



**Funder
Safeguarding
Collaborative**

Summary Report

Safeguarding in Philanthropy

**Safer grant-making
for greater impact**

January 2026

1 Introduction

Every year, funders invest billions aimed at achieving positive change in the world. The impact of this investment is undermined when organisations, through their actions or omissions, cause harm to people or communities.

Increasingly, funders are incorporating safeguarding requirements into their assessment and due diligence procedures, requiring applicants to demonstrate that certain measures are in place in order to qualify for funding. Once funding is approved, grantee partners may be required to comply with safeguarding requirements as part of their grant agreement.

While funders are increasingly taking action on safeguarding, a study by Funder Safeguarding Collaborative in 2021 found inconsistent, unrealistic expectations, tick-box approaches to due diligence, and gaps in funder knowledge. Individually and collectively, funders are seeking to address these challenges but stronger evidence about what works is needed to support these efforts.

Building on this, the Funder Safeguarding Collaborative commissioned Accountable Now to conduct research to map current funder practice and generate new evidence on which measures are effective in supporting safer organisations. Altogether 87 grant-making organisations, 285 grantee partners and 55 sector professionals contributed to the study, which combined a literature review, surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups.

This report presents a summary of the research findings. It has seven thematic sections, covering different stages of the grant cycle. It looks at the ways in which funders approach safeguarding in their grant-making, which practices are effective, as well as the resource implications of doing safeguarding well.

This report presents a summary of the findings of the study. For the full findings, as well as the details on the methodology, bibliography and acknowledgements see the report [Safeguarding in Philanthropy: Safer grant-making for greater impact](#).

2 Definitions and Scope of Safeguarding

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We see safeguarding, safety, and wellbeing as interconnected and inseparable, and we align our advice with national legislation while tailoring our approach to the needs of our partners.”

— Funder, Europe

Q Key findings

- » To be effective, findings suggest that safeguarding should go beyond an exclusive focus on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse and should consider all forms of harm.
- » Grantee partners were much more likely than funders to include staff and volunteers within the scope of safeguarding
- » Some funders and grantee partners also include the environment as a subject of safeguarding measures, although this is still relatively uncommon.

This research found that clarity about definitions and scope of safeguarding is essential to give grantee partners confidence about what is expected.

If funders use definitions that differ widely, this can create additional workload for grantee partners as they have to adapt their policies and practices each time to be eligible for funding. Both funders and grantee partners agree that safeguarding is more effective when it is holistic and applies to anyone in contact with the organisation as this places an emphasis on building a strong organisational culture of accountability rather than focusing on specific groups.

Recommendations for Funders

- 1 Adopt a broad view of safeguarding that considers all forms of harm that might be experienced. Clarify expectations for the safeguarding of people more vulnerable to harm.
- 2 Ensure there is a clear definition of safeguarding in grant-related documents.
- 3 Discuss definitions and scope of safeguarding with peer organisations who make grants in similar issue areas and align your policies as far as you can.
- 4 Be flexible in terms of how grantee partners operationalise their definitions and avoid requests for narrow policies targeting specific vulnerable groups.
- 5 Consider staff wellbeing as part of safeguarding.

3 Due Diligence and Funder Requirements

Q Key findings

- » 70% of funders check safeguarding policies but due diligence should also explore how policies work in practice.
- » Funders stated that it was helpful to discuss risks with applicants as it provides useful indications of ownership of safeguarding in the organisation.
- » Safer recruitment practices emerged as a positive indication of effective safeguarding practices.
- » It can be helpful to encourage organisations to assign safeguarding responsibilities but to be effective, safeguarding leads need time, capacity and resources.
- » Grantee partners reported that funder requirements that encourage the involvement of senior leadership and boards in safeguarding have a positive impact.
- » Clarity, simplicity and greater alignment in funder requirements are helpful.

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When funders require specific documents, to be aligned with their own, it can either lead the potential grantee to exclude themselves, or the potential grantee creates or copies a policy that is not fit for their purpose.”

– Grantee Partner, Europe

The research found that funders have diverse safeguarding requirements, but in general, grantee partners view these as clear and realistic.

However, where organisations have multiple funders, they may have to spend a lot of time and effort to meet each funder's specific requirements.

Furthermore, too much focus on policies may be unhelpful. While the majority of funders check grantee partners' safeguarding policies, fewer discuss or explore how these work in practice, which may lead to safeguarding being treated as a tick-box exercise. In contrast, grantees reported that asking questions about how policies work in practice helped them remain up to date and improve internal systems.

Recommendations for Funders

- 1 Simplify requirements and templates and align with other funders where possible.
- 2 Ensure expectations are realistic and proportionate to the activities to be undertaken, level of risk and capacity of the organisation.
- 3 Go beyond checking the existence of policies and seek to understand how they work in practice.
- 4 Support staff to know how to start discussions on safeguarding.
- 5 Assess and discuss the specific risks related to the project to ensure your expectations are proportional and support the identification and mitigation of risk.
- 6 Encourage grantee partners to discuss risks with stakeholders and communities, to ensure safeguarding measures are contextualised.
- 7 Be open to alternatives to background checks – safer recruitment is more than just criminal background checks.
- 8 Don't automatically reject higher risk proposals, but consider how risks can be managed.
- 9 Don't rule out grantee partners who have previously experienced safeguarding incidents, but look at how these were reported and managed, and for evidence of learning and improvements.

Recommendations for Grantee Partners

- 1 If you are concerned about the impact of funder requirements, it is important to raise this so that funders can continue to improve their approach and support your work.
- 2 Clarify and document your approach to safeguarding and build on other existing accountability mechanisms.

4 Monitoring and Check-Ins

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To stay responsive, quarterly check-ins with grantees help track evolving safety and wellbeing priorities, which can change with the environment or even as a result of the grantees' own work.”

– Funder, North America

Q Key findings

- » Open and trustful dialogue between funders and grantee partners can contribute to strengthening safeguarding and help ensure a shared understanding about lived realities.
- » It is particularly effective when conversations on safeguarding are informal and not simply an issue raised after a safeguarding incident or concern.
- » While 43% of funders check in on safeguarding through calls and meetings, over a quarter (26%) do not monitor safeguarding at all.
- » Field visits can provide valuable insights but require careful planning to manage power dynamics and avoid overwhelming grantee partners or diverting resources away from operations.

This research found that regular conversations about safeguarding can support safer practice. While many funders do include safeguarding in their monitoring practices, a substantial number do not monitor safeguarding at all.

The level of discussion on safeguarding generally depends on the grant type and may be constrained by internal funder capacity. Where funders stipulate that grantee partners are required to make improvements in safeguarding as part of grant conditions, these funders are more likely to provide additional resources, such as access to external expertise or additional funding to grantee partners.

Recommendations for Funders

- 1 Make space for continued discussions on safeguarding with grantee partners.
- 2 Ensure that grantees feel safe to reach out regarding their safeguarding progress or challenges.
- 3 Check on safeguarding if activities have been adjusted or the context has radically changed.

Recommendations for Grantee Partners

- 1 If your funder is open to it, tell them when new and significant risks arise and/or when there are rapid changes in your context.

5 Technical Support

This research found that most funders do not provide technical support for grantee partners unless they have asked for it or due diligence assessments indicate that support is necessary.

However, grantee organisations reported that they appreciate it when funders provide access to technical support to develop policies and practices. Contextualised, in person training and opportunities for peer learning on safeguarding were considered particularly effective.

Key findings

- » 35% of funders provide technical support only when requested, while 31% offer it based on assessment findings.
- » 26% say they do not provide technical support as they believe the responsibility for this rests with the grantee partner.
- » UK funders provide less technical support than funders based elsewhere
- » Where technical support is provided, it is usually in the form of guidance from funder staff or signposting to materials and tools.
- » Generic training that is not tailored to organisations' operations or context was not seen as helpful, especially if delivered online.
- » Providing peer learning opportunities can be effective as it enables the sharing of practical, contextualised safeguarding measures.
- » Many grantee partners said that advice from funder staff is not always helpful, especially when funder staff do not have specialist safeguarding knowledge.

“ Our approach to safeguarding combines prevention with capacity building. Recognising that we operate in a challenging environment, we support grantee partners in developing their own risk mitigation strategies.”

– Funder, Asia

Recommendations for Funders

- 1 If possible, offer capacity building or technical support to grantee partners.
- 2 Facilitate access to training that is adapted to the partners' size, capacity, risks and expertise.
- 3 Provide grantee partners with access to localised safeguarding expertise with relevant, contextual, and localised knowledge.
- 4 Facilitate peer learning and exchange if possible.
- 5 Only give technical advice if you have relevant and contextualised expertise.

Recommendations for Grantee Partners

- 1 Ask for technical and capacity support if you need it.
- 2 Don't be afraid to push back on technical support or advice from funders that is not helpful for your context or organisation.

6 When Things Go Wrong

Q Key findings

- » 75% of grantee partners said that at least one of their funders has a requirement to report incidents.
- » Many grantee partners wonder what funders do with reported incidents, as they do not hear back or receive any follow-up.
- » Funders' reporting timescales vary significantly. Timescales vary between 24 hours to within 10 days.
- » Only 18% of UK-based grantee partners reported receiving resources to help them respond to incidents compared with 39% of grantee partners elsewhere.
- » Only 41% of grantee partners find that reporting to a funder helped their response.
- » 32% of grantee partners found support from funders helpful, if the funder was knowledgeable and had expertise on safeguarding.

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Our role is to help organisations respond to concerns in ways that are practical, culturally relevant, and supportive of both staff and young people.”

– Funder, Europe

This research revealed that there is a lot of variation in funders' reporting requirements and a lack of clarity on what type of incidents should be reported and how. This can create an unnecessary burden on grantee partners as they have to adapt the information provided to meet the needs of different funders.

Funders also respond very differently when an incident is reported to them. While the majority allow grantee partners to lead the response, most funders do not provide additional resources to support grantee partners in managing the concern. Critically, our findings suggest that reporting to funders does not help organisations respond to incidents.

Recommendations for Funders

- 1** Encourage (and fund) grantee partners to implement an incident reporting system and ensure they have systems in place to respond.
- 2** Funders should develop their own procedures for how to respond to reported incidents from grantee partners.
- 3** Where possible, align reporting requirements and response mechanisms with other funders to provide clarity and reduce administrative burden on grantee partners.
- 4** Make sure to follow up on reports received.
- 5** Trust the grantee partner to lead the response, but verify if you have concerns as funders can provide an important layer of accountability.
- 6** Allocate resources to support the grantee partner to respond, either following an incident or by allowing budget for reporting and response to incidents in applications.
- 7** Encourage grantee partners to learn from incidents by reflecting on what contributed to the incident and how similar harms can be prevented in the future.
- 8** Learn internally from the incidents reported to you to identify any trends and insights. Wherever possible, consider ways to share your learning.

Recommendations for Grantee Partners

- 1** Develop a robust reporting and response system, adapted to your context and to the needs of different users.
- 2** Make sure your staff are trained on how to identify, report and respond to incidents.

7 Resourcing Safeguarding

Q Key findings

- » While 45% of funders said grantee partners can include budget line for safeguarding, responses from grantee partners indicated that they are often unaware they can request these resources.
- » Only 6% of grantee partners received additional grants for safeguarding and only 8% got their external safeguarding support covered.
- » 78% of grantee partners in the UK said no funder provides additional grants for safeguarding, compared to only 33% of grantee partners based elsewhere.
- » 75% of funders said they do not know or ask questions about grantee partners' unmet safeguarding needs.
- » 80% of grantee partners recommended that funders should provide more safeguarding-specific funding.

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INGOs in the Global North typically account for true costs with well-structured budgets, whereas Global South organisations often request far less than they need, reflecting a power dynamic where they feel compelled to underestimate their needs, sometimes to the detriment of their work and people.”

– Funder, North America

This research found that safeguarding is not well-resourced in grantee partner organisations. Critically, both funders and grantee partners are unsure about the true costs of safeguarding which makes accurate resource allocation more complex.

Not all grantee partners are forthcoming about their needs. The power differential between funders and grantee partners may also prevent organisations from stating their needs or requesting support. Well-framed questions about safeguarding costs at application and monitoring stages can lead to reflection about current needs, and may strengthen grantee partners' ability to properly budget for safeguarding over time.

Recommendations for Funders

- 1** Consider offering unrestricted grants so organisations can allocate funding where they determine the need is greatest. However, in doing so, funders should still emphasise the importance of resources for safeguarding so this is not deprioritised.
- 2** Consider harmonising cost classifications for safeguarding with other funders to reduce confusion and help organisations budget more effectively.
- 3** When planning new funding rounds, explicitly consider what resources should be allocated for safeguarding.
- 4** Ask grantee partners about the resources they need for safeguarding and ensure budgets cover the true costs.
- 5** If you offer additional grants for safeguarding, communicate this clearly and make sure grantee partners know how to access these.

Recommendations for Grantee Partners

- 1** Monitor and track safeguarding costs within your organisation.
- 2** Include safeguarding costs in your grant budget if possible.
- 3** Advocate for adequate funding for safeguarding.

8 Funder Safeguarding Capacity

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You cannot make other organisations do something without doing it yourself. [Safeguarding] was a journey that we did ourselves first before applying it to our partners.”

– Funder, Europe

Q Key findings

- » 80% of funder respondents have a safeguarding policy or a formalised approach within their own organisation.
- » Implementing safeguarding practices internally before asking others to comply with your requirements increases credibility and trust.
- » Training governance bodies in safeguarding improves buy-in at the Board level and improves safeguarding support.
- » Training for grant managers is particularly important to enable them to discuss safeguarding with grantee partners.

While this research was not primarily focused on funders' internal safeguarding practices, respondents highlighted the importance of funders demonstrating the same commitment to safeguarding they expect from grantee partners.

While most funders have a safeguarding policy and approach, internal support for safeguarding varies and many funders do not have dedicated safeguarding staff to support and guide implementation.

Recommendations for Funders

- 1 Ensure your staff have the knowledge they need to fulfil their role in safeguarding.
- 2 Ensure access to additional expertise where necessary.
- 3 Ensure your staff have knowledge about the contexts your grantee partners are working in. Visiting partners can give invaluable insights into the realities of the work.
- 4 Invest in peer learning opportunities for your staff.

9 Conclusion

This research highlights the many ways that funders can positively influence safeguarding within the organisations they fund. It also illustrates how poorly designed approaches may create an additional burden for grantee partners, without having a positive impact on their practice.

Three interconnected findings emerged as critical across all aspects of the grant cycle.

1

Clarity and alignment among funders helps reduce confusion and administrative burden on grantee partners:

- » Clear, upfront communication about safeguarding expectations helps prevent organisations wasting time applying if they do not meet requirements.
- » Greater alignment of expectations between funders would reduce the time grantee partners spend on tailoring the information they provide to fit each funder's needs.
- » Clarity and alignment on what safeguarding costs can be funded would help organisations access the resources they need.
- » Funder communication should emphasise why safeguarding is important and the importance of organisational ownership of safeguarding practice.
- » When incidents occur, clarity and alignment in reporting expectations helps to reduce the time needed to report and allows the grantee partner to focus on the response.

2

Safeguarding cannot be one-size-fits-all: flexibility is required, with a strong emphasis on context:

- » Funder requirements and due diligence assessments must take into account local realities, levels of safeguarding risk and the size and capacity of the partner organisation.
- » Funding should be flexible so grantee partners can make their own decisions about how to shape their safeguarding measures and build their own capacity.
- » Monitoring should promote discussion and learning about the realities faced by grantee partners and the impact these have on safeguarding
- » Training and support that is tailored to the grantee partner's context is more effective than generic support.
- » When funders respond to incidents in grantee partners, they need to recognise the limits of their own knowledge and avoid imposing actions that could cause additional risk or harm.

Trust and the quality of the relationship between funder and grantee partner play an important role in promoting positive safeguarding practices.

- » Open dialogue and trust are pivotal to ensuring funders work in ways that support effective safeguarding within grantee partners.
- » Dialogue at the application stage and during monitoring ensures a common understanding about realities on the ground, and why certain practices have been implemented.
- » It is important that the funder shows a willingness to listen and learn as this reinforces their commitment to a partnership approach.
- » A trust-based relationship encourages grantee partners to report to funders when incidents arise, and to speak up if they have unmet resourcing needs for safeguarding.
- » Trust is enhanced when funders have their own safeguarding measures in place and invest in experienced and knowledgeable staff.

This is an abridged version of the report [Safeguarding in Philanthropy: Safer grant-making for greater impact](#), published by Funder Safeguarding Collaborative in November 2025.

For credits and acknowledgements see the full report.



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