movement to End Rape As a Weapon of War](#), (2020), SEMA. SEMA is the Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence initiated in 2017 by the Mukwege Foundation.

Trauma Informed:

Trauma is when we experience very stressful, frightening, or distressing events that are difficult to cope with or out of our control. It could be one incident, or an ongoing event that happens over a long period of time⁸. A trauma-informed approach is grounded in an understanding of how trauma affects individuals⁹ and emphasises the need for safe, supportive environments that avoid practices which could be re-traumatising.

“

We have reflected on how traditional funding models have also reinforced this inequality, resulting in led by and for organisations historically receiving less funding and consequently, are more vulnerable to closure when national emergencies and shocks arise”

– Comic Relief, Global Majority Fund, [Overview](#)

Vicarious trauma (also referred to as secondary trauma):

Vicarious trauma refers to the emotional and psychological impact experienced by people as a result of empathetic engagement with trauma survivors. Anyone who engages empathetically with survivors of traumatic incidents, and/or material relating to their trauma, is potentially affected¹⁰.

Victim/Survivor-centred:

An approach in which the victim/survivor's wishes, safety and wellbeing remain a priority in all matters and procedures¹¹.

⁸ UK charity MIND's guidance on trauma: [What is trauma? | Types of mental health problems | Mind](#).

⁹ Scottish Government's Toolkit (2021): [Trauma-informed practice: toolkit - gov.scot](#).

¹⁰ British Medical Association (2024) [Vicarious trauma: signs and strategies for coping](#).

¹¹ The global alliance of humanitarian and development organisations, CHS Alliance's Foundational paper on their Victim/Survivor-Centred Framework: [Victim-survivor-centred-approach-to-PSEAH-CHS-Alliance.pdf](#).

3 Getting your safeguarding foundations right

This guide highlights specific safeguarding considerations when funding lived experience-led organisations. However, safety and wellbeing should be a key consideration within all grant-making organisations, wherever and whoever they fund.

It is important that funders have appropriate safeguarding measures in place to prevent harm to the people and communities they work with, including their grantee partners, staff, volunteers, and others working on their behalf. This not only helps ensure that funders 'do no harm', it also helps build relationships of trust with grantee partners as the funder is 'walking the talk' and meeting their own safeguarding expectations before requiring this of others.

All funders should ensure that they have appropriate safeguarding measures in place before funding LEOs. Consideration should be given to:

Governance and Accountability

For safeguarding to be effective, it must be understood at all levels of the organisation including by those in leadership positions. There should be clearly defined responsibilities at distinct levels of the organisation, and effective management with oversight and accountability. Safeguarding must be prioritised and appropriate resources and capacity available to enable effective practice.

Safe People

Everyone should be made aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and equipped to fulfil their role in keeping people safe, through the provision of learning, training, support, and regular line management. Safe recruitment processes must be in place which include vetting to ensure the suitability of staff, volunteers, and consultants. Where there are people with lived experience among staff and volunteers, culturally appropriate support and wellbeing measures should be in place.

Reporting and Responding to Concerns

Allegations of harm, abuse, and misconduct can occur in any organisation. There must be accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms for staff and others to raise concerns. All concerns should be taken seriously, with procedures to guide the response including considerations around referrals to statutory agencies, carrying out investigations, and the provision of support services for those affected. For grant makers, this should include clarity about how the funder will respond to safeguarding concerns in the organisations they fund.

Safety in Grant-Making

Grant-making is often the area of highest safeguarding risk for funders. Due diligence should consider whether potential grantees have appropriate measures in place to ensure the safety of their work. Once funding is awarded, funder staff should be equipped to talk about safeguarding as part of their ongoing relationship with grantee partners. They should also know how to respond if concerns are raised by or about grantee partners. Funders should consider safeguarding throughout their grant-making but requirements should be proportional to the level of risk.

Safety Online

In an increasingly digital world, it is essential to consider and mitigate potential risks to safety and wellbeing through online harm. Data protection policies and procedures should be in place to ensure personal data is handled securely and prevent the risk of data breaches. If you are engaging with people online, including on social media, potential risks should be assessed and procedures in place to uphold people's dignity, safety, and ensure any inappropriate content or conduct is responded to in a timely manner.

Policies and Procedures

For safe practices to be fully embedded and implemented, it is important that these are documented in policies and procedures that are tailored to your work. These should be shared widely so that everyone has a clear and consistent understanding of the measures in place and the steps that should be taken to keep people safe. Policies and procedures should be reviewed regularly to ensure they are up to date and their effectiveness is monitored.

Learn more about safeguarding in grant-making organisations:

- Join the [Funder Safeguarding Collaborative](#) which is open to charitable trusts and foundations, intermediary funders, and funder networks committed to improving safeguarding practices globally.
- Use the Funder Safeguarding Collaborative and Association of Charitable Foundations' [Safeguarding Framework for Foundations](#) to adopt a proportionate approach to safeguarding in your work.
- Feminist Humanitarian Network (2025) [The Impact of Funding Cuts on Feminist Actors in Crisis Response Around the World](#).
- Comic Relief's Global Majority Fund (2025), [United for Change: Transforming the Funding Landscape for Global Majority Communities](#).
- The Funding Justice Collective (2024) [Funding Justice for DPOs – A Call to Action](#).



4 Understanding safety and risks of harm

Funders are responsible for identifying and managing risks across their operations. This section provides an overview of some of the key risks to consider when funding lived experience-led organisations.

It will help you consider:

- What are some of the risks you might encounter within lived experience-led organisations?
- What are some of the specific risks that can arise from funder practices when working with lived experience-led organisations?

Concepts of safety and risk vary across organisations. While some may consider work that carries a higher (or perceived) level of risk 'unsafe', others may accept these risks as necessary to achieve a positive social change. Whatever your organisation's risk appetite, avoiding all risk is impossible and priority should be placed on understanding potential risks and putting in place systems, structures and resources to minimise these.

“

It is not that user-led organisations pose more risk, but that the structures around them and the nature of their organisation makes risk a factor ... We must not exacerbate a misplaced narrative because they are user-led.”

– Funder

Risks will vary across organisations, programmes and contexts, and the risks identified in this guide are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Funders should avoid imposing your own assumptions about risks and what constitutes safety, as these may differ from the experiences and perceptions of those you seek to support.

A risk-informed approach requires that funders invest time and effort to understand the specific issues facing people connected to LEOs and their organisations. You can do this by creating space for open dialogue and longer-term collaboration to better understand the risks and the measures that are in place to reduce them. The illustrative examples provided in this section can help inform, but should not replace, efforts to understand the specific needs and challenges of the LEOs you seek to support.

4.1 Risk of harm within lived experience-led organisations

Harm through being (re)-traumatised:

People with lived experience bring valuable knowledge, and some will have a deep personal commitment to the issues they are working on. However, using this experience on a regular basis, including in public settings, can affect an individual's mental and physical health. Understanding the personal and professional impact of this work is a critical part of safeguarding.

People involved in LEOs may experience some of the following:

- Burn-out, trauma or re-trauma because of the continuous focus on the issues which they have experienced or continue to experience.

- Burn-out and exhaustion due to difficulty in disconnecting from work as their personal experiences are so inherently tied with the activities they are working on.
- Implicit or explicit pressure from peers or others to share their stories and experiences, which can be re-traumatising (although, for some, this can also be cathartic or strengthen bonds with others).
- Triggers or flashbacks on hearing about the similar experiences of others or when being reminded of, or sharing their own experiences.
- Feeling more personally confronted or criticised by any negative or perceived negative responses to work which is close to their experience. This includes feeling more personally confronted when disagreements arise within groups and can lead to mistrust or tension within teams.
- Strong feelings of helplessness or feeling threatened if the organisation's decision-making processes or relationships mirror earlier negative experiences.
- Compassion fatigue or losing empathy through being in a group with people with unmet needs or significant negative experiences.
- Feelings of tokenism or exploitation if they feel they are only valued for their experiences and not for their skills or knowledge.

Funders should consider what resources they can make available to support LEOs to respond to these types of issues. This can include connecting them with organisations who have tackled similar issues, sharing opportunities and platforms for deeper engagement, and allocating financial resource for specialist support. The provision of resources and support should always be agreed in collaboration with the LEO itself to ensure that it is welcomed and appropriate to the organisation's needs.

“

I do this work based on pain and anger towards the system...I do it out of passion. Sometimes I burn out and this takes me back.”

– Lived experience-led organisation

“

Some people have a lower expectation of safety and wellbeing than Westerners. It can feel tokenistic to talk about this given what they have been through.”

– Funder

Harm caused by discrimination and societal inequalities:

Individuals are often motivated to undertake this work to address inequities and negative social norms that have personally affected them. While this can act as a powerful motivator, the persistence of prejudices and injustices within wider society can have a negative impact.

- People in LEOs, including their leaders, often face multiple forms of discrimination because of their intersecting identities and social economic position. This dynamic is often replicated within the wider sector, where their voices may be similarly marginalised in debates and decisions.
- Their identities and personal connection to issues may make people more visible targets for abuse. This can extend beyond the individual, to their families, and wider community.
- The organisation can be subject to targeted abuse by groups who oppose its work, advocacy, or even its very existence.
- Negative narratives about marginalised communities can have a profound impact and compound existing trauma.
- Where discrimination and societal inequalities interact, individuals may be less able (or willing) to access protection from formal systems and agencies if they have been failed, threatened, or had adverse experiences with them in the past.
- Conversely, where individuals do have contact with protection services and agencies, this may cause harm and distress if systemic discrimination and inequity persist in those bodies.

Safeguarding does not exist in a vacuum, and funders should seek to understand how intersectional identities and structural inequalities influence risk and increase the likelihood of harm.

You should have an established approach to diversity, equality, and inclusion, including within your grant-making, to avoid reinforcing multiple forms of oppression. This should also inform your approach to safeguarding as an individual's intersecting identities influence their experience of harm and ability to access protection.

Harm through digital technologies:

Digital technologies can be a force for good, enabling greater connectivity and sharing of information. However, they can also magnify risks by increasing the visibility of people with lived experience, particularly when they are from marginalised groups and/or involved in advocacy and activism.

- Governments or other organisations may use surveillance techniques¹² to monitor people advocating on specific issues, creating serious security, safety, and privacy concerns.
- Individuals and agencies who disagree with the views or work of people with lived experience can use information available online to locate them, creating serious threats to safety for the individual, their families, communities, and others in the organisation.
- Information about a person's experience can result in online abuse or hate crimes or be used in smear campaigns to discredit people (e.g. Doxing, Outing, Digital blackmail, etc¹³).
- Digital platforms can also be used to target individuals and groups for harassment (e.g. zoom-bombing¹⁴).
- Artificial intelligence can be used to generate false information through the use of deepfakes and misinformation and disinformation campaigns which can lead to serious harm and abuse.

- Online harms can be particularly damaging for young people whose lives are more likely to be documented online, and where technology is embedded in their everyday interactions. This can increase opportunities to target and harass them.

Technology is evolving fast and so are the potential risks. Funders should seek to maintain their awareness and understanding of potential online harms in order that they can have meaningful conversations with grantee partners about the safeguards that are needed.

Harm between peers:

As with any organisation, individuals in LEOs can behave in ways that cause harm. While a person's lived experience may influence their behaviour, this cannot excuse acts of harm or abuse.

- Individuals can struggle with issues connected to their lived experience and this can lead to behaviour which causes unintended harm if left unsupported or unchallenged.
- A shared lived experience can result in blurred boundaries or overly familiar behaviour. If there is a lack of clear boundaries, this can lead to inappropriate behaviour.
- Some people may hesitate to address or challenge harmful behaviour, believing that doing so would conflict with trauma-informed practice. However, trauma-informed practice and accountability are not mutually exclusive. Adapting how you engage with someone in light of their trauma does not mean overlooking or excusing harmful behaviour.

It is essential that LEOs are as accountable as any other organisation for preventing and responding to harm and abuse. It is appropriate for funders to expect LEOs to have clear expectations around safe conduct, and measures in place to support individuals and address concerns when they arise. These must be tailored to the specific lived experiences of the individuals and their wider peer community.

¹² Amnesty International's [Security Lab](#), [Surveillance Industry Glossary](#).

¹³ Adapted from [Online Violence](#) by Amnesty International.

¹⁴ Adapted from [Zoombombing](#) by Tech Target.

Abuse by founders, leaders, or high-profile advocates within LEOs:

Harm is often perpetrated where there is an imbalance of power. The status of individuals with lived experience who hold influential roles can make it harder for those who experience harm from them to raise concerns.

- It can be difficult to challenge the behaviour of founders or high-profile advocates because of the power they hold, and the fear that they may use this power to undermine or retaliate against those who speak out.
- Empathy for the person's lived experience can act as a barrier to speaking out, often reinforcing feelings of blame towards the victim, rather than the person causing harm.
- The visibility and relationships held by high-profile individuals (e.g. with funders, media, etc), can mean that people may resist speaking out for fear that funding will be stopped or the organisation's work is undermined.
- There can also be concerns that the wider community may be stigmatised or negative perceptions reinforced because of the behaviour of one person.

Funders should be aware of these types of power dynamics and seek assurance that there are effective mechanisms in place to support people to speak out, and to genuinely respond to concerns. Funders must also be aware of their own role in reinforcing power dynamics through their relationships with founders and high-profile advocates, and must avoid relationships which blur professional boundaries, excuse inappropriate behaviour, or operate outside established systems.

“

Perpetrators know the vulnerabilities and can manipulate them. These issues are present in all organisations, they can be heightened when the perpetrator is a founder, influential advocate, or community leader.”

– Lived experience-led organisation

4.2 Risk of harm through funder practices and engagement

Harm through engagement with funding programmes:

Unintentional harm can be caused by the way funders design and deliver their grant-making programmes. The multitude of systemic and structural barriers which LEOs often already experience can be further reinforced through poor practice.

- Extractive processes and deficit-based language can cause psychological triggers, reinforce views of disempowerment, and perpetuate stereotypes.
- Dismissing, disbelieving, or downplaying a person's lived experience and its impact can cause emotional harm.
- Failing to make appropriate and reasonable adjustments to ensure access and participation can restrict engagement or exclude certain groups, deepening feelings of marginalisation.
- Resource-intensive funding calls with short turnaround times can create cycles of intense emotional work without space for recovery, amplifying the risk of burn-out.
- Funding processes which create competition among organisations can cause tension within movements and harm their ability to mobilise for change in the longer term.
- Tokenistic consultation, where people are asked to share their experiences but do not see how their participation has influenced funder practice, can lead to distrust.
- Making unreasonable and disproportionate requests regarding reporting of safeguarding concerns to funders can reinforce experiences of being disbelieved or disproportionately questioned.

Funders must be aware of how your own practice might cause harm, even if unintentional, and implement measures to mitigate this. At a basic level, this means ensuring your staff are supported with guidance and training to understand potential harm and how to undertake their work safely. Beyond this, trust-based engagement with lived experience-led organisations, with a priority on listening and learning, will help funders understand the risks and adapt their ways of working in real-time. In particular, co-production with people and organisations with lived experience is an effective way of designing and delivering programmes centred in care and safety.

Harm due to funder requests and communications:

The expertise and credibility that LEOs bring to their work can mean that funders request case studies, ask them to speak at events, feature in online content, or host visits. While this might be viewed as positive as it increases an organisation's profile, it can also create challenges.

- Responding to requests requires time and resources, often taking people away from core work without adequate remuneration. Power imbalances between funders and their partners can make it hard for organisations to say no for fear it might jeopardise future funding.
- Requests may create division within groups if only certain people are invited to take part. If invitations are only extended to those who are perceived to be most articulate, uncontroversial or compliant to funders' wishes, this can marginalise less confident individuals, reinforce internal (and societal) inequalities and contribute to feelings of shame.

- Divisions can be created more widely if some (often larger) organisations receive repeated requests and become the "go-to" organisation. This can create unnecessary competition.
- Insufficient consideration of the scale, duration and reach of funder communications can lead to over-exposure of people's stories, which can have a greater personal impact for those with lived experience.
- In certain contexts, public association with funders (through public partnerships, logos, branding, etc) can increase a grantee partner's risk of harm from governmental and other actors, particularly when their work challenges state systems. High-profile funders can attract additional scrutiny, making local partners appear to be acting against 'national interests' and making them vulnerable.

While funders may want to promote a LEO's work, you must consider the impact of requests. Take care when deciding who to approach, when and how often – this will support more equitable practice by creating access to funders and funder platforms for all types of LEOs. Where possible, adopt a relational approach that explicitly considers the impact of power dynamics and invites conversation to help you understand the impact of requests on the LEO. This may also help grantee partners to feel more comfortable saying 'no' and allow alternative approaches to be explored.

Where the association with funders creates risk of harm from governmental and other actors, a risk assessment can be an effective tool to help your staff and grantee partners think through potential risks together and implement measures to reduce these.

Harm to people in funder organisations or foundations:

Funders have a duty of care to their staff and partners. If funding processes are poorly designed or inadequately managed, their staff may themselves experience harm. While engaging with LEOs is not inherently risky, staff may occasionally encounter situations that lead to adverse outcomes.

- Being exposed to distressing disclosure or traumatic lived experiences, either in person or through accounts in written reports, may leave staff emotionally affected.
- Some staff may have experienced harms or injustices similar to those the LEO is raising, which can bring personal histories of trauma to the surface.
- Blurring of professional boundaries, especially when staff share lived experience with those they seek to fund or are active in these groups outside of their funder roles, can create difficulty in balancing empathy and active engagement – especially in co-production processes – and maintaining a professional role.

- Staff may face requests for help that goes beyond their role, such as being treated as a source of care or emotional support. Without the right skills or supervision, maintaining appropriate boundaries can be difficult. Requests may be distressing if there are few or no alternative support structures available.
- In high-risk contexts, there may be risk at community events if funders do not understand the context, know how to navigate threats, or fail to follow advice from the LEO.

To ensure funders meet their duty of care towards staff, you must make sure that appropriate measures to ensure their safety are considered as part of your wider safeguarding arrangements. In particular, when working with LEOs, funders should be alert to the emotional impact of the work and must ensure staff are supported appropriately.



Learn more about risks of harm and responses:

- British Medical Association (2024) [Vicarious trauma: signs and strategies for coping](#).
- [The Africa Online Safety Platform](#) (2024) provides resources for a safer internet in Africa.
- Asia Centre (2024) [Digital security training for high-risk users: Needs assessment report](#) provides an overview of digital security threats and safety measures.
- European Commission (2019) [Ethics guidelines for trustworthy AI](#).
- Amnesty International [Online Violence: Technology-facilitated gender-based violence](#) provides guidance and case studies on the use of technology to target women and girls.
- [Chayn DIY Online Safety Guide](#) (2025) is a co-created guide by survivors at the global non-profit [Chayn](#).
- [Mapping the Lived Experience Landscape in Mental Health](#) (2021), a project commissioned by NSUN and Mind, includes challenges and risks inherent in lived experience work.
- The UK National Youth Agency has issued guidance on working well with young people on its [Safeguarding and Risk Management Hub](#).
- Ignite Philanthropy (2025) report on [Survivor-Led Safeguarding: Lessons for Funders and the Field](#).

5 Designing the fund: Reducing the risk of harm from grant-making processes

Careful consideration of care, safety and wellbeing is an essential part of prevention and harm reduction and should begin at the design stage of any funding programme.

This section will help you consider:

- How to ensure that the safe design of your fund is informed by the knowledge of lived experience-led organisations?
- How to plan for and mitigate risks, including steps you can take to adapt safeguarding practice?

5.1 Incorporate the lived experience reality into decision-making

When funders understand the realities of LEOs and their differing experiences of safety and risk, you are better able to challenge assumptions, identify unintended consequences, and design funds that are ethical and safe. Involving individuals with lived experience directly enhances credible decision making as funders put the principle of “nothing about us without us”¹⁵ into action.

- **Consider how individuals with lived experience are represented on your board and leadership team.** This helps ensure expertise from lived experience informs decisions at a strategic level. In addition, having diversity of thought at leadership level, grounded in a genuine commitment to co-production, helps enable equity and embed safety in decision making. To achieve this, you may need to adapt ways of working – for example through changing the ways you recruit, ensuring greater diversity on recruitment panels, adapting the support for and induction of board members, and building greater awareness to how people process and digest information.
- **Embed lived experience expertise into advisory panels, steering committees, and fund reference groups**¹⁶. These groups can support the design and planning of funds by acting as a critical friend, giving honest and constructive feedback, and offering nuanced and credible insights to support safe design and reduce the risk of unintended harm. These groups should have a co-produced terms of reference with clear roles and responsibilities.
- **Review research reports, policies, guidance, blogs or other material published by people and groups with lived experience** to learn more about their concepts and understanding of care and safety, and how this impacts their approach to managing risks of their people and organisation.

¹⁵ This term is reported to have its origins in Poland, but has been adopted by the disability rights movement to demand the direct participation of people with disabilities in formation of policies and decisions about them.

¹⁶ For example, Comic Relief recruited a Fund Reference Group to shape and lead the design and delivery of their pooled Global Majority Fund. The Group was made up of people from the global majority and as part of their ‘shifting the’ power agenda.

“

We are trying to share our power by consulting with this expertise to curate our programme with people who have the frontline expertise.”

– Funder

- **Speak to your funder peers** who have knowledge and experience¹⁷ of funding lived experience work. This will provide insights into what is needed to support good safeguarding practice and any challenges you might face developing a safe and ethical fund.
- **Explicitly adopt an intersectional lens.** Racism, ableism, sexism, classism, and other systemic inequalities can influence who feels safe, who is heard, and who is protected. Understanding this complexity is key to creating safeguarding approaches that are genuinely equitable and proportionate. A “one-size-fits-all” model will rarely meet the needs of people working in organisations that sit at the intersections of multiple forms of discrimination. Adopting an explicit intersectional lens can help you see how existing systems and safeguarding norms can unintentionally exclude or harm people and help in the creation of safeguarding approaches that are genuinely equitable.

“

“Intersectionality is what happens when we do everything through the lens of making sure that no one is left behind.”

– Alicia Garza, Co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter

5.2 Clarify risks, mitigations, and resources and involve senior leadership

Your leadership team and board will determine the organisation’s risk appetite and the degree to which you are willing to accept certain risks in order to achieve your mission. While support to lived experience-led organisations can advance your mission, it is important to explicitly consider risks as well as benefits. Identifying risks should not prevent you from moving forward but will help ensure that the necessary time, resources and systems are in place to manage those risks.

- **Use your risk management procedures** to systematically identify, assess, and decide how to manage any potential risk when funding these organisations. Conversations with LEOs about how they manage their own risk can be useful to inform this process and reduces the risk of implementing protection measures that are inappropriate or disempowering.
- **Share the understanding of risks and needs with senior leadership.** This can include insights gained from staff, panels, and risk assessments so leadership gain a better understanding of the practical realities for people in LEOs. Engaging leadership teams and Boards at the earliest stage of fund design helps avoid the need to make adjustments after the fund is launched which can be difficult and costly.
- **Engage your designated safeguarding lead/focal point** so that their expertise helps ensure that safety is embedded throughout the design of the fund. Involving them at this stage will also provide the safeguarding lead with important knowledge so that they can update safeguarding procedures and practices to address any issues that might arise from a new LEO fund.

¹⁷ Examples of dedicated funds include The Global Fund for Children’s [Survivor-led Activism Fund](#), The Freedom Fund’s [Survivor Leadership Fund](#), the by and for [Baobab Foundation](#) supporting communities who have experienced racism, and the [Global Survivors Fund](#) for and with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

- **Secure budget for care, safety and wellbeing.** Lived experience-led organisations with limited funds will often prioritise support to their communities or efforts to advocate for change over support for their own safety, care and wellbeing. Funders can help ensure these needs are addressed by actively encouraging organisations to include dedicated budget lines for safety, care and wellbeing in their applications. Some funders may also want to build in budget for additional support (training, technical support, etc) beyond grant funding and to help LEOs strengthen their safeguarding (often referred to as 'funder plus'). However, there should be flexibility around how individual organisations can use this money so it meets their specific needs which could be anything from peer support spaces, clinical support, access to specialist services, wellbeing away days etc.
- **Include resources for crisis response.** Lived experience-led organisations are often disproportionately affected by sudden external crisis (for example, outbreaks of attacks or protests targeting specific communities might result in LEOs having to find and divert emergency resource for safety and security measures, as well as support to staff and their communities). Having a crisis budget available enables funders to move money at short notice to alleviate serious security and safety concerns. However, delays in transferring money can exacerbate safety concerns so agreeing procedures to delegate authority to move money without board approval can be important.

5.3 Update your safeguarding arrangements

As you develop and deliver your funding programmes, you should review and update your own internal safeguarding arrangements. This should begin at design stage and continue as you learn more about the realities of partnering with LEOs.

- **Ensure your designated safeguarding lead/focal point has the relevant skills, knowledge and capacity** to support work with lived experience-led groups (e.g. an understanding of trauma-informed practice).
- Where necessary, provide access to training or partner with safeguarding specialists with relevant experience. Also, make sure that they have sufficient time to support staff and engage with LEOs as needed.
- **Review safe recruitment procedures and support structures if you plan to recruit staff, assessors or board members with lived experiences.** This might include changes to the way you recruit, increasing diversity on recruitment panels, and changes to the induction process and support you offer your people.
 - **Implement a mechanism to ensure that any conflicts of interest** are declared. For example, assessors/staff may have connections to groups applying for funding. If so, they should be removed from reviewing that application to ensure fairness and impartiality.
 - **If you are funding through an intermediary partner,** you must ensure that they also have appropriate arrangements in place within the design and delivery of their funding programmes to work safely with, and support lived experience-led organisations.
 - **Ensure that all staff and volunteers are trained** in unconscious bias, and diversity, equity and inclusion, with a strong intersectional lens.
 - **Ensure data protection systems are adequate,** particularly where you are working with groups who may be at additional risk due to their work. Ensure that processes are in place to minimise the collection of personal and sensitive information and that appropriate data protection and security mechanisms are in place. If it is unsafe for activists working in high-risk countries to receive communications from funders (including automated emails), this must be included in communication protocols.
 - **Where you use Artificial Intelligence,** safe and equitable AI policies and practices should be in place and understood by all funder staff. In addition, care should be taken to ensure these procedures and practices reflect specific risks for the people and organisations with lived experience that you interact and engage with.

5.4 Plan support for staff with lived experience

While the safety and wellbeing of all staff should always be a consideration, particular care should be taken for those with lived experience of the issues they are working on. Continuous exposure to issues related to an individual's own experience can (although not always) cause distress and affect wellbeing, especially when there are insufficient internal support systems. Putting such systems in place at design stage will support the retention of valued skills and expertise. Measures that can be implemented include:

- **Develop a wellbeing approach** (and policy) that is appropriately resourced¹⁸. This will support all staff, not just those with lived experience.
- **Establish a dedicated internal staff working group** so that people with different types of first-hand experience can guide steps to promote a healthy work place, create environments that embrace diverse needs and support practices that improve self-care. These groups should be adequately resourced and supported.
- **Be aware of the impact on staff if/when asking them to talk about their lived experience** and ensure that respect, choice, consent and confidentiality are central in all requests. Internal staff working groups can play a pivotal role here by providing guidance to help prevent unintended harm.
- **Provide support for staff with specific needs** (e.g. disabilities, mental ill-health, distress or trauma) to have flexible work structures in policy and practice.
- **Offer safe spaces for people to rest**, both physical spaces and virtual (with cameras and microphones off, with breakout rooms to pause, etc).
- **Create peer support** within and across teams.
- **Provide access to culturally relevant support services** that reflect the diversity and experiences of your staff. This could include investing in clinical supervisors for group sessions, and culturally relevant Employee Assistant Programmes.

Learn more about fund design:

- Bayers Business School guidance on [Lived experience in nonprofit boards](#).
- Blog from Alliance (January 2024) on [12 things charities that centre 'lived experience' get right](#).
- The Human Rights Funders Network (July 2022) report on [Funding for Intersectional Organising: A Call to Action for Human Rights Philanthropy](#).
- The Alliance of Gender Equality In Europe (July 2024) analysis of [Intersectionality in our grant making: A learning journey](#).
- Resource & Support Hub (2021) guidance sheet on [Intersectionality and safeguarding](#).
- Womenkind Worldwide (November 2019) news on [Intersectionality 101: what is it and why is it important? - Womankind Worldwide and Making Visible: The Lived Realities of LBTQI+ across Nepal, Uganda and Zimbabwe](#).
- Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) (2021) handbook on [Applying a Feminist Lens to Grantmaking for Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls: Funding for Transformative Change](#).
- Project Evident & Technology Association of Grantmakers (2023) [Responsible AI adoption in philanthropy: An initial framework for grant-makers \(V1\)](#).
- Blog from We are CAST (2025) on [AI Together: Exploring the Safe Use of AI](#).



¹⁸ Adapted from [Supporting Employees with Lived Experience](#) a report by Esmée Fairbairn, Peer Power Youth, and Place Matters, developed with staff in lived experience-led organisations.

6 Applications and assessments: Implementing a safe and equitable approach

Funders should carefully consider their approach to assessments to ensure that the process is fair, equitable, and avoids harm. Within this, you should seek to understand how potential grantee partners keep people safe.

This section will help you consider:

- How to implement assessment and due diligence practices that are inclusive and avoid harm to people in lived experience-led organisations?
- How to seek assurance about safeguarding practice in ways that are appropriate and proportionate for lived experience-led organisations?

6.1 Avoid funding criteria that excludes or require disclosure

While it is important to establish clear criteria to ensure applications meet strategic priorities, care must be taken to ensure these do not unfairly exclude some LEOs or create pressure on individuals to disclose experiences, or trauma related to their lived experience.

- **Any requirement to have a specific proportion of leadership or staff positions filled by individuals with lived experience¹⁹ must be balanced with an awareness of structural inequalities** that may prevent people from formalising their engagement. For example, people who do not have a right to work will not be able to hold formal employment roles in organisations. Similarly, people below the age of 18 are barred in most countries from holding governance roles, which means they are legally unable to formally join the board of a young people-led organisation.
- **Consider alternative ways to clarify lived experience to avoid creating pressure to disclose personal experience for the purpose of securing funding.** This can be done by looking at an organisation's systems and structures. For example, is there explicit reference to lived experience in job descriptions²⁰ or within the Theory of Change or Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework? How do people with lived experience influence decision-making? Are people with lived experience included in strategic decision-making groups? Are there lived experience leadership opportunities and programmes? These types of questions not only reduce the pressure on formal disclosure but will also give you a better sense of how lived experience is embedded across an organisation.

¹⁹ For example, **Funders for Race Equality Alliance** (FREAA) require that 75% of senior leadership teams, including trustee boards, are from the communities the organisation serves. The **Disability Rights Fund** defines a Disabled Persons Organisation as one where "persons with disabilities constitute a majority of the overall staff, board, and volunteers in all levels of the organization". That is least 75% of the board and 50% of staff and volunteers. In 2023, **UN Women** required women-led organisations to "evidence that a minimum of 61% of leadership positions ... including in management, senior management and board levels are held by women".

²⁰ For example, the UK **Equality Act 2020** allows providers to run single sex services and recruit staff into those services as part of a legal single-sex exemption or exceptions relating to biological sex.

6.2 Consider the emotional impact of the application process

Every funding application takes time, resources and energy, with no guarantee that funding will be agreed. This can divert resources away from an organisation's core work, particularly in small LEOs with limited staff. It can also have an emotional impact if applicants, explicitly or implicitly, feel pressure to relive and summarise complex and personal lived experience.

- **Ensure the application and assessment process is proportionate to the size of grant.** Consider adopting a lighter-touch approach such as requesting shorter initial applications, and only asking for detailed information when the application progresses to a second stage. Gathering compliance related documents also takes time so consider when it is really necessary to ask for this information.
- **Make application deadlines long enough** for LEOs to find out about funding calls and then complete the application process. This will reduce the risk of burnout associated with short application timescales, and avoid reinforcing feelings of marginalisation among LEOs who are less networked and may not have the capacity to promptly identify new funding opportunities.
- **Recognise that applications that focus on demonstrating 'need' can be emotionally demanding for people with lived experience of injustice and may feel extractive.** For example, asking an organisation to describe structural and systemic social problems with long historical roots within limited words. Where possible, focus on allowing applicants to share solutions and impact, rather than just demonstrating need, or consider building in conversations where there is more opportunity to establish rapport and organisations can share relevant context.

“

Our biggest issue as a funder is meeting the level of need...It is enormous and we can only support a small proportion of those who apply.”

– Funder

- **Make sure not to create pressure – even implicitly – for applicants to share accounts of their lived experience.** Even if you don't require such accounts, LEOs may feel an implicit pressure to share experiences to demonstrate the need for their work or establish their own credibility. Avoid this by explicitly requesting strengths-based information about the organisation's progress rather than personal testimony.

6.3 Ensure a strong equity lens

When your approach is accessible and promotes equitable engagement, you are more likely to reach and fund impactful work rather than selecting organisations that are familiar with, and able to navigate, funder processes.

- **Use spoken and written language that is simple and understandable.** Avoid jargon and provide materials that accommodate different literacy levels.
- **Consider what adaptations might be required to make materials accessible,** such as making materials available in braille, large print and audio formats for partially sighted or blind people, additional languages common in the community or population the target organisations serve, or in different fonts and formats for people who are neurodivergent.
- **Make sure information about new funds reaches those that need it most.** You can do this through intermediary partners, influential actors who are locally connected, or community networks and their public meetings and digital platforms. You could also consider hosting live or pre-recorded webinars specifically tailored to LEOs.
- **Provide sign or language interpretation at assessment meetings.** However, care is needed as people may have experienced harm as a result of misrepresentation, poor interpretation or inappropriate behaviour by interpreters. Ensure interpreters are familiar with relevant vocabulary, linguistic and cultural nuances. Be clear that their role is to interpret only, rather than summarise or probe. As much as possible, give LEOs options about the gender of interpreters.

- **Do not assume that everyone has access to the same technology or workspace.** This should be considered at the design stage, but you can also include channels for LEOs to reach out if they are encountering challenges so that this does not act as a barrier to applying for funding.
- **Where you can, allow applications in different formats** such as audio or video as well as written applications. Ensure there is informed consent from people featured in photos or video, and let organisations know how long you'll hold their applications and when they will be deleted.
- **Try to adapt your ways of working to facilitate engagement.** This could include ensuring that meeting times suit those with work, caring or study commitments.
- **If you are conducting assessment meetings, share information in advance.** This includes agendas, questions, and where suitable to do so, the names and roles of funder staff attending the meeting. Request consent before recording or using artificial intelligence notes, and give people the genuine option to say no.
- **Consider the cost implications of the process** for LEOs and cover or support with expenses if they help remove barriers and ensure inclusive engagement (e.g. travel, childcare, data costs etc).
- **Consider building in light-touch feedback for unsuccessful applicants** so that they are better equipped and in a more informed position to apply and secure other or future funding.
- **Train all assessors** on the assessment process so they understand expectations and any specific considerations related to lived experience-led organisations. Peer conversations about how they can manage their own wellbeing during the process can also be helpful.
- **Ensure that appropriate levels of support is available.** The level of support will depend on the nature of the fund and the needs of the team. It could include space to debrief and feedback or access to individual or group supervision. It is essential that people are encouraged, and not penalised, for sharing concerns, and that the organisation listens and makes reasonable adjustment based on any issues raised.
- **Pay particular attention to the wellbeing of peer reviewers who have lived experience** of the issues addressed by the funding programme. Where you can, work with peer reviewers to co-produce a support plan and ensure the necessary resources are available for its delivery. People must not be penalised for asking for support or raising concerns.

6.4 Support to assessors and funder staff

Reading applications or engaging in meetings where personal information and accounts of lived experience are shared can be difficult, particularly if this includes details of past trauma. To reduce the impact on staff and assessors:

- **Introduce a wider panel of assessors** so individuals have fewer applications to review, have time to digest information, and take breaks away from the content.

6.5 Reviewing safeguarding in lived experience-led organisations

Being sensitive to the needs of lived experience-led organisations does not mean lowering your expectation that organisations keep people safe. Care should be taken to understand how LEOs approach safeguarding. Your approach should aim to convey a genuine interest in preventing and responding to harm, as presenting safeguarding as only a compliance measure can cause mistrust and reinforce negative perceptions of funders.

- **The term safeguarding may be unfamiliar to some lived experience-led organisations.** If you can, use local and contextualised terms that are familiar in the places that you fund and that organisations themselves use. At a minimum, your communications (both written and in meetings) should clearly explain what you mean by safeguarding, while also ensuring that there is flexibility for lived experience-led organisations to express their approach in terms that makes sense to them.

- **The historical underfunding of LEOs means that their policies may not always meet funder expectations, but their practice may exceed what is documented.** You should, therefore, seek to understand their practices rather than relying solely on written policies.

“

Funder requirements often feel like it is to protect them and not us.”

– Lived experience-led organisation

- **Guidance on how organisations keep people safe may be contained in multiple documents**, such as codes of conduct, community agreements, staff handbooks, wellbeing frameworks, etc. LEOs may not have a document specifically called a ‘safeguarding policy’. You should prioritise ensuring that organisations have clear and accessible guidance, while allowing them to determine how this is guidance is framed and where it is held.
- **Where there are gaps, organisations should be encouraged to update their policies and procedures** so that there is clear and consistent guidance on safe practice. Organisations should have flexibility to develop measures that are relevant to their day-to-day work, the specific risks they face, and framed within the relevant national and legal context in which they operate.

For more information about the assessment process:

- Association of Charitable Foundations guidance on [Assessing and Selecting the Work We Support](#).
- Funder Safeguarding Collaborative’s Essentials Guide for Funders (2023) on [Safeguarding & Participatory Grant Making](#).
- Segal Family Foundation (2024) has collated resources and templates from a number of funders to promote equity in philanthropy in their [Equitable Giving Toolkit](#).
- NCVO (2021) information about [Safeguarding in Grant Applications](#).



7 Grant management: Working in partnership

Ensuring safety does not stop at the application stage. Building in opportunities for open and collaborative communication within grant management helps funders to understand the realities facing lived experience-led organisations, including any safeguarding issues or challenges that may emerge.

This section will help you consider:

- What are some of the practical ways to support safe practice through relational grant management with lived experience-led organisations?
- How to plan and host online and offline meetings to prioritise care and safety?
- What are the specific issues to consider when receiving and responding to safeguarding concerns reported by lived experience-led organisations?

7.1 Invest in trust-based relationships

Trust-based philanthropy has been gaining momentum over recent years with many funders shifting to a more relational approach²¹. This can support safeguarding as it encourages more regular, open communications which allow funder staff to learn about the issues that LEOs are facing.

- **Do not rely only on contracts to communicate your safeguarding expectations, conditions or reporting obligations.** Be open and transparent from the outset, through written communications, on-boarding meetings, and conversations during grant set-up.
- **Normalise safeguarding in conversations** rather than waiting until an issue arises. Finding ways to talk about safeguarding that centres on people, and regularly asking about care and wellbeing, shows that you are genuinely interested in people's safety and wellbeing. This can help LEOs feel safe to share information.
- **Avoid knee-jerk reactions** when there are safeguarding concerns or gaps in safeguarding practice. Some organisations work in inherently riskier (or perceived as riskier) contexts where safeguarding related challenges may be more likely. Work with the LEO by listening and seeking to understand the issues, providing space to think through what safeguarding needs they may have. Offer resources or access to support where reasonable and feasible for you to do so.
- **Improve trust by ensuring data protection and security protocols are in place.** For lived experience activists and advocates in high-risk contexts, security protocols are essential, including when communicating with or receiving funds. Sensitive information must be stored securely and there should be documented protocols for communicating with partners and their people to ensure confidentiality. Consult with local experts who understand the context (and the specific risks) on safety and security to avoid unintended harm.

“

We actively support our partners so they come and talk to us rather than ‘report concerns’. They know we will try to help them first.”

– Funder

7.2 Offer capacity building and support

Some funders already provide support beyond grant funding to help organisations strengthen their future resilience (often referred to as a 'funder plus' approach). This is particularly important for lived experience-led organisations as it helps them address often overlooked needs, such as the emotional and mental impact of their work.

Ways you can provide this kind of support include:

- **Budget for access to safeguarding consultants or additional expertise** who can help to develop or review policies, provide training and/or support with incident management. Ideally, consultants should be based in the context where the LEO is operating and understand the issues they seek to tackle.
- **Allow budget for rest and recovery workshops, training and other forms of support.** This might include safeguarding training for those with strategic oversight aimed at formalising or strengthening safeguarding governance structures. It could also include access to coaching and mentoring for designated safeguarding leads/focal points given their critical role.
- **Facilitate peer learning spaces** with past and current lived experience-led grantees to share learning about promoting safety and wellbeing with each other. These spaces will also provide you with an opportunity to learn and inform your own practice.
- **Organise specialist workshops on issues** relevant to LEOs, such as trauma-informed practice, preparedness in the face of public unrest, risk management, survivor-centred investigations, etc. These workshops should always be planned in collaboration with organisations to ensure the issues covered are relevant and address their specific needs.

7.3 At times of crisis, flex your approach to meet theirs

External crisis can create additional stress on people who may already be navigating multiple challenges related to their lived experience. Being flexible and responding to needs as they arise can make their (and your) work more sustainable as well as supporting individual wellbeing. Things that you can do include:

- **Moving a reporting deadline or adapting requests.** For example, where a progress report is required and genuinely cannot be delayed, consider whether the information might be obtained in other ways such as a light-touch conversation that can be recorded in lieu of a report. If you had planned for monitoring or other visits, explore whether these can be delayed or take place online.
- **Be proportionate with your communications** recognising that dealing with your requests will take time and energy, and may divert resources away from managing the response to the crisis.
- **Where a LEO is unable to respond due to exceptional circumstances, adopt compassionate reasoning** that takes the situation into account, so that the organisation is treated fairly and not viewed unfavourably in future.
- **If there are safeguarding concerns,** an assessment will need to be made based on available information, recognising that the LEO may not be able to respond immediately with further details. The situation should be regularly monitored and support provided if feasible.

“

There was a military escalation in our country as our project reached final stages. Our team were unable to work because of the emotional impact. The donor was very strict in finalising the project.”

– Lived experience-led organisation

- **Where a LEO faces financial struggles because of crisis,** consider whether you can provide additional funding to cover core costs. If the organisation is unable to complete planned activities within agreed timescales, consider allowing them to accrue funds to the next financial year.
- **Offering non-financial support can be valuable.** Consider whether you can offer access to internal specialists such as communications, finance or legal teams. In addition, consider whether you can facilitate peer connections with other grantee partners to support improved coordination and mobilisation.
- **Consider whether you can use your influence** in others ways and providing it does not create additional risks or unintended harm. For example, you may publish a public statement or coordinate signatures to an open letter with other funders by way of support or to show unity in relation to an issue.

7.4 Managing the reporting of and response to safeguarding concerns

Funders may require grantee partners to inform them when serious safeguarding concerns arise. This can be difficult for any organisation, due to fear of funding being withdrawn. The impact on lived experience-led organisations can be even more acute as their work may already be seen as higher risk, and they may worry that reporting concerns will reinforce stereotypes or add to stigma around their community. The fear of reporting may be magnified within organisations if they have previously been failed by partners, or even harmed when issues have been raised by statutory agencies or those in positions of power.

If you require safeguarding incidents to be reported, always provide clear guidance for grantee partners that explains the purpose of reporting, what should (and should not) be reported, how information will be handled and how you will respond.

“

We are not experts in handling reports so we also need help ... Some of the reports are complex and upsetting.”

– Funder

In addition, there are some particular important considerations when working with LEOs:

- **There must be clear guidance about privacy, confidentiality, and data handling.** This should include explicit guidance not to ask for personal data, to ensure consent is in place where relevant, and guidelines on confidentiality when sharing information internally. This is particularly important for LEOs working in high-risk contexts or where any breach of sensitive information could put them or their work at risk.
- **Timelines for reporting concerns need to be realistic** to allow the organisation to respond to the issue, and ensure the safety of people involved before reporting to funders. This is particularly important for LEOs which are small or have limited capacity.
- **Funder staff should receive training on responding to concerns and have access to wellbeing support.** This is important if staff also have lived experience.
- **Ensure the person handling the concern is confident and competent** to manage concerns, and is aware of the context and additional considerations created by the organisation's connection to lived experience. Generally, this should be led by your designated safeguarding lead/focal point.
- **Some LEOs may find these situations hard to manage without specialist expertise.** You can support by facilitating (and funding) access to external experts including independent investigators.
- **Equally, some lived experience-led organisations will have significant experience in responding to concerns,** particularly if they are survivor-centred or trauma-informed. This is an opportunity for you to understand and support their approach rather than impose solutions.

- **If a LEO refuses to take safeguarding issues seriously, and attempts to resolve the matter have been exhausted, further action may be required.**
As a last resort, you may decide to withdraw or suspend funding but this should always be based on an assessment of the risks of doing so. The wellbeing of everyone involved should be prioritised throughout.
- **There should be a clear procedure for how you will respond to reports from third parties outside the LEO,** for example via your whistleblowing policy, or complaint channels on your websites. While this is not unique to LEOs, particular care and sensitivity is needed to avoid deepening trauma among people who may already feel disbelieved, marginalised or threatened due to their lived experience.

7.5 Safety at online and in-person meetings

Online webinars or meetings may present particular safety and security considerations when working with people with lived experience of injustice. Where possible, design protocols with lived experience-led organisations so that they reflect the needs of the people engaging. Things to consider include:

- **Choose platforms that are considered safe** and that have strong security control (passwords, waiting rooms, etc).
- **Share guidance in advance** that cameras may be turned off and showing names on screens is optional so that people can protect their privacy.

“

One of our partners was working in a refugee camp. Usually you need an official notice to join an online meeting. Half way through the meeting it got raided by camp police and the laptop, projector, and all personal phones were confiscated.”

– Funder

- **Only allow access to the meeting via waiting rooms and know how to remove people if needed.**
- **Encourage the use of headphones** so that only those invited to discussions can hear. Where sign interpretation is visible, ensure that people consider the risks.
- **If you are recording or using artificial intelligence to transcribe meetings, check that people are comfortable with this and ask for their consent.** Even when people consent, it may inhibit their engagement so always balance the benefits with the impact on people's feelings of, and actual, safety and security.
- **The pace of meetings should support people to digest information** based on differing needs and include breaks and pauses for reflections.
- **Ensure access to support.** Depending on the nature of the discussion, this might mean having more than one host so that someone is available for support if issues emerge. Depending on the topic, you might choose to involve someone with clinical expertise to help hold the space as safely as possible. Where possible, offer and respect requests to speak to people of similar genders, religious or racial backgrounds.
- **Ensure that people know how to access aftercare where appropriate.** This might be through providing a check-in on wellbeing yourself or through contracting or signposting to other support services, depending on what is proportionate.
- **All recorded notes must be stored securely in line with good data protection practice.** Consider the implications of holding these records. Be mindful that you could receive subject access requests (or similar) that mean they would need to be shared outside your organisation.

Most of these measures can be adapted for **in-person meetings**. However, when meeting in person, you should ask lived experience-led organisations about their own safety and security protocols and ensure that these are followed. Lone working policies should be in place, with arrangements made to meet in secure locations with appropriate arrangements in place for safe transport to and from the location.

7.6 Seek out learning and feedback during and at the end of funding

It is important to learn and document how your funding programme interacts with people's personal and professional experiences, and the implications for safety and wellbeing.

- **Where possible, co-design feedback processes with LEOs** at the start of funding programme. This can increase accessibility in language, improve the framing of questions, and ensure adaptation for different learning or communication styles.
 - **Carefully consider when you obtain feedback.** Relational grant-making can allow you to obtain real-time feedback during the partnership. However, obtaining feedback at the end of the grant relationship may mean that grantee partners may be less worried that feedback could affect funding and may feel more able to give open, honest or critical feedback.
 - **Carefully consider whether the feedback is identifiable or anonymised.** Obtaining identifiable feedback means you can delve deeper to gain a better understanding of the issues. However, people may feel more able to be honest if feedback is anonymous.
- If you offer anonymous feedback, consider whether individuals could be indirectly identified because of their lived experience or because there is a smaller pool of people involved.
- If appropriate, **consider running feedback sessions led by people with similar experiences and backgrounds** if this can be done safely. This may help unlock feedback and ensure it is understood within the context of the LEO's work and experience.
 - If **safeguarding issues are shared in feedback**, they must be safely raised with your designated safeguarding lead to ensure an appropriate response and future learning.
 - **Share learning to inform future programmes.** This should be done internally but could also include sharing learning with partners and other funders. However, care is needed to manage sensitive information and maintain confidentiality.
 - Depending on the scale of the engagement, **organisations should be fairly compensated for their time, skills and expertise.** Budget will need to be allocated for this.



Learn more about funder approaches to safeguarding:

- Funder Safeguarding Collaborative (2021) guidance for funders on [Funder Approaches to Safeguarding Challenges, positive practices, and opportunities for collaboration.](#)
- CHS Alliance guidance on tackling sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in aid work [Putting Victims and Survivors First | CHS Alliance.](#)
- [Supporting Employees with Lived Experience](#) is a report by Esmée Fairbairn, Peer Power Youth, and Place Matters developed with staff in lived experience-led organisations.
- Resource & Support Hub (March 2022) [Tip Sheet: Workplace wellbeing and safeguarding - For CSOs in developing and humanitarian settings](#) and (April 2022) [Pocket Guide: Safeguarding persons with disabilities and/or mental health conditions in the workplace.](#)
- South London CSA Support Services guidance on [Supporting survivor-practitioners in the workplace.](#)
- HSBC Asia Pacific perspective (2024) on [Trust-based philanthropy the Asian way | HSBC Private Bank.](#)
- Resource & Support Hub (2023) for [Safeguarding risk management of an event: A 3-step guide.](#)
- AVA's [Digital Safeguarding Resource](#) (2020) which includes guidance on digital risk in online platforms and in ways of communicating and working.
- BOND (2025), [Closing programs whilst continuing to keep people safe: what to consider.](#)

8 Communications: Safe promotion of work

Requests to involve lived experience-led organisations in communications, presentations and visits can increase the visibility of their work but can also create risks and cause disruption if not done with care.

This section will help you consider:

- What are some of the key principles in planning communications that feature lived experience-led organisations?
- How to safely engage speakers with lived experience at funder events?
- How to ensure that funder visits do not cause unintended harm?

8.1 Requests to feature in communications

Funders are in a unique position to showcase the work of lived experience organisations. When done without due attention and care, sharing stories can put individuals and organisations at risk of harm.

- **Work with LEOs to consider the potential risks as well as benefits.** For example, social media channels are increasingly mobilised to target and harass people and communities who are marginalised. Risks and agreed mitigations should be documented in a risk assessment, with LEOs having choice about how and where their stories are told.

- **Obtain informed consent.** LEOs must be given enough information to help them decide whether they are happy to be included in communications. This should include where, when, and how information will be shared and how long it will be used. Organisations should be given sufficient time to consider the implications, and to make the right decision for their people and organisation. Obtaining informed consent must include a discussion of any related risks.
- **Respect their safeguarding approach** and be guided by their know-how about lived experience engagement in communication activities. This includes honouring and respecting the values of LEOs as the foundation of a mutually beneficial collaboration.
- **Ensure an accurate portrayal.** Framing people's experience through single-lens issues²² often fails to accurately portray the complexity of individuals' lived reality. You should seek and respect the LEO's wishes around how stories are told and promote strengths-based stories to showcase their capabilities.
- **Lived experience-led organisations must know that they have the right to say 'no' and that this will not affect their funding.** Historically, LEOs have struggled to secure funding and consequently, they may have a strong desire to accommodate your requests. Working to establish a relationship can help to facilitate honest conversations about what is realistic and appropriate.

“

As a refugee, if I make a small mistake then the government could target me so I have to be careful and make sure we do everything correctly.”

– Lived experience-led organisation

²² Author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED Talk (2009) on [The Danger of a Single Story](#)

8.2 Requests to speak at funder events

Lived experience-led organisations can receive more requests to speak at events (in person or online) given the power and impact of sharing real life experiences. This exposure and the credibility is often welcomed by many LEOs, but appropriate safeguards must be in place to avoid (re) trauma, information shared being used against them, or experiences being challenged.

- As with all speakers, **LEOs must be equipped with enough information** to help them decide whether to participate. This should include information about the purpose of the event, who the audience is, and what commitment is required. Information about photography and recordings must be shared and consent obtained.
- The **specific risks to individuals must be discussed** as part of an ongoing process. This should not simply address risks to safety and security but should also consider emotional wellbeing, risk of discrimination and reinforcing structural inequalities. Funders must be clear that they do not expect LEOs to take any risks they are not comfortable with.
- **There should always be a thorough briefing(s) in advance** of events to support lived experience speakers. This includes support to shape talking points (if needed), being made aware of potential questions, and informing funders of questions that might be off-limits.
- **Individuals with lived experience must have equal standing with other speakers.** This means being given an equal amount of time to present and speaking early (not last). They should also be informed about the dress code so that they feel comfortable, and any other 'what to expect' information.

“

I have been explaining my story for many years so I now just do it naturally. It has become my way of living but it has cost me many things like being away from my community.”

– Lived experience-led organisation

- **There must be a process for managing audience questions** to avoid insensitive and overly probing questions. Speakers should be aware and supported to refuse to answer questions if they are uncomfortable or the questions are inappropriate.
- **There must be suitable accessibility arrangements** to meet the specific needs of all lived experience participants. This extends to venue, hotel and transport spaces that can support access for people with disabilities or who are neurodivergent. Access needs should be directed by attendees, but the logistical arrangements facilitated by the funder (if this is what they prefer), as this supports people with lived experience to influence the planning without adding to their own workload.
- **No one should be allowed to record people with lived experience speaking at events without consent.** This must be considered as part of the risk assessment with measures implemented to reduce the risk and/or prevent any person recording without permission.
- **Speakers should be remunerated or compensated for their expertise and time,** especially if it takes them away from their core work.
- **Always check in and formally debrief** after the event and then a short period later as agreed once people have had enough time to reflect and share feedback.

8.3 Funder visits

Trustees and staff of funders often have a particular interest in visiting lived experience-led organisations to learn about their experiences first hand. When you arrange visits, all participants must understand the importance of safeguarding and what is expected of them. While it is good practice to set out expectations around all visits within your safeguarding policies, some considerations are particularly important when working with LEOs.

- **Visitors must follow the safeguarding measures required by the LEO,** recognising that there may be specific risks or sensitivities that are specific to individual's lived experience which the funder and other visitors may not be fully understand.
- **In particular, visitors should be given clear guidance around asking about people's lived experience** as this could cause distress or be seen as extractive.

- **Agreement for photography or filming should be obtained in advance, reconfirmed during the visit, and written consent obtained.** This is particularly important when working with LEOs from marginalised communities as being photographed without consent by those in positions of power can carry historical and ongoing legacies of exploitation and being 'studied'.
- **Visitors must not be allowed to take photos on personal phones.** This presents a data security risk, as you and the LEO will have limited oversight or control over how photos on personal devices are used, stored, or shared.
- **While visitors may wish to engage with and support the work undertaken by the organisation, it is important that boundaries are maintained.** This **includes not contacting or visiting the LEOs outside agreed times** and without knowledge of the funder, not exchanging personal contact numbers, and not connecting on social media channels with any vulnerable person.
- Funder staff must be clear about their responsibilities to **report any inappropriate behaviour by funder visitors** to the appropriate safeguarding lead/focal point in order to address concerns without delay.

Learn more about communications and engagement:

- Dignified Storytelling is a global platform led by The Alliance providing a set of [Principles](#) and their [Dignified Storytelling Handbook](#).
- Resource & Support Hub (2023) [Safeguarding risk management of an event: A 3-step guide](#).
- UNICEF, [Childhood in a Digital World Screen time, digital skills and mental health](#).
- World Health Organisation (2024), [Teens, screens and mental health](#).
- Save The Children (2023) [Children's Consultations in Humanitarian Contexts](#).
- Resource & Support Hub (2022) [Tip Sheet Safe Media & Communications for CSOs in Nigeria](#).
- BOND (2024) [Putting the people in the pictures first: Guidelines for the ethical production and use of content \(images and stories\)](#).



Funder Safeguarding Collaborative (FSC) supports grant-making organisations across the globe that want to ensure that their work and the work they fund keep people safe.

FSC provides funders with a unique community to learn and share about safeguarding practice and policy with their peers, along with practical and tailored assistance for funders to help them find the right solutions for their specific context.

The collaborative also invests in member led initiatives to help keep people safe and strengthen safeguarding globally.



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