

A review of Esmée Fairbairn Foundation's Funding Plus support for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

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Luminance**Insight**

Tharani Learning and Research



Meet the Team



Theresa Jones

With a decade as a qualitative researcher, Theresa works on justice, equity, and inclusion research delivering cultural insights, shaping healthcare and community strategies.



Amira Tharani

Amira supports charities in advancing justice, equity, and inclusion. She specialises in participatory methods, ensuring insights lead to meaningful change.



Taslim Tharani

Tas combines organisational psychology and lived experience across research, consultancy, facilitation, and coaching, generating insights that advance equity and support relational change.

Review at a Glance



1. Launch

Align on Review goals, expectations, and ways of working.



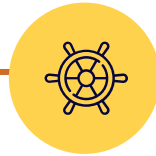
2. Desk research

Review of existing materials (inc. Funding Plus bids, and impact reports).



3. Gather feedback

A mix of semi-structured interviews and written evaluations.



4. Interim debrief

Presenting initial insights and agreeing on next steps.



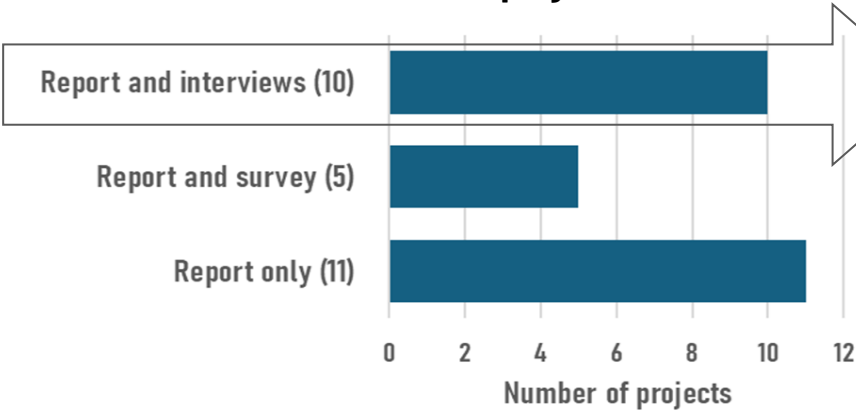
5. Reporting

Report write-up and presentation, internal and external sharing.

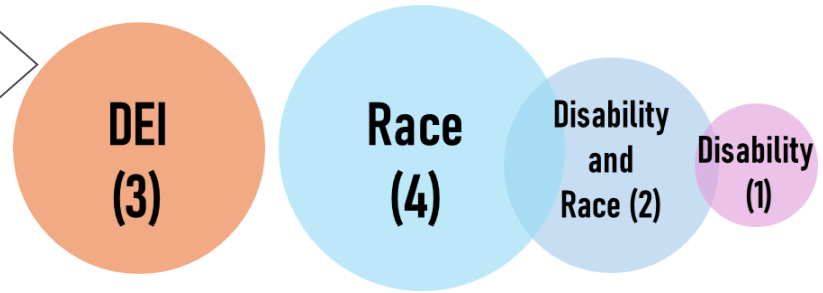
Updates and fortnightly check-ins throughout the Review helped ensure alignment

About the Projects

Research involvement of 26 projects:



DEI focus for interviewed projects:



Area of Esmée's strategy:



Where the projects work:

	Number of projects:
UK-wide	14
London	5
England	1
Birmingham	1
Coventry	1
Oxford	1
Tyne and Wear	1
Yorkshire	1

How organisations engaged with DEI support

Most organisations worked with providers over several months, rather than one-off engagements. And all engagements were bespoke to the organisation's needs.

- The majority of organisations in the interview sample opted for a combination of training and consultancy, with activities including:
 - Audits or surveys
 - Training workshops with staff
 - Coaching or support for staff members with specific DEI responsibilities
 - Development or co-development of action plans

Key themes in more detail

A variation of DEI journeys

- There are varied start points as well as varying needs and capacities.
- Tailored support is key for aligning DEI efforts with specific goals.
- A relational, learning culture leads to deeper, long-term impact.
- DEI should be integrated across all areas, not just HR.

Partnerships shape practice

- DEI provider characteristics were also important.
- Building safety, adding structure and rebalancing power were seen by our interviewees as particularly transformational for organisational DEI.

Turning theory into practice takes time

- Progress depends on building a shared language and embedding practical action.
- This process is often constrained by short-term, project-based funding, limiting space for strategic planning or organisational development.

What's working and what's next?

- Esmée's Funding Plus is well-placed to support DEI capacity-building.
- Flexible, light-touch support is valued by organisations.
- Safe, open spaces are key for progress.
- Many organisations have called for peer learning opportunities to strengthen impact.

Key themes in more detail

A variation of DEI journeys

“You can do all you want with recruitment and representation but if the impact of your EDI work [on the communities you serve] isn’t transformative, it isn’t going to go anywhere.”

Interview 10

Partnerships shape practice

“One thing that was good for us was that initial [trust-building]. I’ve heard about other situations where it’s gone badly [and] there’ve been these big, open conversations that bring up a lot of pain and then leave people to crack on. You have to be wary of exposing Black and minoritised staff to the ignorance of their colleagues.”

Interview 13

Turning theory into practice takes time

- “So for instance, when the riots happened over the summer, I think that the team felt more comfortable having something to say about it than they might have, because we accepted that we are going to be vulnerable in this.”

• **Interview 13**

What’s working and what’s next?

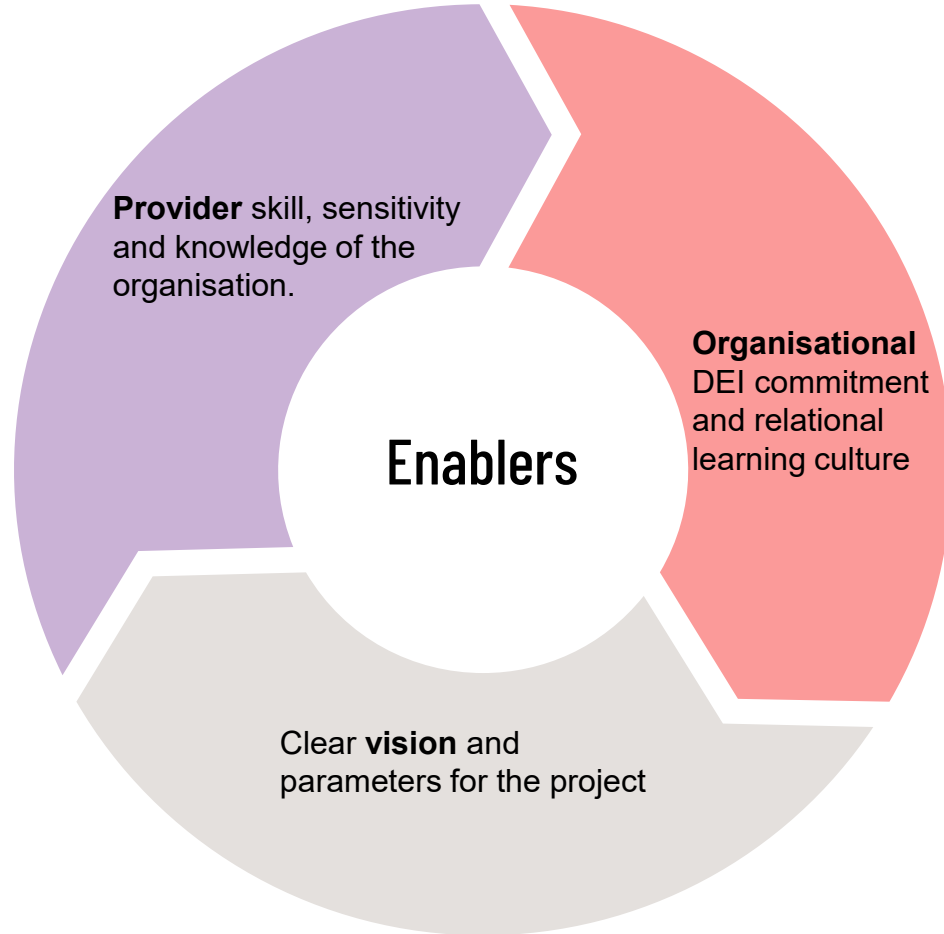
“I’ve always found those sorts of things [peer networks] really useful to meet with other organisations and be able to put these topics together and have some expert speakers [so we] get inspired.”

Interview 18

Enablers

3 key enablers facilitated project implementation and impact.

They were described as setting the tone for the projects and how they were implemented, felt, and embedded within organisations.



Barriers

A mix of internal and external barriers added challenges to the DEI support journey. Most were overcome, but leadership buy-in and misalignment were harder to resolve.

While organisations appreciated the support, there were factors that made implementation more difficult.

- **Capacity and conflicting commitments**
 - however, many found innovative ways to make training or workshops accessible.
- **Leadership buy-in:** Strong leadership buy-in was common. Where that wasn't the case, it was much harder to ensure that the funding was spent on what it was intended for, and to embed the work across the organisation.
- **Misalignment:** Generally, this was internal, either between teams or with leadership or trustee boards. In one case miscommunication with the provider led to faulty assumptions on both sides and barriers to project progress.
- **Fear:** We heard about a fear of 'getting it wrong' and letting down minoritised communities.

External barriers

Funding constraints led to short-termism. Without core or ring-fenced long-term funding, organisations will struggle to embed lasting change.

Funding/resourcing constraints

- Most of the organisations we spoke to found it difficult to sustain momentum once the funding had come to an end.
- Charity sector funding is often short-term and project specific.
- Embedding change is therefore often more challenging in the charity sector.

“There are always so many competing priorities. And it's so difficult to make plans when you don't quite know what on earth is happening to your organization in 6 months time.”

Interview 5

Overview of project outcomes at five levels

DEI support can lead to outcomes at different levels, depending on the organisation's starting point, internal culture and nature of support provided



1.

Personal learning & transformation

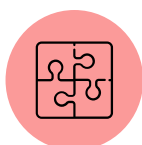
New theoretical frameworks and deeper changes to mental models, approaches, relationships or emotions



2.

Action planning & strategy

Developing a plan for next steps



3.

Staff experience & demographics

Either changes in the experience of minoritised staff, or changes in the composition of staff, volunteers or trustees - and sometimes both



4.

Changes to project delivery

Embedding DEI learning in the delivery of services, partnerships and/or communications



5.

Impact at strategic/organisational level

Organisational transformation in terms of strategy or overall culture

Overview of project outcomes at five levels

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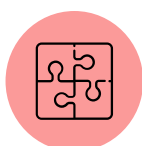
1.

"I think we know from conversations with staff that it's just opened their eyes [to different] ways of thinking and understanding of what somebody might have been through and how things might impact them." **Interview 15**



2.

"So our next 3 year strategy [is in progress] and EDI is already one of the enabling change goals that we've identified that will underpin our priorities." **Interview 9**



3.

"It's about having that conversation about, what is it you need from us to be your best? What is it that you need us to do to enable you to function within the workplace? But it's all very, very individually based. So there's no just because you're autistic, X, Y and Z happens." **Interview 16**



4.

"Any time we make a funding application we include budget to work with by-and-for organisations - to recognise their contribution in terms of remuneration and also their expertise." **Interview 9**



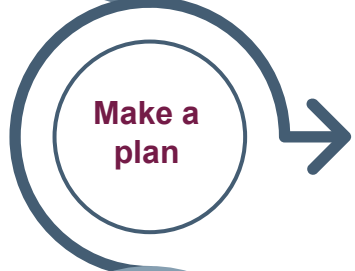
5.

"It's like pockets of practice, which makes it really hard to [achieve] consistency or standardisation. If we've been involved or have lived experience [there is more likely to be good practice]" **Interview 4**

Recommendations: for organisations seeking DEI support



...about where you are on the journey and what the key next steps are for your organisation - then choose a provider to match.

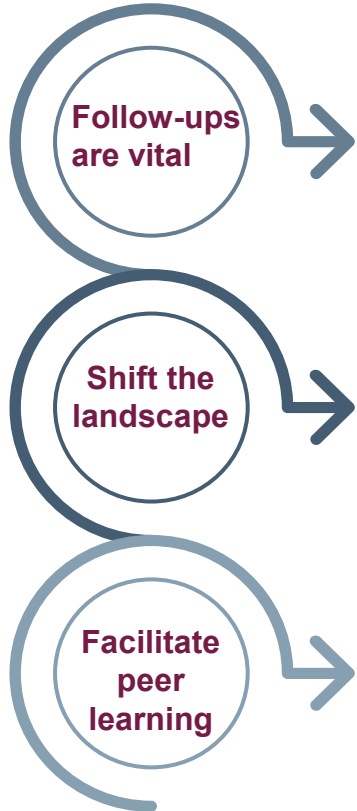


...for maintaining momentum after the support concludes and identify additional resources available at that stage.



...Leading this internal work is complex - it's key to have someone with confidence to lead and the trust of the organisation (it may not always be the CEO)

Recommendations: for funders supporting organisational DEI journeys




- This was the most common ask
- Longer-term programmes to keep momentum
- Tailored support for Senior Leadership Teams to drive culture change
- Additional funding for refresher training
- Periodic follow-up sessions to capture growth

- This was another top priority for organisations
- Set expectations for funding and evaluation criteria (i.e. racial equity) beyond funding
- Diversify support to make it more accessible (such as training, peer learning, and resource sharing)
- Offer DEI support alongside grant funding, so organisations don't have to apply for it separately
- Offer more unrestricted funding

- Facilitate shared learning between organisations for DEI support and wider operational tools
- Consider creating content such as webinars and events to sustain focus

Thank You!

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