

Introducing our new strategy for 2022-25 – Advancing wellbeing with 100% of our assets

(4 minute read)

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This article is about our new strategy, which is available to read in full [here](#).

John Ellerman Foundation's new strategy for 2022-25 calls on us to deliver our organisational aim to advance the wellbeing of people, society and the natural world with 100% of our assets – namely our grantmaking, our investing, our values and our organisational competencies, capabilities and assets. This is our first strategy in some time, and we are delighted to be able to share it with you all publicly.

Building an emergent strategy

When I joined John Ellerman Foundation in January 2020, Trustees, staff and external stakeholders committed to a listening and learning exercise. Internally, this comprised individual and group meetings and one-to-one, group and Away Day discussions with the Board. These conversations all explored deeply what was and was not working within the organisation, the ambitions and motivations held within the team and Board, the external challenges and opportunities we were identifying and the capabilities we felt we had in order to respond to these.

Externally, listening and learning involved being more outward-facing. We engaged in networks, one-to-one and group meetings and learning opportunities with the people and organisations we work with in relation to our endowment, grantmaking practice and three grantmaking areas of arts, social action and environment, with our findings shared and reflected upon internally on an ongoing basis. This work has included being actively involved with and acting upon the principles of things like the [Foundation Practice Rating](#) and IVAR's [Open and Trusting #FlexibleFunders](#) grantmaking commitment, in order to help design our strategic future. We also commissioned nfpResearch to do a [research piece](#) for us on the future of the grant funding sector and a [perception audit](#) with grant-holders and applicants assessing quality within our grantmaking processes.

Our response to the Covid-19 pandemic helped us to understand further some of our key capabilities, competencies and ways of working, as well as experimenting with less established ones, such as working collaboratively with other grantmakers, increased external communications, working remotely and flexibly and taking a more strategic, ethical and environmentally sustainable approach to the management of our endowment.

What we will be focussing on

The strategy outlines more clearly our organisational purpose and ambitions, and how we hope to deliver against these successfully.

We will focus our efforts on:

- **our funding offer**, ensuring that we embrace and deliver best and promising practice
- **our investment policy**, ensuring that we invest in ways that are aligned to our aim, values and funding categories
- **our work with others**, ensuring that we understand our stakeholders and can work with them to deliver our work together more effectively
- **our commitment to accountability**, ensuring that we make further progress on diversity, equity and inclusion, transparency and impact and learning.

Our strategy shares more detail of what kind of work we are likely to be focussing on under each of these four headings. We often use the shorthand of becoming an organisation that is more **strategically responsive**, which means seeking out opportunities to respond to ideas and opportunities where we feel we could add value and make a real strategic difference that benefits us and those we work with. For example, with our grantmaking, this means focussing some of our efforts initially on some of the more unique work we fund, such as the work in our social action category to fund policy advocacy and campaigning work that actively involves those with personal experience of the issues tackled, or curatorial work in museums and galleries, or environmental work in the UK Overseas Territories.

Our strategy sets out our intentions and commitments in the coming years. We will report on the progress made against our strategy formally once a year – most likely around the same time that we complete our Annual Report and Accounts. We will also share written and verbal updates on our progress throughout the year, including through blogs and articles like this on our website.

Why we have taken our time

I have been in post for over two years now, and had it not been for the Covid-19 pandemic I suspect I would have produced a new strategy for the organisation much sooner – perhaps in my first year. However, taking our time has allowed me to work with the team and Trustees to think deeply about the environment we operate within and the strategy we want to design and deliver within this context.

We have also used this time to think through our response to the scrutiny and criticism that institutional grantmakers like us can face. We are part of a rich and diverse global philanthropic ecosystem and tradition comprising so many different forms of giving, and we know that the coming years will be critical in responding to the global climate and nature crises, alongside the political, economic, cultural and societal challenges we face. John Ellerman Foundation believes that as a modern grantmaker striving for more, we can support civil society to respond to these challenges in a way that is transparent, accountable and effective.

We look forward to working with you all to deliver this strategy successfully.